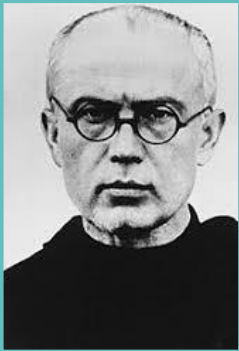


STORIES OF POLISH RESISTANCE



Irena
Sendler



Maximilian
Kolbe



Emanuel
Ringelblum



Mordechai
Anielewicz



Witold
Pilecki



Janusz
Korczak



Jan
Karski



Zofia
Kossak-
Szczucka



Father
Marceli
Godlewski



Jan &
Antonina
Zabinski



Józef &
Wiktorina
Ulma

About half of the six million European Jews killed in the Holocaust were Polish. In 1939 a third of the capital city Warsaw, and 10% of the entire country was Jewish. By 1945 97% of Poland's Jews were dead.

These eleven examples of Polish resistance *do not* purport to give an overview of what happened in Poland during The Holocaust. They have been chosen to reflect the unimaginably difficult choices made by both Jews and non-Jews under German occupation – where every Jew was marked for death and all non-Jews who assisted their Jewish neighbours were subject to the same fate.

These individuals *were not* typical; they were exceptional, reflecting the relatively small proportion of the population who refused to be bystanders. But neither were they super-human. They would recoil from being labelled as heroes. They symbolise the power of the human spirit – their actions show that in even the darkest of times, good can shine through...

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Learning from the Righteous
Inspiring children with the courage of the few

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MORDECHAI ANIELEWICZ 1919–1943 & The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

Mordechai Anielewicz was the leader of the Jewish Resistance fighters that fought back against the German Army between 19th April and 8th May in what remained of the Warsaw Ghetto. By that time the vast majority of the ghetto's residents had been sent to Treblinka death camp and it was when the Germans attempted to deport the rest that Anielewicz's fighters attacked.

There was no realistic hope of a military victory – this Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was purely a final act of resistance in response to the atrocious violence that had been inflicted on the Jews of Warsaw over the previous three and a half years. It was an opportunity to get some revenge for the murderous attacks that had been visited upon their fellow Jews – a change to die with some dignity



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Mordechai Anielewicz (top right) with other members of the youth movement he was part of before the war which became a crucial part of the Ghetto Uprising in April 1943.

Anielewicz was 20 when the Germans invaded Poland in September 1939. Aware of the dangers that Polish Jews were going to be subjected to, he joined an organisation that tried to set up an escape route through Romania, which shared a border with Poland at the time. However, he was imprisoned by Soviet troops and, on release, returned to Warsaw. By mid-1941 he had begun to train youth groups in the ghetto in armed resistance and reached out to other underground movements to help supply weapons for a possible uprising.

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Mordechai Anielewicz (circled) with a group of Jewish resistance fighters

Anielewicz was engaged in underground work in southern Poland when he learnt about the deportations from Warsaw. He immediately returned to the capital with the intention of organising an armed resistance movement against the Germans. Previously the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto were reluctant to sanction attacks on the occupiers for fear of inciting even more reprisals. But attitudes changed after the deportations – few realistically expected to survive the war.

The deportations to Treblinka during the summer of 1942 reduced the population of The Warsaw Ghetto drastically. As a result, the southern part of the former ghetto was subsumed into the rest of the city and most of the wall that had previously separated the Jewish population from the rest of the city was demolished. Consequently, during the winter of 1942 the surviving Jews were crammed into the northern section of the former ghetto – close to where the transports departed from Warsaw to Treblinka. The residents knew it was only a matter of time until the Germans would complete the liquidation of the ghetto...

MORDECHAI ANIELEWICZ 1919–1943 & The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

...this happened in January 1943. But to the Germans' surprise they were met by Anielewicz's resistance fighters. Twelve fighters secretly slipped themselves into the lines of people being led into the loading area (the *Umschlagplatz*) and, at a signal, each shot the nearest soldier. In the confusion many Jews were able to escape back into the ghetto. Although all 12 fighters died, this first act of resistance was seen as a victory and was a source of great encouragement to Anielewicz's organisation.



A basement bunker that housed a fighting unit.

The Germans were forced to abandon the planned final liquidation of The Ghetto and the fighters used that lull to prepare for the inevitable final attack. They prepared as much home-made ammunition as possible and did all they could to smuggle in weapons as well. In preparation for what was inevitably going to be an ambush-based attack, the fighters set up cells in the basements of the what remained of the ghetto.



Many female couriers posed as non-Jews to establish lines of communication with other underground organisations. They passed on messages and smuggled in weapons and ammunition, often paying for such bravery with their lives.

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Compared to the German troops the Uprising fighters were poorly armed. They relied mostly on petrol-bombs known as "Molotov Cocktails" and had a limited number of weapons with very little ammunition.

In the days leading up to the final battles of The Ghetto Uprising, German troops began to encircle the area and they made their move in the early hours of April 19th. The resistance fighters predicted that the Germans would enter through an entrance near to a brush-making factory – which is where they decided to set their trap. Armed fighters positioned themselves on roof tops and others, with improvised “Molotov cocktail” bombs, crouched below windows that looked down at the street below. The German’s had no idea that as their column of tanks and trucks slowly made its way into the ghetto that they were about to be ambushed. It was when the first tank was over a landmine-bomb that had been buried in the road, that the attack happened. The explosion that set the tank on fire was the cue for the hidden fighters to start their attack and the German’s retreated.

Anielewicz wrote in a letter a few days later –

It is impossible to put into words what we have been through. One thing is clear, what happened exceeded our boldest dreams. The Germans ran twice from the ghetto. One of our companies held out for 40 minutes and another for more than 6 hours. The mine set in the "brushmakers" area exploded. Several of our companies attacked the dispersing Germans. Our losses in manpower are minimal... the dream of my life has risen to become fact. Self-defence in the ghetto will have been a reality. Jewish armed resistance and revenge are facts. I have been a witness to the magnificent, heroic fighting of Jewish men in battle.

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The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising lasted 28 days. Eventually the Germans resorted to systematically burning the ghetto, building by building, to finally quell the resistance. They flushed out any remaining cells by dropping grenades into the basement bunkers - Mordechai Anielewicz, along with the surviving fighters he was hiding with, chose to kill themselves rather than be captured by the Germans.



Some of the ghetto residents managed to escape through the sewer system, but most of the remaining Jews were either executed in Warsaw or sent to Treblinka.



MORDECHAI ANIELEWICZ 1919–1943 & The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising



Monuments in Warsaw that remember the Ghetto Uprising. The structure on the left commemorates where in Warsaw the fighting took place and the monument on the right signifies the location, in Mila 18, of the bunker where Anielewicz died.

It's unlikely that the events that took place in the Warsaw Ghetto in the early months of 1943 resulted in many more Jews surviving the war. But the symbol of resistance against what was perceived to be an invincible enemy had a hugely significant impact. The Ghetto Uprising, which took place two years before the end of the war, was seen by surviving Jews as an expression of resistance and showed that world that, in the words of Mordechai Anielewicz, not all Jews “*went to their deaths like lambs to the slaughter*”.