

DELEGATURA REPORT TO THE POLISH GOVERNMENT-IN-EXILE, APRIL 24, 1943¹

THE JEWISH-GERMAN WAR

In face of firm Jewish resistance, and the aforementioned refusal to leave the ghetto, the German authorities decided to proceed with the liquidation of the ghetto remnants by force. On Sunday, April 18, large and heavily armed units of gendarmerie and SS were put on alert. At six in the afternoon the same day, the Polish police were put on high alert. During the night between Sunday and Monday, April 19, Polish police were withdrawn from the ghetto and deployed — under strict supervision of German gendarmerie — around the external ghetto wall. That same night, at 4 a.m., armed German troops entered the ghetto. On this occasion, however, they encountered a wholly different situation than that last summer. Jews decided to put up armed resistance, for which they had made thorough preparations. They had amassed huge quantities of weapons and ammunition, including large amounts of hand-grenades, rifles, even heavy machine-guns, flame-throwers and small anti-tank guns. They fortified numerous houses, turning them into veritable defensive bunkers: they

1 This Polish description of the uprising, sent by the Polish underground authorities to their government-in-exile in London, contains a number of historical inaccuracies. The document is presented here as it was written, without corrections, because its power derives from the immediacy of the report of the Warsaw ghetto uprising from a Polish perspective, and not from historical details. The document can be found in Yad Vashem Archives, O.6/888.

removed stairwells, put up removable ladders, bricked up exits, and punched passages through the walls of neighboring houses. In anticipation of being cut off from the water supply, they rebuilt old wells, and drilled new ones. They also stocked up considerable food supplies in the ghetto area. A sudden and effective fire of the defenders greeted the German troops, who entered the ghetto at dawn, April 19. The Germans suffered casualties, including many dead and wounded. The resistance proved so strong that the Germans threw fresh troops into the fray, including field artillery, flame-throwers and tanks. The situation was further complicated by bold sallies of Jewish fighters beyond the walls of the defended streets, as well as shots fired in profusion from the streets in the Aryan sections outside the ghetto in the direction of the attacking Germans. The gendarmerie and SS units failed to take control of the situation, which prompted the Germans to deploy Wehrmacht formations against the ghetto.

Throughout Monday, April 19, and Tuesday, April 20, the gendarmes, Wehrmacht and SS units launched ceaseless attacks against the fiercely defended ghetto. Day and night incessant and fierce gunfire could be heard by the ghetto walls. German troops, deployed in an extended line, launched numerous attacks. The German side suffered hundreds of dead and wounded, and the ghetto kept on fighting. The resistance appears to have caused changes in German tactics. Direct attacks were halted and a regular siege was imposed on the ghetto. All regular traffic on the streets in Aryan neighborhoods adjoining the ghetto was stopped, and a large ring of German troops surrounded the Jewish fortress. Drain pipes were sealed. German artillery began pounding the ghetto with incendiary shells. A large number of houses were set on fire. For several days now large clouds of smoke have been hanging over the ghetto, and at night the northern section of the city is illuminated by a huge glow. The Germans use special loudspeakers to call on the ghetto residents to surrender. Some Jews heeded the surrender calls. Nearly ten thousand people turned up at the assembly sites, designated by the German

authorities, and subsequently were taken outside Warsaw. These people comprised mostly the elderly, including many women, old people and the weaker males. The remainder, mainly young men numbering more than twenty thousand, keeps on fighting doggedly. It goes without saying that the Jewish side too suffers heavy casualties in this campaign. At the same time, however, it is a fact that during the six days that have elapsed since the onset of the German operation against the Warsaw ghetto, Jews have not been subdued, and continue to exhibit an undiminished will to defend and fight, and the end [of] the battle is nowhere in sight. This Jewish-German war has given rise to feelings of compassion and admiration on the Aryan side, and to consternation in German circles, who rightly view the situation that has emerged in Warsaw as an unusual German humiliation. The allegedly omniscient and all-powerful Gestapo failed to prevent the excellent preparations undertaken by the Jewish population in advance of resistance and fight, so that the combined forces of gendarmerie, the SS, and the Wehrmacht failed to suppress the resistance despite six days of attacks. Under the date of April 21, one of the Warsaw underground papers reports the following story, an eyewitness testimony of the Jewish-German battles: "In two wars I took part in many battles, but none has made such a shocking impression on me as yesterday's. Illuminated by raging fires, accompanied by the ramble of anti-armor and field guns, as well as the grenade launchers placed on roof-tops, the rat-tat-tat of heavy machine-guns, the German sappers moved under Jewish nests of resistance to lay dynamite charges under them. Flame-throwers were also used. Following these preparatory operations, the German infantry moved in to attack but was repulsed by the Jews time after time. In just one sector I counted 15 Germans dead and 38 wounded. Jews have machine-guns and a large amount of grenades at their disposal. They defend themselves fiercely and with great determination. Petrol bombs rain down on tanks and armored cars. I saw a burning German tank from which burned crew was being removed."

Amidst all the confusion created by fighting in the ghetto periphery, a certain number of Jews managed to sneak out and go into hiding in the Aryan neighborhoods. In the coming days, the Germans prepare a sweeping action to search for and hunt down the hiding Jews. German authorities have published a decree announcing [the] death penalty or deportation to a concentration camp not only against those Aryans who hide the Jews or help them to hide by supplying them with food, means of transport, etc., but also against those who refrain from informing the German authorities about a hiding Jew.

Translated from the Polish by Jerzy Michalowicz