

The Gesiówka Story: A Little Known Page of Jewish Fighting History

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Introduction

In mid-summer 1944, all signs clearly pointed to the approaching military defeat of Nazi Germany. In the West the Allied armies captured Rome and entered occupied France. In the East the huge mass of the Red Army rolled the Germans back from Soviet lands and steadily advanced toward Germany proper. The large Red Army offensive that began on July 19, 1944, crushed German resistance and entered occupied Poland. The troops crossed the Vistula River at two points south of Warsaw and were rapidly approaching the capital's eastern suburbs. Soviet propaganda called on the local population to rise up in arms in support of the advancing Red Army.

The Polish Government-in-exile in London faced a singularly complicated situation. Since the Soviet Union had withdrawn its recognition of this government a year earlier, the Poles could not count on coordinating a planned uprising with the Soviets. They also lacked detailed information on movements planned by the Red Army. However, the government-in-exile believed that, in the interest of the Polish nation and state, the liberation of at least the capital city of Warsaw could not be left to the Red Army. Thus, it was decided to start an uprising in Warsaw against the Germans on August 1, 1944.

The Soviets wanted the world to believe (and to a great degree did believe themselves) that the oppressed populations were eagerly awaiting liberation by the Red Army, and any armed resistance beyond enemy lines would be in support of that army. This helps to explain the

ambiguous Soviet attitude to the 1944 Warsaw uprising led by the Armia Krajowa (AK; Home Army), which was loyal to London but which was joined by the Armia Ludowa (AL; People's Army), Bataliony Chlopskie (Peasant Battalions), and other Soviet-affiliated organizations. By September 13, 1944, however, when the Soviet-sponsored First Polish Army conquered the Praga suburb of Warsaw (liberating quite a number of Jews in hiding there), the anti-Russian leanings of the majority of rebels became obvious. Nevertheless, the commanding general, Zygmunt Berling, disregarding heavy losses, tried his best to help the insurgents, sending troops and supplies from Praga to the fighting town. Two battalions of his army under fiery German pounding were ferried across the Vistula to the insurgent held left bank. But under mounting German attacks they suffered such heavy losses that late in September 1944 Berling was compelled to stop his operations in support of the dwindling uprising. Consequently, the commandment of the Red Army left Warsaw to the German until mid-January 1941¹.

The number of Jews still in Warsaw, in August 1944, is estimated as 20-30,000. About half of them, trusting their "Aryan" appearance and false documents, worked and moved freely, many of them belonging to different underground organizations. The other half generally had to hide under inhuman conditions in cellars, attics, cupboards, and lofts. For the Poles, the uprising was a patriotic, national action. Moreover, many--probably even the majority--regarded the uprising as a safeguard for Polish independence not only against the German occupiers but also against the future threat of Russian occupation. As for the Jews, quite a

1. According to Jerzy Kirchmayer: *Powstanie Warszawskie, Ksiazka i Wiedza*, Warsaw. 1959, pp.390-396, the First Polish Army lost during these operations over 2000 men and almost all of its precious landing craft and gear. Benjamin Meirchak: *Jewish Military Casualties in the Polish Armies in World War II, Volume I: Jewish Soldiers and Officers of the Polish People's Army Killed and Missing in Action 1943-1945*, Tel-Aviv, 1994, lists 83 Jewish men and one woman of the First Polish Army killed in Warsaw at the relevant time and buried there. In addition 112 Jewish men reported as missing, quite apparently lost during the fateful Vistula crossing between September 18th and 23rd, their bodies drowned and not recovered.

number shared their Polish fellow-citizens' patriotic attitude, the success of the uprising would, above all, mean the end of their underground life, and the entry of the Red Army would mean liberation.

These concerns were all the more evident with regard to the motivation of a group of about 400 prisoners from the Gesiówka concentration camp, who were liberated at the start of the uprising by the rebels and spontaneously joined their ranks. Only a **minority of** Polish Jews were in that group, mostly prisoners recently transferred from the Pawiak prison. The majority were Hungarian and Greek, with some Czech, Dutch, and Slovaks. They knew hardly any Polish, and their knowledge of the country was practically nonexistent. While they did not share Polish fears or anti-Russian prejudices, the desire for revenge against the Nazi oppressors and solidarity with their liberators had been strong enough to make them devoted and fearless fighters in the Polish uprising.

Half a century later, on August 1, 1994, attracting worldwide attention, Poland celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the 1944 Warsaw uprising--a well-known drama turned tragedy, considering the enormous losses on the side of the insurgents, the wholesale slaughter of the civilian population, and the total destruction of their city.

Five days later, in a modest ceremony, a tablet affixed to the house at 34 Mordechaj Anielewicz Street, just opposite the entrance to the devastated Jewish cemetery, was unveiled. The inscription on the tablet in Hebrew and Polish reads: "On the 5th of August 1944 the scouts' Zoska battalion of the Radoslaw group of the Armia Krajowa captured the German concentration camp Gesiówka and liberated 348 Jewish prisoners, nationals of different European countries. Many of them fought and fell in the Warsaw Uprising."².

This was a very symbolic event. The location was in what used to be the very heart of

² . The Polish inscription: "5 sierpnia 1944 roku harcerski batalion "Zoska" zgrupowania "Radoslaw" Armii Krajowej zdobył niemiecki obóz koncentracyjny "Gesiówka" i uwolnił 348 więźniów Żydów obywateli różnych krajów Europy. Wielu z nich walczyło i poległo w Powstaniu Warszawskim" (Photo of the tablet in author's possession).

The total destruction of the Warsaw ghetto was ordered by Himmler in February 1943, “as a measure of security and pacification of Warsaw.”⁴ In addition, there was a directive to exploit anything and everything that was to be found to have any value. Under the German master plan, after the full exploitation had been completed, the 180 hectares of the ghetto ruins were to be levelled and converted into a park. This project was scheduled to be completed on August 1, 1944.

Four German enterprises were charged with executing the project, budgeted at 150 million Reichsmarks. The machinery included twenty-two narrow-gauge steam engines, shuttling 565 trucks on 30-km.-long tracks laid in the ruins, and nine big mechanical--mostly steam--engines. The technicians who were hired were primarily Poles, with a few Germans. All the menial work was to be done by Jewish prisoners. The first camp commandant, SS *Obersturmbahnführer Goecke*, of KZ Mauthausen brought 300 German criminals with him from there to assist the SS guards in overseeing the Jews as *Kapos*, *Blockälteste*, and *Vorarbeiter*.

After the suppression of the Warsaw ghetto uprising in May 1943, Jürgen Stroop and his collaborators had set all the houses in the ghetto on fire and had deported the last 50,000 surviving Jews to Treblinka and to forced-labour camps. In July 1943, a concentration camp for the remaining Jews of the KZ Warschau was established on the ruins bordering the intact Pawiak prison and Gesia Street; hence, the name “Gesiówka”⁵.

Stroop suspected that up to 10,000 Jews were still hiding in the ruins. In order to isolate them from the outside world and to prevent contacts between the inmates and the employed Poles, he barred Polish Jews from the Gesiówka work force. Indeed, 3,683 Jewish prisoners sent, in 1943, from Auschwitz were Belgian, Dutch, French and Greek nationals.

⁴ The International Military Tribunal (IMT), Nuremberg, The Trial of German Major War Criminals, document NO-2496.

⁵ For the full history of the Gesiówka camp, see Rutkowski, “Le Camp,” and the author’s “Gesiówka (KZ Warschau),” in *“Zeszyty Historyczne”, Nr. 110, (1994), pp.62-73.*

Still, fifty Polish Jews were included on one occasion when the Auschwitz SS was shorthanded. And among the “foreigners” there were a number of men who had emigrated from Poland during various periods. Among them was Chaim Itsel (Charles) Goldstein who had left Warsaw for Paris in 1929, and now returned via Auschwitz. His book, *Sibn' in a Bunker*,⁶ which has been translated into many languages, relates his experiences and the story of his survival along with his six companions. As a result of the failure of the German strategy, contacts with Poles employed on the site were established quite early. Thanks to these contacts, some of the secreted valuables found in the ruins could be exchanged for badly needed food and medicines.

Generally, the attitude of the Poles was rather ambivalent: there were some who obviously enjoyed the sight of Jews toiling under the German kicks; others were simply indifferent. But there were also those who tried to help. Goldstein tells how, hungry and sick with malaria, he was saved out of sheer compassion by a Pole who surreptitiously helped him in his work, brought food and quinine. On another occasion young Polish peddlers, disregarding the threats of the SS guards, threw bread and apples to a passing group of Jewish prisoners.

While the prisoners had to dig in the ruins in search of hidden treasures, the camp commandant, Goecke, embarked on a much simpler scheme to collect gold. First he tried to order the visiting doctor to check the prisoners' dentures and extract gold teeth and fillings. Not discouraged by the doctor's refusal, he took a short cut: every day his SS guards would bring a couple of prisoners with recognizable extensive golden dentures. Then Goecke and one or two of his confidantes led the group into the ruins to be shot there in cold blood as "trying to escape." When these dental practices became too widely known, Goecke and two of his helpers were arrested and sent to Germany. It is unknown whether they had to face trial there. If they did, then it was certainly not for killing Jews—which was in any case officially

⁶ Page numbers are quoted from *Sibn' in a Bunker* (Yiddish) (Warsaw: Idisz Buch, 1962). The book appeared in English as *The Bunker* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1980).

programed and encouraged--but more probably for the illegal appropriation of gold belonging to the *Reich*.⁷

In the winter of 1943/4, only one-third of the Jewish working force survived a typhus epidemic. The new commandant, *Obersturmbahnführer* Schmitzer, asked Auschwitz for replacements. Soon he was sent a new and still unused work force of more than 4,000 young--mostly Hungarian--Jews. In the next two months he could boast that 80 percent of the projected demolitions had been accomplished, and 34 million usable bricks had been extracted.

A twenty-man squad “corpse unit” (Leichenkommando) had been busy round the clock burning corpses on wooden pyres in one of the courtyards. Besides the deceased or executed in Gesiówka and Pawiak prisons, hundreds were brought every day from the mass public executions in the town and the clandestine killings by the Gestapo on the site of the ruins. With the ever-growing number of executions, it was then decided to build a crematorium. Since at the end of the daily toil, every Gesiówka prisoner had to bring four bricks to the construction site, at the end of June 1944, the crematorium was ready and was provided with a sufficient supply of coal. Only the outbreak of the Warsaw uprising on the day that had been planned by the Germans to mark the end of their ghetto “rehabilitation” project, prevented the Germans from starting it up.⁸

The Evacuation

In face of the swiftly progressing Russian summer offensive, the Germans ordered the evacuation of Gesiówka and Pawiak. On July 27, 1944, the prisoners were told to make themselves ready for a 60-km daily march. Those who felt they were not strong enough and

⁷ Reported by Dr. Felicjan Loth, *Bylem lekarzem na Pawiaku* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1964), p. 359.

⁸ Reported by Peter Lebovic, a Slovak Jew sent from Auschwitz to Gesiówka at the age of **eighteen** in May 1944. *Israelitisches Wochenblatt*, Zurich, 15, April 16, 1993; and Rutkowski, “Le Camp,” pp. 93, 95.

needed transportation were ordered to come to the camp infirmary. There 180 were shot that same evening along with some 250 sick inmates who had been brought there earlier.

The next morning, in sweltering heat, the SS guards drove the thirsty and already exhausted prisoners westward. Whoever could not keep up with the murderous pace was shot on the spot. After three days of marching, the decimated column arrived at the Zychlin railway station. There the prisoners--100 to a boxcar--embarked on a four-day journey to the Dachau concentration camp. As a result of the inhuman conditions, at least fifteen people died daily in every boxcar. According to the Dutch Red Cross statistics, out of 1,050 Dutch Jews sent, in 1943, from Auschwitz to Gesiówka, only fifteen survived until the liberation of Dachau by the American army on April 29, 1945. About 300 prisoners were left in Warsaw. They were joined by ninety-six Jewish men and twenty-four women transferred from the evacuated Pawiak prison. The prime task of the prisoners left in the camp was to gather all the leftovers from the camp and stores and to dispatch them to Germany. A fifty-man work unit sent each morning to the railway siding at the former *Umschlagplatz* toiled there under the watchful eyes of the SS guards loading goods to be sent to Germany. Then the prisoners would also be used to remove the more evident traces of the German crimes. Once the work was done, in accordance with the standing German concentration camp practice, they were all to be shot. Here again the SS designs were thwarted by the outbreak of the Warsaw uprising.

The Liberation

The main group of prisoners left in Gesiówka was kept busy removing the corpses of the executed inmates and cleaning and emptying the barracks and stores. With the sounds of cannon fire coming closer and closer, the tension in the camp rose. On August 1, steady gunfire could be heard all around. The same evening the German *Kapos* were issued army uniforms and armed. The fifty-man unit sent in the morning to the *Umschlagplatz* did not return to the camp for the night. Those in the camp were confined to barracks and cut off

from the outside world. Some bet the Russians were already in the town; others sensed the outbreak of a rebellion; some believed both scenarios.

In fact, the initial operational plans of the Polish High Command provided for the early capture of both the Gesiówka camp and the Pawiak prison. But on the first day of fighting, only the outer perimeter of these strongholds fell to the insurgents. It was the good fortune of the unit of fifty to be in that perimeter at the railway siding of the *Umschlagplatz* and to be liberated in the very first hour of fighting. There practically all of the liberated-- among them, Chaim Goldstein (“*Warszawiak*” in the AK)--volunteered spontaneously to join the uprising.

In the following days Gesiówka was stormed at least twice, but each time the attacks stopped short of the strongly fortified defenses. The Polish area commander, mindful of the losses suffered, decided to circumvent the strongholds and to leave their capture to a more propitious time. That tactically sound decision left the surviving 350 Jewish prisoners to the Germans’ rage--meaning almost certain death. In full knowledge of the situation, a group of Polish officers, all of them veterans of the Polish Scouts’ Organization (Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego, integrated into the AK as Szare Szeregi – The Grey Rangers) asked for permission to have one more try. Albeit reluctantly, permission was granted, on the condition that the attacking force would be a limited one, entirely voluntary, and supported by only one tank. . Taking the Germans by surprise, two platoons of the scouts’ Zoska battalion, led by a solitary tank, succeeded in capturing Gesiówka. The “Felek” platoon attacked, while the “Alek” platoon engaged in a diversionary attack.⁹

⁹One AK man “Piotr” (Juliusz Rubini) was killed and five wounded in the attack. See “*Pamiętniki żołnierzy Baonu Zoska*”, (Warsaw, *Naza Księgarnia*, 1980), pp. 90, 96, 599. He was a single volunteer from another company („Giewont”) of the battalion Zoska. Considering that the known purpose of the attack had been the liberation of the imprisoned Jews, it seem probable that “Piotr” was himself Jewish.

The surprise, emotion, and enthusiasm of the liberated prisoners is difficult to describe but easy to understand.¹⁰ “Wacek” (Captain Waclaw Micuta), commander of the operation, lived to experience one more surprise: he had just about left the turret of his tank when he saw a militarily organized column of striped-clad prisoners. Then he heard in Polish: “Junior Officer Henryk Lederman presents the Jewish battalion ready to fight.”

Following Wacek's report permission was given to accept volunteers. A dozen professional electricians and mechanics were recruited into the armored platoon. Other skilled mechanics were absorbed into the only rebel arms-producing workshop on Grzybowska Street.¹¹ Many others joined the three scouts' battalions: Parasol, Wigry, and Zoska. Since there were so few arms, the largest groups were absorbed by the logistic units of Wigry and Zoska quartermasters Captain Feliks Cywinski (“Rys”) and Lieutenant Ludwik Michalski (“Fil”).

Their activities are part of a lesser-known history of Jewish fighting as part of the Polish Warsaw uprising in 1944. In order to appreciate the entire story, the Jews who joined the AK and the AL earlier have to be identified along with the hundreds or more Jews who, after the outbreak of the uprising, left their hiding places and joined its ranks. And finally, the part played by the revived Jewish Fighting Organization – Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa (ZOB) must also be told.

¹⁰ Bogdan Deczkowski (“Laudanski”) of the platoon “Alek” was surprised seeing among the liberated Jews the brothers Jakób and Józef Miodowski. He was imprisoned with them in the Pawiak prison in 1941/2. Their survival and liberation on August 5, 1944, was a real miracle. Pamiętniki, p. 90. In their own narration recorded shortly after the end of German rule, the brothers related their unbelievable survival story: as professional tailors and members of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS). Both were arrested in August 1940, already brought to the Pawiak prison, they were immediately taken to work in the prison garments' workshop. In that capacity they were protected by the prison staff to the extent that the inquiring Gestapo was told of their alleged execution. When Pawiak was evacuated, their protectors sent them to the Gesiówka camp. There they were liberated, almost four years to the day of their incarceration. From their account it seems that they joined the ranks of the insurgents along with other Pawiak rebel Jews. It was then only that their luck left them (or did it?): Jakób was wounded at Wola and brother Józef in the Old. The rest of the uprising they spent in hospitals, the last one being a German one in Milanówek near Warsaw. Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute (AZIH), Warsaw, 301/5678, 1958; and testimony of AK Lieutenant Tadeusz Zuchowicz (“Marek”), AZIH, ibid., 301/467.

¹¹ Ibid., 301/5678, 1958.

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Confronting the Enemy

The stores captured by the AK were full of food, German uniforms, and helmets. As they were told to help themselves to these treasures, Goldstein's hungry squad scrambled for the canned food, paying no attention to the fact that their striped garb made them particularly distinctive. During the following week they fought in the same garments against the German armored force on the barricades of the Wola quarter, striving unsuccessfully to open free access to the vital Vistula bridges.

One day an AK officer commanding a unit of forty-two men, six of them Jews, in face of murderous German fire, considered surrender. All six Jews in the unit instinctively reacted to this possibility by jumping into the open space in front of the barricade, firing rapidly on the advancing Germans. Taken by surprise, the Germans fled.¹² Two of the Gesiówka Jews were killed; one was wounded.

After the retreat from Wola and while still in their striped garb, Goldstein witnessed the cold-blooded murder of one of his comrades by an armed Jew-hater. His AK officer did not intervene under the pretext that it was beyond his authority. But following that incident, the Jews of the unit were issued uniforms and helmets.¹³

In the Old City Goldstein and his group remained in the AK ranks. One night the commander called for twelve volunteers for a dangerous mission. Goldstein and eleven other Gesiówka Jews stood up immediately. Two received machine pistols, while the rest, under cover of their comrades, dug during the night a deep defensive trench under the very nose of the attacking Germans. The Jews were consequently cited for bravery.¹⁴

¹² David Edelman from France was the first Gesiówka man to fall in battle. Two others were at the same time wounded Goldstein, *Sibn.* pp.9, 121, 127).

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.125-128.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 119.

Only a small number of the liberated Gesiówka Jews had any military training or experience. Besides the lack of arms, that is the reason why the majority were assigned to logistic duties. Under German fire they constructed barricades, manned munitions-transporting squads, served as stretcher-bearers, hospital personnel and kitchen staff¹⁵. All the while the majority of them remained in their striped attire--an easy target for the Germans. The toll was extremely heavy. Besides dozens who fell during the one week of fighting at Wola, after the AK retreat the Germans executed about 120 Gesiówka Jews along with thirty Polish Redemptorist priests.¹⁶

The group incorporated into the armored platoon was kept constantly busy by the almost round-the-clock heavy fighting in which tanks were engaged and taking many enemy hits. It was only thanks to the ingenuity, persistence, and extraordinary bravery of the technical squad that they were kept functional. One such case, during the last days of the Wola fighting, was reported by Platoon Commander Micuta: at just the time that two German armored vehicles faced one of the two rebel tanks, the tank cannon jammed. Under heavy enemy fire, Corporal Józef Filar,¹⁷ the Gesiówka squad's electrician, accompanied by another Gesiówka man--"Kuba," a young Hungarian--reached the tank and, with lightning speed, repaired the cannon. It immediately began firing, forcing the Germans to flee. Both Filar and Kuba were decorated with the Bravery Cross (*Krzyż Walecznych* KW). They fell in battle at the Czerniaków bridgehead on September 15.

¹⁵ Even the officer commanding the AK group, Lt. Colonel Jan Mazurkiewicz ("Radoslaw"), have had during the whole time of the uprising as his personal cook an elderly Gesiówka Dutch Jew by the name Carl. the capitulation he was given "Aryan" documents as Karol Kucharek ("cook" in Polish). Dr. Zygmunt Kujawski ("Brom") surgically removed his Auschwitz arm tattooed number and tried to "correct" his Semitic appearance. All three of them went together in the German POW camp Zeithain.. After the liberation "Karol" returned to Amsterdam; as recollected by Zuchowicz, AZIH, 301/5678, and "Dr. Brom" at the Zosska veterans' meeting in June 1989).

¹⁶ Rutkowski, "Le Camp," p.100.

¹⁷ Józef Filar, a highly skilled professional engineer-electrician, was a former Pawiak prisoner transferred to Gesiówka on July 31; (Anlen, "Memories" p. 92; and *Pamiętniki*, p. 602). As to Kuba, see Anna Wyganowska-Erikson, *Pluton pancerny w powstaniu warszawskim*, (Warsaw: First Business College, 1994), pp. 84, 210, 454..

Shortly before the retreat from Wola, one of the two rebel tanks received such heavy German hits that it had to be abandoned. The second one led the way into the Old City. On September 11, heavy German forces attacked the Stawki region, aiming to cut the rebels off from possible reinforcements operating in the bordering forests. The armored platoon, with its only tank, was ordered to join the defending units. After initial success the tank was hit by German anti-tank artillery and could not be repaired with the means at the insurgents' disposal. Junior Officer Lederman ("Heniek"), one of the four Gesiówka men fighting there in the ranks of the platoon, set fire to it so as to leave the Germans only a worthless "carcass."¹⁸

Passing into the Old City, the squad fought in the AK ranks in all the fierce battles. At the very beginning, Wacek was severely wounded while defending positions on the borders of the ghetto ruins. While he was lying unconscious and bleeding profusely, a nurse, Alicja Golod-Golebiowska ("Lusia"), managed to reach him despite heavy German fire and saved his life by stopping the bleeding and applying a provisional dressing. Before he was fully recovered, after only ten days in a makeshift infirmary, the wounded Wacek resumed command of one of the posts in the Old Town.¹⁹

¹⁸ Rutkowski, "Le Camp," pp. 110-111. The same event is related as an alleged eyewitness report by the already twice mentioned Lt. Zuchowicz in his 1958 ZIH recorded testimony: (verbatim et literatim!): "I remember about August 9th an attack of three German tanks... One of them is stopped by our well aimed "Piat". The SS crew jumping out of the tank is cut down by our fire. The two remaining tanks turn their guns firing at us with all their might. The major commanding the sector shouted: 'Who could enter the immobilized tank, turn the cannon and fire at the retreating Germans?' One of our Jews jumps like a cat and is already inside... We see the cannon turning and then firing at the retreating tanks destroying one of them... The commander kisses the man on both cheeks and pins on his chest his own *Virtuti Military Cross*." A really touching story but, obviously, an exaggerated hear-say tale. Filar could not--and did not--repair one of three German attacking tanks and was not and could not be decorated on the spot with the *Virtuti Military Cross*. Only the Supreme Army Commanding Officer could award that decoration. In his many recollections and memories published in later years, Zuchowicz does not mention that episode any more..

¹⁹ Wyganowska, *Pluton*, pp. 147, 192. Golod-Golebiowska, twice decorated with the Bravery Cross, is described as "a blue-eyed blond with a broad smiling face." She mentions that her mother and the youngest of her seven sisters were living at Czerniaków and then one day perished in the ruins of the bombed-out house. A few days later she deliberately chose to stay with gravely wounded comrades-in-arms in a building, already almost totally destroyed by persistent enemy fire and died there September 16th, *ibid.*, pp. 281, 355, 366, 445. Not mentioned is the real family name, which is not "Golod" but the very Jewish "Gold." With her blue eyes and broad smile she fought and fell as Polish Christian and was buried at the Catholic Warsaw cemetery. Benjamin Meirchak, *Jewish Military Casualties*, Vol. IV, p. 68.

In the meantime, on August 16, under the command of Wacek's successor, "Rawicz" (Lieutenant Eugeniusz Romanski), all four Gesiówka men--Filar, Heniek, Kuba, and Rysiek--participated in the surprise night attack on the German fortifications in the ghetto ruins.²⁰ Here Lederman was essential in establishing a vital munitions supply route through the underground sewer canals between the besieged Old Town and the Zoliborz district. Lederman, who fell on September 5, was decorated with the KW Bravery Cross. Two other Gesiówka Jews of the Armored Platoon--Kuba (Hungarian, real name unknown, fell September 13) and Rysiek (Junior Officer Ryszard Sutka, fell September 14), who both were killed at the Czerniaków bridgehead--were also decorated.²¹

Jews scattered among all the rebel units participated massively in the defense and house-to-house fighting in the Old **Town**. The largest group was of more than 100 Gesiówka men rescued from the slaughter at Wola, many of them still in their striped garb. They continued to be employed in the logistic services. It was their bad luck that among those responsible for these services was also a platoon of virulently antisemitic National Armed Forces (Narodowe Sily Zbrojne; NSZ). They excelled in finding every opportunity to send the Jews on suicide missions. When it was discovered that Sergeant Bedek of the NSZ shot the advancing Jews from behind, one of the Greek Gesiówka men executed him. On another occasion two "striped" Jews fighting on the barricade at the entrance to Miodowa Street were

²⁰ Wyganowska, *Pluton*, p. 179.

²¹ *Pamiętniki*, pp. 602, 603. Besides these four decorated men, at least six more Gesiówka men are mentioned as soldiers of the armored Platoon: three Hungarians not established identity called only by their first names: Kobus, Koloman, and Tibor, the last two platoon cooks, all three fell in the final days of fighting; then three Polish Jews: Gutek – Dawid Goldman – fell October 2nd exploring the possibilities to cross Vistula; Koper – Stanislaw Sieminski (name adopted during the occupation); and Szaber – Abram Silberstein, the two of them survived as Germanheld POWs and returned to Warsaw.. With the Nurse Gold-Golebiowski, there were twelve known Jews in the forty-nine men and women strong Armored Platoon, or 25 . The two named survivors mean a 16.6 survival, or 83.4 loss rate for Jewish fighters. Wyganowska (*Pluton*, pp. 451-464) names at least twenty-one survivors of the remaining thirty-seven non-Jewish men and women making it 57 % survival or 43 % loss rate for this group.

shot dead by other NSZ men who were shouting: “We do not need fighting Jews! Death to Jews!”. The killers managed to escape unpunished²².

Just as it was their bad luck to confront the NSZ, it was the good luck of the Gesiówka men to have the ZOB squad among the Old Town fighters. In fact, the ZOB commander, Yitzhak Cukierman (“Antek”), seeing their plight, intervened quite early and successfully on their behalf both with the AK and AL commands, naming Josef Bei as their liaison and spokesman. As a result they were treated fairly, and the AL opened its stores to provide them with food and clothing.

Cukierman did not forget them in the difficult last days of the Old Town defense. He tried twice to evacuate them through the sewers to the then relatively safer Zoliborz suburb. Both times the retreating men met with German ambushes and grenade attacks. Though the losses were minor, the men refused to advance and turned back. With the fall of the Old Town, on September 2nd, the AK was in command of the evacuation. In spite of the extremely difficult situation, the AK consented to Cukierman’s request to include the Jews in the organized evacuation. However, as they had not yet recovered from the shock of the two previous unsuccessful experiences, most of them refused. Cukierman’s arguments, which emphasized the murderous German behavior with regard to surrendering rebels, were of little avail. Only a small number went with the ZOB squad through the sewers to Zoliborz. The majority were murdered in the Old Town together with the remaining Poles, who were for the most part severely wounded²³.

²² The *Mostowa* incident is mentioned by Goldstein, *Sibn*, p. 126. The execution of the NSZ sergeant was related to the author of this study by Albert Levi and Josef Nahmias, the Greek Gesówka survivors in 1964 in Israel.

²³ Yitzhak Zuckerman: *A Surplus of Memory: Chronicle of the Ghetto Uprising* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) pp.540-543 and *These Seven Years 1939-1946*, Beit Lohamei Ha-Getaot, 1990), pp.454-456. In the last days of the Old Town AK hospital at the corner of Duga and Miodowa streets was bombed and burned. Among the about 100 victims was a Pawiak and Gesiówka man, the surgeon Dr. Leon Kosinski; his real Jewish name “Kadysiewicz” (Anlen, *Memories of Pawiak*, p. 92).

Another four of the Gesiówka Jews incorporated into the scouts' battalion Parasol became widely popular within the ranks. They were Henryk Poznanski ("Bystry") and his wife, both members of the ZOB; Dr. Zoltan Safiyeff ("Dr. Turek"); and Dr. Peter Forró ("Pawel"). Bystry had been the most trusted organizer and guide in the complicated sewage system of the underground canals; he knew them well from his wide experience as a ZOB fighter during the 1943 ghetto revolt. At the end of the Old Town battle, on August 31, he led the chief of the AK, General Bor-Komorowski, and his staff to new positions in the town center. The same day, on his next tour, he took the commander of the Northern Front, Colonel "Wachnowski" (Colonel Ziemiński), and the wounded Radosław (Colonel Jan Mazurkiewicz) with their staffs. Toiling around the clock, he even returned to the Old Town to take the remaining rear guards to relative safety. A week later he fell while firing at the enemy. (His wife, serving in the same unit as a messenger, probably survived.)²⁴

Dr. Turek, a captain in the Red Army, a surgeon (most probably of Bukharian origin; he was deported to Auschwitz from Western Ukrainian territory annexed by the USSR in 1939), joined the battalion directly after the liberation of Gesiówka. He dressed and operated on the wounded under the most exasperating conditions. During the retreat from the Old City, he insisted on being left there with the rear guard and was the last to enter the canals with Bystry²⁵.

The Hungarian Pawel, though a physician by profession, distinguished himself and was generally admired from the beginning as an exceptional sniper. Armed with the English anti-tank weapon "Piat," he had to his credit the destruction of quite a number of German armored cars and tanks, which he carried out with unusual precision and sang-froid. On September 22, when their squad commander considered surrender, Dr. Turek and Pawel,

²⁴ Piotr Stachiewicz: „Parasol”, *Dzieje oddziału do zadań specjalnych kierownictwa dywersji Komendy Głównej Armii Krajowej*, (Warsaw, Pax, 1981), p. 565.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 567, 678.

trusting their perfect German, volunteered to contact the SS unit facing them. Before they could explain their mission, a round fired by Germans killed both of them²⁶.

Captain Feliks Cywinski, the quartermaster of the Wigry battalion, was a distinctly extraordinary personality. On his own initiative and with no assistance from anyone, under the German occupation he sheltered twenty-six Jews. Among them was Shmuel (Stanislaw) Kenigswein, a prize fighter of the Maccabi sports' club in Warsaw and a (res.) army sergeant. Thanks to Cywinski's connections and insistence, when the August 1944 insurrection broke out, all of them, with the exception of one elderly couple, were accepted and incorporated into various AK rebel units. After the liberation of Gesiówka, his Parasol counterpart, Lieutenant Michalski, took a few dozen of the inmates and dispersed them among barricade-constructing squads and kitchen service.

As for Cywinski, he took several of his protected Jews and some forty Gesiówka men, mostly Pawiak ex-prisoners with ZOB and ZZW (the Revisionist Zionist Zydowski Zwiasek Wojskowy; Jewish Military Union) experience, and turned them into the Wigry Jewish Platoon, with Kenigswein as its commander. After a few days work on constructing barricades, Cywinski succeeded in arming the Jewish Platoon. It first fought in mid-August, based in Simon's Passage ("Pasaz Simonsa") in the battle of Muranów, under the temporary command of Lieutenant Rawicz of the Armored Platoon. Later they defended St. John's Cathedral in the Old City. After suffering heavy losses, the eighteen survivors moved to the Czerniaków bridgehead, fighting until the bitter end²⁷.

²⁶ Ibid., p.598.

²⁷ Shmuel Krakowski, *The War of the Doomed: Jewish Armed Resistance in Poland, 1942-1944* (New York, London: Holmes & Meier, 1984), p. 278, quoting survivor Erno Hermonovic's testimony. After the AK Command's refusal to have Antek ukerman's ZOB squad as a separate Jewish unit and likerefusal of Radoslaw's demand to form such Jewish unit out of the liberated Gesiówka prisoners, Cywinski's Jewish Platoon was the only distinctly Jewish Warsaw AK unit. Cywinski was awarded the *Yad Vashem Righteous among the Nations* medal (idem) and Wyganowska, *Pluton*, p. 164.

Owing to its manifestly Jewish character, the unit's few survivors did not surrender to the Germans when the hostilities ceased. Instead, Kenigswein took them back to the ruins of the Old Town, where they hid undiscovered in a bunker at the corner of Kilinski and Krzywe Kolo streets until the Red Army crossed the Vistula on January 17th, 1945²⁸. Two Greek Gesiówka men—Isaac Aruh and Dario Nussen—survived under similar circumstances in a big bunker dug in the ruins between Sliska and Sienna streets²⁹.

Quite a few of the fifty Gesiówka men, some of them Greeks, who were liberated at the *Umschlagplatz* in the very first hours of the uprising by a Kedyw (HQ Diversions Command) unit, joined another Kedyw unit--the Nalecz company. This later became a battalion under the command of Lieutenant (later promoted to Captain) Stefan Kaniewski. Kaniewski and his soldiers, among them the Gesiówka Jews, held up against the incessant attacks of German armour, air force, and artillery for two weeks, using the ruins of three Warsaw landmarks (Radziwill Palace, Bank Polski, and Simon's Mall) as strongholds. The price of blocking German entry into the Old Town was heavy: the strongholds held out until the last days of the Old Town, but then the Nalecz battalion ceased to exist³⁰.

After the surrender six of the surviving Greek Gesiówka fighters (Baruch, Sami and Yacov Arditi, Josef Nahmias, Yacov Malah, and Yacov Parente) left Warsaw with the general evacuation ordered by the Germans. But then, on the advice of two passing Catholic nuns, they fled and boarded the still-functioning suburban Grodzisk electric train. As they

²⁸ Bernard Goldstein, *Stars Bear Witness* (New York: The Viking Press, 1949), p. 269. Bernard Goldstein himself was an activist of the Jewish socialist party *Bund*. He fought in the Uprising in the ranks of the AL. After the capitulation he hid with twenty-seven more Jews (and one Polish woman) in a bunker at Wspólna 26 Street. Among the Jews there were David Guzik, a somehow controversial American Joint Distribution Committee "Joint" representative in occupied Poland, and one Greek Gesiówka man. The latter was a professional pickpocket and entertained his co-inmates by demonstrating his skills; *ibid.*, p. 269.

²⁹ Maciej Kledzik's article „Robinsonowie” in the Polish daily *Rzeczpospolita, Magazyn*, 18, 2002.

³⁰ Jerzy Przygonski, *Powstanie Warszawskie w sierpniu 1944* (Warsaw: PWN, 1980), pp. 228 ff.; Kirchmayer, *Powstanie*, pp. 316. Arie Isaak recounted, in 1959, how he and two other Gesiówka Greeks, David Cohen and Ishai Moshe, together with some more Jewish and Polish fighters after the fall of these strongholds hid in a self-constructed bunker till the arrival of Polish and Russian liberators in January 1945; (Beit Lohamei Ha-Getaot, Archive, 520/2).

were asking for tickets, to their astonishment, they suddenly heard the question: *Amchu?* Upon their appropriate response to this Jewish code word, they were advised to get off at one of the next stops because of the persistent German screenings. Following that advice they fled into the forest adjoining the rail line.³¹

There five of them, hoping--as so many others--for the imminent arrival of the Red Army, prepared a primitive shelter under the trees. They had to remain there for four and half winter months. The five paid a Polish cobbler from the near village to supply them with food. The sixth, Josef Nahmias, posing as a Greek Christian, found a Polish lady for whom he worked in exchange for food and shelter. After the arrival of the Russians, all six were again reunited; however, shortly thereafter they were imprisoned as alleged “fascists” together with Germans, Ukrainians, and Russian traitors. Even the evidence of their tattooed Auschwitz numbers was of no help. It was only after the final unconditional German surrender, in May 1945, that they were finally liberated. When they were released from the well-guarded Russian refugee camp, they were finally allowed to return to Greece³².

As mentioned above, the Jewish survivors of the Wola massacre fled with the retreating rebels into the Old **Town**. There, among the Polish defenders, the leftist AL was represented more strongly than elsewhere. There were quite a number of Jews in its ranks, including in the command. The AL showed much more understanding for the Jews than did the dominant AK. It was the AL, and not the AK, that immediately agreed to incorporate as a separate and distinct Jewish unit the ZOB fighting squad under the command of Antek Cukierman. Shmuel Krakowski quotes the testimony of AL officer Jan Fotek, who was charged with organizing another Jewish unit:

³¹ Related by Josef Nahmias in his 1965 testimony (Beit Lohamei Ha-Getaot, Archives 2955//65-03/2692). “*Amchu?*” had been the popular Jewish password.

³² At first, and for quite long time, the Soviets suspected anyone found alive in territories liberated from the German occupation as having been spared as a German collaborator. The significance of the tattooed Auschwitz prisoners’ numbers was beyond their knowledge and understanding.

“We had to find some way to grant these people who were being chased by the Nazis the satisfaction of participating in battle and the opportunity to retaliate after all the crimes their people had suffered from... In this way a unit made up entirely of Jews was established and took part in the Warsaw revolt. The command named the unit “AL Auxiliary International Jewish Brigade.” I was responsible for assembling this unit...and was the only Pole in the unit... Dr. Stern from Bratislava, was considered the leader of these men. I thus appointed Dr. Stern head of the headquarters of the brigade... As a result of the work of the brigade, three or four barricade lines, fortifications, and posts were built that could be defended with little manpower...”³³.

According to another Polish source quoted by Krakowski (J. Przygonski), the Jewish Brigade numbered about 150 soldiers. Later it took over the task of defending the positions it had built. In the last days of August, during the final German assault on the rebel positions in the Old City, the Jewish Brigade suffered such heavy losses that it ceased to exist. The few survivors were evacuated through the sewage canals together with their remaining AL comrades³⁴.

Last Stand

³³ Krakowski, *War of the Doomed*, p.279.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 279-280. Przygonski, *Powstanie*, ol. 2, p. 360; Here it seems interesting to give an example of how truth is being twisted to suit changing political trends: it is the justmentioned book by Antoni Przygonski whose early publications are quoted above by Krakowski. But here, in the quoted, 1980 published *Powstanie* only the ZOB platoon deserves a two-line mention. ol. 1 p. 379. The auxiliary International Jewish Brigade disappears altogether being replaced by something called “household company” or “brigade” (sic!), (*kompania gospodarcza*). Its strength is given this time as “over 120 persons” of various nationalities and “professions, among them Warsaw cobblers.” Jews as such are not mentioned at all and replaced by anonymous “foreigners liberated from the Gesia camp and Danilowiczowska prison” (ol. 1, p. 381). Gesiówka Greek Jews appear then all of a suddenly as soldiers of the household company being evacuated together with the ZOB survivors in the general AL evacuation on August 25, to Zoliborz (ol. 2, p. 360). You have to keep in mind that publisher is the Polish Government Scientific Publications (PWN), and 1980 was the zenith of anti-Semitic propaganda thinly disguised as “anti-Zionist.

On September 2, the Old Town was in ruins and was abandoned. The Armoured Platoon defenders, led by Gutek, Heniek, and Koper, crawled together with the remaining Zoska survivors through the sewers first to the centre of the city and from there to the Czerniaków bridgehead. There more Gesiówka men fell in fighting; among them, Józef Filar, Henryk Lederman, Richard Sutka, and three Hungarians known only by their first names or pseudonyms--Koloman, Kuba, and Tibor.

After the deadly defence of the last stronghold at the Okreg Nr.2, it was decided to try to retreat through the sewers to Mokotów. By that time the Germans had already discovered the importance of the rebels' underground communications and did their best to prevent their escape. A patrol sent ahead reported back that the way was blocked by the Germans. Then Wacek sent Gutek and Koper to explore the situation better. Fooling the diligent German watch, they succeeded in opening a passage in the newly Germans' constructed barricade. Upon their return, they declared that they were ready to lead the escape. At that time Radoslaw ordered the general evacuation under Wacek's command. Indeed, it was only thanks to the persistence, ingenuity, and unabated bravery of the two Gesiówka Jews, David Goldman and Stanislaw Sieminski, that the surviving remnants of the Czerniaków fighters were able to move on to Mokotów³⁵. As for the Armoured Platoon, after the number of soldiers dwindled from thirty-five to only twelve, it had to be disbanded.

Emerging at the sewer entrance at Mokotów, the wounded and exhausted Wacek fell and lost consciousness. He was put into a makeshift hospital with some other gravely wounded men. From his bed, on the last day of the fighting, Wacek repeated his earlier

³⁵ At that time the situation of the totally encircled remnants of AK battalions Zoska, Parasol, and Czaty as well as of some Polish Army Berling soldiers still stuck with them, was hopeless. The Russian command on the right bank of Vistula, in spite of unabating appeals, could not or would not evacuate them. The attacking Germans troops, composed mostly of the murderous SS units of Dirlewanger and Kaminski, recognized only Berling soldiers as POWs executing on the spot all others. It could be said that, by some curious twist of destiny, two Gesiówka men, David Goldman and Stanislaw Sieminski, repaid the AK and their comrades August rescue and liberation by saving now some hundreds of AK fighters. "Yad Vashem" recognized the bravery of the Battalion Zoska voluntary action in two letters addressed to its survivors' organization. The extraordinary exploit of the two Gesiówka Jews still awaits proper recognition by Polish military historiography.

encouragement to the Jewish soldiers to try to reach the Russian-held right bank of the Vistula. As before, they refused to leave him, but he insisted that this time it was an order.

For the last time Gutek and Koper descended into the sewers and led some thirty Zoska survivors into the city centre. There Gutek (David Goldman) went to explore the possibilities of crossing the Vistula. On his way back he was killed by a German sniper. Koper and Szaber decided to remain with the others. Koper already had an “Aryan” identity as Stanislaw Sieminski; and Szaber--Abram Zylbersztajn--became Henryk Kowalski. The two of them survived as POWs. Keeping that identity, Sieminski died in Warsaw in 1988. Zylbersztajn reverted to his Jewish identity, emigrated to Israel in 1947, and died there in 1986³⁶. Some other Gesiówka men, among them, Albert (Abraham) Giladi, succeeded in reaching the Russian lines by swimming the Vistula icy waters³⁷.

After the Capitulation.

At the time of the capitulation, in deliberate violation of the conditions that had been agreed upon, many Poles--and all those recognized as Jews--were summarily executed by the murderous bands of Dirlewanger and Kaminski SS units. Under these circumstances, the Gesiówka men with the Auschwitz prisoner numbers tattooed on their forearms had little if any chance to escape alive³⁸. It was for this reason that the still-conscious commander advised them either to try to join the Russians on the right bank of the Vistula River or to go into hiding. Some twenty Greeks were successfully led to the Russian-held bank by AL guides. These who fought to the last in the Mokotów suburb were cut off from the Vistula

³⁶ Wyganowska, *Pluton*, pp. 370, 387, 391, 409, 418, 431,440.

³⁷ Giladi survived and, after spectacular experiences, reached Israel, serving there as a judge (told by himself to the author in 1964). At least four more Gesiówka men, among them a Transylvanian lawyer, Bela Harap, succeeded, on September 26, to cross the Vistula; Krakowski, *War of the Doomed*, p. 289.

³⁸ After the capitulation, on October 2, several dozen Jews, among them many Gesiówka men, were executed at Krasinski square ,” at the outskirts of the Old Town Rutkowski, Le Camp, p. 100: Krakowski, *War of the Doomed*, p. 289.

and from that possibility of escape. Sixteen of them discarded their military uniforms and joined the ranks of the civilian population escaping into the woods. One group went into hiding in Nadarzyn near Warsaw. There a peasant named Hajduk selflessly helped them to survive until the arrival of the Red Army in January 1945³⁹.

In anticipation of the swift arrival of the Russian and the Soviet-sponsored Polish armies, many more tried to hide in more-or-less well-prepared bunkers in the ruins of the town. One, housing forty Jewish fighters, was located in the ruins of the Sienna-Zlota streets' apartment block. After the suppression of the Uprising, the Germans immediately began searching for such hiding places. One of the first was discovered on October 27. Seven inmates, among them three Hungarian Gesiówka men, fell in the fighting⁴⁰. Bernard Goldstein estimates the number of Jews who were in hiding at over 500. Of them, only about 200 managed to survive⁴¹.

Chaim Goldstein, along with two other Gesiówka men and four more companions, one of them a Polish priest, survived in a similar manner. In the last days of the fighting in the Old Town, their commander advised them to go into the hiding. With the help of some Polish comrades-in-arms, they constructed a bunker connected to the underground canals, expecting the arrival of the Red Army was not too far away. When the frequent German patrols would approach, they would leave the bunker and descend into the canal.

After about three weeks, they met an AK patrol and learned that the fighting continued. Goldstein and another Gesiówka man went with them to the AK Zoliborz command, where they declared themselves ready to join the ranks again. They were given a very friendly reception but learned, too, that the final surrender was only a matter of hours away and the best they could do was to return to their bunker. Sometime in December, in the

³⁹ Rutkowski, "Le Camp," p. 100.

⁴⁰ Krakowski, *War of the Doomed*, p. 291.

⁴¹ Goldstein, *Stars*, pp. 269, 276.

cold winter, they were thrilled to discover the existence of another underground bunker with ten Jews, all of them AL fighters. Alas, the joy was short-lived: the hiding place was discovered, and all the men were executed. On a cold January 17, 1945, Goldstein and his companions, after four and a half months of darkness, finally saw the sunlight of liberation⁴², as did all of the approximately 200 Jews still hiding in the ruins of Warsaw.

Conclusion

After a careful look at all the available evidence, it can be stated that there are reliable reports confirming the survival of at least seventy-seven ex-Gesiówka men. It seems to be justified to round that number off to eighty⁴³. It would then match almost exactly the number of reported losses.

Starting with David Edelman and the 120 executed at Wola through the losses in the Old Town, Czerniaków, Mokotów and the city centre fighting, and ending with the three discovered in a bunker, as reported above, these add up to the 398 Gesiówka men and twenty-six women liberated in the first days of the uprising. In other words, there are confirmed losses of 82.5%, or a 17.5% survival rate among the men. Though Anlen mentions by name only five Gesiówka women as survivors, of the twenty-six transferred, on July 31, from Pawiak, it is probable that some more survived in the ranks of the Polish civilian population. Assuming that half of the remaining twenty-one Gesiówka women managed to survive, we arrive at a total number of fewer than 100 survivors. This means a 25% survival rate.

How does this compare with the general Polish losses during the uprising? According to the renowned Polish military historian Kirchmayer, as quoted above, out of about 50,000 rebel soldiers, 16-18,000 lost their lives. Taking the higher number of 18,000, this makes a 36% casualty, or 64% survival rate. The same source gives the number of all those who died

⁴² Goldstein, *Sibn*, p. 324.

⁴³ Anlen serving at the Pawiak prison as an orderly knew personally almost all of the prisoners transferred with him to Gesiówka. He tried to maintain contact with them during the Uprising as well as after the liberation. In his report, besides the people mentioned already in this survey, he states the following survivors: women, Zofia Samsztajn, Natalia Blüth, Hanna Włodawer, Józefa Kruszynska, and Józefa Zabielska; men: Leon Lutman, Jakób Rozenchwajg, Henryk Kaplan, Tomasz Hebdzynski, Ignacy Diamant, Aleksander Faliszewski, the Atlasowicz brothers, and Marian Słuchowski.

during the uprising as 200,000, which includes the civilian population as well as the fighting men and women. With a population in Warsaw of over one million, this makes no more than a 20% loss or 80% survival rate (including the wounded)⁴⁴. It is evident that the losses suffered by the Gesiówka prisoners in the wake of the Polish Uprising in August 1944, were out of all proportion to the general average. But it has to be remembered that there could be no doubt whatsoever that, without the Polish Uprising and the following liberation, all of about 420 Jewish men and women - Pawiak and Gesiówka prisoners – would be executed by Germans. Thus: the 25% survival rate is indeed very low but still better than a zero one.

The paramount importance of “The Gesiówka Story” is its significance in the complex Jewish-Polish relations. There are quite a number of stories relating anti-Semitic events in Poland at all times, some of them also during the 1944 Uprising.. There are also – as witnesses a real forest of memorial Polish trees at the Yad Vashem in Jerusalem – numerous stories of individual heroism of Polish men and women risking their lives saving persecuted Jews. But there was one and only organization – “Zegota”, dedicated to saving Jews. The behaviour of the five Polish scouts’ battalions fighting in the 1944 Uprising towards the Jews generally and their Jewish comrades-in-arms especially is, besides Zegota, a rather exceptional example of another Polish distinctly positive attitude on an organizational level⁴⁵. The Jewish response had been unwavering loyalty, bravery and self-sacrifice. And this not only on the part of about hundred strong group of Polish Jews, but as well as all the remainder of mostly Greek and Hungarian origins. This became clearly evident when in mid-September the opportunity arose to seek safe haven by passing to the Red Army held right Vistula bank. No one did, unless expressly ordered to do so in the last days of the falling

⁴⁴ Kirchmayer, *Powstanie*, pp. 136, 442.

⁴⁵ That attitude found its recognition in one of the Yad Vashem letters mentioned in footnote 35 above. Signed by prof. Shevah Weiss, Yad Vashem President and Israel Ambassador in Poland and handed over in Warsaw on the occasion of the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Revolt, it says *inter alia*: “*podziękowanie i wdzięczność dowódcom i żołnierzom batalionu Zoska...oddajemy im część za bohaterski wysiłek, który włożyli w wyzwolenie obozu Gesiówka...świadectwo wielkiej odwagi i humanitaryzmu.*” (“thanks and gratitude for battalion Zoska commanders and soldiers...rendering them honours for their heroic deed of liberating the Gesiówka camp... proof of great bravery and humanitarism”).

Uprising. It is well known that in the past two centuries Jews inscribed their pages of glory in all struggles for Polish independence. Starting with Kosciuszko through the November 1830 and January 1863 Uprisings through 1905 revolt, Pilsudski's Legions and the bloody 1939 campaign. It shall be stated that the Gesiówka fighters did their best to keep-up that tradition.