

Resistance in Europe

“Never Again ” . This statement engraved on memorials scattered across the breadth of Europe form one of the last visible remnants of the Holocaust in which over 6 Million would perish. Yet despite the grasp of the Third Reich, groups rose up, undeterred by fear, resisted the crushing imposition of the authoritarian state and its associates, varying in both size and magnitude, from small families like the Dutch Oversteegens in joining the Dutch resistance, through to the actions of the hundreds in the Jewish Military Union situated in the Warsaw Ghetto, or the thousands who valiantly fought in the Polish Underground.

With the occupation of the Netherlands occurring in May 1940, the Dutch Oversteegens saw the implementation of forced Semitic relocations to Amsterdam, resulting in the Dutch Jewish population decreasing from 150,000 to a mere 5,000 individuals(Griffioen, and Zeller). For sisters Freddie and Truus Oversteegen, they witnessed this firsthand in their city of Haarlem. The late Freddie, stated in 2016, that she recollected “Germans banging on doors – that made so much noise, you'd hear it in the entire neighbourhood ... It was very frightening”(Daniels). The Oversteegens also saw living standards fall significantly with the Dutch Famine taking hold, as Dutch farmers faced the confiscation of harvests which were redistributed through Antwerp for the Wehrmacht(WoOLF) leading to over 20,000 fatalities by the time of Nazi withdrawal in May 1945. Thus, Freddie and Truus, both wanting to liberate their nation, joined the Dutch Resistance, a fleeting yet determined organization consisting of figures from the clergy, the former military and everyday Dutch citizens wanting to make a difference. However, both Freddie and Truus were not content with distributing propaganda, given that such roles were reserved for women in the organization. Instead, along with companion Hannie Schaft, they were trained as fellow officers tasked with sabotaging bridges, railway tracks and roads which hindered Nazi abilities transport supplies(Daily Express). This would be of crucial significance in slowing German progress during Operation Barbarossa by restricting the supply of petroleum exports available from Norway being routed through the Netherlands(Daniels). Freddie and Truus would survive the war, receiving Mobilization Crosses for bravery. In contrast, Hannie Schaft would be captured at a Nazi checkpoint in March 1945. She was executed on 17th April 1945, yet when her executioner missed his first shot she still did not rescind resistance, evident in her final words “I shoot better”(Daily Express).

While the Netherlands became a hub for counter-Nazi insurgents, resistance was encountered in all facets of society including those actively persecuted by the Germans, most notably the Jewish inhabitants of the Warsaw Ghetto. Constructed in August 1940, the ghetto had an overall area of 3.4km² yet became the living space to 60,000(Stone et al.). The result was the disease spreading, dirty water and malnourishment, causing 92,000 fatalities(Stone et al.). Yet the Germans were never concerned as the area was constructed only as a stopgap until the camps at Treblinka could be constructed north-east of Warsaw. In 1941, Ghetto relocations commenced. Despite the bleak outlook, the Jewish Military Union, or ŻZW with a mere 20 members led by Paweł Frenkiel, had taken arms smuggled by sympathetic Poles and couriers from the Polish Government in exile in an attempt to prevent what many knew would be an extermination of all inside the ghetto(Kraut). Summer 1942, saw the ŻZW reach 500 members, enough for an armed uprising, thus in later summer, Warsaw Ghetto Uprising occurred. In all, the uprising hampered the transport of Ghetto inhabitants to both the Treblinka and Majdanek complexes significantly, sending a powerful message to the German State. However, most ŻZW members were captured, most notably, the unknown Warsaw Ghetto Boy, known from the 1943 photo captured during the dissolution(Stańczyk). After the war, the photo would

become the symbol for resistance against the horrors of war (Staćzyk), akin to New Zealand's own "Unknown Warrior".

Similar to the actions in the Warsaw Ghetto, outside in Warsaw, the Polish Underground Government also planned an insurrection, commencing on 1st August 1941. Inspired by the Czech Uprising which had occurred in May the same year, the insurrection was spurred by the plethora of socio-economic issues that Poland saw under occupation including crackdowns on free speech and commerce. The diversity of insurrectionist's backgrounds cannot be understated as people from all backgrounds united against their occupiers, as the case of Auguste Browne who was of Nigerian descent (Boston). As Browne was a subject of the British Empire, his family urged him to emigrate to the United Kingdom preceding the imminent invasion of Poland, but Browne refused, stating his intentions in preserving the sovereignty of his "loved country" (Boston). Browne would play a vital role during the uprising conducting innumerable artillery strikes which would lead to over 300 Wehrmacht and SS casualties, a price the already overburdened Wehrmacht could not afford (Boston). Browne's actions also distracted the overstretched German troops enough that it indirectly facilitated acclaimed photographer and resistance fighter Eugeniusz Lokajski, in capturing more than 1000 images of war-torn Warsaw ("Eugeniusz Lokajski „Brok"), of which many would be published across the world to show the human and architectural carnage that had occurred. Even today, all of these photographs still hold special significance to the Polish State in remembering and commemorating the valiant efforts of all who participated in the 63 day Warsaw uprising against Nazi Germany ("Eugeniusz Lokajski „Brok").

While it is important to reflect on the inhumanity Nazi Germany, and how it ruthlessly separated people based on differences, the remarkable actions of groups such as the Oversteegers, the Jewish Military Union, and the Polish Underground resistance, have left their mark on history, by choosing to stand in defiance of terror, when others accepted Nazi rule. Their stories set an invaluable precedent, so even when we face adversity against the good of mankind today, we too must stand up, even if those around us remain quiet.

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