

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943

Key enquiry questions and learning from topic study.

- What can be learned from examples of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust?
- What was life like in Jewish ghettos? How did this differ to the experience in concentration camps?

Historical Background on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

The Nazis established ghettos in areas in Eastern Europe under German control, predominantly in German-occupied Poland and the Soviet Union. The purpose of the ghettos was to confine Jews until they could be executed. The Warsaw Ghetto was established in October 1940 and sealed on 15 November of that year. It was the largest Jewish ghetto in German-occupied Europe. The ghetto population fluctuated, but at its peak housed 400,000–460,000 Jews. Conditions in the ghettos were lethal with overcrowding, disease, and little food. The rations supplied by the Germans in the ghetto were around 218 calories per day, whereas calorie intake for the Germans was over 2000.

Between July and September 1942, German SS and police units carried out mass deportations from the Ghetto to Treblinka extermination camp, deporting approximately 265,000 Jews. In July 1942, several underground organisations within the ghetto grouped together to create an armed self-defense unit known as the Jewish Combat Organisation (*Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa*; **ŻOB**). A second force was called the Jewish Military Union (*Żydowski Związek Wojskowy*; **ŻZW**). Combined the two groups had approximately 450–500 members. The majority of fighters were poorly equipped, had little military training or experience. The remaining ghetto population was largely unarmed and sought to build hiding places.

The first attempt at resistance was made in January 1943 when German SS and police returned to Warsaw to carry out more deportations. A small group of Jewish fighters resisted, disorientating the Germans and allowing many Jews to escape. The deportations were suspended after 4 days. Approximately 5000–6500 Jews were deported and around 1700 were killed in the ghetto.

On 19 April 1943, the Germans entered the ghetto with the intention of deporting its surviving inhabitants. They once again met armed resistance. After 2-3 days of street fighting, SS-Brigade Leader Jürgen Stroop ordered the systematic destruction of the Ghetto by burning it to the ground. The Uprising continued for 27 days from 19 April to 16 May 1943, by which time the Germans had crushed the uprising and deported survivors of the resistance to labour and extermination camps.

According to figures given by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), at least 7,000 Jews died in the fighting or hiding in the ghetto. Approximately 7,000 Jews were captured by the SS and police and deported to Treblinka extermination camp where they were murdered. Circa 42,000 Jews captured during the Uprising were sent to forced-labour camps in the Lublin District. This was the largest uprising by Jews during World War II and according to the USHMM “one of the most significant occurrences in the history of the Jewish people”.

Testimony Linked to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

During the winter I was very cold; to keep warm I stayed in bed covered by whatever I could find. I was continuously hungry. Because of flour shortages the meager bread rations that we received contained sawdust. In the ghetto, young starving children were begging for food, dead bodies were just lying in the streets -. Ed Herman

My life's dream has become a reality. I have seen the Jewish defense of the ghetto in all its strength and glory. - Mordechai Anielewicz, Commander of the Jewish Combat Organisation, April 1943

I was no stranger to destruction, including the last days of the 1939 siege of Warsaw. But the present destruction surpassed anything I had ever seen. - Baruch Goldman, Documentary

Images of the Warsaw Ghetto

[Imperial War Museum \(IWM\) photography from the Warsaw Ghetto.](#) The IWM provides an archive of images from the Ghetto. Please note that some of these images are graphic.



Image of the Warsaw Ghetto following its destruction. Taken from the Stroop Report, that is the report written by Stroop for Heinrich Himmler giving an account of the suppression of the Uprising.

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Summary of Key Dates and Figures

- The Warsaw Ghetto was established in October 1940 and sealed in November 1940.
- Conditions in the Ghetto were lethal, including overcrowding, disease and starvation rations.
- Between mid-July 1942 and mid-September 1942, the Nazis deported about 265,000 Jews from Warsaw to the Treblinka extermination camp.
- The uprising began on 19 April 1943 (the eve of Passover) when the Germans entered the camp to deport its-remaining inhabitants. It lasted 27 days
- In response, SS-Brigade Leader Jürgen Stroop ordered the complete destruction of the Ghetto, razing it to the ground.
- At least 7000 Jews died in the Uprising and a further circa 7000 were deported to Treblinka. Approximately 42,000 were sent to forced-labour camps in the Lublin District.

Key Resources for Teacher Subject Knowledge Development and Further Reading

- [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Warsaw Ghetto Uprising"](#). USHMM article on the Uprising, includes easy-to-digest information, statistics and information in chronological order.
- [Britannica, "Warsaw Ghetto Uprising"](#). Encyclopaedia Britannica article on the Uprising. Contains a significant amount of detail and would be useful for deepening subject knowledge.
- [History.com, "Warsaw Ghetto Uprising"](#). Good starting point for more detailed information on the Uprising.
- [Ed Herman, "Ed Herman: My Warsaw Ghetto Memories"](#). Herman was born in Warsaw in 1931 and had first-hand experience of life in the Ghetto.
- Elaine Landau, *The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (Prentice and Hall, 1992). This book includes images and testimonies that will be easy to understand for both students and teachers.

Existing Resources for the Classroom

- [Holocaust Educational Trust, "Ghettos"](#). Lesson plan for helping students to understand what ghettos were and what role they played in the Holocaust.
- [Yad Vashem, *Fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto*](#). Testimony of fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto, a moving documentary that includes footage taken by survivors (approx. 8 and a half minutes). See also Yad Vashem, *The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising: Key Historical Concepts in Holocaust* (approx. 3 minutes 45 seconds).
- [BBC, "Warsaw Ghetto: A Survivor's Tale"](#). Story of Warsaw Ghetto survivor, Janina Dawidowicz, who was 9 years old at the outbreak of the War.
- [Deutsche Welle, *The Warsaw Ghetto*](#). Documentary about life in the Ghetto and the Uprising, including first-person testimonies (approx. 42 minutes).
- [Yad Vashem, "Photographs of the Warsaw Ghetto"](#). Images from the Warsaw Ghetto from a variety of perspectives. Teachers should

exercise discretion in terms of graphic content. Many of the images are taken by Germans, including the Stroop collection.

- [Film: Archaeological Excavations at the Site of the Former Ghetto.](#) Video summarising the archaeological excavations at the site of the Warsaw Ghetto. In Polish with English subtitles.
- [Oneg Shabbat/Ringelblum Archive Online.](#) Archive of life in the Ghetto, original documents written, collected and hidden by those living in the Ghetto.

