

# THE 1939 SOCIETY: PARTISANS

## JEFFREY GRADOW

*As told by his daughter, Helene Gradow Kingston*



My father lived with his parents and two younger sisters in a town called Mlawa, close to the German border. On September 1, 1939, when he was 14 years old, the Germans invaded Poland and the occupation began.

Because the police were looking to arrest my grandfather, he and my father headed East, ending up in Bialystok. There, they tried in vain to bring the rest of their family. In June 1941, the Germans attacked Russia. Someone threw a grenade into the house where they were staying. My grandfather was killed, and my father was left to wander the streets until a neighbor took him in. He was forced into a labor camp, required to clean the streets, cut down trees, and lay the trunks on the highway to pave the road. There was little food and he was forced to work from dawn to dusk.

He decided to escape into the forest and eventually met up with and joined a group of Jews and Russians in a camp in the woods. There was a shortage of guns but because of his skills he was chosen to learn to use one. In 1941, the various groups hiding in the forest were separate and loose entities. Their goal early on was mere survival. Later, they became more organized and aggressive. Their mission changed from mere survival to attempting to disrupt the Germans and their accomplices.

My father was sent out on missions at night, and was sometimes unable to return to the same base camp. The base camps were built as follows: The Partisans dug a hole about 4 to 5 feet deep, cut down birch trees and used the branches as vertical support. Tree trunks were placed diagonally across the hole. Then they laid leaves and smaller branches to fill the small holes. The dirt that had been dug out was placed on the leaves to help keep the hole warm during the winter months. My father's Partisan group slept in the hole on top of some makeshift bunks made out of smaller tree branches. About 15 people slept in each bunker. Some of the Partisans served as

guards while the others slept. My father's group consisted of about 100 to 150 Partisans—mostly men. They were either Jews or Russian ex-officers or soldiers.

## **HILDA EISAN**

*As told by her grandson, Joey Rubenstein*



My dear grandmother, Hilda Gimpel Eisen was born in Izbiza Kuj, in the state of Posnin, Poland. When the Germans invaded Poland and the Nazis began their round-up of the Jews, Hilda fled deep into the woods and joined the Jewish resistance fighters or Partisans in December 1941.

The group was headed by Yechiel Greenberg and was located in the state of Biala Podlaska, near the Russian border. They were known as “Cheel’s Group.” There were about fifteen people in Cheel’s Group or their “little nest” as they called themselves. The Elbaum brothers, Butche and Edek; David Dutkin; the Torbiner family; and the four Rubenstein boys. Young and beautiful with black hair, my grandmother had the nickname of Shane Hinda.

Each member of the Partisans had a special job to do for the success of the group. Shane Hinda’s job was one of the most daring—providing the water supply for the group. In addition, she was an excellent marksman. With a rifle in her possession, she thought she would ease Nazi oppression.

One day, as Shane Hinda was dipping for water in a stream, the German SS lay in wait, camouflaged between the trees. Hinda was trapped. The Germans grabbed her, discovering her weapon. They should have shot her on the spot, but they did not. Instead, they took her to a nearby barn where they harshly interrogated her. They took her up the ladder and locked her in the loft after her refusal to betray her fellow Partisans. She was left alone and told to think about her future.

With no hope in sight, Shane Hinda decided to jump out of the small window opening on the second floor. She never expected to live. But, though injured, she made a miraculous escape. And the rest is history. Hinda survived the war and is the proud mother of four and devoted grandmother of eight.

## MAX CUKIER

*As told by his son, Jeff Cukier*



My father left his hometown of Riki (a small town in Poland) in 1935 to live in Warsaw and seek a better education. My father's sister followed him soon afterward.

With the German occupation of Warsaw in 1939, my father left Warsaw and went to Gelecopf, having heard that his hometown of Riki had been destroyed and that the survivors had relocated there. He left his beloved sister behind not knowing how risky his journey would be. He felt she would be safer in Warsaw than with him. Sure enough he reunited with his father and two brothers in Gelecopf and returned with them to Riki to try to rebuild what the Germans had destroyed. After resettling his family in Riki, my father decided it might be a good idea to escape to Russia where he felt it would be safer. His father aging, and his brothers too young to travel, he headed off with some friends to Bialystok.

When my father arrived in Bialystok, she saw that the town was destroyed; people were sleeping in the streets. My father tried to escape across the Lithuanian Border and on to Palestine but was unsuccessful. He returned to the town of Mulchat and worked on the railroad for a while in order to get his passport.

Upon the German occupation of Mulchat in 1941, my father was offered a role in the Juderat (the Jewish police), but he declined. He realized that the country was in trouble and that he would need to inform people of what he has seen and heard about the Germans and the war. He headed to the small village of Bialoggoina where he met some Red Army personnel who supplied him with guns and grenades. He was assigned a captain to help him set mines at the railroad stations and cut telephone wires. Later, he learned that some of the very men who worked with him were abusing the female Partisans. When he confronted these men, the captain whom he worked with shot him in the leg.

The famous Dr. Atlas removed the bullet from my father's leg and introduced my father to a group of approximately 300 people that called themselves "Tel Aviv." Now, with the Partisans group growing larger, my father felt he should let more people know. He went to Devoretz and explained to the Juderat how strong the Partisans had become. He begged them to allow him to take the Jews out of the town. After some discussion, they let him to remove three people. After they left, the Germans attacked the town, and everyone was killed.

My father spent the remainder of the war attacking small towns that the Germans were occupying, setting mines, destroying bridges and cutting telephone wires in strategic areas in the towns of Solim, Baranfish, Jewlovik and Noborgrodek. Sleeping on the ground in the summer and in graves or caves in the winter, the Partisans used wood or what ever they could find to shield themselves from the cold. Food did not come easily, but sometimes the Gentiles in the area would help them out.

My father was a stranger in a strange land. He wanted to help and let as many people know that they were in danger. He would help them if they followed him to the Partisan . His biggest regret was leaving his sister in Warsaw. He learned that she had followed him two days after his departure from Warsaw and the Germans had thrown her from a train. Two days later she died at home in Riki.

## **BEN KAMM**

*As told by his daughter, Marlene Kamins*



After escaping the Warsaw ghetto, my father first joined a Partisan group near Lublin with some friends at the end of 1941, just a few months after the Germans attacked the Soviet Union. The first group he joined was very small and did not have any guns. Their only way to obtain weapons was to ambush local police or buy them from the farmer peasants. Many escaped Russian POWs joined the group, but the Jewish members could not trust them. Indeed, in one incident, the Russians killed some of the Jewish Partisans for their possessions. Revenge was extracted.

The Jewish Partisans formed a new group and one day learned that there were 600 Jews working in a nearby labor camp on the Vistula River. My father's group attacked the guards and freed the Jewish prisoners. One of them was Henry Nussbaum, a "1939" Club member.

Eventually my father joined a much larger group consisting of thousands of Russian farmers and Polish and Russian Jews. This group was well equipped with good arms, grenades, and other munitions. A Soviet General led it. The group had a hospital with five doctors, a pharmacy, and different shops for fixing guns, shoes and clothing. Each day there were air drops of guns, mines,

and ammunition. Their main function was to mine railroads, roads, and warehouses. My father went through training just like in an army. He was sent out once or twice a week to mine trains carrying war materials to the Russian front. In 1943 his group destroyed a staggering 541 trains and hundreds of German guards guarding those trains.

At the end of 1943, the commander of his group decided to send a large group of Polish-born men back into Poland to organize more Partisan groups. He was one of 1,200 men and women chosen. They were named the Wanda Wasilewska group after a famous Polish writer living in Russia. The back of the German army was already broken and the Germans were retreating from the Eastern front. Wanda Wasilewska Group returned to Poland and established themselves in the Lublin forest. The Germans became easy prey and were ambushed. The Germans sent 75,000 men to rid the forest of Partisans. They attacked with fierce artillery bombardment and every imaginable weapon but did not win. Thirty-five Partisans died but the Germans lost 1800 troops.

After the battle they regrouped in another forest area where my father took part in the capture of Chelm. There, the Jewish Partisans organized a little shul and had services on Friday nights and Saturday. Within this group, were also a few Jews who took part in the infamous Sobibor uprising. My father's group also saved hundreds of Jewish men women and children hiding in the forest, as well as Russian Jewish soldiers.

## **ZENON NEUMARK**

As told by his daughter, Kitty Neumark



Outside of the well known acts of Jewish resistance such as the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the Partisans, little is known about Jewish resistance in smaller-town ghettos or on the so-called Aryan Side. Jews also participated in non-Jewish underground: sometimes as Jews but often, under assumed names and false identities.

So little is known about this resistance because, tragically, most of the participants did not survive or, those who did survive, rarely spoke about it. My father knows about such Jewish resistance from personal experience and participation.

Although born in Lodz, early in the war my father found himself in the city of Tomaszow. In 1941, in the Ghetto, he and eleven other youngsters—16 and 17 years old—formed an underground cell, Akiba. Their objective was to prepare; to contact other underground groups outside the Ghetto; to acquire false Identity Cards; and to escape. As it turned out, the main action of the group was to let the Ghetto Elders know that “Resettlement” meant going to the death camps! Several of the group who were sent out beyond the Ghetto walls were soon caught by the Germans and, one by one, perished. By the end of the war, only my father survived.

In 1943, my father escaped from the Tomaszow Labor Camp to the Aryan side in Warsaw. Passing as a Catholic Pole, he found a job with a German Construction company. Soon thereafter, he joined the ZOB, the Jewish Fighting Organization, and was given the job of a courier. His tasks were varied. Under his superior Krysia—a girl of 20—he delivered, to designated points, weapons for the Partisans or, medicines, false documents, or money for those in hiding. He also made trips to some of the still-remaining Ghettos: twice he ventured to make contact with the Lodz Ghetto, the last time as late as July 1944. Other activities consisted of just helping and saving as many Jews as possible.

Often, those who hid on the Aryan Side had great difficulties surviving among the Polish population. The environment was hostile. Being discovered and denounced was a daily occurrence. New hiding places had to be found; new documents provided. In one instance, 13 Jews with such difficulties were equipped with Polish ID Cards and sent to Riga, Latvia to work in a branch of the Construction company where my father worked. They all survived. Incidentally, many of you know Krysia’s superior, Vladka Mead.

At the end of 1943, a coworker—also Jewish and active in the Polish AL—asked my father for some special “services”: he was to count the comings and goings of German military train transports to the Eastern Front. As a Polish Catholic working for a German Company, his workshop window was in the right location to make these observations. He delivered his reports to a contact man in the center of Warsaw every other day. This coworker, Roman, is now a retired professor of engineering and lives in Sweden.

Finally, during the same time period another coworker, a Pole, inducted my father into a rightist underground organization, Sword and Plow. This was particularly dangerous because this group was also—as he later discovered—very anti-Semitic. But, refusing to join would have been equally dangerous. The activities were minimal but they provided an excellent cover. His landlord never suspected that he may be other than a good Pole or questioned his rather mysterious behavior.

In August 1944, my father was taken prisoner in the Warsaw Uprising and sent to a camp near Vienna, Austria. He was liberated there in 1945.

## PAUL SACK

*As told by his daughter, Libby Lieber*



My was born in Globoke, Poland near the city of Vilno. After the Germans forced the Jewish community into a Ghetto, he worked in the kitchen of the Gebitscomisar, under an SS Officer named Goldberg. On March 22, 1943, Goldberg secretly told him that the Germans were planning to annihilate the Jewish Ghetto the next day. Goldberg said that he would take three members of my family to the edge of the forest and leave them there. Not knowing whether to believe this threat or trust Goldberg, the family decided that they needed to go somewhere else, anywhere else. My father was to take his mother and sister Zelda. His father and older brother and sister were to follow. He never saw them again.

Goldberg kept his promise. My father, grandmother and aunt were left to wander in the forest for days until they found another Jewish family hiding in a cave. After a few weeks, my father found the location of the Partisans in the Neveer Forests and decided to join them. He did not realize that the Jewish boys were sent on the most dangerous missions where so many never returned.

He was a trusted Partisan, participating in many raids until the Germans retreated. His group received supplies parachuted in by the Russians. At one point, his battalion captured 36 German SS soldiers. These Germans had killed 12 of the bravest Partisans including the commander. His best friend and fellow Partisan Luska Pintov, who was the only surviving member of his family, was also killed. The Partisan group made sure that these German soldiers would not threatened others.

As you would expect, the unspeakable experiences which transformed my father from a typical teenager to a hardened Partisan still haunt him.

## LEON WEINSTEIN

*As told by his daughter, Natalie Gold Lumer*



My father was one of seven children born in Radzimin, Poland, a village where his family had lived and prospered for several generations. Radzimin was a prototype Jewish Shtetl and, in fact, Isaak Bashevis Singer lived there and based many of his stories on the lives of people in Radzimin.

The tranquil life of the Shtetl was vastly changed by the war, and my father was conscripted into the Polish Army in May 1939. His unit fought the German Army. The last point of retreat was Kovel at the Russian-Polish border. The Polish unit was disbanded, and soldiers were given the opportunity to join the Russian Army or go home. My father went home, but soon left as the Germans were closing in.

Unable to find shelter for his family in Warsaw outside the ghetto, he decided to leave his young daughter at the doorstep of a Polish police station with a sign saying she was the child of a mother who could no longer care for her. "In the name of Christ, could whoever finds this girl, give her shelter?" he wrote. The police eventually picked her up and took her to a convent where she spent the war years.

Entering the Warsaw Ghetto my father became part of the resistance fighters led by Analevitch, Antoch Zuchevman, and the men and women who led the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. Rumors of the liquidation of the ghetto spread throughout the early part of '43. The young resistance fighters had firmly pledged themselves to die fighting to the last rather than be taken to concentration camps. My father was among them, smuggling in rifles, guns, bullets, and raw material for Molotov cocktails. Every trip in and out of the ghetto with such contraband was life threatening. Yet, he had friends in the railroad industry who could supply these materials, and every possible weapon was essential.

The Germans marched into Warsaw on the second day of Pesach, April 1943. Much to their surprise, they were met by a defiant and cunning guerilla army of young people fighting from rooftops, cellars and burning structures—wherever they could find a foothold. Fearless and brave, they kept the Germans at bay for over a month until the death of what appeared to be the last fighter.

Eventually, my father reconnected with seven other survivors of the inferno, and together they pursued the effort to stay alive in the Ghetto. Without food or water in the midst of rubble, they searched the bombed out homes for remnants of food. Little was left—a bit of flour here, some



rotten vegetables there. The ghetto had been starved out long ago. They found a bathtub full of muddy water and somehow managed to stay alive.

Finally, they entered the sewer system of Warsaw and wandered in the rat-infested slime until they were able to find a manhole which opened to the outside. Once there, my father was able to find a family willing to give him shelter. He also joined the Polish Resistance Fighters and spent the rest of the war fighting in the underground.

Ladies and gentlemen, the little girl taken to the police station was me. The man I've described is my father, Leon Weinstein, who is celebrating his ninetieth birthday.