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## Part 1

**Yehudah Maimon** (Poldek Wasserman) describes the activities of the Cracow ghetto resistance with some attention to his own personal progress through the war.

**Personal History:** He was born in 1924 and attended the Hebrew gymnasium in Cracow. He was 15 when war broke out. He had been involved in a Zionist youth group and had a happy childhood in a group of close friends. Wasserman says that at the beginning of the war he kept going to school but by December the school had closed. The first act of resistance he recalls was that of the teachers from the school who continued to teach the students in private homes, secretly, after the school had already closed.

**Establishment of the Ghetto:** At first, Wasserman says, Cracow under siege was tolerable; the people were not too hungry and everyone continued to live in family groups. Then, the majority of the Jews of Cracow were scattered to surrounding villages, including Wasserman, so the Germans could set up the ghetto. Wasserman and his friends had work papers that allowed them to work in relatively safe conditions where they did not run a high risk of being rounded up on the street. They returned to Cracow in March 1941, with 15,000 other Jews.

**Establishment of the Resistance:** In summer 1942 they got word that Jews were being deported and put to death. The leadership of his Zionist youth organization, Akiva had long been trying to figure out ways to move Jews into Russia and on to Israel. There were at this time two resistance hubs populated by Zionist youth group members – one in Warsaw, and one on a farm outside of Cracow in Kopalina. From the Warsaw group, Isak Fogler and Henka Lamzek were sent out to find an escape route and were captured and killed and everyone realized that escaping was not really an option. Szymek and Dolek, former youth group leaders, started inviting members of their group in Cracow to form a resistance. Wasserman makes some interesting observations about how transitioning from a youth group to a resistance movement was rather unnatural and difficult. They had been trained for friendship, comradeship, openness, warmth, and now they were forced to work in isolation, in secrecy, and in danger. They split into cells of five and their first task was to find hiding places for all members of the underground.

**His Job as a Courier:** Wasserman served at first as a courier. He was among the only man to do so. It was harder to prove that a woman was a Jew than that a man was a Jew if he was found (because of the male's circumcision).

What qualified him as a courier? His appearance (blonde, blue eyed), his fluency in Polish, and the fact that he did not carry himself like a Jew. Wasserman emphasizes that it was always the Polish children who could pick out the Jews because they looked depleted and terrified.

**Romance with Czeszka:** Czeszka was another courier. She was unusually beautiful, carrying herself like nobility. He notes that someone overheard German soldiers discussing how surprised they were by her beauty. He describes one occasion on which he met her outside the ghetto and they walked together. He was more frightened that Szymek would discover them than that the Gestapo would discover them. To be in the underground, he emphasized, you had to give up your own personal desires, and being out in public with his girlfriend was a violation of that. This was the last time he saw her.

**Main Activities of the Resistance:** Forging Christian identity papers, obtaining arms, procuring money (through robbery), maintaining ties between resistance fighters in the ghetto and outside the ghetto, trying to work with the Polish resistance (which didn't succeed).

**Opposition to Resistance:** Because Cracow was the capital of the German Generalgouvernement, the ghetto in Cracow was a "model ghetto." Many Jews who lived there believed that the ghetto would last until the end of the war and did not want the resistance to unsettle their chances of lasting it out. The Zionist youth movements were receiving funds from Palestine but they would not share it with the members of the resistance even though the resistance was formed from its ranks because they weren't further immigration to Palestine. The Polish resistance viewed the Jews as the walking dead and wouldn't take their requests for cooperation seriously. Finally, the Germans were apprehensive about armed resistance and swift to respond violently and viciously to any and all intimations of it.

**Aharon "Dolek" Liebskind:** On a Friday night, at an Oneg Shabbat of the resistance, Dolek gave an inspirational speech in which he talked about how the only thing left of the Jews after the war would be three lines in a history book about the Jewish youth who resisted. From that point on, the resistance was constantly galvanized by the realization that even if they didn't survive, their bravery and resistance would outlive them.

**Emotional Responses:** Wasserman details the emotional experiences of an eighteen year old in the armed resistance. He was distressed that his youth was over and that his death was impending. He was also delighted by the fact that Szymek's parents' apartment, after their deportation in October 1942 became a gathering place for the resistance. As he puts it, it was a "corner of life within the catastrophe."

**The Photo In Front of the Hospital Revisited:** Wasserman describes the hospital that Rivka Leibskind (Dolek's widow) discusses in her interview. The daughter of the caretaker of the hospital arranged for the resistance to use a hut outside of it as their rendezvous point. It was there on December 2<sup>nd</sup> (22<sup>nd</sup>?) that they got instructions from Laban for an operation in which they would kill Germans in three cafes (Cyganeria, Splanada and Kofaika) and confiscate their weapons. They hung Polish flags in the market square so the attack would look as if it had come from the Polish underground. This was more for the sake of inspiring the Poles to productive action than it was to deflect blame from themselves.

**Wasserman's Role in the Operation of December 2<sup>nd</sup> (though the historical records say December 22<sup>nd</sup>):** Wasserman had been assigned to stay in the ghetto to watch over the members of the resistance who were unable to leave. After the attacks he went back to the hut by the hospital and saw that the place had been searched and ransacked. Two Germans were in there and they held a gun to his head. He told them that he was a member of the Jewish Police (he was dressed in a uniform he had confiscated) and that he was searching for some escaped Jews. They let him go and asked him to buy them some cigarettes. He wanted to find out what had happened to his compatriots, so he did what they asked, hoping they would tell him. They did not. He traded his earmuffs at the store for the cigarettes because he had no money.

Many of these details are recorded on the USHMM website: <https://www.ushmm.org/research/the-center-for-advanced-holocaust-studies/miles-lerman-center-for-the-study-of-jewish-resistance/medals-of-resistance-award/jewish-fighters-in-the-cracow-ghetto>. Also, see the Yad Vashem website: [http://www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/armed-resistance-in-krakow-and-bialystok.html#footnoteref8\\_wn5b60f](http://www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/armed-resistance-in-krakow-and-bialystok.html#footnoteref8_wn5b60f).