

## **Interview of Survivors of the Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto – with Reid Collins, WNEW radio, on April 14 and 21, 1963**

*This interview explores life before and after Germany's invasion of Poland and then examines life in the Warsaw Ghetto up to and including the Uprising. Several survivors give their eyewitness accounts of this time period. The interviewees include Vladka Meed, Jonas Turkow, Joseph Kutzreba, Joseph Tekulsky, and Jack Eisner.*

### **Summary**

#### **Part 1**

**Before the War** – Survivors spoke about antisemitism before the war including store boycotts, being harassed on the way to and from school, and a feeling of fear when going out alone. While they were aware of Hitler's rise to power, no one imagined the terror that they would witness.

**Invasion of Poland and Life in the Ghetto** – All the interviewees described the horrific conditions they experienced, especially between Sept. 1 and Sept. 27, 1939. When Warsaw fell, people went out to find bread and other food, which was difficult to get. Most had no electricity or water. Many went to the Vistula to get water, but Jews were not allowed to be in the water line. Within weeks of the German takeover, Jews were forced first to wear yellow patches and then on November 12, 1939, all Jews 12 and over had to wear Star of David armbands. On October 14, 1940, all Jews were given two weeks to move to a one-hundred block area that bordered on slums. Four to five hundred thousand people were forced into the ghetto. Rations totaled about 170 to 200 calories per person per day. The people in the ghetto were forced to build the wall around it. Some of the interviewees mentioned that they (Jews in the ghetto) were criticized for not resisting, but they said this wasn't true. People did not directly challenge a German because if a German was attacked, 100 Jews could be killed in retaliation. Instead, they used passive resistance. A self-help organization set up soup kitchens to help feed people. Schools and libraries were established, concerts given, and newspapers published. Organizers knew that if people were caught, they would be deported or killed, but that didn't stop them. Their resistance ignored the laws and took the form of a spiritual and intellectual defiance. The end of tape one concludes in January 1943, when the final resistance, active not passive, began.

#### **Part 2**

**The Uprising** – Each day, according to Vladka Meed, 6 to 10 thousand people were deported. Many were tricked by the Germans who sent postcards, supposedly from loved ones, to people in the ghetto telling them how well they were doing in the camps where they were. Since the ghetto was cut off from the world, they didn't know this was a trick. Again, the topic of the Jews showing no resistance was denied. They did say that many families wanted to stay together and

that was a reason that younger people accompanied their parents and were transported to camps.

People in the ghetto had differing opinions about military resistance, but the resistance organization moved ahead with plans. Bunkers were built, guns, gasoline, ammunition and more were smuggled into the ghetto. There were Jews living on the "Aryan Side" who helped get and bring in supplies. By the time the uprising began, only about 40,000 people were left in the ghetto. On April 19, 1943, around 2 AM, many of the organizers were aware that the Germans were preparing to liquidate the ghetto. The Germans entered at 6 AM, moved to the main intersection and the resistance opened fire on them. The Germans were stunned and withdrew. The fighting went on for about 6 weeks and guerilla warfare for another few months. Of the 500 organized underground fighters who escaped through the sewers, only 60 survived and made their way to the woods. There 50 of them were killed by Polish partisans.

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Organization was founded around the time of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Uprising to ensure that the world would not forget it and to inspire and remind the world, especially the younger generations, that the Jews in Warsaw were the first people in occupied Europe to stand up to the Germans.