



UPRIS IN TREBLIN

SAMUEL GOLDSTEIN



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ON SHEMINI ATZERES OF 1942, the 13,000 Jews of Kozenice, Poland, were deported in cattle cars to Treblinka. The old and the sick were shot before they reached the train station. Dr. Abramowitz, the only Jewish doctor in town, and his wife and two daughters took poison pills and died before deportation. The cars were packed; the doors were locked; we were without water or air; we were pressed against each other.

After two days we arrived in Treblinka. Many died before we arrived. We were told to undress because we would get work clothes instead. A mountain of clothes grew as we deposited our clothing. Immediately, the hair of the women was cut off by order of the Nazis. A few healthy Jews were chosen for various jobs in the camp. The remaining mass of thousands of Jews were pushed brutally by the SS and vicious dogs down the road to the gas chambers. They were told they were going to take a bath. With cries of *Shema Yisroel* the victims went to the gas chambers that looked like big



Goldstein Family in Kozienice, Poland, in 1920. Samuel is the little boy in the sailor suit.

shower rooms. The whole operation took no more than 15 minutes. The bodies were pulled out and thrown into the ovens.

Shimon Rosenthal and I, Samuel Goldstein, were among the 50 people who were chosen for labor. My job was sorting clothes. Every day more and more Jews were arriving and being killed the same way. I did this work for about five months. I would labor from before dawn until dark. Any little mistake carried with it the threat of death. Since shooting was such a “mild” penalty, quick and painless, they used to hang people by their feet first so they would suffer for about 12 hours before dying.

When children arrived, an SS man would swing the child by his or her feet, banging the little head against a stone wall, then throw the child into a pit where a fire was always burning.

One night, my neighbor escaped. I don't know what happened to him. But the next morning at the lineup it was discovered that someone was missing. Two Jews and I were taken to Obersturmführer Kurt Frantz to be punished. He had a long whip with a metal tip. He told us to undress and lie down on the bench. The punishment was 50 whips, and we had to count. The first two were unable to count to 50. He smashed their kidneys and they died. The lashes my comrades failed to receive were given to me.

After it was over, I was carried unconscious

to the barracks where, thanks to two Jewish doctors in my bunk, I survived.

The Jews who worked in the camp were divided into groups according to profession. After five months sorting clothing, I became a shoemaker.

It is worth mentioning that in this great hell where people died over a crust of bread, there was an SS man who guarded a group of Jews who were taken daily outside the camp to cut young branches for brooms; he would act dumb and pretend not to notice what was going on when the Jews managed to buy an extra piece of bread once in a while. Since they worked outside the camp, they managed to do that. The Jews tried their best to quietly express gratitude and respect to him in any way they could.

When I came to Treblinka, I met my *landsman* Max Bendler. He worked as a clothing sorter. In the big mountain of clothing, he found his wife's coat and his baby's diapers. This destroyed him; it was the last straw. He decided to take the risk and to escape and tell the people the truth about Treblinka; otherwise, he felt he would just commit suicide. My friend and I decided to help him escape so he could tell the remaining Jews outside the camps what was being done to our people. We loaded a truck with clothing and hid Max under the packs of clothing and smuggled him out. We also gave him some money. When he arrived

home and told his stories, nobody believed him. They told him he was *meshuga*. Only when they were deported to Treblinka themselves did they realize that he had told them the truth.

We understood our situation.

We knew we would die soon.

A thought occurred to us—to rise up in revolt. A central committee of 12 people was formed of which I was a member. Word of the planned uprising was quietly spread among all inmates, and a date was set (July 28). Weapons were distributed to the Jews in Treblinka. Everyone knew where the ammunition was being stored in their area and used this knowledge to help prepare for the uprising.

For example, the one who would clean the commandant's bathroom knew where the hand grenades were stored; he made a duplicate key and managed whenever possible to remove a few hand grenades. In this way, 83 hand grenades were assembled and buried in the sand.

Another Jew managed machine guns. He worked as an automobile mechanic near the munitions warehouse. Forty-five machine guns were removed. Mechanics who worked with tanks were given the mission to sever the chains of the tanks before the uprising. Others were given the mission to sever the telephone lines. It was decided to kill the camp administration members first.

At 3:30 p.m. on July 28, 1943, a Jew named Kurland lifted his shovel high in the air. This was the signal that revolt had begun. Like one man everyone swung into battle.

The camp commandant was invited for measurements of a new pair of boots. I was the shoemaker who took his measurements; meanwhile, another man came from behind and with a piece of pipe clubbed him to death. The same thing happened in all other departments. The day

before all barracks were “disinfected” with a lot of kerosene so they would burn better.

The SS man named Kive arrived and he was killed by us. All of the barracks were set afire. Our fighters attacked the Germans and the Ukrainians with machine guns and hand grenades. The Ukrainians on the watchtowers were told to come down or they would be burned alive. When one hesitated, his tower was set on fire.

About 1,000 Jews participated in the revolt. We fought about 150 armed Ukrainians. Many fell dead, others escaped. The camp was burned to the ground and the gates were opened and everyone was free to go wherever he wanted. The uprising was a success, but there remained one problem: Where could one go??

Many heroic fighters fell in this battle, among them our townsmen Moshe Sherman, Alter Kohn and his son Yissochor Kohn. After the revolt, the camp (whatever was left of it) was liquidated. Only the railroads leading from the station to the camp remained, and some foundations of the buildings. This was the end of a death camp that swallowed close to one million Jewish people.

When he arrived home and told his stories, nobody believed him. They told him he was *meshuga*.

POSTSCRIPT



Samuel with his wife, Sabina, in 1955.

U.S. from before the war, and he sponsored the Goldsteins' entry into this country. Their second son, Paul, was born shortly thereafter.

Mr. Goldstein was a shoemaker by trade; making shoes was the family business in Poland. He worked in several shoe factories in New York. Life was hard and they had very little money, but they lived respectably in a small apartment in Brooklyn. Several years later, Mr. Goldstein became a businessman, operating first a laundromat and then a dry goods store.

In addition to their two sons, the Goldsteins had three grandsons: Adam, Matthew, and Shmuel Yaakov. Mrs. Sabina Goldstein (Sheindl Tziporah *bas* Avraham Tzvi) passed away in 1994 and Mr. Samuel Goldstein (Shmuel *ben* Pinchas) in 2005. They loved life and enjoyed every moment they shared with each other and with their beloved family. They were very active in Holocaust remembrance, and they did a significant amount of writing and speaking on the subject, one example of which is this article, "Uprising in Treblinka." ❧

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After his escape from Treblinka, Samuel Goldstein walked on foot to Russia. Soon after his arrival there, he was drafted into the Russian army where he spent the last year or so of the war. Following the German surrender, he returned to Koziencice to see if any relatives were still alive. None had survived.

There he met Sabina Weinstock, who was working as a nurse, and they got married. Together they traveled through several DP camps, including one in which their first son, Abraham, was born.

Mr. Goldstein had a brother who had been living in the



Samuel Goldstein working in a shoemaking shop on the Lower East Side in 1955.



Samuel Goldstein in 1950.