



The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

Exploring history, meaning and significance

Learning objectives

- To develop knowledge and understanding about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising
- To think about what the meaning(s) of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising are
- To decide what is significant about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

Examining a photograph

Look carefully at the picture opposite – a larger version is provided on the next slide.

What do you think is happening in this scene?

To help you answer this, make a note of your responses to the following questions.



- What is the condition of the building?
- How could it have got in this state?
- Why might this have occurred?
- Who are the people? What are they doing?
- What, if anything, is unusual about this scene?

What is happening in this scene?



Developing an explanation



You have started to construct an account describing what can be seen in the photograph, and why – possibly – this is happening.

However, at the moment, there are some uncertainties around your account.

Consider the following questions. Make a note of how you might answer these.



- Do the soldiers look calm, or in a hurry? Why might this be?
- Where and when was this photograph taken?
- Why did someone decide to take this photograph?

Putting the photograph in context

The photograph you have been examining originally appeared in a report written in 1943. In the report, it had the caption: 'An assault squad'

The report was 125 pages long. It was written with a typewriter, and contained 53 photographs.

Four copies of the report were made. Some of the copies were bound in leather.

At the front of the report was a cover sheet. This sheet contained key information about the contents of the report. A copy of the cover sheet is on the next slide.

Examine the cover sheet. As you do so, answer the following questions:



- What language or languages can you see?
- What words or terms are visible?
- What questions do you have after looking at this cover sheet?

MIRS
LIBRARY

15621



Es gibt keinen
jüdischen Wohnbezirk
in Warschau mehr!



089744

INTERNATIONAL MILITARY TRIBUNAL
NUREMBERG, GERMANY
USA Exhibit 275
Filed Dec 13 1945

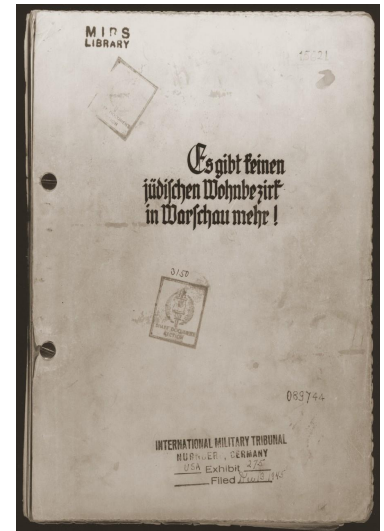
The cover sheet

The report is today known as 'The Stroop Report'. Its original name, however, is different. In fact, as the cover sheet shows, the report had the title:

‘Es gibt keinen jüdischen Wohnbezirk in Warschau mehr!’

These words are German. Translated to English, they read:

‘The Jewish Quarter of Warsaw is no more!’



- What does the original title suggest the report is about?
- How does this information develop our understanding of the earlier photograph?
- What might the words 'International Military Tribunal' on the cover sheet suggest the report was used for?

The origins of 'The Stroop Report'

To understand what 'The Stroop Report' was, we need to learn about where it comes from, and why it was written.

The report was commissioned by Chief of the SS in Krakow, Fredrich-Wilhelm Krüger, and was authored by SS Major Jürgen Stroop. It was originally intended as a souvenir for the Head of the SS, Heinrich Himmler.

The occasion that this gift was to mark was the crushing of an armed uprising in the Warsaw ghetto.

The uprising began on the 19 April 1943. It was sparked by German forces entering the ghetto to remove the last 55-60,000 people who had remained there after mass deportations from the ghetto in 1942.



- What do the origins of The Stroop Report say about the attitude of men like Krüger, Stroop and Himmler?

Responding to deportations

In the summer of 1942 around 265,000 Jewish people were taken from the Warsaw Ghetto to the death camp at Treblinka. Many did not survive the journey. Those that did, were shot on arrival or killed in Treblinka's gas chambers. Thousands more were taken to forced labour camps, or died in the ghetto from disease or starvation.

In response to these events, a few hundred Jewish people organised themselves into self-defence groups. In the last months of 1942, these groups managed to secretly acquire some weapons from the Polish Home Army.



- What obstacles and challenges would the resistance groups inside the Warsaw ghetto have faced?
- Why should we be cautious about criticising people for not joining resistance groups?

Building the resistance

On 19 April, 1943 a large German force of over 1,000 men with heavy arms and artillery support entered the ghetto. Having discovered the plan in advance, everyone in the ghetto went into hiding. Once the German force was inside, it was ambushed. Jewish resistors fired on the Germans and attacked them with flaming missiles. Caught unawares and suffering growing casualties, the German force withdrew in embarrassment. When it returned over the following days, it repeatedly encountered fierce resistance.

The original commander – Ferdinand von Smmern-Frankenegg – was quickly replaced by SS Major Stroop. With experience of fighting on the Eastern front, Stroop employed a new tactic: instead of front-on combat, the ghetto was to be razed to the ground. Small groups of men – like the ‘assault squad’ seen in the earlier photograph– were sent into the ghetto, with the purpose of setting buildings alight and flushing out people from their hiding places with smoke bombs and grenades.

Building the resistance

Mordekhai Lanski was in the ghetto as the resistors prepared themselves. He remembers:

‘The entire population, young and old, were busy creating hiding places, particularly underground. To all intents and purposes the ghetto appeared to be a military camp. In the courtyards one could see Jews carrying sacks of sand, bricks and mortar. Work was carried out day and night. The bakeries, in particular, were heavily frequented, as large quantities of bread were needed to prepare rusks [which could be stored for long periods of time without spoiling]. The women worked ceaselessly, kneading dough, preparing loaves of bread and making noodles. As they worked, carrying the dough to the bakeries, their faces bore an expression of [...] tension and an almost religious anxiety; they were preparing for what was to come. No one considered going to Treblinka willingly. These people, survivors of previous deportations, now prepared everything needed to survive in hiding for months.’

Building the resistance



Sleeping quarters in a bunker prepared by the Jewish resistance for the Warsaw ghetto uprising



Cooking facilities in a bunker prepared by the Jewish resistance for the Warsaw ghetto uprising.



- These photographs were taken by the Nazis. They appeared in The Stroop Report. Why do you think the Nazis took these photos?

The Uprising begins

On 19 April, 1943 a large German force of over 1,000 men with heavy arms and artillery support entered the ghetto. Having discovered the plan in advance, everyone in the ghetto went into hiding. Once the German force was inside, it was ambushed. Jewish resistors fired on the Germans and attacked them with flaming missiles. Caught unawares and suffering growing casualties, the German force withdrew in embarrassment. When it returned over the following days, it repeatedly encountered fierce resistance.

The original commander – Ferdinand von Ssmern-Frankenegg – was quickly replaced by SS Major Stroop. With experience of fighting on the Eastern front, Stroop employed a new tactic: instead of trying to fight the resistors in a large battle, the ghetto was to be burnt to the ground.

Small groups of men – like the ‘assault squad’ seen in the earlier photograph– were sent into the ghetto. Their job was to set fire to buildings and flush out people from their hiding places with smoke bombs and grenades.

The Uprising is defeated

By the end of April, much of the ghetto had been on fire for days. The resistance had been weakened by the deaths of several leading members.

Then, on 8 May, the Germans came across the main command centre of the resistors. Inside was the leader of the resistance – 24 year old Mordecai Anielewicz – and a few hundred fighters. Some, determined not to be captured, swallowed poison capsules; others either died fighting or were killed by poison gas pumped into the building.



Mordecai Anielewicz

The Uprising is defeated



The ruins of the Great Synagogue, 16 May 1943

Some small groups and individuals carried on resisting. A few continued to find ways to escape the ghetto through the sewers and other tunnels. But by 16 May, after 27 days of fighting, the Germans had full control of the ghetto. To mark this victory, Stroop personally detonated explosives placed under Warsaw's Great Synagogue.

In his report, Stroop declared: 'total number of Jews dealt with 56,065 Jews, including both Jews caught and whose extermination can be proved'. Around 7,000 of these people had been killed during the uprising, with the rest sent to Treblinka and Majdanek. On the German side, approximately 110 men had been killed.

What does it mean?

Following the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, many of the buildings left standing were destroyed. In July 1943, the Germans constructed a concentration camp on the site of the ghetto. Some 10,000 Jewish people from German-occupied territory were sent to this camp. In the summer of 1944, the camp was closed. A few hundred Jewish inmates were liberated from the camp during the Warsaw Uprising in August 1944.

Some copies of The Stroop Report were seized by the Allies at the end of the war. The report was used as evidence at the International Military Tribunal held at Nuremberg in November 1945. It was also used as evidence in the trial of SS Major Jürgen Stroop in 1951. Stroop was sentenced to death by hanging, and died in March 1952.



- 'Ultimately, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was a failure'. What is your response to this statement?
- In your view, what is the meaning and significance of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising?

UCL CENTRE FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATION



The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

Exploring history, meaning and significance



Centre for
Holocaust Education

Institute of Education, University of London, 20 Bedford Way, London, WC1H 0AL,

tel: +44(0)20 7612 6437 **fax:** +44(0)20 7612 6126 **email:** holocaust@ioe.ac.uk **web:** www.ioe.ac.uk/holocaust

The IOE's Centre for Holocaust Education is jointly funded by Pears Foundation and the Department for Education.