

Andrey Finegersh  
Mission Viejo High School  
Jan Jurgemeyer (Counselor)  
High School Essay  
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## The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

Bravery and courage are measured by their merits and implications, and not by their successes. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising had all of these merits and implications, all of those occurrences that turn events into history, and men into heroes. The Jews of Warsaw held out longer than the French against the Nazi attack and proved for the first time that the Third Reich was not invincible, but fallible. With the patience of Masada and the will of Jericho, the Jewish Fighting Organization resisted one of the world's most superior armies, fighting Panzers and machine guns with smuggled pistols and homemade bombs.

The horrors experienced by the Jews of Warsaw in their two years of confinement are almost too vile and inhuman to have been committed by the hands of men. Stories of Nazi guards shooting children as if they were pigeons, six-year-old boys crawling through barbed wire to steal a morsel of food from the "free" side, and the growing number of bodies piling up in funeral homes made the Warsaw ghetto a community of fear, rather than conscience. It is in this misery that resistance is fostered and grown. All things taken for granted now became sustenance and survival. In this atmosphere of constant threat, dignity and freedom became just as important as food and water. Mordechai Anielewicz, the leader of a group of some 750 loosely organized combatants known as the Jewish Fighting Organization (ZOB), became one of the first to strike out for a sense of retribution and honor. These men and women were not the first to resist, or even the first to drive the Nazis back, however, they are remembered as the ultimate warriors of liberation and pride. Of the 750 only a scant few survived, but during a few months in early 1943, they reigned as kings over the Third Reich, not only fighting back against the Nazi forces, but demoralizing them, destroying all of their notions of the superior race.

The feelings of those 750 people of the Jewish Fighting Organization in January must have been overwhelming. They had seen the ghetto reduced from 450,000 inhabitants to about 50,000 and had been informed by the Polish underground that Nazi soldiers were moving in to take the rest of the inhabitants to Auschwitz, Treblinka, and other death camps. Rather than submit to the Nazis, Mordechai organized his ZOB into battle divisions, each poised for street combat and equipped with Molotov cocktails, pistols, and a few hand grenades. When the Nazi soldiers entered the ghetto on January 18, 1943, for a "second liquidation," they met unexpected resistance by the ZOB. The Jewish Fighting Organization was able to drive the Nazis out of the ghetto. The statistics did not matter in their encounter with the Nazis, only the fact that for the first time they had seen fear in the Nazi soldiers who fought them. For the next three months the ZOB was in charge of the ghetto. They met no opposition, exercising their power and

preparing for the return of the Nazis, as all of “free” Warsaw became abuzz with the news of Jewish victory.

The Jewish Fighting Organization became a symbol of resistance in Warsaw, a new hope that united they could defeat the Nazis. When the Nazis returned with a larger force, including tanks, on April 19, the Jewish Fighting Organization remarkably held out for nearly a month. The strength of the Jews demoralized the German war machine, suppressing the very nature of racial superiority for which many of them were fighting. Although nearly every member of the Jewish Fighting Organization was killed in combat, they died with honor and courage. It was not senseless violence that led them to their graves, but their humanity. The ability of a few so seemingly weak to hold back a force so much more physically powerful could only come from a great strength within, a sense that the cause for which they were dying was far worthier than that of the Nazis, a sense of moral victory as defeat crawled in around them in May 1943. The Jews of Warsaw became the model for all resistance organizations during the Second World War; they became not only the first community of resistance, but the most successful community of conscience.

We can take lessons from the heroism of the Jewish Fighting Organization. Only with necessity was the ZOB able to win morally. Violence had nothing to do with their success, but their ability to fight for their own ideals and morals was their driving force. The Jewish Fighting Organization fought for freedom in the same way that Gandhi fought for independence or Martin Luther King, Jr., fought for equality. They did it through principles and a sense that what they were doing far outweighed anything their enemies could put up against them.

These same principles apply in our lives. To stand up for what you believe in rather than becoming entrenched in submission and limited by apathy is to have honor and courage. The Jewish Fighting Organization was able to stand up for its beliefs and hold them against everything else. This is the true lesson of their courageous acts, courage and morality will triumph over evil.

The acts of the Jewish Fighting Organization will ring through history, but their lessons will prevail only if we preserve and learn from them. Their acts were some of the bravest in the history of men, their goals among the purest, and their abilities unmatched. They startled an empire with their heroics and found justice in their hearts.

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