

= Robinson Crusoes of Warsaw =

Robinson Crusoes of Warsaw were people who , after the end of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising and the subsequent planned destruction of Warsaw by Nazi Germany , decided to stay and hide in the ruins of the German @-@ occupied city . The period of hiding spanned as long as three and a half months , from the day of the capitulation of the uprising , October 2 , 1944 , until the entry of the Red Army on January 17 , 1945 . Most of the Robinsons were Jews , although a considerable number of non @-@ Jewish Poles were also present . The hideaways lived in the ruins of houses , basements , and bunkers which had been prepared ahead of time . They lived in extremely dire circumstances , while the city was being destroyed around them . Some managed to escape Warsaw , many were captured and killed by the Germans , while others survived until the withdrawal of German troops .

The estimates of the number of hideaways vary from several hundred to about two thousand . Even though the majority of the Robinsons perished during the war , most of the information about their circumstances comes from those who survived . The largest group of hideaways consisted of probably around 36 individuals who were led by two medical doctors . The Robinsons also included a group of Jewish Combat Organization (Polish : Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa , ŻOB) Warsaw ghetto fighters , who managed to leave the ruined city in mid @-@ November .

The terms " Robinson Crusoes " or " Robinsons " for the hideaways appeared almost immediately , and were popularized in many contemporary and later works , including memoirs , newspaper reports , and films , by both writers and the " Robinsons " themselves , the most famous of whom was the composer Władysław Szpilman , whose story was the subject of the film *The Pianist* (2002) .

= = Background = =

The Warsaw Uprising , which began on August 1 , 1944 , was an attempt by the Polish Home Army (Armia Krajowa , AK) to liberate the capital of Poland from Nazi occupation in advance of approaching Soviet forces . The insurrectionists hoped for Soviet and Allied support , but in early August Joseph Stalin halted the Red Army on the right bank of the Vistula and denied British and American planes , which carried aid to the uprising , landing rights in Soviet controlled territory . Despite the fact that in September the Soviets captured the Praga suburb and allowed a few limited landings by Allied planes , the insurrection became more and more isolated and pushed into an ever shrinking area within the city . By early September , without Soviet aid , the uprising was doomed . While capitulation talks were already in progress , the Germans took the suburb of Żoliborz on September 30 . The final surrender agreement was concluded on October 2 , by the commander of the Home Army in Warsaw , Tadeusz Bór @-@ Komorowski , and the German general in charge of suppressing the uprising , Erich von dem Bach .

The provisions of the capitulation agreement stipulated that the Home Army soldiers were to be accorded full combatant status and treated as prisoners of war . The civilian population of Warsaw was to evacuate the city , be transferred to holding camps and then released . From the date of the surrender all civilians and soldiers had three days to leave the capital .

Another portion of the agreement , point # 10 , stated that the German command would ensure the preservation of remaining public and private property as well as the evacuation or protection of objects and buildings of " artistic , cultural or sacred value " . However , soon after the fighting was over at a conference held on October 9 , 1944 , Heinrich Himmler , Reichsführer of the SS , ordered the total destruction of the city . Himmler stated : " The city must completely disappear from the surface of the earth and serve only as a transport station for the Wehrmacht . No stone can remain standing . Every building must be razed to its foundation . " The task of carrying out the destruction was assigned to SS @-@ Brigadeführer Paul Otto Geibel . Subsequently , the buildings of the city were systematically reduced to ruin , one by one .

= = Origins and usage of the term = =

About two weeks after the fall of the Warsaw Uprising , on October 17 , 1944 , the commander of the German 9th Army stationed in Warsaw , Smilo von Lüttwitz , issued an order in which he informed his soldiers that there was a large number of " sneaky Poles " still hiding in the ruins of Warsaw . According to Smilo , they " posed a threat to the German forces " . Von Lüttwitz ordered a large scale *apanka* (police action / round up) to " cleanse the city " of them . The order also sanctioned immediate execution of any individuals found hiding in the ruins . In some rare cases , those found were placed in a specially created concentration camp , and used as manual labor as the German army looted the remnants of the city .

The phenomenon of the hideaways was noticed soon after the Red Army captured Warsaw . On January 26 , 1945 , a bulletin of the *Żydowska Agencja Prasowa* (Jewish News Agency) reported that 48 individuals had emerged from hiding and referred to them as *jaskiniowcy* , or " cavemen " . The term " Robinsons " soon became common , a reference to the fictional castaway Robinson Crusoe in the Daniel Defoe novel . The Soviet writer and journalist , Vasily Grossman upon entering the ruined city , described finding four Jewish and six non-Jewish Poles who had just left their hideouts .

The term and the analogy with the castaway has often been made by Robinsons in their own memoirs , as well as by other writers . Dawid Fogelman had been imprisoned at the *Gęsiówka* concentration camp . After the camp was liberated by the Polish Home Army , he joined its ranks and fought in the uprising . At the end of the fighting , Fogelman became a Robinson , hiding in a bunker on *Szczęśliwa Street* , where he began writing a diary . He wrote : " We lived like Robinson Crusoe , with the one difference that he was free , could move about freely , while we lived in hiding . " While Fogelman 's diary survived , his ultimate fate is unknown .

In his memoirs , *Władysław Szpilman* also compared himself to Crusoe and , like Fogelman , emphasized the isolation and hopelessness which characterized the Warsaw Crusoes . Szpilman 's memoir served as a basis for a screenplay , written as early as 1945 by the Polish writers Jerzy Andrzejewski and Czesław Miłosz , entitled *Robinson of Warsaw* . The movie that was eventually filmed , *Miasto Nieujarzmione* (" Unyoked city ") , was heavily censored by the communist authorities , and its original theme changed to such an extent that Miłosz requested his name be removed from the film 's credits . The experience with the film contributed to Miłosz 's disillusionment with cinema as an artistic medium .

Wacław Gluth - *Nowowiejski* , a member of the Home Army who was wounded during the uprising and barely managed to escape the Wehrmacht 's *Marymont* massacre of civilians and wounded soldiers , hid in the basement of a destroyed house from mid-September until mid-November . Gluth - *Nowowiejski* wrote several books about his experiences after the war , including *Rzeczpospolita Gruzów* (" The Commonwealth of Ruins ") and *Stolica jaski? : z pamięci warszawskiego Robinsona* (" The capital of caves : memoirs of a Warsaw Robinson ") .

Major *Danuta Żłazak* of the Home Army , hid out with a group of wounded patients whom she had saved from a hospital that had been set on fire by the Germans during the last days of the uprising . After the war she wrote a book about her experiences , *Byłam Warszawskim Robinsonem* (I was a Warsaw Robinson) . A portion of her group left the hiding place after German troops called out for them to surrender and were immediately executed . The rest remained hidden and escaped detection . Eventually they used the corpses of their murdered companions to disguise the entry to their hiding place .

The name " Robinsons " has also been used to refer to those Jews who hid out in the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto in the aftermath of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising . Uri Orlev 's (Jerzy Orłowski) children 's book *The Island on Bird Street* (1981) , adapted into a 1997 film , tells the story of an 11-year-old boy who hides out in the ruins of the ghetto . Orlev also draws analogies with Robinson Crusoe in this work ; in fact one of the few things Alex , the story 's protagonist , possesses is a copy of Defoe 's novel .

Other memoirs by the Robinsons include *Bunkier* (The Bunker) by Chaim Goldstein , *Byłam ochroniarzem Karskiego* (Karski 's Bodyguard) by Dawid Landau , *Ukrywałam się w Warszawie : styczeń 1943 ? styczeń 1945* (I Hid in Warsaw : January 1943 ? January 1945) by Stefan Chaskielewicz , *Moje szczęśliwe życie* (My Fortunate Life) by Szymon Rogoński , and *Aniołowie*

bez skrzydeł? (Angels Without Wings) by Czesława Fater . Many other testimonies and recollections are contained in the archives of the Emmanuel Ringelblum Żydowski Instytut Historyczny (Jewish Historical Institute) in Warsaw and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem .

= = Reasons for staying = =

The capitulation agreement between the Home Army and German forces stipulated that insurgents were to be treated as regular prisoners of war . The city 's civilians were to be transferred to transit camps and afterward released .

Although the agreement did not stipulate different treatment for Poles who were ethnically Jewish , many Jews feared that the agreement would not be honored in their case . In fact , the Nazis conducted a " medical examination " at the Pruszków internment camp , in order to " catch out " Jews from among Warsaw 's refugees . As a consequence , a large number of the Jews who were still in Warsaw at the time of the uprising , decided to remain in hiding rather than join the non @-@ Jewish civilians leaving the city . According to memoirs from the period , the choice often came down to whether a particular person " looked Aryan " and could pass for a non @-@ Jewish Pole .

A significant number of non @-@ Jewish Poles also did not trust the Germans and decided not to leave the city . Many wounded Home Army soldiers became stranded during the uprising and were simply not able to evacuate in time . For others , the choice to remain resulted from feelings of despair and hopelessness brought by the fall of the uprising ; at least initially , they simply did not have the motivation to leave .

= = Number and demographics = =

Between the end of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (May 1943) and beginning of 1944 , there were between 10 @, @ 000 and 20 @, @ 000 Jews hiding in the Ghetto ruins . The number of Robinsons after the Warsaw Uprising has been estimated at between several hundred and two thousand , spread across all the suburbs of Warsaw . Another source gives the number as between 400 and 1 @, @ 000 . Most of those hiding were Jewish , including some who had been in hiding since the fall of the ghetto uprising , though a significant number were non @-@ Jewish Poles . Unlike Szpilman , whose case was somewhat unrepresentative , most of those in hiding remained in medium @-@ sized to large groups , often of mixed ethnicities . The majority of the Robinsons were men .

Many of the hiding places and makeshift bunkers were prepared in advance by those anticipating the fall of the uprising . As a result , the sequence whereby people became Robinsons closely followed the military developments of the insurrection . The first groups went into hiding in Wola during the Wola massacre and in Starówka (Warsaw Old Town) , while fighting was still taking place in other parts of the city . The majority of the Robinsons hid when German forces captured the Żoliborz and ŻródnieŹcie (Warsaw City Centre) districts from the insurgents .

The largest known group of Robinsons was composed of approximately 37 people under the leadership of Roman Fiszer and medical doctors , Dr. Beer and Prof. Henryk Beck . Beck was the director of a makeshift insurgent hospital during the uprising . As it became clear that the insurrection was going to fail , he and Cpt . Władysław Kowalski , a Home Army soldier who also decided to stay , converted two adjacent basements into a well @-@ equipped and -supplied hiding place . The group stockpiled water , coffee , medicines , fuel , and various foodstuffs . Additionally , Beck kept a set of watercolors , crayons , ink , and paper , which he used to illustrate life in the bunker . As some of the members had fought in the uprising , the group also possessed a small cache of weapons , unusual for Robinsons . A dog , Bunkierek (" bunker puppy ") , also stayed with them and , according to the memoirs , did not bark or make any noise .

After their water ran out , the Beck / Fiszer group developed a routine whereby some of the group worked to dig a well , while others watched out for approaching Germans , and yet others ventured outside the bunker to scavenge for useful items . The group eventually dug their way to two water canals and built a well . On November 17 , during an excursion outside the bunker , the group made contact with a small partisan unit , also in hiding , led by a Russian soldier POW who had been

liberated during the uprising . Subsequently , several of the group would join the partisans for small scale attacks on German troops . The group survived until the entry of the Red Army in mid @-@ January .

= = Living conditions = =

Initially , the living conditions of the Robinsons varied according to whether or not they had had time to prepare . There were roughly three days between the signing of the capitulation and the deadline for civilians to leave the city , during which those who made the decision to stay could stockpile food and water , and camouflage their hiding places . As time passed , supplies ran out , and many Robinsons had to change their locations for security reasons . The situation soon became equally desperate for all who remained .

While food was extremely hard to come by , an even more pressing need was obtaining drinking water . Thirst and the search for water are mentioned in most of the Robinsons ' memoirs . The most common sources originally included toilet cisterns , boilers , and standing water found inside bathtubs . As these ran out , those in hiding were forced to risk sneaking access to wells , which were often guarded by German soldiers . Some memoirs describe long periods observing a particular well and waiting for a chance to obtain a quick drink . Another method involved obtaining polluted sewer water from the canals , and then filtering it through coals wrapped in rags . Generally , records indicate that whatever scant water supplies existed were shared fairly among individuals hiding as a group . In at least one instance , one person was unable to withstand the thirst and drank the whole group 's water supply . As a result , Jakub Wi?nia , a former G?siówka inmate and after its liberation , a Home Army soldier , was court @-@ martialed by his fellow group members and sentenced to death . The execution was to be postponed until after liberation , but when that occurred , the Robinsons were so overwhelmed with joy , the crime was forgiven and the sentence was never mentioned again .

There were numerous instances of death from drinking poisoned or fouled water (there were still many unburied , decomposing corpses inside the ruins) . In one instance , desperate Robinsons were driven to drink their own urine and subsequently died .

The coming of winter improved the water situation for some who had access to icicles , but the cold made living conditions worse . It was impossible for those in hiding to build fires to warm themselves , as smoke could reveal their location to the Germans . As a consequence , many died of cold .

Unlike the Robinson Crusoe of the novel , who craved human contact , most of the Warsaw Crusoes tried to avoid it at all cost . This contradiction was noted by both the Robinsons and those who wrote about them after the war . Being discovered by the Germans in almost all cases meant immediate death . There were , however , some exceptions , the best known being that of Szpilman 's encounter with Wilm Hosenfeld , a captain of the Wehrmacht who helped to hide and feed him . In a few instances those captured were first forced to help the Germans with the looting of the city 's ruins , before being either executed or sent to the Pruszków camp .

A few of the Robinsons actually tried to actively take revenge on the occupying forces . The most famous of these , who became a local legend , was an individual known only as " Ares " (after the Greek god of war) , described by Gluth @-@ Nowowiejski , based on interviews with the Robinsons he conducted . Ares , active in the ?ródnie?cie district , staged numerous ambushes of German soldiers , in at least one case using an improvised explosive device . According to Gluth @-@ Nowowiejski 's sources , he would leave behind graffiti of his name , as well as slogans such as " Hitler kaput " . Other messages included communications to the German soldiers . In one case he dumped a body of a soldier he had killed with the note : " This awaits all of you in Warsaw " . In another he wrote : " Ares is a ghost , not matter ? your search for him is useless " . Eventually , Ares met his demise when the Germans left some poisoned food for him to find . Soon they discovered a man in the ruins who was obviously sick from having eaten it . He shot at them before taking his own life . According to some sources , other individuals took on Ares ' struggle but used the names of other Greek Gods as their signature .

Within some of the destroyed suburbs , a limited postal system between various Robinson groups

was established . Dawid Landau had served as a bodyguard to the courier of the Polish government in exile , Jan Karski , while Karski secretly entered the ghetto to gather information for a report on the extermination of Polish Jews by Nazi Germany for the Western allies , in 1943 . Later , Landau fought in both of the Warsaw uprising as part of Żydowski Związek Wojskowy (Jewish Military Union , ŻZW) and afterward decided to stay in the ruins . In his memoirs he reports that the post functioned through the use of empty electrical socket boxes . Various groups would leave notes for others informing them of who was alive and in hiding , news from the front that had been obtained , as well as requests for special forms of assistance . According to Landau , the most common pleas were for doctors or other forms of medical help .

= = Escape = =

Some of those who had initially remained in the ruins of the city after the uprising later made attempts to leave . This was particularly true of Robinsons who had stayed , not of their own choice , but due to unfavorable circumstances .

The best known case of post @-@ uprising departure involved a group of Jewish Combat Organization fighters under the leadership of Icchak Cukierman and Marek Edelman , who had taken part in both the Ghetto and the Warsaw Uprisings . Originally , the former Ghetto fighters stayed together in a large group , but in the second week of October , some of them moved to a different location . Those remaining stayed in the same place on Promyka Street until mid @-@ November , when they were contacted by Ala Margolis , a courier from the Home Army , who had previously managed to leave the city . Margolis and a " rescue squadron " of five people returned to get the rest of the group out . The Germans had begun a systematic search and destruction of ruined houses near the hiding place , which meant time was running out . Dressed as nurses and doctors , with clothes and Red Cross IDs provided by Dr. Lesław Węgrzynowski , director of the Home Army sanitation unit , the rescue squadron and the seven in hiding made their way out of the city through two German checkpoints . The group consisted of five men and two women : Edelman , Cukierman , Cywia Lubetkin (later , Cukierman 's wife) , Tosia Goliborska , Julek Fiszgrund , Tuwia Borzykowski , and Zygmunt Warman . The first checkpoint was crossed during dinner , and the Germans did not bother to examine the group , but at the second , an SS officer noticed that Warman , who was lying in a stretcher , was wearing combat boots . He yelled , " These are Polish bandits ! " , but one of the escorts dressed as a nurse quickly declared that the patients in the stretcher were ill with typhus . The SS soldiers backed off , and the group moved on its way .

In many cases , the opportunity to leave Warsaw came by chance . For example , the hiding diarist Wacław Gluth @-@ Nowowiejski was taken out , after he was accidentally found by a woman (name unknown) who had been given permission by the Germans to remove some of her property from the ruins . On their way out of the city the group also had to pass German checkpoints and encountered difficulties similar to those of the ŻOB fighters . A Wehrmacht soldier accused the wounded and sick Gluth @-@ Nowowiejski of being a " bandit " but let him pass after protestations made by his escort .

= = Individual Robinsons = =

Of the total number of the Robinsons who hid in the ruins of the city only a portion 's names and locations are known . The recognized individuals are mostly the ones who either survived the war themselves or who came into contact with other survivors at some point . As such , the list of the known hideaways is not representative ; the majority of the Robinsons died while in hiding , and hence their identities , were never recorded . The table below lists some of those who have been mentioned in the memoirs or other written works on the subject .

Sources for table :