The 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising: Correcting the Historical Record

By Arthur Kemp

When SS Brigade Leader Juergen Stroop was summoned to suppress an outbreak of unexpected violence in the Jewish residential area of Warsaw in April 1943, he—and very few others—realized quite how extensively the uprising had been planned.

Stroop was sent in to replace SS-Oberfuehrer Ferdinando von Sammern-Frankenegg, who had been taken completely unaware by the uprising.

Von Sammern-Frankenegg had been tasked with removing all the factories—and their workers—contained within the Jewish residential area of Warsaw to the Lublin region of Poland to be incorporated into the SS-Ostindustrie (SS-Eastern Industries) factories.

The Jewish workers, however, were determined to stay put in the ghetto of Warsaw, and had prepared for military action against such a move for more than a year.

This preparation consisted of the creation of a network of underground bunkers, arms and ammunition stockpiles, and even the concrete fortification of many of the factory buildings in which they worked.

All this had been possible only because of the fact that the Jewish residential area was under the direct control of the local Jewish Council, and not the Germans.

When building work was noticed by the Germans, it was explained away as the building of air raid shelters—an explanation which was readily accepted by the German and Polish city authorities, both of whom preferred to have as little interaction as possible with the Jewish population.

Thus, when the order from Reichsfuehrer SS Heinrich Himmler came in January 1943 to move factories, von Sammern-Frankenegg set April 16, 1943 as the Gross-Aktion or “large-scale action” removal date. On that day, the Jewish underground, assisted by the Polish Communist Party—which was largely one and the same—took to the streets, erected barricades and launched their armed rebellion. Stroop arrived the next day, summoned from the Eastern Front to take command.

It took Stroop and his force—consisting of Wehrmacht, SS and Polish policemen—29 days to finally suppress the uprising. It was an unprecedented event, in an already unprecedented war. Stroop knew this to be the case, and ordered a commemorative book made of the battle for the Warsaw Ghetto.

Only four copies of this manually typed and handmade book—now known as The Stroop Report—were ever made. Three of these were complete copies, bound in leather. One was kept by Stroop, and the other two
Inside the Ghetto

Eyewitness to the uprising:
A small sampling of what’s in Stroop’s on-the-scene reports

At 0600, order to Waffen-SS (strength: 16 officers and 850 men) to comb out the remainder of the ghetto. Hardly had the units fallen in, strong concerted fire concentration by the Jews and bandits. The tank used in this action and the two heavy armored cars pelted with Molotov cocktails (incendiary bottles). Tank twice set on fire. Owing to this enemy counterattack, we had at first to take the units back. Losses in first attack: 12 men (six SS-men, six Trawniki-men). About 800 hours second attack by the units, under the command of the undersigned. Although the counterattack was reported, this time we succeeded in combing out the blocks of buildings according to plan. We caused the enemy to retire from the roofs and elevated prepared positions into the cellars or bunkers and sewers.

During this combing-out we caught only about 200 Jews. Immediately afterward, raiding parties were directed to bunkers known to us with the order to pull out the Jews and to destroy the bunkers. About 380 Jews captured. We found out that the Jews had taken to the sewers. Sewers were completely inundated, to make staying there impossible. About 1730 hours we encountered very strong resistance from one block of buildings including machine-gun fire. A special raiding party invaded that block and defeated the enemy, but could not catch the resisters. The Jews and criminals resisted from base to base, and escaped at the last moment across lofts or through subterranean passages. About 2030 hours the external barricade was reinforced. All units were withdrawn from the ghetto and dismissed to their barracks. Reinforcement of the barricade by 250 Waffen-SS men.

—Daily Combat Report sent by SS Brigade Leader Juergen Stroop
April 20, 1943
The Stroop Report in German & English

By Juergen Stroop. Translated, annotated and introduced by Arthur Kemp. The Stroop Report is the official German account of the battle for—and the ultimate destruction of—the Warsaw Ghetto from April to May 1943, prepared by the commanding officer of the operation, SS-Brigade Leader Juergen Stroop.

This edition contains the original German pages alongside full English translations, and also contains all 70 original photographs, many of which are published here for the first time ever.

Juergen Stroop (1895–1952) served in both World War I and World War II, winning the Iron Cross 2nd Class, and was wounded in action on the Western Front during the 1914–1918 conflict. He joined the German National Socialist Workers Party and the SS in 1932. By 1938, he had participated in the re-occupation of the Sudetenland, and held the rank of colonel in the SS.

He served in the invasion of Poland, and fought as a frontline soldier with the infantry regiment of the 3rd SS Division Totenkopf in Russia, earning a Clasp to the Iron Cross and an Infantry Assault Badge in Bronze. By late 1942, he had been promoted to SS brigade leader and assigned to the security police in anti-partisan actions in Russia. Upon the failure of the SS forces in Warsaw to contain the 1943 Ghetto Uprising, Stroop was sent to suppress the armed resistance.

He later served as SS leader and police chief in occupied Greece and later in Wiesbaden, Germany, a position he held until the end of the war.

Arrested by the Allies, he was charged at the U.S. Military Tribunal at Dachau for the murder of downed American bomber crews. He emphatically denied the charge, and it was conceded that there was no proof that he had actually ordered any such shootings.

He was then handed over to the USSR-installed Communist Party government in Warsaw, where he was tried for the suppression of the armed uprising in Warsaw and hanged in 1952.

Authorities intervened only where German interests were involved. In order to enable the Jewish Board of Elders to execute its orders, a Jewish police force was set up, identified by special armbands and a special beret and armed with rubber truncheons. This Jewish police force was charged with maintaining order and security within the Jewish residential area.

This Judenrat or “Jewish Council” in Warsaw was one of many such institutions throughout the Polish Government General. Completely elected by Jews, these councils had total control over their areas, which included the organization of schools, hospitals and other local amenities. The Jewish police employed by the Jewish Councils operated fully independently to maintain law and order in the Jewish residential areas.

Thirdly, Stroop's first course of action as outlined in his report was to order the closing of all the armaments factories within the ghetto that had been supplying the Jewish forces with weapons and explosives. The extent of the Jewish autonomy within the ghetto was revealed when Stroop discovered that some of the factory buildings had even been fortified with concrete to become nearly impenetrable forts.

Fourthly, The Stroop Report shows that the German forces were assisted by SS-auxiliaries recruited from former Russian army soldiers (the “Trawniki Men”) who were drawn from Ukrainians and ethnic Russians.

Fifthly, The Stroop Report shows that the action to remove the Jews from Warsaw was actively supported by the majority of the local Polish population. Polish police took an active part in the “large-scale action” and also suffered casualties from combat with the Jewish resistance.

Finally, throughout the report, Stroop repeatedly refers to the Polish parts of Warsaw as the “Aryan” sections of town—indicating what can only be an official change in German policy regarding the racial makeup of Poland. The use of Polish police auxiliaries also indicates that the Nazi attitude toward Poles was not as derogatory as many postwar accounts have claimed.

The Stroop Report is a goldmine for anyone seeking an insight into this critical period of suppressed and distorted history.

The preceding is just a small sampling of what appears in the new translation of The Stroop Report.

Arthur Kemp is a noted writer, speaker and political figure who has been the foreign affairs spokesperson for the British National Party. Born in Southern Rhodesia, he worked as a journalist in South Africa before moving to Britain. Kemp's magnum opus, March of the Titans, can be purchased from TBR. See ad on page 43 to get this extremely important book. Hundreds of illustrations.