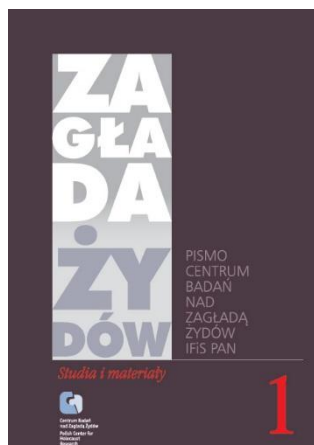




Holocaust Studies and Materials

Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały

VOL. 1 (2005)

ISSN: 1895-247X

eISSN: 2657-3571

DOI: 10.32927

WWW: www.zagladazydow.pl

Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów IFiS PAN
Polish Center for Holocaust Research

Polish Partisan Formations during 1942–1944 in Jewish Testimonies

Partyzantka polska lat 1942–1944 w relacjach żydowskich

Aleksandra Bańkowska

Jewish Historical Institute

olabankowska@interia.pl

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1037-0550>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32927/ZZSiM.152>

Strony/Pages: 148-164



Aleksandra Bańkowska

Polish Partisan Formations during 1942–1944 in Jewish Testimonies

For many Jews who made an attempt to save their lives after the ghettos had been liquidated, the existence of Polish partisan formations and their attitude to refugees became a matter of life and death. On the one hand, joining a Polish unit gave them a chance to survive and take part in anti-German resistance; on the other hand, civilians hiding in woods and villages had to treat Polish partisans as a force to be reckoned with. This article aims to examine, on the basis of narrative sources produced by Jews, how those hiding perceived the partisan units of the Polish underground, what they witnessed, what stories were circulated about it, what emotions it aroused, how it was characterised, what it was for them: a chance for survival, help or a threat? I was interested not only in concrete events, but the entire sphere of imagination, feelings, and models of behaviour of Polish Jews vis-à-vis Polish partisans.

One unique source for this type of research consists of testimonies and memoirs of Jewish survivors. This article is based on my research carried out in the Testimony Fond of the Jewish Historical Institute Archives in Warsaw.¹ Among over 7,000 testimonies, I chose those that mentioned “Polish partisans” or names of Polish underground formations, not only those that were pro-independence (the Home Army and lesser armed groups incorporated during the so-called “integration action” as well as the National Armed Forces), but also the People’s Guard and the People’s Army. This article deals exclusively with issues of forest-, and village-based partisan units. It does not deal with issues of relations between Jews and the Polish underground in towns and cities; hence I did not include testimonies from the Warsaw Uprising or testimonies of Jewish members of underground organizations, not even those temporarily engaged in a partisan unit.

It is very difficult to adopt a definition of Polish partisan formations with respect to Jewish testimonies. I did not choose to regard as a partisan unit any group thus called by authors of testimonies, because it would greatly distort the picture. First, I dismissed those testimonies that mention the term “partisans” but it is evident from the context that it was a group of a different kind, as in, for example Dobruczka Kowzało’s testimonies, in which the term “partisans” is used to describe a group of

¹ Hereinafter AŻIH. For linguistic reasons I have considered only testimonies written in Polish and those written in Yiddish translated and available in the archives.

refugees.² Second, I dismissed testimonies concerning Polish self-defence groups from Volhynia and Galicia. They were, indeed, armed groups made up of Poles, but they did not represent the Polish underground state or the communist underground, but were an independent, grass-roots initiative. Some were even backed by the Home Army, but this was not reflected in the memoirs. In yet another testimony a peasants' self-defence group was treated as partisans.³ Third, this article does not contain testimonies which make references to such terms as Polish-Soviet or Polish-Jewish partisans. They usually were loose groups of refugees who had made for the woods, and formed ethnically mixed units, or units made up of Poles or commanded by Poles, but were subordinated to Soviet partisan staffs. In principle, apart from these three cases, I regarded as Polish partisan units those groups that were so named by the authors of testimonies and associated them with armed formations of the Polish underground. I should explain why I included the partisan units of the People's Guard/Army. One problem is the issue of their non-Polish (Soviet) command; another, their frequently mixed ethnic make-up, particularly at the early stages. I have decided to include the People's Guard not only because the authors of the testimonies considered it to be a Polish organisation, but also due to the fact that it is invariably defined as a Polish formation in Jewish historiography, frequently mythologised and contrasted with the "dark legend" of the Home Army and the National Armed Forces.

The relations between Jews and the Polish underground have been greatly mythologised. There are debates going on between Jewish and Polish historians, and between communist and right-wing historians as well. The already mentioned "dark legend" accuses the Polish pro-independence underground of not helping their Jewish fellow citizens, dissociating from the Jewish resistance movement, refusing to accept Jews into their ranks, attacking Jewish partisan units, and finally, of committing racially-motivated murder. In some publications, the Home Army and the National Armed Forces are portrayed as an equally dangerous enemy as the Germans.⁴ Polish historiography responds to such claims by accusing Israeli historians of failure to understand the context of events and the operational capabilities of the Polish underground, overlooking positive facts, or even lack of conscientiousness.⁵

²"In the last months we'd joined a Polish partisan unit near Pińsk. They were Poles from the Dąbrowica area and the entire Polesie [region]. They had to go to the woods, because they were being destroyed like the Jews." Dobruczka Kowżało's testimony, AŻIH 301/404, p. 5.

³"At the same time the local peasants wanted to organise a partisan formation to fight against the Germans, Russians and Jews." Chunay Zak's testimony, AŻIH 301/3532, p. 2.

⁴ Cf. R. Ainstein, *Jewish Resistance in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe* (London, 1974), 499; S. Krakowski, *The War of the Doomed. Jewish Armed Resistance in Poland 1942-1944* (New York, 1984); I. Gutman, S. Krakowski, *Unequal Victims. Poles and Jews During World War II* (New York, 1986).

⁵ Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *Żydzi i Polacy 1918 - 1955. Współistnienie - Zagłada - Komunizm* (Warsaw, Fronda, 2000); L. Żebrowski, introductions to: *Narodowe Siły Zbrojne. Dokumenty - struktury - personalia*, vol. 1, (Warsaw, 1994), vol. 2 (Warsaw, 1996); I. Barwich, ed., *Polskie Podziemie Polityczne wobec zagłady Żydów w czasie okupacji Niemieckiej* (Warsaw, 1988); K. Dumin-Wąsowicz, ed., *Spółeczeństwo polskie wobec martyrologii i walki Żydów w latach II wojny światowej*

What seems to be important here is the attitude to sources. Whereas Jewish historians tend to take at face value any statement made in Jewish testimonies, Polish historians hardly ever make any reference to them. Yet, even though testimonies require great caution as historical sources, they are frequently the only source available. In fact, Jewish perception of Polish partisan formations can only be explained on the basis of testimonies.

However, one should be mindful of the fact that the picture of Polish partisan formations was formed in the immediate post-war years, in the atmosphere of that time and based on the assessments made then of the Polish underground's activity. Of the 108 testimonies that meet the above outlined criteria, 74 were submitted to the Jewish Historical Commission during 1945-1950, a period of particularly intensive propaganda against the Polish underground state and the Home Army, let alone the National Armed Forces; at the same time, the achievements of the Polish Workers' Party and the People's Guard/Army in their anti-German struggle was greatly exaggerated. Also, Jewish organisations officially claimed and accused, *expressis verbis*, Polish partisan formations of complicity in the Holocaust.⁶ It became customary to implicate the Home Army and National Armed Forces with murder of Jews. I do not claim that it resulted in a spate of lies, but it could particularize those testimonies, and dot certain i's, which could only be surmised by those giving testimonies. In most cases, I believe, this was not intended to mislead. Psychological research demonstrates how easily people transform their memories of overheard or read information into facts, which they then consider certain, just as they eliminate facts that contradict commonly held beliefs.⁷ One should be mindful of this phenomenon when reading testimonies, particularly those whose authors formulate general opinions and judgements, instead of describing concrete cases.

Another influence on the form of a given testimony is who its author was. Of the 109 testimonies on which this article is based, 24 were written by Soviet partisans, and 28 by People's Guard/Army partisans. Evidently, the attitude of Polish partisan units to these formations was hostile, and based on political considerations. But it is easier to ascribe negative characteristics to political enemies.

Different types of problems may arise from the definition of the term "partisan". This term could have been used in a testimony to refer to a sympathizer of the underground or an underground activist, sometimes to an armed person, or a member of an armed group operating in the woods, and could refer to bandits as

towej. *Materiały z sesji w IH PAN* (Warsaw, 1996); T. Prekerova, *Zakres dziejów Żydów w Polsce w latach 1939 - 1945* (Warsaw, 1992); *idem*, "Podziemie żydowskie a podziemie polskie", *Odra* No. 3 (1991), 20-36.

⁶ For example, the following passage can be found in a proclamation of the Central Jewish Committee in Poland of 4 February 1945: "It [the Jewish population] will never forget the criminals from the NSZ or the AK, who serving the Nazi bandits actively participated in murdering the Jewish population, [and] killed Jewish partisans. They have the blood of many Jews on their hands," quoted in A. Grabski, *Żydowski ruch kombatancki w Polsce w latach 1944-1949* (Warsaw, 2002), 21. See also "rezolucja Związku Partyzantów Żydów z 1945 roku", *ibid.*, 191-192.

⁷ Krystyna Kersten, "Relacje jako typ źródła historycznego", *Kultura i społeczeństwo*, 1970, vol. 14, No. 3, 133.

well. In an attempt to eliminate such cases, I dismissed all testimonies that do not specify the name of the formation. This does not, however, offer a complete solution to the issue of underground soldiers being implicated in banditry by authors of testimonies. This is particularly true of soldiers of the Home Army, the largest Polish underground organisation, which, on the one hand, facilitated pretending to be this organisation [by various groups], and, on the other, the tendency of testimony authors to identify every armed group with this organisation. Also, terms such as “NSZ-etowiec” (member of the National Armed Forces), “AK-owiec” (member of the Polish Home Army), and “PPR-owiec” (member of the Polish Workers’ Party), in some testimonies might denote a person with definite political views, but not necessarily their actual political affiliation. The authors of testimonies who tend to treat Polish underground formations as a whole often confuse the individual formations. One testimony mentions “conspiracy for the Home Army or People’s Army”, and its author fails to notice the fundamental differences between the two formations.⁸

I have also considered autobiographical materials written several or even several dozen years after the war. Their weakness, in turn, is the long temporal distance, gaps in their authors’ memory, being modelled on the already published memoirs and scholarly text concerning the Holocaust, or different types of ideological bias. They have one advantage, however; to wit, they are not influenced by the aggressive propaganda of the first post-war decade. Furthermore, the temporal distance between these testimonies and the events they describe is conducive to greater objectivity and more balanced judgement.

These reservations, however, cannot lead to a complete dismissal of testimonies as a source. When we consider the context of the absolutising influence of propaganda, it is curious that numerous testimonies describe the brutality of Soviet partisan units: rape, theft, disarming, atrocious anti-Semitism in their midst.⁹ Also, all the negative aspects of People’s Guard partisan units can be found in testimonies given by their members.¹⁰ The official propaganda line was totally different with respect to these issues, and those who gave such testimonies risked getting into trouble for their frankness. One should also be mindful that the testimonies were given for research purposes, and were not meant to be promulgated or published. What is most important, however, is the fact that, in this article, I have examined perceptions of Polish partisan formations; therefore, even assuming certain falsehood at the factographic level, I have not erred in determining the views of the authors of the testimonies on the attitude of partisans. In principle, this study can be treated as a description of certain stereotypes.

The analysis of material contained in testimonies can be divided into two main thematic groups. I shall begin by outlining the circumstances in which Jews joined Polish partisan units as soldiers and how they were treated, then I shall move on

⁸ Karol Grębel’s testimony, AŻIH 301/4673, 7.

⁹ For example, AŻIH 301/49; 156; 397; 563; 568; 569; 664; 719; 961; 1046; 2837; 2994; 3755; 4722; 5657.

¹⁰ Testimonies of Abram Bron (AŻIH 301/542), Jan Załęski (301/1818), Sara Gutgold (201/4615), Marian Szarach (301/5344).

to discuss the attitude of Polish partisans towards independent Jewish groups and Jewish individuals hiding in the country and in the woods. In order to maintain clarity in my presentation I have separated discussions regarding the different partisan formations.

There are surprisingly few testimonies regarding Polish partisan formations – only 109 meet my criteria. Most frequently, they mention the Home Army (70 testimonies), quite frequently, the People's Guard/Army (37 testimonies), then the National Armed Forces (16 testimonies), the Peasants' Battalions (6 testimonies), and socialist armed groups (5 testimonies). In Vilna, Nowogródek and Białystok provinces, Soviet partisans, and after them also Jewish partisans, referred to the Home Army as the "Whites", "White Poles" or "White partisans".¹¹ Geographically, this text deals with the pre-1939 territory of Poland. Most testimonies pertain to the Lublin (28) and Kielce (20) provinces, fewer to the Kraków (13), Białystok (12), Warsaw (12) and Nowogródek (9) provinces. Others are mentioned only sporadically. Some testimonies describe the same event or the same detachment. But, in principle, their contents do not overlap.

Most testimonies (i.e. 70) mention Home Army partisans.¹² In principle, they discuss three issues: Jews joining Home Army detachments, murders committed by Home Army members on Jews, and inter-partisan fighting. Three testimonies are of neutral character: they merely mention Home Army partisan activity, but their authors did not take part.¹³ Three others mention help offered by Home Army members to Jews. One discusses care offered by a detachment to a boy who jumped off a train to a death camp.¹⁴ In her testimony, Sonia Powązek mentions help given to a group of 17 Jews, roaming around the Mazowsze countryside, by a Home Army commander, Bek, actually against the will of his subordinates.¹⁵ In yet another, its author mentions that his 36-man strong group of refugees from Drupia in the Siedlce region received weapons from the Home Army and Peasants' Battalions.¹⁶

Jews who joined the Home Army were almost exclusively isolated individuals. Only one testimony mentions short-lived collaboration between a group of refugees from Sterdyń in the Podlasie region and the local Home Army detachment, terminated, according to the author, due the aggressively anti-Semitic behaviour of the Poles.¹⁷ According to the memoirs of the Jewish Fighting Organisation members Icchak Cukierman and Cywia Lubetkin, negotiations were conducted with the Home Army to escort some young people out of the ghetto. The Jewish Fighting

¹¹ K. Krajewski, *Na ziemi nowogrodzkiej. 'Nów' – Nowogrodzki Okręg Armii Krajowej* (Warsaw, 1997), 143, 150.

¹² All figures in this text refer exclusively to testimonies from the ŻIH archives. For the sake of illustration, I sometimes give examples from published memoirs, but I separate them from data included in testimonies.

¹³ Testimonies of Izrael Wegwajzer, AŻIH (301/1440), Helena Trok (301/2507) and Adam Grosberg (301/5445).

¹⁴ Salomon Liberman's testimony, AŻIH 301/2752.

¹⁵ Sonia Powązek's testimony, AŻIH 301/4380.

¹⁶ Eli Gorzeliński's testimony, AŻIH 301/6383.

¹⁷ Pinchas Lerman's testimony, AŻIH 301/4771.

Organisation leadership, even before the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, received a proposal from the Home Army to move to Volhynia, where Polish-Ukrainian fighting was already in full sway. Cukierman turned down the option, as he said for two reasons: "1) none of them [Jewish Fighting Organisation members] will make it to Volhynia, because they are Jews, and in order to get there, one would have to travel hundreds of kilometres through hostile territory; 2) Volhynia was a battleground for Poles, Germans and Ukrainians and there was no place there for Jewish partisans." The Jewish Fighting Organisation command decided that this order could not be executed and it was tantamount to a death sentence.¹⁸ A failed attempt to join a partisan detachment, made by a group of Przemyśl Jews, is discussed in Karol Gebel's testimony: "We received a negative response, with an explanation that the Jews were trying, at any price, to free themselves from their plight and would gladly collaborate with the Soviets, which the Polish partisans would object to."¹⁹ This is the only Jewish testimony which pointedly explained why Polish partisan formations would not accept Jews, and which formulated clear accusations against the Jewish community. Jews, refugees from the ghettos, for Polish partisans were merely people trying to survive, but not potential soldiers. And since their aim was only to survive, they could not be expected to fight bravely. They were also indifferent about the political goals of the partisan formations, which were determined to fight for independent Poland. Thus, it was assumed *a priori* that Jews would collaborate with the Soviets, if a Polish-Soviet conflict broke out, at least for practical reasons. Such opinions were rooted in the commonly held assessment of the behaviour of the Jews under the Soviet occupation of eastern Poland during 1939–1941. There is no trace of supposition that a Jew could be a Polish patriot. Fears of [the Jews'] attitude to the Soviet Union and communist influences in ghetto organisations were the reasons behind Home Army representatives breaking off talks with the ghetto underground in Vilna and Białystok.²⁰

If it is true that the Home Army did not accept groups of Jewish refugees into its ranks, then acceptance of individual Jews looked a little different. I have not found in the ŻIH archives a single testimony of an individual being turned down for membership by a partisan formation. This matter has come up three times in published memoirs. Marian Berland made attempts to join a partisan formation through a colleague who was working in Warsaw. The result was a statement to the effect that "Jews aren't accepted very much."²¹ Julian Aleksandrowicz, a physician, and a pre-war officer, who had fought in the September campaign (of 1939), was referred to a Home Army detachment after a year of deception and waiting. For this he blamed the leadership of Cracow Home Army.²² Another person turned down was Tomasz

¹⁸ Icchak Cukierman, *Nadmiar pamięci. (Siedem owych lat). Wspomnienia 1939–1945*, transl. Z. Perelmuter (Warsaw, 2000), 278. C. Lubetkin, *Zagłada i powstanie*, transl. M. Krych (Warsaw, 1999), 142–146.

¹⁹ Karol Gebel's testimony, AŻIH 301/4673, p. 7.

²⁰ Y. Arad, *Ghetto in Flames* (New York, 1982), 248–249; T. Prekerowa, *Podziemie żydowskie...*, *op. cit.*, 34–35.

²¹ Marian Berland, *Dni długie jak wieki* (Warsaw, 1992), 283.

²² Julian Aleksandrowicz, *Kartki z dziennika doktora Twardego* (Cracow, 2001), 61–70.

Toivi Blatt, a refugee from Sobibór, although he met a friend who could vouch for him in a detachment he wished to join.²³ It is hard to say how often similar situations were the case. There were only a few Jews who served in Home Army detachments and did not hide their identity.

I have found 12 testimonies of Jews who were Home Army partisans. One could also add to these the published memoirs by Halina Zawadzka and Julian Aleksandrowicz.²⁴ The volunteers' priority was to establish contact with a Home Army cell. Some had been active in the underground before joining a [partisan] detachment.²⁵ Others, already in hiding "on Aryan papers", got in touch with a Home Army activist and were sent to a partisan detachment in the woods or collaborated with one.²⁶ In the case of others, their Polish acquaintances opened doors for them.²⁷ Four testimonies mention their authors' being accepted by a Home Army detachment following an accidental encounter in the woods. This might appear odd: a person wandering in the woods meets a partisan patrol, is then taken to the command post, questioned and accepted, if for some reason the commander decides to trust that person.²⁸

A great majority of these people used their "Aryan papers" while in a Home Army detachment. One cannot say for certain that all of them were actually trying to hide their identity. One author, who emphasised that he served in a detachment as an Aryan, recalls that there were both Jews and Poles in the ranks.²⁹ Evidently, their concealment was either imperfect or unnecessary. Others were hiding their Jewish origin. Those who joined a [partisan] detachment after an accidental encounter did so for fear of their lives. Jakub Kogut was also hiding his brother, who had a Semitic appearance, from the partisans in his detachment.³⁰ Doctor Aleksandrowicz was afraid that his origin might be disclosed, which is mentioned in the testimony of Salomon Reis, who was a member of the Home Army "Huragan's" detachment in the Kielce region. Reis himself was not hiding. Forced to leave the detachment, Aleksandrowicz revealed his real name to him, asking him at the same time not to disclose it to anyone, as it would have been tantamount to a death sentence. His fears were confirmed by the way Reis was treated by the members of his detachment. He was forced to pay for his upkeep, met with strong aversion, and was threatened to be killed. His commander's interventions saved him.³¹ Only one testimony mentions

²³ Toivi Blatt, *Z popiołów Sobiboru (skąd nie było powrotu). Historia przetrwania* (Włodawa, 2002), 164–165.

²⁴ Halina Zawadzka, *Ucieczka z getta* (Warsaw, 2001), Julian Aleksandrowicz, *Kartki . . .*, *op. cit.*

²⁵ Jankiel Kopiec's testimony, AŻIH 301/2555.

²⁶ Testimony of Jerzy Fordowski, AŻIH 301/2294, Nechemiasz Szulkaper (301/3962), Oskar Gelles (301/1207), Henryk Wasserlauf (301/1585).

²⁷ Henryk Herstein's testimony, AŻIH 301/3263, H. Zawadzka, *Ucieczka z getta*, *op. cit.*, 120; J. Aleksandrowicz, *Kartki...*, *op. cit.*, 61–70.

²⁸ Testimonies of Juliusz Gryczman, AŻIH 301/1199, Salomon Reis (301/1791), Abraham Furman (301/4716) and Jakub Kogut (301/4970).

²⁹ Jankiel Kopiec's testimony, AŻIH 301/2555.

³⁰ Testimonies of Juliusz Gryczman, AŻIH 301/1199 and Jakub Kogut (301/4970).

³¹ Salomon Reis's testimony, AŻIH 301/1791. Jews were treated in a similar manner in the detachment, with which, without trying to hide, Abraham Furman stayed. When his comrade told

a Jewish woman exposed before a detachment commander. Its author, Alina Colle, was summoned by the commander, who allowed her to stay with the detachment, but was evidently afraid of what could happen if more people found out about her origin. The author herself, like Aleksandrowicz, was certain that she would be killed for her Jewish origin.³²

Similar statements can be found in a number of testimonies. Jews hiding in the woods and in the country were frightened of death at the hands of Home Army partisans, and, it seems, this feeling prevailed in their attitude. In the set I have analysed, there are 36 testimonies that describe an atmosphere of menace generated by the partisans. The crucial issue here is the source of information regarding Home Army members committing murders on Jews. In 9 testimonies, their authors give no explanation, while some do not provide any examples.³³ In Adolf Wolfgang's testimony and in Halina Zawadzka's memoirs, information on murder came from the partisans themselves, unaware that they were talking to Jews who were hiding their [true] identity.³⁴ Three authors were threatened directly by partisans.³⁵ Nine authors were would-be victims.³⁶ Six told stories they had heard, but they did happen in the area where they were staying. In most cases, their source was a Polish acquaintance.³⁷ Izak Lichtenberg, the author of another testimony, was a Soviet partisan, who was sent to the Kielce region to find information for the intelligence service. He also describes murders of Jews committed by members of the National Armed Forces.³⁸ Five testimonies are clearly second-hand. They give information about the fate of refugees from the ghettos which the authors could not have witnessed. Two of them mention murder of the authors' family members, but it is not clear where the authors obtained the information on the perpetrators.³⁹

A good deal of narrations deal with murders of individuals or small groups of Jews wandering around the woods. Refugees from ghettos or camps were attacked sometimes immediately after their escape – according to testimonies of Jews from Kraśnik, Józefów (both in the Lublin region), Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski, Vilna and

him that he could not vouch for his life, he escaped and hid in the woods until the end of the war (Abraham Furman's testimony, AŻIH 301/4716).

³² Alina Colle's testimony, AŻIH 301/4009.

³³ Testimonies of Bluma Dagnefisz-Drajer, AŻIH 301/1452, Juliusz Gryczman (301/1199). Towia Groll (301/2614), Chaskiel Zacharewicz (301/3148), Alina Colle (301/4009), Ita Gartenkrantz (301/4103), Jakub Kogut (301/4970), Fiszle Flechter (301/5440), Natan Rodań (301/6299).

³⁴ Adolf Wolfgang's testimony, AŻIH 301/590, H. Zawadzka, *Ucieczka z getta...*, *op. cit.*

³⁵ Testimonies of Hela Arbeiter, AŻIH 301/272, Salomon Reis (301/1791), Abraham Furman (301/4716).

³⁶ Testimonies of Abram Finkler, AŻIH 301/55, Izrael Szlajcher (301/105), Jakow Malewski (301/507), Hirszel Cukierman (301/1187), Karolina Kremer (301/1569), Zelman Baum (301/2425), Benjamin Brest (301/2531), Szmuel Garber (301/3604), Icek Szlama Cwajgman (301/4427).

³⁷ Anonymous testimony, AŻIH 301/379, testimonies of Pesla Pencyna (301/1525) Pinkus Kornhauser (301/1647), Jedida Klajnlerer and Gerszon Lewkowicz (301/2760), Josel Szyszler (301/3132), Mosze Zylberszpan (301/4137).

³⁸ Izak Lichtenberg's testimony, AŻIH 301/2441.

³⁹ Testimonies of Ita Hering-Hilowa, AŻIH 301/111, Wolf Fajnsztat (301/945), Nuchim Rozenel (301/2221), Chil Grynszpan and Józef Birger (301/4858), Lila Szynowłoga (301/5521).

Lida.⁴⁰ Permanent hideouts in the woods were destroyed as well. According to one witness, partisans would shoot inside the dugout. Escape was only possible through a back exit.⁴¹ Other testimonies specify that such attacks took place: near the village of Paprotnia outside Garwolin, where 12 people were killed; near Zamość – 3 victims; near Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski – a few people; in a forest near Przysucha – 10 people.⁴² Some information of murders of random Jews found in the woods can be found in Adolf Wolfgang's testimony. Wolfgang encountered a Home Army patrol, his ID was checked (he had "Aryan papers") and he asked to be referred to a PPS detachment, which was done quite smoothly. The guards "said, apologising, that recently a great number of Jews had been hiding in the woods and they got shot."⁴³ Halina Zawadzka obtained similar information. When she was with a Home Army detachment, hiding her true identity, she found out that soon before she arrived, her comrades shot a Jew who was sneaking through the woods, because "it was safer for everyone".⁴⁴

Some testimonies deal with murders committed in the country. What astonishes the reader is the fact that partisans are reported to have been fairly actively searching for victims. Partisans would turn up unforeseen in houses where Jews were hiding temporarily. In one case, seven Jews were taken to the police station; in two others there were shootouts, with the authors being able to escape; in the last testimony, the author miraculously survived a massacre and witnessed the death of eight family members.⁴⁵ Two testimonies mention the torturing of captured Jews, so that they would reveal the hideouts of others.⁴⁶ Sometimes houses were searched for Jews. One anonymous testimony describes such an assault, which resulted in three Jews being killed: "Fira said that Home Army members came to him at night, asking where the Jews were, but if he didn't tell and they found them, everyone would be shot, so he was forced to confess and show where they were."⁴⁷ In two cases, searches led to the death of the Jews found in the process.⁴⁸ But, more often than not, the Poles who harboured them managed to prevent intervention and when they heard that partisans were approaching either told their guests to leave or found them a different hideout.⁴⁹

⁴⁰ Testimonies of Nuchim Rozenel, AŻIH 301/2221, Izrael Szlachet (301/105), Benjamin Brest (301/2531), Jakow Malewski (301/507).

⁴¹ Karolina Kremer's testimony, AŻIH 301/1569. Her hideout was located in the woods near Połaniec.

⁴² Testimonies of Ita Hering-Hilowa, AŻIH 301/111, Wolf Fajnsztat (301/945), Josel Szyszler (301/3132), Mosze Zylberszpan (301/4137).

⁴³ Adolf Wolfgang's testimony, AŻIH 301/590.

⁴⁴ H. Zawadzka, *Ucieczka z getta...*, op. cit., 121.

⁴⁵ Testimonies of Zelman Baum, AŻIH 301/2425, Hirszel Cukierman (301/1187), Benjamin Brest (301/2531), Karolina Kremer (301/1569).

⁴⁶ Testimonies of Zelman Baum, AŻIH 301/2425, Lila Szynowłogi (301/5521).

⁴⁷ Anonymous testimony, AŻIH 301/379, p. 2.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, and testimonies of Zelman Baum, AŻIH 301/2425, Pesla Pencyna (301/1525).

⁴⁹ Testimonies of Aron Brejzel, AŻIH 301/34, Josel Szyszler (301/3132), Chaskiel Zacharewicz (301/3158), Fiszel Fechter (301/544).

Sometimes a Jew hiding in a Polish home was evicted with the consent of the Pole in question, as, for example in Pinkus Kornhauser's testimony. A peasant from the village of Olszyny in the Cracow region, who wanted to get rid of four Jews he was hiding, handed them over to a Home Army detachment, who shot them in the woods.⁵⁰ In other cases, partisans' intrusion was totally unwelcome to the peasants. According to Pesla Pencyna's testimony (who was hiding "on Aryan papers" in a village near Cracow), one of her friends complained that the partisans who took the Jew she was hiding left her with nothing to live on, because the money he was giving her was her basic income.⁵¹ Those who were hiding Jews, regardless of motivation, risked partisans' intervention, and sometimes had to suffer repression. Josef Szyszter, who was hiding with the peasant Laskowski in the village of Gawenda in the Kielce region, describes such an intervention as follows: "Laskowski prepared the last hideout, because he was afraid of Polish partisans. They just came to see him and demanded that he give me over, [and] they beat him. At that time I was hiding behind a spruce tree and saw the partisans beating him up. They told him to give me over, and promised not to hurt him."⁵² Sometimes Poles, due to fear of partisans, threw out the Jews they were hiding and used this as a pretext to refuse help.⁵³

Sometimes Poles who were helping both Jews and partisans hid them from each other. One testimony describes a Polish woman who was hiding several Jews in the basement and two Home Army members in the attic. One night her gall stones caused pain. Even though there was a doctor in the basement, she did not let him out, afraid of the reaction of those in the attic.⁵⁴ This is a perfect illustration of how deep and general a conspiracy was necessary to hide Jews, and what kind of paradoxical situations it caused. Equally absurd seems the conspiracy in helping a group of Jews by providing them with food and information on the part of a PPS partisan detachment. Perhaps the reason was to hide the fact that such help was being offered a neighbouring Home Army detachment, which, according to the author of the testimony, shot Jews encountered in the woods indiscriminately.⁵⁵

Home Army partisans are also accused of cheating Jews who were willing to join them, leading them into ambush, and attacks on Jewish partisan detachments and family camps. I have found two testimonies accusing Polish partisans of provocation. One took place in Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski, where a group of 18 Jews was taken out of the ghetto for a sizeable fee (10 thousand zlotys per person), demanding additional benefits such as clothes, shoe leather, and money for food. After these Jews had been robbed of their property, all of them were murdered. The author of the testimony survived by pretending to be dead. The unit was commanded by a major of the Polish Army, whom the author identified. According to a different testi-

⁵⁰ Pinkus Kornhauser's testimony, AŻIH 301/1647, p. 16.

⁵¹ Pesla Pencyna's testimony, AŻIH 301/1525.

⁵² Josef Szyszter's testimony, AŻIH 301/3122, p. 8.

⁵³ Pesla Pencyna's testimony, AŻIH 301/1525 and Fiszel Fechter (301/5440).

⁵⁴ Natan Roda's testimony, AŻIH 301/6299.

⁵⁵ Adolf Wolfgang's testimony, AŻIH 301/590.

mony from Ostrowiec, this murder was committed by a Home Army detachment.⁵⁶ Abram Finkler's partisan group was formed as a result of another provocation: a group of 23 Jews working in a plant at Wolanów, persuaded by a Polish employee, ostensibly a Home Army member, escaped to a [partisan] unit. When they reached their destination, they were shot at. Most of them managed to flee, but never sought contact with Polish partisan formations.⁵⁷

One testimony, by Jechiel Grynszpan, the commander of a People's Guard detachment, says that the Home Army was responsible for murdering a group of refugees from a prisoner-of-war camp at Lublin. The group's leader was Wolf Glajcher. This, as it seems infamous incident, is mentioned in two other testimonies, but they specify that it was a Polish Military Organisation (POW) detachment of "Czarny's" group.⁵⁸ According to historians, the most important testimony in this case, i.e. that of Jan Szelubski, a member of Glajcher's group, was falsified by the author for opportunistic reasons. In fact the murder appears to have been committed by people sent by the People's Guard [partisan] unit commander Grzegorz Korczyński. The reason is considered to be Glajcher and Szelubski's refusal to join Korczyński's detachment.⁵⁹

Two cases involving a detachment made up of Jewish Fighting Organisation members from the Warsaw and Częstochowa regions led to a conflict between the Jewish underground and the Home Army. The first case involved the disappearance of Mordechaj Growas's group, which was part of the [larger] Anielewicz unit, affiliated with the People's Guard and operating in the woods around Wyszaków. Some time later the group purportedly joined a Home Army detachment and was never heard of again. Icchak Cukierman claims that the group members were murdered by their comrades.⁶⁰ Another infamous case involves the attack of 2nd Lieutenant Leon Szymbierski's ("Orzeł") Home Army detachment on a group of Jewish refugees from Częstochowa, which took place near Koniecpol, and as a result of which several people were killed.⁶¹ The Jewish detachment was made up of fighters of the Częstochowa Jewish Fighting Organisation, and had good contacts with the local Home Army Leadership. "Orzeł" was eventually sentenced by Home Army court-martial to death for a series of robberies.⁶²

Five other testimonies describe fighting with independent Jewish groups. The authors accused Home Army members of being provocative.⁶³ Misza Krupczyk

⁵⁶ Testimonies of Icek Szlama Cwajgman, AŻIH 301/4427 and Wolf Fajsztat (301/945). It was a group of Retribution Union (Związek Odwetu), a sabotage unit of the Association of Armed Struggle (Związek Walki Zbrojnej), S. Krakowski, *The War of the Doomed*, *op. cit.*, 118.

⁵⁷ Abram Finkler's, AŻIH 301/55.

⁵⁸ Testimonies of Jan Szelubski, AŻIH 301/4857, Chil Grynszpan and Józef Birger (301/4858), Szymon Fajersztajn (301/1813), Mieczysław Gruber (301/114).

⁵⁹ R. Ainsztein, *Jewish Resistance*, *op. cit.*, 420; S. Krakowski, *The War...*, *op. cit.*, 84

⁶⁰ Icchak Cukierman, *Nadmiar pamięci...*, *op. cit.*, 286-287; Jan Załęski's testimony, AŻIH 301/1818.

⁶¹ Sara Gutgold's testimony, AŻIH 301/4615.

⁶² *Ibid.*; T. Prekerowa, *Zarys...*, *op. cit.*, 183, R. Ainsztein, *Jewish resistance*, *op. cit.*, 460.

⁶³ Testimonies of Aron Grenda, AŻIH 301/110, Hela Arbeiter (301/272), Misza Krupczyk (301/353), Abram Manelis (301/3972), Pinchas Lerman (301/4771).

claims that partisan attacks led to his group's involvement with a Soviet partisan formation.⁶⁴ The attacks affected three family camps: one in Parczew woods, one in Lipczanski forest, one in Nacki forest. The first was in the care of Jechiel Grynspan's detachment, which was part of the People's Guard. The other two were involved with Soviet partisan formations. There was a fusillade that led to a number of deaths. These acts of aggression can be explained in view of the Home Army fight against hostile communist formations.⁶⁵

Quite a few, i.e. fifteen, testimonies contain information on inter-partisan fighting. Their authors are Jews, either Soviet or People's Guard/Army partisans. Such fighting involving Soviet partisan formations took place in the Vilna, Nowogródek and Białystok regions.⁶⁶ The testimonies describe the skirmishes. The Home Army is described only as a political enemy and a belligerent. Emphasis is laid on its strength and the fact that it is a real threat to Soviet partisan formations. Two testimonies suggest that the Home Army had contacts with the Germans.⁶⁷ Abram Manelis's testimony from the Białystok region mentions an interesting case of a Home Army detachment being incorporated into a Soviet one. Soon the Jewish group had to pay for this. When the commander decided to move to a different area, Home Army members purportedly demanded that the Jews be sent away, as a condition for the Poles to take part in the new operation. The commander agreed, for military and political reasons, as he wanted the Polish group to take part.⁶⁸ Fighting between the Home Army and the People's Guard is dealt with in six testimonies, mainly from the Lublin region. The skirmishes took place in the Minkowicki forest, in the village of Chrzczonów, near Łuków, and Biała Podlaska. One testimony comes from the Kielce region, to wit from the woods near Ostrowiec.⁶⁹ Most testimonies contain enigmatic information on skirmishes, and ambushes set up by the Home Army in the woods. Contrary to Soviet partisans' testimonies, some Jews who were People's Guard partisans had bad personal experiences with the Home Army.⁷⁰

Other formations are also mentioned in testimonies dealing with the Home Army. Pro-independence underground organisations such as the Peasants' Battalions, socialist armed groups, and the National Armed Forces are less frequently mentioned than the Home Army. Since they are dealt with separately in the testimonies, I separated them from those dealing with the Home Army, even though they had been, either in part or completely, incorporated into the Home Army.

⁶⁴ Misza Krupczyk's testimony, AŻIH 301/353.

⁶⁵ Testimonies of Mieczysław Gruber, AŻIH 301/114, Rachmiel Łozowski (301/540), Lejb Rajzer (301/555).

⁶⁶ Testimonies of Hersz Bronner, AŻIH 301/275, Eliahu Kowieński (301/506), Berl Bakszt (301/664), Mania Glezer (301/2517), Miriam Jaszuńska (301/2530), Abram Mieszczański (301/2536), Aba Ołędzki (301/3144), Estera Świerzeńska-Marchwińska (301/3307), Litman Murawczyk (301/3755), Abram Manelis (301/3972).

⁶⁷ Testimonies of Eliahu Kowieński, AŻIH 301/506, Berl Bakszt (301/664).

⁶⁸ Abram Manelis' testimony, AŻIH 301/3972.

⁶⁹ Testimonies of Aron Brejzel, AŻIH 301/34, Aron Grenda (301/110), Hela Arbeiter (301/272), Wolf Fajnsztajn (301/945), Józef Kapłan (301/2632), Jankiel Grynblat (301/4800).

⁷⁰ Testimonies of Aron Brejzel, AŻIH 301/34, Aron Grenda (301/110), Wolf Fajnsztajn (301/945).

According to popular opinion, the National Armed Forces was an organisation that fought against the Jews. It is mentioned only in 15 testimonies, and is frequently mentioned in connection with the Home Army. One testimony, by Izak Lichtenberg, contains harsh words on the complicity of “the entire National Armed Forces and a part of the Home Army in catching, denouncing and killing Jews near Piotrków, Radom and Kielce. The accusations refer to particular detachments: “Powała’s” (Home Army) and “Bohun’s” (National Armed Forces).”⁷¹ Furthermore, 6 testimonies mention murders of Jews committed by the National Armed Forces. Most of them discuss attacks on Jews hiding in the woods: Abram Bron’s group in Janów forest in the Lublin region, a group of 12 Jews camping on marshes near Wizna, a group of 25 refugees from the camp at Bliżyn (Kielce region), the bunker at Rajgród and hideouts near Połaniec (the latter two in the Cracow region).⁷² Authors of testimonies from Kielce suggest that the National Armed Forces organised an escape of five people from the ghetto and then killed them upon reaching the woods.

Four testimonies mention the National Armed Forces in the context of conflict with communist partisan formations. Awigdor Niełowicki’s testimony presents the National Armed Forces as an organisation that dominated the entire area (Łomża region), hunted communists, and was preparing an anti-Soviet uprising.⁷³ Others inform about skirmishes between the National Armed Forces and the People’s Guard in Rudniki, Chrzczonów and Janów forest (all in the Lublin region) and in Branski forest in the Podlasie region.⁷⁴ One testimony from the Kielce region makes a strong accusation against the National Armed Forces concerning collaboration with the Germans during a round-up for partisans.⁷⁵

As many as four testimonies deal with one event, to wit the liquidation of Ignacy Podolski’s group by the National Armed Forces. Podolski’s group was part of the Anielewicz detachment, subordinated to the People’s Guard. Details of this incident are given in Eliaż Bumac’s testimony. Piasecki, the commander of the National Armed Forces detachment, visited the Jewish detachment, and while talking to Podolski, drew his gun and shot him. A fusillade broke out and 30 Jews died. There are certain discrepancies between testimonies and the information they provide is second-hand. Some mention “treacherous murder” of Ignacy’s group, a National Armed Forces ambush, even a skirmish. Some Polish historians dismiss the thesis that the National Armed Forces were the culprit and suggest that the murder could have been carried out by a People’s Guard detachment.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Izak Lichtenberg’s testimony, AŻIH 301/2441.

⁷² Testimonies of Abram Bron, AŻIH 301/542, Awigdor Niełowicki (301/384), Lejbusa Rozenblatt (301/428), Dawid Wulf (301/2314), Karolina Kremer (301/1569).

⁷³ Awigdor Niełowicki testimony, AŻIH (301/384).

⁷⁴ Testimonies of Jankiel Kleinman, AŻIH 301/11, Aron Brejzel (301/34), Józef Kapłan (301/2532), Mula Klejnot (301/3530).

⁷⁵ Salomon Reis’s testimony, AŻIH 301/1791.

⁷⁶ Testimonies of Eliaż Baumac, AŻIH 301/5042, Jan Załęski (301/1818), Bronisław Jaworski (301/5016), and Szymon Datner’s note on Wacław Birbaum (301/2003). See M. J. Chodakiewicz, P. Gontarczyk, L. Żebrowski, eds., *Tajne oblicze GL – AL. PPR. Dokumenty*, vol. 2, 76.

Two testimonies concerning the National Armed Forces stand out. Jankiel Kleinman encountered a National Armed Forces patrol in the woods, but during the interrogation did not admit that he was Jewish and joined “Jacek’s” detachment in the Lublin region. As a National Armed Forces partisan, he took part in fighting against the People’s Army. He remained with the detachment until it was disbanded.⁷⁷ On the other hand, the testimony of two refugees from Kielce mentions collaboration with the National Armed Forces. Planning their escape, the authors got in contact with a few people, including a member of the National Armed Forces, Kazubek. After they had escaped they found him in the woods in a group of 17, which included 3 Poles from the National Armed Forces. Kazubek continued to help them, but not for free. Even though the authors give an example of collaboration with the National Armed Forces, they are generally very unfavourable to this formation.⁷⁸

A mere 7 testimonies mention partisan detachments of the Peasants’ Battalions. Still, they reflect an entire spectrum of this formation’s attitudes towards the Jews. Testimonies mention two groups of refugees from ghettos that were allowed to join the Peasants’ Battalions. The first was stationed near Przemyślany, the second near Łuków in the Lublin region, although its contact with the leadership was weak and eventually was broken off.⁷⁹ On the other hand, the attempt to obtain permission from the commandant of the Rzeszów district to allow Jews from the local ghettos to join the formation failed. The refusal was purportedly justified by one sentence: “It would be shameful for us to consort with the Jews.”⁸⁰ This observation illustrates a deep divide between the two ethnic groups, which makes all attempts at understanding impossible, even when faced by a common enemy.

Three authors of testimonies regarding the Peasants’ Battalions were members of that formation. All of them joined by recommendation of their Polish friends. Emilia Pachciarkówna apparently did not hide her identity while with the detachment. Her father, Szlama, even built bunkers for the partisans in the woods.⁸¹ Two authors of testimonies remained in partisan detachments “on Aryan papers”. Helena Schmalholz explained this feeling by the fact that she felt she was threatened by the partisans, but she stresses the enormous friendliness offered to her and her sons by the detachment commander.⁸²

Two testimonies mention Peasants’ Battalions’ violence towards the Jews. One author, Naftali Spanglet, stayed under a false name with a Peasants’ Battalions detachment in the Rzeszów district. Eventually he was promoted and commanded a small unit. His subordinates found two Jews hiding in the woods and asked their commander for permission to assault them to seize their weapons. Spanglet managed to cleverly talk them out of it, warn those hiding and find them a new hide-

⁷⁷ Jankiel Kleinmans testimony, AŻIH 301/11.

⁷⁸ Jedida Klajnlerer’s and Gerszon Lewkowicz’s testimony, AŻIH 301/2760

⁷⁹ Testimonies of Berek Bergstein, AŻIH 301/4592, Jankiel Grynblatt (301/4800), Eli Gorzeliński (301/6383).

⁸⁰ Naftali Spanglet’s testimony, AŻIH 301/3579.

⁸¹ Emilia Pachciarkówna’s testimony, AŻIH 301/3214.

⁸² Testimonies of Helena Schmalholz, AŻIH 301/1376, Naftali Spanglet (301/3579).

out.⁸³ Another testimony, Zelman Baum's, mentions a veritable local war between a Peasants' Battalions detachment and a Jewish group near Koprzywnica (Sandomierz area). Members of this group posed as Poles, were armed, and had their agents in the local structures of the Peasants' Battalions. Their main task was to protect Jews hiding in the neighbouring villages and forests. They tried to obtain information about planned denunciations, "blown" hideouts, and committed murders; they pressed the Poles who were hiding Jews to continue with their efforts, and searched for hideouts for the newcomers. Their activities met with some resistance, they were hunted, and attempts were made to kill them. The testimony contains descriptions of ambushes set up by partisans, and it paints an atmosphere of a campaign against Jews, and a number of murders of Jews in the area committed by members of the Peasants' Battalions and the Home Army. It even says that the Peasants' Battalions' objective was to finish off the Jews.⁸⁴

The only group that is not accused of being anti-Jewish is that of the Polish socialists. True, their armed groups are mentioned only in five testimonies, but always in a favourable light. It is difficult, however, to identify precisely which armed group the authors are talking about. One testimony specifies a detachment of the Polish People's Army, i.e. the armed arm of the Polish Workers' Socialist Party (*Robotnicza Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*). In other testimonies the authors use the term "a PPS partisan unit". This may refer to the People's Guard of the PPS-WRN, the armed arm of Polish Socialists, i.e. the Socialist Fighting Organisation, but also the above-mentioned Polish People's Army. Two testimonies describe the history of collaboration between a group of Jews from Pilica (Miechów area) with "Rudolf's" group. They collected weapons together. During deportations from the ghetto, Jews were hidden in peasants' homes in the village of Podgórze.⁸⁵ Three further testimonies deal with individuals joining [partisan] detachments. One of them, Adolf Wolfgang, witnessed very compassionate conversations and help offered by a detachment commander to Jews hiding in the woods, although he kept it a secret from the members of his unit.⁸⁶

The image of communist partisan formations of the People's Guard/Army largely differs from that of the pro-independence formations. The difference comes down primarily to a different approach to Jews willing to join and to the issue of forming detachments from Jewish groups. I have found 37 testimonies concerning People's Guard detachments, with as many as thirty written by its members. Thus a decisive majority of these testimonies portray relations within the People's Guard, and not from the outside as was usually the case with the Home Army. This is of crucial importance for this formation's image in the testimonies.

⁸³ Naftali Spanglet's testimony, AŻIH 301/3579.

⁸⁴ Zelman Baum's testimony, AŻIH 301/2425. It is worth mentioning here that the authors of the document collection *Tajne oblicze GL – AL PPR*, when they compared Zelman Baum's testimony with file sources, suspect that in one skirmish the Polish group was the People's Guard, not the Peasants' Battalions. *Tajne oblicze, op. cit.*, vol. 2, 44–45.

⁸⁵ Testimony of Eстера Rusinek, AŻIH 301/502, Salomon Wettman (301/588).

⁸⁶ Testimony of Feliks Kisielewski, AŻIH 301/310, Adolf Wolfgang (301/590), Wolf Fajnsztat (301/945), Pinkus Kornhauser (301/1647).

A mere glance at how individuals got to the partisan detachment of the People's Guard shows important differences between the various partisan formations. Of course, those that joined this partisan formation were Polish Workers Party members, active in towns or those who got in touch there with a party cell. Such testimonies are relatively few.⁸⁷ But most authors were accepted after an accidental encounter in the woods or in a village.⁸⁸ In one case a Pole put in a good word for one author, not as a member of the communist underground, but through personal contacts.⁸⁹ Marian Szarach mentions that he was accepted as a member of a partisan unit because the commander turned out to be his acquaintance.⁹⁰ Only Moszek Merenstein's testimony contains words that can be interpreted as a suggestion of having to overcome certain difficulties: "I managed to show my identification and prove that I was a fighter from Sobibór and was accepted as a member of the partisan detachment."⁹¹

The authors have rather favourable memories of their time with the [partisan] detachments. Kalman Bucheister was greeted warmly by the partisans, even though due to his [advanced] age and disease he was unable to take active part in combat.⁹² According to Hersz Broner's testimony, Jewish partisans were praised by their commander for their outstanding achievements in combat.⁹³ People's Guard members were twice expelled from the detachment, but only on account of poor health, which rendered them unfit for action.⁹⁴ It should be noted that Jews in the People's Guard virtually did not hide their true identity.

Testimonies mention eight Jewish People's Guard detachments. Most of them were groups of refugees from the ghettos, which after some time of independent activity were incorporated into the People's Guard. The famous Jechiel Grynszpan's detachment operated independently in Parczew forest between late 1942 and May 1943, keeping a civilian camp of several hundred people, but it maintained contacts with the People's Guard.⁹⁵ A large group led by Abram Bron, made up of a hundred refugees from Janów Lubelski and the neighbouring area, did not start to search for partisans until the spring of 1943, when it was incorporated into the People's Guard as a result.⁹⁶ A testimony of a refugee from Wiślica differs from others in that a sizeable organized group of "Gordonia" members had already escaped from the ghetto.

⁸⁷ Testimonies of Hersz Broner, AŻIH 301/275, Nuchim Rozenel (301/2221), Hersz Rubinsztejn (301/2397). See G. Alef-Bolkowiak, *Gorące dni* (Warsaw, 1959).

⁸⁸ Testimonies of Aron Brejzel, AŻIH 301/34, Majer Szulim Lewinsohn (301/44), Mateusz Felsen (301/1358), Chaim Hirszman (301/1476), Józef Nabel (301/1793), Moszek Merenstein (301/2785), Henryk Kenner (301/3248), Joel Szapszewski (301/5299), Marian Szarach (301/5344).

⁸⁹ Kalman Bucheister's testimony, AŻIH/1104.

⁹⁰ Marian Szarach's testimony, AŻIH 301/5344.

⁹¹ Moszek Merenstein's testimony, AŻIH 301/2785, p. 5.

⁹² Kalman Bucheister's testimony, AŻIH/1104.

⁹³ Hersz Broner's testimony, AŻIH 301/275.

⁹⁴ Testimonies of Kalman Bucheister, AŻIH/1104, Moszek Merenstein (301/2785).

⁹⁵ Testimonies of Mieczysław Gruber, AŻIH 301/114, Izrael Szafsza (301/514), Josef Rolnik (301/4619). S. Krakowski, *The war...*, *op. cit.*, 32–59.

⁹⁶ Abram Bron's testimony, AŻIH 301/542.

After a lengthy search they found a People's Guard detachment, with which they established loose contacts that consisted in sharing information.⁹⁷ A group of refugees from a Jewish POW camp in Lublin led by Samuel Jeger found itself in the woods in the autumn of 1942 and only then established contact with the People's Guard.⁹⁸ At a fairly late date, in July 1944, Dawid Kępiński's group escaped from the camp in Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski, but it did not join an existing detachment either, but formed its own unit, formally belonging to the People's Army.⁹⁹ A testimony from Ostrowiec mentions a Polish-Jewish People's Guard detachment, operating since the autumn of 1942 in Świętokrzyski forest, led by a Jew by the name of Bach from the Iłża ghetto. This testimony is extremely brief, but I believe that it was made up of refugees, similar to those already mentioned.¹⁰⁰ Marian Szarach talks about the Jewish Berek Joselewicz's detachment, but he stayed with it for a very short time.¹⁰¹

Those detachments that were formed after the Warsaw ghetto uprising were eventually subordinated to the People's Army. They were Mordechaj Growas's, Dow Szniper's, Adam Szwarcfus's and Ignacy Podolski's groups, and together formed the Mordechaj Anielewicz detachment. These groups operated in Wyszaków forest. It seems that the detachment lost its Jewish character: at least Szwarcfus's and Podolski's groups were ethnically mixed: Polish-Jewish. The detachment fell apart. Growas's group presumably joined the Home Army and was never heard of afterwards. Szniper returned to Warsaw. Janek Biały's group was denounced, exposed and murdered by the Germans in August 1943. Podolski's group was destroyed in the spring of 1944, probably by the National Armed Forces. The survivors reached the Białystok region, where they joined the Jewish detachment "Naprzód" (Forward), which was a Soviet partisan formation.¹⁰²

Both the fact that Jews could freely join People's Guard detachments and the formation of Jewish detachments are very favourably remembered by the authors of testimonies. This demonstrated that communist partisan formations were open to those seeking help, and were free from national prejudice. One should be mindful that the People's Guard, established in April 1942, whose aim was to start immediate partisan activity, lacked volunteers, military cadres and weapons. That is why all kinds of small groups operating in the woods were incorporated: Soviet refugees from POW camps, refugees from the ghettos, and even bandits.¹⁰³ Those Jewish groups that were able to arm themselves were gladly accepted. Members of the Polish Workers' Party trapped in the ghettos, who counted on weapons and support during escape and later, were in a far worse situation. The testimony of

⁹⁷ Alter Ajzenberg's testimony, AŻIH 301/1687.

⁹⁸ Testimonies of Mieczysław Gruber, AŻIH 301/114, Lejb Wajsbrot (301/3095). See Gustaw Alef-Bolkowiak's article, AŻIH 301/1682.

⁹⁹ Wolf Fajsztat's testimony, AŻIH/945.

¹⁰⁰ Lejbuś Rozenblatt's testimony, AŻIH 301/4428.

¹⁰¹ Marian Szarach's testimony, AŻIH 301/5344.

¹⁰² Testimonies of Jan Załęski, AŻIH 301/1818, Bronisław Jaworski (301/5016), Eliasza Baumac (301/5042), and a collective testimony (301/6378).

¹⁰³ P. Gontarczyk, *Polska Partia Robotnicza. Droga do władzy 1941-1944* (Warsaw, 2003), 193. The author claims that this situation continued until as late as autumn 1943. *Ibid.*, 254.

Sara Gutgold, a communist from Częstochowa, is fraught with bitterness at the lack of any real collaboration between the Polish Workers' Party and the communists in the ghetto. Accusations range from cheating of Jews in weapon-related matters, to breach of agreements and unnecessary risking of Jewish lives.¹⁰⁴ The People's Guard's weakness is reflected in the collaboration of one detachment operating near Rzeczyca with Jews from the Kraśnik camp. It was the camp underground organisation that offered help to the detachment by providing medicine and clothes. Only a few prisoners managed to escape from the camp before its liquidation.¹⁰⁵

The relations between the People's Guard leadership and the commanders of Jewish detachments were not always smooth. Some conflicts are reflected in the testimonies. The testimony of Mieczysław Gruber, who succeeded Samuel Jeger as commander of a Jewish detachment, contains a description, alas fairly laconic, of a conflict with the battalion commander, "Kolka" (Mikołaj Meluch). After battalion reorganisation following a battle with the Germans in May 1944, "Kolka" refused to accept the Jewish partisans back into his outfit. When a Jew in Chil Grynszpan's detachment accidentally shot a Pole, "Kolka" "started an anti-Jewish uproar." Unfortunately, the author failed to specify what the "uproar" involved, but Grynszpan's group left the People's Guard as a result. At the same time, Gruber emphasizes the friendly attitude of the People's Guard's Lublin district command, i.e. generals Baranowski and Rola-Żymierski.¹⁰⁶

Two completely contradictory testimonies deal with the relations in Wyszaków detachments. In his testimony given in 1946, Jan Załęski, "Dudek", describes the local People's Guard leadership as follows: "Often the commander would send Jews to carry out tasks that were doomed to fail, thus losing them, or they would expose individual partisans or entire outfits. The Warsaw underground was familiar with the 'Dudek' (yours truly) affair; he protested and stood up for the exposed and mistreated Jewish partisans, which jeopardized him vis-à-vis the party (i.e. the Polish Workers' Party). He was branded a Jewish nationalist and relieved of his command."¹⁰⁷ A different, very favourable opinion of the attitude of the Polish leadership towards Jewish partisans can be found in Bronisław Jaworski's testimony.¹⁰⁸

One consequence of incorporating various kinds of groups into the People's Guard, and thus people of different opinions, was internal conflicts, which sometimes affected the Jews. There are a few known cases of tragic incidents, when Jewish members of People's Guard detachments or those in their care were murdered by their comrades. In the fund I studied, I found only one testimony that described such an incident. Abram Bron's group, operating in the woods outside Janów Lubelski, was incorporated in Władysław Skrzypek's People's Guard detachment. After some time, the Polish members of the detachment murdered 17 Jews.

¹⁰⁴ Sara Gutgold's testimony, AŻIH 301/4615.

¹⁰⁵ Testimonies of Hersz Broner, AŻIH 301/275, Nuchim Rozenel (301/2221).

¹⁰⁶ Mieczysław Gruber's testimony, AŻIH 301/114.

¹⁰⁷ Jan Załęski's testimony, AŻIH 301/1818, p. 5.

¹⁰⁸ Bronisław Jaworski testimony, AŻIH 301/5016.

The rest of the group left, but in November 1943, at the request of Polish Workers' Party representatives, returned. According to other sources, the one responsible is Karol Hercenberg-Lemiszewski, commander of a People's Guard detachment that camped near Skrzypek's group. He shot two Jewish guards, who had let themselves be disarmed, and then tried to kill another partisan. The Jews began to defend themselves and Lemiszewski was wounded, which infuriated his subordinates. A fusillade broke out, which soon engaged Skrzypek's detachment.¹⁰⁹

Naturally, Jewish members of the People's Guard did fight against Home Army and National Armed Forces partisan formations. This has been discussed above. Some testimonies mention executions of collaborators carried out by Jewish partisans of the People's Guard.¹¹⁰ Such operations raise certain questions, because the word "collaborator" did not necessarily have to mean people collaborating with the Germans. At least in one case, the "collaborators" were Polish pro-independence underground activists. In January 1943 at Drzewica, a Jewish People's Guard detachment, commanded by Izrael Ajzenman, murdered seven civilians, whom the author of the testimony mentions by name. He interprets this incident precisely as a crackdown on collaborators, who "were interrupting" the Polish Workers' Party underground activity. He also emphasises that the operation was an example of Polish and Jewish Polish Workers' Party activists.¹¹¹ There could have been more of such erroneous interpretations.

Testimonies of Jewish survivors were the basis for stereotypes concerning Polish underground military formations. These can be briefly summarised as follows: the Home Army did not try to facilitate Jews' escapes to the woods or their formation of partisan detachments. Even the ghetto organizations that collaborated with the Home Army, such as the Warsaw Jewish Fighting Organisation, could not count on it in this matter. It was very difficult for individual people to get to partisan formations. Jews who were partisans in the Home Army had to hide their true identity. In turn, Jews hiding in the villages and woods could only expect death at the hands of Home Army partisans. A similar picture of the Peasants' Battalions' partisan formations emerges from those testimonies. On the other hand, socialist partisan formations have been remembered only favourably. Unlike the above, testimonies concerning the National Armed Forces do not, as a rule, discuss the issue of Jewish accession. This might sound paradoxical, but Polish partisans of the pro-independence formations are primarily a threat according to testimonies of Jewish civilians. A separate issue, however, is that of the picture of the Home Army in the testimonies of Jews who were Soviet and People's Guard/Army partisans, where this organisation was perceived as a political enemy.

¹⁰⁹ Abram Bron's testimony, AŻIH 301/542. S. Krakowski, *The War...*, *op. cit.*, 93-95. P. Gontarczyk, *Polska Partia...*, *op. cit.*, 252-253. These testimonies do not reflect the apparently greatest crime, i.e. the murder of around 100 Jews hiding in the Ludmiłówka area by Grzegorz Korczyński's group. See P. Gontarczyk, *ibid.*, 178-182.

¹¹⁰ Testimonies of Kazimiera Kagan, AŻIH 301/2295, Zelman Baum (301/2425) Józef Kapłan (301/2532), Jankiel Kopiec (301/2555), Lejb Wajsbrot (301/3095).

¹¹¹ Josel Szyszler's testimony, AŻIH 301/3132.

Generally, Jews tended to be more trustful of the communist partisan formations. The People's Guard/Army had its Jewish detachments, and the individual accession of Jews to these detachments was not obstructed. But I am not certain whether during the occupation the Jews who were not involved at the organisational level with the Polish Workers' Party cherished the myth of Jew-friendly communist partisan formations. Refugees from the ghettos hardly ever decided to join a specific formation. When they chose to join the partisans, they were not interested in the concrete political option they represented, as long as it fought against the Germans and was not hostile to the Jews. On the other hand, it seems that it was already during the war that the myth of the Home Army and the National Armed Forces as extremely anti-Semitic organisations was created. The testimonies of murders and fear of partisans from these formations are too numerous to be only a product of post-war manipulations. It must be borne in mind, however, that the Home Army was not an ideologically homogeneous population, but a military organisation made up of armed groups of different political parties: from the socialists to the nationalists. It was also better known, so other group's activity could have been ascribed to it. Hence, I believe, its marked presence in the testimonies.

The picture of Polish pro-independence partisan formations in Jewish testimonies looks rather sordid. The issue of the attitude of the partisans to the Jews naturally requires further in-depth examination, primarily of Polish sources, because the materials I have analysed represent the point of view of but one side. I also think that the partisans ought to be treated as part of Polish society, and not merely as members of military organisations who just followed orders. Their views and actions reflect the then various attitudes of Poles towards the Jews, perhaps in a more radical form. We will not get anywhere by defaming or exonerating the individual organisations. We should follow Dieter Pohl's postulate to integrate as closely as possible Holocaust history and general social history under the occupation.¹¹² I believe this is the only way to construct a comprehensive, i.e. more accurate, picture of Polish-Jewish relations during the war.

¹¹² Dieter Pohl, "‘Akcja Reinhardt’ w świetle historiografii", in: Dariusz Libionka, ed., *Akcja Reinhardt. Zagłada Żydów w generalnym Gubernatorstwie* (Warsaw, 2004).