



Isaac's Army: A Story of Courage and Survival in Nazi-Occupied Poland

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Starting as early as 1939, disparate Jewish underground movements coalesced around the shared goal of liberating Poland from Nazi occupation. For the next six years, separately and in concert, they waged a heroic war of resistance against Hitler's war machine that culminated in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. In *Isaac's Army*, Matthew Brzezinski delivers the first-ever comprehensive narrative account of that struggle, following a group of dedicated young Jews—some barely out of their teens—whose individual acts of defiance helped rewrite the ending of World War II.

Based on first-person accounts from diaries, interviews, and surviving relatives, *Isaac's Army* chronicles the extraordinary triumphs and devastating setbacks that befell the Jewish underground from its earliest acts of defiance in 1939 to the exodus to Palestine in 1946. This is the remarkable true story of the Jewish resistance from the perspective of those who led it: Isaac Zuckerman, the confident and charismatic twenty-four-year-old founder of the Jewish Fighting Organization; Simha Ratheiser, Isaac's fifteen-year-old bodyguard, whose boyish good looks and seeming immunity to danger made him an ideal courier; and Zivia Lubetkin, the warrior queen of the underground who, upon hearing the first intimations of the Holocaust, declared: "We are going to defend ourselves." Joined by allies on the left and right, they survived Gestapo torture chambers, smuggled arms, ran covert printing presses, opened illegal schools, robbed banks, executed collaborators, and fought in the two largest rebellions of the war.

Hunted by the Germans and bedeviled by the "Greasers"—roving bands of blackmailers who routinely turned in resistance fighters for profit—the movement was chronically short on firepower but long on ingenuity. Its members hatched plots in dank basements, never more than a door knock away from summary execution, and slogged through fetid sewers to escape the burning Ghetto to the forests surrounding the city. And after the initial uprising was ruthlessly put down by the SS, they gambled everything on a bold plan for a citywide revolt—of both Jews and Gentiles—that could end only in victory or total destruction. The money they raised helped thousands hide when the Ghetto was liquidated. The documents they forged offered lifelines to families desperate to escape the horror of the Holocaust. And when the war was over, they helped found the state of Israel.

A story of secret alliances, internal rivalries, and undying commitment to a cause, *Isaac's Army* is history at its most heart-wrenching. Driven by an unforgettable cast of characters, it's a true-life tale with the pulse of a great novel, and a celebration of the indomitable spirit of resistance.

Isaac's Army: A Story of Courage and Survival in Nazi-Occupied Poland Details

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From Reader Review Isaac's Army: A Story of Courage and Survival in Nazi-Occupied Poland for online ebook

Amanda says

I got this book as a GoodReads FirstRead, and I was really excited. This book is a story that we only hear vague glimmers of in most of history classes of World War II. I actually didn't know a lot of the history of the destruction of Warsaw, as well as the destruction of the Ghetto. I knew that there was a Jewish rebellion, as well as a Polish rebellion. But to hear it firsthand (well second hand -- Brzezinski interviewed a lot of the players, as well as going on diary entries from the Resistance members who survived but died before he started writing the book.

The story moves along quickly -- like Hunting Eichmann, it's a fast paced story. Unlike Eichmann, each corner gives me more and more horrific elements, things I didn't even know occurred. It's eye-opening and heartwrenching, and Brzezinsky spares no details. Definitely an engaging read. Seeing all the politics at play, wanting to strangle each of the uncooperative parties. It's tough, but an important read, especially the fact that these voices are disappearing, 70 years on.

Sherwood Smith says

One of the reasons I don't read horror fiction is because reading history can be grim enough. As this tightly and vividly written, impeccably researched, book exemplifies. You know going in that it's going to be grim, and it is.

But there are stories of courage and virtue in the sickening relation of deliberate slaughter. One of the Jewish Resistance groups was a bunch of teenagers. Girls were involved, not just as couriers but toting weapons, as well as the boys.

The SS was given the mandate late in the war to totally destroy Warsaw, and even the Germans couldn't control them and the Russians who joined them in rape, murder, and rampage, but despite Himmler's pouting and slamming his little fists on the table, the Nazis lost the war before they could totally destroy the city--and wipe the Jews off the map.

Amid the many stories of betrayal, ambivalence, enterprise (in a good way and in a not good way; check out the definition of greasers) are shining examples of bravery and courage. These people deserved to have their stories told, their deeds remembered.

Brzezinski not only did extensive research in archives, but he interviewed many survivors. These accounts are especially precious.

Steven Z. says

Ten years ago my wife and I visited Poland. Since I had studied the Holocaust for many years I thought I knew what to expect, but after visiting the remnants of the Warsaw Ghetto and Auschwitz-Birkenau I was wrong. Since many of my relatives were murdered in Auschwitz and part of my journey was to find my

father's village outside of Krakow I had a very sobering and emotional reaction to what I saw. I have read countless books on the Holocaust, but few measure up to Matthew Brzezinski's ISAAC'S ARMY. The book is not a comprehensive history of the plight of Polish Jews during the Holocaust, but after reading it I had the feeling that it was. What is presented is an eye opening account of Polish Jewry before, during, and after World War II. The author's main focus is the city of Warsaw which was depopulated and destroyed by the Nazis between 1940 and 1944. By focusing on a select number of Jews who lived, died, and survived the trauma that befell Eastern European Jews the reader is exposed to fresh insights and is taken on a journey like no other.

The author begins by describing the difficulty of imagining Warsaw from the platform of 2012. Today Warsaw is thriving with a modern capitalist economy, but as Brzezinski points out the office buildings, financial centers, hotels and other modern edifices are built on the "holy ground" that was the Warsaw Ghetto. The first chapter provides an insight to the Polish mindset as the German invasion takes place on September 1, 1939. The masses retained the firm belief that this was another Hitler land grab and once he seized Danzig (Gdansk) and some Silesian land he would be satiated and things would return to normal. Though their neighbors seemed confident there was a "collective nervousness" in the Jewish community. Within a few days reality hit home as the Germans entered Warsaw on September 8th.

After his introductory material Brzezinski shifts his attention to Warsaw and the ghetto that the Germans created. His narrative is presented through the eyes of a number of people. By focusing his attention on Isaac Zuckerman, Simha Ratheiser, Mark Edelman, Boruch Spiegel, Zivia Lubetkin, the Osnos and Mortkowicz families, and a number of other important individuals the reader is drawn into their world and their co-religionists struggle for survival. By mid-September the Soviet Union invaded Poland from the east making it very difficult to escape. As the narrative develops Brzezinski describes the inability of the Jews in Warsaw to develop a unified response to events. The Nazis created the Judenrat, designed to rule the ghetto and carry out their policy. Within the Jewish community a Zionist faction emerged whose goal was to get as many Jews as possible to immigrate to Palestine, opposing them was the Bund who felt allegiance to Poland and wanted to build up the Jewish community as nationalistic Poles and remain in Poland. A Jewish Fighting Organization (ZOB) was created and both the Zionists and Bund members could not unify against the Nazis. In addition the Polish gentiles created a Home Army supported by the British.

By October Poland as an independent nation ceased to exist. The Nazis worked ceaselessly to rekindle Polish anti-Semitism that had plagued Polish Jews for centuries but had declined in the early 20th century. Soon a Jewish underground developed to cope with the deteriorating conditions and oppose the Nuremberg Blood Laws which defined the Nazi version of Jewishness, the looting, roundups for slave labor and outright murder carried out by the German command. Through the eyes of Brzezinski's characters the reader gets a glimpse of Jewish life and culture in pre-war Poland that the Nazis destroyed as they seized Jewish businesses ranging from banks to publishing and industry.

The author weaves the story of the escape of the Osnos family from Poland to Romania by way of Germany to highlight the immigration barriers set up by western countries especially the United States and the machinations of Breckenridge Long, an assistant Secretary of State who created numerous roadblocks to prevent Jews from entering America (see David Wyman's two volume history of American immigration policy before and during the war towards Jews). The Osnos family escaped Warsaw before the Nazis walled in the ghetto in the fall of 1940 resulting in almost 500,000 people squeezed into 732 acres. (100)

Once the ghetto was created Brzezinski describes the underground smuggling operation that would feed the ghetto for the next three years. The author integrates the important role that children played in the process as families relied on their offspring for survival. Many Jews were rounded up and along with Gentile Poles were sent to perform slave labor in Germany and areas they occupied in the East. Isaac Zuckerman was one of the 1.6 million people who suffered the fate of being a forced laborer and through his eyes we experience what it was like. Overall the Jews in the ghetto suffered from an ethical dilemma, how much should they cooperate with the Nazis. Under the Judenrat, headed by Adam Czerniakow a Jewish Police Force was created to assist in rounding up and policing Jews. Czerniakow's diary (THE WARSAW DIARY OF

ADAM CZERNIAKOW edited by Raul Hilberg) describes his mental state as he presided over the ghetto under the Nazis and the day to day issues that Polish Jews faced. Finally on July 23, 1942, Czerniakow could no longer deal with the situation and committed suicide.

Though Brzezinski concentrates on the Warsaw Ghetto he also describes the pogroms in Vilna and Kovno following the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June, 1941. As numerous historians have pointed out Hitler did not plan in advance as to how the Jews would be dealt with once Germany invaded the Soviet Union. Decisions and killings would be made on an ad hoc basis until the Final Solution was decided upon at the Wannsee Conference on January 20, 1942. Special killing squads were employed by the Nazis in the East and experimental methods were instituted to maximize death until finally the concentration camps were refined to maximize the killing.

On July 22, 1942 the Nazis ordered the Gross Aktion (Great Deportation) to empty the Warsaw Ghetto and settle people in the East. Mark Edelman emerged as a leading figure in the underground and as a hospital orderly he helped smuggle Jews out of the Ghetto. Preference was given to underground members and as Edelman described years later he felt like he was playing God as he chose who he could assist. Soon after this Edelman and his cohorts learned that Jews were not being resettled but were being taken to a new concentration camp, Treblinka. By September 21, 1942 the deportations had ended as over 300,000 Jews had perished at Treblinka.

Throughout the book Brzezinski provides details of the negotiations between the different factions among the Jewish community as to how to deal with Nazi depopulation policy. In addition, the author provides insights concerning discussions with the Polish Home Army to acquire weapons. What emerges are the many obstacles that the Jews faced as they tried to fight the Nazis and just survive. The latent anti-Semitism of the Home Army, the ideological predilections of the different factions, and the many "greasers" (the term used to describe Ukrainian and other ethnic groups that the Nazis used to harass, rob, and murder Jews) all contributed to the inability of thousands of Jews to save themselves. By January, 1943 the Germans began to round up the remaining 50,000 Jews that had escaped the Gross Aktion.

The new German effort to deport Jews to Treblinka led to the ZOB merging with the Bund and a more unified Jewish command. The ZOB took over leadership from the Judenrat and Brzezinski explores how they developed their strategy, bomb making capacity, and acquisition of weapons. Though they did not acquire a great deal from the Home Army they were able to manufacture their own "version" of weaponry. On April 20, 1943 the SS stormed the Ghetto to liquidate it. They were met by roughly 500-750 armed Jews. Receiving little help from the 380,000 member Polish Home Army they shocked the Germans who expected to be met by a few revolvers not bombs. Heinrich Himmler fearing another Stalingrad type situation in Warsaw appointed Jurgen von Stroop his counter insurgency expert to deal with the situation. Von Stroop applied massive artillery to flush out the insurgents as building after building was destroyed. Brzezinski goes into great detail as to how the Jewish defenders survived the onslaught. The remaining Jews were able to escape their harrowing situation by entering the sewer system to reach the Aryan side of the city and seek a path to safety.

On May 16, 1943 von Stroop declared the Ghetto liquidated, but 28,000 Jews remained hiding in the city. The biggest threat were the "greasers" who continued to extort and murder Jews. These "greasers" numbered between 5-10,000 Poles and were on a fee basis from the Gestapo. Brzezinski correctly points out that little research has been done concerning this problem, but he sheds more light on the precarious situation Jewish survivors of the liquidation faced. It is interesting that so much work has been done concerning the role of Righteous Christians, but so little with "greasers." (See Jan Grabowski's new book, HUNT FOR JEWS: BETRAYAL AND MURDER IN GERMAN OCCUPIED POLAND)

On August 1, 1944 Warsaw erupted once again as the Home Army led a revolt against the Nazis. The Poles wanted to liberate themselves before the red Army arrived. Brzezinski explores the diplomacy among Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin concerning the future of Poland and it becomes clear by the Tehran and

Yalta Conferences that Britain and the United States despite protestations realized that Poland would fall into the Soviet sphere. During the Warsaw uprising Stalin kept 800,000 troops from entering Warsaw and refused the use of Soviet airspace to the British and the United States who sought to assist the Home Army. From Stalin's perspective the more Poles the Nazis killed the better. The man who was responsible for the Katyn Forest Massacre earlier in the war was just finishing a project to decimate the Polish leadership, politically and militarily as soon as possible. On October 2, 1944 Warsaw capitulated with 200,000 casualties in 63 days. (362) "From a pre war population of 1.35 million, only an estimated five thousand remained hidden in the rubble of October 1944." (369)

Once Poland was liberated by the Soviet Union and the war was brought to an end the full horror of the Holocaust was brought front and center for the world to witness. For the remaining Jews who survived the war they trickled back to Poland, but their ordeal was not at an end. Over 300,000 Jews returned to Poland and most did not want to remain as most Poles were not happy that so many Jews survived the war. Isaac Zuckerman worked ceaselessly to assist as many as possible to immigrate to Palestine, but the British, now a declining empire refused their admittance for fear of angering the Arabs. For those Jews who wanted to remain in Poland prewar anti-Semitism quickly resurfaced. As Jews tried to regain their homes, businesses, and other property from the prewar years many Poles either owned or occupied them and refused to go back to their prewar status and return them to their rightful owners. Beatings of Jews and robberies and other types of harassment were common in postwar Poland, but none reached the level of the pogrom at Kielce in July, 1946, which resulted in the death of 40 Jews and many more injured. The massacre was carried out by "ordinary Poles; bakers and seamstresses, white collar workers and carpenters, God-fearing Catholics who went to church on Sundays. How, after the tragedy of the Holocaust, something like this could occur in a supposedly civilized society, Isaac could not understand." (401) For a full description of the events in Kielce and the role of the Polish government consult Jan Gross' account in his book, FEAR: ANTI-SEMITISM IN POLAND AFTER AUSCHWITZ. The Polish government would then, after asking permission from the Soviet Union, facilitated the immigration of 115,000 Jews to Palestine. (403)

Brzezinski closes his narrative by reintroducing characters that he had interviewed for the book . Some of these survivors lived in Israel and had to deal with the remnants of their experiences. Issues such as post traumatic stress disorder were apparent in most survivors and for Isaac and Zivia death would come at a fairly young age. Mark Edelman returned to Lodz after the war and became one of the Poland's leading heart surgeons. Many settled in Krakow, while others went to Toronto and New York. As time moves further and the continued building of skyscrapers all physical evidence of the Holocaust in Poland will be extinguished except for a few yards of the ghetto wall which stood as of my visit in 2003. At that time the wall was tended to by an older gentleman. I wondered as I closed Brzezinski's book if that gentleman was still alive, and if not had someone else taken over the mission of caring for some of the last evidence of the Nazi destruction of such a beautiful city. ISAAC'S ARMY is superb book that reads like fiction, but the trouble for humanity is that it is all based on fact.

A.L. Sowards says

WWII was a difficult experience for almost everyone affected by it. For Jews and for Poles, it was especially horrible. *Isaac's Army* gives a good glimpse of that, but since it focuses on survivors (you can't interview people who died 70+ years ago), the book manages to be engaging and hopeful rather than depressing.

Brzezinski follows several people through the war years, including the German invasion of Poland, a couple Soviet invasions of Poland, the establishment of the Warsaw Ghetto, and then both the 1943 and 1944 uprisings in Warsaw. It also goes over the chaotic years immediately following the war. The story focuses on

men and women who fought in and survived both uprisings. That they lived through both is miraculous, since the Ghetto was pretty much leveled during the 1943 uprising and Nazi strategy for a few months was the complete destruction of Warsaw and all its inhabitants during the 1944 uprising (Himmler wanted Warsaw wiped from the map).

I learned a lot more about Poland during WWII and the various Jewish groups and their goals (some wanted to stay in Poland and improve relations with the Gentiles, others were Zionists, some were Communists.) Lots of interesting stories of occupation, hiding, and urban warfare.

It's obvious Brzezinski's audience is a modern American one. I found references like "the Trumps of prewar Poland" a little jarring at first, but the descriptions worked. For readers looking for in-depth, day-by-day accounts of the uprisings, this isn't the book for that. Brzezinski covers the highlights, but other accounts are sure to be more detailed. However, if you're like me and enjoy historical narratives focused on real people and how they survived, this is a great read.

Manchester Military History Society (MMHS) says

"One of the bravest scenes Edelman witnessed during the war was the sight of a man entering the Warsaw transit station for the transports to Auschwitz with his son on his shoulders. The boy was frightened and asking where they were going. "Not far", the father reassured him. "Soon it will all be over".

This is the last line of this amazing book detailing the armed Jewish underground in Warsaw.

The author interviewed many of the survivors and his book details the build up to the Ghetto revolt of 1943 as well as Jewish participation in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944.

Lesser known aspects are also detailed such as the conflict between some of the right wing fascist elements within the non-Jewish Polish resistance army and the Jewish units.

I'd highly recommend this for an understanding of the Jewish underground and particularly the internal conflicts within the Jewish resistance itself.

Marla says

I have read many books about World War II and about the Holocaust. I didn't know much about the Jewish Resistance and Brzezinski does a great job bringing these people to life. I learned so much from this book. It really opened my eyes on just how many were involved with the resistance and what they sacrificed.

This book is so hard to listen to, listen to what these people lived through. Sometimes it's hard to wrap my mind around the fact that the Holocaust even happened. That there were people out there who would do this to other people. I enjoyed this book so much I might get the printed copy, sit down in a quiet corner and spend time with them again.

This is a book that anyone who is interested in this time period should read. I don't read many books a second time but I might with this time so I can give these brave souls more of my time and respect. This book reads like fiction but unfortunately the characters are real people who had to live through the horrors of

the War and what the Nazis did to them. Good on them for standing up for what was rightfully theirs. Their freedom and their lives.

Bucklez says

This should be required reading for high school students and for everyone who has a vote. "Isaac's Army" tells the story of Jewish resistance in Warsaw, one of the great, ancient cities of Europe that was destroyed by the Nazis aided a bit by a slow rescue by the Russians who waited across the river while the Nazis finished their destruction of the city. Before the war Hitler had plans to destroy Warsaw and make it into the model German city. The Germans began their plan by driving in with tanks and looted the property of Warsaw civilians, Gentile and Jew. Homes, businesses, furniture, art, clothing, jewelry, everything was simply taken. The people? They were simply shot by the Germans in the streets and forests, or sent to concentration camps.

The city was divided into a Jewish section and the German section. Inside the Jewish section were individuals of extraordinary courage who fought back quietly and for the most part without any weapons eventually erupting into the Warsaw Uprising in their last attempt to avoid shipment to Treblinka. Jews were living in caves beneath buildings, moving through full sewers in order to avoid detection, staying ahead of the German flamethrowers who hunted hiding Poles and burnt them alive. Without Allied support, the uprising was doomed. The Germans slaughtered the remaining Poles; gang rapes and torture were commonplace and public entertainment for the German civilians who had, without guilt or remorse, moved into the lovely old apartments of the Poles. About 90% of Warsaw's buildings were destroyed by the Germans. Demolition teams sought out and destroyed cultural treasures: ancient libraries, palaces, monuments, irreplaceable archives, museums, churches, everything of historical, religious, or cultural value to the Poles. Gone.

The more I read about Nazi Germany, the more I realize that there were very few "good" Germans. Despite what has been said about the nobility of the regular German military or the acts of kindness and courage of a small percentage of German civilians, cruelty and evil on this scale could not have happened without the express support of the majority of Germany's civilians. The entire country was infected with greed and sadism; Germans who had the heart and courage to stop the evil were in the vast minority.

A free press and free elections are the only things that prevent a entire country from embracing organized murder, rape, and theft; any country without a free press (witness Russia today) is easily led down the same path as Germany was in the 1930's.

Brian says

Matthew Brzezinski provides an excellent historical narrative of the Jewish Resistance to Nazi Occupation in the Warsaw Ghetto during World War II. The sheer devastation brought on by the Nazi's is often overlooked in many military narratives but the razing of Warsaw and of the Ghetto's destruction in particular is artfully brought to life. Using first person narratives from the participants and historical documents the author is able to put a human face on the struggle against the Nazi's and show the genesis of Jewish resistance. The book provides an excellent picture into how and why it took so long for the threat to be realized and why once realized resistance was so difficult. The tragedy of an entire culture being wiped out is captured throughout the book and takes a pointed look in the afterword. Very well written and well articulated, this will become a

must for those studying the holocaust as well as those looking at the history of Poland. While not military significant in the outcome of World War II the resistance in Poland gives the reader a look at what life was like under Nazi occupation and the horror of those trying to avoid being rounded up for the gas chambers.

Jennifer says

I LOVED this book! I read it while in Poland. This took place in Warsaw and of course there is nothing left to see as most of Warsaw was destroyed, but it was still neat to read this while in Poland. I have read so many Holocaust memoirs but this was a well researched book on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising---not to be confused with the Warsaw Uprising---which was later. The Jews of Poland were for the most part such a peaceful people. And so optimistic! With the exception of a few---up until the very end they really believed their nightmare would soon end and life would go back to normal! I learned about all the different factions of Jewish dissidents and their conflicts also. I recommend this book to anyone who is interested in Holocaust History.

Shannon says

I won this as a Firstreads book here on Goodreads.

I just finished this book a few minutes ago and my first reaction after reading it is that I just want to curl up in the fetal position and have myself a good cry. This book broke me, it just absolutely gutted me. I have read many books about this time period, but this has quickly become one of my favorites. It reads really well and not once did it feel like a dry textbook just spouting off facts. These were real people and Brzezinski made them real to me and while reading I came to care about each and every one of them.

I learned so much from reading this book. I went into this knowing some basic details of the Jewish Resistance, or at least I thought I did. Turns out I didn't know near as much as I thought. I had no idea that there were so many different underground groups and I really didn't know they all squabbled with each other so much.

There is so much brutality in this book that it's just impossible to wrap my brain around it. The SS penal unit and the Russian RONA Brigade alone are enough to give me nightmares for a lifetime. I can't imagine what it was like to live in the midst of this chaos, let alone to actually stand up and fight against it. I have nothing but the utmost respect for these resistance fighters, but I think it is really important to remember that no one is perfect and that includes these heroic individuals. Brzezinski presents them as real human beings with all their flaws and strengths.

This is a brilliant book and I cannot recommend it highly enough to anyone that is even remotely interested in this period of time. The names of these brave men and women are now seared in my memory and I will not be forgetting them.

Checkman says

I've read many books over the years about World War II. I am an American citizen so it should come as no surprise that the bulk of those books have been focused on the American experience in the war followed closely by the British experience. "Isaac's Army" is the first actual book that I have read that is about the Jewish resistance in Poland ,during the war, and also looks closely at what day to day life was like for the Jews in occupied Poland. Yes I've read books about the Holocaust, life in the death camps and books that covered the Nazis policies and security state (gestapo and so on), but I've never actually *read* a book that covered the day to day life of the Jews who managed to stay *out* of the concentration camps (with the exception of Ann Frank's diary and of course the Nazis eventually got her). Looking back at this oversight I realize that I have depended on movies, television productions and documentaries for that information.

I have made a small step to filling in that gap by reading "Isaac's Army". It's a fascinating book which shows that ,like anything in this world, surviving under the Nazi regime in occupied Poland was a complicated endeavor. Not all of the Jews were noble and brave and not all of the gentiles ,and Germans for that matter, were collaborators and murderers. For example I was surprised to learn that thousands of Jews (I always pictured a much smaller number in my head) never were rounded up and put into the ghettos. They refused to go and through good luck, the help of gentiles and corruption (i.e. bribes) they survived. It wasn't pretty and often the things they had to do to survive were ugly and would later come back to haunt them. For an excellent fictional account of this dilemma I recommend reading *Enemies: A Love Story* by Isaac Bashevis Singer. It's a story about a Jewish man who survived the war in such a manner and the cost it inflicts on him years later after he has immigrated to the United States. Survival extracts a heavy toll at times and many of the Jewish survivors would suffer from post traumatic stress syndrome for the rest of their lives.

Of course with the word army in the title this book focuses on the armed aspect of the Jewish resistance movement. This aspect I'm more familiar with since I have always been more focused on the military and espionage aspects of World War II. This part of the book was really nothing new. Matthew Brzezinski interviewed the few survivors from the resistance approximately ten years ago, but much of what he writes about has already been well documented in other books, movies and television productions. Nevertheless his account is very professional and well written - which I would expect nothing less from a journalist with his experience and credentials. His account of the both the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (April 43) and the general Warsaw Uprising (September 44) is tight, smooth and easy to follow. I've read accounts of battles in the past in which the writers either get bogged down in minutiae or are so vague as to be confusing. Brzezinski finds a middle ground which is the mark of some of the better historians. Enough details to satisfy the anal retentive, but not so much as to put the casual reader to sleep.

If pressed to find any faults with the book I would have to point to the lack of photos and maps. Now I understand that in the 21st century such data is just a couple moments away courtesy of the Internet and I have spent some time on Google and Wikipedia looking up many of the participants that Brzezinski writes about. Why this strange oversight? As is the case with so many things in this world I have to conclude it has to do with money. I imagine adding several glossy pages of photos adds significantly to the cost of printing a book. Perhaps the decision was made to omit photos because of the very fact that the Internet is so very accessible to so many and the truly curious (like this humble reviewer) will spend a few minutes pressing key pads and manipulating a mouse to find the photos. All true, but it still would have been nice to have some photos that could have been easily turned to while actually reading the book, but such a gripe probably dates me more than anything else.

In closing with the exception of one relatively minor gripe I strongly recommend "Isaac's Army". Ultimately it's a surprisingly uplifting book and also a fascinating read. It lays out the stark struggle for survival and the mind-numbing brutality of the war and the years immediately following the war in Poland, but it also shows that there were survivors and somehow they got on with their lives when it was over. Many had a hard time

of it and struggled with ghosts, but they still lived. Not just survived, but lived. Excellent book.

Kelly Knapp says

Brzezinski has written a step by step, carefully researched book detailing the Resistance Fighters in Poland during WWII.

Most of the books about the Holocaust are personal memoirs or about the hiding of Jews. While many books mention it, I have seen very few that detail the resistance in Poland. There are a few books that describe the French Resistance, but even those don't seem to have reached the depth of or gotten such a feeling for the time.

I was impressed with the number of direct quotes and interviews with the people involved in the Resistance. In addition, this was an easy read. I don't mean it was simple, but it flowed more like a novel and less like a "textbook" style nonfiction that I was expecting. However, it was not a quick read. I found that I had to put the book down and mull over what I had read, contemplating the ramifications of this fight, and what it meant to the success of the Allies against Germany. Therefore, it took me awhile to read it, but was well worth the effort.

This book is not one I would choose for a novice reader of the Holocaust and Resistance, but this is my favorite subject and so, I found it very satisfying as many books have given the impression that the Jews were led to slaughter with little resistance; it was nice to see that the Hitler's was was not as smooth during the first few years as it seems from previous readings.

I hope that this is not the only book the author writes about WWII and its atrocities. I would like to read a scholarly review of the prisoners on U.S. soil, the relocation of The Japanese-Americans, and the compact made between the U.S. and South/Central America regarding the relocation of German-Americans.

History clearly shows that if we do not learn from our past, we are doomed to repeat it. Little is taught about WWII anymore. However, this would be a great book to add to the High School curriculum.

Jessica (booneybear) says

Wow! One of my favorite books of all time is Leon Uris' 'Mila 18'. This book is the real life Mila 18. Being able to follow this certain group of Jews who lived in Warsaw, Poland during the time of WWII and seeing exactly how they lived and preserved day after day is true testament to the power of survival. I am truly amazed at the luck and will power of the human spirit. Books like this should be a must read for the human population. I really appreciate how the author was able to make the reader very familiar with the characters. It would have been so easy to overwhelm the reader with too much information and names but the author managed to keep the narrative on a personnel level and made it easy for the reader to develop relationships with the characters.

I am very happy to have been lucky enough to win this book through Goodreads. Otherwise I am afraid I would have never heard of it and would have missed out on this amazing book.

Chris Witkowski says

I can't remember ever reading a sadder book. After returning from a trip to Poland, prompted by the realization that I know next to nothing about Polish history, particularly as it relates to the plight of the Jews during WW2, I began a search for a non-fiction account and stumbled across this book.

With great clarity Brzezinski recounts the story of the Warsaw Jewish Resistance movement through the eyes of half a dozen young activists, young men and women who, against all odds, survive Hitler's campaign to obliterate the entire Jewish population along with just about the entirety of the city of Warsaw. The story is truly wrenching. As are the tales of the few Jews who do manage to actually leave the country during the war. And then there are the young children who are hidden away in Gentile homes and Catholic convents, scrambling to learn by heart the Catechism, so they can appear non-Jewish.

Reading the book I was amazed at the youth of the resistance leaders, but the mystery of this is explained by Mark Edelman, one of the central Jewish activists : " To join the Resistance, one had to leave one's family behind to face starvation, disease, and the roundups. It took less courage to pick up a gun than to stay with one's children and comfort them in the face of almost certain death. It was not a coincidence, he explained, that Resistance fighters were almost all young and unmarried. In fact one of the bravest scenes Edelman witnessed during the war was the sight of a man entering the Umschlagplatz (train station) with his son on his shoulders. The boy was frightened and asking where they were going. "Not far", the father reassured him. "Soon it will be over."

Just amazing.

Mike says

Juden haben Waffen! Juden haben Waffen! I hope they always do.

The book is a journalistic account of the Jewish resistance, with the stated goal of reading like a novel (I'm not sure why so many writers feel like they have to make this a goal—written history is a narrative by necessity unfortunately). Because it is a journalistic account that tries to focus very specifically on the Jewish resistance in Warsaw it sacrifices any real analysis, not only on the wider themes of the war, anti-Semitism, and Zionism, but on the narrower themes of the resistance itself. For example, the author states repeatedly that the resistance was splintered between different factions of political ideology but provides no real background on or exploration of the causes and motivations for the differences. This isn't a detriment, exactly, and would likely have pulled the book far afield from its focus, but it's worth pointing out; the result is a sort of vagueness of detail and a concentration on externals and actions.

The aftermath of the Nazi's retreat with the consolidation of Soviet power and its effects on Jews and Poles was given a brief treatment, which is slightly unusual and welcomed; the balancing act required to show non-Jewish Poles as they were—both victims and perpetrators—is handled well; the writing is competent. It's probably a must-read for anyone interested in the subject.

4.5 stars

I won this in a goodreads giveaway; my opinion would be the same regardless.
