

Bialystok

City in northeastern Poland. Before World War II, 50,000 Jews lived in Bialystok, representing more than half of the city's population.

The Germans invaded Bialystok on September 15, 1939. A week later, they transferred the city to the Soviets, as promised in the Nazi-Soviet Pact. However, when the Germans attacked the Soviets in June 1941, they retook control of Bialystok. June 27 was named "Red Friday," because on that day Nazi *Einsatzgruppen* murdered 2,000 Jews there. Over the next two weeks, another 4,000 Jews were killed in an open field near Pietraszek.

On June 29 the Nazis ordered the Jews to establish a *Judenrat*; Efraim Barasz became its chairman. On August 1, 50,000 Bialystok Jews were restricted to a Ghetto. Within three months, the *Judenrat* was ordered to transfer 4,500 of the ghetto's inhabitants to the town of Pruzhany. Most of them were killed when the Pruzhany Ghetto was destroyed in January 1943.

The Bialystok Ghetto was divided into two parts, on the east and west sides of the Biala River. It quickly became an industrial center where textiles and weapons were manufactured for the Germans. Most of the Jews worked in these industries; a handful worked in German factories outside the ghetto. Within this setup, the Jews also managed to secretly manufacture products for their own use. The Germans gave the Jews very little food, so they grew their own food in "*Judenrat* gardens." The *Judenrat* instituted aid organizations in the ghetto. These included soup kitchens, two hospitals, an outpatient clinic, pharmacies, a gynecological clinic, a first aid organization, two schools, and a court. They also established a Jewish police force.

There were several Jewish youth movements in the ghetto that split into two undergrounds. These eventually united in July 1943 under the command of Mordechai Tannenbaum and Daniel Moskowicz. Tannenbaum also established a secret archive in the ghetto that functioned until April 1943. The archive's documents, which included many from the *Judenrat*, were hidden on the Polish side of Bialystok.

From February 5--12, 1943 the Germans carried out a massacre in the ghetto. Two thousand Jews were shot and 10,000 were deported to Treblinka.

One of the two resistance movements tried to fight the Nazis and lost many of its members. *Judenrat* chairman Barasz believed that the Nazis would be satisfied with those Jews they deported, and would therefore leave the rest of the ghetto alone. However, in August 1943, the Nazis ordered the final liquidation of the ghetto. At that point, the ghetto had 30,000 inhabitants. On the night of August 15, German troops and Ukrainian collaborators surrounded the ghetto. The next morning, the Jews were ordered to gather for evacuation. At 10:00 a.m. the underground revolted. The main goal of the uprising was to create an opening in the German lines, allowing the fighters to escape to the forest. However, they only had a few weapons and over 300 died per day. At one point, German troops even entered the ghetto with tanks and armored cars. The fighting lasted until August 20, when the resistance fighters' last defenses fell. The resistance leaders, Tannenbaum and Moszkowicz, fell back to the last stronghold where they committed suicide.

Deportations began on August 18 and lasted for three days. Most of the Jews of the ghetto were deported to Treblinka, Majdanek, Poniatowa, Blizyn, and Auschwitz, while 1,200 children were sent to Thersienstadt, and later to Auschwitz. About 150 fighters from Bialystok joined the partisans. Only 2,000 Jews were left in the ghetto; they were deported to Majdanek three weeks later. In all, about 200 Jews from Bialystok survived the camps and several dozen survived by hiding on the Polish side of the city; 60 Jews who had joined the partisans also survived. Bialystok was liberated by Soviet troops in August 1944. (see also resistance, Jewish.)