

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 444

“Tempest”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

Well, what is a Home Army anyway? What sort of an army has no artillery, no tanks, no air force? They don't even have sufficient small arms. They are minor partisan units, not regular forces. I've heard that the Polish Government has ordered these detachments to drive the Germans out of Warsaw, I don't know how they propose doing that ... these folk don't normally fight the Germans, but hide in the forests—they can't do anything else.

Joseph Stalin.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 444: Tempest.

Last time, I talked about events that took place on the Western Front from late July into early August 1944. This week, I want to look at events on the Eastern Front during the same period.

The last time I talked about the Eastern Front was in episode 440. I finished off that episode by noting the Red Army's capture of Vilnius and Lublin.

After most of Army Group Center was encircled and destroyed, its portion of the German line disintegrated. Hitler then turned to one of his favorite commanders, Marshal Walter Model, who had become his go-to guy when a strong defense was needed. Over the course of July 1944, Model managed to rebuild Army Group Center and organize a new German defensive line using replacement troops plus divisions borrowed from Army Group North and Army Group North Ukraine, the forces that held the line to the north and south, respectively.

The reconstituted Army Group Center was soon able to stand its ground against the advancing Red Army, but the Soviets found weaknesses at both ends of Army Group Center's line, the seams, if you will, between the section of the front Army Group Center held and the sections held by its two neighboring army groups.

The Soviet advances to Vilnius and Lublin represent exactly this—the spots at the northern and southern edges of Army Group Center’s line, where the line was still vulnerable. In the north, after driving the Germans out of Vilnius on July 13, Red Army units in the region proceeded to advance toward the city of Kaunas, the pre-war capital of Lithuania. That city fell to the Red Army on August 1.

As a side note, long-time listeners may recall from our 1919 World Tour, the series in which we looked at the new nations and new borders created in the aftermath of the last war, that although Vilnius was the traditional capital of Lithuania, after the dust settled from the Polish-Soviet War in 1920, Vilnius was under Polish control and was part of Poland from 1922 until the Soviet Union occupied Eastern Poland in 1939. In 1940, the USSR restored the Vilnius region to Lithuania, which was nice of them, while they also occupied Lithuania and incorporated it into the USSR as the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, which was not nice of them.

During the period when Vilnius was not within Lithuanian borders, the city of Kaunas served as the nation’s capital. Kaunas, as I said a moment ago, was captured by the Red Army on August 1, 1944.

The Red Army also entered Riga, the capital of Latvia, on August 1. If you look at a map, you’ll see that Riga is near the Gulf of Riga, which in turn is a part of the Baltic Sea. So when the Red Army reached the shore of the Baltic Sea, they broke the land connection between Army Group Center and Army Group North. The latter was now isolated in Estonia and the eastern portion of Latvia, also known as Livonia.

This wasn’t quite as bad as it sounds. The Germans still controlled the Baltic and had the capacity to supply Army Group North by sea, and, if necessary, evacuate it by sea. But the Wehrmacht was not yet convinced that was necessary. Instead, the Army prepared a plan to reopen the land connection between the two army groups.

While all this was going on in the north, dramatic events were unfolding in the south. On July 25, the Red Army reached the east bank of the River Vistula. To be more specific, this was the First Byelorussian Front, commanded by Konstantin Rokossovky, an ethnic Pole serving in the Red Army. Stalin had made him a Marshal of the Soviet Union less than a month earlier, in recognition of his accomplishments during Operation Bagration.

One hundred kilometers to the north lay the city of Warsaw, the pre-war capital of Poland, which also lies on the River Vistula. That same day, July 25, officers of the Polish Home Army were amazed to see some of their comrades who had been arrested by the Gestapo, some as long as a year earlier, turn up at their homes. The Germans had released them all.

Why had this happened? No one can say for certain, but it is likely German authorities in Warsaw were expecting the Red Army to march into the city any time now and decided to offer

an olive branch to the Home Army. Perhaps the Germans hoped for an alliance between themselves and the Home Army to hold Warsaw together against the approaching Soviets.

For the past two days, members of the Home Army living undercover in Warsaw had been watching as tired, dirty, disheveled German soldiers passed through the city, headed back to Germany. These were the soldiers who had escaped the destruction of Army Group Center, and they made quite a contrast to the German soldiers who had marched into Warsaw not quite five years ago. Those German soldiers had goose-stepped down the streets of the city smartly, in polished boots. These Germans trudged along wearily, hungrily, in shabby uniforms, and with looks of resignation in their eyes. Anyone could see they'd been thoroughly beaten and now thought only of their own survival.

As part of Model's efforts to reconstitute Army Group Center, most of the garrison in Warsaw had been sent to the front to replace these soldiers. Only about 2,000 German soldiers remained in Warsaw; even the German Governor of Warsaw, Ludwig Fischer, had fled the city. Fischer was a Nazi Party loyalist who had been administrator of Warsaw since 1939. In that capacity, Fischer had overseen mass executions of educated Poles, the creation of the Warsaw ghetto and the later deportation of its residents to the death camps. For his crimes, Fischer had already been sentenced to death by the secret court operated by the Polish resistance, and his name appeared first on the Home Army's list of Nazis targeted for assassination. The Home Army had already tried to kill him once, unsuccessfully.

To anyone living in Warsaw, the signs seemed crystal clear: the beaten German Army was retreating and the German civilian authorities were fleeing Warsaw. The Red Army must be drawing near. People began to cite the example of 1918, 26 years earlier, when the Polish citizens of Poznan rose up against Germany. Was now the time to rise up against the Germans again?

There was another consideration. The Home Army in Warsaw had heard the reports coming out of the cities to the east, cities such as Lwow and Vilnius, the places where the Home Army had assisted the Red Army in liberating the city, only to have their supposed allies intern Polish soldiers and imprison or kill their officers. It was Katyn Forest all over again!

The same would surely happen at Warsaw if the Red Army took the city. But what if the Home Army rose up against the Germans now, while they were weak? The Soviets would arrive at a Warsaw that was already free and reestablished as the capital of independent Poland under the authority of the government-in-exile. Surely not even Stalin would dare to wage open warfare against the legitimate Polish government before the eyes of his allies and all the world.

But that moment of German wavering was all too brief. The next day, July 26, Ludwig Fischer was back in Warsaw. On the 27th, he issued an order demanding 100,000 men and women of Warsaw to report for work digging trenches and building fortifications. Evidently, the Germans decided to defend Warsaw after all.

This change in attitude on the part of the Germans was due to Model's efforts to reconstitute Army Group Center, but no one in Warsaw knew about that.

The German need for fortifications was clear enough, in the form of the Red Army's 3rd Tank Division which had reached a point less than twenty kilometers from Warsaw. Home Army officers could see the T-34s for themselves through their binoculars. It appeared that if they did nothing, the Russians would soon be occupying the city.

The following day, July 28, Fischer's order went unheeded. No one showed up to do forced labor under German direction. To the leaders of the Home Army, this amounted to another reason to begin the uprising, before the Germans began carrying out reprisals against civilians in Warsaw for failure to comply.

On July 29, Moscow's Radio Kosciuszko broadcast an appeal to Warsaw, in Polish, calling on them to fight the Germans:

The Polish Army now entering Polish territory, trained in the Soviet Union, is now...the armed arm of our nation in its struggle for independence. Its ranks will be joined tomorrow by the sons of Warsaw. They will all together, with the Allied Army pursue the enemy westwards, wipe out the Hitlerite vermin from Polish land and strike a mortal blow at the beast of Prussian Imperialism...For Warsaw, which never capitulated and never gave up the struggle, the hour of action has struck ... By fighting in the streets of Warsaw, in houses, factories and stores, we shall bring nearer the moment of ultimate liberation, and we shall preserve the country's wealth and the lives of our brothers.

Here was confirmation that the moment was at hand. And the Soviet broadcast sounded conciliatory, inviting the Home Army into a joint struggle against the common enemy.

Late in the afternoon of July 31, the Home Army leadership in Warsaw received a report of Soviet tanks on the outskirts of the city. They concluded it was now or never. The uprising would begin tomorrow, August 1.

The uprising began with Home Army attacks on many of the key German positions in Warsaw: offices of the military and the civilian administration, Gestapo headquarters, supply dumps, and an attempt to take one of the four bridges that spanned the Vistula. Perhaps these were too many objectives at once, as the result was failure everywhere. German soldiers were too experienced and too well armed for the Home Army, and the Germans had learned that the uprising was imminent, so the Home Army lost the element of surprise. The uprising had only one success that day; it captured a supply dump full of German uniforms and rations and some arms. The uniforms were camouflage SS uniforms, which the Home Army took as their own, adding red and white armbands to distinguish themselves from the actual SS.

The fighting was vicious and bloody. Neither side was in any mood to take prisoners. About 2,000 members of the Home Army died in that first day of fighting, along with 500 or so Germans. Polish civilians, unaware of how difficult the Home Army's situation was, hung Polish flags on their houses and began celebrating in the streets.

Neither the civilians nor the Home Army were aware of the situation facing the Soviets. The tanks the Home Army had seen on the outskirts of Warsaw were merely a small reconnaissance force. On August 1, Rokossovky ordered some of his armored units to advance north toward the eastern side of Warsaw, but the Soviet 3rd Tank Corps was surprised and surrounded by four German armored divisions: two from the Army, one SS division, and the Luftwaffe's Hermann Göring Division. The Red Army tank corps held out for two days, but was destroyed by the German armor, which forced Rokossovsky to halt his advance.

When the German Army's new chief of staff, Heinz Guderian, learned of the uprising, his first thought was that Warsaw was just behind the front line, posing the possibility that the Polish fighters could attack the German Army from behind and perhaps trigger a collapse of the new and still shaky front line, he asked Hitler to give the Army control over operations in Warsaw. Hitler refused his request and instead assigned the role to Heinrich Himmler, commander of the SS, which was responsible for maintaining security in occupied Poland.

Himmler placed a high-ranking officer of the Waffen-SS named Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski in command of German forces in Warsaw. As you might deduce from his name, Bach-Zelewski was himself an ethnic Pole born in Imperial Germany to a minor aristocratic family. His birth name was Erich von Zelewski. He grew up in a Catholic household and spoke Polish at home.

He served in the German Army during the last war, enlisting at the age of 15, and in 1918 fought to put down the Polish uprisings in the East. After the war, he got involved with the right-wing Stahlhelm and with anti-Semitic organizations. In 1925, he changed his name to add "dem Bach" to make it sound more German. He joined the Nazi Party in 1930 and the SS in 1931. In 1933, he converted to Lutheranism. In 1940, he dropped Zelewski from his name and was known afterward as Erich von dem Bach, but I'm going to call him Zelewski anyway, because he was ashamed of his Polish background. He was also ashamed that three of his sisters married Jewish men. Also, I don't want to call him "Bach," because I'm afraid someone might think he was related somehow to the family of Johann Sebastian Bach, and I wouldn't want anyone to think that.

Zelewski quickly rose through the ranks of the SS. Because he could speak Polish, Himmler assigned him to the governance of Poland in November 1939, where he oversaw the mass resettlements and confiscations of property of Poles living in territory claimed by the Reich. He played a role in selecting the site of the Auschwitz death camp. When Germany invaded the Soviet Union, he was assigned to oversee the activities of the Einsatzgruppen.

In 1942, he was sent to Berlin for treatment of opioid abuse, after which Hitler wanted to appoint him to replace Reinhard Heydrich in Prague, following Heydrich's assassination, but Himmler interceded, telling Hitler he needed Zelewski on the Eastern Front to oversee anti-partisan operations. In that capacity, Zelewski made a name for himself for his willingness to slaughter civilians indiscriminately, whether they were involved in partisan activity or not.

Now Himmler assigned Zelewski to the job that he in some sense had been working toward all his adult life: putting down an uprising of Polish freedom fighters.

Himmler told Hitler that, "the moment is not convenient from a historical point of view. However, what the Poles are doing is a blessing in disguise. Within five or six weeks it will all be sorted out and then Warsaw, the capital, the head, the brains behind these 16-17 million Polish people will be extinguished. The people that has blocked our way east for 700 years...will no longer be a great historical problem for our children..." Himmler went on to say that he would use the uprising as an opportunity to raze the city and slaughter its population, which was about one million at the time.

[music: Tchaikovsky, *Symphony No. 5*.]

When the uprising began, the Germans had a reduced garrison in Warsaw, though it was likely more than 10,000 at that moment. The Home Army had perhaps 25,000 fighters, but only about 10% of them had any combat experience, or a rifle, for that matter. Still, by August 4, most of the city was in the Home Army's hands.

But then the tide began to turn. The Home Army's leaders expected the Red Army to reach Warsaw any day now and finish driving away the Germans. But the Red Army remained in place. This was because of the losses they'd suffered, the exhaustion of the soldiers, and the difficulties of resupply after an advance of hundreds of kilometers. Or that's what they said. Ask any Pole, and they'll tell you that the Red Army was deliberately holding back, waiting for the Germans to destroy the Home Army for them.

German forces in Warsaw, meanwhile, were receiving reinforcements from the SS; another 12,000 or so fighters were approaching. These SS troops were soldiers and civilians taken prisoner in the Soviet Union who'd agreed to fight for the Germans, and they included ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, Azeri, and Cossacks, among others. Mindful of the well-known resentments felt by Ukrainians toward Poles, the Poles in Warsaw tended to label all these auxiliary soldiers "Ukrainian."

On Friday, August 5, the new units began assaulting Warsaw. Pursuant to Himmler's orders, they went from house to house, slaughtering everyone they found, often in gruesome ways I can't discuss on a family podcast. Over the next few days, an estimated 50-100,000 civilians in Warsaw were brutally murdered. Their German officers told these auxiliary fighters they'd be permitted to keep any valuables seized from the Poles, a measure meant to give them an

incentive to keep going. They were also told that if the Poles captured them, they would be killed, and if they fled from the battle, they would be returned to the concentration camps they'd been recruited from.

Even senior German military commanders were appalled by the violence against civilians. When Zelewski arrived at Warsaw and learned what was going on, he ordered a stop to the killing and looting. But of course it is much easier to begin a campaign of looting and murder than it is to end one. At Hitler's headquarters in the Wolf's Lair, two of his closest subordinates, Army chief of staff Guderian, and Himmler's SS deputy Hermann Fegelein, Eva Braun's brother-in-law, reported the atrocities in Warsaw to Hitler and recommended these auxiliary forces be withdrawn from the city. Besides, the Reich needed laborers, right? Well, there are a million people in Warsaw.

The Germans forced the Home Army back into smaller portions of the city, but then the fighting ground to a stalemate that lasted weeks. The Germans resorted to heavy weapons, such as Stuka dive bombers, tanks and mortars, including some experimental weapons the Germans had been testing, since ultimately they intended to destroy the city anyway.

These tactics of massacring prisoners and civilians were intended to demoralize the Poles and encourage surrender. That's Nazi logic for you. Make your enemies as miserable as possible until they do what you tell them. The problem with Nazi logic is that wanton cruelty usually makes your enemy want to fight harder. Gradually, over the course of August, as the fighting went on, cooler heads prevailed on the German side. They ordered an end to the massacres; now German officers pondered the wisdom of offering to extend full prisoner-of-war protection to Home Army fighters, as a way of inducing them to surrender.

Also over the course of August, the Western Allies began airdropping arms and supplies on Warsaw to aid the Polish fighters. These airdrops were flown out of bases in Italy, initially by a Polish bomber unit, later joined by South African and RAF units. The airdrops were hampered by the Soviet government, which denied Allied requests to allow the planes to land at Soviet air bases to refuel before returning home. Stalin dismissed the Home Army as "enemies of the Soviet Union," and not real soldiers, as per the quote I read at the top of the episode. Soviet refusal to cooperate made the airdrops more dangerous and reduced both the weight of supplies they could carry and the number of sorties the planes could make. And there were the usual accuracy problems. Many of the drops intended for the Poles fell into the hands of the Germans, but even so, the knowledge that the Allies were supporting them helped rally Polish morale.

On August 25, Winston Churchill sent a message to Franklin Roosevelt proposing that American bombers assist in the airdrops and that Allied planes performing the drops land at Soviet airfields in defiance of the ban and, as Churchill put it, "see what happens." Roosevelt rejected the idea.

On August 30, in Britain, the British government announced that if the Germans did not grant POW status to captured Polish fighters, Britain would revoke the POW status of German

prisoners they held. The Germans took note. From this time forward, German surrender demands to the Polish fighters in Warsaw included promises of POW protection.

In early September, the USSR relented and allowed some Allied air units to land and refuel at Soviet airfields. The Soviet Air Force began its own supply drops into Warsaw, and US B-17s joined the operation, although the American bombers were regarded as particularly inaccurate. The Soviet government asked the Americans to stop after Red Army observers reported that more than 90% of what the Americans were dropping had landed on German-held territory.

The Red Army frontline units in the Warsaw region did not advance through August and September. We might find one possible, admittedly generous, explanation for the failure of the Red Army to act to relieve the Home Army in Warsaw by looking at what was going on elsewhere on the Eastern Front. On August 16, the Germans began an offensive to retake Riga, where Red Army units had wedged themselves between Army Group Center and Army Group North. A coordinated attack from both directions by units from both army groups succeeded in pushing the Red Army back, retaking Riga, and re-establishing a line of communication between the two army groups.

When you consider this Soviet defeat, along with the earlier loss of a tank corps near Warsaw, you might think there was some truth to the claim that the Red Army was overextended and exhausted.

Also, on August 20, the Red Army began another offensive at the southern end of the Eastern Front, the portion of the front adjacent to the Black Sea, which might suggest the Soviet leadership was sending units and supplies south in preparation and giving this operation a higher priority than further advances in the north.

The stakes for this offensive were high; the Soviets planned nothing less than to overrun Romania and push deeper into the Balkans. Once again, Red Army *maskirovka* techniques disguised the buildup of forces here and kept it hidden from German intelligence.

The Romanians, on the other hand, did suspect something was up. The reigning monarch in Romania at the time was King Michael. Michael was born in 1921 and became King following the death of his grandfather, King Ferdinand. Michael's father renounced the throne and left the country following an extramarital affair that led to his son Prince Michael becoming next in the line of succession.

Michael succeeded to the throne in 1927, when he was five years old. Naturally, this meant that a regency council ruled in his name. In 1930, during the Great Depression, Romania was wracked by political turmoil just as were many other countries, which led to dissatisfaction with the regency council, and the Romanian Parliament proclaiming Michael's father King Carol II.

His reign lasted until 1940, when prime minister Ion Antonescu organized a coup and overthrew the King and reinstalled the now-18-year-old King Michael, but Michael was seen by all as a figurehead; the real power in Romania was in the hands of Antonescu, who pursued a pro-Germany foreign policy and ran a fascist government.

By 1944, though Antonescu was still loyal to Germany, most other Romanians saw the handwriting on the wall. In June, representatives of King Michael began a series of meetings with leaders of the Romanian Communist Party to work out a plan to depose Antonescu, install a new coalition government of leftist parties including the Communists, and for Romania to withdraw from the Axis and join the Allies.

On August 20, the Soviets began their offensive into Romania, against the German Army Group South Ukraine, which also included Romanian units. By August 23, the Red Army had surrounded the German Sixth Army and would soon destroy it. By the way, this Sixth Army was recreated following the destruction of the previous German Sixth Army, which you'll recall was at Stalingrad. Unfortunately for them, this new Sixth Army met the same fate at the hands of the Soviets.

In Bucharest, the King and his political allies realized the Red Army would soon be overrunning Romania and the time to act was now. The King met with Antonescu, who gave him a report on the situation at the front. The King then directed Antonescu to ask the Allies for an armistice. Antonescu objected in principle to capitulating to the Soviet Union and pointed out the practical difficulties posed by abandoning the Axis while hundreds of thousands of German soldiers were stationed in the country.

Seeing that Antonescu wasn't going to cooperate, the King, in his capacity as commander-in-chief of the Romanian Army, ordered the military to arrest him. That night, the King gave a radio address announcing a cease fire and Romania's desire for an armistice, and pledged that the Romanian army would defend the nation against the German Army.

Hungarian and Romanian Army units along their mutual border immediately began opening fire on each other. The German Army attempted to take control of Bucharest the following day, but were held off by the Romanians. Other Romanian Army units attacked the German garrisons at those crucial oilfields in Ploiesti and drove the Germans across the border into Hungary. In the weeks that followed, the Romanian Army advanced into Transylvania, into the lands that had been Romanian but were awarded to Hungary at the German-led Second Vienna Conference in 1940.

The Romanians managed to pull off what the Italians had tried to do and failed; that is, to switch sides in the middle of the war while avoiding a German occupation. Of course, it helped that the Soviet Union had far more soldiers in Romania at the moment of the switch than the Western Allies had in Italy. It also helped that the Red Army had just encircled and killed or captured over 100,000 German soldiers in a blow that rivaled German losses at Stalingrad.

As for Warsaw, there's plenty of evidence that Stalin was hostile to the uprising and deliberately chose not to assist the Home Army, at least not until late September when at least the Soviet Air Force also began dropping arms and supplies over Warsaw in response to pressure from the Western Allies. The Polish Communist government in Lublin reportedly was emphatic in its messages to the Kremlin not to aid the Home Army, as they represented a would-be Polish government in competition with the Lublin Committee.

But one has to ask how much the exhausted and overextended Red Army would have been capable of, even if it had been all in on rescuing Warsaw. Both Rokossovsky and Georgi Zhukov stated after the war that they had advised Stalin against intervention in Warsaw because of the likelihood of heavy casualties. The vanguard force that arrived in early August was mostly armor, not suited to urban warfare. Had the Red Army entered Warsaw, they would have had to engage in the same kind of bloody, street by street, house by house battle as Stalingrad. And remember that battle lasted five months and caused heavy casualties, including many civilians.

And there's blame to go around. The timing of the uprising was a tricky question; in hindsight, it's clear the Home Army's leaders jumped the gun.

I'll also note that, in spite of the attitude of the Communist government in Lublin, the Polish First Army—that's the force organized by the Soviet government that fought alongside the Red Army—did attempt to enter Warsaw in mid-September, apparently in defiance of their orders, but were unable to link up with the Home Army and sustained nearly 6,000 casualties in the attempt. Afterward, the Soviets relieved the Polish First Army's commander, either because he disobeyed orders or because he led his troops into a bloodbath, or possibly both.

The failure of the Polish First Army to reach the Home Army in Warsaw was the final blow to the Home Army's hopes, and they began negotiating their surrender. The Germans promised to grant prisoner-of-war status to the Home Army fighters and not to carry out reprisals against Warsaw's civilian population.

About 15,000 Home Army fighters surrendered to the Germans, who sent them to POW camps. Despite their other promise, the German authorities expelled the entire civilian population of Warsaw from the city. Most of them were dispersed across the General Government; about 150,000 were sent to do forced labor in concentration camps or in Germany. Tens of thousands of city residents deemed undesirables, because they were or were suspected to be too sick or disabled to do labor, or Jewish, or educated, or Home Army fighters posing as civilians, were executed.

Adolf Hitler had always intended eventually to raze the city of Warsaw; now the Germans went to work implementing that plan. German combat engineers were dispatched to burn as much as possible with flamethrowers, then demolition teams would dynamite whatever remained standing. They paid particular attention to the destruction of Polish historical monuments, as well

as Warsaw's schools, universities, and the Polish National Library. Some thought was given to creating an artificial lake over the rubble that was once Warsaw to erase any trace of the city.

After Warsaw, the Home Army abandoned its strategy of rising up in each Polish city as the Red Army drew near, though some Home Army units had traveled to Warsaw and tried to support the fighters there. But the end of the Warsaw Uprising marked the end of Operation Tempest. The Home Army itself was dissolved in January 1945.

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd like to thank Cameron for his kind donation, and thank you to Lukas for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Cameron and Lukas help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone always, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, you are most welcome; just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

As always, the podcast website also contains notes about the music used on the podcast. You know the drill. If you hear a piece of music on the podcast and you would like to know more about it, including the composer, the performers, and a link to where you can download it, that would be the place to go. While you're there, you can leave a comment and let me know what you thought about today's show.

And I hope you'll join me next week, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*; as we go back to France and see what George Patton is up to. Breakout and Pursuit, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. Kraków, Poland's second-largest city, was one of those where the Home Army planned an uprising. The Germans had chosen this city, not Warsaw, to be the capital of the General Government, which meant the smaller city had a much larger garrison than Warsaw.

In the end, there was no uprising in Kraków, although some members of the Home Army did attempt to join the fight in Warsaw. One of the reasons there was no uprising was because the Archbishop of Kraków was dead set against it. Instead, the archbishop attempted to persuade the Germans to declare Kraków an open city, but the Germans refused.

On August 6, 1944, a few days after the Warsaw Uprising began, the Gestapo in Kraków ordered a roundup of all young men in the city to forestall any similar action. In one particular house, a young man, 24 years old, a member of the resistance who had dreams of becoming a priest, was in hiding. As Gestapo agents searched the house, he was on his knees in his hiding place, praying to God that he not be discovered.

He was not discovered, and after the Gestapo left, he was escorted to the archbishop's palace, where they took him in, put him in a cassock, and passed him off as one of the archbishop's secretaries.

The young man's name was Karol Wojtyła, and after the war he was indeed ordained as a priest. Less than fourteen years after that day he hid from the Gestapo, at the age of 38, he became an auxiliary bishop of Kraków. Five years later, he was appointed Archbishop of Kraków. Three years after that, he was made a cardinal, and finally, eleven more years later, in 1978, he was elected pope. But that is a story for another episode.

[music: Closing War Theme]