

I Remember Nothing More

A Doctor's Powerfully Moving Memoir of Her Struggle to Save the Children of the Warsaw Ghetto

Adina Blady Szwajger. *I Remember Nothing More*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster; 1988. 205 pages. ISBN 0-671-76038-6.

Review by COL (Ret) Warner "Rocky" Farr, MD

When one looks for examples of sophisticated medical care occurring inside a guerrilla warfare movement, the many allied unconventional forces of World



War II immediately spring to mind. Since the guerrilla groups had several years to mature, attracted many educated people from European countries that were industrialized, and received some measure of outside support in the form of both personnel and supplies, the lessons of their auxiliaries and undergrounds are the main source of data about such a practice of covert medicine. They also were somewhat more urban

based than the guerrilla movements in Asia and the rest of the non-European world.

Many of these accounts have come from the literature of the Holocaust. This journal is one and is among its most memorable, haunting, and well-constructed narratives that I have read. Adina B. Szwajger, a pediatrician, was a Polish Jew born in 1917 who grew up in Poland. She went to a Jewish female high school with Polish as the language of instruction. After the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact in 1939 divided Poland, she was first a nurse and then a student doctor working at the Bersohn and Bauman Children's Hospital in the ghetto, where she received a prized pass to travel between the Warsaw ghetto and the "Aryan side." Her duties were to care for dying children who had no food, no medicine, and no future. She recounts youngsters, starving and four to a bed, before it was disbanded. After attempting to commit suicide herself, she spares her patients an even crueler fate by administering overdoses of morphine as the Nazis were taking others of them to the waiting cattle cars. She also recounts a monastery's children's center

and describes its violent closure by the Nazis, who hung the slaughtered priests on display.

Using false identity papers, Szwajger becomes an auxiliary force member as a courier girl for the underground Warsaw Jewish Fighting Organization, the ZOB. Adina knew personally and worked closely with Antek, Marek, and all of the other leaders of the Warsaw ghetto uprising. She journeys throughout Poland carrying weapons and money to Jews and finding safe houses for them. In addition, as a member of ZOB, she risked her life traveling back and forth from the ghetto to the Aryan side in Warsaw to secure papers and money to allow other Jews to escape through the sewers of Warsaw while providing both intelligence and medical care on the fly as she could. Her success depended on her "Aryan" looks, excellent Polish language skills, and good fake documents. Her husband was sent to a concentration camp while she escaped a massacre at a Home Army hideout. She obtains a Red Cross pass and escapes Warsaw with selected patients as the noose tightens around the resistance fighters. As the war winds down and the front passes Poland, she works to find Jewish children placed with Aryan families during the war.

She waited 40 years to tell this story. Her own training as a doctor resulted in the most painful duty of all: she was in charge of mercy killing. Her writing is matter-of-fact while heartbreaking in both the events it describes and her reaction to them. Her impossible moral dilemma as a doctor dedicated to healing is striking. It is a unique contribution to guerrilla literature and an important primary source for students of it. There has always been an ethical dilemma in guerrilla medicine, and this book highlights it. Although published 25 years ago, this book is easily found on the various used book sites on the web.