

THE UNDERGROUND CITY

SYNOPSIS

The Underground City is a film about the Warsaw's sewage system that played a significant part in the city's Uprising. The rising broke out on August 1st in 1944 at the end of the Second World War. It was organized by the Home Army, which during the occupation conspired against the Germans.

The use of the sewers as a communication system is something unprecedented in war history. During the Warsaw Uprising the sewage system was used to uphold the communication between different city districts that had been cut off by the Germans. Orders, mail, information, and weapons were transported via the sewers. Later its tunnels were used to evacuate Polish civilians and entire army divisions.

The soldiers of the Uprising were both Polish intelligentsia and ordinary citizens who were mainly young people; students, lawyers, doctors, teachers, and artists. All of them had formed the largest underground army in Europe and wanted to defeat the Germans who had been occupying their country for five years. Although they were poorly armed they took on the much stronger German forces. The underground soldiers decided to rise up when the Soviet Army had advanced to Warsaw's borders. The main objective of Poland was to restore its sovereignty and prevent Stalin from imposing his rule on their country. The leaders of the underground strived to restore the rightful government of Poland. The uprising lasted for 63 days. 18 000 soldiers were killed, 25 000 were wounded and there were 200 000 victims among the civilians.

The characters in this film are the participants of the Uprising. They are elderly people who were then very young. The main character is Jerzy Stefan

Stawiński, a lieutenant of the Home Army, scriptwriter and author of the story “Kanał”. He also wrote the script of the movie adaptation, directed by Andrzej Wajda. The movie “Kanał” was awarded at the Film Festival in Cannes in 1957. Fragments from this movie are intercut with interviews of J.S. Stawiński and other the participants of the Uprising. One of them, Ewa Jeglińska, tells the story of how she was trapped for 36 hours in a sewer with filth up to her neck before she was finally rescued. Emotional interviews together with original archive footage from the Uprising are joined with footage from present day Warsaw; we see its sewerage system still functioning and its buildings still splattered with bullet holes. Each anniversary the city stops for two minutes silence to mark the hour at which the Uprising broke out and to honour the memory of those who fought for Warsaw. The day is also commemorated by visiting the graves of the Home Army soldiers.