



**HEROISM AND
RESISTANCE:
RESCUE BY JEWS
DURING THE
HOLOCAUST**

**“That was when
my conscience said –
Act!”**

HEROISM AND RESISTANCE: RESCUE BY JEWS DURING THE HOLOCAUST

The Jews in the Holocaust found themselves facing unprecedented situations. In view of the violence, terror and systematic destruction perpetrated by the German Nazis, many Jews felt they had been abandoned to their fate by the people among whom they had lived for hundreds of years. In many cases, the local populations chose to turn a blind eye, and were indifferent to the desperate state of the Jews; in some cases, they even collaborated with the murderers. Only very few of them chose to offer aid to the persecuted Jews.

The Jews were faced with extreme situations, which tested their Jewish and human principles of solidarity. Despite this, there are a multitude of cases across the board of acts of solidarity and mutual aid. This help was nothing short of essential to the survival of a particular individual.

In this context, a fair amount of Jews chose to act to save other Jews, under a very real threat to their lives. These rescuers demonstrated tremendous resourcefulness, adhering to their missions with endless devotion. These rescue operations often involved terrible personal and moral dilemmas. A unique aspect of this phenomenon lay in the persecuted victims' ability to identify the threat facing them and, despite their basic survival instinct,

find within themselves the moral courage to step up and engage in the rescue of other persecuted Jews.

This exhibition presents stories of Jewish rescue from the years 1938-1945 from all over Europe. In these accounts, the rescues were planned to help as many Jews as possible. They are also characterized by the absence of any personal or familial relationship between the rescuers and the people whose lives they saved.

The ability of these Jews to act and save others was affected by different factors, including geographical circumstances, the willingness of the local population to help Jews, and the nature of the administration imposed by the Germans in the places they occupied.

The rescue methods were diverse, and included establishing welfare organizations, finding hiding places, procuring and issuing forged documents, creating jobs for "essential" workers, smuggling people across borders, encouraging people to escape, calling upon the non-Jewish population to help rescue Jews, disseminating information about the mass murders and operations to escape the camps. These rescue efforts were in many cases made possible thanks to cooperation with non-Jews, and helped save the lives of many Jews during the Holocaust.



The Saving of Miriam, Hein Robert Korpershoek, 1987

The drawing depicts a rescue effort involving the participation of three members of the Dutch underground: Hein Korpershoek, Wibo Florissen and Ans van Dam (Anna Chana Rosa Drukker). In 1943, van Dam was involved in moving Jewish children to hiding places. On 30 November 1943, she asked Korpershoek to help smuggle out a Jewish girl named Miriam Dasberg, who was about to be deported to the camps. Disguised as members of the Dutch Order Service, Korpershoek and Florissen removed Dasberg from the guesthouse in which she was staying and transferred her to van Dam, who found her a hiding place. Two weeks later, van Dam was arrested and deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau; from there she was taken to Kaufering, and then finally to Mühldorf.

Van Dam survived, and after the war she worked to reunite Jewish children with their families.

In 1987, Korpershoek and Florissen were recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations.

Yad Vashem Collections



Since its founding in 1953, Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center, located on the Mount of Remembrance in Jerusalem, has been dedicated to preserving the memory of the Holocaust. Through its collections, documentation, research and education about the horrors of the Holocaust, Yad Vashem aims to instill the significance of the Holocaust in the coming generations.

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Photograph sent from the front by a German soldier.
Written on the back of the photograph: "Jews in an *Aktion*, Ivangorod, Ukraine, 1942"
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Jerzy Tomaszewski

The Holocaust (Shoah) was an unprecedented genocide, total and systematic, perpetrated by Nazi Germany and its collaborators with the aim of annihilating the Jewish people, culture and traditions from the face of the earth. The primary motivation for the Holocaust was the Nazis' antisemitic racist ideology. Between 1933 and 1941, Nazi Germany pursued a policy of increasing persecution that dispossessed the Jews of their rights and property, and later branded and concentrated the Jewish populations under their rule into designated areas.

By the end of 1941, the policy had developed into an overall comprehensive, systematic operation that the Nazis called "The Final Solution to the Jewish Question."

These policies gained broad support in Germany and across much of the European continent.

Nazi Germany designated the Jews of Europe, and eventually the rest of the world, for total extermination. Alongside the mass extermination of millions of Jews by shooting, millions more from all over Europe were rounded up and deported on freight trains to extermination camps - industrial facilities in which they were gassed to death. During the entire process of registration, rounding-up and boarding the trains, the Germans deceived the victims as to the real purpose of their journey.

By the end of WWII in 1945, some six million Jews had been murdered.

GETTING JEWS OUT OF THE REICH TERRITORY



Wilfrid Israel, England, 1942
Courtesy of the Central Zionist Archives, Israel

Wilfrid Israel

1899-1943

“The struggle to reach out and touch the world is my particular burden in life.”

Wilfrid Israel

When the Nazis rose to power, Wilfrid Israel, who was born to a well-connected and affluent family in Berlin, realized that the Jews no longer had a future in Germany. He decided to do what he could to encourage Jewish emigration from Germany. In 1933, he and Recha Freier managed to get the first group of young people out of Germany to the Land of Israel (British Mandatory Palestine), a project that would later become the “Youth Aliya” organization.

Following the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany in 1938 (the *Anschluss*), thousands of Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps. After the *Kristallnacht* riots, the number of Jewish detainees soared into the tens of thousands. To be released from the camps, the inmates had to prove they had a visa to a foreign country. Wilfrid Israel filled many senior positions in organizations that promoted emigration and became known for his activities in this area, and thus became the person to whom Jews appealed for help to free their relatives from the camps. He cooperated with Francis “Frank” Edward Foley, a British intelligence officer responsible for the visa department in



A dog-shaped brooch and an autograph book with an inscription received by Anna Nussbaum from her father when she left Austria on the *Kindertransport*.
Yad Vashem Collections

the British Embassy in Berlin, who issued visas; as well as with Herbert Pollack, who had connections with the Gestapo, and used Wilfrid Israel's money to bribe officials and acquire the necessary emigration papers for the inmates. Thanks to them, many Jews were released from the concentration camps and consequently managed to emigrate from Germany and Austria.

Israel also worked with the Quakers in Britain and with the local Jewish leadership on the *Kindertransport* operation, which brought children from the Reich territory to Britain. On 2 December 1938, the first group of children Israel helped to escape, arrived in Harwich Port, England. In May 1939, Israel left for Britain, but returned to Germany to help the last groups of Jewish children leave the country. After the war broke out, he immigrated to Britain and continued his rescue work from there. In 1943, he organized a ship that brought Jewish refugees from Spain and Portugal to the Land of Israel. Upon his return to Spain, on 1 June 1943, his plane was downed by the Germans.



Jews waiting at the entrance to the Polish Embassy after the *Anschluss*, in an effort to obtain visas that would allow them to leave the country.
Vienna, March-April 1939
ANL/Vienna, OEGZ/H4851/1

As the situation of the Jews of the Reich worsened in wake of the *Anschluss* and the *Kristallnacht* pogroms, the need to emigrate became increasingly urgent. Because so many countries closed their gates to Jews, they were forced to leave the Reich as refugees in an effort to reach any possible destination.

RESCUERS UNDER A FALSE IDENTITY



Max Léons

1921-2019

Max Léons, the Netherlands, during WWII
Private collection, Léons family

In the spring of 1943, nine months after the deportations from the Netherlands to the extermination camps had begun, Max Léons of Rotterdam found a hiding place with the Dyck family in the village of Nieuwlande in the Drenthe district in the east of the Netherlands. Léons, who was 21 years old, decided to adopt a non-Jewish identity. To that end, he learned how to speak in the local dialect, began attending church services, mixed with the local population, and took on the name Nico. In Nieuwlande, Léons met Arnold Douwes, who was active in the Dutch underground led by Johannes Post. Léons asked Douwes to let him join in the activities of the underground. Douwes at first feared for Léons safety and refused, but after Léons gave him the addresses of two Dutch people that he had succeeded in convincing to hide Jews, Douwes declared: "From now on we'll be working together." Léons and Douwes cooperated for two years. Thanks to Léons' false identity, he was able

Arnold and I didn't think we had any other alternative – you never need a reason to do the right thing."

Max Léons

to participate in all underground activities. Léons and Douwes disseminated underground newspapers and writings, but principally found hiding places in the area for Jews from the central areas of the Netherlands. First, they located Dutch families willing to hide a single Jewish person or an entire Jewish family in need of refuge. Afterwards, Léons sought out Jews and convinced them to go into hiding in Drenthe, a rural area, remote from the larger cities. Léons and Douwes also provided food vouchers, warm clothing for the winter, and false documents in the name of deceased Dutch people or emigrants from the Netherlands. In addition, they addressed the personal and psychological problems that arose among the people in hiding, as a result of the conditions in which they were forced to live. In May 1944, Léons himself was forced to go into hiding at the express instructions of Johannes Post, until liberation.

Satirical figures drawn on postcards by Lou Hermann Gans while in hiding in Nieuwlande

On the back of the postcards is the inscription: "Help people in hiding in their darkest hour – Buy these postcards at the highest possible price" and also: "Sold for the benefit of the divers" [as the people in hiding were known].

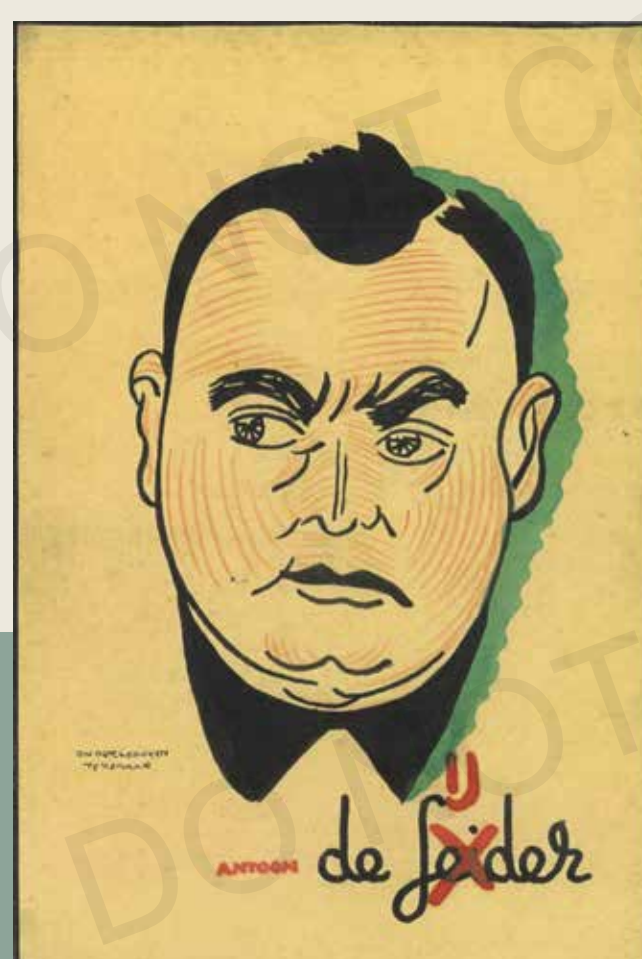
Léons and Douwes sold the postcards and used the money they received to pay for some of the underground activities.

Yad Vashem Collections

Left to right:

1. Drawing of Max Blokzijl, a Dutch journalist and member of the Dutch National-Socialist movement (NSB), who was appointed Director of the Press Bureau in the Ministry of Information and Arts in 1942. On his weekly radio program, he expressed distinctly Nazi views.
2. Scene in a cable car:
Short man: "Sir, are you going to the front?"
German soldier: "Of course."
Short man: "Wonderful! Perhaps you can start by getting off my toes?"
3. Drawing of Nazi collaborator Anton (Adriaan) Mussert, one of the two founders of the NSB in 1931, and its leader in the 1930s. The caption says: "the leader" (*de leider*), but replacing *ei* with *ij* changes the word to "the sufferer" – meaning: willing to suffer [German rule].

4. Drawing showing the newspaper *Volk en Vaderland* [People and Fatherland], the official NSB organ. In the caption, the boy says to the man holding the newspaper: "Regards from my father, and you should remain standing like that even after the war is over...!"
5. Under the drawing of a woman fleeing with a child and infant, the caption says: "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers" (Hebrews 13:2). The verse and the next one continue: "...for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember they that are in bonds, as if you were bound with them; and those that suffer adversity, as if you yourselves were suffering in your own bodies." In the religious Protestant environment of the eastern regions of the Netherlands, people were very familiar with the Bible and the New Testament, and many were able to complete the verse on their own, which in the context of that time clearly alluded to the duty to provide shelter for the persecuted.



RESCUERS UNDER A FALSE IDENTITY



Miriam Hochberg
"Marisha Marianska"
1913-1996

Miriam Hochberg (Peleg)
Ghetto Fighters' House Museum, Israel \ Photo Archive



Feygl Peltel
"Wladka Kowalska"
1921-2012

Feygl Peltel (Wladyslawa-Wladka Kowalska, later
Wladka Miedzyrzeczki - Meed), 1943
Ghetto Fighters' House Museum, Israel \ Photo Archive

Żegota was a Polish underground organization made up of representatives of Polish and Jewish movements active from December 1942 until January 1945. The organization's main activities were providing false documents for Jews under its protection, as well as hiding places, food and financial support for Jews in hiding. The members of the organization risked their lives and helped save some 4,000 Jews.

Miriam Hochberg assumed a false identity outside the Kraków ghetto, first as a member of the temporary Counsel to Help Jews, and then as part of Żegota after it was established. Her non-Jewish appearance and excellent Polish enabled her to work as a courier and move freely about the city and its environs under the false name Marisha Marianska. Her tasks included producing false identity papers and bringing them to Jews hiding outside the ghetto, and preparing Jews for their new lives under a false identity, including teaching them all about the Catholic religion. At times of cash shortages, she sold her own belongings in order to support both herself and the Jews in hiding. After the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Miriam provided the members of the underground hiding in Suchedniów with false papers and money.

Authorizations signed by "Marianska" for financial assistance given to Jews hiding in Kraków
Yad Vashem Collections



Feygl Peltel was a member of the Bund youth movement, and served as a courier of the Jewish Combat Organization (ŻOB) in Warsaw. Her appearance, fluent Polish and false identity as Wladyslawa-Wladka Kowalska enabled her to move among the various ghettos and work camps. Peltel smuggled underground literature, arms and money into the ghetto, but her main activities focused on helping Jews hide outside the ghetto, both before and after the Uprising. Peltel worked very hard seeking hiding places as well as financial support, and provided emotional support and encouragement for those in hiding; she paid the Poles who provided refuge for the Jews and took care to prevent them from taking advantage or abusing their charges. A special task she took upon herself was to smuggle out Jewish babies and hide them outside the ghetto. Peltel was also in charge of making contact with and helping Jews who had fled from the ghettos and camps, as well as the fighters in the forests.

"I must pretend to the end. Either I will succeed, or it's all over."

Feygl Peltel (Wladka)

Feygl Peltel's false identity card, issued on 27 November 1943
Ghetto Fighters' House Museum, Israel \ Photo Archive



RESCUERS UNDER A FALSE IDENTITY

“Thanks to his excellent relations with the representatives of the German authorities, he was allowed to run the factories... And he made every effort to protect their residents from the dangers that loomed.”

Gregory Szur

Oscar Glik

1901-1942

Vilna, the capital of Lithuania, was occupied by the German army on 24 June 1941. From the start of the occupation, the Jews lived in terror of the *Aktionen*, during which thousands were taken to Ponar (Ponary), where they were shot to death. The only Jews who were relatively safe were those who had work permits, indicating their necessity to the German war effort, together with their families. By late 1941, of the 60,000 Jews who had lived in the ghetto at the time of the occupation, only 20,000 remained.

Oscar Glik fled to Vilna from Austria immediately after its annexation to Germany. After the German occupation of Vilna, Glik encountered a childhood friend among the German soldiers, and he arranged false papers for Glik under the identity of a *Volksdeutsche* (ethnic German) from Vienna. Under this false identity, Glik proposed to the German regional supply manager to reopen Kailis, a leather-processing factory that was about to be closed after its Jewish employees had been murdered soon after the occupation. Glik's plan was aimed at providing the German army with necessities, while at the same time saving Jews who were in danger of being murdered. After the plan was approved, Glik managed to get many Jewish experts out of the ghetto together with their families, and he moved them into the factory buildings located in the city. About a thousand workers' permits were issued for the employees and their families, indicating their importance to the war effort, which provided them with temporary protection against *Aktionen*. Thanks to the relationship he developed with the German command, Glik was given control over the factory and the workers' residences, and in this way managed to shield them from the danger that threatened them.



One of two buildings in Vilna that served as residences for the employees of the Kailis factory and their family members
The Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum

On 18 January 1942, a fire broke out in the factory. During the investigation that followed, it was discovered that Glik was Jewish. He was imprisoned and then executed. Nevertheless, the factory continued to operate even after the liquidation of the Vilna ghetto in September 1943; its employees were among the last surviving Jews in Vilna until early July 1944. As the Red Army approached, the camp at the Kailis factory was liquidated and most of the factory employees and their families were murdered at Ponar, just days before the liberation of the city.

Metal tag worn in the Vilna ghetto by Jews considered fit for work.
Engraved on the tag was the worker's serial number.
Yad Vashem Collections



Miniature fur coat manufactured in Kailis
and sent to Germany



RESCUERS UNDER A FALSE IDENTITY



Shmuel (Oswald) Rufeisen, Vilna, 1944
after the liberation of the city
Ghetto Fighters' House Museum, Israel \ Photo Archive

Shmuel (Oswald) Rufeisen

1922-1988

"I thought that at a time when all the Jews were being destroyed, heroism was needed, but that it was even more important to save lives, Jewish lives. I believed that live people were preferable to dead heroes!"

Shmuel Oswald Rufeisen

When the town of Mir in Belarus was occupied by the Germans in June 1941, it had a Jewish population of 2,400. In October 1941, the Jews were rounded up in a ghetto, and on 9 November, the Germans, together with the local police, murdered about 1,300 of the town's Jews. The 850 surviving Jews in the ghetto were rounded up and imprisoned in the Mir fortress, which was surrounded by a wall and turned a ghetto in late December 1941.

Shmuel Rufeisen arrived in Mir from Vilna immediately after the *Aktion* of November 1941, bearing false documents in the name of Oswald Rufeisen. Under this false identity, he served as the official secretary of the local police station, and won the full confidence of both the Belarusians and the Germans. Rufeisen decided to take advantage of his position and risk his own personal safety to help the Jews of the area, and when he learned of the planned liquidation of the Mir ghetto on 13 August 1942, he immediately conveyed that information to the members of the ghetto underground. His efforts were mainly directed at trying to convince the members of the underground to organize a mass escape, and encourage as many Jews as possible to join them and not to remain in the ghetto and fight. Rufeisen helped smuggle arms from the police warehouses into the ghetto, and instructed the members of the underground not to allow anyone they didn't know into the ghetto in order to prevent the escape plan from being discovered. To facilitate the escape of the Jews, Rufeisen reported false

information about "partisan activity" outside Mir to all the police stations in the area, in order to keep the number of German police officers stationed near the ghetto to a minimum. On the day of the escape, 9 August 1942, only about 300 Jews attempted to escape from the ghetto, including all 50 members of the underground. All the rest were murdered during the liquidation of the ghetto four days later.

At first, Rufeisen was not suspected of having conveyed the information to the Jews, but his identity was later exposed. He was forced to confess to the commander of the German police that he had smuggled arms to the Jews of Mir, and immediately afterwards, he revealed that he too was Jewish, because he wished to prove that a Jew was capable of executing a plan of this type. Rufeisen was forced to write a confession, which he chose to conclude with the words, "I have done my duty – I go to my death in peace." However, that same day, he managed to escape.

The Mir fortress, c. 1925

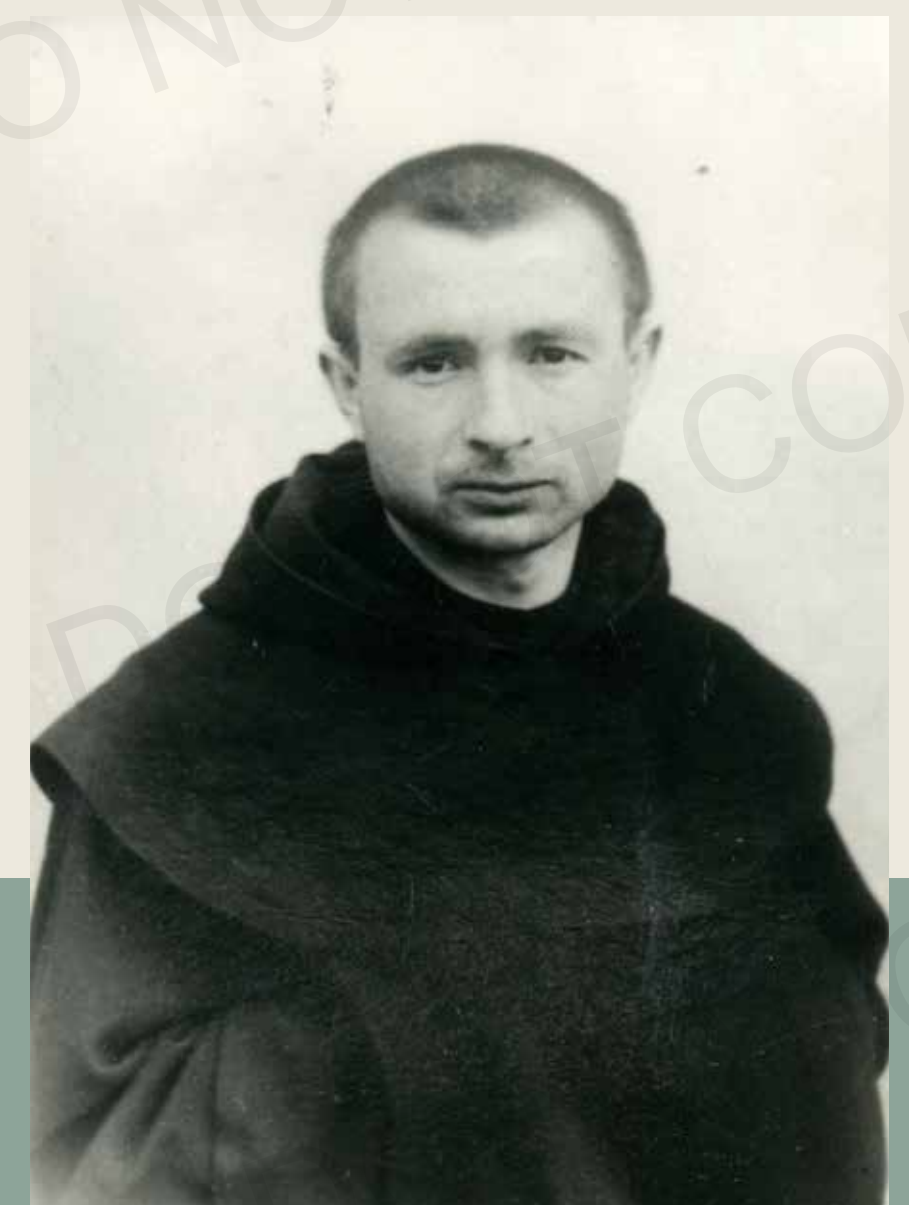
Mir Association in Israel, Private Collection Bruria Rosenblum (Ratner), Courtesy of Yehuda Raz



After his Jewish identity was revealed, Shmuel Rufeisen hid for more than a year in a convent near the police headquarters where he had served under a false identity. There, he converted to Christianity. Later, he joined a partisan unit in which he served until August 1944.

After the war, Rufeisen joined the Carmelite Order in Poland, taking the name "Brother Daniel," and in 1952, was ordained as a priest. He lived in Israel from 1956 until his death, in the Stella Maris Carmelite Monastery on Mount Carmel, and he defined himself as "Catholic by religion, Jewish by nationality."

Ghetto Fighters' House Museum, Israel \ Photo Archive



RESCUING CHILDREN

Transports began to leave northern France for the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp in March 1942. In the summer of 1942, as the deportations began spreading to the southern parts of France (Vichy), Jewish organizations and underground groups began to formulate comprehensive plans to save Jews. One of these organizations was the OSE (Œuvre de secours aux enfants – Children’s Aid Society), which rescued Jewish children. Its activities focused on rescuing children from detention camps, operating care centers and children’s houses, finding hiding places, and smuggling out children who were in danger of being deported.



Andrée Salomon

1908-1985

Andrée Salomon with a group of children for whom the OSE managed to get visas to the United States, Marseilles, 1941. The children had been placed in OSE children’s homes. They left France in May to July 1942. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Courtesy of Vivette Herman Samuel



Georges Loinger

1910-2018

Georges Loinger with his wife and children, 1945
 Yad Vashem Collections, Courtesy of Charles Loinger

Andrée Salomon was responsible for the social workers in the OSE, and was placed in charge of an operation to free hundreds of Jewish children from the detention camps in which they were imprisoned together with their families. Salomon moved among the camps, overseeing the work of the OSE members who tried to convince parents to hand their children over to the organization. From the summer of 1942, when the deportations reached their height, the work went completely underground. When the raids began on the children’s homes, the Jewish children were smuggled into convents, Christian institutions and foster families. The social workers, led by Salomon, visited the hidden children to make sure they were being cared for adequately. Salomon also served as a liaison between the official activities of OSE and the underground groups that smuggled the children from France to Switzerland. When this smuggling route became too dangerous, she conceived the idea of turning to the “Jewish Army” underground and placing the children on the smuggling route to Spain, personally accompanying them up to Toulouse.

Georges Loinger served as Treasurer of the OSE children’s homes and Head Counselor of the OSE daycare centers in France. He was a physical education teacher by training, and he taught the counselors in the daycare centers to encourage sports activities among the children, with the idea that physical activity would benefit them in their depressed emotional state.

In April 1943, the OSE, with the help of the Jewish Scouts and Zionist youth movements, began to smuggle children up to the age of fifteen from France to Switzerland. Loinger, together with Mayor of Annemasse Jean Deffaugt, planned the escape route. The country’s borders were carefully guarded, which made the smuggling operations especially intense and dangerous. In October 1943, the escape operation was placed in the hands of Loinger and Emmanuel Racine. Loinger, who was in charge of the last part of the smuggling route, managed to get more than 300 children across the border.

In 1944, Loinger learned that the Gestapo were on to him. Despite the danger, and although he could have found asylum in Switzerland, he decided to return to France and continue his rescue activities.

“First, we rented a basketball field near the border... we instructed [the children] to kick the ball hard across the border from time to time. Each time three children ran to look for the ball, but only one returned; the other two were collected by local representatives of the OSE [in Switzerland].”

Georges Loinger



A group of children after their liberation from imprisonment on the steps of Annemasse City Hall, France, 8 August 1944. Georges Loinger is in the second row from top, first on the left. Yad Vashem Collections

The children were captured by the Germans in May 1944 during an attempt to smuggle them into Switzerland. Deffaugt, Loinger and Racine managed to free them, but their guide, Marianne Cohn, was murdered by members of the French militia.

RESCUING CHILDREN



Josef-Yoshko Itai-Indig

1917-1998

Josef-Yoshko Itai-Indig, Italy, September 1943
Ghetto Fighters' House Museum, Israel \ Photo Archive

*"I will keep the promise I made to Recha:
They will all get to the Land of Israel."*

Yoshko Indig

Recha Freier conceived the "Youth Aliya" project to send persecuted Jewish youth from Germany – and later from all of Europe – to the Land of Israel, where they were placed in an educational institutions and given vocational training. By the time WWII broke out, about 5,000 girls and boys had been sent to the Land of Israel by the Youth Aliya project, and a few thousand more immigrated during the war itself.

In early 1941, a group of about 120 children and teenagers, most of whom had fled from Germany and Austria in the context of "Youth Aliya," formed in Zagreb to immigrate to the Land of Israel. Freier succeeded in obtaining immigration certificates for only ninety of them before she, too, was forced to flee from Yugoslavia. Yoshko Indig, 24, a member of the leadership of the Hashomer Hatzair movement in Zagreb, promised her that he would take care of all the remaining group members until they arrived in the Land of Israel.

Three months after Zagreb was occupied by the Germans, Indig managed to smuggle the group into the Lesno Brdo castle in the Slovenian region, which was under Italian control. Indig added a number of Jewish adults to the group to assist in the care and education of the children. After a year's stay at the castle, Indig was forced to relocate the group to the village of Nonantola in northern Italy and place them in Villa Emma, where they were joined a year later by more children from Yugoslavia. The

A group of children from Villa Emma, Nonantola, Italy
Seated in the center, the director of the Villa on behalf of DELASEM, Umberto Jacchia
Ghetto Fighters' House Museum, Israel \ Photo Archive



group now numbered ninety-five children and counselors. When Italy was occupied by the Germans, the group's leaders hid the children with local Catholic families and religious institutions, with the assistance of the local priest Arrigo Beccari and physician Giuseppe Moreali. In October 1943, with the help of Jewish activist Goffredo Pacifici and non-Jewish friends, the organizers of the group, led by Indig, managed to smuggle the children into Switzerland.

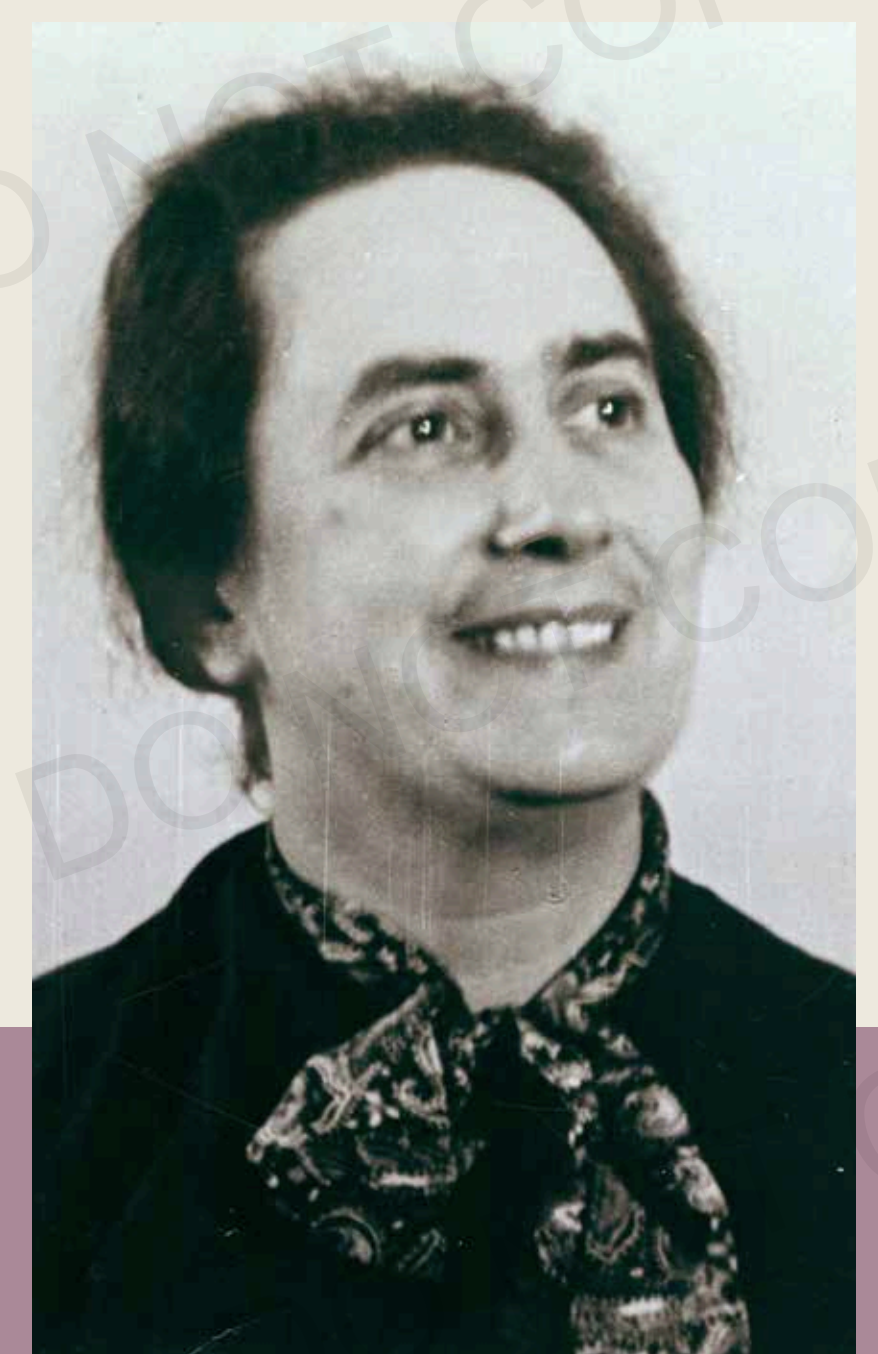
Throughout all the years of flight and escape, Indig and the counselors made sure to keep the children's spirits high by maintaining a strict routine of work, a cooperative life, education and Zionist activities. At the end of the war, the group left Switzerland and arrived in the Land of Israel, with Indig thus fulfilling his pledge to Freier, who was awaiting them at the port dock.

Goffredo Pacifici, a member of DELASEM, a Jewish-Italian refugee aid organization, with Aron Cohen, the youngest child at Villa Emma
CDEC – Fondazione Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea, Milano

Pacifici worked for a while at Villa Emma, and helped get children across the border to Switzerland. Indig tried to convince him to cross the border together with them, but Pacifici refused: "I must get more Jews across... It is my duty! And as for me and my fate – whatever will be will be."
Pacifici was captured during one of his rescue operations and murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944.

"Here my conscience said: Act!"
(from *Yeshareh*, the memoirs of Recha Freier)

Recha Freier, initiative of the "Youth Aliya" program
Courtesy of the Central Zionist Archives



RESCUING CHILDREN



Walter Süskind
Collection Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam

Walter Süskind

1906-1945

“Saving the children was the result of Walter’s planning. The operation was carefully organized, planned and executed like a complex battle... Each step was meticulously prepared and calculated.”

Lisette Lamon, a courier in the Dutch underground

In July 1942, the Germans began to deport the Dutch Jews to the extermination camps. The tens of thousands of Jewish victims sent from Amsterdam to the Westerbork transit camp and from there to the extermination camps were at first rounded up in the *Hollandsche Schouwburg* (Dutch theater), located in the heart of a large Jewish neighborhood in the city center.

Walter Süskind was employed by the *Joodse Raad* (Jewish Council) in Amsterdam. Thanks to his excellent native German, he was positioned in the Dutch theater as the Jewish representative, under German supervision. After acquiring the Germans’ trust, the supervision over his actions lessened, giving him the opportunity to doctor the file of Jews in the theater, in particular by removing name cards. Thus, with the help of other Jews from the theater and members of the Dutch underground, he facilitated the escape of close to 1,000 people, including about 600 children, without being discovered.

Due to the deplorable living conditions in the theater, the Germans allowed Süskind to move children into a Jewish daycare center (crèche) across the street from the theater. Together with Johan van Hulst, who located people who could potentially hide Jews, and in cooperation with members of various underground groups in the Netherlands who smuggled the children out, Süskind and the director of the crèche, Henriëtte Henriquez Pimentel, created a wonderfully effective rescue network.

Children in the crèche bedroom, 1942
Collection Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam



The younger children were smuggled out of the crèche in backpacks, laundry bags, crates and baskets, or hidden under coats. Süskind himself smuggled some children out. A tram car that stopped at a station between the crèche and the theater would block the German guards’ view for a few moments; it was at that time that a child would be secreted away. The older children were taken out of the crèche for “trips,” with only some of them returning.

In order to mislead the SS guards, parents who agreed to hand over their young children to be hidden were given a doll wrapped in rags, with which they boarded the deportation train. In September 1944, Süskind joined his wife and daughter, who had been incarcerated in Westerbork, and the family was deported to Terezin. From Terezin, they were later sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where his wife and daughter were murdered. Süskind himself was apparently murdered during the death march that set out from the camp in January 1945.



The children’s crèche across the street from the Dutch theater, where the children were held until deportation, and from which some of them were smuggled out to hiding places, Amsterdam, 1942

Collectie Stadsarchief Amsterdam: fotoafdrukken



Abusz Werber

1908-1975

Abusz Werber, Brussels, 1945-1946
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Courtesy of Moshe Werber

“If the association sends you a summons, refuse to show up.”

Abusz Werber

Nazi Germany invaded Belgium on 10 May 1940. Belgium surrendered in less than three weeks, and a military government was installed to administer the country. In the early spring of 1942, Hertz Ghert Jospa initiated talks between the Jewish communists and the Po'alei Zion movement in order to form a joint Jewish rescue organization, the *Comité de Défense des Juifs* (Jewish Defense Committee, CDJ), under the auspices of the *Front de l'Indépendance*, the national Belgian umbrella organization of the communist underground. Following the first wave of deportations, the CDJ began its activities on 15 September 1942, which, among many things included fundraising, the distribution of false documents and, most importantly, the hiding of Jews.

Abusz Werber, one of the leaders of Belgium's Po'alei Zion Left, was involved in the establishment of the CDJ. Following the German invasion of Belgium, Werber and his family fled to France, where they were issued visas to the United States. However, Werber and his wife refused to abandon the Jewish community of Belgium, the vast majority of whom were immigrants from Eastern Europe and refugees from Nazi Germany, and decided to return to Belgium.

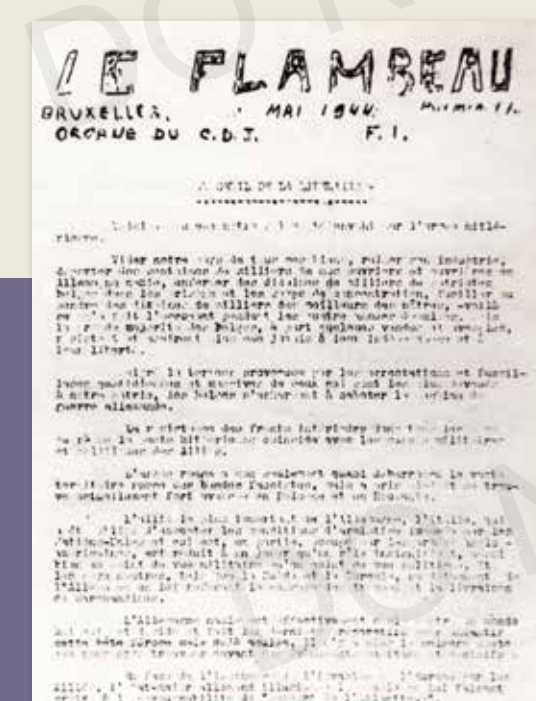
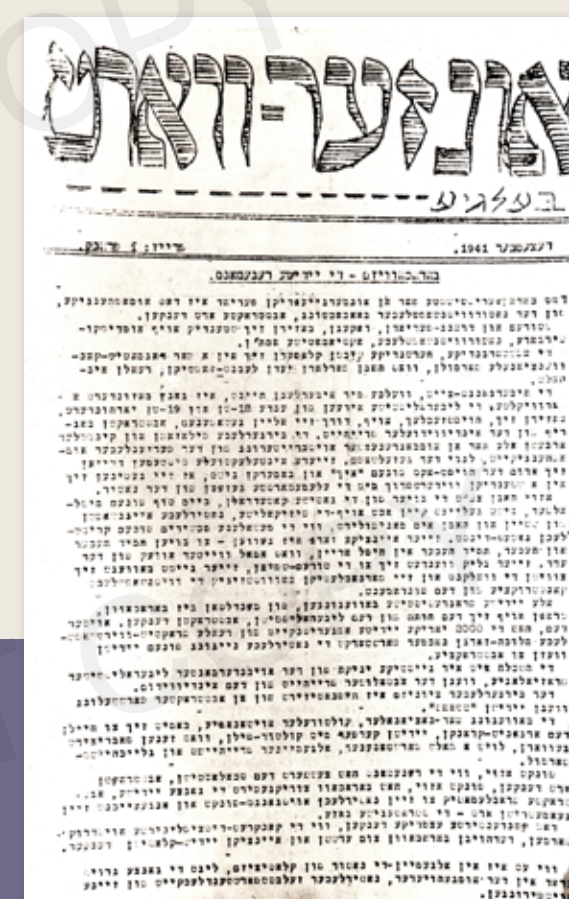
As part of his activities on the committee, Werber took on a number of different roles – he headed the department that distributed aid to adults, and managed the propaganda and press department. In this capacity, he disseminated the underground newspaper *Undzer Vert* (Our Word). This newspaper, which was distributed from December 1941 until Belgium's liberation in September

1944, was the only one that provided information in Yiddish – the language spoken by 90 percent of Belgium's Jews. His articles called for civil disobedience and refusal to report for transports, in addition to providing information regarding the possibilities available for rescue and hiding in the country. From February 1942, Werber, together with Henri (Leopold) Flam, published other underground newspapers, the French-language *Le Flambeau* (The Torch) and the Flemish *De Vrije Gedachte* (Free Thought). These newspapers, which were designated for the general Belgian population, encouraged non-Jewish citizens to extend assistance to Jews, emphasized the struggle shared by Belgians and Jews alike for the liberation of their country, and contributed to shaping public opinion and to the enlistment in rescue operations of the CDJ.

Ghert Jospa, who conceived the idea of the CDJ, his wife Yvonne and their son Paul, June 1945. Yvonne Jospa and Shifra Werber, Abusz's wife, were very active in the CDJ's department in charge of saving Jewish children. Association belge L'Enfant caché (ASBL), Courtesy of Paul Jospa



The three underground newspapers published by Abusz Werber
Moreshet Archive, Mordechai Anielewicz Memorial



RESCUE NETWORKS

After the occupation of Hungary by the Germans in 1944, the members of the youth movements in Budapest decided to go underground in order to save Jews in any way possible. The main rescue operations included the smuggling of a few thousand Jews from Hungary to Romania, organized, among others, by Moshe Elefant and Dan Zimmerman; the forging of documents for hidden and fleeing Jews; and the establishment of dozens of Jewish children's homes in Budapest, ostensibly under the auspices of the Red Cross, which protected the residents of the homes.



Efraim Teichman

1922-2010

Efraim (Efra) Teichman in the uniform of a Hungarian railroad officer, Budapest, May-November 1944
The Society for the Research of the History of the Zionist Youth Movement in Hungary

After Germany occupied Hungary, Efraim (Efra) Teichman (Agmon), a member of the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement, joined the leadership of the movement, which went underground. Under the false name Imre Benkő, and posing as a Hungarian railroad officer, Teichman was sent by the underground to inform the Jewish communities in Hungary what had happened to the Jews throughout Europe. His disguise also later allowed him to help Jews escape from forced labor brigades and go into hiding in Budapest, activities that on more than one occasion almost cost him his life.

Teichman took part in the smuggling of Jews to Romania. His role was to provide them with cash and false papers, as well as information about hiding places and how to ask for assistance after crossing the border. After the fascist Arrow Cross Party came to power, Teichman was among those who established children's homes, in which 6,000 Jewish children found shelter until liberation.

Efraim (Efra) Teichman's false papers in the name of Imre Benkő, issued in Budapest on 2 February 1943
Moreshet Archive, Mordechai Anielewicz Memorial



Dávid Grosz

b. 1926



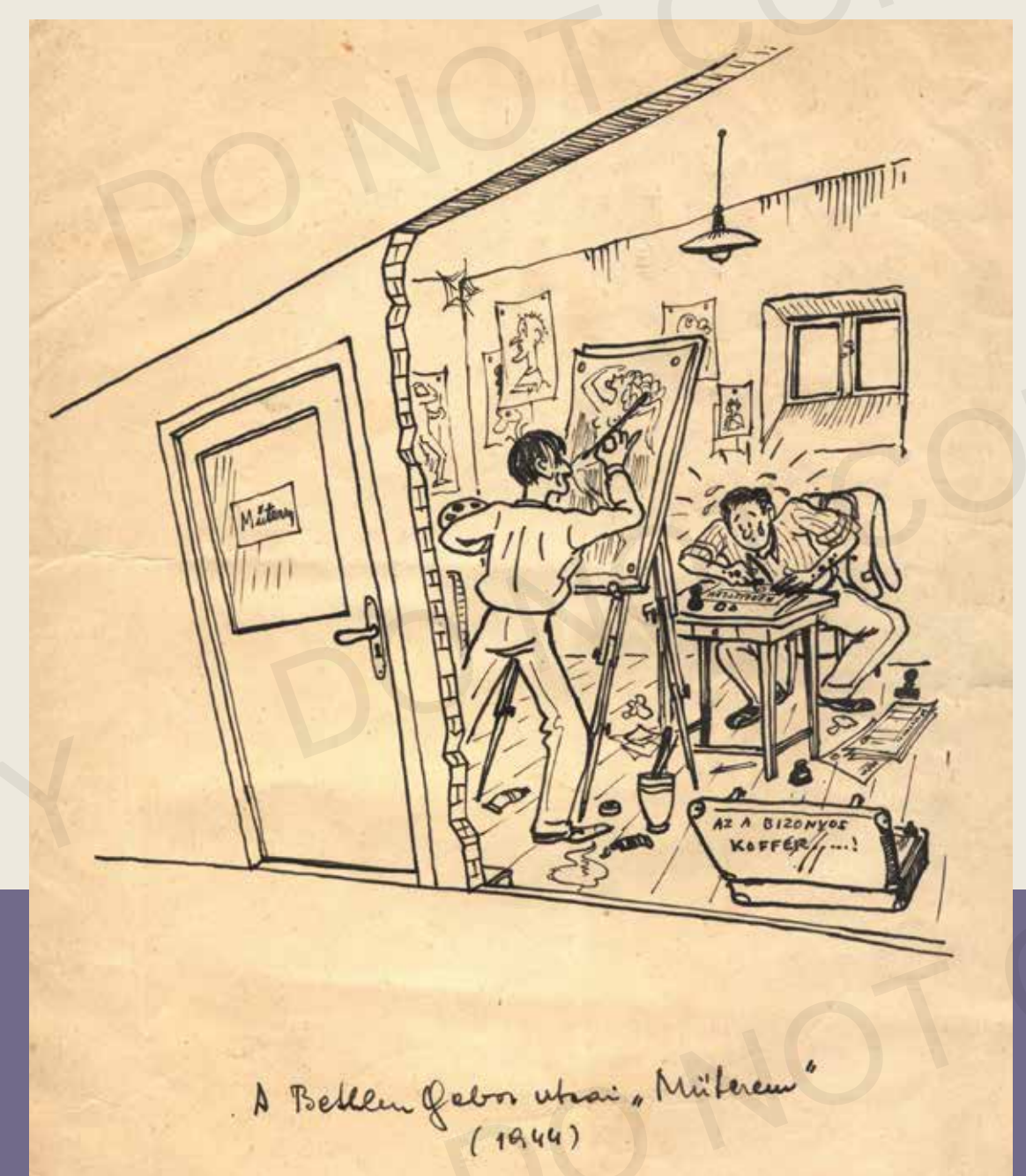
Dávid Grosz (Gur), Budapest, November 1946
The Society for the Research of the History of the Zionist Youth Movement in Hungary

In 1944, Dávid Grosz (Gur), a member of the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement in Budapest, joined a team of document forgers. Their workshop, which was located at 12 Bethlen Street, was disguised as an art studio, with half-finished drawings hanging on the walls. In the workshop, Grosz and his team used their artistic skills to create a variety of official stamps used to falsify documents. Due to the frequent raids, they were forced to move from place to place, and repeatedly find spaces where they could continue their work. On Christmas Eve 1944, they were apprehended; they managed to swallow the false documents they had been working on so that the other members of the group would not be betrayed. Grosz and the others were interrogated under severe torture, and ultimately freed in a daring rescue operation organized by the underground.

The "workshop" for the forgery of documents on Bethlen Street; a cartoon drawn by underground member Shraga Weil, a member of the forgery team, Budapest, 1944

The Society for the Research of the History of the Zionist Youth Movement in Hungary

David Gur seated, Shraga Weil standing On the valise are the words "The Particular Suitcase" – which held the equipment used to forge documents, and was always taken with them at times of danger.





**Rabbi Michael
Dov Weissmandel**

1903-1956

Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel, 1945
Courtesy of Ariel Frieder, Netanya, Israel



Gisi Fleischmann

1897-1944

Gisi Fleischmann
Yad Vashem Collections

The deportation of the Jews of Slovakia to Poland began in the spring of 1942. In the wake of the deportations, a group of Jewish activists was formed – known as the “Working Group” – in order to try to prevent the deportations by lobbying Slovakian government officials and offering bribes to German representatives and key members of the Slovakian government. Among the leaders of the group was Gisi Fleischmann, the founder and leader of the Women’s International Zionist Organization (WIZO) in Slovakia, and Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel.

“I thought to myself: If Wisliceny takes a bribe for a single person, why wouldn’t he take one for many... and I said to myself: May God bring me success on the path I have taken.”

Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel

With the start of the deportations from Slovakia to Poland, a rumor spread that one of the deportees had managed to bribe his way to freedom. This gave Rabbi Weissmandel the idea of offering money to the Slovaks and later to the Germans to halt the deportations. Fleischmann stood at the head of the committee that conducted the negotiations. The deportations were stopped because of political considerations, but Rabbi Weissmandel, convinced that the bribery payments were the reason for the respite, succeeded in convincing Fleischmann of his new initiative – the “Europa Plan.” This plan aimed to prevent the deportation of Jews from German-occupied Europe to Poland in exchange for large payments. Fleischmann and Weissmandel believed that all possible steps had to be taken to stop the deportations, despite their doubts as to whether the Germans would ultimately keep their word should the plan be put into action. They negotiated with members of the SS, and at the same time established ties with Jewish organizations in neutral Europe and the Land of Israel in order to obtain the necessary funds. The negotiations

concluded without results and, after the fact, turned out to be yet another SS ruse.

Fleischman tried to do as much as she could for the persecuted Jewish children. One of her activities involved an illegal attempt to transfer 1,000 children from the Bialystok ghetto to the Land of Israel. Unfortunately, the plan was discovered and Fleischmann was arrested and imprisoned. When she was released, the members of the group suggested they try to smuggle her into Hungary, and from there to the Land of Israel, but she refused.

After the Germans occupied Hungary, Weissmandel warned the Hungarian Jewish communities not to register with the authorities and to do whatever they could to avoid being deported to the camps. In April and June 1944, after the testimonies of those who had escaped from Auschwitz were collected, the reports of their testimonies were conveyed to Rabbi Weissmandel and the members of the Working Group, who sent them on to Hungary and Switzerland together with an appeal to the Allies to bomb the camp.

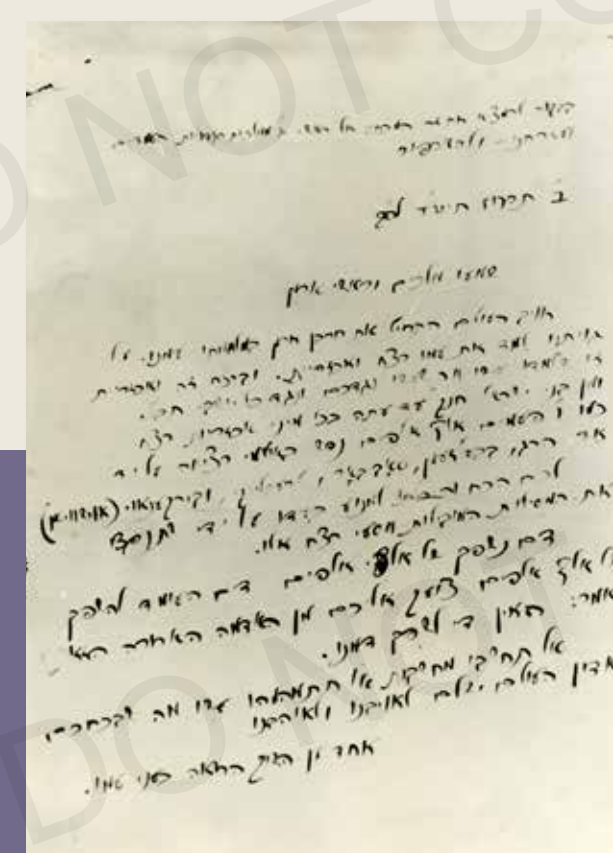
In the fall of 1944, during the suppression of the Slovak national uprising, a manhunt was carried out in Bratislava, during which Fleischmann and Weissmandel were arrested along with other members of the Working Group. In October, the leaders of the group were deported to Auschwitz. Weissmandel jumped off the train, and survived. When Fleischman arrived in Auschwitz, she was separated from the rest of the Slovakian deportees even before the selections process, and murdered.

Cartoon drawn in 1944 by Ernest (Hron) Auerbach in Bratislava at the request of Dr. Oskar Neumann, a member of the Working Group. Gisi Fleischmann is portrayed as Joan of Arc surrounded by the members of the Working Group. Dr. Neumann holds the reins of the horse. At the front of the drawing, left to right, are Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel and Rabbi Abba Avraham Frieder. In the back, left to right, are Ernst Abeles, Endrej Steiner, Dr. Tibor Kovacs and Wilhelm Fürst.

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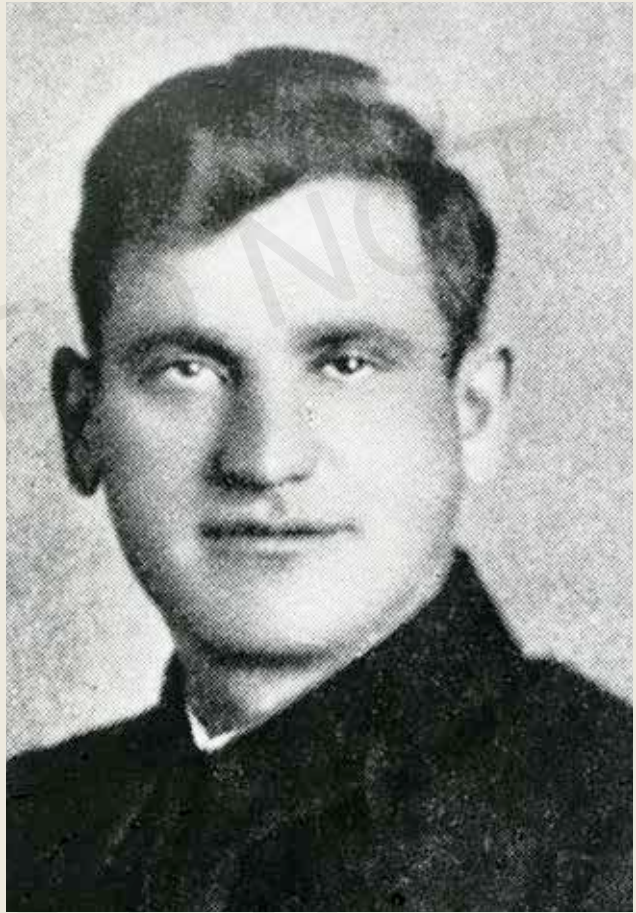


“Harken kings and leaders of the world... The foe of the world has begun the destruction of the earth with its war on us... You have the power and ability to prevent this from happening by bombing the railroad tracks on these journeys of death... Tarry not, do what you have the power to do – and the Master of the Universe shall pay our foes and friends.”
Excerpt from the letter written by Rabbi Weissmandel addressed to the Allies and the Pope, sent together with the *Auschwitz Protocols*
Ghetto Fighters’ House Museum, Israel \ Photo Archive





Tuvia Bielski
Yad Vashem Collections



Asael Bielski enlisted in the Red Army after the family camp was dismantled and was killed in the Battle of Königsberg in eastern Prussia on 7 February 1945.
Yad Vashem Collections



Alexander (Zus) Bielski
Courtesy of Sonia Bielski

The Bielski brothers

Tuvia Bielski – 1906-1987

Asael Bielski – 1908-1945

Alexander “Zus” Bielski – 1912-1986

Aron Bielski b. 1927

“For what is our goal here, to save only our own skins? As long as it is possible to save even one more Jew from the claws of the Nazis, we will be there.”

Tuvia Bielski

In late 1941, the Germans massacred the Jews in the Nowogródek region (today Belarus), including much of the family of the brothers Tuvia, Asael, Alexander and Aron Bielski. In the spring of 1942, the brothers decided to flee to the nearby Naliboki forests to try to save family members who were still alive.



A backpack used by Moshe and Pesia Bairach during their escape from the Lida ghetto to the Bielski camp. Moshe was a fighter in the unit and Pesia worked in the camp workshop.
Yad Vashem Collections

The brothers set up a unit in the forests, which Tuvia was chosen to lead. He believed that the unit's main role was to provide refuge to Jews fleeing the ghettos, and to protect them from the Germans and the hostile local population. Until May 1942, the unit numbered just a few dozen Jews, but it soon became a camp that took in every Jew who found their way there, and a year later, it numbered 750 people. The Bielski brothers' decision to focus on saving Jews turned the

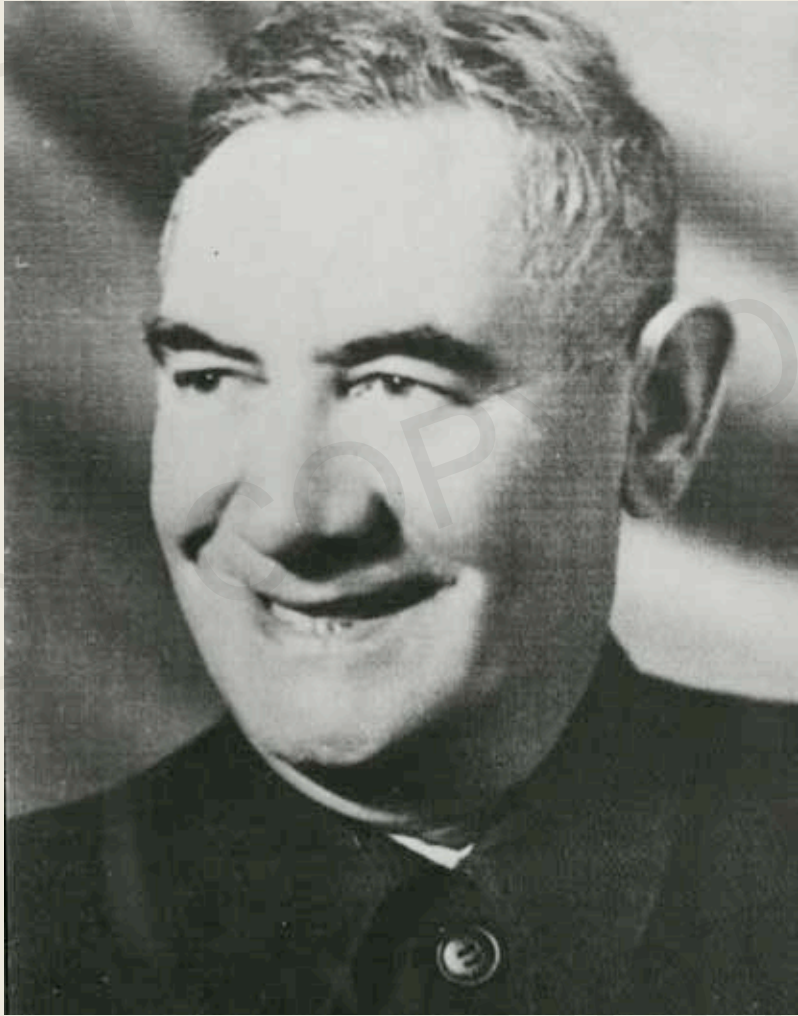
camp, which the partisans called “The Jerusalem of the Forests,” into the largest Jewish family camp during the war. Refugees of *Aktionen* in the ghettos, relatives of Jewish partisans, and Jewish fighters whom the Soviet units had rejected all arrived at the camp. Tuvia Bielski even sent envoys into the ghettos in the vicinity to persuade Jews to flee and join the camp.

Most of the people in the camp were noncombatants; the young people who participated in hostilities against the German forces made up but a small part of the group. When the camp joined the Soviet command in 1943, the unit was divided into two, and Alexander took over control of the fighters. The rest, under Tuvia's command, were recognized as a family unit that provided services to the fighting partisan units, subordinate to the commander of the district's partisan units. To improve the camp's mobility during times of danger, the family camp was split into small sub-units, each of which included young people that bore arms, alongside the women, children and elderly.

At the time of liberation in the summer of 1944, there were 1,230 people in the camp.

Jews in the family camp of the Bielski brothers, Naliboki forest, May 1944
Yad Vashem Collections





Shalom Zorin

1898-1974

Shalom Zorin, Soviet Union, 1960s
Yad Vashem Collections

“We must protect the people and save those still in the ghetto. That is our duty.”

Shalom Zorin

Minsk, the capital of Belarus, was occupied by the Germans on 8 June 1941. After the establishment of the ghetto, the Jewish population of Minsk numbered 80,000. Just one year later, as a result of the starvation, diseases and mass murders by shootings and gas trucks, only 11,000 Jews remained in the ghetto.

In the late of summer 1941, an underground organized in the ghetto, headed by Jewish communist activists who had remained in the city. The members of the underground tried to smuggle Jews capable of engaging in combat out of the ghetto to join the partisan units in the forests, and at the same time also encouraged those unable to fight to escape.

Shalom Zorin was sent from the Minsk ghetto to a forced-labor camp on Shiroka Street in Minsk, where he met a captured Soviet officer named Semyon Ganzenko. Towards the end of 1941, they both fled from the camp to the forests near Minsk, where Ganzenko set up a fighting partisan unit in which Zorin served as the commander of a reconnaissance unit for a year-and-a-half.

Jews who fled from the surrounding ghettos had difficulty being accepted into partisan units. Most of them were women, children and the elderly, and the partisans feared that they would become a burden to them. In addition, some of the partisans held antisemitic views.

Zorin, who was aware of the distress of those escaping the ghettos, and who, while on missions in the forest, came across Jewish children looking for a place to hide, established a separate Jewish family unit in April 1943. Some partisans considered this a betrayal, but the unit received official approval from the Soviet partisan command, and in 1944, it was renamed the Family Unit no. 106.

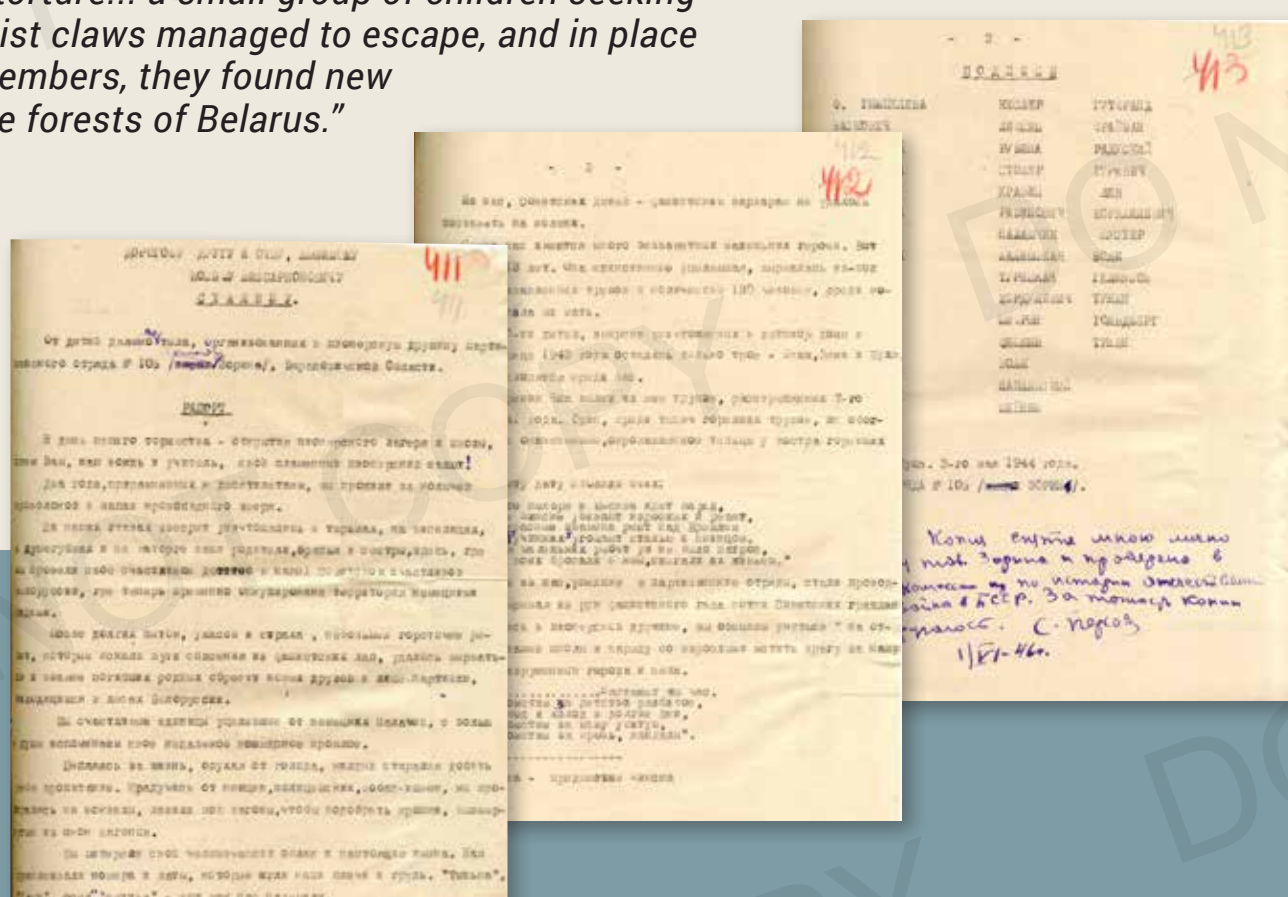
The unit's declared goal was to save Jews, and the general commander of the partisans in the Minsk area issued an order that all Jews who were not fighters should be sent to Unit 106. The members of the unit gathered up Jews who were on the run, and also helped get Jews out of the ghettos into the forests. Children aged between eleven and fifteen served as couriers between the ghetto and the unit, which also had workshops, a hospital and a school.

In late 1943, Zorin's unit numbered about 800 Jews, of whom about 150 were children. Most survived until the area was liberated in July 1944.

“After much suffering and torture... a small group of children seeking a way to flee from the fascist claws managed to escape, and in place of their murdered family members, they found new friends: the partisans in the forests of Belarus.”

A letter written by children from the Unit 106 family camp to Stalin, 3 May 1944

Государственный архив Российской Федерации



Wallet and gun holster prepared by Rachel Ozerski for her son Zيامa in the Family Unit no. 106
Zيامa Ozerski was murdered together with other young people from the camp by Polish partisans.

Yad Vashem Collections



Haviva Reik

1914-1944

“We must parachute into Europe like a mother bursting into a burning home to save her children.”

Haviva Reik, before setting out on her mission

Haviva Reik in the uniform of the British army, 1944
 Yad Vashem Collections

In November 1942, credible news reached the Land of Israel regarding the scale of the destruction of European Jewry. As a result, the Jewish Agency for Israel decided to send Jewish emissaries into occupied Europe as part of the British army. In 1943-1945, emissaries from the Land of Israel were directed to carry out military operations behind enemy lines, as well as on various rescue missions on behalf of the pre-state Jewish community in the Land of Israel.

Haviva Reik volunteered in late 1943 for underground military training and instruction so that she could be sent to Slovakia, from where she had immigrated to the Land of Israel just four years earlier. The aim of the operation as defined by the British army was to obtain intelligence and rescue allied air crews who had parachuted into the occupied territory. The main goal of the mission as Reik saw it was to save the Jews that remained in Slovakia and organize them to rise up against the occupation.

Reik landed in Slovakia in September 1944 in the middle of the Slovakian National Uprising, arriving in Banská Bystrica, which at that time was a free enclave where Jewish refugees from all over Slovakia gathered. Together with her fellow fighters, Reik endeavored to help the refugees by organizing jobs and arranging for shelter and material assistance, in cooperation with community leaders. Reik was also responsible for preparing mass escape plans should the enclave fall, and

for finding places to hide in the forests and mountains. She maintained contact with the members of the Jewish Zionist youth movements, and she and its members smuggled American and British soldiers across the border into Italy.

As the Germans approached Banská Bystrica, Reik and the other paratroopers began to plan the evacuation of the Jews from the city, and provided the evacuees with money. Reik refused to flee to safety together with the Slovakian army because she was unwilling to abandon the remaining Jews. Reik and the other paratroopers were among the last to leave, as they accompanied a group of Jews that were under their responsibility. Within a short time, the camp that Reik and the others had set up in the mountains was attacked, and Reik and her comrades, who were leading a group to safety, were captured.

On 20 November 1944, hundreds of Jews, including Reik, were executed near the village of Kremnička.

Paratroopers at the Tri Duby (Three Oaks) airfield, Slovakia, 1944
 Left to right: Haim Hermesh, Haviva Reik, Rafael Reiss, Abba Berdiczew, Zvi Ben-Yaakov
 Yad Vashem Collections



Israeli paratroopers, Bari, Italy, March-April 1944
 Top row, left to right: Abba Berdiczew, Zadok Dorogoyer, Reuven Dafni
 Bottom row, left to right: Haviva Reik, Arye Fichman, Sara Braverman
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RESCUERS IN THE CAMPS



Heinz Prossnitz
Yad Vashem Collections

Heinz Prossnitz

1926-1944

4,400 kilograms of food sent directly to Theresienstadt [Terezin], 830 kilograms of food to Birkenau and the Lodz ghetto, 600 kilograms of clothing and food to Sachsenhausen and Hamburg... without public support, at his own initiative, at risk to his life, at a time of economic oversight and restrictions on the Jews, under the Gestapo's sword of Damocles."

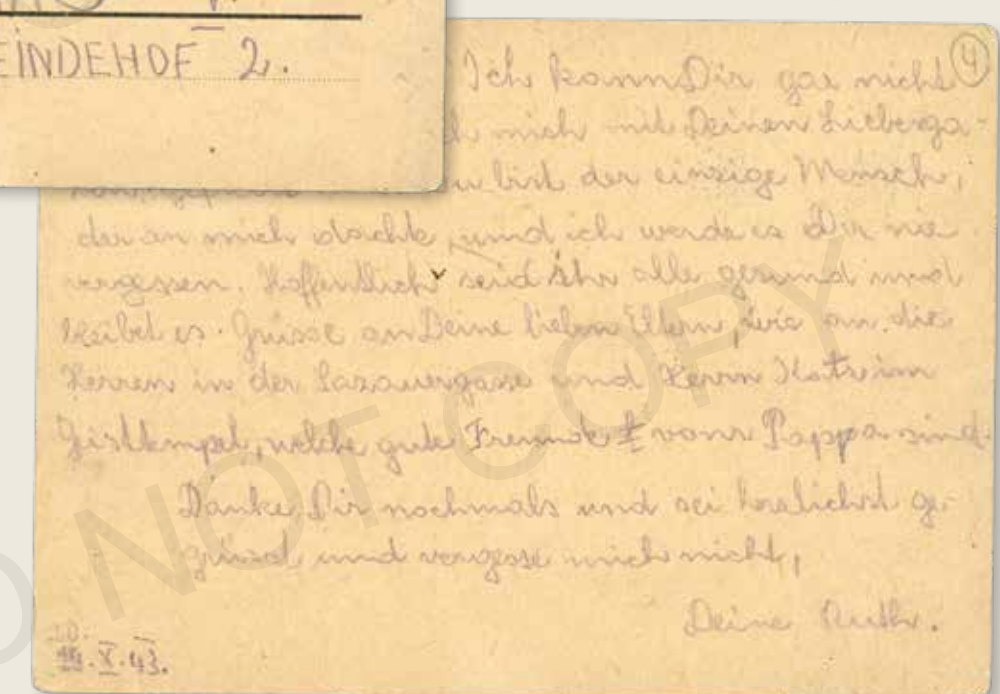
Eulogy for Heinz Prossnitz written by Erika Wolf and Edith Brezina

On 15 March 1939, in violation of the Munich Agreement, Nazi Germany invaded Bohemia and Moravia. From October 1941 to March 1945, more than 46,000 Jews were deported from Prague, mostly to Terezin. For the majority, it served as a transit camp on the way to their death in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

When the deportations began, the Maccabi Hatzair youth movement rallied and established a joint fund to help the deported members of the movement. Heinz Prossnitz, aged sixteen at the time, was placed in charge of managing the fund. The first deportees were sent to the Lodz ghetto in Poland, and Prossnitz used the fund to send them sums of money and later food packages. In 1942, most of the deportees from Prague were sent to Terezin. Prossnitz would send letters and food packages with the deportees to the prisoners already there. He sometimes even managed to send personal packages among the regular shipments sent from Prague to Terezin. Prossnitz even succeeded in sending food packages to prisoners who were later sent from Terezin to Birkenau. Most of the package recipients were members of the Zionist leadership, members of Maccabi Hatzair, and Prossnitz's friends and their family members.

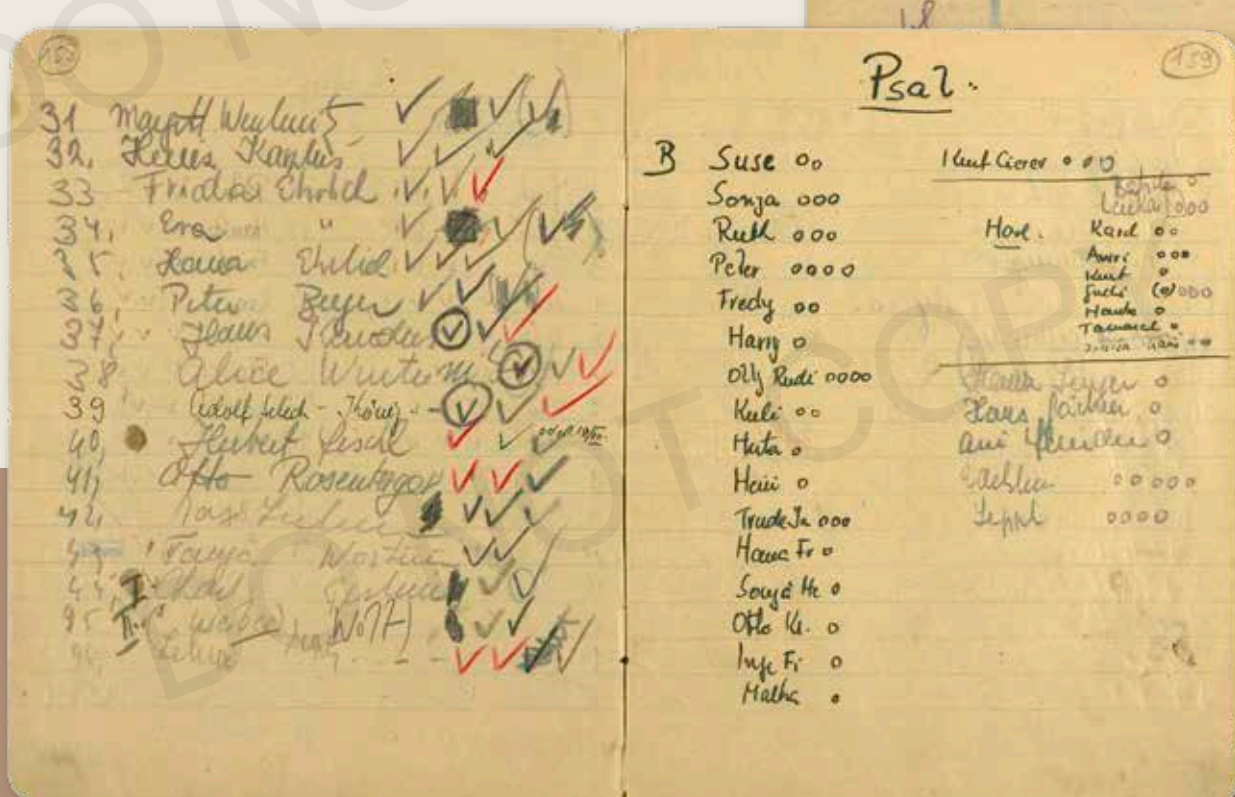
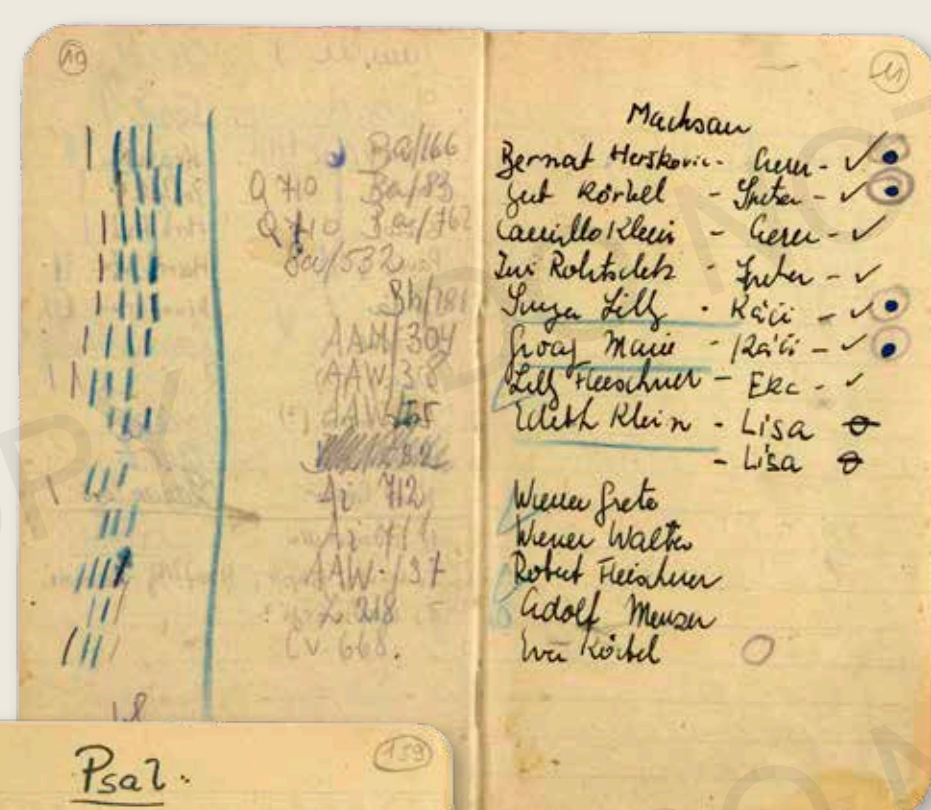


Postcard sent by Ruth Barber from Birkenau to Prossnitz with a request for support, 20 October 1943
On the postcard, Ruth writes:
"I have no words to tell you how overjoyed I was to receive your gift package. You are the only one who thinks of me and I will never forget that... Don't forget me."
Yad Vashem Collections



In order to address all the requests made to him, Prossnitz was aided by non-Jewish or half-Jewish acquaintances who still lived in Prague, in addition to using the money from the Maccabi Hatzair fund. In addition, Prossnitz took money from his parents, saved up from his own ration card to help friends, and even sold his own personal items to purchase supplies. Despite the danger of being sent to a concentration camp or hanged if he was caught, he bought food on the black market. The packages, which also contained medications, strengthened the bodies and spirits of their recipients, and most importantly, gave them hope. In October 1944, Prossnitz and his parents were deported to Terezin and later to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where they were sent directly to their deaths.

Ledgers kept by Heinz Prossnitz of the aid operations he administered
Yad Vashem Collections



RESCUERS IN THE CAMPS



“We safeguarded the children until the last minute... The initiative was ours, and everything that was done was our responsibility. If something had happened, we, a group of Polish Jews working in the underground, would have paid the price with our lives.”

Jacob (Jack) Werber

Jacob (Jack) Werber

1914-2006

Jacob (Jack) Werber, Radom, Poland, 20 January 1934
Courtesy of David and Martin Werber, New York, USA

The Buchenwald concentration camp was established in Germany in 1937. In the eight years of its existence, some 240,000 prisoners of different nationalities, including Jews, were incarcerated there. During the final stages of the war, control over the daily proceedings in the camp was handed over to the political prisoners. This not only made the living conditions in the camp more tolerable, but also made it possible to carry out a widescale rescue operation inside the camp.

Jacob (Jack) Werber was deported to Buchenwald from Radom, Poland in 1939. In the camp, he worked as a builder, and in 1942, he joined the camp's international underground. In late 1944, transports of Jews from liquidated ghettos and other concentration camps began to arrive in Buchenwald. One of the transports included about 700 Jewish children, most aged 13-15, although some were even younger than ten. Together with additional members of the underground, Werber decided to try to hide the children, fully aware that if their presence became known to the Germans, they would be sent to their deaths. These children joined approximately 200 children who were already being hidden in the camp. In 1945, their numbers were increased by children who arrived at Buchenwald on the death marches.

This unique rescue operation, which was led by Werber together with Gustav Schiller, Jack Handelsman and Eliyahu (Elek) Greenbaum, was the full responsibility of the members of the Jewish underground, although they were helped by prisoners of other nationalities.



A striped prisoner's uniform from Buchenwald that belonged to David Finkelstein. Finkelstein arrived in Buchenwald after the evacuation of Auschwitz, in January 1945, and was among the children hidden in Block 66.
Yad Vashem Collections

In order to hide the large number of children and teens, they were scattered among the barracks of the camp. Most were sent to the "Small Camp," which the Germans visited less often, and there, most of the children were concentrated in Block 66. The rest of them were placed in barracks in the larger camp. The clerks in the camp offices made sure to change the children's ages in the records, thus making them "fit for work," and their food was smuggled in secretly from the camp kitchen and from prisoners who shared their own rations with the children. Werber, who was barrack secretary of Block 23, personally looked after about 150 children. A school was even opened for them in this block, and prisoners volunteered to teach in the school at great risk to their lives.

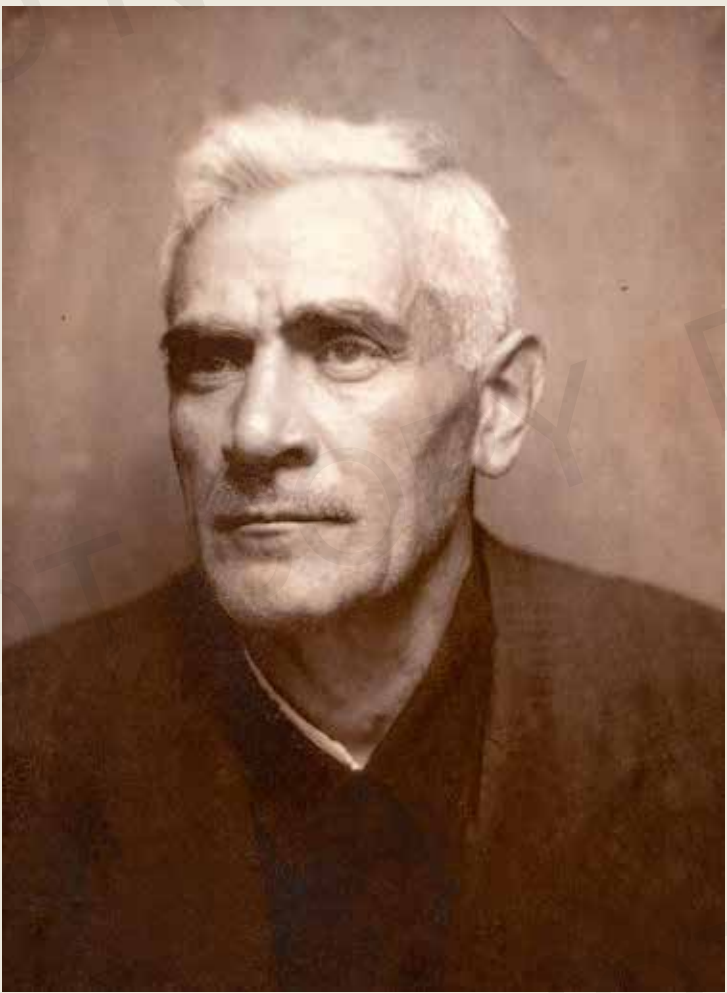
In April 1945, the camp was liberated by the US army. Most of the Buchenwald children survived, including future Nobel Prize Laureate Eli Wiesel and future chief rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Israel Meir Lau.



A group of Buchenwald children during liberation.
On the right: Jacob (Jack) Werber; on the left: Eliyahu (Elek) Greenbaum – two of the leaders of the rescue operation
Buchenwald, Germany, 1945

Yad Vashem Collections

RESCUERS IN THE CAMPS



Yaakov Wiernik, August 1943
Ghetto Fighters' House Museum, Israel \ Photo Archive

Yaakov Wiernik

1887-1972

“When spring arrived, we decided to free ourselves or die.”

Yaakov Wiernik

Treblinka was one of the three extermination camps operated by the Germans in the *Generalgouvernement* (German-occupied Polish territories), and it was used to carry out systematic and industrialized murder, mainly of Jews from central Poland. Some 870,000 Jews were murdered in Treblinka in the thirteen months of its operations, from the summer of 1942 to the summer of 1943.

Yaakov Wiernik was deported from the Warsaw ghetto to Treblinka on 23 August 1942. On the way to the gas chambers, he managed to steal away and blend in among the Jews performing forced labor in the camp. At first, he worked at clearing away the bodies, but after he attested that he was an expert carpenter, he was transferred to building the camp facilities.

In early 1943, the members of the Jewish underground in the camp realized that only by organizing all the prisoners could they undertake an armed uprising and mass escape, and thus enable the rescue of a large number of people. The early stages of planning the uprising and escape were carried out in the area where the prisoners were taken off the trains and rounded up. When two of the members of the underground were transferred to the area used for the extermination, an underground cell was established there, too. The Germans were careful to keep the two parts of the camp separate, and the prisoners were forbidden to make contact between them. Wiernik, who by virtue of his job was permitted to move between the two areas, served as a liaison between the undergrounds and conveyed messages between them regarding the planning of the uprising.

On 2 August 1943, the uprising broke out. The prisoners in both parts of the camp, who had armed themselves ahead of time with firearms and other weapons, launched the uprising and burned down buildings in the camp. At the same time, a mass escape in the direction of the camps' fences ensued, as the Ukrainian guards in the guard towers shot at the prisoners running away. The leaders of the uprising remained behind to provide cover for the escapees, and most were shot and killed inside the camp. About half of the camp's 850 prisoners were killed during the escape, while approximately the same number managed to cross beyond the boundaries of the camp, although most were captured later by the Germans with the help of local farmers. Only about seventy of the escapees survived until liberation.

Wiernik managed to escape and reach Warsaw, where he lived under a false identity and served as a courier in the Jewish underground. He even participated in the fighting during the Polish uprising in the city.

Treblinka Death Camp, Samuel Willenberg
The drawing of the camp was created from memory in the years 1982-1984, by Samuel Willenberg, who was among those who survived the escape from the camp.
Yad Vashem Collections, Courtesy of the artist



Smoke spiraling above Treblinka during the uprising
Photograph taken on the day of the uprising, 2 August 1943, from the Treblinka train station by the stationmaster.

Ghetto Fighters' House Museum, Israel \ Photo Archive
Photo: Zygmunt Wierzbowski

