

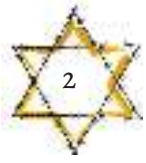


הוועדה להוקרת גבורתם של המצילים היהודיים בשואה  
Committee to Recognize the Heroism of Jewish  
Rescuers During the Holocaust

המרכז העולמי של בני ברית - ירושלים  
B'nai B'rith World Center - Jerusalem



# Jews Who Rescued Jews During the Holocaust



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## Introduction

For many years, the historiography of the Holocaust tended to present Jews only as victims. This trend began to change some two decades ago, and many studies have since examined the daily lives of Jews during the Holocaust as they grappled with the deteriorating reality around them, and different types of Jewish resistance.

While the Germans and their collaborators attempted to methodically annihilate European Jewry, many Jews resisted the grim fate that awaited them. Hundreds of thousands of Jews fought in the Allied armies and in the ranks of the partisans, revolted in ghettos and led uprisings in extermination camps.

One largely downplayed phenomenon of Jewish heroism in the Holocaust is that of Jews who rescued fellow Jews while exposing themselves to great danger. Recent research shows that the rescue of Jews by Jews during the Holocaust had been a much wider phenomenon than what was known until now. Although researchers and historians occasionally mentioned such events, the issue was not identified as a unique field of study and certainly did not receive the attention it deserves. Holocaust researcher Bella Gutterman argues that Jewish self-rescue is “an additional aspect of the study of the Jewish response during the Holocaust which is not sufficiently well-known.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1953 the State of Israel decided, through the Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Law, to entrust Yad Vashem with the responsibility

of commemorating the Righteous Among the Nations: non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews. However, as Holocaust scholar Yehuda Bauer wrote, “non-Jews were not the only ones who saved Jews; Jews also saved Jews, and non-Jews were sometimes saved by Jews.”<sup>2</sup> Without underestimating the efforts of the Righteous Among the Nations, it is known that in many cases there was close collaboration between Jewish and non-Jewish rescuers, and that sometimes the initiative for the rescue operation came from the Jewish participants. Without this invaluable collaboration, these rescue operations would likely have failed.

The Jews’ ability to act was much more restricted than that of non-Jews, who were not persecuted by the Nazis, and the activities of Jewish rescuers therefore also deserve appreciation. Although these rescue efforts appear negligible when compared to the magnitude of the extermination, they should nevertheless be researched and taught as an independent and significant phenomenon alongside other aspects of Jewish resistance to the Nazis. While it is true that on many occasions “even resourcefulness, courage and planning were to no avail”<sup>3</sup>, the main focus should not be the results but rather on the intentions and actions taken by the rescuers. The efforts of Jewish rescuers reflect the highest form of Jewish and human solidarity and are a supreme expression of the ancient Jewish principles “Thou shalt not stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor”<sup>4</sup> and “All Jews are responsible for one another”.<sup>5</sup> These activities do not reflect a collection coincidental events but, in many cases.

1. Bella Gutterman, “Jews saving Jews”, *Yalkut Moreshet* 76 (2003), pp. 75-80 [Hebrew].

2. From a letter to the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research, 24 December 2007. A similar statement appears in the preface of the book: Avraham Milgram (ed.), “Jews Rescuing Jews in the Holocaust”, Jerusalem, Yad Vashem, 2014 [Hebrew].

3. Dina Porat, “The Prospects of Rescue During the Holocaust”, *Massuah* volume 18 (1990), p. 30 [Hebrew].

4. Leviticus 19:16.

5. Sifra, Bechukotai, chapter 7, 5.



a phenomenon of methodical, carefully planned rescue operations. The operations took place in different countries, and in different contexts, and were carried out both by individuals and groups. Many Jewish rescuers were awarded national decorations by foreign countries, while the State of Israel and its institutions have made no similar gesture, even to this day.

### **Scope of rescue**

Rescue operations were carried out by Jews all across Europe, from the rise of the Nazis to power until after the end of World War II. Despite the difficult conditions, which varied from place to place and evolved as the war progressed, many who could have fled chose to exhibit exemplary solidarity and remained behind to rescue others; some paid for it with their lives. With great heroism, Jews in Germany and every country in occupied Europe exploited loopholes in Nazi bureaucracy and employed subterfuge, document replication, smuggling, concealment and other methods to help Jews survive the Holocaust or assisted them in escaping to a safe haven. In doing so they foiled the Nazi goal of total annihilation of the Jews. Some of these efforts were the result of individual initiative, while others were part of organized Jewish and general resistance movements. Since many rescue operations were not documented, there is no clear estimate of the scope of this phenomenon, and it is likely that records of many cases have been lost forever.

### **Committee to Recognize the Heroism of Jewish Rescuers During the Holocaust**

The Committee to Recognize the Heroism of Jewish Rescuers During the Holocaust has been active since the end of 2000 with the purpose of raising public awareness in Israel and throughout the world to the phenomenon of Jewish rescuers during the Holocaust. Founding committee

members included rescuers, survivors, and the director of the B'nai B'rith World Center – B'nai B'rith International's permanent presence in Jerusalem and its public affairs arm in Israel. The founder and chairman of the committee is social activist Haim Roet, a Holocaust survivor from the Netherlands who survived with the help of Jews and non-Jews, and established the international commemoration project "Unto Every Person There is a Name"

The Committee strives to close a gap of seventy-five years, during which these heroes were left largely unknown and unrecognized by the Jewish People. To achieve this, it promotes public activities in Israel and abroad in cooperation with governmental bodies, academia, educational institutions, Jewish communities and organizations for Holocaust commemoration.

The B'nai B'rith World Center and the Jewish National Fund are both committed to this effort, and since 2002 have held a unique annual ceremony on Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day) dedicated to Jewish rescuers. The ceremony is attended by hundreds of pupils, students at pre-military preparatory programs, soldiers, survivors, rescuers and their families.

### **Jewish Rescuers Citation**

In 2011 the Jewish Rescuers Citation was established by the Committee in partnership with the B'nai B'rith World Center in an effort to rectify the historical record regarding Jewish rescue and offer long overdue recognition to these heroes. Until today, 330 such heroes have been honored with citations for rescue activities in France, Hungary, Greece, Germany, Slovakia, Russia, Yugoslavia, Lithuania, Poland, Italy, Belgium, Romania, Morocco and the Netherlands at ceremonies that have taken place in Israel, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Canada, Belgium, Greece, and the United States.





The Jewish Rescuers Citation is awarded based on the following criteria<sup>6</sup>:

1. The nominee is a Jewish person who:
  - a. operated in the occupied countries under the Nazi regime during World War II, or in countries that collaborated with Nazi Germany in persecuting Jews from September 1, 1939 until May 8, 1945; or
  - b. operated in Germany after the Nazis' rise to power in 1933, or in Austria after the "Anschluss" on March 3, 1938; or
  - c. risked his life rescuing Jewish children in Europe immediately after the war until the end of 1946.
2. The nominee belonged to the Jewish people during the rescue efforts.
3. The nominee risked his life in the course of those rescue efforts beyond the dangers already posed to him as a Jew.
4. The nominee did not demand or receive payment as a condition for rescue.
5. The story is supported and corroborated by testimonies of survivors, research and reliable archival material.
6. The rescue effort was undertaken for the benefit of Jews who were not related to the rescuer by close family ties.
7. The rescue was of multiple Jews. The Committee may make an exception and approve nominees who rescued individual Jews.
8. The ultimate success of the rescue attempt is not a condition for conferral of the Citation.

This booklet includes examples of rescuers who were presented with the Jewish Rescuers Citation. Some of them acted out of their own initiative, while others acted as members of resistance movements, youth movements and other organizations.

### Reasons for the omission of Jewish rescuers in Holocaust commemoration

While the rescue of Jews by other Jews during the Holocaust was mentioned in literature already in the 1950s, it was not discussed under this title but rather as part of studies on general resistance to the Nazis, the Judenrats' activities, Jewish resistance movements in different countries, or in the context of Jewish and human solidarity. The increased public interest in non-Jewish rescuers – the Righteous Among the Nations – often resulted in the marginalization of Jewish rescuers, even in



Jewish Rescuers Citation

6. Despite gender specificity, this document is intended for women and men equally



cases where Jews and non-Jews collaborated side by side in the same rescue operation. This effect was reinforced by the fact that public discussion on the Righteous Among the Nations originated outside Israel, in the public discourse of different countries that sought to highlight rescue efforts carried out by their own nationals, thus focusing attention on the non-Jewish rescuers. All these factors fostered the perception that only non-Jews rescued Jews.

Despite the Committee's best efforts, and the fact that the Holocaust occupies a central place in Israeli society and in the collective consciousness of the Jewish People<sup>7</sup>, the phenomenon of Jewish rescue and the instructive stories of thousands of Jews who labored to save their endangered brethren throughout Europe have yet to earn fitting public recognition and resonance.

It seems that the dearth of research into the subject as a separate category or phenomenon is largely a result of presumptions as to the nature and motives of assistance provided to Jews by Jews which were commonly held among Holocaust scholars for many years after the events. These presumptions began to change over the years along with changes in research areas, and the increasing focus on Jews during the Holocaust as individuals and their responses to events, which replaced the tendency to regard Jews merely as victims. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to mention here a number of presumptions that delayed the study of the phenomenon of Jews who rescued Jews which reflect perceptions that are still

common in the general public. One presumption was that the activities of Jewish rescuers were no more than an incidental phenomenon, an act of persecuted Jews who had very limited control over their own fate and the fate of others. This view is based on the misconception that a victim cannot be a rescuer.<sup>8</sup> A second presumption took for granted the idea of solidarity among Jews, which is viewed as something whose motivation does not require explanation or merit special recognition – as opposed to help provided by non-Jews, which contradicts the traditional assumption that “Esau hates Jacob”. Another presumption was that Jews were passive victims, that they were conflicted among themselves, and that many community leaders were powerless at best and collaborators at worst.<sup>9</sup>

The fact that Jews who rescued Jews were not studied under a distinct category, but instead were discussed in the context of Jewish solidarity, is partly related to the following objective circumstances: the rescue attempts and rescue operations carried out by Jews under exceptional conditions – such as among partisans in the forests, or under false identity as part of general underground movements that operated in a hostile environment or in Nazi camps, etc. – were clandestine in nature. Given these perilous conditions, and due to the high level of caution and secrecy that characterized such operations, it is no wonder that documents and notes, which could have endangered both the rescuers and the Jews they were trying to save, were not preserved.<sup>10</sup>

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7. Milgram, “Jews Rescuing Jews in the Holocaust”, p. 17.

8. Nechama Tec, “Who Dared to Rescue Jews and Why?”, in Jacques Semelin, Clire Andrieu and Sarah Gensburger (eds.), “Resisting Genocide: The Multiple Forms of Rescue”, New York: Columbia University Press 2011, p. 119.

Idem., “Reflections on Rescuers”, In: Michael Berenbaum & Avraham J. Peck (eds), “The Holocaust and History”, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998.

9. Bob Moore, “Survivors: Jewish Self-Help and Rescue in Nazi-Occupied Western Europe”, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 8.

10. Milgram, “Jews Rescuing Jews in the Holocaust” p. 18.



Moreover, it is likely that some rescue attempts, in particular those carried out by individuals, failed without leaving witnesses or any shred of evidence to preserve and document them. This contrasts with larger operations carried out by organizations, youth movements or partisans, many of whom survived and could testify after the war about the rescue operations that had been undertaken. Even among those rescuers who survived, many chose not to talk about their heroic actions. Sonni Schey related how, after arriving in Israel, "I was so ashamed of being a Holocaust survivor! [...] and in Israel, people were always talking about the Warsaw Ghetto and how they fought, and we didn't fight. Eventually, I realized that my parents' struggle was also a fight, no less than anywhere else. But at the time I was ashamed."<sup>11</sup> According to Hanna Yablonka, this reflected the "muteness of the survivors and the disparity between them and native Israelis".<sup>12</sup> Many rescue operations were classified as "Resistance", a term that was in line with the spirit of the period following the establishment of the State of Israel, whose leaders attempted to shape and cultivate a resolute national identity. Such a definition of the term "resistance" can be found in Yehuda Bauer's book, *Rethinking the Holocaust*: "Any group action consciously taken in opposition to known or surmised laws, actions or intentions directed against the Jews by the Germans and their supporters ... Here in Israel, the only type of heroism that was valued was standing up to your enemy bearing arms."<sup>13</sup> The rescue of a Jew by another Jew was taken for granted as a natural obligation under the conception that "all Jews are

responsible for one another".

The systematic identification of rescuers is a gradual process. As noted by Avraham Milgram in relation to the Righteous Among the Nations, this process gradually permeated public consciousness. It "began at the end of 1962, and by 1980 only about 3,500 people were recognized as Righteous Among the Nations, out of the nearly 25,000 who had been identified and recognized by the end of 2013."<sup>14</sup> The absence of a similar process to recognize Jewish rescuers, and the time dedicated to determining the parameters for defining the Jewish rescuer, further added to the delay in coping with the issue.

### **Researchers' observations on the importance of honoring Jewish rescuers**

Today, over eighty years after the Holocaust began and with a broad perspective on the events, it is clear that the rescue operations performed by Jews under Nazi reign deserve our recognition, commemoration and respect as heroic deeds undertaken by resourceful people who, despite being persecuted themselves, helped save other Jews. Their actions saved tens of thousands of lives, and consequently hundreds of thousands of Jews living today owe their existence to them. Therefore, as stated by Mordechai Paldiel, "The stories of Jewish rescuers in the Diaspora need to be told: persons and organizations who displayed not submissiveness and resignation to a bitter fate but initiative, inventiveness, and courage, in a superhuman attempt to outwit the enemy and rouse fellow Jews to self-asserted rescue acts, and who succeeded in saving literally thousands of

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11. Transcription of excerpts from an interview with Sonni Schey, conducted on January 30th, 2013.

12. Hannah Yablonka, "Unknown Brothers: Holocaust Survivors in the State of Israel, 1948-1952", Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben Zvi 1994, p. 59 [Hebrew].

13. Yehuda Bauer, "The Jewish Emergence from Powerlessness", Toronto University Press, Toronto 1979, p. 27

14. Milgram, "Jews Rescuing Jews in the Holocaust", p. 17.





Jews. These Jews deserve an honorable place in the Jewish pantheon”.<sup>15</sup>

Patrick Henry observes that “Jews played an active and significant role throughout occupied Europe in the rescue of other Jews”<sup>16</sup> and therefore the lack of recognition of Jews who rescued Jews leads to “a strange situation in which Christians who rescued Jews and persons born Jewish who converted to Christianity and rescued Jews have been publicly recognized as “Righteous,” but Jewish people who rescued Jews have never been so recognized. To insist on these differences violates the spirit of the overwhelming majority of rescuers, both Jews and Christians alike, who did not think in terms of religious differences when they performed their courageous deeds... We defile the memory of the rescuers, Jews and Christians alike, when we confine them to categories that their magnanimous souls obviously transcended. For the great majority of rescuers, the “Jewishness” of the person to be rescued was not an issue.”<sup>17</sup>

It should be noted that rescuing Jews out of motives of “Jewish solidarity” is an accurate description only in some cases, and therefore we prefer using the term “Jewish and human solidarity”.

Asa Kasher also wrote about the difference between the attitude toward Righteous Among the Nations and toward Jewish rescuers: “If under certain circumstances one Jew and one non-Jew participated in the same rescue operation,

planned it together, risked their lives together, succeeded in their efforts, and Jews were rescued thanks to them, would it be conceivable to recognize the non-Jew among the two, in many positive ways, as is customary with Righteous Among the Nations, and ignore the role played by the Jewish rescuer in the same heroic effort? To me, this distinction is completely immoral.”<sup>18</sup>

The compendium of rescue operations presented in this booklet is intended to tell the story of Jewish rescuers, their motivations and heroic achievements. We must remember the non-Jews, but also the Jews “who did the right thing... [and] proved that even in the darkest hours of human history, the human spirit prevailed.”<sup>19</sup>

We would like to conclude this overview with a quote from a letter written by Albert Einstein in June 1939 to Maurice Lenz, a Jew who was active in bringing Jewish refugees from Germany to the USA: “We have no other means of self-defense than our solidarity and our knowledge that the cause for which we are suffering is a momentous and sacred cause.”<sup>20</sup>

15. Mordechai Paldiel, “Saving One’s Own – Jewish Rescuers during the Holocaust”, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, University of Nebraska Press, 2017, p. xxi

16. Patrick Henry, “Jewish Resistance against the Nazis”, Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 2014, p. xxii

17. Patrick Henry, “Righteous Jews”, SHALOM Jewish Peace Letter, Vol. 39 No. 1, February 2010, pp. 10-11

18. Asa Kasher, letter to the Committee to Recognize the Heroism of Jewish Rescuers, dated May 17th, 2016.

19. Ron Prosor, from his speech in the UN General Assembly on International Holocaust Memorial Day, January 27th, 2014

20. letter by Albert Einstein on Jewish resilience <https://www.timesofisrael.com/einsteins-1939-letter-calling-for-jewish-solidarity-sells-for-over-134000/>.



## The Zionist Youth Resistance Movement in Hungary, 1944 – David Gur

In 1940, during World War II, Hungary joined the Axis countries (Germany, Italy, Japan) who fought against the Allies. In the same year, the Hungarian Ministry of Interior closed all branches of the Zionist Federation in provincial towns, except Budapest, and banned the activities of Zionist youth movements. These movements continued to carry out limited activities, under different names, and held their meetings in private homes. Meetings between the activists of the different movements took place in the Palestine Office and the Jewish National Fund bureau, whose activities in Budapest continued uninterrupted. In late 1943 and early 1944, it became clear to the leadership of the Zionist youth movements in Hungary that a systematic annihilation of European Jews by the Germans was under way.

In February 1944, representatives of the different Zionist youth movements formed the “Defense Committee”(Haganah Committee), which included four members: Leon Blatt (Hanoar Hatzioni), Dov Avrahamchik (B'nei Akiva), Menahem Klein\* (Maccabi Hatzair), and Moshe Alpan\* (Hashomer Hatzair). Its appointed chief was Moshe Rosenberg (Gordon Circle). The committee members were assigned specific activities and responsibilities in the event of a German invasion of Hungary, such as building bunkers, stockpiling food, procuring weapons and obtaining the appropriate documents for underground activity. This laid the foundations for the formation of the Zionist Youth Resistance Movement in Hungary.

By the time the Germans entered Hungary on March 19, 1944, the leaders of Zionist youth movements realized that Hungary's Jewish population of 900,000 people, as well as

approximately 70,000 Jewish refugees who had escaped from countries occupied by the Germans earlier in the war, were all that remained of European Jewry. The leadership saw it as its obligation and responsibility to do everything – the possible as well as the impossible – to rescue Hungary's Jews and foil the plot of the Germans and their collaborators to exterminate them.

The entry of Germany into Hungary took the Hungarian authorities and the Jewish institutions by surprise, but not the leadership of Zionist youth movements. Already on the night of March 19th and on the following day, while other organizations did not yet grasp the dramatic implications of what was happening, the Zionist Youth leadership reacted. The heads of the movements ordered adult members over the age of 17 to assume an Aryan identity and go underground. Under their new identity, the anti-Jewish laws that were to follow would not apply to them, and they would be free to save others. This strategic decision marked the beginning of resistance activity. Thus, on the very day the Germans entered Hungary, the Zionist Youth Resistance Movement in Hungary (ZYRM) was formed.

In addition to assuming Aryan identities, the ZYRM initiated two rescue operations:

- Sending emissaries to provincial Jewish communities and to forced labor camps
- Smuggling Jewish youth across the Romanian border toward Mandatory Palestine

The Zionist Youth Resistance Movement sent emissaries to the provinces, to remote Jewish communities and to forced labor camps, in order to warn them about the expected anti-Jewish decrees: the ghettoization, the impending deportation, and the real purpose of the deportation. The



emissaries brought with them the appropriate documents as well as money and instructions, to help Jewish youth escape to Budapest.

Written documentation from 1944 reveals that approximately 200 emissaries visited some 300 communities and forced labor camps. In Hungary, the ZYRM was the only organization that initiated and carried out these dangerous missions to rescue others. Among those courageous emissaries we would like to mention David Grünwald, Shmuel Löwenheim\*, Yaakov Szamosi, Eliezer Kadmon\*, Yeshayahu Resenblum\*, Ephraim Agmon\*, Asher Arani, Tamar Benshalom\*, Shoshana Barzel\*, Hana Ganz, Moshe Weiskopf\*, Sarah Kohavi\*, Ephraim Nadav\*, Hedva Szántó\*, Neshka Goldfarb\*, Menachem Tzvi Kadari\*, Betzalel Adler, Pinhas Rosenbaum\*, Joseph Gárdos, and the list goes on...

The only way to escape the deportation to concentration and extermination camps, and the certain death that loomed there, was Aliyah – escaping across the Romanian border enroute to the Land of Israel (then “Palestine”). And so began the organized smuggling of Jewish youth (“Tiyul” [excursion] was the Hebrew code word – even among professional non-Jewish smugglers) to Romania through the border towns of Szeged, Kolozsvár, Békéscsaba and Nagyvárad. Among the activists who took part in this dangerous operation were Hana Ganz, Asher Arani, Moshe Alpan, Yaakov Diósi\*, Ephraim Agmon, Yehuda Levi\* and Menachem Tzvi Kadari.

The meticulously organized smuggling operation ended on August 23, 1944. By then Romania had switched sides and joined the Soviet Union in its war against Germany, thus turning the Romanian-Hungarian border into a battlefield.

According to records in the registries of the Jewish communities in the towns of Arad and Turda, approximately 15,000 Jewish youths were

illegally smuggled across the border between April and August 1944. The scope of this operation, which saved those involved from certain death, was unprecedented in World War II German-occupied Europe.

On October 15, 1944, the Hungarian fascist Arrow Cross Party seized power, which marked the beginning of the brutal persecution of Budapest’s Jews. Every day, Jewish men and women of all ages were ordered to report to forced labor service. These decrees meant that the adult Jewish population in Budapest virtually disappeared, and many children were left without parents. This led to a spontaneous reaction: neighbors and older siblings came to the offices of the International Red Cross at 4 Mérleg Street, where they left the parentless children. The ZYRM reacted immediately. Within a short period of time, 55 homes for abandoned children were set up under the protection of the International Red Cross, as part of the organization’s Department A, which was headed by Ottó Komoly\*, the president of the Zionist Federation. Department A rented buildings, procured supplies, assembled a team of caregivers from among the youth movement members, appointed an administrative and financial staff, posted guards, and hanged a sign on the front of the building: “this house is under the protection of the International Red Cross”. The Zionist Youth Resistance Movement provided the children homes with a constant supply of basic food, as well as means of heating during the cold winter months. Every evening a meeting took place that included Hansi Brand\*, head of Department A’s financial division, Rudolf Weisz, who was responsible for transport, and Efra (Ephraim) Agmon, representative of the ZYRM. They decided where supplies would be sent on the following day – to a children’s home, portected house or the central ghetto in District 7; which supplies would be sent; from which warehouse



they would be taken; and which transportation method would be used. The ZYRM was responsible for accompanying the wagons, in order to protect the food deliveries from attacks by armed groups of the Arrow Cross or arbitrary confiscation by a military unit. Delivering food supplies intact to the destination was the primary mission of the Resistance Movement; it was a critical mission for the fate of thousands of children, which endangered those who guarded the deliveries. Some of the dedicated Jewish guards lost their lives during these operations.

Throughout the murderous reign of the Arrow Cross, the siege and the battles of Budapest, the Zionist Youth Resistance Movement set up 55 children's homes, operated and sustained them, rescuing approximately 6,000 lives who survived the war. It is a unique and extraordinary episode in the annals of World War II.

From 1941 onward, the Swiss Embassy in Hungary represented many other countries that had severed their ties with Hungary because of the War. Among them was the United Kingdom, including matters related to Mandatory Palestine (as part of the British Empire) and the arrangements for Aliyah – the immigration of Jews to Palestine. Three weeks after the Allies' successful landing in Normandy (June 6, 1944; the opening of "the second front"), the forum of Hungarian government ministers approved a memorandum presented by the Swiss Embassy, permitting the use of 7,800 immigration certificates which had been issued by the authorities in Palestine and held by the Palestine Office in Budapest.

On July 24, 1944, an office dedicated to the registration of immigration requests and to facilitating Aliyah was opened in Budapest in a building called the Glass House, at 29 Vadász Street, under the sign "The Office of Foreign Interest Representation of the Swiss Legation". Until the completion of the administrative

immigration procedures, applicants received a confirmation stating that they were registered in a collective passport, and that until they leave Hungary, they were Swiss citizens who are under the protection of the Swiss Embassy. This protective certificate is known as a "Schutzpass".

The Zionist Youth Resistance Movement demanded to be represented at the Glass House, which enjoyed an extraterritorial status. Starting in August, an office with the sign "Halutz Section" operated in the building, headed by Rafi Benschalom\*. This was where ZYRM activists furnished members with the appropriate documents; where members were assigned missions; where candidates for escape over the border were briefed; where encrypted messages about a successful smuggling operation were received; and where emissaries received instructions to go to forced labor camps. The Halutz office in the Glass House also received reports about members who had been caught or imprisoned, and their release was arranged from there. Finally, the Halutz Section hosted discussions and negotiations with representatives of anti-German groups about possible collaborations. All this activity at the Halutz Section took place without the knowledge of the Glass House management or the Swiss Consul, Carl Lutz. Even the meetings of ZYRM leaders were relocated to the safety of the Glass House at that stage, instead of random, risky venues such as coffee houses and parks.

In the second half of October, after the Arrow Cross Party's rise to power, the Glass House opened its doors, at the initiative of Alexander Grossmann\* and admitted deserters from forced labor camps, to families of Zionist activists, members of ZYRM – including youth movement members, who were the natural candidates to carry out all types of rescue operations – and others. In November, another Swiss Embassy sign





was placed on a building at 17 Wekerle Street (today Hercegprímás), and 700 Jews soon gathered there. In December, the dividing wall between the Glass House basement and that of the adjacent house, a deserted building of the Hungarian football association at 31 Vadász Street, was taken down, and the space was used to house approximately 1,000 youth movement members under the authority of Dr. Shimshon Natan. The ZYRM organized the internal life of the three locations. Among the many activists involved were Moshe Biedermann\*, Simha Hunwald\* and Benjamin Feigenbaum\*. The Glass House (including all three buildings) became a safe haven to more than 4,000 Jews, who managed to survive until the liberation of Hungary by the Red Army on January 18, 1945. The house, which had been intended to serve as an office for arranging immigration (Aliyah), became a massive sanctuary for persecuted Jews – an achievement that can be credited, among many others, to the Zionist Youth Resistance Movement.

In October-November 1944, the brutal race for life began. Jewish men aged 16-60 and women aged 16-40 were ordered to report for forced labor service to build a defense system and fortifications around Budapest (October 21). Seventy units of Jewish forced laborers were deported to Germany by the Hungarian army (October 26). The horrendous death marches of women, children and the elderly were launched (November 6), and at the same time, starting from November 2, the rumble of Russian bombardments could be heard from a distance of 20 km from Budapest. The ZYRM embarked on a huge and ambitious rescue operation from within the Glass House walls: to make Swiss protective certificates available for all, to buy some time, to delay their doom!! They started printing tens of thousands of protective certificates and distributing them with the help of ZYRM activists. The operation was carried out at the Glass House, the International Red Cross

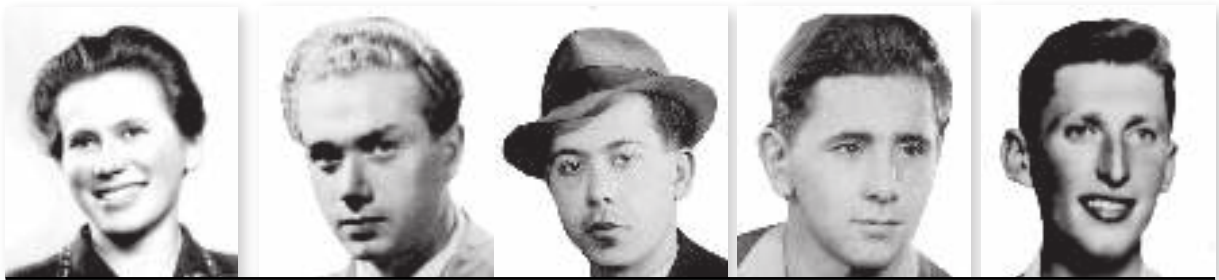
offices (at 4 Mérleg Street, 52 Baross Street and Joseph Avenue), and the new Swiss Consulate at 2-4 Perczel Mór Street, which was established specifically for the distribution of Swiss protective certificates to the general public. Mounted police stood guard in Szabadság Square, in front of the building, as the crowds stormed the new consulate while Peretz Révész\* and Avri Feigenbaum, ZYRM activists who presented themselves as consulate officers, signed the protective certificates. Entire units of forced laborers were brought back from the German border thanks to these certificates. Among those who conceived and executed this enormous and successful rescue operation was Alexander Grossman.

During May and June 1944, an anti-German alliance called Magyar Front was formed by several dissident parties and individuals. When the participants decided to take concrete steps – that is, engage in underground activity against the regime – they needed the appropriate documents. In the absence of a suitable mechanism of their own, representatives of all the groups comprising the Magyar Front approached the ZYRM with the same request: to provide them with documents that would enable their members to assume new identities and operate in the underground. All their requests were accepted. The main documents produced for the dissident groups were police residential reports, military documents, and military exemption cards for workers in military industries. Some of the noteworthy contacts formed through the collaborative effort against the regime were with Demény Pál and his close associates, and the workers' leaders Kádár Iván, Sólyom László and Galambos Futó Sándor. Representatives of the ZYRM were also in contact with liberal circles via Pál Fábry, with a group of Allied officers who had escaped German captivity via Van der Waals, and with others. The anti-German activists provided apartments, hiding





Jews Who Rescued Jews During the Holocaust



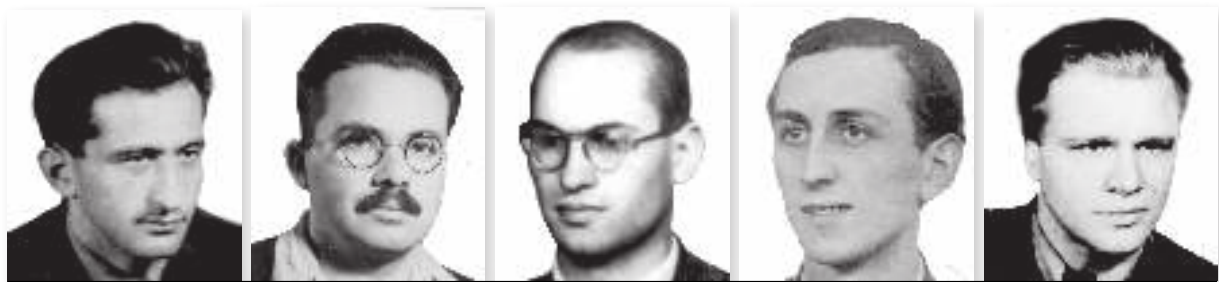
Agmon  
Tzipora

Arányi  
Asher

Rosenblum  
Yeshayahu

Gur  
David

Gárdos  
Joseph



Herbst  
Yitshak  
("Mimish")

Billitzer  
Adonyahu

Alpan  
Moshe  
("Pil")

Friedmann  
David

Benshalom  
Rafi



Kadari  
Menhahem

Szántó  
Hedva

Agmon  
Ephraim

Grünfeld  
Aniko



Grossmann  
Alexander

Révész  
Peretz

Goldfarb  
Neshka

Hunwald  
Simha



places and jobs to ZYRM members. The rescue-resistance Zionist youth – a small, persecuted, Jewish Resistance Movement – became a valued collaborator that provided assistance to local anti-German groups.

The certificate – the right certificate – was the most effective weapon of the ZYRM, and the workshop that issued these certificates was the heart of the movement. An efficient undercover team produced this invaluable "ammunition", used daily in the ZYRM's rescue operations and in the activities of other anti-Nazi resistance groups, according to changing requirements. David Gur\* was assigned to the workshop team in March 1944, joining existing team members Dan Zimmermann\* and Shraga Weil\*. Within a short time, David Gur assumed overall responsibility for running the workshop and for adapting the production process to the new demands – from designing custom-made documents to the mass production of certificates, which entailed obtaining certificate forms, preparing stamps and solving logistical-security problems.

For safety and security reasons, the ZYRM's main workshop changed its location and cover fifteen times within a ten-month period. In the days that followed the seizure of power by the Arrow Cross, the workshop operated in Baross Street, in the building that housed the library of the fascist student union (Csaba Bajtársi Egyesület) which belonged to Semmelweis University. The daily presence of a few young people, who were around the same age as the rest of the students, fit in well with the atmosphere of the place. In the beginning of December, Baruch Eisinger, the liaison between the workshop and the outside world, did not show up at the appointed time. He did not arrive at a later time either. According to the unwritten laws of the ZYRM, the workshop immediately relocated. On December 21, 1944, three workshop team members were captured in their new "workplace", a branch

of the Municipal Building Department of Budapest at 13 Erzsébet Boulevard. The three members, David Gur, Miki Langer and Avri Feigenbaum, were brutally interrogated at the Arrow Cross Party offices in District 6. Miki Langer died there as a result of the torture. The two surviving members were taken to the central military prison at Margit Boulevard, where they continued to be interrogated under torture. On December 25, in a bold operation, the ZYRM leaders liberated the two, along with 118 other members who had been imprisoned in the same place. The freed prisoners included the leadership of the Dror Habonim: Neshka and Tzvi Goldfarb, Ze'ev Eisikovics\*, Eli Shalev\*, and other important activists. Among the ZYRM leadership members who successfully executed this bold rescue operation were Moshe Alpan, Peretz Révész, Yitzhak Herbst\* and Efra (Ephraim) Agmon.

The ZYRM's main workshop in Hungary played an important role in German-occupied Europe during World War II. It stood out in terms of the scale of production, the variety of documents it produced, and the achievements of rescue and resistance operations that were facilitated by these documents.

The Zionist Youth Resistance Movement carried out unique rescue and resistance operations in Hungary during 1944 including:

- Initiating the smuggling of approximately 15,000 youths to Romania, saving them from deportation to Auschwitz, where certain death loomed.
- Sending 200 emissaries to Jewish communities and forced labor camps, in order to warn and rescue them.
- Printing and distributing protective certificates to tens of thousands of Jews.
- Establishing and running 55 children's homes, which saved 6,000 lives – an unparalleled achievement.

In 1944, the leaders of the ZYRM correctly



read the political and social situation during an extreme historical crisis, provided immediate practical response, initiated rescue operations, and assumed responsibility on matters of life and death. The leadership shrewdly delegated powers and managed the activities of the ever-expanding circle of members. The ZYRM members knowingly risked their lives to save their comrades, as well as tens of thousands of Jews they did not know, in the spirit of Jewish and human solidarity.

The ZYRM leadership's decisions on rescue operations were autonomous; they received orders from no one, neither locally nor from abroad. The activists could have escaped and saved themselves at any time, but they never did. They stayed on their guard and risked their lives, again and again, to save others.

The leaders of the ZYRM had the wisdom to include in the rescue operations all the different factions of Zionist youth movements in Hungary, including Hanoar Hatzioni, Dror Habonim, Maccabi Hatzair, Hashomer Hatzair and B'nei Akiva, who all cooperated, in harmony and solidarity, under one roof. All activities were managed without animosity or ideological or personal clashes. This comprehensive inter-movement collaboration, during the reign of fascists and Nazi collaborators in Hungary, was undoubtedly one of the contributing factors in the success of rescue operations in Hungary. The ZYRM's activities had a social-political significance for the general Jewish public. Toward the end of Ferenc Szálasi's regime, the Jewish public in Budapest saw in the ZYRM and its leaders an alternative Jewish leadership.

The German Nazis and Hungarian fascists intended to eliminate Hungarian Jews without a trace. The Zionist Youth Resistance Movement boldly resisted and thwarted these plans and managed to rescue more than 30,000 people. Although the Zionist youth movements were

badly battered by the destructiveness of war, they realized that the impossible can be achieved with courage and sacrifice.

According to Prof. Randolph L. Braham, the Zionist Youth Resistance Movement's operations constituted the only organized resistance against what became a murderous Hungarian regime after the Germans entered Hungary in 1944.

The inimitable large-scale rescue efforts of the ZYRM, which resulted in some impressive achievements during the reign of Hungarian fascists and Nazi collaborators, is a glorious page in the history of Hungarian Jewry and a lesson and inspiration for generations to come.

David Gur

March 2020

#### **Recommended reading:**

- Avihu Ronen: "The Battle for Life", Yad Ya'ary Publishing House, 1994.
- Asher Cohen: "The Halutz Resistance in Hungary 1942-1944", Institute for Holocaust Studies of the City University of New York 1986.
- Rafi Benshalom: We Struggled for Life: The Hungarian Zionist Youth Resistance During the Nazi Era, The Society for the Research of the History of the Zionist Youth Movement in Hungary, 2001.
- David Gur: Brothers for Resistance and Rescue, Edited by Eli Netzer, "The Underground Zionist Youth Movement in Hungary during World War II", The Society for the Research of the History of the Zionist Youth Movement in Hungary, 2007, 2010.
- Gábor Kádár, Christine Schmidt van der Zanden, and Zoltán Vági: Jewish Resistance and Self Rescue in Hungary, in Patrick Henry (ed.): "Jewish Resistance against the Nazis" (pp. 519-546), The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C. 2014.



## Rescue by the Jewish Resistance in France - Dr. Tsilla Hershco<sup>21</sup>

The networks of Jewish resistance in France operated throughout the period of German occupation - from June 1940 to September 1944. Each network was established as a separate, autonomous entity, but they cooperated with each other in various areas: rescuing thousands of children and adults, issuing forged documents, smuggling Jewish convoys to Switzerland and Spain, and establishing guerilla groups in French cities and organizing groups of "Maquis" (partisans) in southern France. These networks were united under an umbrella organization known as "Organisation Juive de Combat" - OJC. Members of OJC took part in the battles to liberate France following the invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944. After the war, the French authorities recognized them as members of an organization which fought against the Nazis, for which they received war decorations. Approximately 230,000 of the 320,000 Jews who resided in France at the beginning of the war (including Jewish refugees from other occupied countries) were rescued from the grip of the Nazis and their French Vichy collaborators. The Jewish resistance networks played a vital role in the rescue of roughly three quarters of the Jews in France but paid a heavy price: around 200 of its members were killed during the underground operations.

The OJC umbrella organization encompassed nine Jewish resistance networks: the Jewish Army, the Jewish Scouts, the Zionist Youth Movement, the OSE-Garel Organization, the Rabbis of the Camps, the Amelot Street Committee, the André Group, the Moussa Abadi Group and the Dutch Group.

### The Jewish Army

The first nucleus of "The Jewish Army" (Armée Juive - A.J.) was established in Toulouse immediately following the German occupation of France. In June 1940, "The Strong Arm" (La Main Forte - M.F.) was established by the poet David Knout\* and his wife Ariane-Régine Knout\* together with Abraham\* and Eugenie Polonski. Later, In January 1942, they established an underground organization named The Jewish Army together with the Socialist underground in Toulouse headed by Lucien Lublin.

The immediate and urgent objective of A.J was to rescue Jews from the Nazis who were already engaged in the persecution of Jews when the network was founded. A.J. also set an objective of engaging in armed struggle against the Nazis by means of guerilla groups that it would establish in the principal cities of France (named "Corps Franc"- C.F.) and Maquis guerilla groups in the mountains. The organization set up workshops for producing and distributing forged documents, established infrastructure for crossing the border into Switzerland and Spain, and transferred money from Switzerland for the various needs of the underground.

The headquarters of the A.J. were in Toulouse, which became known as "the capital of the Jewish resistance". Polonski ran the organization from the French ONIA chemical factory, where he worked as a chemical engineer. The activity was also conducted from a radio shop located near Gestapo headquarters in Toulouse. The city was the point of departure of groups joining the Maquis in the mountains as well as of the convoys to Spain.

21. Dr. Tsilla Hershco is a Senior Research Associate at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA), and a "Spiegel Fellow" at The Arnold and Leona Finkler Institute of Holocaust Research, both at Bar Ilan University, Israel.





Ariane Knout coordinated these operations. On July 22, 1944, she came with Raoul Leons - a high-ranking commander in A.J. Maquis as well as in the French "Secret Army" resistance network in the Tarn - to a safe house in Toulouse to meet with other A.J. Maquis members. There they fell into an ambush laid by two French militiamen. When one of the militiamen left the apartment to call for help, Ariane and Raoul attacked the other one. Ariane was killed by the militiaman and Raul Leons was seriously wounded but survived. The tragic incident could have been prevented had Ariane listened to her comrades warnings that the enemy had advance knowledge of the meeting. Ariane reacted to the warnings with her signature motto: "If you fear, you do not act". These words reflected her courageous and uncompromising devotion to her clandestine rescue activities. However, there was probably a certain amount of incautiousness in her conduct, letting down her guard due to the fatigue produced by so many years of dangerous clandestine activity and the anticipation of imminent victory over the Nazis. Ariane's tragic death, less than a month before the liberation of Toulouse, was a severe blow to the Jewish Resistance and, naturally, to her three children.

Ariane's daughter Betty Knout-Lazarus\* inherited her mother's exceptional courage. In 1942 the 15-year-old Betty, a member of A.J., smuggled her stepfather David Knout to Switzerland, since the Germans were in pursuit of him. In 1943, she smuggled Marc Yarblum, the head of the Zionist movement in France, into Switzerland when they knew that he too was under surveillance. Betty carried out many other dangerous missions, such as transporting arms. Once, when alighting a train with dismantled weapons in her suitcase, a German soldier kindly offered to help her and expressed surprise at the suitcase's weight. Betty replied with an innocent smile that the suitcase contained arms. The German soldier smiled back

and she continued on her way. In August 1944, she participated in the battle for the liberation of Paris. After Liberation, she became a military correspondent, attached to the French army.

The C.F. groups of A.J. in Lyon served as the center for communications with Switzerland, mainly for the purpose of smuggling money for various needs of the underground activities. In May 1944, members the C.F. raided the offices of the "General Union of the Jews in France" (Union Générale des Israélites de France - UGIF), destroying all files pertaining to Jews, thus preventing the Germans from obtaining information about them. After retreating, they returned to destroy any remaining files with explosives, while taking precautions not to harm the UCIF employees there. The operation was accomplished by Ernest Lambert\*, the commander of the C.F. in Lyon, and Maurice Hausner\*, both senior commanders in the "Jewish Army".

Ernest Lambert and his wife Anne-Marie\* ran a newspaper shop near Gestapo headquarters, which served as a cover for clandestine operations. Ann-Marie undertook multiple successful missions to transfer money from Switzerland to finance the many needs of the underground rescue activities. At the end of June 1944, Ernest Lambert and Maurice Hausner escorted her to the train station enroute to one of her missions. Ernest had an insurance agent's certificate that allowed him to travel throughout the period of his clandestine activities. Unfortunately, that day he forgot the certificate in a jacket at home, wearing instead another jacket with a perilously compromising list in its pocket. The German controllers discovered the list, which in fact was a record of money transfers. Rather than taking the train, Ann-Marie Lambert went together with Maurice Hausner to Gestapo headquarters to try to persuade the Germans that her husband was not a "terrorist", thus endangering her own life





as well. Indeed, the Germans threatened to arrest her, and she understood that she had to flee as quickly as possible. Ernest Lambert was executed by the Nazis a few days before Liberation. The tragic incident, as in Arian's case, probably reflects the fatigue as well as the decline in alertness resulting from the approaching liberation.

The C.F. activities in Nice from April to June of 1944 included the assassination of informers who collaborated with the Gestapo and the blowing up of a night club and an antique shop, both of which served as centers for anti-Jewish activities. Consequently, the gang of informers disappeared from the streets of Nice and the arrests of Jews decreased by 80%. In addition, the Jewish Zionist Youth Movement and "La Sixième" (The Sixth), the underground network of the Jewish Scouts (EIF) in Nice, cooperated mainly in producing forged documents.

The C.F. group in Grenoble functioned as a center for producing and distributing forged documents and organizing border crossings into Switzerland. They also recruited volunteers to accompany convoys to Spain, maintained a military training center as well as a branch for relaying secret radio transmissions.

In January 1944, several members of the Nice C.F. group were sent to establish a C.F. group in Paris. At that time there was no organized activities of A.J. in Paris since the underground Zionist group that had operated in cooperation with the Amelo Street Committee, had been eliminated by the Germans in 1943. The C.F. group in Paris executed informers and blew up a factory that manufactured parts for German V5 rockets. In July 1944, members of A.J. in Paris fell into a trap set by a double agent of the Gestapo, resulting in the arrest of 14 members. The prisoners were interrogated and tortured but revealed no information. They were sent to Drancy but, fortunately, almost all of them managed to escape on the way to Auschwitz by jumping from

the train.

Despite the severe blow, the C.F. Paris group succeeded in organizing themselves into a fighting unit after receiving A.J. reinforcements from Nice, Lyon, and Toulouse. The group ultimately numbered 90 including members of the Zionist Youth Movement and Jewish Scouts, all of whom took part in the liberation of Paris. Members of the Paris C.F. were the first to enter Drancy and free the remaining Jewish prisoners there.

### **The Jewish Scouts**

The "Jewish Scouts" (Eclaireurs Israélites de France – EIF), was established in 1923 by Robert Gamzon\*, who continued to head the organization during the war. The Jewish Scouts established farms in southern France with the aim of providing young people with professional training, while emphasizing the humanitarian and spiritual values of Judaism. The Jewish Scouts was recognized as a legitimate organization since it was perceived by the Vichy regime as serving its objectives – particularly the ideal of "returning to the land". The Vichy regime even provided the organization with financial support. Under the guise of legitimacy, the organization worked secretly to rescue Jews, while taking advantage of financial aid from UGIF.

The organization went underground when the Germans occupied southern France in November 1942 and created its clandestine arm - the "Sixth" (La Sixième). Members of the Jewish Scouts hid children and adults, smuggled them across the border into Switzerland and furnished them with forged documents. The first guerilla Maquis groups of the Jewish Scouts were established in November 1943 in La Malquiere - an isolated farm in the mountains of Lacaune, east of Vabre. From April 1944 additional Maquis groups were organized in La Farasse, Laroque, and Lacado. The incentive for the formation of these additional



guerilla groups was the Jewish Scouts decision to dismantle all their farms in April and May 1944 in order to prevent their members from falling into German captivity.

The groups primary function was to pick up parcels of ammunition, equipment and food that were dropped by parachute at various points and deliver them to the local forces. Members of the group participated in seven operations to collect equipment from the drop-off point at La Virgule from June 29 to August 8, 1944. On August 18, 1944, the group set up an ambush and placed explosives on the railroad tracks, capturing 60 German soldiers in the operation. The Jewish Scouts guerilla group also participated in a raid two kilometers from La Bruguiere, resulting in the surrender of 3,500 German garrison troops.

Members of the guerilla groups of the Jewish Scouts, which operated under the "Secret French Army", signed an agreement with the A.J. on June 1, 1944, under which the military branch of the Jewish Scouts was integrated into the A.J. They received financial support from the A.J. on condition that they submit detailed reports of their activities. Many members of the Jewish Scouts led the A.J. convoys to Spain. Among them was Leo Cohen\*, one of the organizations leaders (the brother of former supreme court judge Haim Cohen). Leo Cohen was captured in the Toulouse train station while accompanying a group to Spain. He was sent to Drancy, where he cared for orphaned children detainees. He was sent to Auschwitz, and perished in the "death march" imposed on the prisoners on the eve of the area's liberation. His wife and three children were smuggled out to Switzerland and ultimately immigrated to Israel.

### **The Zionist Youth Movement**

A federation of Zionist youth movements existed in France before the war. The aim of these movements was to spread the Zionist idea

among French Jewish youth, while each group within the federation remained autonomous. Even after the German occupation of June 1940, local Zionist youth groups continued their educational activities. However, no attempt was made to unite the various movements due to the geographical distance between the groups, the difficulties in transportation and communication, and the ideological differences that set each movement apart.

In May 1942, the first congress of French Zionist youth movements took place in Montpellier, with 25 representatives from the so-called "free region" of southern France. The congress decided to establish a single united Zionist Youth Movement (Mouvement de Jeunesse Sioniste - MJS). The new movement united all the French Zionist youth groups, disregarding their previous political differences and emphasizing their common Zionist ideologies and values. The congress also decided to make MJS a clandestine movement and, therefore, not to register it at the UGIF offices. The congress also made another principled decision - to focus on rescue activities rather than military operations.

This decision was translated into a division of tasks between MJS and the A.J. whereby MJS focused on rescue activities while A.J. focused on military operations. However, this division was not rigid since many MJS members, who were also in A.J., were sent to the Maquis guerilla groups of A.J. for military training. In addition, A.J. also performed rescue operations as noted above. A.J. was interested in retaining a reservoir of manpower from the MJS which entitled them to receive financial resources from the Zionist Federation.

During the mass arrests in the southern region in August 1942, the Zionist Youth Movement established the "Social Service for the Youth" whose primary function was to smuggle children out of



the camps and hide them. The organization was established in cooperation with the “La Sixième”, the clandestine arm of the Jewish Scouts. At the end of 1942, the two organizations decided to cooperate through a joint supervisory committee.

In January 1943, the MJS established an underground network named “Physical Education” for hiding young people, and producing and distributing forged documents. Their representatives located young people who needed to be hidden and housed them on farms. They also initiated educational activities, taught clandestine courses in Jewish history and Zionism and established a mobile library. Members of the network also smuggled convoys of children to Switzerland. They exposed themselves to great danger when reaching out to municipal secretaries and mayors of the regional councils to ask that they affix official seals to the forged documents, as well as forging the names of Jews in the population registries.

Frida Wattenberg\* (alias: Thérèse Verdier), a member of the OSE, MJS and A.J., started her activities of children’s rescue already in 1940, when she was a high-school student in Paris. She engaged in numerous and diverse rescue activities: issuing forged documents, hiding children, transferring money to the underground and moving convoys of children and adults to Switzerland and to Spain. These missions were extremely perilous and more than once Frida managed to avoid capture when she learned that the Germans were searching for her. She had a “non-Jewish” appearance and could live in relative security with the help of high-quality “forged genuine” ID documents she possessed. However, she chose to endanger herself repeatedly by continuing to carry out rescue missions.

Otto Giniewski-Eitan Guinat\* (alias: Toto) and Lily Sitner Giniewski\* met during their rescue activities in Grenoble and married at

the Grenoble municipality with their forged ID documents. Toto was one of the founders of the Zionist Youth Movement and the commander of the Grenoble group. He conducted the group's rescue activities from his laboratory at Grenoble University, where he was conducting his doctoral research in chemistry. In January 1944, when the Gestapo came to the university to arrest him, he succeeded in escaping, not before discarding the forged documents kept in the laboratory. His pregnant wife Lily was already waiting for him at home with a small suitcase. They took the train to a safe house. Just before arriving they had to stop at the hospital in Montauban, where Lily gave birth to their daughter Judith. Toto, Lilly and the baby arrived shortly afterwards in Caussade, where Toto continued his rescue activities.

### **The OSE – Garel Organization for the Rescue of Children**

The Organization for the Rescue of Children (Oeuvre de Secours Aux Enfants - OSE), was founded in 1912 by a group of doctors in St. Petersburg, Russia. The organization relocated to Paris in 1933. The OSE specialized in providing welfare services and medical aid for children. During the war, the organization removed children from detainment camps, housed them in OSE residences and provided them with health care and education. In September 1943, the OSE’s clandestine arm, the “Garel Network”, was created by Georges Garel and Dr. Joseph Weil, the director of OSE in southern France. The aim of the network was to rescue children whose safety could not be guaranteed in OSE residences. Archbishop Jules-Géraud Saliege from Toulouse assisted Garel in the mission to rescue children.

The Garel Network became a widespread organization that specialized in rescuing children. A group of social workers was responsible for moving the children to hiding places. They also



discretely visited the children on a regular basis and ensured the flow of monthly payments to people and institutions in charge of the hiding places. Garel operated in a compartmentalized manner: the social workers knew only the people who were directly in charge of them. Andrée Salomon\* supervised the social workers and coordinated between the activities of the legal OSE and its Garel clandestine arm.

Garel also adhered meticulously to strict rules of security regarding contacts with the outside world. The children's addresses were hidden even from their parents to ensure their safety. The network kept secret lists of the children so that they could be located when the war was over. These lists were held by priests who were not hiding children. An additional list, containing the names of 1,600 children, was smuggled out by OSE and handed over to the International Committee of the Red Cross in Switzerland. After the war, the organization helped rehabilitate the rescued children in its dedicated children's homes.

The OSE-Garel members, in cooperation with members of the Zionist Youth Movement, moved convoys of children and adults to Switzerland. These operations were extremely perilous due to the strict control of the German border guards. Mila Racine\* (alias: Marie-Anne Richmond) and Marianne Cohn\* (alias: Marianne Colin), both members of OSE and MJS, were apprehended (in September 1943 and May 1944 respectively) while transferring convoys of children to Switzerland.

Mila and Marianne were tortured but did not disclose the names of their commanders and comrades. Moreover, they rejected their comrades offers to free them from prison, since they feared the Nazis would take revenge on the children who had been arrested with them. Mila Racine was killed during an Allied bombardment of the Mauthausen concentration camp, a few days before its liberation. Marianne Cohn was executed by the

Gestapo on July 1944, just one month before the regions liberation. The two groups of children were liberated from German prison. Mila and Marianne became national heroines in France and were decorated posthumously with military medals.

### **The Rabbis of the Camps**

The Rabbis of the Detention Camps (Les rabbins des camps) played an important role in rescuing Jews in France. The rabbis operated mainly in the southern region. The Vichy regime agreed to the appointment of Rabbi René Hirschler as chief rabbi of the camps and authorized him and other rabbis to provide religious services to the prisoners. Concurrently, the rabbis of the camps conducted underground activities, including smuggling people out of the detention camps and furnishing them with forged documents.

There was no such service of rabbis of the camps in the northern German-held region. However, Rabbi Eli Bloc from Metz performed the job on his own initiative until he was arrested by the Nazis and sent to an extermination camp with his whole family.

### **The Amelot Street Committee**

The Amelot Street Committee (Comité de la rue Amelot) was established by a group of activists from the Federation of Jewish Organizations in June 1940, following the German occupation of Paris. The organization was named after the street where its headquarters was located. The members of the committee established a social-medical center and popular canteens. Young members of the socialist "Hashomer Hatzair" movement also operated within the framework of the committee. The committee enjoyed official status, but its leadership decided not to operate under the command or supervision of the Germans. The committee aided Jews in detainment camps, smuggled them out of the camps and provided





them with forged documents. Most of the committee members were arrested by the Nazis and sent to extermination camps in 1942.

### **Service André**

"Service André" was established in Marseille in the autumn of 1942 by Joseph Bass, who was known as "Monsieur André". The network focused on rescuing and hiding Jewish children in southern France and established a guerilla group whose members took part in the battles to liberate France.

The network attempted to grant an overall solution to families. At first, many of the refugees were brought to the Italian region and were later smuggled to Switzerland or Spain. In Marseille, Joseph Bass was aided by Father Marie Benoit. Bass smuggled Jews to Chambon-sur-Lignon, where the Protestant minister André Trocmé helped in providing hiding places to Jews. Joseph Bass extended his rescue network to additional cities such as Grenoble and Lyon. Initially, he funded his rescue activities from his own pocket, and later he was granted funds by the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC).

Bass remained in Marseille together with Denise Siekierski\* (Colibry) after the mass arrests that took place at the end of January 1943. They continued their rescue activities with the help of Father René Lemaire. After being exposed by informers, Bass and Siekierski were forced to flee Marseille, but Father Lemaire refused to leave. He was captured, sent to Mauthausen and Dachau, and returned after the war.

At the end of the winter of 1944, Monsieur André established a guerilla group in Chambon Sur Lignon that participated in the battles to liberate France under the command of the internal French forces. The Jewish guerillas were able to operate in the area thanks to the sympathetic Protestant population. The Chambon Sur Lignon Maquis group reached an agreement with the A.J. under

which A.J. provided the group with equipment, arms and training. Members of the Maquis had to pledge loyalty to the A.J. The Chambon Sur Lignon guerilla group provided cover for members of A.J., as a security measure, after performing underground rescue missions.

### **The Moussa Abadi Network**

The Moussa Abadi network began operating after the occupation of the Italian border region of France in September 1943. Thousands of Jews, who had succeeded in fleeing from the German-controlled areas to the relatively secure Italian region, became victims of an intensive manhunt under the command of Alois Brunner.

Moussa Abadi\* was a Jewish actor of Syrian descent. He was invited by Paul Rémond, the Bishop of Nice, to teach phonetics to the students at the local theological seminary. He provided Abadi with forged papers identifying him as a supervisor of Catholic education in the diocese, which enabled him to travel freely in the area and rescue Jews.

Abadi contacted Garel, who preferred not to become affiliated with the new network but offered Abadi advice and contacts. Like Garel, Abadi began searching for Christian and secular institutions that were willing to hide children. He recruited social workers and began issuing forged documents from a workshop that operated in his workplace with the consent of the diocese staff. He received financial assistance from the Joint and managed to rescue 500 children without suffering any losses.

### **The Dutch Group**

The Dutch group was a Zionist underground of the "Hechalutz" (pioneer) movement in the occupied Netherlands, which included refugees from Germany and Austria. The group was headed by Yoachim Simon\* (nicknamed "Shushu"), who had escaped from Dachau to the Netherlands. Simon, in cooperation with Joop Westerweel,





a non-Jewish Dutch schoolteacher who headed a Dutch underground group, initiated rescue operations of Jews. Westerweel was captured by the Germans and executed in March 1944.

Members of the group came to occupied France later and cooperated with members of the French Jewish resistance.

Simon sought to organize a rescue operation for transferring Jews from the Netherlands to France and from there to Switzerland. To that end he met with the socialist Zionist leader Marc Yarblum in Lyon in the autumn of 1942. The program, however, was never implemented. Simon sought to initiate another rescue operation across the Spanish border and therefore met with Otto Giniewski - Eytan Guinat ("Toto") in December 1942. Guinat advised him to contact the A.J. in Toulouse. Simon was caught by the Germans during his travels in January 1943 and committed suicide in the Breda prison on the Dutch-Belgium border, apparently fearing that he would not withstand the torture and would reveal his comrades' secrets. Simon's wife, Adina Simon-Van Coevorden, continued his initiative and met with Marc Yarblum, who had been smuggled into Switzerland for protection. Yarblum helped her and other members of the Dutch group to contact members of the A.J. in Toulouse. Members of the Dutch group were voluntarily transferred to a TODT<sup>22</sup> work camp in La Manche and to a submarine base in La Rochelle using forged documents. At the La Rochelle base, they managed to acquire forged border passes, which enabled them to smuggle about 100 members of the group across the border to France. They provided forged documents to A.J. as well. These enabled the A.J. to move many members of the Jewish resistance to Spain including members of the Dutch group. Some Dutch group members joined the A.J. guerilla group in Paris. Most of

them were captured by the Nazis in April 1943 or July 1944, and sent to Auschwitz. Paula Kaufman\* worked at the Gestapo headquarters in Paris and delivered information and forged documents to her comrades until she was exposed and sent to Auschwitz. She ultimately survived.

Some members of the Dutch group who were sent by A.J. to its guerilla groups in southern France, joined the Allies in the battles for the liberation of France. Most of the members of the Dutch group made Aliya to pre-State Israel, thus fulfilling their Zionist ideal.

In conclusion, the unique story of hundreds of members of the Jewish resistance in France is not well known to the general public in Israel and the world. They did not ask for honors and awards for their dangerous rescue activities, since they believed they had only fulfilled their duty. At the same time, they wished to impart to the future generations their legacy and values of solidarity.

\*Jewish Rescuers Citation recipient

#### **Recommended reading:**

- Tsilla Hershco, "Those Who Walk in the Dark Will See Light, The Jewish Resistance in France during the Holocaust and the Creation of Israel, 1940-1949", Tel Aviv, Israel Galili Association for Research of the Defense Forces, 2003, Effi Meltzer Publishing House, 2018. [Hebrew].
  - Nathan Bracher, "Up in Arms: Jewish Resistance against Nazis" Germany in France, in Patrick Henry (ed.): Jewish Resistance against the Nazis (pp. 73-120), The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C. 2014.
  - Mordecai Paldiel, "Saving One's Own Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust", The Jewish Publication Society Philadelphia, 2017, p. 201-264
- the Holocaust, Mordecai Paldiel, The Jewish Publication Society Philadelphia, 2017, p. 201-264

22. TODT was the forced labor organization established by the Germans in all occupied countries, including France



## The Committee for Jewish Defense in Belgium (Comité de défense des Juifs - CDJ)

The "Committee for Jewish Defense" (CDJ) was established in September 1942 as a cooperative effort of Communist and Zionist organizations. Their objective was to rescue as many Jews as possible from the roundups that were being conducted by the Gestapo in Antwerp and Brussels in August of 1942. The CDJ rescued Jewish children and helped Jewish adults survive the harsh conditions of life in the underground.

The Association des Juifs en Belgique (AJB) – the Association of Jews in Belgium – had been operating since the end of 1941, serving as the Belgian Judenvereinigung (Jundenrat), under total subservience to the Gestapo. When evictions began, the Communist organization "Solidarité Juive" and the Left Labor Zionist organization "Mutual Help" worked to rescue children and adults by finding hiding places and ensuring their survival. Both organizations operated independently due to ideological differences. The Left Labor Zionist organization was headed by Fela Perelman who established four kindergartens that continued to functioned from the beginning of 1942. The rescue activities of "Solidarité" were directed by Yvonne Jospa.

CDJ was established through cooperation between Jews and Christians. Its initiators were, among others, Ghert-Hertz Jospa, a 37-year-old Communist from Bessarabia and his left-wing Catholic friend Émile Hambresin, president of the Belgian Committee Against Racism. Both were members of the Belgian underground known as the "Front de l'indépendance" (FI) under which CDJ operated. Eight people attended the founding meeting of the Committee for Jewish Defense: Émile Hambresin, Ghert-Hertz Jospa, Eugène Hellendael, Maurice Mandelbaum from "Jewish Solidarity", Edouard

Rotkel, the secretary of the Jewish Community in Brussels, Abusz Werber from Left Labor Zionists, Chaim Perelman, a professor from the University of Brussels and a Zionist who had contacts in the faculties of various universities and Benjamin Nykerk who had experience in hiding Jews for short periods with the Perelman family. Perelman and Werber were the only two who managed to escape the Gestapo during their activities. The other six were sent to the death camps and only Jospa and Mandelbaum survived.

The activities of CDJ concentrated on politics, information and practical work. The political department encouraged the Jewish population to disobey the German instructions and the initiatives of the Association of Jews in Belgium. This department was also responsible for publishing underground newspapers.

The department for practical work focused on rescuing children and smuggling them out of AJB institutions that the Germans knew about. Maurice Heiber joined AJB for this purpose. He was responsible for transferring files from AJB to CDJ and activists from the organization began to evacuate children accordingly. CDJ retained complete details about the children, their parents, place of residence and economic situation. The Jewish children were moved to families and to Christian religious and secular institutions. The department for practical work also aided adults by providing forged documents, supplies and food ration coupons, finding employment for Jews as domestic help, and providing financial support. With the help of patriotic Belgian postal workers, they were able to intercept letters by informers to the Gestapo, delay their delivery and warning the targets to take precautions.



The Children's Department was directed by Maurice Heiber and the Adults Department was headed by Chaim Perelman. These two departments were supported by several professional departments. The Financial Department was directed by Benjamin Nykerk, a Dutch underground fighter who resided in Belgium. Nykerk was arrested and deported in December 1943 and was replaced by David Ferdman. The department for forging documents was directed by Abusz Werber, and the department for providing food and ration coupons and the information department were directed jointly by Chaim Perelman and Abusz Werber who were fluent in many languages.

The children's department was divided into several sections. The reception center was directed by Yvonne Jospa. The section for placement, that was responsible for locating hiding places, was directed by Ida Sterno. The children's department also included a section for providing shoes and clothing. The adoption section coordinated requests for adoption that were submitted to the CDJ from all social sectors. The communications section was responsible for meetings between children and their parents that took place on rare occasions.

The main branch of the CDJ was located in Brussels and directed by Mr. Emile Hambresin until his arrest in 1943. Other branches existed in Charleroi and Liège. The organization operated in Antwerp - which was characterized by wide local support of the Nazi regime - only from the end of 1943. Three small groups had operated in Antwerp previously - the Abraham Manaster group, the Josef Sterngold group, and the Leopold Flam group - but these three groups did not cooperate with each other.

The CDJ suffered losses during the war. Many of its members were captured and sent to concentration camps. The CDJ rescued 3,000 -

4,000 Jewish children and 5,000 adults. 55% of the 75,000 Jews who lived in Belgium prior to WWII (only 6% of whom were Belgian nationals), including some 22,000 recent refugees from Germany, survived the Holocaust due to three factors: the immediate response of the Jews themselves who went underground, the activities of the Jewish Defense Committee and the support of the local population.

**Recommended reading:**

- Mordecai Paldiel, "Saving One's Own Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust", The Jewish Publication Society Philadelphia, 2017, p. 265-286
- Suzanne Vroman, Unique Aspects of Jewish Armed Resistance and Rescue in Belgium, in Patrick Henry (ed.): "Jewish Resistance against the Nazis" (pp. 73-120), The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C. 2014, p. 121-137
- Michel Weber, "The Word of Abusz Weber", self-published, 2017.



## Individual Accounts of Heroism by recipient of the Jewish Rescuers Citation

### Wilfrid Israel

Wilfrid Israel was born in London in 1899 to a wealthy family of Berliner merchants. In the biography written by Naomi Shepherd entitled "Wilfrid Israel, German Jewry's Secret Ambassador,"<sup>23</sup> she reveals his involvement in rescue operations that saved tens of thousands of Jews from the terror of Nazi persecution, with a strong emphasis on children and youth.

Wilfrid's activity preceded the Nazi's rise to power. In 1927, he supported the establishment of the Ben-Shemen Youth Village in pre-state Israel,



Wilfrid Israel

closely following its progress and serving as its Chairman of the Board for many years. He was a central figure in the founding of "Aliyat Hanoar" (Youth Aliya), which directed the first group of young Jewish refugees to Ben-Shemen, and later groups to Moshavim and Kibbutzim.

With the Nazi's rise to power in 1933, Wilfrid was one of the first to grasp the full severity of the threat it posed to German Jewry, convinced that everything must be done to expedite their emigration. From that point on, he devoted all of his energy, money and connections to assisting Jewish refugees. Wilfrid made all of his experience and knowledge about Germany available to the British Foreign Ministry after he was forced to flee to Great Britain in 1939 due to Nazi persecution.

In March 1943, he was sent as an emissary on behalf of the Jewish Agency and Aliyat Hanoar to Portugal and Spain to rescue Jewish children and arrange their immigration to pre-state Israel. On his return flight from that mission, on June 1, 1943, his civilian airliner was shot down by German fighter planes. Wilfrid and all passengers on board, including the famous movie actor Leslie Howard, were killed.<sup>24</sup>

### Bielski Brothers

The Bielski family were farmers who lived in Stankievitsh, a small village in Belarus. The four brothers – Tuvia (1906–1987), Asael (1908–1945), Alexander 'Zus' Zisel (1912–1995), and Aron (b. 1927) – managed to escape to the nearby Naliboki Forest after their parents and other family members were murdered in the Novogrudok Ghetto in December 1941. They, along with 13

23. Naomi Shepherd, *Wilfrid Israel: German Jewry's Secret Ambassador*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson (1984)

24. Ofer Aderet, *The Silent Savior of Germany's Jews*, Haaretz, February 4th, 2011





Tuvia Bielski

other Jews who fled the Ghetto, established a group of fighters affiliated with the Soviet partisans who operated in the forests. The brothers accepted any Jew into the group, even those who were unable to fight. Immediately after the Lida Ghetto massacre on May 8, 1942, about three hundred others joined them. With time, the group evolved into a small town whose peak population reached 1,230 inhabitants. They lived in trenches and temporary buildings they erected in the forest that included a synagogue, courthouse, school and medical clinic. Taking in escapees to the forest placed a heavy burden on the armed fighters who were obliged to secure food in larger quantities, a task that



Zus Bielski

endangered them above and beyond the call of duty. Additionally, the chances of the camp being revealed increased as it grew. As long as it was possible to do so, Tuvia Bielski initiated actions to persuade Jews to leave the ghettos. Thus, in December 1942, he took in a portion of the population of the Ivey Ghetto.

In July-August of 1943, units of the Einsatzgruppen carried out Operation Hermann aimed at liquidating partisans based in the forests of Naliboki. The camp's residents, who at the time numbered some 800 people, were forced to trudge through swamps deep in the forest as the bullets whistled all around them. They arrived at an isolated island within the forest where they





Asael Bielski

lived for two weeks until the Germans abandoned the chase. In organizing this flight of the camp's residents in which not a single soul was lost, Bielski had violated orders of the partisan division command to which the camp belonged. The command had instructed him to have the unit composed only of armed, unmarried individuals and not to attach families to the unit. Bielski thus doubly endangered his life—once for fear of being killed by the Germans, and once in the

face of being executed by the Russian partisan command for violating an order. He was also forced to deal with a third front comprised of opponents within the camp who grew tired of supporting its unarmed inhabitants. Bielski said: "Since so few of us remain, the important thing for me is that Jews survive, which I see as the main goal."<sup>25</sup>

In the summer of 1944, when the Soviet counterattack reached Belarus, Asael was recruited into the Red Army and fell in the battle of Königsberg in 1945.

### **Yehoshua & Hennie Birnbaum<sup>26</sup>**

Yehoshua Birnbaum, a native of Łancut, Poland, emigrated to Germany where he met his future wife Hennie, a native of Köln. The two were married in 1927. In October 1938, Yehoshua, who held Polish citizenship, was sent to the border city of Zbaszyn due to the increasingly strict anti-Jewish measures imposed by the Nazis. Hennie, a mother of five who was pregnant at the time, sent her children to Holland on their own, and with great ingenuity eventually obtained the release of her husband. The family was reunited in Holland. But by the end of 1939 and because they were refugees, they were sent to the Westerbork transit camp established by the Dutch government to control the flow of refugees fleeing Nazi Germany and prevent their integration into Holland. While interned in the camp, the couple ran a children's home that harbored abandoned children who were caught while in hiding. After the Germans took control of the camp, the couple endangered themselves by sparing no effort to save the children from the weekly transports eastward for

25. Nechama Tec, *Defiance. The Bielski Partisans*, Oxford University Press 1993

26. The Birnbaum brothers, *a Tree of Life*, Tel Aviv, Kavim 2010; Spielberg Archives: Testimony no. 14655 of May 5, 1996, Sonni Schey; Yosef Weiss, 'Passover Seder in Bergen-Belsen', from: Nathaniel Katzburg (ed.), *Pedut – Rescue in the Holocaust*, Bar-Ilan University, 1984; <https://www.jpost.com/jewish-world/jewish-news/holocaust-orphans-remember-about-the-birnbaum-family>



The Birnbaum family in the Westerbork camp, 1940<sup>27</sup>

extermination and obtaining food for the ones remaining in the camp. The couple cared for 200-250 children in the span of five years. Their eldest daughter (Sonni Schey) recounts: "Each time a list (for deportation) was prepared, it was forbidden to enter the place where the lists were held until publication. Risking their lives, my father or my mother would sneak into that place. They'd locate the children on the list and begin to take action so that they would not be deported. They worked with the Dutch resistance and brought in doctors who would claim that the children suffered from some sort of illness and thus attempted to rescue them.

Thanks to the certificate of immigration to Palestine that the family held, they were left in Westerbork until February 1944 and later

transferred to Bergen-Belsen. The parents and their six children were imprisoned in the "star camp" of Bergen-Belson where Yehoshua was called upon to care for 50 small children, some of whom were too young to know their identities. Close to liberation of the camp, the family and the children they cared for were put on a train that would later be known as the "lost train". It travelled for about two weeks under Allied bombardment without a clear destination. Since it was believed that the train had been hit in the bombing, no one searched for it or its passengers at liberation. The train's passengers were liberated by soldiers of the Red Army in April 1945 - near the town of Troebitz. Throughout that period, the couple cared for all the children. After the liberation by the Russians, the Birnbaum couple searched for

27. "The Birnbaum brothers, a Tree of Life"



a place in the nearby village where they could transfer all the children together.

Already in October of that same year they established a children's home in Amsterdam, in a building that once served as a Jewish aid institution. There, the couple cared for the surviving children so that they could live a normal life and enroll in studies. Just before Passover of 1946, the entire children's home was relocated to the town of Bussum, and at the end of June 1950 they all emigrated to Israel, except for eldest daughter Sonni, who had already emigrated there in 1946.

### **Eliezer Lev Zion**

Eliezer Lev Zion was born in 1927 in Berlin into a patriotic German middle-class family. He discovered his Jewishness only in 1933 when he was beaten in the street by German soldiers. In that same year, his father was imprisoned by the Nazi regime and was never to be seen again. Eliezer fled with his mother to France where he acquired agricultural training offered by the Jewish Scouts of Lyon. Upon the occupation of southern France by the Germans in September 1942, when he was just 15 years old, his mother, who oversaw assistance services for Jewish refugees, referred him to the Resistance. On March 7, 1944, his mother and younger brother were transported to Auschwitz where they were murdered. Between 1942–1944 he operated in southern France under instructions of French priest Alexandre Glasberg and Dika Jefroykin of the Joint to rescue members of the Zionist Jewish movement in Grenoble. From 1944–1945, under the guise of an roofer's apprentice, Lev Zion gathered intelligence for the Jewish Resistance in occupied southwestern France. After the war was over, Lev Zion was recruited to interrogate heads of the Gestapo



Eliezer Lev Zion<sup>28</sup>

and worked to gather Jewish orphans, sending them to Israel via illegal immigration operations. During Passover of 1946 he immigrated illegally to Israel on the SS Champollion, enlisted with the Palmach and fought in the Harel Brigade during Israel's War of Independence in defending the road to Jerusalem. Lev Zion was one of the founders of Kibbutz Degania Bet and a founder of the "fortress" in Neve Ilan.

### **Rabbi Moshe Shimon Pesach**

Rabbi Moshe Shimon Pesach (1869–1955), the son of a family of illustrious Sephardic rabbis in Greece, served for 63 years as rabbi and later Chief Rabbi of Volos, Greece. Rabbi Pesach was both a Greek patriot and a revered figure in the Jewish community which he served. He initiated and

28. Source: Museum of the Jewish Soldier in World War II





Rabbi Moshe Shimon Pesach<sup>29</sup>

spearheaded the rescue of the Jewish community in Volos during the German occupation and contributed to the survival of 74% of the city's Jews, a tremendous achievement in a country where some 85% of all Jews were murdered by the Nazis. He also established a partisan unit that rescued Allied soldiers in the Volos region while fighting the Germans.

On Rosh Hashanah 5730, September 30, 1943, Rabbi Pesach was summoned to the headquarters of Kurt Rickert, the German military governor, who demanded that he submit a list of all the city's Jews, including details of their personal properties, within 24 hours - ostensibly in order to determine the scope of supplies needed to sustain them during the occupation. From the start, the prescient rabbi had no intention of carrying out this German demand; instead, he immediately embarked on a series of measures meant to rescue his community while risking his own life and that of his family. After pretending

to be relieved by the governor's explanation-that the list was required solely for statistical reasons - he asked Rickert for a three-day extension, which the latter granted, in order to prepare the list. The rabbi immediately approached his friend archbishop Joachim Alexopoulos and asked that he ascertain the Germans' true intentions. The archbishop contacted the German consul in Volos, Helmut Scheffel, who told him unequivocally that the Jews must leave Volos before the deadline for submitting the list. The archbishop relayed this information to Rabbi Pesach and gave him a letter addressed to the priests and inhabitants of outlying towns in the surrounding mountains, imploring them to extend assistance to the Jews and protect them in any way possible. In 1977, upon the initiative of the Volos Jewish community, the archbishop was recognized by Yad Vashem as a Righteous Gentile.

The rabbi's initiative succeeded, and within three days with the help of the mayor, city officials and the chief of the city police, fighters of the Greek resistance smuggled most of the city's Jews to the mountainous region surrounding Volos. However, 130 Jews remained in the city, and in March they were deported to extermination camps.

The decision to evacuate the entire community was not an easy one for Rabbi Pesach considering the harsh conditions in the mountains and the approaching winter, but he was determined to carry out his plan. The flight of Rabbi Pesach gave the starting signal for the mass exodus of the remainder of the community. All those who fled found shelter in the mountains with the help of the Greek resistance. Due to these activities, the Germans placed a bounty on the rabbi's head. Two of the rabbi's sons, who were captured by the Germans in other towns where they had been

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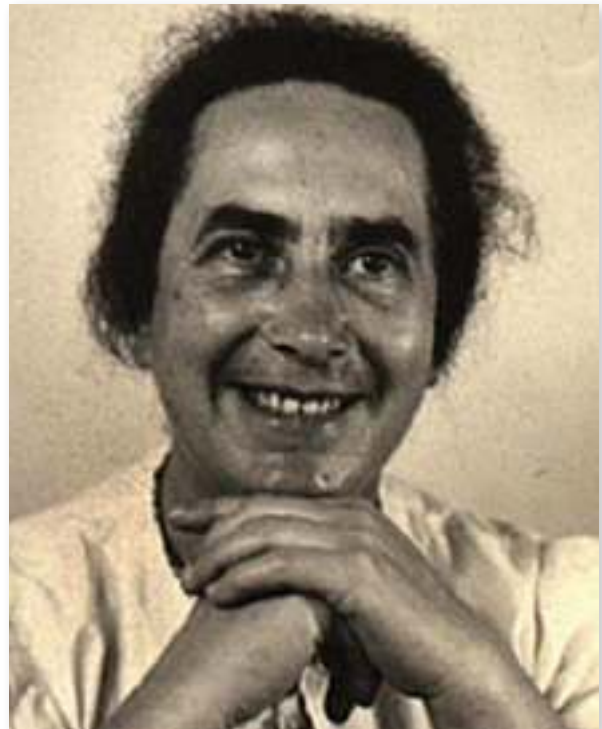
29. Wikipedia, Moshe Shimon Pesach



Josef Itai<sup>30</sup>

teaching Hebrew, perished in the extermination camps. His son-in-law was murdered by Bulgarian forces, and his wife died of grief during their stay in hiding over the death of her sons. Nevertheless, the rabbi's spirit was not broken. He established a partisan unit that aided soldiers of the Allied armies, actions for which he was decorated after the war by the Allied commander in the Mediterranean and by Paul, King of Greece.

After the war, Rabbi Pesach returned to Volos with 700 Jews who had been rescued and joined the efforts to rebuild the destroyed city. In 1946, he was elected Chief Rabbinic Court Judge and Chief Rabbi of Greece, titles he held until his death. In April 1955, Volos was hit by a devastating earthquake. The aged rabbi was forced to live in a tent, later forfeiting his home to have a new synagogue built in its stead. But he died shortly afterwards, on November 13, and never lived to see the synagogue built. In recognition of his

Recha Freier<sup>31</sup>

contribution to Greek Jewry, Rabbi Pesach and his wife Sara were reinterred in 1957 in Har Ha'Menuhot Cemetery in Jerusalem, beside Chief Rabbi Ben Zion Uziel. The rabbi's extensive library, including thousands of books and rare documents gathered over several generations, was brought to Israel, in accordance with his will, and archived as a separate unit at the Ben Zvi Institute.

### **Recha Freier and Josef-Yoshko Itai-Indig**

Recha Freier (1892–1984) conceived the idea of the mass Aliya of Jewish youths from Germany to collective agricultural labor settlements in Israel, in 1932. During that same year she sent the first group of 12 children to Eretz Israel. In January 1933, she founded the Youth Aliya Organization in Germany that developed into a significant rescue operation that rescued of some 7,000 children during the Holocaust. Recha Freier continued this

30. From the archives of the Ghetto Fighters' House, photo department no. 24954

31. Sarah Ben Reuven, "Recha Freier vs. Henrietta Szold – part 2", Association of Israelis of Central European Origin



endeavor under Nazi rule until she was forced to escape secretly from Germany to Yugoslavia in 1940 with her nine year old daughter Maayan after a personal confrontation with Adolf Eichmann.

Josef Itai (1917–1998) was a counselor in the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement in Yugoslavia and was called upon by Recha Freier to care for Jewish child refugees from Germany and Austria who were smuggled into Zagreb, where Recha Freier continued her rescue activity after having fled Germany. She succeeded in obtaining 90 certificates for children to pre-state Israel before she herself immigrated there in 1941. Another group of 30 youths remained behind in Zagreb with no certificates and fell under German occupation. Josef Indig (Itai) remained with them and led them through numerous dangerous escape routes across Yugoslavia and Italy until he succeeded to smuggle them across the border to Switzerland in October 1943. The children immigrated to pre-state Israel about a year and a half later. Thus, he kept his promise of four and a half years vintage to Recha Freier and brought all the children to Israel.

### **Walter Süskind**

Walter Süskind (1906–1945) fled Germany to Holland in 1938. He was employed as the manager of the Unilever company in Amsterdam but lost his job under the anti-Jewish laws imposed by the Nazis after occupying Holland in 1940. In 1941, he was appointed by the Jewish Council, which was established under orders of the Germans, as director of the transit camp for Jews established at the Hollandsche Schouwberg theater in Amsterdam.

Children under the age of 13 were separated from their parents and placed in a children's home (Creche), which stood opposite the theater



Walter Süskind<sup>32</sup>

and was run by a staff of Jewish caregivers. The children were meant to rejoin their parents sometime before their deportation. Süskind and the children's home director, Henriette Henriques Pimentel, plus additional caregivers, smuggled between six hundred and one thousand children out of the home and into the hands of members of four Dutch resistance groups. These activists transferred the children to hiding places in provincial towns where they were hidden from the Nazis in the homes of Christian families until the end of the war. Among the caregivers who risked their lives by taking part in the smuggling operation were Betty Oudkerk, Sieny Kattenberg, Ines Cohn, nurse Virginia 'Viri' Cohen, and Harry Cohen. The children smuggled out of the home represented about one-quarter of all Dutch Jewish children who survived the Holocaust, but, unfortunately, only a mere 10% of the 5,000–6,000

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32. Source: Wikipedia



children who were housed over time at the home.

The perilous and daring smuggling operations were carried out by different methods under the noses of the German guards and behind the back of the Jewish Council, which was unaware of these actions and forbade them. Methods included hiding small children in backpacks and milk canisters and smuggling them out of the children's home and into a streetcar that ran along the road that separated the home from the theater. Smuggling was timed such that the passing streetcar hid the exit door from the view of the guards at the theater; the smuggler would board the train at the nearest stop and get off at the central station. Another method was for the Jewish staff to persuade the Germans that the children required outings in the fresh air. Once this was authorized, the children were concealed through various sophisticated methods during the outing. In all cases such concealment made it necessary to correct the meticulously kept records and, in cooperation with the parents, stage the handing over of the children prior to being deported from the theater. In early 1943, the children's home was expanded into an adjacent house after its Jewish owners were deported to the camps. The expansion resulted in the children's home being adjacent to a Protestant teachers' seminar. The seminar's director, Johan van Hulst, at the request of Pimentel, was also recruited to the rescue operation and helped smuggle out additional children.

On July 26, 1943, Henriette Pimentel, along with 36 other staff members were deported. She met her death in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

Süskind led the rescue efforts during his two-and-a-half-year tenure as the theater's director. In addition to saving children, Süskind also smuggled adults out of the theater building, which was guarded even more heavily than the children's home. On September 29, 1943, the

Germans emptied out the children's home and on the next day - Rosh Hashanah - the remaining Jews of Amsterdam, including members of the Jewish Council, were deported to Westerbork. Thanks to prior information provided by Süskind and Joe Wartman, the leader of the NV (Naamloze Vennootschap) resistance, the two largest smuggling operations of children from the home were carried out a short time before the liquidation of the home.

Süskind and his family were also deported to Westerbork in 1944. He succeeded in exploiting the friendly relations he cultivated with a number of important Nazis in order to leave the concentration camp and return to Amsterdam. However, he failed to free his family from the camp and returned to Westerbork to find that his family had been deported to the extermination camps. His wife and his daughter were murdered at Auschwitz in October 1944 while he himself died in February 1945 during the forced Nazi death march of camp survivors prior to the end of the war.

### **Ottó Komoly**

Ottó Komoly (1892–1945) served as President of the Hungarian Zionist Federation and chairman of the Aid and Rescue Committee for Hungarian Jewry. From 1940 until his murder in early 1945, Komoly played a historic and decisive role in assistance and rescue operations in the framework of the Hungarian Zionist Federation. After the Germans entered Hungary in March 1944, Komoly was appointed by Friedrich Born, of the Swiss International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Budapest, to serve as director of Department A of the International Red Cross delegation in Budapest which was responsible for the rescue of Jewish children. Despite being able to leave Hungary on the train arranged by the Aid and Rescue Committee and to save himself





Ottó Komoly<sup>33</sup>

from the impending danger, Komoly consciously decided to remain in Budapest and work to rescue other Jews. He worked with the Zionist Youth Resistance Movement to establish and operate 55 children's homes, which harbored more than 4,500 children and 1,500 teachers and staff. He arranged for the Red Cross to extend its protection to these homes and clinics operated under the management of the Jewish community prior to the war. Thanks to this protection, the Jewish children, teachers, staff, doctors and nurses at these institutions were saved. Department A and the children's homes also served as distribution points for thousands of Letters of Protection ('Schutzpasses') prepared by the Zionist Youth Resistance Movements. The entire system at its peak comprised of more than one hundred sites. Komoly initiated underground activities for assisting Jews and negotiated with moderate entities in the Hungarian government and with leaders of the political resistance in order to

prevent the deportation of Jews in Budapest to the extermination camps. He was involved in negotiations with the Germans which enabled the escape of 1,684 Jews to neutral countries on the Aid and Rescue Committee train. In early 1945 Komoly was abducted and murdered by henchmen of the Fascist regime of the Arrow Cross Party, just two weeks prior to the Red Army liberation of Pest.

### **Jonah Eckstein**

Jonah Eckstein (1902–1971) was an active member of the Bratislava Jewish community and a successful boxer in the Jewish HaKoach Sports Club. Through his athletic activity and thanks to his charismatic personality, Eckstein succeeded in making friends with police and city officials.

Eckstein's rescue activity began after Austria's annexation to the Third Reich. In March 1938 all Jews of Burgenland District were deported and their property confiscated. Some were sent on rafts down the Danube River towards Slovakia and came upon a small island near Bratislava. Among the deportees were the parents of Michal, Eckstein's wife, Lea and Israel Hirsch. Eckstein scrambled to rescue them and arranged accommodations in Bratislava for them and for other deportees.

Eckstein exploited the permission he received from the authorities to distribute kosher food to Jewish prisoners in the Patronka transit camp which was erected in an abandoned factory at the outskirts of Bratislava. The aim was to secretly transfer food and vital information to Jews who were in hiding. Although Eckstein was forbidden to converse with the camp's residents and was told he would be executed for doing so, he smuggled in letters from detainees to their families so that they would be aware of their fate. In many cases

33. Ghetto Fighters' House, photo department no. 1016104





Jonah Eckstein and four children who remained with him in hiding, Bratislava, 1942.

he delivered information that was essential for the release of the detainees.

In 1942–1943, Eckstein cared for abandoned Jewish orphans who arrived in Bratislava from Poland. He arranged accommodations for Jewish children who fled to Slovakia, helped Jews flee to Hungary and hid Jews in two bunkers. In July 1943 he was arrested in his home by soldiers of the SS who demanded that he lead them to four Polish Jews who were hidden in Bratislava. After denying that he knew them he was beaten and tortured for several days. He withstood the torture and did not reveal the Jews' hiding place and thus saved them from certain death. Later, in order to exert additional pressure and break his will, his wife Michal was arrested and held hostage while Eckstein was forced to search for the Jews in hiding. During her detainment, Michal was subjected to abuse including severe violence. She too withstood the torture and divulged nothing of the hiding place. The four survived the Holocaust.



Shmuil Markowitz Pevzner<sup>34</sup>

Although his actions were partially in the service of the "Working Group" led by Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandl and Gisi Fleischman, most of Jonah Eckstein's activity was taken upon his own personal initiative.

### **Shmuil Markowitz Pevzner**

Shmuil Markowitz Pevzner (1912–1991), a Jewish communist and bachelor from Leningrad, served as director of the summer camp in the city of Druskininkai, Lithuania during the German invasion in June 1941. The camp, which was affiliated with the communist Pioneer Youth Movement, was populated by some 300 youths, about half of whom came from Bialystok and its environs. Exhibiting leadership and personal heroism, Pevzner evacuated the three hundred children and saved their lives (these children would later be known as the 'Bialystok children'). He led them into the Soviet hinterland in dangerous flight that lasted two weeks, during

34. From: Ghetto Fighters' House, photo department no. 11.17946



which he was forced to threaten a train conductor at gunpoint so that he would continue the trip into Russia. The train suffered repeated attacks by German warplanes, each time forcing its passengers to disembark and run for cover in the surrounding forests. Pevzner made certain to return all the children to the train after each such incident. After arriving to a safe destination in the Ural Mountains, Pevzner, with the support of the Soviet authorities, established a childcare institution and cared for the children for five years through extreme cold and deprivation. Ultimately, most of the children returned to Poland.

Only four of the children were able to find their parents still alive after the Holocaust. About a hundred and twenty of the children immigrated to Israel, most of them after the declaration of statehood. Some remained in a detention camp in Cyprus for eight months until being allowed to immigrate in late 1947 and some fought in the War of Independence. They went on to study, develop, start families, and contribute greatly to the development and security of the State of Israel during its early years of existence.

Shmuil Pevzner was decorated by both the Russian and Polish governments for his actions in saving the children. Stasys Sviderkis, the Lithuanian instructor at the Druskininkai camp, was awarded the title of a "Righteous Among the Nations" in 1997 by Yad Vashem for his role in this episode.

### **Max 'Nico' Leons**

Max Leons (1912–2019), a native of Rotterdam, was 18 at the time of Germany's invasion of Holland in May 1940. In the spring of 1943, a fighter from the Resistance brought Leons to a small village in northern Holland named Niuewlande. At the time the village was in the impoverished and undeveloped district of Drente. People from



Max Leons

Niuewlande and four nearby villages succeeded in saving some three hundred Jews from central Holland in addition to non-Jewish refugees and today the village is known for its underground operations during the Nazi occupation

Max Leons found a hiding place in the village with the Van Dyck family. The owner of the home was a painter by profession. There, Max began to learn to speak the local dialect. He found work in agriculture and joined the family on Sundays for church services. Thus, he built a non-Jewish identity for himself in order to blend in with the local population and enable him to take part in resistance operations. Such an opportunity arose when he met Arnold Douwes, an activist in the Resistance. At first, Arnold did not place his trust in Nico since he was young and inexperienced. But after a short time, he realized that Nico could indeed be depended upon and was impressed with his resourcefulness. During the last two



years of the war the two cooperated closely in operations that were fruitful and effective.

The main thrust of their operations focused on finding nearby hiding places for Jews. Such activity was a complex affair that included persuading families to take in Jewish refugees, whether individuals or families, into their homes. Doing this involved great personal risk, frequent train trips to Amsterdam and using forged documents. At the same time the two needed to persuade Jewish families to go into hiding in a remote village that they had never heard of. After completing these stages, the two continued to attend to the Jewish refugees and provide them with ration cards, forged identity documents and warm clothing while handling personal and psychological strain caused by the difficult situation. They also distributed illegal publications issued by the Resistance. Arnold and Nico assisted Allied pilots who fell in Dutch territory and gathered weapons that were parachuted for the armed Dutch resistance, even though they themselves were anti-militaristic. Throughout this effort Nico served as Arnold's right-hand man and the two can be credited equally for the success of this activity. Nevertheless, Nico's name was never mentioned regarding this activity, until receiving the Jewish Rescuers Citation on his 90th birthday, from one of his wards, Haim Roet, founding chairman of the Committee to Recognize the Heroism of Jewish Rescuers during the Holocaust.

### **Rabbi Nathan Cassuto**<sup>35</sup>

Rabbi Dr. Nathan Cassuto was the son of the great scholar of biblical exegesis Rabbi Prof. Umberto Cassuto. He was an ophthalmologist whose career was cut short by the anti-Jewish



Rabbi Nathan Cassuto

laws issued by the Fascist government in Italy in 1938. He studied at the Rabbinical College, first in Florence and then in Rome. In 1939 he moved with his wife Anna Di Gioacchino and three children to Milan to teach at the Jewish school and in 1943 he was appointed Chief Rabbi of the Jewish community of Florence. His sister Hulda Cassuto, with her husband Saul Campagnano, followed Nathan to Milan and to Florence, where their two children were born.

In mid-September 1943 dozens of Jewish refugees arrived in Florence after crossing the Italian-French border on foot in the vain hope that they would not encounter the Germans in Italy. Nathan created a relief committee that worked in the framework of DELASEM (Delegazione Assistenza Emigranti - Delegation

35. Based on a paper by Prof. Liliana Picciotto, Historian, Fondazione Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea [Foundation Jewish Contemporary Documentation Center] - CDEC





for Emigrants Assistance). As the dangers to the Jews – local and foreign alike – increased, after the German invasion of Italy on September 8 1943, Rabbi Cassuto approached the Archbishop of Florence, Cardinal Elia Dalla Costa, with a request to form a joint Jewish-Christian rescue committee. The Cardinal agreed. He enlisted don Leto Casini and father Cipriano Ricotti (both recognized as a Righteous among the Nations in 1965 and 1972 respectively) and appealed to various convents to shelter the refugees. The young Matilde Cassin, the very young sisters Luciana and Wanda Lascar, Nathan's brother-in-law Saul Campagnano, Raffaele Cantoni, Giuliano Treves, Aldo Tedeschi, Hans Kahlberg and Joseph Ziegler were part of Cassuto's Committee. Rabbi Nathan devoted all his strength to assisting his local congregation as well as the families who had come to Florence in the belief that it had been liberated, not knowing a word of Italian, only to find themselves in the Nazis' clutches. As these newcomers flocked to him, he found them hiding places in the homes of merciful Italians or in monasteries, convents, or other Christian institutions. Hulda and Anna (who in October 1943 gave birth to their fourth child, Eva) found accommodations with their children at the Convento della Calza, under false identities. Betrayed by an informer, several members of the committee including Cassuto, Casini, the Lascar sisters, Kahlberg and Ziegler were arrested by German SS on November 26, 1943 at the "Azione Cattolica" headquarters in Via dei Pucci 2, where the group was meeting to plan future rescue operations.

Three days later, betrayed by the same informer, Saul Campagnano, Anna Cassuto and Raffaele Cantoni were arrested in Piazza della Signoria. Only Cantoni managed to escape the transport to Auschwitz and to resume his role as organizer of DELASEM in Milan and

subsequently from Switzerland. Don Leto Casini was released. The others were deported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp and, with the exception of Anna, all perished. Even in the death camps, Nathan found ways to help those in need. For example, he spent an entire night with a Jew whose glasses had broken, hunting through the piles of discarded spectacles at the camp until he created a pair that allowed the sight-impaired man to survive until the liberation. At the last stop in the death march he advised a young man (Moshe Halle) to hide under a railcar. The youth suggested that the rabbi join him there. But he declined: "If we all hide the Germans will look for us and kill us." He kept walking. At the next stop the Germans murdered the few prisoners who had survived the march.

Anna Di Gioacchino Cassuto, survived the camps in Terezin, and returned to Florence in 1946.

Hulda Cassuto, meanwhile, found herself alone in Florence caring for six young children., With the help of underground Italians and financed by DELASEM, the boys were assigned to non-Jewish families (David with the Colzi family, Daniel with the Santerini family, Reuven with the Billour family). Eva was placed in the care of a wet nurse in a small town on the outskirts of Florence but unfortunately died at four months. The girls, Susanna and Sara, were placed in a Catholic orphanage outside Florence, where Hulda also lived for some time, and then spent the remainder of the war hiding in different locations in Florence. After the war Anna's parents and Hulda Cassuto moved with the children to Eretz Israel, where Anna, having survived the extermination camps, joined them. Two years later, on April 13, 1948, she was murdered by Arab troops in the Hadassah medical convoy massacre in Jerusalem during Israel's War of Independence. 🌟