

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



## **A Brief Biography of Giovanni Palatucci (1909 – 1945)**

On May 31, 1909, Giovanni Palatucci was born in Montella, Italy, located in the region of Campagna, near Naples in southern Italy (see map on page 2). By the age of 23, he graduated from the University of Turin with a degree in law. He practiced as an attorney for four years until 1936, when he qualified to be an inspector for the Italian Ministry of Public Administration.

After working at the Genoa Police Station for one year, Giovanni Palatucci was transferred to Fiume in 1937, located near Trieste, where he was put in charge of the Office of Foreigners. Only one year later, he was named Chief of Police of Fiume, one of the major port cities located on the northern Adriatic Sea (see map on page 3). At the time, Fiume was part of Italy; today, the city is officially located in Croatia, and goes by the Croatian name Rijeka.

In 1938, the same year that Giovanni Palatucci was named Fiume's Chief of Police, Italy passed a number of anti-Semitic laws under pressure by the Nazi government of Germany, including the detainment of Jewish people in internment camps established across Italy. It was at this time that Palatucci decided to begin helping the Jewish people of Fiume by "officially" deporting them to internment camps near Rome, where he had family members who could ensure the safety and well-being of the Jewish deportees. His uncle, Giuseppe Palatucci, was Bishop of Campagna, and his other uncle, Alfonso Palatucci, was the Provincial of the Franciscan Order in Puglia, located along the Adriatic Sea just north of Bari. Giovanni Palatucci called on both his uncles to protect and watch over the Jewish deportees, and said in response to the Nazi laws, "*They want to make us believe that the heart is just a muscle, to prevent us from doing what our hearts and faith tell us to do.*"

In 1939, nearly 800 Jewish refugees set sail for Palestine, trying to escape the impending tyranny of the Nazis in Germany and Eastern Europe (i.e., Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland). Being a major port city along the Adriatic Sea, the ship had to pass through Fiume, Italy in order to reach Palestine. Nazi collaborators were plotting to stop the ship and send all the passengers back to Germany, but Giovanni Palatucci managed to alert the passengers in time, and as a result the ship landed safely in southern Italy before the Nazi collaborators could capture the passengers.

By 1940, Italy officially joined World War II on the side of the Germans. From 1940 to 1944, Giovanni Palatucci did everything he could to save the lives of Jewish people. He issued false identity papers and visas, delivered food and money to those who were in hiding, gave warnings when the Nazis were planning a "Jew hunt," and sent as many Jews as possible to the internment camps in Campagna and Puglia. By the end of the war, the internment camp in Campagna was one of the largest in all of Europe.

In late 1943, the Germans became dangerously suspicious of Palatucci when he was not able to provide them with a list of all Jewish residents residing in Fiume. Most of the files had been destroyed, and those remaining in Palatucci's office were of Jewish families that had been documented as having long emigrated from Italy.

Knowing the danger that faced Giovanni Palatucci, his close friend, the Swiss ambassador to Trieste, offered him an exit visa to Switzerland. Palatucci accepted the visa, but gave it to his then recent fiancée who was Jewish, rather than using it for himself. She survived the war, and lived in Israel until her death (date unknown).

Only days later, Giovanni Palatucci was arrested by the Gestapo (German security police) on September 13, 1944. He was charged with treason and conspiracy, and was sentenced to death. However, due to the plea of his friend, the Swiss consul, his sentence was commuted to exile to Dachau, a concentration camp located in Munich, Germany. He was transferred to Dachau on October 22, 1944. His prison number was 117.826.

On February 10, 1945, Giovanni Palatucci died in Dachau, just ten weeks before the camp was liberated. Some say he died of malnutrition, others have testified that he was shot.



<sup>1</sup> University of Texas Library, [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/cia04/italy\\_sm04.gif](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/cia04/italy_sm04.gif)

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<sup>2</sup> University of San Diego, History Department, <http://history.sandiego.edu/cdr2/WW2Pics/81522.GIF>