

## Session 8: The Holocaust: “The Final Solution” of the Jewish Question (*die Endlösung der Judenfrage*)

June 22, 1941 – May 8, 1945

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Torah Scrolls desecrated by Nazis strewn about a Kovno (Lithuania) synagogue. The intimate relationship between the Jewish people and the Torah made it an irresistible target for Nazi vandals. Courtesy: The Holocaust Chronicles

**Introduction:** Germany’s decision to invade Russia--Operation Barbarossa--and violate the terms of the 22-month-old Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (the Treat of Non-Aggression between the Reich and Soviet Union)--signaled not only a dramatic change in the course of World War II but a seismic shift in policy towards Europe’s Jews. The argument could be made that *two* things cost Hitler his dream of a thousand-year Reich: first, the invasion of Russia for which--like Napoleon--he was ill-prepared, and second, his obsession with the killing of Jews which drained enormous resources from the Reich.

### Background

As early as 1925, Hitler asserted, in *Mein Kampf*, his intentions to invade the Soviet union citing that the German people needed *Lebensraum* (“living space”)—not only land, but the raw materials that it would bring. He had little use for the Soviets as he considered them ethnic “*untermenschen*” (sub-human) who were under the control of the “Jewish Bolsheviks.” Operation Barbarossa was, as Hitler saw it, a death struggle between the forces of light against the forces of darkness—the *Urbemmenschen* (sub-humans) versus the *Untermenschen* (super-humans). Simply put, German National Socialism and Jewish Bolshevism could not co-exist—something had to give.

For Hitler conquering The Soviet Union was not just an ideological requirement but was an economic one as well. With victory came arable land in the Ukraine, access to Baku oil fields as well as a slave-labor force. Albert Speer would later testify “the need for oil certainly was a prime motive” in the decision to invade.

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On December 5, 1941 Hitler approved military plans for the invasion and signed War Directive No. 21 approving “Operation Barbarossa” in which he stated that “The German Wehrmacht must be prepared to crush Soviet Russia in a quick campaign.” The operation was named after the leader of the Third Crusade in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Emperor Frederick Barbarossa of the Holy Roman Empire. “Barbarossa” was to combine an assault toward Leningrad in the north, the symbolic capturing of Moscow and the seizing of the oil fields in the south.

The goal was not simply to conquer the Soviets but to decimate them. As Göring remarked to Gian Galeazzo Ciano, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, “this year between twenty and thirty million persons will die in Russia of hunger. Perhaps it is well that it should be so, for certain nations must be decimated.”

The Germans expected a *Blitzkrieg*-type campaign. The early successes in the first weeks of Operation Barbarossa in the Ukraine, Byelorussia, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were encouraging for the Germans. By the beginning of September 1941 German troops were at the gates of Leningrad. But Stalin was a formidable foe and the Soviet Union an enormous land mass. Stalin’s scorched earth policy made it impossible for the Wehrmacht to live off the land. Soon the October rains would come and the rutted but firm roads of August would become soggy, muddy and impassable by late fall. Not expecting a winter war the Germans were ill-prepared for it and failed to reach Moscow before the cold set in. The late fall and winter brought near exhaustion to the Wehrmacht. General Gunther Blumentritt in his diary noted similarities between Napoleon’s invasion of Russia and began to re-read Caulaincourt’s grim account of 1812.

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The invasion on June 22<sup>nd</sup> marked with a tragic shift in German policy towards the Jews. In the 21 months prior to Barbarossa some 30,000 Jews perished. Twenty thousand had died of starvation in the Warsaw and Lodz ghettos. Another 10,000 died in pogroms, targeted killings, and outbreaks of violence in ghettos and labor camps. In no Jewish community in the East had more than 2 - 3% been murdered while in Western Europe Jews were comparatively unmolested.

But with the outbreak of Operation Barbarossa all of that changed. The invasion of Russia provided the Germans with an unprecedented opportunity. The Nazis now worked under the cover of political “darkness”. As they advanced into remote regions far from Germany, under the cover of an advancing army, they were aided by like-minded anti-Semitic local collaborators. They could accomplish here what they already knew would not have been tolerated in Germany.

The systematic destruction of Jews was about to occur in eastern Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, the Ukraine and in western regions of the Russian Republic. Entire communities would perish forever. In preparation for the invasion killing squads—the *Einsatzgruppen*—organized by the SS set about finding and organizing local collaborators—Lithuanians and Ukrainians—in murderous gangs. The Nazis were betting that two centuries of anti-Jewish hatred could be harnessed and “converted” to the new religion of mass murder. Their calculus proved correct.

The slaughter began from the first day of German operations. With the aide of the Lithuanian and Ukrainian police the *Einsatzgruppen* moved alongside advancing German forces. In the frontier village of Virbalis, Jews were placed into a two kilometer long anti-tank trench and machine gunned. Lime was sprayed on them and a second row of Jews were driven into the trench, made to lie down—and shot. Eight rows were eventually formed—one atop the other. The children were not shot. Instead their heads were bashed against rocks before they were tossed into their grave—buried alive. After being covered with dirt the ground would move for three days before it stood still.

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In many cases the local population often attacked its Jews as the Red Army withdrew eastward--even before the Germans had arrived. These pogroms were unlike any other before. The aim was no longer to humiliate, loot and harm--but to kill. In hundreds of villages no Jews were left alive.

The ferocity of Operation Barbarossa was not only directed against the Jews. Russian POWs were also murdered in cold blood by the advancing Nazis. By the end of the war two and a half million Russian POWs had been similarly murdered.

The pre-war Geneva conventions, which protected hundreds of thousands of British and French POWs, were ignored when it came to the Russians and Jews. Just as there was racial hatred toward ‘the Jew’, the Germans had a similar contempt for Russian POWs referring to them as ‘degenerate Slavs’.

On June 27, 1941 the Nazis entered Bialystok. Since the outbreak of the war some 10,000 Jewish refugees from German-occupied Poland found shelter there raising the Jewish population of Bialystok to over 50,000. On ‘Red Friday’ a German motorized unit entered the Jewish quarter. Within minutes they laid siege to the area around the Great Synagogue and started chasing the town’s Jews. Armed with pistols and grenades many died in the streets while the living remnants were herded into the Great Synagogue. Some 800 Jews were locked into the synagogue before it was torched.

At Eichmann’s trial in Jerusalem he recounted his visits to Minsk and Lvov.

*“I told everyone who came my way—I said: ‘How can you shoot a woman and children, how is this possible? It cannot be done—these people can go mad or become sadists, and they are our own people.’ He said: ‘This is true, and this is how it is done here. The shootings are carried out here, too—do you wish to see for yourself?’ I said: ‘No, I do not want to see.’ And he said: ‘We shall see whether you wish to or not, because it is on our way.’ There was a trench, but the trench was already filled in; and there was a kind of spring of blood gushing from the earth—and this, too, I had never seen before. As far as I was concerned, I’d had enough, and went back to Berlin and told Gruppenführer Muller.”*

Eichmann was then asked whether he had ever seen a ‘written order’ for the ‘physical extermination’ of the Jews. He replied:

*“I never saw a written order. All I know is that Heydrich told me, ‘the Führer ordered the physical extermination of the Jews.’ He said this quite early and with certainty, the way I repeat it at this moment. And these were the first results. These were small things that I have just related.*

*I asked the Gruppenführer: ‘Please do not send me there, send someone else, someone stronger than I am. You see I was never sent to the front, I was never a soldier; there are other men who can look upon such actions. I cannot. At night I cannot sleep, I dream. I cannot do it, Gruppenführer.’” Within 5 weeks of the German invasion of Russia on June 22nd the number of Jews massacred exceeded the total Jewish death toll since Hitler’s rise to power.*

### **Operation Barbarossa**

From 1939-41 Germany upheld the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact—the non-aggression pact with Russia. Once the Nazis withdrew from the Battle of Britain, however, their attention turned to the East.

Operation Barbarossa was the code name for the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union during WWII that began on 22 June 1942. Over 3 million German troops, 3500 tanks and 1800 German aircraft invaded the USSR along an 1800 mile front. Another 900,000 Axis troops were also involved in the offensive. In terms of sheer manpower, area traversed and the number of casualties, *Operation Barbarossa was the largest military operations in human history*. It should be noted that Hitler conducted the operation against the advice of many of his generals who were concerned about opening up a second front in the war.

The goal of Operation Barbarossa was the rapid conquest of the European part of the Soviet Union west of a line connecting the cities of Arkhangelsk and Astrakhan, often called the A-A line. By the January 1942, the Red Army had withstood Hitler’s worst attack and the Führer had not achieved the quick victory he’d hoped for. While the Germans had occupied much of the Ukraine they were pushed back from their advance on Moscow. The failure of Operation Barbarossa was the turning point in World War II. Hitler had not envisioned the war dragging on through the winter of 1942.

Barbarossa’s failure led to Hitler’s demands for further operations which included the Siege of Leningrad, Operation Nordlicht and the Battle of Stalingrad, among other battles in occupied Soviet territory.

The war with the Soviets continued until July 1943 when Germany was finally beaten. The cost of the war was enormous as 28 million Soviets died during the bloodiest war in world history—7 million Soviet troops and 20 million civilians!

The outcome of Operation Barbarossa was the major turning point in the war for Germany.

**June 24, 1941**—Germans launch a surprise offensive against Soviet forces in Kovno. Immediately before the occupation of Kovno Lithuanian nationalists began attacking Jews in the city accusing them of supporting the Soviet occupation that began a year earlier. Lithuanian nationalists killed between 800-1000 Jews during a 2 day period.

**June 27 1941**--Bialystok, Lithuania fell into Nazi hands as a result of the invasion of Operation Barbarossa. On June 27<sup>th</sup> the Nazi troops ordered the police the surround the town square by the Great Synagogue and forced residents from their homes into the streets. Many were shot against the building walls. Some 2,000 men, women and children were locked in the synagogue—the largest wooden synagogue in Eastern Europe—which was locked and set on fire. The Nazis continued on their rampage tossing grenades into Jewish homes near the town square. Over 3000 Jews lost their lives that day alone.

**June 27, 1941**-- The Iași pogrom begins (see below: *Black Sunday*).

**July 6, 1941**--Lithuanian militiamen murder 2,514 Jews in Kovno.

**July 7, 1941**-- *Einsatzkommando* unit begins systematically killing Lithuanian Jews.

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**July 8, 1941:** The first of the Ponary Executions begin. The town of Ponar is located 6 miles from Vilna. Between July 8, 1941 and July 1944, 70-100,000 (mostly Jews) were murdered in the large pits at Ponar.

**July 10, 1941**—Before WWII, 1600 Jews lived in Jedwabne, Poland. The Jedwabne Pogrom occurred a month after the Germans had retaken the Polish town from the Soviets. Most, if not all, of the Jews of Jedwabne were herded into a barn which was then locked and set on fire. Their Polish neighbors took their homes and property. Although this was thought to be an SS Aktion further investigation revealed that the massacre was carried out by the Poles.

**July 10, 1941**—the Kovno Ghetto is established; it eventually houses 30,000 Jews into 2 ghettos—“large ghetto” and “small ghetto.”

**July 20, 1941**—The Minsk ghetto is established.

**July 31, 1941**--Goering commands Heydrich, *"to carry out all the necessary preparations with regard to organizational and financial matters for bringing about a complete solution of the Jewish question in the German sphere of influence."* - That influence now covered a dozen countries. - *"I further charge you with submitting to me promptly an overall plan... for the execution of the intended **Final Solution** of the Jewish question."*

**August 1, 1941**--Heydrich informs Himmler, *"that in the future there will be no more Jews in the annexed Eastern Territories."* Everyday in every village and town, Jews would be hunted down, molested, tortured, and executed.

### **The Final Solution**

On July 17, 1941--a month after Operation Barbarossa Hitler empowered SS Chief Heinrich Himmler to manage all security matters in the Soviet Union. Himmler was to eliminate any and all perceived “threats” to German rule. Two weeks later, July 31, 1941, Herman Göering authorized SS General Reinhard Heydrich to make preparation for implementing a “final solution of the Jewish question.”

In the fall of 1941 Himmler assigned German General Odilo Globocnik with implementation of a plan to murder the Jews of the *Generalgouvernement* under the code name **Operation Reinhard**. Three killing centers were established in Poland as part of Operation Reinhard—**Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka**.

Other killing centers were established at **Majdanek, Chelmno and Auschwitz**—all located in Poland. By the end of World War II, two-thirds of European Jewry—6 million men, women and children would die in the Holocaust.

**Late June 1941**—American radio commentator Father Charles Coughlin celebrates Hitler’s invasion of Russia as “the first strike in the holy war on communism” and attacks “the British-Jewish-Roosevelt war on Germany and Italy.”

**August 18, 1941**--Germans now take over authority of Kovno and seal off the ghetto. Looting and killing of the Intelligentsia soon follow. Over eighteen hundred Intelligentsia are shot at Fourth Fort.

**August 20, 1941**—Germans start to liquidate Kielce Ghetto.



**Father Charles E. Coughlin**

As radio entered mainstream American life, Father Charles E. Coughlin’s Sunday “Hour of Power” would emerge as one of the more important broadcasts of its day. The “Father of Hate Radio”, first took to the airwaves in 1926 and espoused a mix of religion, politics and virulently anti-Semitic sermons that reached and estimated 3.5 million Catholics and Protestants weekly.

Coughlin, a Catholic priest of the Diocese of Detroit, stoked the fears of Communism repeatedly spoke of the “Judeo-Bolshevik threat” and *asserted that the Soviet leadership--including both Lenin and Stalin--was Jewish*. Coughlin believed that Jewish bankers and other power brokers financed the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and he became one of the principal disseminators of anti-Semitic propaganda into mainstream American culture. In addition to his radio broadcasts he also published *Social Justice Weekly*, a journal which soon achieved a circulation of one million copies.

Though an initial supporter of FDR, Father Coughlin became a fierce opponent of the New Deal and attacked Jews in key government positions as well as Jewish bankers and financiers as “modern shylocks.” By 1936, Coughlin compared the New Deal to, “...the red mud of Soviet Communism and...the stinking cesspool of pagan autocracy.”

Throughout the 1930s Coughlin defended Nazism as a deterrent to Communism and established the “Christian Front” in 1938 and even published the *Christian Index*, a guide to non-Jewish merchants in New York City.

As war loomed in Europe, Coughlin supported isolationism, charging that Jewish financiers were behind the efforts to involve the United States in the war. He was a fervent believer in the existence of a secret world Jewish conspiracy. In 1938 his magazine, *Social Justice*, published *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

Coughlin was finally silenced by the Bishop of Detroit after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor when he continued to argue against American participation in World War II.

**August 27-28, 1941—First mass killing of the “Final Solution”--**Detachments of the *Einsatzgruppen* in Kamenets-Podolsk, a city in the Western Ukraine, under SS. General Friedrich Jeckeln carried out mass killings of the Jewish deportees as well as the 11,000 local Jews.

**September 3, 1941**—Auschwitz--Germans experiment on Polish opponents and Jews. They test the effectiveness of Zyklon B. All were killed—a successful test.

**September 5, 1941**—Two ghettos are established in Vilna referred to as Ghetto No. 1 and Ghetto No. 2. About 30,000 Jews are forced into Ghetto No.1 and between 9,000 and 11,000 Jews into Ghetto No.2. German *Einsatzgruppen* kill about 8,000 Jews at Ponary with the aide of Lithuanian auxiliary police.

**September 17, 1941**-- Several thousand Jews taken from Kovno, locked in synagogues for three days, then brought to prepared ditches and all shot dead. Entire families wiped out.

### **The Iași Pogrom—“Black Sunday”**

The Iași pogrom—one of the most violent in Jewish history— conducted by government forces in Iași, Romania resulted in the slaughter of over 13,000 Jewish citizens--according to the Romanian authorities own statistics.

Plans for a pogrom had already been developed when Ion Antonescu, the Romanian dictator, contacted the commander of the Iași garrison demanding that he "cleanse Iași of its Jewish population."

Rumors had circulated that Russian parachutists had landed outside Iași and that the Jews were working with them to overthrow the local government. In the week prior to the pogrom Christian houses were marked with a cross while Jewish men were forced to dig ditches in the local Jewish cemetery.

On **June 27, 1941** the Jews of Iași were formally charged with sabotage by the local authorities. The local police and soldiers were told that Jews had attacked soldiers in the street and so the stage was set for the pogrom.

According to a Romanian government report participants in the pogrom included the local police, the Bessarabia police and gendarmerie units along with army soldiers, young civilians and mobs who robbed and killed Jews with the knowledge that they would not be held accountable for their actions.

Eight thousand Jews were killed in the early days of the pogrom. Another 5,000 were forced onto a train station—where many who did not move quickly enough were shot. Over 100 people were stuffed into each railway cars of two trains that traveled back and forth across the country side for 7 days until they died of starvation and thirst. In the death train that left Iași for Călărași, southern Romania, which carried as many as 5,000 Jews, only 1,011 reached their destination alive after seven days.

According to official Romanian records 13,266 Jews were victims of the Iași Pogrom.

### **Babi Yar**

German forces entered Kiev, the Ukrainian capital, in June 1941—home to 175,000 Jews. On September 19, 1941 German forces entered the town. Over one hundred thousand Jews had already left in advance of the German occupation. During the first days of occupation 2 major explosions were set off by Soviet military engineers and destroyed German headquarters in the city center.

The decision—made by military governor, Major General Friedrich Georg Eberhardt and SS-*Obergruppenführer* Friedrich Jeckeln—to exterminate the Jews of Kiev was made on September 26, in retaliation for guerrilla attacks against German troops. The Germans used the sabotage as a pretext to murder the remaining 60,000 Jews—largely women, children and the elderly who were too sick to flee.

On September 28<sup>th</sup>, under the command of Reinhard Heydrich, the *Einsatzgruppen*, and other SS brought nearly 34,000 Jews of the ghetto to a suburban ravine known as Babi Yar, near the Jewish Cemetery. The Jews were herded into barbed-wire areas at the top of the ravine, guarded by Ukrainian collaborators. There they were stripped of their clothes, beaten and led down the side of the ravine. The first groups were forced to lie face down on the ground and were machine-gunned by Germans who fired an unrelenting volley of bullets in a two-day orgy of execution. Most of the remaining Jewish population was exterminated in the months that followed.

Babi Yar is considered to be the largest single mass killing for which the Nazi regime and its collaborators were responsible during its campaign against the Soviet Union and is considered to be "the largest single massacre in the history of the Holocaust."

**September 18, 1941**--Himmler states in a letter to Arthur Greiser that Hitler is demanding that the original Reich and the Protectorate be 'cleaned out from west to east and be rid of Jews as quickly as possible.'

**October 4, 1941**--In Kovno, 1,500 Jews without work passes were taken away to be shot. The Kovno hospital was sealed shut and burned to the ground with everyone still in it.

**October 4, 1941**--Heydrich drew up plans for the future deportation of Jews from Czechoslovakia.

**October 22-24, 1941**—The events responsible for the deaths of 25 – 34 thousand Jews are called the *Odessa Aktion*. The Jews in Odessa and the surrounding town of Transnistria were murdered by Romanian forces under German control. Often Jews were herded into warehouses—those refusing to cooperate were shot in the street. Those that made it into the warehouses were burned alive.

**October 25, 1941**: The *Einsatzgruppen* report to Berlin complains '*the local population of White Russia was not being helpful in the various actions*' requiring the stepped up efforts of the Germans.

That very day in Germany Dr. Viktor Brack rolled out the new plan for mass execution: "the installation of the necessary buildings and gas plants"—**this was the birth of gas chambers for mass executions**. Eichmann approved of this method and very likely preferred its



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orderliness. A new policy was being established--the secret killings of millions of Jews, away from the eyes of witnesses.

**November 6 - 7, 1941**--Rovno, Ukraine--17,500 Jews taken to the forests and ordered to dig five large pits. Under bitter cold conditions they were ordered to strip. Then they are all murdered over a two day period.

**November 6, 1941**-- Minsk; 12,000 Jews killed in the latest "*Aktion*."

**November 19, 1941**--In the West, gassing was becoming the popular method of exterminating the Jews. Eichmann moves forward on his plans for the deportation of Jews.

**November 24, 1941**--A ghetto is set up in Theresienstadt. Jews begin to be sent there by Eichmann from all corners of the Reich. Eventually it would be a major center for the gathering and re-deportation of Jews to the death camps.

**November 25, 1941**: The resettlement of German Jews into Kovno give the SS new targets for their killing raids. Einsatzkommando report: 1,159 men, 1,600 women, 175 Children. Four days later the report notes; 693 men, 1,155 women, 152 children are murdered.

**November 29, 1941**--Kovno Massacre of the Ghetto. Estimated 10,600 people would be killed over the next few days.

**November 30, 1941**--Jews begin to arrive at Theresienstadt from Prague.

**December 1, 1941**-- *Einsatzkommando* Report: Only 15% of Lithuanian Jews were left alive.

**December 7, 1941**—The Japanese Attack Pearl Harbor. The United States enters the War on December 8, 1941. This will delay the Wannsee Conference which was originally scheduled for December 9th.

**December 8, 1941**--700 Jews brought to Chelmno for final experiment of the new method of killing. In groups of 80, the Jews are driven around the woods in a special van, gassed to death by the fumes of the exhaust. A thousand Jews a day for the next four days go through the same test. As the Americans enter the war, Germany begins to formalize its "Final Solution" to the Jewish problem.

**December 11, 1941**—Hitler declares war on the United States.

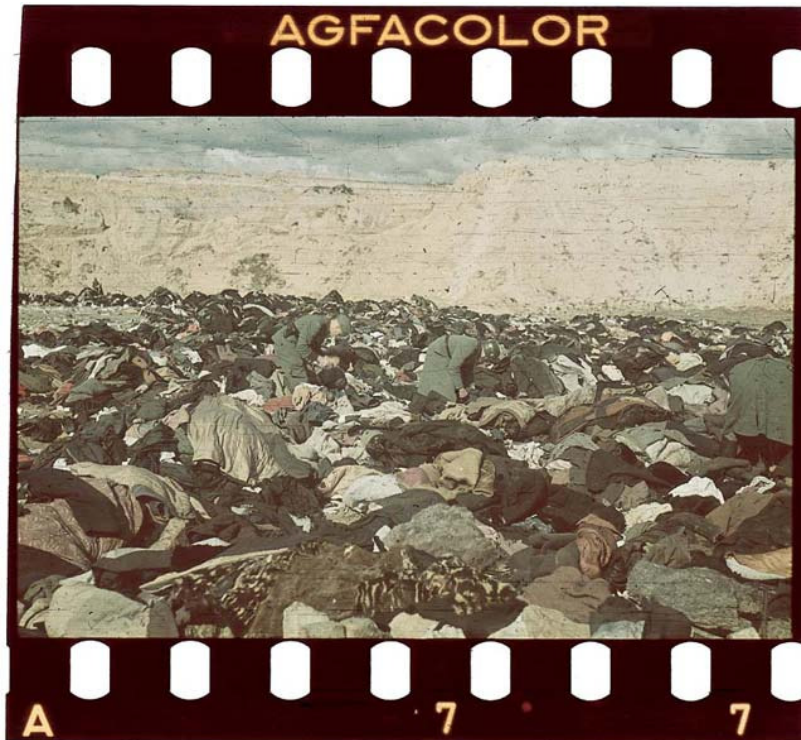
**December 31, 1941**—Abba Kovner, a young Jewish resistance leader, held a clandestine meeting in Vilna, Lithuania and crafted a manifesto stating.

*"Hitler plans to destroy all of the Jews of Europe...and the Jews of Lithuania have been chosen as the first in line...We will not be led like sheep to the slaughter! True, we are weak and defenseless, but the only reply to the murderer is revolt! Brothers! Better to fall as free fighters than to live by the mercy of murderers. Arise! Arise with your last breath!"*

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**Scenes at Babi Yar**



### Theresienstadt “Camp-Ghetto”

The ghetto at Theresienstadt has been remembered for its culture, its famous prisoners, and its visit by Red Cross officials. Many were unaware that within this outwardly serene facade lay a real concentration camp. In a ghetto originally designed for 7,000 Jews some sixty thousand were crowded into extremely tight quarters. Disease and starvation were among the many threats to life as were the frequent transports to Auschwitz

The Theresienstadt “Camp-Ghetto” existed from **November 24, 1941 – May 9, 1945** and served 3 purposes:

1. It was a **transit camp** for Czech Jews whom the Germans deported to other ghettos (Riga, Warsaw, Lodz, Minsk and Bialystok), killing centers (Auschwitz, Majdanek, and Treblinka), concentration camps and forced labor camps in occupied Poland, Belorussia, and the Baltic states.
2. As a **ghetto-labor camp** Theresienstadt incarcerated certain categories of German, Austrian, and Czech Jews, based on their age, disability or domestic celebrity in the arts and other cultural life.
3. Third, Theresienstadt served as a “show camp” when the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was finally allowed access in June 1944.

The propaganda function of Theresienstadt could not be underestimated. The publicly stated purpose of the deportation of the Jews from Germany was to “resettle” them in the east. In Nazi propaganda Theresienstadt was described as a “spa town” where elderly German Jews could “retire” in safety. In reality the ghetto was a collection center for deportation to ghettos and killing centers in Eastern Europe.

In one of the more elaborate hoaxes the Germans permitted the International Red Cross to visit in June 1944. The ghetto was “beautified” with newly planted gardens and freshly painted barracks. The dignitaries were feted with various social and cultural events. After satisfying the Red Cross its previous function as a deportation center was resumed.

Ghetto conditions were harsh and tens of thousands died of starvation and disease. A crematorium was built to handle 200 corpses per day.

During its three-and-a-half years of operation 140,000 Jews were transferred to Theresienstadt, 90,000 deported to the East and 33 thousand died in the ghetto-camp.

In spite of the living conditions Theresienstadt had a well-developed cultural life thanks to Jewish artists from Czechoslovakia, Austria and Germany. Professors, musicians and actors gave theater performances, lectures and concerts. The ghetto maintained a library and many of its 15,000 children went to school. Ninety percent of these children perished in death camps.

***Henry Silberstern, our Survivor-educator and member of the Holocaust Study Group was a child-survivor of Theresienstadt.***

## 1942

**Introduction:** One of the most important events of 1942 is the Wannsee Conference. Ten days after its conclusion, on January 30, 1942--the ninth anniversary of Hitler's rise to power--Hitler gave a speech to the German public and declared that the end result of the war will not be the destruction of the Aryans but will be the complete annihilation of the Jews. Outside of Nazi-occupied Europe neither governments nor individuals could fully grasp the entirety of what Hitler and his acolytes intended for European Jewry. 1942 would be recorded as the most lethal year in Jewish history. The start of the year would witness the beginning of mass killings at Auschwitz-Birkenau using Zyklon B. By its end 1942, alone, would claim 2.7 millions Jewish lives. By the end of 1942, between 3.5 and 4 millions Jews have died since the beginning of the war.

In June and July of 1942 the *New York Times* would carry many stories of Nazi atrocities during the war with little mention made of Jewish genocide. In 10 weeks beginning in mid-July some 265,000 Jews would be transported from the Warsaw ghetto to Treblinka. 1942 is the year that Edith Stein, who would later be canonized as *Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross*, was gassed at Auschwitz. It is the year that Bielski brothers would take to the forest and begin an effort that would save over 1,200 Jewish lives--mostly women and children. 1942 is the year that Reinhard Heydrich was assassinated--for which Jewish Czechs would pay a very high price. In mid-1942 the British Ambassador to the Vatican, Francis d'Arcy Osborne, observed of Pope Pius XII that his “moral leadership is not assured by the unapplied recital of the Commandments.” The condemnation of Pius XII is echoed by the American *chargé d'affaires* in the Vatican, Harold Tittmann, who reports to the State Department that Pope Pius XII is adopting an “ostrich-like policy towards atrocities that were obvious to everyone.”

That same summer Dr. Gerhart Riegner, a 30-year old refugee from Berlin, prepared a report for Rabbi Stephen Wise, the founder and president of the World Jewish Congress, detailing Nazi Germany's aim to resolve--once and for all--the “Jewish question in Europe.” The Riegner report was not made available to the media until November of that year. Although the Allies would issue a declaration entitled “German Policy of Extermination of the Jewish Race” in December of 1942 the fact remains that little was done to save Jewish lives in Europe. Over the objection of several U.S. State Department officials, the Allies--Great Britain, U.S., Soviet Union, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Luxembourg, Holland, Norway, Poland, Yugoslavia and the French National Committee--officially condemn the Nazi “bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination” and vow to punish those responsible. This was the **first** time that the Allies officially condemned the Nazi for their treatment of the Jews in a report entitled “*German Policy of Extermination of the Jewish Race.*”

The Allies urge Pius XII to condemn the Nazi atrocity perpetrated on the Jews yet the Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Luigi Maglione explained that the Pope could not publicly condemn particular atrocities--a few weeks later the year would end as Pope Pius XII tells an American representative that he regards the story of Jewish atrocities to be an exaggeration “*for the purpose of propaganda.*”

**The Wannsee Conference:** Originally intended for December 9, 1941 the Wannsee Conference was delayed by the bombing of Pearl Harbor until January 20, 1942. The meeting, chaired by Reinhard Heydrich, did not launch the Final Solution--rather it coordinated it.

Having received instructions from Göring, Heydrich invited top bureaucrats (see below)--**not** Hitler's inner circle--to a meeting in the Berlin Interpol Office at 56 Am grössen Wannsee on December 9, 1941 to secure “*a uniform view among the relevant central agencies of the further tasks concerned with the remaining work of the final solution.*” Because of the Japanese invasion at Pearl Harbor the conference was delayed until January 20, 1942.

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From the outset Heydrich made clear that the meeting had been called to clarify “fundamental questions.”

*“The wish of the Reich Marshal to have a draft sent to him concerning organizational, factual and material interests in relation to the final solution of the Jewish question in Europe makes necessary an initial common action of all central offices immediately concerned with these questions in order to bring their general activities into line. The Reichsführer-SS and the Chief of the German Police (Chief of the Security Police and the SD) was entrusted with the official central handling of the final solution of the Jewish question without regard to geographic borders.”*

In fact, by January 1942 the “Final Solution” had already started. Mass shootings of Jews by the *Einsatzgruppen* had already begun with Operation Barbarossa. The gassing of Jews had started in early December 1941 at Chelmno, Poland.

The Conference brought together an array of 15 individuals—high-ranking officials from the SS and key Reich ministries—with different goals. For Heydrich, who chaired the 90 minute meeting, the Jews were a nuisance to be deported. For Kammler, chief of SS construction, the Jews were a potential source of labor for an 80 billion-mark construction project in the East. For Himmler there was no place for Jews in his Germany of the future yet he could not build it without them. The Wannsee Conference sought to resolve these apparently mutually exclusive demands. In all, fifteen men attended the conference—not one of them objected to the announced policy. It was the first time in recorded history that a modern state committed itself to the murder of an entire people—and they did so, unanimously. Dr. Josef Bühler would argue that the *Generalgouvernement* in Occupied Poland should be the Final Solution’s priority target.

Heydrich quickly proceeded to his **central objective—to give Himmler “primary responsibility for the handling of the Final Solution of the Jewish Question.”**

*“In the course of the Final Solution, the Jews are now to be suitably assigned as labor in the East...In big labor gangs, with the sexes separated; Jews capable of work will be brought to these areas, employed in road building, in which task a large part will*

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*undoubtedly disappear through natural diminution. The remnant that may eventually remain...will have to be appropriately dealt with.”*

The final record of the meeting—of which only one of 30 copies remains—was made by Adolph Eichmann. In the final, edited record Heydrich notes that “Europe will be cleansed up from the West to the East” of some eleven millions Jews—“from Ireland to the Urals and from the Arctic to the Mediterranean.” The plan was to send Jews, group by group, to transit camps and then “to the East.” The elderly would be separated from the able-bodied, men from women and used for slave labor. Death to the labor force would be through “natural causes” with “survivors” to be treated “accordingly” to prevent “a Jewish reconstruction.”

Approximately 11 million Jews will be involved in the final solution of the European Jewish question, distributed as follows among the individual countries:

Country	Number
A. Germany proper	131,800
Austria	43,700
Eastern territories	420,000
General Government	2,284,000
Bialystok	400,000
Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia	74,200
Estonia - free of Jews -	
Latvia	3,500
Lithuania	34,000
Belgium	43,000
Denmark	5,600
France / occupied territory	165,000
unoccupied territory	700,000
Greece	69,600
Netherlands	160,800
Norway	1,300
B. Bulgaria	48,000
England	330,000
Finland	2,300
Ireland	4,000
Italy including Sardinia	58,000
Albania	200
Croatia	40,000
Portugal	3,000
Rumania including Bessarabia	342,000
Sweden	8,000
Switzerland	18,000
Serbia	10,000
Slovakia	88,000
Spain	6,000
Turkey (European portion)	55,500
Hungary	742,800
USSR	5,000,000
Ukraine	2,994,684
White Russia	
excluding Bialystok	446,484
<b>Total</b>	<b>over 11,000,000</b>

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The Wannsee Conference coordinated the various needs of the Nazi regime. Though the ultimate aim was clear—to rid Europe and Russia of its Jews—there were practical matters to consider. First, there was a need for labor. As the war expanded the Reich urgently needed to address the growing labor shortage. Were to goals of annihilation compatible with the need to use Jews as a slave labor force? The conclusion was “yes.” The Nazis would extract productive labor from the Jews before they died. The process would start out by separating those deemed useful to the Reich from those that would simply impose a drain on the Reich’s resources. The elderly, sick and young were expendable. On the other hand the “healthy” would work under horrid conditions, consuming a minimum of allowable food until they died of “natural causes.”

**January 1, 1942**—the United Nations is formed in Washington, D.C., by 26 signatories who agree to work together to defeat the nations of the Tripartite Pact.

**January 13, 1942**—the governments-in-exile of Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, Greece, Holland, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland and Yugoslavia condemn German atrocities—but never specifically mention “Jews.”

**Mid-January 1942**—the first Jews are deported from Lodz, Poland to Chelmno extermination camp.

**January 20, 1942**—the Wannsee Conference

**January 21, 1942**—Jews in the Vilna Ghetto establish the Unified Partisan Organization to resist Nazi terror.

**February 15, 1942**—the first mass gassings of Jews at Auschwitz begins. This will continue until November 1944, when Auschwitz is “decommissioned.”

**February 24, 1942**—The sinking of the Struma.

### ***The Struma***

In December 12, 1941 769 Jews, desperately trying to escape Europe, boarded the *Struma* —a barely seaworthy vessel—in the Romanian port of Constanta. The ship’s first stop was Istanbul—despite the fact that none of the passengers had Turkish visas. The passengers were not allowed to disembark and for 10 weeks were restricted to the boat. The Turkish government refused to transfer them to a transit camp. The British government would not allow the refugees to immigrate to Palestine. On February 23, 1942 the Turkish authorities towed the old ship to the open waters of the Black Sea, without food, water or fuel. Within hours the ship was torpedoed—most likely by a Soviet submarine mistaking it for a German vessel. All but one refugee drowned.

**February – March 1942**—14,000 Jews in Chortkow, Ukraine are murdered.

**March 1942**—all Dutch Jews are concentrated in the Jewish quarter in Amsterdam.

**March 5, 1942**—In the wake of the February 24, 1942 sinking of the Struma, the British War Cabinet reaffirms its decision to not allow “illegal” Jewish refugees to Palestine.

**April 1942**—Sobibor camp is nearly operational. Gassings begin in May 1942.

**March 17, 1942**—Full-scale extermination begins at Belzec.

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**May 27, 1942**—Reinhard Heydrich is ambushed by Kubiš and Gabčík in his open Mercedes as he was driving through the Prague suburb of Kobylisy. Heydrich died of sepsis on June 4, 1942.

**Spring 1942**—Bielski partisans



**Late May 1942**—London-based Polish government-in-exile received news from the Warsaw Jewish Bund that emphasizes the following:

- 700,000 Polish Jews have been murdered by the Germans
- Identified sites of death camps
- That the Nazis planned on destroyed all of Polish Jewry

*In June the figure was revised to 2 million*

**May 30, 1942**—Britain’s first 1000-bomber raid on Cologne, Germany occurs.

**June 1, 1942**—I.G. Farben’s Buna-Monowitz synthetic-rubber and oil works opens near Auschwitz. The Allies will bomb the factory in 1944 but leave Auschwitz’s gas chambers, 5 miles away, unscathed. The excuse offered—a rather lame one—is that such an action will detract from the overall war effort.

**June 9, 1942**—In Lidice Czechoslovakia Germans begin to murder over 190 men and boys in retaliation for the attack on Reinhard Heydrich.

**June 13, 1942**—British Ambassador to the Vatican Francis d’Arcy Osborne observes about Pius XII that his “moral leadership is not assured by the unapplied recital of the Commandments.”

**June 16, 1942**—The American *chargé d’affaires* in the Vatican, Harold Tittmann, reports to the State Department that Pope Pius XII is adopting an “ostrich-like policy towards atrocities that were obvious to everyone.”

**June-July 1942**—Multiple articles in the New York Times appears highlighting the Christian victims of the Germans rather than Jewish victims—though the latter is far greater.

**July 6, 1942**—Ann Frank’s family go into hiding in Amsterdam.

**July 8, 1942**—The *Einsatzgruppen* kill seven thousand Jews in Lvov, Ukraine.

**July 10, 1942**—Three days after a meeting with Himmler, one hundred Jewish women are selected for sterilization experiments at Auschwitz.



### **The Bielski Brothers**

The Bielski family included millers, farmers and successful entrepreneurs in Stankiewicz near Nowogródek, part of the Second Polish Republic. In September 1939 Stankiewicz was seized by the Soviet Union after signing a non-aggression treaty with the Nazis. The Bielskis were low-level administrators in the new government—a position that caused strained relations with other local Poles who saw the Soviets as occupiers. Following Operation Barbarossa (June 22, 1941) Nowogródek became a Jewish ghetto under Nazi control. The brothers—Tuvia, Zus, Asael and Aron would lose their parents and siblings to the Nazi pogroms that followed. The surviving brothers became the de facto leaders of resistance movement. They were men of incredible will, personal strength and leadership ability. They insisted on absolute obedience from anyone joining them and were clear that their primary goal was not merely resistance but to save lives.

After their parent’s death, the brothers along with 13 neighbors fled and formed the nucleus of their partisan combat group in the spring of 1942. Originally the group consisted of around forty people but quickly grew. Tuvia, the eldest and the group’s leader, had already served in the Polish Army from 1927-29 and rose to the rank of corporal. He had been interested in the Zionist youth movement and “would rather save one old Jewish woman than kill ten German soldiers.”

Tuvia sent others to infiltrate the ghetto and recruit new members to join them in the Naliboki Forest. Hundreds of men, women and children would find their way to the Bielski camp. At its peak there were 1,230 people in the group. No one was turned away. 70% of its membership consisted of women, children and the elderly.

The Bielskis activities were aimed at Nazis and their collaborators who had betrayed the Jews. They conducted sabotage missions and would offer protection to the noncombatants among them. They would raid nearby villages and seize food.

The Bielski Jews took part, fighting with the Soviets, in clashes between Polish and Soviet forces. The partisan leaders split into two units—one led by Zus and other by Tuvia. According to partisan documentation, both units killed 381 enemy fighters with 50 members of the group killed in action.

In the summer of 1944, when the Soviet counteroffensive began in Belarus and the area was taken over by the Soviets, the group led by Tuvia, numbering 1,230 men, women and children, emerged from the forest and marched into Nowogródek. Few of the survivors stayed behind in the Soviet Union. Many migrated to the United States and Israel as well as other Western European countries. Tuvia Bielski sank into obscurity although those he rescued continued to admire him. He first settled first in Israel, where he owned a taxi. Later, he moved to the United States, where he settled down in Brooklyn, drove a truck; he owned two trucks by the end of his career. He died in 1986, buried on Long Island and then re-buried a year later in Jerusalem with a full military honor guard.

Until the end of his life, he thought of his years in the forest as the most important time of his life.

In 2009 the movie, *Defiance*, tells the story of the Bielski brothers and their heroism.

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**July 13, 1942**—Mayor Wilhelm Trapp, the commander of German Reserve Police Battalion 101 addressed his men near Józefów—a village with 1800 Jews in Nazi occupied Poland. The teary-eyed mayor explains that the Battalion has been ordered to round up Józefów’s Jews and select out only able-bodied men. The rest—women, children and the elderly—were to be shot. Mayor Trapp, however, gave his 500 man battalion of conscientiously opting out of the slaughter. Only a dozen men of his battalion opted out of the killing. The rest proceeded.

By the end of 1943 Police Battalion 101 together with Order Police killing units would shoot 38,000 Jews and deport another 45,000 to Treblinka.

Years later, Holocaust scholar Christopher Browning would write *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, in an attempt to answer the question ‘How could apparently normal people become mass murderers?’

**July 14, 1942**—Hitler begins the transport of Dutch Jews to Auschwitz.

**July 19, 1942** - Himmler orders Operation Reinhard, mass deportations of Jews in Poland to extermination camps. In fact, the operation designed to kill 2 million Jews in the *Generalgouvernement* began in the fall of 1941 but was given this designation after Reinhard Heydrich’s assassination.



**More than a million Jews from all of Europe were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau and killed. Nearly 440,000 Hungarian Jews died there in mid-1944 alone. Seventy-thousand non-Jewish Poles died there alone with 20,000 Gypsies and 15,000 Soviet POWs**

**July 22<sup>nd</sup> - September 12<sup>th</sup> 1942**—265,000 Jews are deported from Warsaw to Treblinka.

**July 28, 1942**—Jewish parents in Tarnów, Poland are forced to watch as their children are shot by the Gestapo. Their parents are then transported to Belzec to be gassed.

**July 28-31, 1942**—Thirty-thousand Jews killed in Minsk, Belorussia by the *Einsatzgruppen*.

**July 30, 1942**—German industrialist Eduard Schulte, whose company has mines near Auschwitz, reveals to a Swiss colleague that Hitler intends to round up the 3.5 to 4 million Jews in Occupied Europe, concentrate them in the East and murder them using prussic acid starting in the fall of 1942. The information is soon passed onto the Swiss World Jewish Congress representative Gerhart Riegner.

**August 3, 1942**—the first portion of Emanuel Ringelblum’s Warsaw diary, hidden in ten tin boxes and milk cans, is secretly buried for safekeeping by a Warsaw schoolteacher named Israel Lichtenstein.

**August 8, 1942**—Dr. Gerhart Riegner, the Swiss World Jewish Congress representative sends an important telegraph to Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, a founder and President of the World Jewish Congress in the United States, and Sidney Silverman, a member of the British Parliament. Wartime secrecy required Riegner’s message to go through government channels. Thus, on August 8, 1942 Riegner contacted Howard Elting, an official at the American consulate in Geneva.

*“An alarming report was received that in Fuhrers' headquarters, a plan was discussed and under consideration according to which all Jews in countries occupied or controlled by Germany numbering 3.5 - four million [excluding Jews in the Soviet union] should, after deportation and concentration in East, be exterminated in one blow to resolve once for all the Jewish question in Europe - stop - Action reported planned for autumn methods under discussion including Prussic acid - stop - we transmit information with all necessary reservation as exactitude cannot be confirmed - stop - informant stated to have close connections with highest German authorities and his reports generally speaking reliable.” -- Riegner*

With Elting confirming the veracity of the “Riegner Cable” he forwarded it to the United States State Department. The US State Department referred to the “fantastic nature of the “allegation” and did not refer it to Rabbi Wise, who nevertheless learned of it by August 28, 1942. Rabbi Wise elected to suppress the information until it could be verified. He did not release the information until November 24, 1942 when, at a press conference, he announced that 2 million European Jews had been murdered by the Nazis—a understatement of the horror.

**August 5, 1942**—Dr. Henryk Goldszmidt was better known by his pen name of Janusz Korczak. Korczak was Polish-Jewish pediatrician, writer and educator who served as director of the Jewish orphanage at Karmelicka 92 in Warsaw. With the outbreak of WWII Korczak dedicated himself to helping young boys and girls. As conditions in Warsaw and the ghetto worsened he secured food and shelter for his children. His efforts were documented by diarist Emanuel Ringelblum in *Oneg Shabbat*.

The Germans occupied Poland in September 1939, and established the Warsaw ghetto in November 1940 at which time the Jewish orphanage was moved inside the ghetto. Korczak received many offers to be smuggled out of the ghetto, but he refused because he did not want to abandon the children. On August 5, 1942, Korczak joined nearly 200 children and orphanage staff members were rounded up for deportation to Treblinka where they were all put to death.

**August 8, 1942**—Edith Stein is gassed at Auschwitz

In Aug 1942—The Jews in Romania forced into Transnistria. By December, 70,000 perish.

### Adam Czerniaków's Diary

**Adam Czerniaków** (30 November 1880 – July 23, 1942) was Warsaw-born Jewish engineer and served as a senator to the Polish Sejm.

For three years Czerniaków headed the Warsaw Ghetto's *Judenrät*. He was the leader of Warsaw's 24-member Jewish Council or *Judenrät*.

Beginning on July 22, 1942 the deportations of 265 thousand Jews would begin to Treblinka. Exceptions were made for Jews working in German factories, Jewish hospital staff, members of the Judenrat and their families and members of the Jewish Ghetto Police.

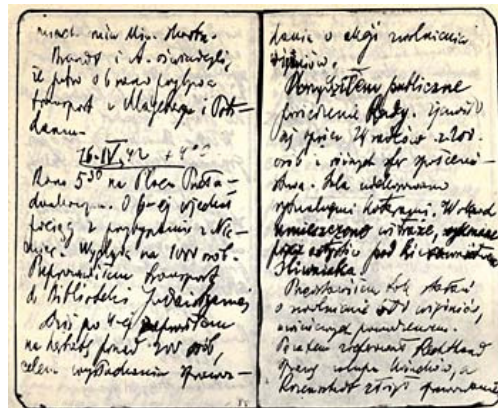
The Nazi's demanded that the Judenrat supply 6,000 deportees per day. The price of non-compliance with these orders would be immediate execution of hostages, including employees of the Judenrat and Czerniaków own wife.

Czerniaków was able to obtain exemptions for only a handful of people but despite his pleadings he could not obtain an exemption for the orphans Janusz Korczak's orphanage.

After his final pleas for the orphans fell on deaf ears he returned to his office and took a cyanide capsule. In his suicide note to his wife he wrote: *"They demand me to kill children of my own nation with my own hands. I have nothing to do but to die. I can no longer bear all this. My act will prove to everyone what is the right thing to do."*

Czerniaków kept an almost daily diary consisting of nine notebooks beginning on September 6, 1939 until the day of his death. All the notebooks, except one, were recovered and published in 1979. Adam Czerniaków is buried at Okopowa street cemetery in Warsaw.

Czerniaków wife Niunia survived the war and made the diary available, Jas their only son, fled to the Soviet occupied territory, did not survive the war.



Pages of the diary

**August 10-30, 1942**—Fifty thousand Jews from Lvov, Ukraine are murdered at Belzec.

**Aug 23, 1942**—14 months after the onset of Operation Barbarossa the German Army begins their attack on Stalingrad.

**September 23, 1942**

At the outbreak of WWII on September 1, 1939 Tuczyn) was a small Polish town that was soon annexed by the Soviet Union and became known as Tuchin. Three-thousand Jews lived there. With Operation Barbarossa the Nazis invaded Tuchin and harsh anti-Jewish measures began. Word of a pogrom in nearby Rovno (July 1942) reached Tuchin the Jews of the town came up with a plan to set fire to the houses in the ghetto, shoot at the Nazis and escape to the forest. On September 24, 1942 the plan was executed and two-thirds of the Jews escaped to the forest while the rest died in battle. The revolt ended on September 26<sup>th</sup> when the leaders turned themselves in to the German. Ultimately half of those that escaped to the forest were caught and killed. Many of the rest died from exposure or were turned in or murdered by local peasants. When the town was liberated on January 16, 1944 only 20 Jews survived.

**October 25, 1942**—The deportation of Jews from Norway to Auschwitz begins.

**November 1942**--The mass killing of 170,000 Jews occurs in the area of Bialystok.

**December 9, 1942**—The *Christian Century*, an American Protestant journal, attacks Rabbi Stephen Wise for his November 24, 1942 press conference regarding the Holocaust of European Jewry. The journal attacks Rabbi Wise as a liar and further argues that even if Wise’s information was correct that announcing it to the public served not purpose.

**Dec 10, 1942** --The first transport of Jews from Germany arrives at Auschwitz.

**December 12, 1942**—A Jewish revolt in Lutsk, Ukraine is crushed by the Nazis.

**December 17, 1942**—The Allies—Great Britain, U.S., Soviet Union, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Luxembourg, Holland, Norway, Poland, Yugoslavia and the French National Committee—officially condemn the Nazi “*bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination*” and vow to punish those responsible. Several U.S. State Department officials try to block this declaration. This was the first time that the Allies officially condemned the Nazi for their treatment of the Jews in a report entitled “*German Policy of Extermination of the Jewish Race.*” The Allies urge Pius XII to condemn the Nazi atrocity perpetrated on the Jews yet the Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Luigi Maglione explained that the Pope could not publicly condemn particular atrocities.

The United States government adopted the position that the Jewish slaughter can only be helped by the total and unconditional Allied victory over Germany. The American press treats the Holocaust as just another war story and fails to call it what it is—the systematic destruction of Europe’s Jews. The Allies would not claim victory for another two and a half years! The Allies appear to accept that the likelihood that most of European Jewry will be killed before the war’s end.

**December 18, 1942**—British Ambassador to the Vatican, Francis d’Arcy Osborne asserts that Pius XII “does not see that his silence is highly damning to the Holy See.”

**Christmas Eve 1942**—Pope Pius XII delivers a 45 minute address during which he speaks of human rights and civil societies. The speech did not mention the plight of the Jews in particular. Instead Pius spoke of the “hundreds of thousands who through no fault of their own, and sometimes only because of their nation or race, have been consigned to death or slow decline.”

### Music for the Doomed

At each of the death camps, orchestras played cheerful tunes as the trains rolled in with their exhausted human cargo. The Nazis choreographed their masquerade by having musicians play familiar music of civilized society. Auschwitz had six orchestras. They performed as inmates went to work, were forced to “selections” and even as they marched to their death. As noted above, they ordered a special tune, the “Tango fun toyt” to usher prisoners to their deaths at Janówka



Encircling a prisoner about to be tortured and killed, the orchestra from Janówka, a labor camp in the Ukraine, serenades him with “Tango fun toyt” (Yiddish for “Tango of Death”). The tune is composed by Jewish musicians ordered to do so by SS-*Untersturmführer* Wilhelm Rokita, also was played when labor details left for work in the morning and when they returned—as well as during the selections of who would live and who would die. From *The Holocaust Chronicle* page 391.



Adam Czerniaków (1880-1942) Chief of the Jewish Council Warsaw, Poland

## Emanuel Ringelblum



**Emanuel Ringelblum and his son (left). Milk can on right is from *Oneg Shabbat* Archive**

Ringelblum was a Jewish historian and founder and director of the secret *Oneg Shabbat* Archive in the Warsaw Ghetto. He earned a doctorate in history at the University of Warsaw in 1927. He worked for the Joint Distribution Committee in Poland. In November of 1938, after the Germans deported Polish-born Germans—now stripped of their citizenship—to Zbaszyn, Ringelblum was sent there and spent 5 weeks acting as the person in charge of the refugees. This experience had a powerful impact on him.

After the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, Ringelblum continued working for the JDC and ran welfare programs and soup kitchens for Jews in the ghetto. Along with his friend, Menachem Linder, Ringelblum founded the Yiddisher Kultur Organizatsye (the Jewish Cultural Organization).

Early in the war Ringelblum launched the *Oneg Shabbat* (Sabbath Pleasure) Archive. Its members met in secret on Saturday afternoons and the archivists would collect testimonies by Jews who had come to the ghetto to seek help from self-aid organizations. Ringelblum would collect information during the day and write notes at night. He was determined to document a description of this unprecedented event for future historians. He and his colleagues collected data, wrote articles about the towns, villages, the ghetto and the resistance movement. They documented the deportation and extermination of Polish Jews.

Toward the end of the ghetto's existence archivists sent the information to the Polish underground which, in turn, smuggled it out of the country. The *Oneg Shabbat* materials were preserved in 3 milk cans. One of the sites was uncovered in 1946, the other in 1950 and the third is yet to be found. *Oneg Shabbat* constitutes the most comprehensive source of information regarding Jews in German-occupied Poland.

Although Ringelblum and his family would temporarily escape the ghetto he would eventually be deported to the Trawniki labor camp and go back into hiding. In March of 1944 his hiding place was discovered and Ringelblum and his family were taken to the ghetto ruins and murdered.

**December 30, 1942**—Pius XII tells an American representative that he regards the story of Jewish atrocities to be an exaggeration "for the purpose of propaganda."

**December 31, 1942**—By the close of the year the Reich has deported more than 2 million Jews to death camps. Hundreds of thousands of Jews have been murdered in the Ukraine by the *Einsatzgruppen*.

**Edith Stein (1891-1942)**

**Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross**



Stein was born in Breslau to an observant Jewish family but as an adolescent became an atheist. In 1916 she received a doctorate of philosophy from the University of Göttingen entitled "*Zum Problem der Einfühlung (On the Problem of Empathy)*."

In 1921 she converted to Catholicism and was baptized on January 1, 1922. In 1932 she became a lecturer at the Institute for Pedagogy at Münster. However, the anti-Semitic legislation passed by the Reich forced her to resign her post a year later. In a letter to Pope Pius XI she denounced the Nazi regime and asked the Pope to openly denounce the regime "to put a stop to this abuse of Christ's name."

She entered the Discalced Carmelite monastery at Cologne in 1933 and took the name Teresa Benedicta of the Cross.

Stein was sent to the Carmelite monastery at Echt in the Netherlands in order to avoid the growing Nazi threat where she wrote *Studie über Joannes a Cruce: Kreuzeswissenschaft* ("The Science of the Cross: Studies on John of the Cross"). Her Testament of June 6, 1939, states "I beg the Lord to take my life and my death...as atonement for the unbelief of the Jewish People." However, the Netherlands also would not prove safe for her and on July 26, 1942, the *Reichskommissar* of the Netherlands ordered the arrest of all Roman Catholics not of Aryan descent--converts who had been previously spared. Edith Stein and her sister, Rosa (also a convert) were captured and sent to Auschwitz where they were gassed on August 8, 1942.

Stein was beatified as a martyr by Pope John Paul II on May 1, 1987 and canonized by him on October 11, 1998 under the name Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. Controversy followed her beatification and canonization. Her death, it was pointed out, came as a result of her Jewish heritage--not her Roman Catholic faith.



## 1943

**Introduction:** In early 1943 not even the Germans had accurate figures of how many Jews had been murdered. To get this information Himmler commissioned Richard Korherr, chief statistician of the SS, to compile a progress report. Korherr, a staunch Nazi, complained that “the classification of the race presupposes many years of training and knowledge of genealogy. Jewish statistics have never been compiled on the basis of race but rather on the basis of religion.” Despite Korherr’s “challenges” his report in early 1943 to the Führer stated that “figures indicate that the Jewish population of Europe has already been reduced by 4 million.”

In 1943 tide of the war began to shift against the Axis. The battle of Stalingrad in southwestern Russia between the Axis and the Soviets for control of Stalingrad took place between **July 17, 1942 and February 2, 1943**. The loss of Stalingrad is often cited as one of the turning points in the war; from then on most Europeans feel that Germany will not win the war. Stalingrad’s capture was of paramount importance to Hitler for 3 reasons. First, it was a major industrial city along the Volga River providing transportation between the Caspian Sea and northern Russia. The capture of Stalingrad would have cut off supplies to the north. Second, its capture would secure the German army’s left flank as they advanced into the Caucasus mountain region—a strategic oil reserve to Stalin’s war machine. Lastly, the capture of the city named, for Joseph Stalin, would have proved a propaganda coup. In the end it was the bloodiest battle in modern history—with combined casualties in excess of 2 million—and little concern for collateral civilian casualties. It has been estimated that The Axis suffered 850,000 casualties (killed, disabled, captured) among all branches of the German armed forces and its allies, many of them POWs who died in Soviet captivity between 1943 and 1945. 400,000 Germans, 120,000 Romanians, 120,000 Hungarians, and 120,000 Italians were killed, wounded or captured.

With the Germans now unable to carry out their “Final Solution” to the remaining Jews of Russia they turned their guns to Europe’s last large Jewish communities still within reach. Hungary still had 750,000 Jews with another 300,000 in Rumania and possibly a sizeable population still in Vichy, France. Korherr concludes that “*European Jewry must have been reduced by almost ½ since 1933, that is to say, during the first decade of the development of power of National Socialism*. Again half, that is a quarter of the total Jewish [world] population of 1937, has fled to other continents.

Meanwhile, on the “Jewish Front,” Heinrich Himmler visited the Warsaw Ghetto on **January 9, 1943**. At its height the ghetto contained 400,000 Jews. Of those three hundred thousand were sent to Treblinka between July and September 1942. By the time of Himmler’s visit some 40 – 55 thousand remained when he ordered the deportation of 8,000 more on that day in January.

On **January 18, 1943**, led by a 23 year old Mordechai Anielewicz, the Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa (**ZOB**, Polish for the *Jewish Combat Organization*; called in *Yiddish* קאמף יידישע ארגאניזאציע) met Himmler’s order with armed resistance as the Jews in the ghetto stepped out of formation and fought the Nazi’s with small arms. The resistance was successful in the 4-5 day deportation to 5-6000 Jews. When the Nazi’s left the ghetto on January 22, 1943 the ZOB considered it a victory.

**January 3, 1943**—Polish President Wladyslaw Raczkiewicz requests that Pope Pius XII denounce the German atrocities against the Jews. Pius remains silent.

**January 7, 1943**—Either in an act of malice or ignorance British Colonial Secretary Oliver Stanley informs the British War Cabinet that Germany’s Eastern European allies have adopted a policy of expulsion of Jews rather than extermination. This is used as a pretext to limit the number of Jewish children accepted into Palestine.

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**Mordechai Anielewicz**

**January 13, 1943**—Twenty thousand Jews are deported from Zambrow, Poland to Auschwitz.

**January 17, 1943**—Berlin Bishop Konrad Graf von Preysing threatens Pius XII, saying that he will resign unless the collaborative behavior of the other bishops ceases.

**January 18, 1943**—Following an almost four-month hiatus (July 22<sup>nd</sup> – September 12<sup>th</sup> 1942), Germans resume deportations from the Warsaw Ghetto. Mordechai Anielievich and the ZOB react with their first acts of over resistance. Brutal street fighting breaks out.

**January 22, 1943**—A death train originating in Grodno, Poland on January 17<sup>th</sup> erupts in violence at Treblinka. A thousand Jews armed with boards, knives and razors attack the guards. By morning 10,000 Jews and guards have been machined gunned by the SS.

**January 27, 1943**—The United States Army Air Force mounts the first all-American raid on Germany, at Wilhelmshaven.

**February 13, 1943**—The *New York Times* reports that the Romanian government is offering the Allies Romanian ships to transport 70,000 Jews anywhere the Allies wish—only for the cost of a minimal departure tax. The U.S. State Department dismisses the offer. The British Foreign Office rejects it outright. The British also refuse further emigration to Palestine. The only way to help the Jews, the Allies maintain, is by the unconditional surrender of Germany—which would not happen for more than 2 years. In March 1943 Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long, wrote that saving Jews “would take the burden and the curse off Hitler.” Long’s contribution to State Department practice was the unremitting obstruction to the rescue of Jews in any form—including allowing the legal quota of immigrants to be filled.

**March 1943**—Nearly 5700 Jews are deported from Westerbork, Holland transit camp to Sobibor.

**March-July 1943**—The SS mounts an ongoing effort at Treblinka to eliminate evidence of mass murder.

**April 1943**—A concentration camp is established at Bergen-Belsen, Germany. Pius XII complains that the Jews are demanding and ungrateful.

### Rosenstraße Protest

On **February 27, 1943**, following the German defeat in Stalingrad, Joseph Goebbels ordered the Gestapo to arrest the remaining Jews in Berlin during the *Fabrikaktion*. Some 1,800 Jewish men—most married to Gentile women—were separated from the other 6,000 arrested and housed at Rosenstraße 2–4, a welfare office for the Jewish community. In one of the more significant acts of resistance during the war a “telephone chain” of interfaith couples spread the word on the whereabouts of their loved ones. Soon the spouses arrived at Rosenstraße demanding information about their husbands, bringing them food and insisting on their release. For a week the protesters, mainly women, held a peaceful protest demanding their husbands back. Some 6,000 protestors participated at one time or another.

Yielding under pressure and wishing to avoid shooting the women, Goebbels, released the prisoners and ordered the return of 25 men already sent to Auschwitz. Almost all the released men survived the war. The protest was one of the few attempts at peaceful resistance during the war and raises the question of “what if?” What if there were similar acts of civil disobedience—would it have saved more lives?

**April 19, 1943**—The Bermuda Conference was convened by the U.S. and Britain—its purpose was allegedly to deal with the issue of wartime refugees. In reality the conference, a calculated response to public pressure to rescue European Jewry, was little more than a public relations façade, intentionally held at a site that would make it inaccessible to reporters and private representatives. Member of the Joint Distribution Committee and the World Jewish Congress were not permitted to attend. Conference organizers carefully limited the agenda items and insisted that the “Final Solution” would not be discussed. From the outset, the Americans refused to consider any change to their strict immigration quotas and the British, as they did at Evian, took Palestine off the table. They would not even discuss sending food packages to concentration camp prisoners. As they did at Evian, the Americans sent Myron C. Taylor in place of any high ranking diplomat.

Instead the attendees spent their time talking about the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees created at the 1938 Evian Conference. In short, the outcome accomplished nothing. And while the Bermuda Conference dithered the Warsaw ghetto was going up in flames.

### April 19, 1943—The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

On April 18, 1943 the Jews of the Warsaw learn that there are imminent plans for the Nazis to re-enter and liquidate the ghetto. The date on ‘Goebbels’s Calendar’ was no accident—the first Seder night of Passover. Given the humiliating withdrawal of the Nazis on January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1943 there was reason enough to fear the return of the Nazis. Mordechai Anielewicz sent women and children down into the bunkers. All able-bodied men would fight to the death.

Led by Commander, SS General Jürgen Stroop, twenty-one hundred Germans troops, accompanied by SS, enter the Ghetto on the morning of April 19<sup>th</sup>. They brought howitzers, 13 heavy machine guns, 69 hand-held machine guns, 135 submachine guns and artillery and nearly 1400 rifles--the Jewish force of 1200 carried 500 handguns and 17 rifles. The main weapon of Jewish resistance was several thousand grenades and Molotov cocktails.

The Jews knew that they faced overwhelming odds. Their goal, apart from saving some women and children, was to exact a high Nazi toll and to not go like lambs to the slaughter.

## Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa (ŻOB) and the Warsaw Ghetto

Witnessing the fate of three-hundred thousand Jews the youth groups in the Warsaw ghetto had no illusions about the true intentions of the Germans. A document published three months before the start of the deportations by *Hashomer Hatzair* (a Socialist-Zionist young group) declared: “We know that Hitler's system of murder, slaughter and robbery leads steadily to a dead end and the destruction of the Jews.”

Because of their ability to view the situation objectively, a number of the leftist *Zionist* youth groups like *Hashomer Hatzair* proposed the creation of a self-defense organization at a meeting of Warsaw Jewish leaders in March 1942. The proposal was rejected by the *General Jewish Labour Union Bund* who believed that a fighting organization would fail without the help of Polish resistance. Others rejected the notion of armed insurgency saying that there was no evidence of a threat of deportation. Moreover, they argued any armed resistance would provoke the Germans to retaliate against the whole Jewish community.

In the summer of 1942 Mordechai Anielewicz had returned to Warsaw and witnessed the mass deportations to Treblinka. The 23 year old attempted to organize an armed resistance on learning that a major deportation to the Treblinka extermination camp had already occurred and that only 60,000 Jewish refugees of the camp remained. Anielewicz joined the ŻOB in November 1942 and by early 1943 was appointed chief commander. Early in 1943 he established a connection with the Polish government in exile in London and was able to receive weapons from the Polish underground on the “Aryan” side of the city.

In January 18, 1943, he was instrumental in the first Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, preventing the majority of a second wave of Jews from being deported to Treblinka. This initial incident of armed resistance was a prelude to the Warsaw ghetto uprising that commenced on April 19. Although there were no surviving eye-witnesses, it is assumed that Anielewicz either died fighting or took his own life, along with his girlfriend and many of his staff, in the ŻOB bunker at 18 Miła Street on May 8, when the Germans overran their position.

During the evening, one of the fighters, Tuvia Borzykowski, went in search of flashlights at 4 Kacza Street. There he found Rabbi Maisel, amidst the night's ruins--conducted the Seder and read from the *Haggadah*.

In nearby Vilna, the poet Shmerl Kaczerginski listened to the radio. Kaczerginski would later recall ‘we suddenly saw clearly the flames of the Warsaw ghetto and Jews fighting with arms for their dignity and self-respect.’

On April 23<sup>rd</sup> Mordechai Anielewicz wrote to Yitzhak Zuckerman...”Keep well. Perhaps we'll see each other. What's most important; the dream of my life has become a reality. I lived to see Jewish defense in the ghetto in all its greatness and splendor.”

The Jewish insurgents had prepared for a close quarters hand-to-hand fight. But before long Jürgen Stroop, choosing to avoid the January humiliating, chose to bombard the ghetto from afar and set it ablaze.

Finally on May 8<sup>th</sup> the headquarters of the Jewish Fighting Organization at 18 Miła Street was destroyed. Among the hundreds that died in the bunker was their leader, Mordechai Anielewicz. Zivia Lubetkin would later reflect ‘We fought back and it made our lot easier and made it easier to die.’

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Seven thousand Jews died in the ghetto and 30,000 were deported to Treblinka. A total of 631 bunkers were destroyed. Many Jews chose suicide rather than execution.

Though the uprising made little difference in a military sense, it was an immensely important statement of Jewish resistance against overwhelming odds.

On May 12, 1943, in London, a leading member of the pre-war Jewish Social Democrat Party, the Bund, Shmuel Zygielbojm, committed suicide. He had been a member of the pre-war Municipal Council in Łódź and for a while a member of the Jewish Council in Warsaw but had been sent out of Poland in January 1940 at the request of the Bund. Zygielbojm had been a leading speaker and broadcaster in London. In his suicide letter he wrote:

*“When the remnant of the Jewish people in Poland, whom I represent, is being steadily annihilated...with weapons in their hands”* he lamented that he “belonged” to them, and to their mass graves. The letter ends as follows: *“By my death I wish to express my vigorous protest against the apathy with which the world regards and resigns itself to the slaughter of the Jewish people.”*

**April 23, 1943**—The SS directs the administration of Auschwitz to prepare 120 women for medical experiments.

**May 16, 1943**—SS-Brigadeführer *Jürgen Stroop* reports the final liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto.

**May 23, 1943**—Nazi *Aktionen* kill thousands of Ukrainian Jews at Przemyslany and Lvov.

**May 30, 1943**—Dr. Joseph Mengele arrives at Auschwitz-Birkenau to begin medical experiments.

**Early June 1943**—Ten thousand Jews are killed in Janowska, Ukraine.

**June 11, 1943**—Himmler orders increased deportations of Jews from the Polish ghettos to the extermination camps.

**June 21, 1943**—Himmler orders the liquidation of all Jewish ghettos in the Soviet Union.

**July 1943**—In a radio broadcast, Jewish Congressman Emanuel Celler excoriates the United States government for its continuing silence on the Final Solution. He called FDR’s immigration policy “cold and cruel” and blasted the “glacier-like attitude” of the State Department. Celler later became a target of Senator Joseph McCarthy.

**August 2, 1943**—Jewish inmates at Treblinka—led by Dr. Julian Chorazycki, Alfred Marcelli Galewski and Zelo Bloch—armed with pistols, rifles, hand grenades and Molotov cocktails stage a revolt. Almost 400 of the camps 700 inmates escape. Most are hunted down and murdered.

**August 1943**—Slave-labor construction begins on Nordhausen, an underground weapons plant. The Mittelbau-Dora concentration camp was located on the outskirts of town to provide labor for the Mittelwerk V-2 rocket program.

**August 16-20, 1943**—Nazis enter the Jewish ghetto at Bialystok, Poland to destroy more than 30,000 Jews. Hundreds of resistance fighters, led by Mordechai Tenenbaum-Tamaroff and Daniel Moszkowicz battle with small arms, axes and bayonets. The few survivors are sent to death camps.

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**August 17, 1943**—Twelve hundred children from Bialystok are sent to Theresienstadt, Czechoslovakia and then onto Auschwitz where they will be killed.

**September 3-8, 1943**—The Allies invade the Italian peninsula. Italy surrenders.

**September 24, 1943**—Nazis complete the liquidation of the Jewish ghetto at Vilna.

**September 26, 1943**—At the Novogrudok, Belorussia labor camp Jews complete work on a tunnel dug under the barbed wire. A hundred of the 220 Jewish escapees make it out alive.

**Autumn 1943**—British and American bombing of the Ruhr region increases in intensity.

### **The American Jewish Conference**

The American Jewish Conference was created in August 1943, organized by the American Zionist movement, in order to unify American Jewish efforts in planning their postwar policy. In all 500 delegates representing 32 American Jewish organizations met. The conference agenda included the rescue of European Jewry, Jewish rights after the war, the Jewish right to Palestine and the election of a group that would carry out the conference’s decisions.

American Jewish leader Stephen Wise delivered a fiery speech calling for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine—a resolution quickly passed.

Unfortunately, the conference accomplished little. The American Jewish Committee (AJC) criticized the conference for failing to emphasize the importance of saving Europe’s Jews. It was not until January 1945 did the conference urge the U. S. government to rescue and provide aid for the Jews of Europe.

The conference is most remembered for two achievements: its seminal influence on American-Jewish commitment to the establishment of the state of Israel and for helping to shift American non-Jewish opinion in favor of the creation of a postwar home for European Jewry.

**November 3, 1943**—Operation “Harvest Festival” (*Aktion “Erntefest”*). This was the code name for the German operation to kill all remaining Jews in the Lublin District of the *Generalgouvernement*. The Aktion was a response to the uprisings at Sobibor and Treblinka extermination camps as well as the armed resistance in Warsaw, Bialystok and Vilna. Fearing additional Jewish-led revolts the SS decided to kill the remaining Jews employed in forced labor projects at Trawniki, Poniatowa and Majdanek.

Music was played through loudspeakers at both Majdanek and Trawniki to drown out the noise of machine guns on November 3<sup>rd</sup>. At Poniatowa the shootings took two days. The final death toll of this Aktion was 42,000 Jews.

**November 28<sup>th</sup> - December 1<sup>st</sup> 1943**—Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin meet in Tehran to discuss a British/American invasion force from the West.

**Early December 1943**—Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau instructs Randolph Paul and John Pehle to investigate the State Department’s handling of the Jewish refugee issue.

**December 22, 1943**—Henry Morgenthau confronts Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long, telling him face to face “*the impression is all around that you, particularly are anti-Semitic!*”

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**Late 1943**—SS chief Heinrich Himmler orders the razing of the Belzec—as has been done with Sobibór and Treblinka. At all three camps the land is plowed under and settled by Ukrainians.



**Morgenthau to the right of FDR**

## **1944**

One of the most important documents of the war—discovered in 1962 near Crematorium III at Birkenau—was a manuscript written by Salmen Lewental, a member of the *Sonderkommando*. Lewental’s account documents the horrific conditions at Auschwitz.

*“This was at the beginning of 1944. A cold, dry lashing wind was blowing. The soil was quite frozen. The first lorry, loaded brimful with naked women and girls, drove in front of Crematorium III. They were not standing close to one another, as usual, no; they did not stand on their feet at all, they were exhausted, they lay inertly one upon another in a state of utter exhaustion. They were sighing and groaning.*

*The lorry stopped, the tarpaulin was raised and they began to dump down the human mass in the way in which gravel is unloaded on to the road. Those that had lain at the edge fell upon the hard ground, breaking their heads upon [unreadable] so that they weakened completely and had no strength left to move. The remaining women fell upon them, pressing them down with their weight. One heard [unreadable] groans.”*

In the Lodz ghetto, where 80,000 Jews would begin the year, the *Ghetto Chronicle* noted on January 20, 1944 ‘People are faced with the catastrophe of inevitable starvation.’ Those caught in the ghetto still lived in hope that their usefulness as workers would keep them alive. The following month, in February, various machines—including sewing machines—arrived at the

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ghetto. Another factory was established. Perhaps this was a sign that they would be allowed to live. Little did they know that the machines had arrived after the *Erntefest* at Poniatowa.

In 1944 there was no letup in the pursuit of Jews, who would be rounded up in large cities and in the most remote villages. In April 1944 the Hungarian Government registered Jews and confiscated their property. A month later, mass deportations of Hungarian Jews began and for the next two months almost a half million Jews were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. By the end of 1944 the ghettos at Kovno and Lodz would be liquidated

From an American perspective 1944 was the year of D-Day—the invasion at Normandy on June 6<sup>th</sup>. Early in 1944 Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr. confronted Roosevelt with irrefutable evidence of anti-Semitism at the highest levels of the American government. Under pressure FDR forms the War Refugee Board. One of the most dramatic events of 1944 was the massive deportation of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz. The pace of extermination accelerated at Auschwitz. In one day during the summer of 1944 over 9,000 Jews were exterminated—a number that exceeded the crematoria’s capacity to incinerate them!

In 1944 Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg arrived at Budapest, Hungary, and proceeded in a quest that would eventually save 30,000 Jews by issuing diplomatic papers and establishing 'safe houses.' That summer the Soviet troops advanced westward and liberated the first concentration camp—Majdanek. Anne Frank, her sister Margot and her family were arrested by the Gestapo in Amsterdam and sent to Auschwitz and later to Bergen-Belsen where Anne died of typhus on March 15, 1945. The famous *Sonderkommando* revolt at Auschwitz-Birkenau resulted in the complete destruction of Crematory IV in the famous October uprising. The following month Himmler ordered the destruction of the remaining crematoria at Auschwitz-Birkenau. 1944 was also the year that Oskar Schindler saved 1200 Jews by moving them from labor camp to his hometown of Brunnlitz.

Who could believe that by January 1944 the world still stood silently as millions of Jews had already been massacred since Barbarossa?

At the highest levels of the American government the Holocaust was known—and had been known for at least 2 years. January 1944—the world would remain silent for almost another year-and-a-half while the gassings, shooting, hangings and death marches continued. Who would believe that the crematorium would continue to billow smoke to stop only when the Nazis themselves tore them down in a vain attempt to hide the evidence from the Allies rapidly closing in on them?

On August 20, 1944 Elie Wiesel witnessed the American bombardment of the I.G. Farben chemical plant near Monowitz-Buna—a part of the Auschwitz complex. Accompanied by P-51 Mustangs one-hundred and twenty-seven bombers dropped over 1300 five-hundred pound bombs on the factory. The killing centers of Auschwitz-Birkenau only 5 miles away went unscathed. Throughout 1944 pleas to bomb Auschwitz and the railway lines leading to it went unanswered. The spokesman for the U.S. War Department—John J. McCloy—stated on August 14<sup>th</sup> that

*“after a study it became apparent that such an operation could be executed only by the diversion of considerable air support essential to the success of our forces now engaged in decisive operations elsewhere and would in any case be of such doubtful efficacy that it would not warrant the use of our resources. There has been considerable opinion to the effect that such an effort, even if practicable, might provoke more vindictive action by the Germans.”*

The world did not just fall silent in 1944—in fact the world turned away. The Holocaust would continue. Six-hundred thousand Jews died in 1944 alone—most were Hungarian Jews at



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Auschwitz. In October the *Sonderkommando* uprising destroyed Crematorium IV. On November 6, 1944 Chaim Herman, one the final group of Sonderkommando, had written to his wife and daughter in France, “I am going away calmly knowing that you are alive and our enemy is broken.”

On November 25<sup>th</sup> at Birkenau the demolition of Crematorium II would begin. The following day, November 26<sup>th</sup>, the last 204 members of the *Sonderkommando* were murdered—including Chaim Herman.

**January 13, 1944**

Senior aides to Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau Jr.-- including Randolph Paul--were able to document a pattern of State Department attempts to obstruct rescue opportunities and to block the flow of information regarding the Jewish genocide to FDR. These men drafted a report to warning Roosevelt that the refugee issue had become a “boiling pot on [Capitol] Hill” and that Congress was likely to pass a rescue resolution unless the White House acted. Roosevelt, under pressure, established the War Refugee Board (WRB). These are excerpts from that report.

“One of the greatest crimes in history, the slaughter of the Jewish people in Europe, is continuing unabated.”

“I am convinced on the basis of the information which is available to me that certain officials in our State Department, which is charged with carrying out this policy, have been guilty not only of gross procrastination and willful failure to act, but even of willful attempts to prevent action from being taken to rescue Jews from Hitler.

I fully recognize the graveness of this statement and I make it only after having most carefully weighed the shocking facts which have come to my attention during the last several months.

Unless remedial steps of a drastic nature are taken, and taken immediately, I am certain that no effective action will be taken by this government to prevent the complete extermination of the Jews in German controlled Europe, and that this Government will have to share for all time responsibility for this extermination.

The tragic history of the Government's handling of this matter reveals that certain State Department officials are guilty of the following:

(1) They have not only failed to use the Governmental machinery at their disposal to rescue Jews from Hitler, but have even gone so far as to use this Government machinery to prevent the rescue of these Jews.

(2) They have not only failed to cooperate with private organizations in the efforts of these organizations to work out individual programs of their own, but have taken steps designed to prevent these programs from being put into effect.

(3) They not only have failed to facilitate the obtaining of information concerning Hitler's plans to exterminate the Jews of Europe but in their official capacity have gone so far as to surreptitiously attempt to stop the obtaining of information concerning the murder of the Jewish population of Europe.

(4) They have tried to cover up their guilt by:

(a) concealment and misrepresentation;

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(b) the giving of false and misleading explanations for their failures to act and their attempts to prevent action; and

(c) the issuance of false and misleading statements concerning the "action" which they have taken to date.

Although only part of the facts relating to the activities of the State Department in this field are available to us, sufficient facts have come to my attention from various sources during the last several months to fully support the conclusions at which I have arrived."

The report ends noting that *"If men of the temperament and philosophy of [Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge] Long continue in control of immigration administration, we may as well take down that plaque from the Statue of Liberty and black out the lamp beside the golden door."*

*Randolph Paul for the Foreign Funds Control Unit of the Treasury Department.*

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**The War Refugee Board: From the left are Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Secretary of War Henry Stimson, and Executive Director John Pehle.**

**January 22, 1944**—Under pressure, Franklin Roosevelt creates the War Refugee Board.

**January 25, 1944**—Hans Frank, governor-general of Occupied Poland, notes in his diary that some 100,000 Jews remain in the region under his control. Before the Wannsee Conference there were 3.4 million Polish Jews.

**February 10, 1944**—1015 Jews on a deportation train from Holland arrive at Auschwitz. Upon their arrival 800 are immediately gassed. Another 1229 Jews are deported from Westerbork, Holland to Auschwitz.

**February 20-25, 1944**—The Allies establish air superiority over Western Europe.

### The War Refugee Board (WRB)

The WRB was created on January 22, 1944 by FDR's Executive Order 9417. The WRB was an independent agency with the task of rescuing victim of enemy oppression in imminent danger of death.

The WRB was a direct result of Morgenthau's efforts as well as pressure from the American Jewish community and the U.S. Congress who insisted that FDR take concrete steps to save Europe's Jews. There was growing outrage at the failure of the Bermuda Conference and the apparent indifference of the U.S. and other Allies towards the plight of Europe's Jews.

Morgenthau, Paul and Pehle at the Treasury Department drafted the January 13, 1944 report to the president issued under Paul's signature. The report assigned blame to the State Department for their callous indifference towards the Jews. *"Unless remedial steps of a drastic nature are taken, and taken immediately, I [Paul] am certain that no effective action will be taken by the [U.S.] Government to prevent the complete extermination of the Jews in German controlled Europe, and that this Government will have to share for all time responsibility for this extermination."* The report was personally delivered to FDR on January 16<sup>th</sup>.

The makeup of the WRB included some who would have prevented its creation in the first place—Undersecretary of State Edward Stettinius, Jr. (representing Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, and Henry Stimson, the Secretary of War. In short the WRB was composed of some of the very leaders who opposed its formation in the first place! This bureaucratic tug of war limited the WRB's effectiveness.

The WRB was poorly funded—1 million dollars. In addition FDR was preoccupied with planning for D-Day while the British feared that a flood of "free" Jews would flood into Palestine. Actual rescue attempts were largely funded by private contributions from the U.S. -based Joint Distribution Committee (who raised 17 million dollars).

The WRB's original notion of establishing "free ports" as safe havens for refugees in the U.S. yielded one success—a single refugee camp in Oswego, NY that accepted 982 mostly-Yugoslavian citizens in August 1944.

The WRB's greatest success came in saving as many as 100,000 Jews in Budapest. The WRB is credited with saving as many as 200,000 European Jews. It is regarded as a late but significant effort on the part of the U.S. Government and American Jewry to help Europe's Jews.

If it can be said that there was some act of redemption on the part of the United States it was in the accomplishments of the WRB.

**February 24, 1944**—Two hundred *Sonderkommando* from Auschwitz are transported to Majdanek where they are all shot.

**March 19, 1944** - Nazis occupy Hungary (Jewish pop. 725,000). Eichmann arrives with Gestapo "Special Section Commandos."

**March 22, 1944**—One hundred Jews escape the labor camp at Koldichevo, Belorussia. The rebels leave behind an explosive charge that kills ten SS guards. Most escapees join the Bielski resistance in the Naliboki forest.

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**April 7, 1944** - Two Jewish inmates escape from Auschwitz-Birkenau and make it safely to Czechoslovakia. One of them, Rudolf Vrba, submits a report to the Papal Nuncio in Slovakia which is forwarded to the Vatican, received there in mid June.

**In May** - Himmler's agents secretly propose to the western Allies to trade Jews for trucks, other commodities or money.

**May 8, 1944** - Rudolf Höss returns to Auschwitz, ordered by Himmler to oversee the extermination of Hungarian Jews.

**May 15, 1944** - Beginning of deportation of Jews from Hungary to Auschwitz.

**May 16, 1944** - Jews from Hungary arrive at Auschwitz. Eichmann arrives to personally oversee and speed up the extermination process. By May 24, an estimated 100,000 have been gassed. Between May 16 and May 31, the SS report collecting 88 pounds of gold and white metal from the teeth of those gassed. By the end of June, 381,661 persons - half of the Jews in Hungary - arrive at Auschwitz.

**March 31, 1944**—Eichmann assures leading Hungarian Jews that German-Jewish relations will be *normalized* after the war.

**April 8, 1944**—On this first night of Passover, a Polish rabbi--Moshe Friedman grabs an SS lieutenant, excoriates him and promises the eternal existence of the Jews and the imminent demise of Nazism.

**April 15, 1944**—Tens of thousand of Hungarian Jews are forced into ghettos.

**April 29, 1944**—The first deportations of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz begins.

**May 1944**—The Lodz ghetto is liquidated. Thirty-three thousands Hungarian Jews from Munkács are gassed at Auschwitz.

**May 15<sup>th</sup> – July 9, 1944**—430,000 Jews are deported to Auschwitz. Transport trains cram a hundred Jews into a single boxcar. Suicide and insanity are rampant.

In a book entitled *The World Must Know*-- the official book for the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Michael Birnbaum wrote:

*“Between May 14 and July 8, 1944, 437,402 Jews from fifty-five Hungarian localities were deported to Auschwitz in 147 trains. Most were gassed at Birkenau soon after they arrived. The railroad system was stretched to its limits to keep up with the demand of the camp, where as many as 12,000 people a day were being gassed.”*

**May 19, 1944**—Adolph Eichmann sends a proposal to the Allies offering one million Eastern European Jews for 10,000 trucks. Eichmann calls it “blood for trucks.”

Joel Brand, the Hungarian Jew who carries the proposal is arrested by the British and sent to Lord Moyne, the resident minister of state in the Middle East, who comments: *“What shall I do with those million Jews?”* Lord Moyne is later killed by the Stern Gang (November 8, 1944)

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**Two transport trains inside Birkenau 1944**

**In June 1944-** A Red Cross delegation visits Theresienstadt after the Nazis have carefully prepared the camp and the Jewish inmates, resulting in a favorable report.

**June 2, 1944**—Itzhak Gruenbaum, the chairman of the Rescue Committee of the Jewish Agency, request the Allied bombing of rail lines leading to Auschwitz. The Allies begin bombing operations (Operation Frantic) in the Balkans and fly routes directly over the railway lines leading from Hungary to Auschwitz. During this 4 month operation tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews are sent to Auschwitz. The railway lines are never targeted!

**June 6, 1944** - D-Day: Allied landings in Normandy.

**June 7, 1944**—The first phase of the deportation and mass murder of Hungarian Jews is complete. In 23 days 290,000 Jews have been killed.

**June 10-11, 1944**—German ships carry an additional 50,000 Jews to Auschwitz.

**June 17-24, 1944**—The Jews of Budapest are confined to designated "Jewish buildings."

**June 12, 1944** - Rosenberg orders "*Heuaktion*" Hay Action the kidnapping of 40,000 Polish children aged ten to fourteen for slave labor in the Reich.

**June 23, 1944**—430,000 Hungarian Jews have been murdered at Auschwitz. Another 300,000 Jews remain in Hungary.

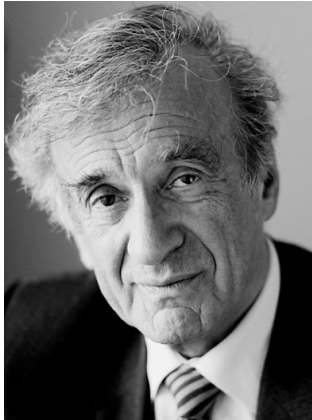
**June 24, 1944**—The U.S. Military Air Operations declares that bombing rail lines to Auschwitz is "impracticable" because it would divert bombers from achieving their missions at I.G. Farben—5 miles from Auschwitz.

**Summer 1944** - Auschwitz-Birkenau records its highest-ever daily number of persons gassed and burned at just over 9,000. Six huge pits are used to burn bodies, as the number exceeds the capacity of the crematories.

**In July** - Swedish diplomat **Raoul Wallenberg** arrives in Budapest, Hungary, and proceeds to save nearly 33,000 Jews by issuing diplomatic papers and establishing 'safe houses.'

**Summer 1944**—Oskar Schindler secretly protects 500 Jews.

**“Around us, everyone was weeping. Someone began to recite the *Kaddish*, the prayer for the dead. I do not know if it has ever happened before, in the long history of the Jews, that people have ever recited the ‘prayer for the dead’ for themselves.”--*Elie Wiesel recalling his experience as a teenager fresh off the transport train at Auschwitz in the spring of 1944.***



**Elie Wiesel Author of *Night*  
Nobel Laureate**

**July 1944**—Jewish-American Lieutenant Colonel Murray C. Bernays is sent to collect evidence of war crimes committed against American servicemen. Bernays formulates his concept of Nazism as a criminal conspiracy—central to the Nuremberg Tribunal of 1945-6. Neutral Switzerland ends restrictive Jewish-immigration standards.

**July 2, 1944**—The last of the Vilna Jews are executed.

**July 7, 1944**—Winston Churchill informs Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden that he is in favor of the Royal Air Force bombing Auschwitz. From July 7, 1944 to January 19, 1945 the Allies will bomb industrial targets near Auschwitz at least four times.

**July 8 – 13, 1944**—Red Army troops and Jewish partisans kill 8000 German soldiers at Vilna. On July 8<sup>th</sup> the Hungarian government tells Berlin that it intends to stop deporting Jews within its borders. Some 300,000 Jews are saved.

**July 9, 1944**—Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg arrives in Budapest with a list of more than 600 Hungarian Jews for whom Swedish visas are available.

**July 19, 1944**—Angelo Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII, appeals to Admiral Miklós Horthy on behalf of 5000 Hungarian Jews with Palestinian visas. Roncalli provides baptismal certificates for the Jews in hiding.

**July 20, 1944**—Operation Valkyrie--Select members of the German High Command plan and execute an unsuccessful bomb-assassination attempt on Hitler at the “Wolf’s Lair” in Rastenburg,

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Germany. The bomb is placed by German officer and aristocrat Claus von Stauffenberg. Von Stauffenberg was executed hour after the failed attempt.

**July 23, 1944** - Soviet troops liberate the abandoned death camp at Majdanek—500 inmates are found alive.



What the Soviets saw on July 23, 1944 at Majdanek where 500,000 were imprisoned of whom 360,000 were Jews who died by gas, hanging, starvation, disease and exhaustion.

**July 29, 1944**—3500 Jews are forced on a death march westward from Warsaw.

**Late July 1944**—SS General Richard Baer becomes new Auschwitz commandant. 46,000 Jews are gassed and cremated at Auschwitz.

**August 2, 1944**—60,000 Jews are deported from Łódź (Poland) Ghetto to Auschwitz after the ghetto is liquidated.

**Aug 4, 1944** - Anne Frank and family are arrested by the Gestapo in Amsterdam. She is among 1019 Jews deported on the last transport from the Westerbork, Holland, camp to Auschwitz. Anne and her sister, Margot, are later sent to Bergen-Belsen where Anne dies of typhus on March 15, 1945.

**August 23, 1944**—Romanian dictator Ion Antonescu is overthrown. Romania joins the Allies.

**August 25, 1944**—German forces surrender in Paris. Eichmann and his staff leave Hungary ending deportations of Hungarian Jews.

**September 6, 1944**—Zalman Gradowski, a Sonderkommando laborer at Auschwitz, buries a diary of camp life that he kept since arriving at the camp in February 1943.

**September 26, 1944**—On Yom Kippur 1000 Jewish boys are assembled at Auschwitz for Dr. Mengele. Those who do not meet an arbitrary height requirement are set aside and gassed 2 days later.



The International Committee of the Red Cross did relatively little to save Jews during the Holocaust. The ICRC considered accounts of a Nazi genocide as hyperbole. They justified their inaction by rationalizing that any attempt to aid Jewish prisoners would harm its ability to help other Allied POWs. The ICRC also advanced the argument that if they took a stance to improve the situation of European Jews that the neutrality of Switzerland would be compromised.

Only after mounting pressure was the ICRC allowed to “inspect” Theresienstadt. The “inspection” was a sham as Hitler showcased the prison into a “model” ghetto allowing the ICRC to write a favorable report.

Year later the ICRC has apologized for its passivity during the Shoah.

**September 28, 1944**—The Jewish Brigade Group of the British army, which fought under the Zionist flag, was formally established by Winston Churchill to fight under the command of Brigadier Ernest Benjamin. The Brigade included 5000 Jewish volunteers from Palestine. The Brigade fought against Germans in Italy from March to May 1945. After the war’s end and Germany’s surrender, the Brigade was stationed along the Italian border with Austria and Yugoslavia, and later in Belgium and the Netherlands. Some soldiers from the Jewish Brigade helped to create the displaced persons camps for survivors. Members of the Jewish brigade also became involved in organizing the “illegal” flight of refugees from eastern Europe into Palestine.

**September 29, 1944**—1,500 prisoners are deported from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz.

**October 1944**--Another 15,000 Jews are deported from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz. The Germans initiate death marches from Auschwitz to camps in Germany—Dachau, Bergen-Belsen, and Sachsenhausen. On October 4, 1944 all women and children traveling on the transport are gassed on arrival at Auschwitz.

**October 6, 1944**—*Sonderkommando XII* Jews from Poland, Hungary and Greece attack SS guards with hammers, stones, picks, crowbars and axes. They detonate Crematoria IV with explosives smuggled into the camp. The story of this uprising is depicted in the *movie The Grey Zone*.

**Oct 15, 1944** - Nazis seize control of the Hungarian puppet government and resume deporting Jews, which had temporarily ceased due to international political pressure to stop Jewish persecutions.

**Oct 17, 1944** - Eichmann arrives in Hungary.

**October 18, 1944**—Oskar Schindler, owners of a newly opened munitions factory in Brunnitz, persuades the SS to give him all 700 Jews for use as workers. Schindler also arranges another 300 Jewish women transferred from Auschwitz to his factory.

**October 20, 1944**—Documents at Auschwitz that reveal the fate of prisoners are burned.



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**Oct 28, 1944** - The last transport of Jews to be gassed--2,000 from Theresienstadt--arrives at Auschwitz.

**Oct 30, 1944** - Last use of gas chambers at Auschwitz. They will be disassembled in November.

**Nov 8, 1944** - Nazis force 25,000 Jews to walk over 100 miles in rain and snow from Budapest to the Austrian border, followed by a second forced march of 50,000 persons, ending at Mauthausen.

**November 8, 1944**—the Stern Gang assassinates Lord Walter Moyne, Britain’s minister of state in the Middle East in Cairo.

**Nov 25, 1944** - Himmler orders the destruction of the crematories at Auschwitz.

**November 25, 1944**--A prisoner demolition of Auschwitz’s crematorium II begins.

**December 16, 1944**—Three-hundred thousand German troops from the Fifth and Sixth Panzer divisions launch an offensive against the American First and Ninth Armies. The Germans gamble to seize the strategic port of Antwerp, Belgium. This becomes known as the Battle of the Bulge.

**Late 1944** - **Oskar Schindler** saves 1200 Jews by moving them from Plaszow labor camp to his hometown of Brunnlitz.



**The Liberation of camps begins in 1944**

## **1945**

The Nazis began evacuating Jewish prisoners from Auschwitz on January 17, 1945. In part they did this to hide the evidence, in part to preserve a much needed labor force but clearly there was a sadistic decision to prolong the policies of the Final Solution with death marches. Sixty-thousand Jews were force-marched from Poland to the German interior where Buchenwald and Bergen-Belsen awaited them.

On April 4, 1945, Ohrdruf—a satellite of Buchenwald—became the first camp “liberated” by American troops. Perhaps a better term would have been “discovered.”

The following is an excerpt from the Jewish Virtual Library at <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/>

Generals George Patton, Omar Bradley, and Dwight Eisenhower arrived in Ohrdruf on April 12, the day of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's death. They found 3,200 naked, emaciated bodies in shallow graves. Eisenhower found a shed piled to the ceiling with bodies, various torture devices, and a butcher's block for smashing gold fillings from the mouths of the dead. Patton became physically ill. Eisenhower turned white at the scene inside the gates, but insisted on seeing the entire camp. "We are told that the American soldier does not know what he was fighting for," he said. "Now, at least he will know what he is fighting against."

After leaving Ohrdruf, Eisenhower wrote to Chief of Staff General George Marshall, attempting to describe things that "beggared description." The evidence of starvation and bestiality "were so overpowering as to leave me a bit sick," Bradley later wrote about the day: "The smell of death overwhelmed us." Patton, whose reputation for toughness was legendary, was overcome. He refused to enter a room where the bodies of naked men who had starved to death were piled, saying "he would get sick if he did so," Eisenhower reported. "I visited every nook and cranny." It was his duty, he felt, "to be in a position from then on to testify about these things in case there ever grew up at home the belief ... that the stories of Nazi brutality were just propaganda." (Seemingly, he intuited then that these crimes might be denied.)

Eisenhower issued an order that American units in the area were to visit the camp. He also issued a call to the press back home. A group of prominent journalists, led by the dean of American publishers, Joseph Pulitzer, came to see the concentration camps. Pulitzer initially had "a suspicious frame of mind," he wrote. He expected to find that many of "the terrible reports" printed in the United States were "exaggerations and largely propaganda." But they were understatements, he reported.

Within days, Congressional delegations came to visit the concentration camps, accompanied by journalists and photographers. General Patton was so angry at what he found at Buchenwald that he ordered the Military Police to go to Weimar, four miles away, and bring back 1,000 civilians to see what their leaders had done, to witness what some human beings could do to others. The MPs were so outraged they brought back 2,000. Some turned away. Some fainted. Even veteran, battle-scarred correspondents were struck dumb. In a legendary broadcast on April 15, Edward R. Murrow gave the American radio audience a stunning matter-of-fact description of Buchenwald, of the piles of dead bodies so emaciated that those shot through the head had barely bled, and of those children who still lived, tattooed with numbers, whose ribs showed through their thin shirts. "I pray you to believe what I have said about Buchenwald," Murrow asked listeners. "I have reported what I saw and heard, but only part of it; for most of it I have no words." He added, "If I have offended you by this rather mild account of Buchenwald, I am not in the least sorry."

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On April 11 American forces entered Buchenwald. Four days later British forces liberated Bergen-Belsen where they found 13,000 unburied corpses along with 58,000, mostly Jewish, prisoners in critical condition. Ten thousand would die within the next few weeks—mostly of typhus.

Neither Hitler nor Roosevelt would live to see the end of the war. On May 7, 1945, at Rheims, France, General Alfred Jodl signed Germany’s unconditional surrender. Hitler had committed suicide a week earlier and three weeks earlier a brain hemorrhage claimed the life of FDR. On May 8<sup>th</sup> the Allies celebrated V-E Day but a long road lay ahead for Europe and the rest of the world.

The European Theatre of WWII claimed more than 35 million civilian and military lives. More than 6 million Jews, millions of Gypsies, Poles, Soviets, Slavs, Jehovah’s Witnesses, homosexuals, mentally handicapped had been targeted by the Nazi regime.

Jewish Holocaust survivors faced unique dilemmas. For them, liberation didn’t mean freedom. For most survivors, surviving meant surviving alone—brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, fathers, mothers and children had perished. There were no graves to visit—for most there would only be memories of a life that went up in ashes. Yet 250,000 Jewish survivors made their way to displaced persons (DP) camps. 142 thousand went to Israel, 72 thousand to the United States, 16 thousand to Canada, 8 thousand to Belgium, 2 thousand to France, a thousand to Britain and another 10,000 to Latin America.

**January 1945**—Five thousand Jews from Skarzysko Kamienna slave-labor camp (*where both Helen and Israel Wortman were imprisoned*) are evacuated westward. That month the Central Registry of War Criminals and Security Suspects (CROWCASS) is created by Supreme Headquarters.

**January 1-16, 1945**—The Battle of the Bulge ends and with it the last great German offensive of the war.

**January 6, 1945**—Hungarian authorities accede to Raoul Wallenberg’s request that 5000 Jews be transferred to Swiss-sponsored safe homes in Budapest.

**January 14, 1945**—The SS evacuates remaining prisoners at the concentration camp at Plaszów, Poland.

**January 17, 1945**—The Red Army enters Warsaw. In Budapest 119,000 Jews are freed by the Soviets.

**January 18 – March 1945**—The SS begins a massive death march of all prisoners and slave laborers at Auschwitz, Birkenau and Monowitz camps. Most die from exposure, exhaustion and abuse.

**January 20, 1945**—4200 Jews are shot at Auschwitz.

**January 21-29, 1945**—Oskar Schindler alters the bill of lading to read “Final Destination—Schindler Factory, Brünnlitz.” After unsealing the cars at his factory Schindler frees the Jews.

**January 27, 1945**—Soviets liberate Auschwitz and find 7,000 living inmates, including Ann Frank’s father, Otto.

**Late January 1945**—Death march begins from Danzig to Palmnicken. 700 marchers are shot. The rest are machine gunned by the SS at the Baltic. Twenty-nine thousand Jews are evacuated on forced marches from Danzig, Poland and Stuthof, Poland. Only 3,000 survive.

Wortman

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**February 1945**—Ukrainian nationals hunt down and murder Jews throughout the Ukraine.

**February 4, 1945**—The Yalta Conference establishes the respective spheres of influence that will take effect after the end of the war.

**February 13, 1945**—German troops surrender Budapest.

**February 18, 1945**—Five hundred Jews married to Christians are seized throughout Germany and sent to Theresienstadt.

**March 12, 1945**—SS Chief Heinrich Himmler and his personal physician Dr. Felix Kersten, sign the Himmler-Kersten Agreement, which provides for the handling of concentration camps as Allied troops approach. The document calls for an end to the killing of Jewish inmates.

**March 19, 1945**—Hitler issues the Nero-Befehl (Nero Order), a scorched earth directive to leave only a ruined Germany for advancing Allied troops.

**April 1, 1945**—The SS initiates death marches to evacuate Dora-Mittelbau and Kochendorf, Germany.

**April 4, 1945**—The U.S. 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division liberates Ohrdruf—a satellite camp of Buchenwald.

**April 9, 1945**—Dora-Mittelbau camp is liberated by the U.S. Army. Few inmates remain alive.

**April 10, 1945**—Eichmann visits Theresienstadt camp and gloats over how many Jews have perished there.

**April 11, 1945**—Buchenwald is liberated—21,000 inmates are still alive.

**April 12, 1945**—Generals Eisenhower, Patton and Bradley visit Ohrdruf and view evidence of Nazi atrocities.

FDR dies and Vice-President Harry Truman becomes president of the United States.

**April 14, 1945**—Swedish diplomat Count Folke Bernadotte negotiates the repatriation of 423 Danish Jews held at Theresienstadt.

**April 15, 1945**—57,000 inmates at Ravensbrück and Sachsenhausen are marched westward by the SS. Many are shot or die of exhaustion.

**April 16, 1945**—Red Army launches final assault on Berlin.

**April 20, 1945**—In a transparent bid to win favor with the Allies, Himmler arranges the transfer of 7,000 women—half of whom are Jewish-- from Ravensbrück to neutral Sweden.

**April 23, 1945**—The U.S. Army liberates Flossenbürg—about 2,000 inmates remain alive.

**April 28, 1945**—Benito Mussolini is captured and executed by Italian partisans at Dongo, Italy.

**April 29, 1945**—Hitler designates Admiral Karl Dönitz to succeed him as Führer and Reich president. Goebbels is named Reich Chancellor. Hitler dictates his final statement blaming the

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Jews and their “collaborators” for the war and all of Germany’s problems. *“Above all, I charge the leaders of the nation and those under them to scrupulous observance of the laws of race and to merciless opposition to the universal poisoner of all people, international Jewry.”*

Mussolini’s corpse and that of his mistress, Clara Petacci, are strung upside down in Milan’s Piazza Loreto before being mutilated by an angry mob.

123 SS Guards captured at Dachau are summarily executed by outraged American troops.

**April 30, 1945**—Hitler commits suicide in his bunker.

**May 1945**—SS-*Obergruppenführer* Hans-Adolf Prützmann, who helped organize the Babi Yar massacre, commits suicide. On May 1, 1945 Joseph Goebbels and his wife commit suicide after poisoning their six children.

**May 5, 1945**—U.S. 11<sup>th</sup> Armored Division liberates Mauthausen—110,000 survivors are found including 28,000 Jews. A mass grave of 10,000 inmates is also found.

The presiding bishop of the German-Catholic bishops’ conference instructs his priests to say a mass in Hitler’s memory.

**May 6, 1945**—U.S. 11<sup>th</sup> Armored Division liberates the concentration camp at Ebensee, Austria. 10,000 bodies are found in a mass grave. 3,500 inmates remain alive, but many die in the days ahead as they overindulge in food innocently offered to them by the Americans.

**May 7, 1945**—Germany signs unconditional surrender at General Dwight D. Eisenhower’s headquarters in Rheims, France. The fighting is to end at 11:01 p.m. on May 9, 1945.



**Colonel General Gustav Jodl signs unconditional surrender at Dwight Eisenhower’s headquarters in Rheims, France**

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**Time Square May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1945**



**Liberation at Mauthausen May 5, 1945**

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## **On Line Resources**

Yad Vashem Website — [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org)

U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Website – [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)

Jewish Virtual Library -- [www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/)