

MARTYRDOM & RESISTANCE



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IT'S OUR TURN TO KEEP THEIR STORIES ALIVE

The American Society for Yad Vashem Annual Spring Luncheon took place on Wednesday, May 23rd, at the JW Marriott Essex House in New York City. Thanks to our wonderful co-chairs (Goldie Hertz, Danielle Karten, Abby Kaufthal, Jaci Paradis, Rachel Shnay and Michelle Taragin) and esteemed honorees (Millie Zuckerman, Ruth Katz, Ann Sklar and Deborah Zuckerman). The luncheon was attended by over 300 supporters, including survivors, their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and friends.

Luncheon co-chair Goldie Hertz welcomed our guests and introduced Leonard Wilf, chairman of the American and International Societies for Yad Vashem. Referring to our honorees, Mr. Wilf stated that “the outpouring of attendance and support for Millie and the Zuckerman family this afternoon is a true testament to the esteem in which they are held by family, friends, and those whose lives they have touched.” Millie, her husband, Abraham, z”l, and their family are Guardians of Yad Vashem. Mr. Wilf then invited all survivors present at the luncheon to please rise and be recognized. “[Their] stories of perseverance and resilience are inspirational and remind us why we are here today.”

Rella Feldman, ASYV board member and longtime friend of the Zuckerman family, introduced our beloved honoree, Millie Zuckerman. Millie was born in 1925 in *Huminska*, Poland. Ms.

Feldman was born in the *BinderMichel* Displaced Persons Camp in Austria, the same DP camp where Millie met and married her late husband, Abe, z”l. Ms. Feldman highlighted Millie’s optimism and fortitude, “the same qualities that allowed [her] to persevere through the horrors of World War II and build a family with Abe after the *Krieg*.”

proudly stood next to her mother at the podium and spoke of the inspiring love she witnessed between her parents all her life. Ms. Katz conveyed the continued strength of her parents and their legacy. “From the ashes of the Holocaust, the Zuckerman family has grown to 32, so far.”

Luncheon co-chair Rachel Shnay introduced our esteemed guest

chronicles the experience of Michael and his extended family during the Holocaust, its aftermath, and into the postwar years. Ms. Holinstat acknowledged that her father, unfortunately, never used to speak about his past and the horrors he faced in Poland during the war. As Leonard Wilf stated earlier in the afternoon, “It took Michael seventy years to tell his story — and what a story it is.” Today, Michael and Debbie travel to schools and conferences to speak about their book and share Mr. Bornstein’s story of survival. Copies of *Survivors Club* were provided for all of our guests, thanks to the generosity of Patti Kenner, and many guests stayed to have their copies signed by the authors.

Luncheon attendees explored the Yad Vashem exhibit “Spots of Light: Women in the Holocaust” before gathering in the ballroom for a meaningful program.

The “Spots of Light” exhibit features nine aspects of the Jewish woman’s daily life during the Holocaust: Love, Motherhood, Caring for Others, Womanhood, Resistance and Rescue, Friendship, Faith, Food, and the Arts. Each aspect is accompanied by a personal story, related in the first person. According to Yad Vashem, “by giving expression to these individual women, the exhibition reveals the poignant stories behind the historical events, and provides faces and voices within the darkness and silence.”

To close the program, Jaci Paradis called upon everyone in attendance to renew their involvement and committed support for Yad Vashem and Holocaust remembrance. Michelle Taragin echoed this and the message of the entire afternoon — never forget. We must continue to tell the stories of those who were murdered and those who survived the Holocaust because “now it’s our turn to keep their stories alive.”



Millie Zuckerman, Ruth Katz, Ann Sklar and Deborah Zuckerman, 2018 Spring Luncheon honorees, are being presented with the American Society for Yad Vashem Leadership Award by Leonard Wilf, chairman of ASYV. They are joined by some of Millie Zuckerman’s grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Millie Zuckerman, a Holocaust survivor and the matriarch of her family, spoke with grace and strength. She said, “It is hard to imagine it has been 73 years since the war ended,” and that it is “such an honor to be honored.” Four generations of the Zuckerman family were present that afternoon. Ruth Katz, Millie’s daughter,

speakers, Michael Bornstein and Debbie Bornstein Holinstat. In her remarks, Shnay, who is also Young Leadership Associates co-chair, aptly described the importance of Yad Vashem when she declared, “The significance of one life, one name — that is Yad Vashem.” As the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, Shnay grew up hearing her grandparents’ stories. It was with great pride that she introduced our guest speakers, as she knows “the time will come when there are no survivors remaining to tell their stories first hand.”

Mr. Bornstein, a Holocaust survivor, is one of the youngest survivors of the Auschwitz concentration camp. He and his daughter, broadcast news journalist Debbie Holinstat, are the co-authors of *Survivors Club: The True Story of a Very Young Prisoner of Auschwitz*. The book

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WAS THIS POLISH *SHTETL*'S PRE-HOLOCAUST JEWISH HISTORY FORGOTTEN, OR ERASED?

BY MATTHEW KALMAN,
THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

When Jerusalem-based photographer and filmmaker David Blumenfeld decided to follow efforts to restore the Jewish cemetery in *Ivansk*, the Polish town where his grandfather was born, he didn't realize he would become entangled in a project that would awaken dark memories of collaboration with the Nazis and spark a national furor in Poland.

Blumenfeld's journey into Poland's guilty past is captured in his new documentary *Scandal in Ivansk*.

Descendants of *Ivansk's* Jews, who in 1939 made up most of the town's population before they were almost all deported and murdered by the Nazis, discovered that the ancient Jewish cemetery had almost been erased. The tombstones had disappeared. The memorial in the town square doesn't mention Jews at all, and all the land and property once owned by the Jews was taken by their Polish neighbors.

"It was strange to think that before the war most of *Ivansk* was Jewish, yet today there was no trace of the Jewish *shtetl* that once existed here," says Blumenfeld.

As the film unfolds and the ancient cemetery emerges from its neglected overlay of trees and scrub, a question haunts the town: Were the Jews forgotten, or was their presence here

consciously suppressed?

The Jewish group begins restoring the cemetery and collecting the tombstones, stirring memories of the once-forgotten neighbors whose stores once lined the main square. Some residents want to forget. Others want to remember — and even apologize. There are whispers of theft, ghosts of betrayal, and dark mutterings of the ultimate sin: collaboration with the Nazis.

When the town mayor unveils a new memorial, the decades-old scandal of mass murder is supplanted by a new uproar. The inscription refers to "collaborators," triggering a national debate about the role of Poles in the crimes of the Nazis.

Blumenfeld is on hand to witness and document these developments, accompanying the descendants of the town's Jews as they seek to preserve the memory of their families, some of whom had lived in *Ivansk* for centuries.

"At first, I was cynical about going back to Poland. When I came across a dramatic testimony by the sole survivor from the town describing the day before the Nazis arrived, I knew I had to make this film," says Blumenfeld.

"Aware of their impending fate, the rabbi gathered the Jews to bury their holy Torah scrolls in the Jewish cemetery. He made those assembled swear to one day 'tell the world what the Nazis and their collaborators did

to us here,'" Blumenfeld says.

"Little did I know that these words etched onto a stone monument 70 years later would cause a front-page, nationwide scandal across Poland, and set me onto an odyssey exploring



David Blumenfeld, director of the documentary *Scandal in Ivansk*.

the subject of memory through the lens of the often contentious relationship of Poles and Jews," he says.

Blumenfeld's timely film provides an intimate portrait of a community struggling with the politics of memory and history that helped forge Poland's new legislation that banned any mention of "Polish" collaboration with the Nazis or "Polish" death camps.

An academic recalls a poll by the Polish Academy of Sciences that

found 61% of Poles believed that Poles suffered as much as or more than the Jews under the Nazis.

"Between Poles and Jews here is a struggle about victimhood and who is the ultimate victim," says Professor Havi Dreifuss of Tel Aviv University.

"During World War II the Poles were under a cruel Nazi occupation. This feeling of victimhood increased under the Soviet occupation. They were the ultimate victims. They couldn't even imagine that there was someone in a worse situation," says Dreifuss.

As Blumenfeld gets the elderly residents to open up about their memories of their Jewish neighbors, the hidden secrets of the town's guilty past tumble out. They recall how the Nazis chased the Jews through the streets, shooting the elderly and sick who couldn't keep up. One day, the Jews were marched into the town square and forced to dump all their belongings before being marched off to the train station.

A resident reveals what happened to those items — and to the homes and land the Jews left behind. "Many of the Poles became rich from this," he says.

And what happened to the precious Torah scrolls?

The rabbi thought they would be safe buried in the cemetery, but did he really understand the neighbors who had shared their little town?

THE WARSAW GHETTO: THE EPITOME OF RIGHTFUL RESISTANCE

BY BEN COHEN, JNS

It's hard to say for sure whether the following fable was really told in the Warsaw ghetto, but it's grimly funny enough to warrant repeating.

The story goes that at the height of World War II, Winston Churchill consulted with the Chassidic Rabbi of *Gur* about the best way of bringing down Nazi Germany. The rabbi told the British wartime leader that there were two ways he could think of: one natural, the other supernatural.

"The natural way would be if one million angels with flaming swords descended on Germany and destroyed it," explained the rabbi. "The supernatural way would be if one million British paratroopers descended on Germany and did the same thing."

"Supernatural" may be too weak a word to describe how the very idea of outside military assistance must have seemed to the approximately 70,000 Jews who remained in the Warsaw ghetto on April 19, 1943 — the first night of Passover — as Nazi troops launched their final liquidation. But by the time they finished that operation on May 16 — with the symbolic burning of the Warsaw Great Synagogue

and the deportation to death camps of the surviving inhabitants — hundreds of the invaders lay dead or wounded after nearly a month of savage fight-



The Mordechai Anielewicz statue at the *Yad Mordechai* kibbutz in southern Israel.

ing with the poorly armed, impossibly brave Jewish fighters in the ghetto.

We think, for good reason, of the Warsaw ghetto ultimately as a tragedy to be mourned, the culmination of the process of eliminating the Jewish population of the Polish capital that began in 1939, and one more example of the same brutal fate met by Jews in other Polish towns and cities — like those in the Vilna ghetto

who rose in armed revolt against the Nazis the previous year, in January 1942.

Yet I want to suggest that the passage of time should encourage us to think a little less mournfully. A story of great hope revolves around the events of the Warsaw ghetto uprising that needs to be heard, particularly at a time when — as a survey carried out by the Jewish Claims Conference revealed recently — the public's general knowledge of what the Holocaust involved is diminishing.

The Warsaw ghetto uprising is not just a key aspect of the Holocaust, but one of the most inspiring stories that history has ever recorded in the general struggle for liberty. The American revolutionaries understood that human beings have an inherent right to resist tyranny regardless of who the tyrant is, and that same understanding was what drove the Jewish fighters.

Moreover, the Jews of Vilna and Warsaw were not the only communities to fight back against the tyranny of Nazism. A circular in November 1943 from the surviving Jewish underground fighters in Poland reported on Jewish armed resistance in the city of *Bialystok*, and in the *Treblinka* and *Sobibor* death camps,

as well as in smaller towns — *Tarnow*, *Bedzin*, *Czenstochow*, *Borislav* — whose names ring few bells with us almost a century later. All of these uprisings broke out in the weeks and months after news of the resistance in Warsaw had spread; in the words of the report, they were "a continuation of the chain of heroic deeds which the Warsaw ghetto initiated."

That same report also proudly observed how Jewish Communists and the socialist, non-Zionist Bund had "joined hands with all Zionist underground organizations" in the Warsaw ghetto. "Our comrades lived and worked with the others just as members of a close family. A common aim united us," it said. "During this entire period of over half a year, there were no quarrels or struggles, which are common among adherents of different ideologies."

There is, in those words, an unmistakable sense of victory, even as the rest of the report records defeats, setbacks and other difficulties. Those fighters knew, as the end engulfed them, what they had achieved. Enough time has now passed for us to judge that even if they did not live, they won. For that, they deserve our eternal gratitude.

TWO FRIENDS WHO ESCAPED FROM AUSCHWITZ AND WARNED THE WORLD

BY JACKSON RICHMAN, TABLET

Thirty years ago, Alfred Wetzler died in his native Slovakia. He and his friend, Rudolf Vrba, risked their lives and escaped Auschwitz so they could warn other Jews and the world in precise detail what was happening behind the fences and gates of the Nazi concentration and extermination camp. Although they were not successful in their attempt to save Hungary's Jews from marching to their deaths at Auschwitz, Vrba and Wetzler did succeed in saving some Jews as well as compiling and publicizing the first record of the Nazis' systematic atrocities at the camp.

Rudolf Vrba, formerly Walter Rosenberg, was born on September 11, 1924, in the Slovakian town of *Trnava*. The son of a sawmill owner, he was expelled from high school in Bratislava due to Slovakia's version of the Nuremberg Laws. He worked as a laborer in *Trnava* until March 1942, when he was arrested, and on June 14, 1942, he was deported to the *Maidanek* concentration camp and later to Auschwitz.

Alfred Wetzler was born on May 10, 1918, in the same town as Vrba. He was sent to *Birkenau* on April 13, 1942. Later, he too was sent to Auschwitz.

Both Vrba and Wetzler held administrative jobs in Auschwitz, which allowed them access to many different areas of the camp and finally to plan their escape. "There had been a number of escapes from Auschwitz; and in every case, the escapee had been caught, sometimes within hours, sometimes within a few days," the late British historian and Oxford professor Martin Gilbert said in a 2011 episode about Vrba and Wetzler's escape in the PBS series *Secrets of the Dead*. As the English historian David Cesarani added, "The consequences of failure were torture and public execution. Anyone connected with the escape would also be tortured and murdered."

In his book *I Escaped from Auschwitz*, Vrba wrote, "It was a simple plan and I literally stumbled across it by accident." When an escape occurred, the two men noticed, the Nazis would look for the escapee for three days, after which they would give up on the search. If they could survive the initial search period, they reasoned, their chances of survival would increase.

On April 7, 1944, almost two years after Wetzler arrived at Auschwitz, he and Vrba hid in a cavity created within a woodpile in an expansion area of new construction in the camp for the Hungarian Jews. They covered themselves with gasoline-soaked Russian tobacco, hoping it would mask their scent from the SS dogs. After remaining immobile in the hiding spot for

three days, they sprinted for the woods. But even though they were outside the hellish place, they were still not safe, as the Germans had expelled the Poles from all the towns and villages in the Auschwitz region and replaced them with ethnic German *Volksdeutsch*.

"Once you were outside you were a marked person. Your head was shaven, you were filthy, you stank. Anyone seeing one of these escaping figures knew exactly who they were



Alfred Wetzler and Rudolf Vrba.

and where they had come from," Cesarani said. "The Nazis were searching with dogs, there were SS teams scouring the countryside. It was an area that was already descending into guerrilla warfare, partisan warfare. It was covered with police, German troops; there were military installations, military convoys on the move. Very few friends."

Vrba and Wetzler were careful, but they made mistakes along the way as they rushed to the Slovakian border. On the third day on the run, they accidentally wandered into a town. With the risk of being discovered, they tried to find their way out by stumbling down alleyways and back streets. Exhausted, starving and lost, they asked for help and were welcomed by a peasant woman who agreed to assist them.

Another close mishap occurred when they were less than halfway to the Slovakian border, running into a woman tending to her crops. Although suspicious, the woman introduced them to a sympathetic Polish farmer, who offered to drive them to the border and direct them where they could cross to avoid the Germans.

On April 25, 1944, 15 days after fleeing Auschwitz and after walking more than 85 miles through occupied Poland, Vrba and Wetzler finally arrived at the headquarters of the Jewish Council in *Zilina*, Slovakia. There, Vrba described to the Council the atrocities taking place at Auschwitz. The Council was horrified. At the time, there were rumors the conditions in these camps were appalling. But few could imagine the

Jews being exterminated en masse.

The two men revealed detail after detail about the systematic murder of hundreds of thousands of Jews. But it began to dawn on them that the Council didn't believe a word they were saying. According to Gilbert, the people at the Jewish Council were "astonished by the story, they couldn't believe it because what they [were] talking about is the death of some of their closest friends, relatives, fellow Slovaks."

Gilbert added that the councilmen couldn't imagine something systematic where, out of 1,000 people, half of them would be taken off a train and gassed within a few hours.

"The Jewish community in Slovakia didn't believe them at first because it was so unbelievable," George Klein, a junior secretary of the Jewish Council at the time, said. "Killing is one thing, but to organize the killing, to make it into a huge bureaucratic apparatus to organize the transport, to have everything streamlined: that was so incredibly German efficiency, that people simply didn't believe that it was possible."

Vrba, who had a phenomenal memory, told the councilmen the names of the people with whom he had been imprisoned. "[Vrba] memorized every transport, every train that came in, how many people were on it and how many of those people who were on it were immediately sent to the gas chamber," Gilbert explained. Convinced the truth was being told, the Council asked them to recall all they could about what was transpiring at Auschwitz. Vrba warned them that Hungary's Jews would be next and that the camp was ready for their arrival.

In their book, *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, historians Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum wrote that Vrba and Wetzler were able to compile the report through the "many dozens of Auschwitz prisoners who at great risk collected top-secret information on the camp crematoria."

According to Cesarani, the process of writing and translating the reports and sending them to places such as

the Vatican, the Jewish community and American representatives in Switzerland, and the Red Cross took time. By the time the report had been compiled and translated, Germany had occupied Hungary and had begun preparing for mass deportations of its Jews.

Rudolf Kastner, who was the leader of the Jewish Council in Budapest, received the Vrba-Wetzler report and was stunned, but did not release the report to the Jews of Hungary. He kept it a secret because he thought that if the information was revealed, it would derail a deal he and the Council were trying to make with the Nazis.

Joel Brand, a Hungarian Jewish council member, met personally with Adolf Eichmann, who made Brand an extraordinary offer. Eichmann would allow a million Jews to go free in exchange for 10,000 trucks loaded with supplies. Brand, feeling that the deal was too good to be true, pursued the deal. He brought the deal to the British, who saw this deal as, according to Cesarani, a "grotesque trick to allow the Germans to claim they are negotiating with the British over the fate of Jews, that they're going to take delivery of trucks to use against the Russians."

On May 15, 1944, over a month after the escape, Vrba learned that despite his risking his life to tell the world what was happening at Auschwitz, despite his pages and pages of detailed accounts, the Hungarian deportations were under way. He believed he had failed.

Two days later, approximately 4,000 Hungarian Jews arrived at Auschwitz. The Nazis bypassed the selection process, and almost all of them were led to the gas chambers immediately. "The extermination of 600,000 Hungarian Jews was the fastest campaign during the entire Holocaust," the Jewish Council's George Klein said. "It went on with incredible speed so there wasn't much time for reflection."

Vrba and Wetzler were devastated. Fearful they would be recaptured, they fled to the Slovakian mountains. Now in hiding, Vrba and Wetzler felt there was nothing more they could do to help the Jews of Hungary. In Budapest, Rudolph Kastner still hoped the Eichmann deal could succeed even though the Allies wanted no part of it. Eichmann knew that as Kastner dragged out the negotiations, more Jews were being sent to the gas chambers.

In the end, Eichmann allowed over 1,600 Jews to go to safety. However, the normal deportations to Auschwitz continued. Cesarani remarked that the reason why information was not broadcast to the Jews of Hungary is

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THE RABBI SAVED BY HITLER'S SOLDIERS

The Rabbi Saved by Hitler's Soldiers: Rebbe Joseph Isaac Schneersohn and His Astonishing Rescue.

By Bryan Mark Rigg. University Press of Kansas: Lawrence, Kansas, 2016. 490 pp. \$49.95 hardcover.

REVIEWED BY DR. DIANE CYPKIN

"To the Lubavitchers, it made sense that angels in human form had saved the Rebbe because, in Chabad's opinion, only God could have choreographed the disparate cast of characters who worked together to extract the Rebbe and his party from a mass of killers."

The story told by the conscientious researcher, Bryan Mark Rigg, in his well-written, riveting work entitled *The Rabbi Saved by Hitler's Soldiers: Rebbe Joseph Isaac Schneersohn and His Astonishing Rescue*, is nothing short of miraculous. And yet, it's all true! Nor were angels involved. Who took an interest in the Rebbe's desperate situation? Who did everything in their power to make sure the outcome was successful?

First off, in September 1939, with the invasion of Poland by the Nazis, the leadership of the numerically substantial Lubavitcher community in America, who viewed Rebbe Schneersohn as the "unquestioned leader of world Jewry and the potential *Moshiach* (Messiah) of their gen-

eration," took a major interest in his welfare. Soon, because of that, heartfelt pleas for emergency action went out to government officials. Among those whose attention was drawn to the plight of the Rebbe were Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, Senator Robert F. Wagner, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, attorney and FDR advisor Benjamin V. Cohen, Postmaster General James A. Farley, assistant chief of the State Department's European Affairs Division Robert T. Pell, and more. (Interestingly, in later years many of these individuals would not be known for their particular concern with the plight of all Jews in Europe during the war years.)

Moreover, among those noted above, it was, most especially, Secretary of State Hull (surprisingly) and Pell who actually acted on what they learned. Indeed, the proverbial "ball started rolling," as regards the Rebbe's rescue, when the secretary of state "authorized" Pell to write to Raymond Geist, the American consul general in Berlin, and Geist, in turn, contacted Helmuth Wohlthat, "the chief administrator of Göring's office of the Four-Year Plan" and "an expert

in international industry and economics." Aside from being "fond of Pell," Wohlthat, by this time, had become a rather "ambivalent Nazi, despite his high office and party membership." In

short, Wohlthat took on the rescue mission. He contacted a good friend and like-minded individual when it came to "political misgivings" vis-à-vis Nazism, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, head of the *Abwehr*, the German military secret service. At that point, Canaris, realizing the "operation would be a delicate one," "entrusted the job of escorting the Rebbe

out of Poland to Major Dr. Ernst Bloch, a distinguished *Wehrmacht* officer who happened to be half Jewish."

At the same time, and of no less import, Max Rhoades, a "distinguished" Washington, D.C., lawyer known for his important contacts, was contacted by Sam Kramer, legal counsel for the Lubavitcher in America. Rhoades would tirelessly and determinedly wade through countless immigration obstacles in order to get the Rebbe and the close associates traveling with him (many of them fam-

ily members) into America. Thus, for example, in attempting to secure non-quota status for them, Rhoades, in presenting the Rebbe's case to American officials, compared him to the Pope and his "hierarchical" ministerial staff seeking safety in America. In case that argument didn't work, he also worked on securing quota visas for them. This meant he had to prove that they were really rabbis and that they could all support themselves. Meanwhile, Rhoades had no rabbinical degrees, bank statements or even birth certificates to show officialdom.

Indeed, there was quite a "cast of characters" that worked to save the Rebbe and his entourage. But ultimately "all the wheels in so many places turned," leading to eventual success.

This reviewer wouldn't attempt to tell the "how" of the story. That wouldn't be fair, especially since Rigg's absorbing page-turner of a work tells it so well.

Finally, concerning the author's comments regarding the Rebbe's actions or, rather, relative inaction regarding the actual physical rescue of other Jews still in Europe once he was safe in America . . . unfortunately, in that area, sadly, there's plenty of blame to go around, plenty . . . One could only wish it had been otherwise .

Dr. Diane Cypkin is a Professor of Media, Communication, and Visual Arts at Pace University.

IN EASTERN EUROPE, WHEN NAZIS KILLED JEWS, A "CARNIVAL ATMOSPHERE" PREVAILED

In *Broad Daylight: The Secret Procedures behind the Holocaust by Bullets*.

By Father Patrick Desbois. Arcade Publishing: New York, N.Y., 2018. 312 pp. \$19.83 hardcover.

In a new, second book about the "Holocaust by bullets," Father Patrick Desbois depicts in grim detail local bystanders' culpability while Nazis implemented the Final Solution.

REVIEWED BY MATT LEBOVIC, THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

For all intents and purposes, the first phase of the Holocaust was a communal undertaking, one that was jointly perpetrated by Nazi Germany and thousands of Eastern European collaborators.

When the Nazis invaded Soviet lands in 1941, the notorious death camps had not yet been constructed in occupied Poland. To enact Germany's "war of annihilation" against the Jews, mobile killing squads — called *Einsatzgruppen* — were deployed to conduct large-scale shooting massacres. In some towns, thousands of non-Jews turned out to watch the slaughter of Jews in festive atmospheres, belying the myth of a genocide carried out in secret.

Typically, *Einsatzgruppen* "actions" were conducted in Jewish cemeteries

or on the outskirts of town. Compared to the death camps more closely associated with the Holocaust, the mass shootings were well documented with photographs and contemporary reports. Nearly two million Jews were murdered in these open-air massacres, comprising one-third of the genocide's six million victims.

"Today, it is still said in the former Soviet territories that the killings were done in secret," wrote Father Patrick Desbois in his new book, *In Broad Daylight: The Secret Procedures behind the Holocaust by Bullets*.

Published in January, *In Broad Daylight* is the follow-up to Desbois's 2008 book, *The Holocaust by Bullets*, based on the Roman Catholic priest's investigations into the *Einsatzgruppen* massacres in Ukraine. For his new book, Desbois drew from research in seven countries where the *Einsatzgruppen* operated, with an emphasis on the non-German men and women who

helped facilitate the shootings.

Earlier this year, the author helped conduct a seminar for tour guides at the former death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, in Poland, where the Nazis murdered one million Jews in gas chambers. During the week-long training in January, 130 guides

learned about the "Holocaust by bullets" killings that — in a matter of months — "evolved" into the construction of six purpose-built death camps.

Although Desbois has identified hundreds of Holocaust mass shooting sites in Poland, the bulk of his work has been east of that country. Since 2004, his research team has interviewed nearly 4,000 eyewitnesses to *Einsatzgruppen* killings, including elderly men and women who admit to having collaborated with the Nazis.

"Memory survived among these people," Desbois has said of witnesses to the genocide, including those who were very young at the time.

"In little Soviet villages, the children

didn't watch the genocide of the Jews on television. They went to the neighboring fields in order to see for themselves," wrote Desbois, adding that boys were sometimes assigned the role of bringing bullets to the killers during mass shootings.

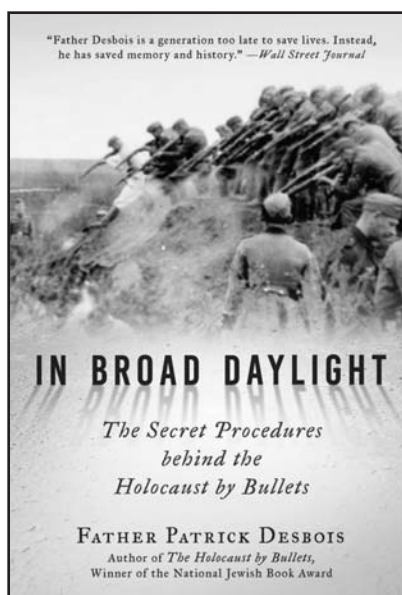
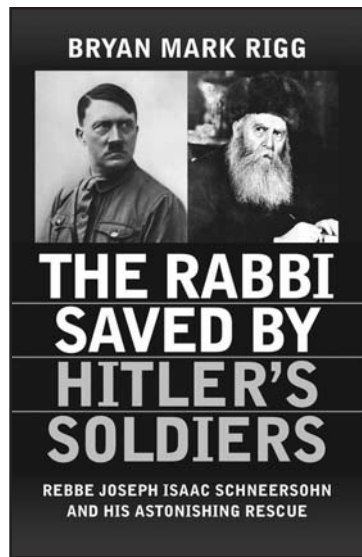
"The capacity to see the mass murder of others without taking any responsibility predates mass media," wrote the celebrated priest.

In 2004, Desbois founded the organization *Yahad-In Unum* (Together in One), based on his mission to locate and mark the Holocaust's *Einsatzgruppen* killing fields. Since then, the priest and his researchers have also applied their methods in war-torn Iraq, interviewing Yazidi survivors of the Islamic State's genocidal campaign.

The book *In Broad Daylight* was organized according to a "typical" *Einsatzgruppen* operation, beginning with "The Night Before" and ending with "The Day After." Within that timeline, some collaborators perform seemingly mundane tasks — the cooks and clerks — whereas others unleash horrors upon their Jewish neighbors, as depicted in a chapter called "The Rapes."

To identify potential eyewitnesses, *Yahad-In Unum* investigators usually

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WERE THERE ACTUALLY “JEWISH PERPETRATORS” OF THE HOLOCAUST?

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki says there were, along with Polish, Russian, Ukrainian and German. Israeli historians say it's part of an ongoing campaign to blur the line between the murderers and the victims.

BY DAVID B. GREEN, HAARETZ

Who was Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki referring to when he spoke about “Jewish perpetrators” in the Holocaust?

Morawiecki was responding to a question from Israeli journalist Ronen Bergman during a session at the Munich Security Conference. Bergman, the son of Polish Holocaust survivors, told the premier that when he was growing up, his mother had said she and her family were saved only because their Gentile neighbors did not know they were there. The neighbors, he said, “snitched to the Gestapo” when there were Jews hiding in the vicinity. Bergman wondered aloud if his revelation would make him subject to criminal charges in present-day Poland.

Morawiecki denied that anyone needed to fear being punished in Poland for claiming there had been “Polish perpetrators” — just as there were “Jewish perpetrators, as there were Russian perpetrators, as there were Ukrainian — not only German perpetrators.”

There is no denying that the Germans, in occupying Poland, forced the country's Jews to assist in governing and policing themselves, by way of the *Judenrat* (the Jewish councils) and the Jewish police, who were responsible for running the day-to-day affairs in the Jewish ghettos and keeping order. When the Nazis began the process of “liquidating” a ghetto, they would obligate the *Judenrat* to provide lists of the Jewish residents, and sometimes to select the victims.

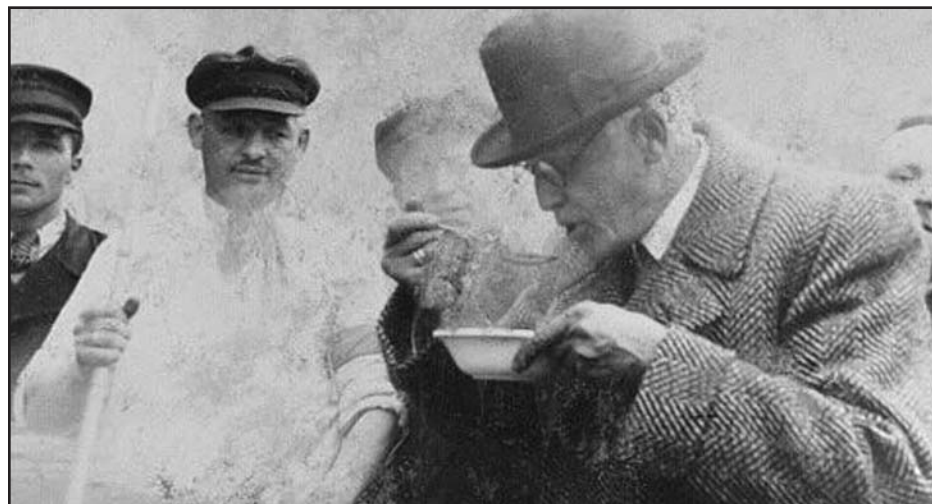
In some cases, such as that of Warsaw ghetto *Judenrat* head Adam Czerniaków, suicide was preferable to assisting in the deportation of his fellow Jews: Czerniaków ingested a cyanide pill on July 23, 1942 — the day the transports began.

Far more controversial was Chaim Rumkowski, who headed the *Lodz* ghetto and implored the Jews there to assist him in turning over the ghetto's children, as well as its elderly, to the Germans so that the remainder would be saved. Of course, all of *Lodz's* Jews were eventually deported, including Rumkowski, who was murdered in Auschwitz, apparently by members of the Jewish *Sonderkommando*, on August 28, 1944. (The *Sonderkommando* were another example of Jews being pressed into doing the Nazis' dirty work for them — in this case, removing dead bodies from the gas chambers.)

But the stories of Rumkowski, and the Jewish police, and many other

disturbing episodes of Jews who collaborated with the Germans — some because they thought it would save some lives, others because of what can only be called moral depravity — are well known.

As Havi Dreifuss, a professor of history at Tel Aviv University and a researcher at Yad Vashem, told *Haaretz* in an interview, “This was one of the first subjects to be tackled by Jewish and Israeli scholars” of the Holocaust, and it continues to be studied today. In Israel, “some Jews were even put on trial for their acts during the Holocaust. Naturally, it is a very sensitive topic, but there's no taboo on studying it. Even if it was a marginal phenomenon, no one even thinks to suggest that it shouldn't be researched.”



Chaim Rumkowski, head of the *Judenrat* in *Lodz* ghetto during the Holocaust. Rumkowski was eventually murdered in Auschwitz, apparently by members of the Jewish *Sonderkommando*, in August 1944.

Dreifuss says she suspects Morawiecki's *Munich* comments were part of a larger effort underway in Poland that is intended “to blur the differences between the murderers and the victims.” And the differences, she says, are enormous.

“First, the scope of the phenomenon was marginal in the Jewish case — important but marginal — whereas the hostile reaction of many Poles to the persecuted Jews was a norm in most parts of Poland. Poles hated and feared Nazi Germany, but many of them saw the murder of the Jews as a ‘positive’ outcome of the war. Second, there is the question of motives. While most Jews collaborated hoping to save themselves, their family or part of their community — Poles helped Nazi Germany hunt Jews due to various reasons, among them hatred and financial benefits.”

Dr. David Silberklang, a senior editor of its *Yad Vashem Studies* journal, concurred with Dreifuss, saying that it was “outrageous” to make the comparison between Jewish collaborators and Polish ones.

Like Dreifuss, he emphasizes that the phenomenon was “marginal,” and also that Jews who did help the Germans “were looking for a way to save their skins.” Among Gentile

Poles, “we're talking about people who went out of their way to hunt down Jews,” he says.

Morawiecki was at great pains to note that it's wrong to speak of “‘Polish’ death camps,” since “there was no Polish independent state” during World War II, and the concentration and death camps were organized and operated by the Nazi German occupiers. But even he had to correct himself a short time later when he began a sentence with the words, “In Poland,” and then corrected himself by saying, “On the Polish soil, I should have said, because there was no Poland during the Second World War.”

That, too, is somewhat misleading, as there was a Polish government-in-exile — which was based in London during the war — and there was also

ranks, and some even “actively hunted down Jews and killed them.”

Recently, notes Silberklang, Morawiecki “laid a wreath at the burial site of some of them,” referring to the premier's visit to a *Munich* cemetery to pay homage to the memory of members of the Holy Cross Mountains Brigade — a far-right, anti-Communist underground group — who are buried in *Munich*.

Argues Silberklang: “It's not just a matter of ‘Your hero is my criminal; my hero is your criminal.’ Someone who's actually murdering people can't be anyone's hero.”

There was a Polish organization, *Zegota*, founded by both Jews and non-Jews, that was dedicated to rescuing Jews. “But now,” says Silberklang, “it's used as an example of the spirit of the Polish people. When the fact of the matter is that Polish rescuers — those who tried to help Jews — had to fear their neighbors more than they had to fear the Germans. Because so many of their neighbors wanted to turn them in.”

As an example, he points to Irena Sendler, the Gentile woman who rescued Jewish children from the Warsaw ghetto. “She saved dozens, maybe a couple of hundred. And she paid for it. She was punished and beaten by the Germans. But one of her comments [after the war] was that, in Poland, it was easier to hide a tank under a rug than a Jewish child in a Christian home.”

Morawiecki tried to limit the damage caused by his remarks a day earlier. A spokesperson issued a statement claiming that his words “should be interpreted as a sincere call for open discussion of crimes committed against Jews during the Holocaust, regardless of the nationality of those involved.”

However, the new Polish law that recently reignited the debate about Poland and the Holocaust forbids open discussion of that topic, making illegal any statement accusing the “Polish nation, people or state” of participating in any way in the Holocaust.

Dreifuss stresses that the argument here is not between “Jews” and “Poles.” She notes that “there are wonderful Polish scholars who have contributed tremendously to our knowledge about the Holocaust, including — yet not only — on some darker aspects of Polish and Jewish relations.

“The argument is between people who want to write history, and talk about history, based on existing documentation and updated knowledge — and those who don't want to allow this open discussion,” she adds. “For me, the saddest thing will be if this attempt to blur differences and frighten the promising younger generation of Polish scholars ends up succeeding. Simplification will take over the field, and the complex reality of those dreadful days will be fundamentally harmed.”

the *Delegatura*, which was commonly referred to as the “underground state.” Its job, in the words of Yad Vashem's Silberklang, “was to try to hold together Polish society against the attacks on it by the Nazis, who were trying to dissolve Polish society.”

Also, there was a Polish police force that numbered some 15,000 in 1942, serving in both the cities and the countryside in the General Government (the Warsaw, *Krakow*, *Radom*, *Lublin* and Eastern Galicia districts). Says Silberklang: “They're often the ones who are hunting down the Jews who ran away. And they could have decided that they weren't going to find the Jews.” They could have put on a show of searching for them, before saying, “You know, these Jews are just so good at hiding, we're not able to find them.” But they didn't do that, at least not as an institution.”

Furthermore, adds Silberklang, neither the government in exile, nor the *Delegatura* in occupied Poland, nor any of the various underground military organizations “ever defined fighting the Germans as including trying to help Jews.” There were other nations — Silberklang mentions the Dutch and the Danish — whose resistance organizations did make that part of their mission, but not the Poles. Some would not even accept Jews into their

SAVING BULGARIAN JEWRY: 75 YEARS LATER

BY DANIEL S. MARIASCHIN

In March 1943, Nazi Germany demanded of its Bulgarian allies that they deport the country's 48,000 Jews. For months, the Nazis and their Bulgarian collaborators had discussed the means for the transfer of Bulgarian Jews to the death camps that already had taken the lives of millions of other European Jews. Two years before, the Sofia government adopted the anti-Semitic Law for the Defense of the Nation, which foreshadowed the ultimate decision to deport Bulgaria's Jews.

Indeed, there was even a Bulgarian Commissar for Jewish Affairs, Alexander Belev, who had been in place for precisely this kind of operation. The plans included the deportation of more than 11,000 Jews from Northern Greece and Yugoslavia, areas under Bulgarian military administration. Jews in both places were forced to wear the yellow star, and many young men in the Bulgarian community served in forced labor details.

For those Jews inside Bulgaria's borders, the plans for their roundup and demise were thwarted by an unlikely coalition of leaders of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, members of parliament, intellectuals and everyday citizens, whose sense of justice and revulsion made the notion of sending their neighbors to their deaths unacceptable.

The reaction of the Church leadership set it apart from religious figures elsewhere in Europe, who through either indifference, self-interest or outright anti-Semitism turned away, or were complicit as Jewish community

after community was destroyed.

Led by the metropolitans (prelates) of Sofia and *Plovdiv*, Stefan and Kyril, the church leadership — not all in agreement at the outset — came to the conclusion that it must deplore the deportation orders. First, the church agreed on protecting the few hundred Jews in the country who had converted to Bulgarian Orthodoxy (many thinking it would save their lives), but that grew into a campaign to speak out for the entire endangered community.

In a letter to the government on May 4, 1943, the Holy Synod noted that "Our people, by its soul and conscience, by its mentality and conviction, cannot bear lawlessness, repression and atrocity against anyone. Our human, as well as our Christian conscience is embarrassed. Hence, the Holy Synod is asked spiritedly from many sides — by good and loyal Bulgarian public figures, by well-known people of culture and patriots, by Bulgarian mothers — to insist on justice and humane attitude for the Jewish minority in the country." The Synod met both with King Boris III and with the prime minister to convey its opposition to the deportation orders.

Metropolitan Stefan of Sofia denounced Hitler from the pulpit, calling him "the miserable and insane Führer." Metropolitan Klement of *Stara Zagora* insisted "we cannot stay indifferent to the fate of the persecuted Jewish minority because we would be condemned by God..."

In the secular realm, the protests against the deportation orders were led by Dimitar Peshev, the deputy speaker of Bulgaria's National Assembly. Peshev, who came from

the small provincial city of *Kyustendil*, was moved by the deportation of Jews from Bulgarian-administered areas outside the country and by reports of Jews in his home town being told to gather their belongings in anticipation of roundups by the authorities. His tenacity and persistence in pressing government leaders — the prime minister refused to meet with him — was a key element in arousing public opinion about the planned deportations.

On the people-to-people level, many Bulgarians had close relations with their Jewish neighbors. Fifteen years ago, I was in *Kyustendil* for the 60th anniversary commemoration of the rescue of Bulgarian Jewry. Following the program, which was held in the town square, an elderly woman ran up to the then Bulgarian foreign minister, and quickly engaged him in animated conversation. She then did the same with an Israeli government representative, who had also participated in the program. Curious, I asked both what the conversation was all about. The woman, I was told, had Jewish classmates who had left for Israel after the war, and now, she wanted to know if anyone could help her track them down. For nearly 60 years she had no one to ask, and this commemoration, with its attendees from Israel, gave her the opportunity to find her friends.

The deportation orders were never carried out. The exasperated German Ambassador Adolf Beckerle, in a cable to Berlin, wrote: "The Bulgarian government, despite its efforts in relation to the final solution of the Jews, is attached to the mentality of the Bulgarian population.... This one

does not find any drawbacks in the Jews, that would justify actions against them."

The role of Bulgaria's King Boris III in the deportation story has been subject to much speculation, but it is clear that the pressure to resist the demands from Berlin came from outside his circle.

Ironically, Belev, who was ultimately dismissed from his job near the end of the war, fled to *Kyustendil*, where he was captured and ultimately shot on the way to Sofia to be tried.

Peshev, whose friendship for the Jewish community eventually earned him the honor of being among the Righteous Among the Nations at Yad Vashem, was tried by the postwar Communist government, charged with collaboration with the Germans. He was sentenced to 15 years in prison and released after serving a brief time.

Tragically, for the Jews of Northern Greece and Yugoslavia, there was no similar rescue effort. Many actually had relatives in Bulgaria, who were powerless to save them. Most were deported across Bulgarian territory, to Auschwitz and *Treblinka*.

At a time when defiance in any form ran tremendous risks, those who helped the Jewish community — the Orthodox Church, Peshev and those who joined him and friends and neighbors who found it unconscionable that fellow Bulgarians would be sent to their deaths — stood their ground. In a demonstration of both conscience and justice, these courageous human beings stood apart in a continent bereft of moral principles.

In that, 75 years later, there is an object lesson for us today.

THE SPY WHO SAVED THOUSANDS OF JEWS

BY MENUCHA CHANA LEVIN,
JEWISH PRESS

Frank Foley lived a quiet life in a small English town after World War II. His neighbors had no idea that this short, unassuming man was a hero who had led a dangerous double life in Nazi Germany. He had been head of Britain's intelligence service and saved thousands of Jewish lives.

Based in Berlin in the 1930s, his official job was passport control officer for the British. In actuality, he was the head of the Berlin office of MI6, Britain's secret intelligence service.

As a spy, Major Foley had a dramatic career. He organized the operation that saved Norway's gold reserves from the Nazis and persuaded leading German scientists not to pass on essential data about atomic research to the Nazi leadership. He also convinced scores of German spies to become double agents.

A lifelong devout Catholic, Foley was greatly moved by the Nazi persecution of Jews, and assisted thousands to escape from Germany.

Following *Kristallnacht* in 1938, he wrote in a confidential report to London: "The Nazi party has not departed from its original intentions and its ultimate aim remains the disappearance of the Jews from Germany."



Foley at the start of World War II.

Though immigration rules still remained strict at that time of economic depression, many Jews realized the danger and tried to flee from the Nazi threat.

Defying the unrelenting policy of his own Foreign Office, Foley issued 10,000 visas for British Mandate Palestine. Without diplomatic immunity in Berlin, he ran a serious risk of being discovered by the Nazis.

Despite the great personal danger to himself and his family, he continued to forge visas and passport documents for Jews attempting to flee Germany and Austria. He entered concentration camps to secure the release of Jewish prisoners. It is believed that he saved about 10,000 lives.

Frank Foley's wife, Kay, reported: "Jews trying to find a way out of Germany queued in the hundreds outside the British consulate, clinging to the hope that they would get a passport or a visa. Day after day we saw them standing along the corridors, down the steps and across the large courtyard, waiting their turn to fill in the forms that might lead to freedom. In the end, that queue grew to be a mile long. Some were hysterical. Many wept. All were desperate. With them came a flood of cables and letters from other parts of the country, all pleading for visas and begging for help. For them, Frank's yes or no really meant the difference between a new life and the concentration camps. But there were many difficulties. How could so many people be interviewed

before their turn came for that dreaded knock on the door..."

"Frank worked from 7 am to 10 pm without a break. He would handle as many applications himself as he could manage and would walk among his staff of examiners to see where he could assist them, or give advice and words of comfort to those who waited."

Wim Van Leer, also involved in helping Jews to escape from Nazi Germany, noted that "the winter of 1938 was a harsh one, and elderly men and women waited from six in the morning, queuing up in the snow and biting wind. Captain Foley saw to it that a uniformed commissionaire trundled a tea-urn on a trolley along the line of frozen misery..."

Miriam Posner, a Jewish girl of sixteen, traveled from East Prussia to beg for a visa to Palestine, although she did not meet Britain's stiff conditions for entry. She maintained: "Foley saved my life. We heard that there was this man Foley who was kind to the Jews. My mother

(Continued on page 11)

IN EASTERN EUROPE, WHEN NAZIS KILLED JEWS, A “CARNIVAL ATMOSPHERE” PREVAILED

(Continued from page 4)

began in German or Soviet archives. In hundreds of cases, testimony has led the team not only to determine where mass executions took place, but to uncover the remains of bullets in the ground.

In contrast to the relatively secretive death camps, the *Einsatzgruppen* massacres were “an attraction” for many communities, according to Desbois. In some localities, the Holocaust unfolded with “carnival” or quasi-religious undertones, such as the organizing of bloody, Passion-like marches through town, or forcing Jews to perform on the edge of mass graves.

“The Germans in the Eastern territories could not be unaware that the

wooden planks placed over the ditches during executions. After conducting hundreds of interviews, he at last came upon a witness who mentioned these planks.

“A board had been placed on the ditch on which the Jew had to go naked,” the witness told Desbois, referring to the 1941 massacre of 2,000 Jews in *Bolekhov*, Ukraine, which took place at the town’s Jewish cemetery.

“I still remember that the Jewish families held hands on the plank,” said the witness. “Then they were shot in the head from behind and then they fell into the ditch. There were a few Jews down in the ditch who had to lay the dead bodies in rows.”

In a chapter called *The Sanitizer*,



Aftermath of the *Babi Yar* ravine massacre in Kiev, Ukraine, during which 33,000 Jews were murdered between September 29 and 30, 1941.

been murdered,” wrote Desbois. “For a few days, the entire village seems to have been transformed into a human slaughterhouse. A slaughterhouse needing to be sanitized after a crime.”

According to Desbois, his investigations yielded many “grave

place was visible on the streets for days.

“It took a village-wide effort to get the Jewish furniture out of the houses and into the schoolyard where it was sold,” wrote Desbois. “Not only was the sale of Jewish goods not hidden or discreet, camouflaged, but it took place in



Jews being forced to dig their own graves in *Storow*, Ukraine, July 1941.

gawkers who rushed to see the Jews murdered, sometimes up to the graves’ edge, crossed themselves over and over,” wrote Desbois. “Consciously or not, they organized a *tableau vivant*, a living picture, of an inverted representation of the Stations of the Cross.”

No role played by collaborators was too small to escape the author’s interest. In the chapter, “The Layer of Planks,” Desbois pondered the use of

Desbois explained how the SS murder squads engaged local communities in “cleaning up” after each massacre. Before Jewish homes and belongings could be pillaged, efforts were made to erase evidence that thousands of people had been murdered.

“The personal bathtubs ripped out of Jewish houses became anonymous tubs for transporting the lime to the mass graves where the Jews had



The *Skede Beach* massacre in Latvia, where 2,700 Jews were shot in three days, December 1941.

fillers,” but few people who admit to transporting Jews to execution sites in trucks or wagons. For those in town who did not witness the massacres for themselves, evidence of what took

broad daylight at the center of Soviet life. ...In the place where everyone went to make daily purchases, the possessions of murdered Jews were sold shamelessly at auction.”

TWO FRIENDS WHO ESCAPED FROM AUSCHWITZ AND WARNED THE WORLD

(Continued from page 3)

that it would have been “pointless.” “The speed and ferocity of the German occupation, the speed of the roundup and ghettoization, and then the ferocity with which the deportations were implemented, made any kind of response almost impossible to effect,” he said.

In June of 1944, the Nazi secret was finally exposed as a copy of the Vrba-Wetzler report was received by British Intelligence. The document was forwarded to top British and American officials. According to the PBS documentary, “On June 15, the BBC broadcast the horrific details of

the report. Five days later, extracts were published in the *New York Times*.”

The Vrba-Wetzler report reached Switzerland on June 18. Historian Yisrael Gutman wrote, “Now, not just the name of the place was revealed; it was also shown to be the place that had so often figured as ‘the unknown destination’ or as ‘somewhere in Poland.’”

On July 2, the U.S. Air Force attacked Budapest, raining bombs on the Hungarian capital. In response, Admiral Miklos Horthy of Hungary, who supported Hitler, had the trains stop the deportations. It

was only a coincidence. At the time, more than 300,000 Hungarian Jews had been sent to the gas chambers, but 120,000 Jews had been saved, 75 times more than the number of Jews saved in the Kastner deal.

As the war was nearing its end, Vrba and Wetzler joined the Czechoslovak partisan resistance and fought the Nazis until the end of the war. By the time the Americans, British and Russians advanced into Germany, the Nazis’ reign of terror had begun to collapse. On January 27, 1945, the Russians liberated Auschwitz. By then, the Nazis had killed an estimated 1.5 million peo-

ple there in a span of under five years.

After the war, Wetzler stayed in Slovakia and married a fellow survivor from Auschwitz. He became a journalist and newspaper editor. He passed away in 1988. Vrba married his childhood sweetheart, Gerta Sidonova, and moved to Canada, where he became an associate professor of pharmacology at the University of British Columbia. He died in 2006. Both men were heroes who used their ingenuity under terrible circumstances to expose a ghastly story to a world that was largely indifferent to their plight.

PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE AMERICAN SOCIETY



Mark Moskowitz, member of the ASYV executive committee; Adina Burian, member of the ASYV executive committee; and Leonard Wilf, chairman of the ASYV.



Back row (l. to r.): Michael Bornstein and Debbie Holinstat, guest speaker; Ron Meier, executive director of the ASYV; Leonard Wilf, chairman of the ASYV. Front row (l. to r.): Dr. Ruth Westheimer, Patti Kenner.



Mark Moskowitz, member of the executive committee of ASYV, and Rose Moskowitz.



Rella Feldman (l.), board member and longtime friend of the Zuckerman family introduced Millie Zuckerman (r.), 2018 Spring Luncheon honoree.



2018 Annual Spring Luncheon at the JW Marriot Essex House, New York City.



Gladys Halpern; Sharon Halpern; Abbi Halpern, board member; and Millie Zuckerman, honoree.

TY FOR YAD VASHEM ANNUAL SPRING LUNCHEON



Michael Bornstein and Debbie Holinstat signing books following the Luncheon.



Ilana Shmoel; Stuart and Margaret Sinclair; and Goldie Hertz, 2018 Spring Luncheon co-chair.



Millie Zuckerman and her children Ruth Katz, Wayne Zuckerman and Ann Sklar.



Jaci Paradis and Michelle Taragin, 2018 Spring Luncheon co-chairs.



Rebecca Altman, Marilyn Rubenstein and Dara Rubenstein.



Auschwitz survivors Michael Bornstein, guest speaker, and Andrew Burian.

WARSAW GHETTO ORPHANAGE HEAD'S LETTERS MADE PUBLIC

BY OFER ADERET, HAARETZ

On August 27, 1940, Maria Rotblat, the director of a Jewish orphanage in the Warsaw ghetto, wrote a letter to Regina Bergman, one of the students who had been in her care and who had fled the city a year earlier, after the German invasion of Poland. "My dear, I'm happy at your happiness. I bless you, Reginka, just as your mother would, and I am so delighted with your joy, just as she would be," she wrote.

Behind these warm words lay a grim reality. Rotblat and the one hundred orphaned girls she was caring for at the Youth Home for Girls — a boarding school affiliated with the Central Agency for the Care of Orphans — were trapped inside the ghetto. Bergman's parents had died when she was a child, and she then moved to Rotblat's orphanage. When the war broke out, she fled the bombardment of Warsaw and moved east to areas under Soviet rule.

Rotblat tried to see the bright side of things and encouraged Bergman to be happy with her lot, with the fact that she was free, and newly and happily married. "You are in the hands of a man guided by values, who loves you with the love you are worthy of, someone who respects you," she wrote to her former student. "When you have a man beside you who loves you and whom you love, life and its circumstances are not frightening

Hebrew. They are now being made public for the first time.

The letters reveal a close bond between the two women, the director and her former ward, who, despite the difficult circumstances, managed to maintain contact during the war. "My dear Reginka, Any news from you is cause for celebration for me. ... The longing and yearning to see people whom I am close to is so great that it is overwhelming," Rotblat wrote in November 1940. In a request to Bergman's husband, she added: "Could you write and tell me what your wife, my Reginka, looks like now? Is she healthy? Is she happy? Have you already gotten to know her and to appreciate her pure character? Is she a bit more serious now that she's a married woman? I really beg you to answer all these questions."

Later in that letter, Rotblat writes: "My dear and beloved ones, If you only knew how much I worry about you since I don't know how you really are. There is nothing new here. I work, and since there is no shortage of work, I don't have time to think too much.... I haven't been paid for four months, but that's insignificant compared to the really serious problems. I embrace you, my children, and kiss you from my heart. Can you feel, Reginka, how strong [it is]?"

The correspondence between the two continued as Bergman wandered across the Soviet Union. She stopped first in *Bialystok*, which

love, There hasn't been a moment that my thoughts have not been with you. Always, but always, they involve you. There isn't a moment in which I don't think about you, my good

I need to see you at my table before I die. I'm sure of that." A final postcard was sent by Rotblat on May 27, 1941, after a long break in contact. "My dearest Reginka, For a few months,



The Jewish orphanage in the Warsaw ghetto.

Reginka, my dear and beloved one. The worst thing is the sense of helplessness: Right, my dear?"

At the end of her letter, Rotblat expressed concern for her other wards, who were in hiding in various places as a result of the war. "If I could divide myself into pieces and send each one of you part of my heart, you could bear anything, knowing that I am on the job, waiting for the moment when I can gather all of you [back] to me," she wrote.

In March 1941, Rotblat wrote that her work at the ghetto orphanage was helping her deal with the harsh reality. "If I didn't have the concern over one hundred girls, I probably would go crazy, but these concerns don't permit me to, and I hold on because of them," she wrote.

The archive at the Ghetto Fighters' House has a photo of Rotblat with some of the girls who were cared for at her orphanage during the war. There are no photos of Bergman during the war years. Her daughter explained that, when her parents wandered across the Soviet Union fleeing the Nazis, they did not take photo albums with them.

"There was a strong bond between my mother and Rotblat, and there was great mutual love there," said Bergman's daughter Miriam. The letters attest to that.

In one letter, Rotblat wrote: "My Reginka, I place my entire heart and soul in these few words that I write. You mustn't doubt. I am trying with all my might to make you understand that I think about you all the time. I'm bothered by the fact that I can't help you with anything. Despite all my efforts, at work I'm always with you in my thoughts. I always see you in front of my eyes. Listen, my dear daughter.

there has been no word from you. I know this doesn't mean you've forgotten me, just as I haven't forgotten you. My dear, hang on. Be brave. I constantly live with the hope that I will see you. I am always thinking of you, talking and remembering nonstop. We must see each other again. Do you understand, Reginka? We must."

Rotblat's wish did not come true. In August of 1942, in the course of the Nazis' mass roundup operation known as the *Grossaktion*, she and the orphans under her care were led to the ghetto square from which the deportations were carried out. Through the intervention of one of her colleagues, all of them were released. The children were sent to other institutions affiliated with the Central Agency for the Care of Orphans.

Maria and her son, Leib, who was active in the Akiva movement, part of the Jewish Fighting Organization, found a hiding place. With the outbreak of the Warsaw ghetto uprising in April 1943, Maria Rotblat was smuggled into the famed bunker at 18 Mila Street, where Jewish Fighting Organization members, under the leadership of Mordechai Anielewicz, were hiding.

When the bunker was attacked by the Germans, Maria Rotblat's son shot and killed her at her request. He then committed suicide along with dozens of other fighters who refused to surrender to the Nazis. Rotblat and her son were buried in a mass grave along with the other fighters.

Bergman, Rotblat's former ward, survived the war with her husband, Zvi. They emigrated to Israel in 1950 along with their two daughters, Miriam and Sarah. Bergman worked in Israel as a psychiatric nurse.



The kitchen of the Jewish orphanage in the Warsaw ghetto.

or difficult. Do you remember, Reginka, the words describing how 'life is worth living if there is something to live for'?" she asked.

Rotblat smuggled her letters out of the ghetto to the Aryan side of Warsaw. From there, they were sent east to Bergman, who kept them until the day she died in 2013 at the age of 95.

"Those letters were very dear to her heart, but now we've decided to entrust them to an archive, since they've begun to crumble," Bergman's daughter Miriam explained this week. Last summer, the letters, written in Polish, were transferred to the archive at the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum at Kibbutz Lohamei Hagetaot north of Haifa. The letters were carefully handled there and translated into

in 1939, by virtue of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, was transferred to Soviet rule. Later she was deported to Soviet labor camps in Siberia. From there she and her husband continued to Dagestan and Turkmenistan in Soviet Central Asia.

As a result of the war, there were interruptions in their correspondence. Some of the letters apparently did not arrive at their destination in a timely fashion — or at all. On January 21, 1941, Rotblat noted that she had stopped receiving letters from Bergman. "For several months, I've had no news from you. I've written countless letters, and I have the impression that my words to you end up in a vacuum. I'm scared to death," the orphanage director wrote. "My

GERMANY'S NAZI HUNTERS IN FINAL LAP OF RACE AGAINST TIME TO TRACK HOLOCAUST CRIMINALS

Tucked away in the picturesque German city of *Ludwigsburg*, a tiny team of investigators tracks the last surviving Nazi war criminals across the globe and through the better part of a century, in an urgent race against time.

"We put together the smallest pieces of information, like the pieces of a puzzle, to work out who was employed in what role, from when until when" in Adolf Hitler's totalitarian killing machine, says prosecutor Jens Rommel.

He has since 2015 led the eight-strong Central Office for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes, at a time when the last perpetrators, accomplices, witnesses and survivors are finally vanishing.

Once all the perpetrators are gone, Germany will close the judicial side of its coming-to-terms with the Nazi government's extermination of six million Jews and hundreds of thousands of others in the Holocaust.

In the meantime, the spectacle of frail defendants aged in their 90s appearing in courtrooms to answer for crimes dating back to 1945 or earlier has renewed vigorous debate about the country's dark history.

For decades after the war, the German government and justice system showed little haste to track down many of those involved in the organized mass murder.

A landmark change came with the 2011 sentencing of John Demjanjuk, who served as a guard at the *Sobibor* extermination camp in occupied Poland in 1943, to five years in

prison.

The ruling opened the way to prosecuting anyone who worked at a concentration camp — from soldiers to accountants — as an accomplice in mass murder.

Before that judgment "we never cast an eye over the smallest cogs in the machine," said lawyer Andrej Umansky, author of a book on the Holocaust in Eastern Europe.

The changed legal landscape since then, he said, offers a chance "to give victims a voice, their families, and to bring the facts back into the public consciousness."

FROM MOSCOW TO BUENOS AIRES

The team's probes into the dust-shrouded past have taken Rommel's team of five prosecutors, two judges and one police officer across the world in search of their quarry.

Many German Nazis fled to South America immediately after the war, among them one of the main architects of the Holocaust, Adolf Eichmann, who landed in Buenos Aires.

He was captured by the Israeli secret services in 1960 thanks to information passed on by German prosecutor Fritz Bauer, who was outraged by the inching progress of his own country's justice system.

As for less notorious Nazis, "all the boats that arrived there were registered. We have combed the passenger and crew manifests" and followed up on any German-sounding names, Rommel said.

Officials scoured immigration registers, applications to be naturalized in Argentina, and the records of the German embassy.

"We owe it to history" and to the millions of victims to "battle against forgetting," said Peter Haeberle, of the justice ministry in *Baden-*



German prosecutor Jens Rommel leads a small team racing to track down the last surviving Nazi war criminals before time runs out.

Wuerttemberg state, where *Ludwigsburg* sits just outside its capital, *Stuttgart*.

The team's travels halfway around the globe — at a time when there remains no chance of tracking down a living high-ranking Nazi official — have not escaped criticism in the press, such as from *Die Welt* daily, over their sometimes exorbitant cost.

1.7 MILLION FILES

Many have criticized the comparatively small number of Nazi war criminals ever brought to justice.

By 2012, some 6,498 people had been convicted for their part in the Holocaust.

The monumental weight of history is clear from the smell of aged paper lingering behind the security doors of the former women's prison where the investigation team is based.

One million seven hundred thousand cardboard files are stored in rigorous alphabetical order in rows of imposing metal cupboards — a unique full-size database of Nazi criminals and details of their acts.

From Hitler to the lowliest soldier or helper, every Nazi wrongdoer identified up until the present day is recorded here, along with the places of their crimes.

Rommel carefully withdraws file 3 AR-Z 95/59 for Dr. Mengele, Josef.

Known as the "Angel of Death," the Auschwitz doctor carried out horrific experiments on those held at the camp.

The record, prepared in the late 1950s, reads that his location is "presently unknown, likely in Argentina."

Mengele died in 1979 in Brazil, having evaded capture — and justice — for the remainder of his life.

However many more Nazis enter the dock or end up behind bars before all trails finally run cold, Rommel and his team know the overwhelming majority of perpetrators' stories will have ended similarly.

Nevertheless, he insisted, "we have to put every day to use if we want the chance to bring someone else to justice."

THE SPY WHO SAVED THOUSANDS OF JEWS

(Continued from page 6)

begged him. He just paced up and down a little and then asked for my passport and put the visa stamp on it. He did not ask any questions." She added, "He was small and quiet. You would never suspect he was a spy."

Ze'ev Padan's father was interned in *Sachsenhausen* concentration camp when Foley rescued him. Ze'ev too was saved by Foley's defiance of authority.

By the time of the infamous *Kristallnacht* pogrom in November 1938, Foley and his wife had undertaken something even more dangerous: sheltering Jews overnight in their apartment. Among their "guests" was Leo Baeck, chairman of the Association of German Rabbis.

In September 1939, when the war began, Foley returned to England. However, he left behind a thick stack of preapproved visas with instructions that they should be distributed to those fleeing the Nazis.

After the war, Frank Foley and his wife Kay retired to the small town of *Stourbridge*. He lived quietly, enjoying his garden and chatting with the local

children. Since he rarely mentioned his wartime experiences, the neighbors had no idea that a hero lived in their midst.

He died in 1958 at the age of 74. Three years after his death, Mrs. Foley finally revealed his brave exploits.

British journalist Michael Smith brought Foley's unknown story to light



Benno Cohn, Chairman of the Zionist Organization of Germany.

in his book *Foley, the Spy Who Saved 10,000 Jews*, published in 1999:

"Foley clearly ranked alongside the likes of Oskar Schindler and Raoul Wallenberg, and yet his name was virtually unknown. I set out to find out the truth about Foley. One of my first

stops was Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust memorial center, where I asked if Foley had ever been considered for the honor of Righteous Among Nations, the accolade accorded to any gentile who helped save even one Jew from the Holocaust."

Although officials at Yad Vashem had heard of Foley, there was no evidence to support his case. However, a document in its archives written by Hubert Pollack, a Jewish aid worker, who had worked alongside Foley in Berlin, described how Foley had saved tens of thousands of Jews from the Nazis.

This was the first of many testimonies by prominent Jews who had known Foley. The most dramatic came during the 1961 trial in Israel of Adolf Eichmann. One of the chief prosecution witnesses, Benno Cohn, former chairman of the Zionist Organization of Germany, paid tribute to Foley.

"There was one man who stood out above all others like a beacon," said Cohn. "Captain Foley, passport officer in the British consulate in the Tiergarten in Berlin, a man who in my opinion was one of the greatest

among the nations of the world. It was possible to bring a great number of people to Israel through the help of this most wonderful person. He rescued thousands of Jews from the jaws of death."

Hubert Pollack, a Zionist agent, pointed out that Foley was also aware of the secret Zionist organization Mossad LeAliyah Bet, which smuggled Jews into British-controlled Palestine. However, Foley had not reported it, as required, to his superiors.

Thanks to the Holocaust Educational Trust, the evidence Michael Smith collected was given to Yad Vashem. After officials interviewed the living witnesses he found in researching the book, they awarded Foley the title of Righteous Among the Nations in 1999, and a tree was planted for him in Jerusalem.

There is also a plaque in Foley's honor in the British Embassy in Berlin and another in the town of *Stourbridge*. An 8-foot-high stone statue in his birthplace of Highbridge also provides a permanent tribute to this quiet hero.

WE FELL IN LOVE IN A CONCENTRATION CAMP

BY ANTHEA GERRIE,
NEW YORK POST

They had everything going against their romance.

But Max and Hanne Liebmann escaped incredible obstacles — separation, serious illness and the horrors of the Nazis — to fall in love in a most unlikely place: a concentration



Hanne Liebmann and Max Liebmann.

camp. As the Queens couple celebrated their 73rd wedding anniversary on April 14, they honored the strangers who saved their lives.

“The people of *Le Chambon* were outstanding, risking their lives for strangers,” said Hanne, 93. “They restored our faith in mankind.”

She and Max were teens when their families were deported from Germany to a camp in *Gurs*, France, in October 1940. Originally a place of internment for political refugees from the Spanish Civil War, it became a concentration camp in which more than 18,000 Jews were imprisoned during World War II — and from which 6,000 prisoners were shipped on to death camps.

Hanne Hirsch (her maiden name) was 15 when she arrived in *Gurs* with her mother, Ella. The girl was assigned to work in the office of the women’s block, alongside Jeanne Liebmann — whose son Max was allowed to visit.

Hanne was immediately drawn to the skinny teenager — “we all looked like skeletons in the camp but there was a certain attraction” — and delighted when he offered to walk with her to gather rations at an adjacent Swiss Red Cross barracks.

“There was no privacy for dating, but we saw each other every day,” she recalled. “Max was allowed unlimited tickets to visit other people because of the fact he was a musician.”

Within weeks they had fallen in love. “The conditions were horrible, but we [had] a cultural life, and I was attracted by Max’s interpretation of music,” she said. Thanks to a group of Quakers who donated instruments, the camp had an orchestra, in which Max played cello, as well as an opera ensemble.

But the teens were separated when the Children’s Aid Society got approval to move children out of *Gurs*. “In September 1941, I was transferred to *Le Chambon*, a Huguenot village where refugees like me were warmly welcomed and protected,” Hanne said.

She was no longer imprisoned, but Hanne’s survival still depended on

keeping a low profile. Periodically, French police, acting for the Vichy government collaborating with their Nazi occupiers, would swoop through *Le Chambon* in search of Jews, but villagers would deny they were sheltering any “undesirables.”

“Max was not so lucky; he was sent to a Boy Scout camp where organizers denied him the false [identity] papers arranged for other boys because he was not Orthodox.” (Some Jews were able to escape France with the help of false IDs that labeled them as non-Jews.)

Their separation might have been the end of the relationship — and of Max — had Hanne not made a heartrending 1,000-mile round-trip journey across France in August 1942. “A relative wrote to tell me my mother was ill, so I traveled back to *Gurs*, which was under lockdown.” Although she was free to venture from *Le Chambon*, she was also in huge danger, as she had no false papers at a time when Jews were being deported to the death camps.

“[My mother and I] had a shouted exchange over rows of barbed wire. She gave me motherly advice, but I can’t remember the exact words because it was so upsetting.

“Two days later I saw her in the freight yard, where she was on a train waiting to be transported. She didn’t know where she was going, but she knew she was not coming back. It was the last time I saw her.” (Ella Hirsch perished at Auschwitz.)

Aware of the intensifying roundups by the Nazis, Hanne made a detour on her way back to *Le Chambon*, to Max’s scout camp near *Lyon*, France. “I told him if he wanted to survive he needed to get to *Le Chambon*,” Hanne recalled.

Within weeks, Max arrived. “He didn’t ask permission — he just left,” said Hanne. But they were only able to see each other twice, as the need to stay in the shadows had grown with news of the increased Nazi roundups.

“We were hidden by farmers; I was in a house and Max was in a hayloft,” Hanne said. “He managed to find me [three weeks later, when] he decided to make his escape from France.” In *Le Chambon*, where one forger alone created hundreds of false IDs, Max received papers identifying him as a Frenchman, Charles Lang.

Max, now 96, recalled how his perilous escape involved scrambling up and down mountains — only to be denied entry by Swiss guards at the border. “I got away by disobeying their orders,” he said. “Instead of walking back into France, I walked deeper into Switzerland, where a priest gave me money for the train. He told me to take a local because the expresses were being searched.

“I managed to reach *Lausanne*, where there was a Jewish community center two minutes from the station. As I walked in, they said: ‘Welcome to Switzerland. We will have to turn you over to the Swiss police, but nothing bad will happen to you now.’”

realizing we had both made it,” she said.

They married in Geneva weeks before the war ended in May 1945, and lived in a series of refugee homes in Switzerland, where Hanne gave birth to their only child, Evelyne, the following year.

The family emigrated to New York, where both had relatives, in 1948, but were separated yet again two years later. “[Max and I] had tuberculosis and were sent to a sanatorium for two years,” Hanne said. “We couldn’t share a room, but the worst thing was we couldn’t see our daughter for a year because doctors were afraid she would pick up the infection.”

Evelyne was fostered “by a very kind woman who took good care of her,” during that time, Hanne said. She and Max would call their daughter “every Sunday and we sent her little presents . . . so she would know we were always thinking about her.”

After the war, the couple discovered that all the relatives with whom they were deported had perished. In a tragic twist, Hanne’s brother Alex had reached safe haven in New York in 1937, but she was never to see him again: “He volunteered for the US Army and never came back from



The concentration camp in *Gurs*, France.

Five months later, it was Hanne’s turn. “I had false papers stating I was Anne-Marie Husser, a Parisienne,” she recalled. Challenged over whether she was Jewish, she managed to spit out to the customs agent: “I have nothing to do with that dirty race.”

A few weeks later, the couple was reunited in Berne, Switzerland, where Hanne was staying with relatives. She recalled the euphoria and relief of being with her true love once again.

“I can’t remember whether we did any more than walk and talk — [just that] we were so overwhelmed with the wonderfulness of being alive and

the war,” she said.

With the help of a US government program, Max studied to be an accountant. Hanne worked in a medical office for many years. The two dote on their grandson and two great-granddaughters.

Despite the forces that worked to keep them apart, Hanne said their romance was meant to be: “We [always] held on to the belief that we would see each other again.

“We were the luckiest of people to get out of the concentration camp, and even more so that we were taken to a place like *Le Chambon*. Otherwise you wouldn’t be talking to us today.”

JEWISH DOCUMENTS OF HOLOCAUST HIDDEN FROM NAZIS, SOVIETS FOR YEARS REVEAL SECRETS

For decades, a confessional in a church in Lithuania's capital Vilnius kept a precious secret: a trove of documents offering an unprecedented glimpse into Jewish life in Eastern Europe before and during the Holocaust.

The cache, with documents dating back to the mid-18th century, includes religious texts, Yiddish literature and poetry, and testimonies about pogroms as well as autobiographies and photographs.

"The diversity of material is breathtaking," David Fishman, professor of Jewish history at New York's Jewish Theological Seminary, told AFP via telephone, describing the discovery as a "total surprise."

"It's almost like you could reconstruct Jewish life before the Holocaust based on these materials, because there is no aspect and no region and no period that is missing," he added.

The trove was discovered earlier this year during a clean-out of the church, which was used as a book repository during Soviet times.

The documents, together with a larger cache found in Vilnius nearly three decades ago, are "the most significant discovery for Jewish history since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the 1950s," Fishman said.

An 1857 agreement between the Jewish water carriers in Vilnius and the city's famous Ramailes rabbinic Talmudic academy, or yeshiva, offers a telling insight into everyday life 160 years ago.

In exchange for copies of the Bible and Talmud, the yeshiva agreed to let the water carriers use a room for prayers on the Sabbath and holidays free of charge.

A ledger of the patients of Zemach Shabad, a famous Jewish doctor and

social and political activist whose monument stands in central Vilnius, was also among the documents seen by AFP.

Known as the "Jerusalem of the North" before World War II, Vilnius — Vilna in Hebrew and Vilne in Yiddish — was a hub of Jewish cultural and religious life and home to hundreds of Jewish social, religious, cultural and scientific organizations.

Established in 1925, the YIVO Yiddish Scientific Institute was among the most important. Co-founded by Shabad, it documented and studied Jewish life in Eastern Europe.

Its New York branch was founded in



The cache includes testimonies about pogroms, autobiographies and photographs.

1926, and became the institute's headquarters in 1940 as Nazi Germany invaded Eastern Europe.

After occupying Vilnius in 1941, the Nazis destroyed the Jewish community and plundered its cultural wealth.

Jewish poets and intellectuals were coerced by the Nazis in the Vilnius ghetto into selecting Yiddish and Hebrew books and documents for a planned institute in Germany about the people they had slated for annihi-

lation.

Their story has been chronicled in a book written by Professor Fishman entitled *The Book Smugglers*.

The Germans sent a portion of the plundered texts to Frankfurt, but the Jewish archivists risked their lives to hide a vast array of precious documents from their tormentors.

But that was not the end of the threat.

After the war, a Lithuanian librarian, Antanas Ulpis, intervened to save those documents that had survived the Nazis from the country's new Soviet occupiers, who were bent on destroying them as part of dictator Joseph Stalin's anti-Jewish purges.

Ulpis deftly hid some of the manuscripts "under a pile of Soviet journals — that's why no one bothered to look, that's why they weren't discovered sooner," Renaldas Gudauskas, director of Lithuania's National Library, told AFP.

There they remained untouched for decades in the confessional in St. George's Church, which the Soviets used as a book repository after the war.

It was only earlier last year, when any remaining papers were being cleared out in order to hand the building back to the Catholic Church, that the pile of Jewish documents was stumbled upon.

They were transferred to Lithuania's newly renovated national library in Vilnius, which already holds a larger archive of Jewish documents discovered in the capital after the collapse of

the Soviet Union nearly three decades ago.

The entire collection includes roughly 170,000 pages, Lara Lempertiene, head of the national library's Judaica Research Center, told AFP.

Library archivists, who read Yiddish and Hebrew, pore over the newly found documents that Fishman estimates will take five years to catalogue.

They are also preparing them to be accessible on the internet. The New York-based YIVO Institute has spearheaded a bid to put the collection online, along with Jewish documents from Vilnius that the US Army found in defeated Germany in 1946 and sent to New York.

Launched two years ago, the cyberspace history project aims to put the overall total of more than one million documents online in a digital archive highlighting Jewish life in Eastern Europe before and during the Holocaust.

Archives that were once scattered on both sides of the Atlantic "are now conceptually, intellectually and physically being reunited," says Lempertiene.

For Simonas Gurevicius, one of the city's few Jews who still speaks Yiddish, the newly discovered archive proves that Hitler and Stalin ultimately failed to wipe out his language and the civilization built around it.

"The star of the Northern Jerusalem nearly burnt out, but its light is still shining," Gurevicius told AFP. Some 195,000 Lithuanian Jews perished under the 1941–44 Nazi German occupation. Today, there are around 3,000 Jews living in the NATO and EU country of 2.8 million people.

POLISH NEIGHBORS BETRAYED MORE JEWS THAN PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT

According to new research done in Poland, two-thirds of the local Jews who hid there from the Nazis did not survive the war, mostly because of the actions of their non-Jewish neighbors.

The figure comes from a two-volume work of 1,600 pages that historians from the Warsaw-based Center for Research on the Holocaust of Jews have compiled over the past five years. It covers nine out of Poland's 13 regions, the TOK FM radio station reported.

Arriving amid a polarizing debate in Poland over a law that limits rhetoric on Polish complicity in the Holocaust, the study suggests Poles are responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths by Jews in the Holocaust — a figure that is significantly higher than previous estimates.

The findings of the research were published earlier this year in a Polish-language book titled *The Fate of the Jews in Selected Regions of*

Occupied Poland. They pertain to the fate of more than one million Jews who went underground to avoid being killed in Operation Reinhard — Nazi Germany's campaign of annihilation of 3.3 million Jews in occupied Poland.

According to Polish Chief Rabbi Michael Schudrich, no more than 2,500 Jews died at the hands of Poles during the Holocaust or immediately after it. Efraim Zuroff, Eastern Europe director for the Simon Wiesenthal Center has disputed Schudrich's estimate: he believes the correct figure is "many thousands" of people, including in at least 15 towns and cities in eastern Poland, where non-Jews butchered their Jewish neighbors.

But if the new study in Poland is correct, then those estimates are just a fraction of a tally of well over half a million Jewish Holocaust victims who died as a result of the actions of non-Jewish Poles.

The issue of Polish complicity in the Holocaust is highly controversial in Poland, where the Nazis killed three million non-Jews in addition to about four million Jews. In January, the right-wing government passed a law criminalizing blaming Poland for Nazi crimes. Protests by Israel, the United States and Jewish groups over this law prompted what observers say is a wave of anti-Semitic hatred with unprecedented intensity since the fall of Communism in Poland.

The government is also leading a campaign that celebrates the actions of Poles who risked their lives to save Jews. The Yad Vashem Holocaust museum has recognized more than 6,000 Poles for such actions — the highest number of any nation.

Especially dangerous for Jews in hiding were small Polish towns, according to historians Barbara Engelking and Jan Grabowski, two of the nine researchers who conducted the study. They called them "death

traps," TOK FM reported.

Grabowski is professor of history at the University of Ottawa in Canada and a dean among Holocaust historians, especially on the actions of bystanders. His 2014 book, *Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland*, was the Yad Vashem International Book Prize winner for the same year. He also served as a fellow at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The latest research entailed identifying, interviewing or reviewing interviews with as many survivors as possible to ascertain the fate of other Jews in hiding who did not survive, the report said. It also features newly discovered archives from remote areas of Poland from the Nazi occupation days and thereafter.

In one region, Miechów, more than 10 percent of the Jews in hiding were murdered directly by partisans who were members of the Polish underground, according to the study.

ISRAEL POSTHUMOUSLY HONORS CZECH PASTOR WHO SAVED JEWS IN THE HOLOCAUST

Israel recently honored Pastor Vaclav Čermák as Righteous Among the Nations for saving Jews during the Holocaust.

Israeli Ambassador to the Czech Republic Daniel Meron, together with the mayor of Prague, Jana Černochová, took part in a ceremony marking the event at the New Town Hall of Prague.

Meron presented a commemorative medal and certificate to Marie Čermáková, Čermák's daughter, on behalf of the state of Israel and Yad Vashem, Israel's national Holocaust remembrance center.

Čermák is the 117th citizen from the Czech Republic, or former Czechoslovakia, to be granted this honor by Yad Vashem.

The award ceremony was accompanied by an exhibition, "Beyond Duty: Diplomats Who Became Righteous Among the Nations."

Čermák hid two Jewish families in a cottage in the mountains in 1944.

After the outbreak of the Slovak National Uprising in August of that year, the Germans launched a hunt for Jews and members of the local resistance.

With the worsening situation, the Weisenberger and Schönfeld families

decided to leave their homes in Prešov. Ľudovít Repáš, an employee of the Prešov city hall, secured fake documents and sent them to Vaclav Čermák, a Baptist preacher in Klenovec.



Pastor Vaclav Čermák and his wife.

Čermák took care of the two families. The Weisenbergers, who now used the name Vasenko, hid in *Gřlica*, and Schönfeld, now Váňa, hid near his own home.

With the increasing intensity and danger of searches organized by the

Germans and Slovak collaborators, many *Klenovec* residents fled to the mountains.

Ján Balciar, one of the remaining inhabitants of *Klenovec*, decided to leave, and insisted that Čermák

Ignác and Margo Weisenberger and their nine-year-old daughter Viera, made the dangerous way to hiding in the mountains together. The next day, Imanuel and Johann Schönfeld joined them.

However, the mountain shelter did not mean the end of their worries.

At one point, an SS patrol discovered the cottage. They found the pastor and several other women, while the men were hiding during the day in the forest. It was strange to the German soldiers that there were so many people in the house. Čermák told them that one of the women had a baby, and the rest were relatives who had come to the baptism ceremony, and that ongoing battles in the area prevented them from returning home. The SS patrol was suspicious, but eventually they left, harming no one.

The group was later extended by another Jewish woman, who was banished by those who had hid her because the local German commander said that anyone caught helping Jews would be shot dead with their whole family.

All six Jews, hidden together with their rescuers in the cottage, survived to see the end of the war.

HOLOCAUST LETTERS CONTAINED "A LOT OF HOPE," EXHIBIT SHOWS

Yad Vashem launched third digital exhibition of letters from the Holocaust.

"She always wrote with a lot of hope and never depressive," says survivor Betty Kazin Rosenbaum of her mother, murdered at the *Sobibor* concentration camp with her baby.

"Hope to see you in good health, a thousand kisses, mommy," were the last words Betty's mother wrote to her

Betty Kazin Rosenbaum read the handwritten letter in Dutch from the mother she never really got to know.

Betty keeps her mother's original letter in her home, but she provided a scanned copy for a new digital exhibition unveiled at Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust research center and museum in Jerusalem.

After spending several years in a ghetto in Amsterdam, the family separated. In 1943, two-year-old

were subsequently sent on a train to their deaths. The father, too, according to records, was eventually sent to *Sobibor*.

Betty did not know who sent her the letter her mother had written, nor the postcard she wrote from the train. But the handwriting was the same as in the well-kept baby record book that she carried, along with several other articles, in a big square blue box that she brought with her from Holland when she emigrated to Israel in 1964.

"She always wrote with a lot of hope and never depressive," said Betty with a smile. "Here she writes mommy. It is her and then I feel very close with her."

Yad Vashem recently launched its third digital exhibition of letters obtained from the Holocaust, entitled

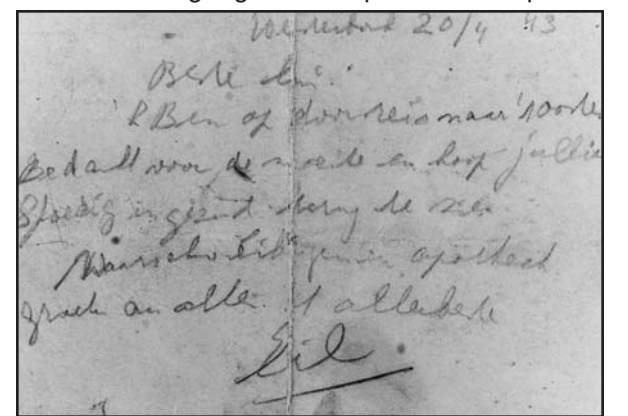
"Last Letters from the Holocaust: 1943." The exhibit "I Left Everyone at Home" includes 10 handwritten letters in different languages.

The letters are mostly hopeful and optimistic.

"All those who wrote the letters and are presented online ... became victims of the Holocaust. They didn't know that when they wrote it," said Yona Kobo, the digital curator and researcher at Yad Vashem. Their fates, she said, were all "more or less the same."

Kobo tracked down each family of the people who wrote the letters. "Each story is different and each family is different and that also allows us to give them back their names, their human dignity, and to commemorate them," she said.

Betty said sometimes she feels anger, but now she is focused on researching her family's history, putting together the pieces of the puzzle



The last postcard thrown by Ephraim Rosenbaum from a deportation train from *Westerbork* to *Sobibor*.

and sharing her story with younger generations.

"The war years vanished, and they never told me anything. Now ... there's nobody to ask anymore and that is very painful," she said as she looked at the fading photographs, prayer books and old, yellowing paper notes she has carried with her around the world.

According to Yad Vashem, fewer than 80,000 Holocaust survivors are still alive in Israel.



Ephraim Rosenbaum and his wife Johanna (née Zion) with their infant daughter Betty.

before being sent with her eight-week-old baby to their deaths at the *Sobibor* Nazi concentration camp in eastern Poland in 1943.

Sitting at her home with a pastoral view from a hilltop town overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, 76-year-old

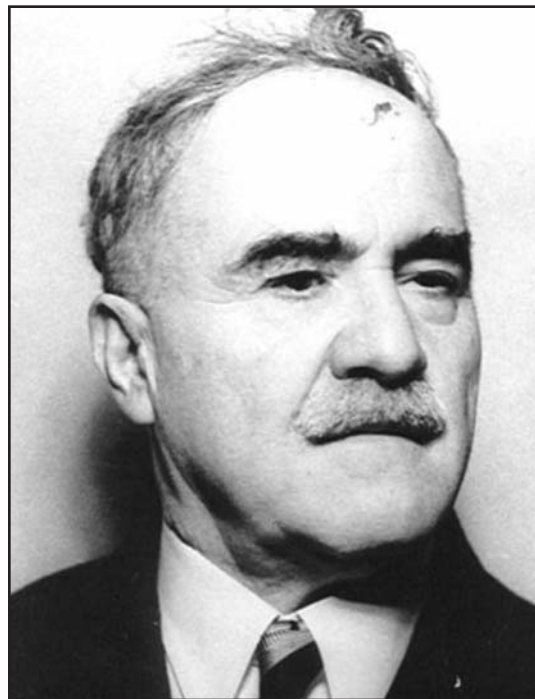
Betty was sent to a Christian foster home in the town of *Eibergen* in the Netherlands until the end of the war.

Her mother and eight-week-old baby brother were hidden by a Christian family in *Neede*, but were betrayed by locals in the town and

THE CHECKERED RECORD OF THE SWISS RED CROSS DURING THE HOLOCAUST

BY SHELDON KIRSHNER,
THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

The Geneva-based International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), one of the oldest humanitarian organizations, emerged from World War II with its reputation stained and damaged. Having come under fire for its failure to condemn the Holocaust or extend substantial



Max Huber.

assistance to Jews trapped in Nazi-occupied Europe, it attempted to improve its tarnished image by launching new aid initiatives in the aftermath of the war.

Gerald Steinacher's first-rate book, *Humanitarians at War: The Red Cross in the Shadow of the Holocaust* examines these issues in minute detail.

Steinacher, an associate professor of history and the Hymen Rosenberg Professor of Judaic Studies at the University of Nebraska, frames his work around the three men who shaped ICRC policy from 1928 to 1955.

Max Huber was ICRC's president from 1928 to 1944. Owing to his ill health, his chief assistant and successor, Carl Jacob Burckhardt, took charge of the ICRC in the autumn of 1942. Paul Ruegger, who succeeded Burckhardt in 1948, had been Switzerland's ambassador to Fascist Italy.

For all intents and purposes, Burckhardt probably exerted the greatest influence on its policy toward Jews during the period under discussion. Although he considered Adolf Hitler a parvenu, he regarded Germany as an important bulwark against Communism. "Burckhardt was no great admirer of Hitler, but no particular friend of the Jews either," writes Steinacher. In a private letter to a friend in 1933, Burckhardt wrote that "there is a certain aspect of Judaism that a healthy Volk has to

fight." And in an early draft of his memoirs, he held Jews responsible for the outbreak of the war.

Steinacher suggests that the Swiss government's cautious approach to Jewish refugees from Germany influenced the ICRC.

Switzerland, fearful of a German invasion, admitted about 30,000 Jewish refugees during the course of the war, but rejected at least as many. Jews were granted only temporary asylum and had to leave as soon as possible. The cost of maintaining them was borne by the 18,000-strong Swiss Jewish community.

Until 1938, German citizens entering the country required no visa. But worried that it might be swamped by "foreign elements," Switzerland asked Germany to mark the passports of non-Aryans with a red J stamp. On the eve of the war, the German Red Cross repeatedly told the ICRC not to interfere on behalf of German Jews because such requests would be ignored.

Although Switzerland was neutral during the war, groups of doctors and nurses from the Swiss army were sent to the Eastern front in 1941 and 1942 in support of Germany, and 755 Swiss nationals enrolled voluntarily in the *Waffen SS*. Switzerland, too, traded with Germany and was a key market for art looted from Jewish collectors by the Nazis.

In 1942, in the wake of the Wannsee conference in Berlin, Burckhardt learned of Nazi plans to systematically murder the Jews of Europe. His informant was Gerhart Rieger, the World Jewish Congress representative in Switzerland. Burckhardt, in turn, passed the information on to the U.S. consul in Geneva. Shortly afterward, the United States and nine of its allies publicly denounced Germany's plan and warned the perpetrators they would be held responsible.

Knowledge about Nazi atrocities did not translate into action on behalf of imperiled European Jews. Leery of antagonizing Germany, the Swiss government persuaded the ICRC to remain silent with respect to Germany's maltreatment of Jews. In any event, Burckhardt preferred quiet diplomacy to public protests. It was only in the 1990s that the ICRC admitted that its silence constituted a "moral defeat."

With the tide turning against Germany after 1942, the ICRC yielded to Jewish pressure inside and outside Switzerland and embarked on a two-pronged strategy to help Jews and non-Jews threatened by Germany. The ICRC began intervening on behalf of civilian concentration camp prisoners. It also started sending food parcels to camps such as

Dachau, *Sachsenhausen*, *Ravensbruck* and *Buchenwald*. A little later, it sent food parcels to ghettos in Poland and to the *Theresienstadt* camp in Czechoslovakia. In June 1943, the ICRC proposed that parcels should be sent to Auschwitz, but its proposal was rejected by the German Red Cross.

Steinacher contends that the establishment of the War Refugee Board by the United States in 1944 was a turning point for the ICRC's rescue efforts. The ICRC distributed food in Romania and Romanian-occupied territories and tried to protect Jews.

The ICRC, however, did not distinguish itself in an inspection tour of *Theresienstadt*. In preparation for the visit, the Nazis sanitized the camp, deported the sick and planted flowers. Once there, the Swiss delegates were shown a school, attended a soccer game and were treated to a performance of a children's theater play. The deception was a success, judging by the ICRC's favorable report. The report, Steinacher says, "discredited the [ICRC] as being either naïve or complicit in a cruel fiction."

Emboldened by its propaganda coup, the Nazis produced *The Führer Gives a City to the Jews*, an archly cynical documentary that portrayed the camp as a "spa town" where elderly German and Austrian Jews could live out their lives in peace. In fact, most of the inmates who appeared in the film were deported and murdered in Auschwitz.

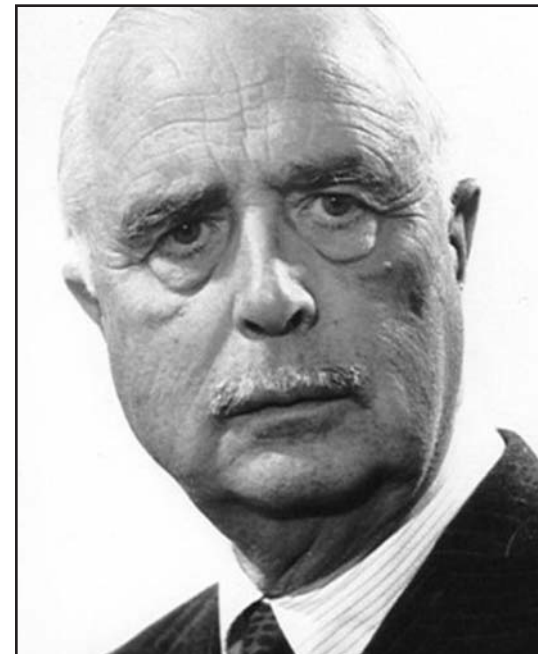
The ICRC soon dispatched a delegation to Budapest, where it handed out letters of protection to Jews and placed Jewish hospitals, clinics, hotels and soup kitchens under its protection. Bowing to the wishes of the majority on the ICRC, Huber wrote a letter to Hungarian leader Miklos Horthy in June 1944 asking him to stop the deportation of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz. Huber's intervention came too late. By that point, 400,000 Jews had already been killed.

Steinacher suggests that ICRC's actions were, in part, impelled by its competition with the Swedish Red Cross, which had played a role in the rescue of Danish Jews in October 1943. This rivalry turned into a personal competition between Burckhardt and the vice-president of the Swedish Red Cross, Count Folke Bernadotte, a nephew of Sweden's king who had expressed criticism of the ICRC. Burckhardt was thus involved in the ransom negotiations, initiated by SS chieftain Henrich Himmler, that enabled 1,684 Hungarian Jews to find a safe haven in Switzerland.

"For Burckhardt, helping the Jews

ultimately became a way to please the Allies, especially Washington, as they moved forward toward victory," writes Steinacher. "It had become clear to him that only a striking humanitarian 'success,' even one carried out in the waning days of the war, would quiet some of the criticism that had been increasingly directed against the ICRC and Switzerland."

In the wake of the war, the ICRC tried to make amends by extending assistance to distressed civilians. In one of its first initiatives, it issued travel papers to displaced ethnic Germans. But much to ICRC's embarrassment, thousands of Nazi collaborators and SS men, including perpetrators like Adolf Eichmann and Josef Mengele, availed themselves of these documents. Nine thousand Ukrainians who had been members



Carl Jacob Burckhardt.

of a *Waffen SS* division also used these documents to emigrate to Canada.

Torn by a sense of guilt over its tepid response to the Holocaust, the ICRC assigned three doctors to SS *Exodus 1947*, which was carrying Holocaust survivors to Palestine. During the first Arab-Israeli war, the ICRC provided humanitarian assistance to Jews and Arabs, and Ruegger personally managed rescue efforts in war-torn Jerusalem.

In conclusion, Steinacher says the ICRC only became more active in aiding Jews once it was clear that Germany was going to lose the war. "But the practical aid the [ICRC] offered was very limited and marked by hesitation," he notes. "The ICRC could have intervened earlier and with more determination, as the example of neutral Sweden shows."

He adds that, with the drafting and signing of the new Geneva Convention in 1949, the ICRC overcame its checkered past and remained "a relevant, innovative and active force in shaping international law and humanitarianism."



ELI ZBOROWSKI LEGACY CIRCLE



The American Society for Yad Vashem was founded in 1981 by a group of Holocaust survivors and led by Eli Zborowski, z"l, for more than thirty years. Recently approved by the Board of Directors of the American Society for Yad Vashem, our Legacy Circle is being named in memory of Eli Zborowski, z"l, who was greatly respected for his work and accomplishments on behalf of Yad Vashem and is missed by all who knew him.

The Eli Zborowski Legacy Circle is open to and will recognize anyone who includes Yad Vashem in their estate plans. This can include a bequest by will, funding a Charitable Remainder Trust or Charitable Gift Annuity, donating a paid-up life insurance policy or contributing an interest in an IRA or retirement plan, or making ASYV the beneficiary of a Charitable Lead Trust. Individuals can make gifts of any size, through a broad range of programs and investment vehicles that can accommodate those of modest means, as well as those with substantial wealth.

By including Yad Vashem in your estate plans, you assure a future in which Holocaust remembrance and education will serve as a powerful antidote to denial, hate and indifference.

"I did not find the world desolate when I entered it. As my fathers planted for me before I was born, so do I plant for those who will come after me."

The Talmud

For further information about the Eli Zborowski Legacy Circle, please contact

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