

# Institute of National Remembrance

<https://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/1792,A-supplement-on-Poles-saving-Jews.html>

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## A supplement on Poles saving Jews

On the occasion of the Polish National Day of Remembrance of Poles Rescuing Jews under German occupation on 24 March “Dziennik Zachodni” in cooperation with the IPN and Stowarzyszenie Pokolenie has prepared a supplement on Poles saving Jews .

Who has done enough to save lives? He who paid with his own life... You may not say that he has not done enough if he has died. He who has survived as an always and steadfast hero? "How I done enough?" What if I could have saved one or two more, and did not do so?

Michał Kerner "Władysław Bartoszewski. Wywiad z ciekawym, Warszawa 2006

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The Council to Aid Jews with the Government Penitentiary for Poland, referred to as "Żegota", was the only official institution in occupied Europe affiliated with state authorities which was tasked with aiding the Jewish population being exterminated by the Germans. No other organisation of this kind enjoyed official and practical support from the government or performed such extensive activities while operating under such difficult conditions.

The Konrad Żegota Social Aid Committee for the Jewish Population, established on 27 September 1942 in Warsaw, preceded the establishment of Żegota. At least several grassroots initiatives contributed to its emergence. These included the Front for the Rebirth of Poland (FRON) formed by Zofia Kossak-Szczucka. She wrote in her proclamation of 1942 (with the meaningful title) - Protest, that "The world is watching this crime, most horrible crime that has ever taken place in history, and keeps silent... We must not tolerate this silence any longer... It is disgraceful. In the face of murder, it is wrong to remain passive. He who remains silent in the face of slaughter becomes an accomplice to murder. He who does not condemn, complicit with the murder".

This proclamation echoed far and wide throughout Polish society. In addition to political parties, also the Jewish Department of the Home Army, led by Henryk Woliński, joined in the talks with the Government Delegation. A breakthrough was made when Leopold Fułkowski, Minister of Internal Affairs at the Government Delegation, decided to grant financial support for aid-oriented activities. He also initiated the establishment of a permanent committee to lead the action.

It was headed by Zofia Kossak-Szczucka and Wanda Krahelska-Rylpowszczyzna. A notice of the establishment of the Committee was published on 14 October 1942 in the Delegation's organ entitled Rzeczpospolita Polska (Republic of Poland). "We would like to inform the public that on the initiative of a number of social organisations from Catholic and democratic

"In the face of murder, it is wrong to remain passive"

# ŻEGOTA. Activities of the Council to Aid Jews



The activists of the Council to Aid Jews present at the celebration of the third anniversary of Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, April 1945. Right to left: Piotr Gajewski, Ferdynand Marek Arcyżński, Władysław Bartoszewski, Adolf Berman and Tadeusz Bok.

circles, a Social Aid Committee is being established for the Jewish population affected by the bestial persecution of Jews by the Germans".

As early as on 4 December the Council to Aid Jews under new leadership replaced the Committee. The Council was headed by Julian Grobelny ("Trojan"), a representative of WRN, his deputy was Leon Feiner ("Lao-dzi") of Bund, with Adolf Berman ("Borowski") representing the Jewish National Committee, becoming the secretary, and Ferdynand Marek Arcyżński of the Alliance of Democrats the treasurer. Witold Bełkiewicz ("Wenda") and Władysław Bartoszewski ("Teofil") acted as representatives of the Delegation in the Council.

The Council quickly overtook the previous Committee in terms of the scope and intensity of work. This was due to the presence of Jewish parties who could reach ghetto and camp escapes. Despite the terror being spread by the invader and the funds being disproportionate to the needs (from 150,000 zlotys in January 1943 to 3,000,000 zlotys in November 1944), about 12,000 people were aided.

However, it was often more important to provide false documents, obtained mainly thanks to cooperation with the legal units of the Home Army and the Delegation. Ferdynand Marek Arcyżński, treasurer of Żegota, assessed after the war that the Council provided Jews with as many as 40,000 such documents.

Attempts were made to place children in care institutions and with private carers. After the war Irena Śendler, the head of the children's department, estimated that together with a group of co-workers about 2,500 children were provided with shelter in this way.

In addition to Warsaw, permanent district committees of the Council to Aid Jews were also established in Kraków and Łódź. The Kraków-based Council was led, as in Warsaw, by a member of PPS, Stanisław Wincenty Dobrowolski ("Stanisław"). In Łódź, it was Władysław Łarysa Chomsowa ("Dionizy") who led the Council to Aid Jews. She was a social activist and member of Alliance of Democrats.

In order to help in the provinces, a field department headed by Stefan Śendzik was established in Warsaw. Tadeusz Samecki and Ewa Samecka served as the Council's couriers at the time. At least several dozen towns are known, where one-time or permanent help was provided in one form or other (sometimes it was only money or false documents). The Council succeeded in placing at least 50 people abroad (in Hungary).

Not all operations performed by Żegota were successful. There were setbacks, arrest and, unfortunately, deaths aplenty. The attempt at a wider operation and the establishment of permanent representation in Białystok, Vilnius, Łódź and Lublin was also a failure. The inability to act on a broader scale remained the main problem of Żegota

throughout the entire period of its operation. In addition to the financial shortages, there were other bones of contention between the Council and the Delegation. These included the organisation of local Councils (Żegota demanded that they be organised by the Delegation, while the latter claimed that it would take care only of already established grassroots entities), the purchase of weapons for Jewish combatants (the Delegation forbade this), cooperation with communists (for the Delegation their loyalty to the Polish authorities was of key importance), combating blackmail and collaboration with the Germans (the Council demanded quick reaction), and propaganda calling for assistance for Jews (the Delegation did not want to disaffect anti-Semitic circles). The tension further increased as the Council requested in December 1942 that a similar institution should be set up in London; however this wish was granted too late, as late as in April 1944.

Also the attitudes of the Jewish population, sometimes posed problems for the Council. People often had their own ideas about surviving the war or organising aid operations. For example, many individuals who could have been saved did not want to part with their families, such as by putting their children in foster care, or were afraid to leave the ghetto or camp and hide underground. Emanuel Ringelblum wrote "There are many fewer dangers than a Jew would think. Therefore, the greatest danger is the one which

is imaginary, the alleged things that the neighbour, caretaker, housekeeper or passer-by see".

Another problem was the politicising, also on the Polish side, of Żegota's activities by the Jewish underground. The scale of the problem is illustrated by the fact that in the report of the Social Aid Committee for the Jewish Population of December 1942, one of the reasons for its dissolution was specified as: "The inability to cooperate with representatives of Jewish political organisations / the introduction of political elements to purely charitable work".

One should bear in mind that the Polish underground, though very extensive, could not protect itself, as even its leaders were captured by the Germans, including Jan Piłsudski, Government Delegate (February 1943) and Gen. Stefan Grot-Rowecki, Home Army Commander (June 1943), not to mention average Poles. The only real aid could be provided by the Allies, although the Russians severed contact with the Polish government in order to create their own, communist government in Poland. On the other hand, the British and US leaders regarded the Holocaust as too insignificant to be of interest. Jan Kurka, Councillor of the Polish Government, recalled "I honestly told them about the hopeless situation of the Jews, underlining that help can only come from the West. Poles are powerless, they can save individuals, but they cannot stop the extermination of Jews".

## EVENT TIMELINE

country under this agreement. Of 522,000 Jews who lived in Germany in 1933, over 308,000 emigrate, including intellectual elites like Albert Einstein. They mainly go to France, Poland and the USA.

**29/30 June 1934**  
The Night of the Long Knives - a campaign intended to capture and kill Hitler's opponents associated with the SA.

**15 September 1935**  
The enactment of the Nuremberg Laws. At the NSDAP rally in Nuremberg, the Reichstag enacts the draft Law on Reich Citizenship, Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour, and Law on the National Flag, as proposed by Hitler. The first two of these laws define Jews as "mixed-race" individuals, as opposed to pure Aryan German people. It is officially defined that "A Jew is an individual who is descended from at least three grandparents who were, racially, full Jews". The Law on the National Flag forbids Jews from wearing the German flag and using its colours. Also, a ban on mixed German and Jewish marriages is introduced, with penalties for breaking the law being specified (e.g. imprisonment in a concentration camp).

**1 November 1936**  
The Rome-Berlin Axis is created. The leader of the Italian fascists, Benito Mussolini, announces in Rome the formation of a new political-military alliance between the Third Reich and Italy.

**October 1937**  
Limiting the emigration of Jews to Mandate Palestine. Due to the growing emigration of German Jews, the British Government decides to introduce regulations aimed at limiting the number of people to be granted asylum in British dominions.

**13 March 1938**  
The Anschluss of Austria. After the annexation of the First Austrian Republic into the Third Reich, cases of internment and pogroms begin to affect Austrian Jews.

**29-30 September 1938**  
The Munich Conference. The agreement between Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and France on the annexation of a part of Czechoslovakia to the German Reich. On 1 October, Germany begins the occupation of the eastern part of Czechoslovakia.

**1 October 1938**  
The Anschluss of the

# National Day of Remembrance for Poles who saved Jews

A SUPPLEMENT PREPARED WITH  
SUBSTANTIVE COLLABORATION OF THE



INSTITUTE  
OF NATIONAL  
REMEMBRANCE



Jarosław Szarek, PhD, President of IPN:  
Let's celebrate the National Day of  
Remembrance for Poles who saved Jews



"Sovereign Poland, wishing to commemorate the millions of victims of the Holocaust and compatriots who rushed to their rescue, feels obliged to preserve the truth about the facts concerning the occupation of our country by Nazi Germany". This fragment forms part of the explanatory memorandum to the act under which this year, on March 24, we celebrated the National Day of Remembrance for Poles who saved Jews under the German occupation, for the first time.

According to one of the principles of Judaism "Whoever destroys a soul, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world. And whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world". Therefore, while the world was learning how to live with the trauma of the Holocaust, among questions like "How could such a genocide happen?", hope was inspired by the stories of people who, despite the danger, lent persecuted Jews a helping hand, gave them shelter, helped them to escape, and provided aid in many other ways.

Many cases of support for the Jewish population were cited immediately after the war but disappeared in the tangle of horrifying reports. It is difficult to

pinpoint the actual date when the word "Righteous" was used for the first time in relation to someone who helped Jews. It has been in use officially since 1963. The title of Righteous Among the Nations can be awarded after a commission recognises that the saved person was a Jew and the rescuer was not, and that the help did not involve any benefit. Poles constitute the largest group among the Righteous Among the Nations, with nearly seven thousand members.

The Institute of National Remembrance also acts to immortalise those Poles who aided persecuted Jews. In addition to publications and research, it has organized many exhibitions, in particular, "Żegota – the Council to Aid Jews". The IPN and the Polish Post commemorated Żegota, on the 75th anniversary of its creation, with a special postcard. Scholars from the IPN also participate in other endeavours. For example, at the Markowa Museum, with the exhibition there being largely based on the studies conducted by IPN historians.

On 24 March 1944, Józef and Wiktoria Ulma and all six of their children were murdered by Germans for harbouring two Jewish families. Their stand and martyrdom became examples of the readiness to provide aid to those in need, whatever the cost. There were many such people, and recently I had the honour of presenting Mrs. Mirosława Gruszczyńska with the Commander's Cross of Polonia Restituta. Her story shows that many of our compatriots were ready to stand against evil. She also encourages us to ask how many of us would risk not only our own lives but also the lives of our entire family, our closest neighbours or even the whole community...?

## Distinctions for Humanity

Dorota Koczniewska-Kalita PhD,  
Head of the IPN Delegation in  
Kielce

The outbreak of World War 2 in 1939 irreversibly changed the world. The period through which the people of the nations occupied by Germany lived was one of chaos, hunger, carnage, and criminals. It was a time of injustice and sorrow. Poland found itself between two totalitarian systems, that of German Nazism and Soviet communism. Hitler's goal was to transform Eastern Europe into a racist empire, where the "Untermensch of the Slavic race" would work for the Germanic Herrenvolk, and where the "Jewish poison" would be completely eradicated. Stalin, on the other hand, resorted to giant deception while using violence to strengthen his totalitarian power. He made himself into a warrior acting for the "good" of all the nations of the world. He killed the "enemies of the people" in the name of this ideology.

Despite the enormous scale of the repression, Poles resisted the invaders throughout the war. It is estimated that approximately 6 million Polish citizens perished under Nazi German occupation, of which 2.7 to 2.9 million were Polish Jews. In occupied Poland, as opposed to the majority of European countries, any help provided to Jews was punishable by death. Even in the face of

such strict regulation, many Poles decided to engage in acts of humanity. Szymon Datner in his "Las sprawiedliwych. Karta z dziejów ratownictwa Żydów w okupowanej Polsce" with uncanny accuracy describes the situation of people seeking help and those who were asked for help. "When an unknown Jew knocks at a cottage window at night, the Jewish problem of that time knocks along with him, together with a tangle of consequences, risks, hazards, as well as the necessity to make a decision and the related dilemmas. The fugitive is asking for help, for a little food to eat, to be able to warm himself at the fireplace for a brief moment. When he sees warmth in the host's eyes or hears kind words, he asks to be allowed to stay for a few days, to work there for a while and then leave. The peasant is then faced with a question of how he should react. He realises that a moral dilemma has knocked at his window, a human who has been denied his humanity, a great question of humanity.

It is the eternal dilemma which has been faced by thousands of generations: what to do when evil temporarily has the advantage, the dilemma of the chased and the persecuted. Times like these force you to test yourself, to compare your behaviour with the dictates of morality. The risks involved in siding with the persecuted and the force resulting from good has always been great. But between 1939 and 1945,

the extent of these risks was incomparable.

It appears that, in general terms, the dilemma could be solved in four ways: the first would be to turn the Jew in to his pursuers in accordance with the 'law' imposed by the invader, which equalled a death sentence; the second would be to refuse help but not turn him in; the third would be to help in the short-term; and the fourth would be to take him in and shelter him for an extended period. The Ulma family from Markowa, who paid for aiding Jews with their lives, became the Polish symbol of the last of these standpoints. In addition to individual aid-oriented actions, Poles also engaged in organised forms of helping Jews. The Polish underground authorities were the only ones in Europe that established and co-financed a governmental institution - the Council to Aid Jews, which operated in the occupied territory.

The war affected whole nations and individuals alike. The good and bad experiences now form an extricable part of their remembrance. Professor Aleksander Skotnicki says "Leon Berenson, a remarkable judge and defence attorney, appearing in many political trials, died in the Warsaw Ghetto on 22 April 1943. He ordered in his will that Jews should raise a monument of gratitude to the Polish people who smuggled food into the ghetto. The monument was to be shaped like a loaf of bread on a marble pedestal". In turn,

Emanuel Ringelblum, a historian of the ghetto, appealed for recognising such actions with an "order for humanitarianism" in future Poland. Julian Aleksandrowicz, a great scholar from Kraków, requested the Israeli government to create a Chapter of the Commander's Cross for Humanity, which would be given to True People for their heroic decisions to save those at risk, despite the danger posed by the occupier.

Perhaps it is worth paying more attention to this deeply humanitarian aspect of their recollections. In 1961, Julian Aleksandrowicz wrote to the Head of the Government of Israel, on the day preceding the date of Eichmann's trial, "... Stigmatising evil will gain gravity if it is made against the background of rewarding people's humanitarian values, i.e. nobleness, good and a willingness to sacrifice oneself for the noblest of human principles..." (as cited in "Nasze Gmina" 09/2013).

In 1963, the Government of Israel decided to establish the "Righteous Among the Nations" medal. So far 25,000 people have received this distinction. Aleksandrowicz could have contributed to the creation of this medal, we do not know it for sure. What we do know, however, is that his deep humanistic drive stemmed from the memory of man's attitude towards another, expressed in kindness and even heroic help, offered by the stronger to the weaker.

Sudetenland. Pursuant to the Munich Agreement, Germany takes the Sudetenland away from Czechoslovakia, directly incorporating it into the Reich. The Jews who live there are repressed the same way as those living in other locations governed by the Germans.

**28 October 1938**

The expulsion of 17,000 Jews from the Reich under the Polenaktion. Polish Jews who reside in Germany are rallied on the border of Germany and Poland in Bytom, Chojnice and Zbąszyń, and expelled from the Third Reich.

**9/10 November 1938**

Kristallnacht A pogrom of Jews, ordered by Joseph Goebbels. As a result, 91 people perish and over 1,000 synagogues and 7,000 shops are burnt down or damaged. The assassination of Ernst vom Rath, secretary of the German embassy in Paris, by Herschel Grynszpan, serves as a pretext for the pogrom.

While Kristallnacht is simulated to be a spontaneous act by German people, it is actively orchestrated by SA and SS detachments. As a result of measures taken after the pogrom, 30,000 more Jews are sent to the concentration camps.

**15 November 1938**

The commencement of the so-called Kindertransports in the United Kingdom. On 15 November 1938, at a meeting of representatives of Jewish organisations operating in the United Kingdom and Prime Minister Chamberlain, a decision is made to rescue Jewish children from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and the Free City of Danzig. By September 1939 the United Kingdom accepts nearly 10,000 Jewish children younger than seventeen years old. They are placed in foster families and care facilities.

**13 December 1938**

The confiscation of Jewish-owned enterprises. A legal regulation concerning the confiscation of Jewish enterprises in the German Reich is enacted.

**3 March 1939**

Hungary introduces laws limiting Jews' rights and call them to leave the country. The limitations mainly concern economic matters, including the ability to run businesses and access to specialist professions.

**15 March 1939**

The annexation of Czechoslovakia and the establishment of the

The news of the Holocaust were communicated to Western Europe. But people in Auschwitz were still dying...

# KL AUSCHWITZ

## Looking at hell

Tomasz Borówka  
Dziennik Łódzki

**3** 1 May 1944. High above Oświęcim, a Mosquito plane glides swiftly across the sky. A South African crew was on board. The aircraft, part of 60 Squadron of the Royal Air Force, was tasked with providing RAF intelligence with aerial reconnaissance photographs. These were supposed to add some detail to the information published in the "Bombers Baedeker", a black comedy name for the Target Book for Strategic Bombing. This guide presented objects of economic importance in the Third Reich and its occupied territories, i.e. what, where and why to bomb. Having captured the synthetic fuel plant in Monowitz on film, the Mosquito turned back and set off on a long homeward-bound journey to Brindisi, Italy. There, the films were taken out of the cameras and sent to England for the purpose of processing and interpretation. It turned out that the pilots did not switch off the cameras after leaving the plant area, so the data collected greatly exceeded expectations. Yet despite ample photographic material, the interpretation centre only produced prints presenting the chemical plant. The remaining photographs were archived for 30 years. It was only in the 1970s that it was discovered what they actually presented. These were the first aerial photographs of KL Auschwitz in history.

There were more photographs taken, as visitors came by with their cameras to capture every detail of the site. Incidentally, they also photographed the unloading of



Allies knew of the Holocaust of Jews in the camp

a freight train carrying a Jewish transport set to be killed in gas chambers. These photographs lay forgotten for years as well, attracting no interest whatsoever.

The Allies knew the extent of the annihilation of European Jews living on the territory of Poland. They even received reports from Polish intelligence and other sources. In autumn 1942, Jan Karski/Kozielewski,

a Polish underground courier, arrived in London to deliver a report on the Holocaust. The data presented were later communicated to numerous British and American politicians, including Franklin D. Roosevelt, the US president at the time. The message was also passed on to Jewish communities in the States. Yet it hardly elicited any response. No adequate reaction followed.

Churchill merely honoured the European Jewry, while Roosevelt declared that the perpetrators would be brought to judgement in the future. In December 1942, twelve allied states issued a joint declaration condemning the ongoing German genocide. However, nothing more happened. Under the pretence of "huge difficulties of a geographical nature" and "certain formal issues regarding safety," in the words of Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, the Allies concluded that there was no possibility to aid the dying Jews.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Numerous operations of the Allied Special Forces throughout the war prove they were capable of remarkable feats. One of the largest of them was the Norwegian heavy water sabotage operation. British Commandos were also on the verge of successfully assassinating the infamous German general, Erwin Rommel. British-trained Czechs managed to assassinate one of the most senior figures in Germany's Third Reich, Reinhard Heydrich. The Polish underground performed a similar act of revenge on the SS General Franz Kutschera, the notorious "Executioner of Warsaw". And the British even managed to get their spies to infiltrate Adolf Hitler's quarters...

The RAF mounted several astonishingly precise and accurate air raids. They breached dams on the Ruhr to flood the valley and frequently bombed the Gestapo headquarters. They freed the prisoners kept in the Amiens Prison and disrupted the Luftwaffe rocket development in the Peenemünde Army Research

Centre. At some point, the Allied forces recognized the crucial importance of fuel and ball bearing plants for the German economy and these became the key targets. Even the night before D-Day, the French Resistance successfully sabotaged the railway lines and disrupted the German transport system.

All those operations called for measures which could have been applied just to interfere with the Holocaust plans. Poland was not, of course, a stone's throw away. But there certainly were some possibilities of averting the massacre and getting in the way of its leaders, of putting fear into their cold hearts. Unfortunately, such possibilities were not taken into consideration.

A member of the National Council of the Polish government-in-exile, Szmuel Zygielbojm, committed suicide to protest against the indifference and inaction of the Allies.

Following the reports of five prisoners who managed to escape Auschwitz in the second half of 1944, it became clear where the main centre of the Holocaust was located. It was then that Zionist organisations began to demand the Allies to step in. Their request was to use long-range aircraft to bomb the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp facilities where Jews were being murdered, as well as the railway lines used for their transport to the camp. But to no avail. The Holocaust was, in fact, almost complete by that time and it would have certainly posed a technical problem to conduct such an air raid. Yet the mere possibility of doing so was not worthy of consideration for the Americans and the British.

## Read the document. KWC Declaration. 1942

**Declaration of the underground Directorate of Civil Resistance (Kierownictwo Walki Cywilnej) on the issue of German atrocities against the Jewish people of 16 September 1942.**

*While Polish society is being decimated by the enemy, for nearly a year our territory has been plagued with the heinous carnage of Jews.*

*This unprecedented mass murder eclipses any other atrocity known to humankind. Infants, children, youths, adults,*

*the elderly, the infirm, the diseased, the healthy, men and women, Catholics, Jews by race and Jews by religion – they are all being murdered mercilessly, poisoned with gas, buried alive and thrown off buildings, left to die in slow agony, tormented and denied by their cynical*

*executioners. The number of victims has already exceeded a million and their number is constantly growing. Being unable to take active steps to stop this tragedy, the Directorate of Civil Resistance is hereby protesting the horrible crime against Jews.*

*Every political and social organisation in Poland is joining this protest. The oppressors and their accomplices, just as in the case of crimes against Poles, shall be held culpable.*

**Directorate of Civil Resistance**

**Aljo Gontarek, Ph.D., Damian Sitkiewicz**  
Historical Research Office Department of the IPN, UMCS

I feel a deep need to give my warmest thanks to the Ambassador for his profound understanding of the fate of the Polish Jewry during his term. We shall never forget that what disturbed many a conscience as to the Jewish tragedy has been and will be due to the diplomatic steps taken by our Government following the initiative of the Ambassador. In these words, Ignacy Schwarzbart thanked Edward Raczynski, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, for Poland's commitment to helping Jewish refugees in 1943. During the war, Schwarzbart was one of two Jewish representatives on the Polish National Council of the Polish government-in-exile, i.e. Poland's ersatz parliament. Prior to this, he was a Member of the Polish Parliament.

It is not common knowledge that the Polish government-in-exile conducted this or any other diplomatic action. We have grown accustomed to the concept of Jews being aided on the Polish territory. But Polish Jews abroad, who found themselves as refugees in the occupied countries of Western Europe or in the East, were not forsaken.

Jewish refugees received aid and support throughout the entire war. Some of the significant people behind it were the ministers of Foreign Affairs: August Zaleski, Edward Raczynski and Tadeusz Romer. Thanks to their efforts, thousands of Polish Jews survived in foreign lands.

Initially, the state-granted support was of a material nature. The Polish Government cooperated with Jewish associations. It created refugee and military camps and founded potential refuge points abroad. It also provided assistance with the formalities connected with visas and passports as well as organised and facilitated the crossing of unguarded borders.

As the intensity of German aggression against Jews increased, it was necessary to separate to Polish citizens administer aid to Jews and Poles separately. This changed in 1942. The only thing that mattered at that moment was to save human life at all costs. This proved an arduous task, not only due to strict German regulations, but also given the indifference of the rest of Europe, the United Kingdom in particular.

Every Polish diplomatic mission endeavoured to save Jews. The most notable

figures committed to this cause were Aleksander Ladoś (Switzerland), Tadeusz Romer (Japan) and Henryk Slawik (Hungary). Slawik was, however, not affiliated with the Foreign Affairs, but with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

The task of Ladoś was specific due to Swiss neutrality, which greatly facilitated his operations in Bern. These intensified in the summer of 1942, when Germany began to exterminate Jews in occupied French territory. Over 6,000 refugees fled to Switzerland from France, Belgium and the Netherlands, 3,500 of them of Polish nationality.

Thus Switzerland became the centre of Jewish aid and rescue operations.

Knowing these people had just barely escaped death, the Swiss forces of law and order captured them and sent them back to die in the occupied areas. Some of them, however, ended up in transit camps or with private families in Switzerland. Witnessing this ruthless policy, Ladoś pleaded with Raczynski to urge the Allies to open the Swiss borders to Polish refugees without visas. As a result, about 3,500 Jewish refugees could hope for help. It immediately became a pressing matter to transfer them quickly to places that were not under a direct threat from the German army.

For this to happen, the aid of other Polish diplomatic missions worldwide was necessary. Employees of other authorities, such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Ministry of Interior as well as the Polish intelligence, implored for action as well. Members of Polish associations in Switzerland, in particular the Central Polish Committee for the Relief of War Victims, assumed the responsibility and acted locally by organising various charity meetings, concerts and events.

Many of them were close associates of Ladoś, including Julius Kühl, Ph.D. An orthodox Jew, he headed the Refugee Department of the Legation

of Poland to Switzerland in Bern. He engaged his friends, Filippo Bernardini, the papal nuncio in Switzerland, and Recha and Icchak Sternbuch, members of Vaad Hatzalah (the Rescue Committee). Thanks to their efforts, it was possible to produce Latin American passports for the refugees to escape to Haiti, Paraguay, Honduras, Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Panama, Uruguay and Venezuela. It is estimated that nearly 400 documents were issued in Switzerland alone. According to some Polish sources, however, the number of "exotic" passports was much, much

Marseille (170) and Perpignan (over 100).

When the French initiated the extermination of Jews along with the Germans in the summer of 1942, a mass exodus to Switzerland began. A heavy burden fell on the shoulders of Ladoś.

In September 1942, Ladoś received a message from Edward Raczynski which said that the Vichy government had expelled a large number of Polish Jews. Later, Raczynski also asked Ladoś to plead with the Swiss government for a decisive démarche on humanitarian grounds. On 17 September 1942, in telegram no. 271, he wrote:

## The time of TRIAL

The efforts of Polish diplomacy to save Polish Jews in occupied Europe

higher. About a thousand Polish people are supposed to have used a Salvadoran passport. Up to 90% of the mission budget was allocated to rescuing Jews. Most of these Polish refugees survived.

The situation in France was entirely different. From the moment the country was occupied by the German army, the Polish diplomatic mission had no possibility of legal operation. Polish Jews in France, however, received aid nevertheless. The people responsible for Polish issues were Feliks Frankowski and, later, Franciszek Dzierżykraj-Morawski.

There was a covert representative of the Polish government in Vichy France from 1940 to 1943, Stanisław Zabiello (1902-1970). Upon the capture of France, it was divided into the German occupation zone in the north and the French State under the Vichy regime headed by Marshal Philippe Pétain. The Polish Bureau under that government tackled all the issues related to Poland.

Initially, it was the Polish Red Cross that aided Polish Jews by locating them in shelters and helping those imprisoned in internment camps. According to Polish estimates, these held about 1800 Jews, including the concentration camp in Argelès. Most Jews found refuge in the regions of Toulouse (800),

"Please stress the fact that the French government refuses to allow Jews to leave the country. This makes it impossible to rescue them from being deported to Germany." Two days earlier, he described his efforts to implore numerous neutral countries and the Vatican to use a démarche to protest against Vichy France deporting Polish Jews. Simultaneously, in consultation with Ladoś, steps were taken to provide the American chargé d'affaires to the French government with instructions on protesting against the deportations on behalf of the US government. Diplomatic actions were in full bloom.

This was particularly visible in Buenos Aires and in Bogotà, where Mieczysław Chalupczyński resided. After receiving instructions, he and others endeavoured to persuade Latin American countries to intervene in defence of Polish refugees. The main objective was to make them issue visas and passports – passes for life. They succeeded, although primarily through bribes. At the same time, Jewish children were being rescued in France thanks to links with the Vatican and with the help of Polish representatives. About 200 children from Poland were saved.

At the beginning of 1944, the focus was set on the Vittel camp in France. It was inhabited by about 2,000

people of Jewish origin mostly. According to data collected by Jewish organisations at the time, about 200 of them were Polish citizens and held Latin American passports. The end of the war was drawing nearer and the Third Reich was growing weaker, yet the extermination efforts did not cease. A special delegation of SS soldiers from Berlin arrived in Vittel in January 1944. They were to check the validity of the Latin American passports held by the prisoners. Jews and the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs immediately started to plead with the governments of those countries to honour the documents.

Most Polish Jews at Vittel held Paraguayan passports. It was therefore Chalupczyński who had to take action again. Ultimately, it was Miroslaw Arciszewski, a diplomat residing in Buenos Aires, who played the biggest role in thwarting the deportation of the Vittel prisoners. Together with Sylwain Strakacz from the legation in New York, they took the operation upon themselves. The deportation of Jews was cancelled and almost 2,000 people were rescued.

This was not, however, made public, as it could have seriously threatened the safety of other Jews who were still in danger. Only a handful of people learnt the story of the diplomats' efforts regarding the passports and the cancelled liquidation of the camp. These were the Jewish Agency, Recha Sternbuch of the Vaad Hatzalah, Yitzhak Gruenbaum of the Committee for the Jews of Occupied Europe, and rabbi Levin, the latter a remarkable figure and a representative of Orthodox Jews. They received the information personally from the Consul General of the Republic of Poland to Jerusalem.

Another important person actively engaged in rescuing Jews was Tadeusz Romer. As the Polish ambassador in Japan in the years 1937-1941, he aided many Polish refugees. These included 2,000 Jews who arrived in Japan using visas issued by the Japanese consul in Kaunas, Chiune Sugihara, and following the agenda of the Polish intelligence in Stockholm. Diplomats in Portugal and Spain took similar steps, saving 3,000 Jews, who were evacuated to Latin and Central America. Some Poles do have considerable merit in respect of rescuing thousands of Jews.

According to preliminary estimates, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs contributed to saving about 10,000 people of Jewish origin, while numerous sources suggest the figures were even larger.

### EVENT TIMELINE

Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

**13 May 1939**  
"Voyage of the Damned". A total of 937 Jewish refugees from Germany reach Cuba on MS St. Louis; however, the country denies them entry due to US influence. Also, the USA and Canada refuse to accept the Jews. Ultimately, they find refuge in France, Belgium and the United Kingdom.

**17 May 1939**  
A White Paper is published. The White Papers published in 1922, 1930 and 1939 are documents intended to explain the position of the British Government in relation to Mandatory Palestine and the possibility of establishing a "Jewish national home" there. For fear of the autonomy of these lands the British Government once again restrict the possibility of Jewish emigration to Palestine.

**1 September 1939**  
German and Slovak aggression against Poland. The task forces of the Security Police and SS commit a number of crimes, also against Jews. Synagogues in Katowice and Będzin are set ablaze. Anti-Jewish misdemeanours are also observed by soldiers of German frontal units.

**2 September 1939**  
Germany establishes the Stutthof concentration camp near Gdańsk.

**21 September 1939**  
Reinhard Heydrich, Chief of the Reich Main Security Office, determines the main procedures regarding Jewish populations in the seized land, in a secret telephonogram.

**8 October 1939**  
The Germans establish a Jewish ghetto in Piotrków Trybunalski, the first in occupied Polish territory.

**12-17 October 1939**  
The Germans deport Jews from Bohemia, Moravia and Austria to Poland.

**12 November 1939**  
Jews are deported from Polish territories annexed into Germany. The Germans relocate them to the General Government.

**November 1939**  
The Jewish Military Union is formed. It associates Polish soldiers of Jewish origin and Jews who do not support communists. The union (subordinate to the Union of Armed Struggle) collaborates with the Polish Underground State and fights the Germans and communists.

EVENT  
TIMELINE

## 1 December 1939

All Jews in the General Government have to wear bands with the Star of David.

## December 1939

The German authorities of General Government confiscate Jewish property. Jewish communities composed of less than 500 people are to be dissolved, and the Jewish population is forcibly relocated to ghettos.

## 8 February 1940

A ghetto is established in Łódź. The ghetto is closed on 30 April 1940.

## 27 February 1940

KL Auschwitz, the German concentration camp in Oświęcim, is established. It is originally intended for Polish prisoners.

## 1 April 1940

An agreement with Ahnenerbe Stiftung, On Himmeler's initiative, Ahnenerbe Stiftung starts anthropological and genetic research on camp prisoners. In subsequent years, many German companies, such as Siemens and Bayer AG, carry out research and experiments on prisoners in concentration camps. This research is often deadly for the prisoners.

## 29 June 1940

The Soviet Union carries out the third mass deportation of Polish citizens from the annexed territories, deep into this state. As many as 78,000 people are deported, of which 82% are Polish Jews.

## June 1940

The first French transit camps are established. Jews and political prisoners are detained in southern France, in dreadful conditions, under the eye of French guards. The Camp des Milles, established in 1939 as a refugee camp, is transformed into a transit camp and becomes the largest facility of this kind.

## 13 September 1940

Governor-General Hans Frank orders that Jewish ghettos be established throughout the entire General Government.

## 2 October 1940

The Warsaw Ghetto is established. It is isolated from other districts of the city on 16 November 1940. It will become the largest ghetto in all of Europe, with 450,000 incarcerated in April 1941.

## 3 October 1940

Romania introduces the first anti-Jewish regulations, e.g. legalises the confiscation of Jewish property.

## 7 October 1940

Bulgaria introduces its first anti-Jewish laws.

The unique bravery of Irena Sendler deserves to be immortalized

# SENDLEROWA, a mother to Holocaust children

Tomasz Borówka  
Dziennik Zachodni

For many years, rather few people knew about her and her feats. These were only those who she saved, some of her friends and a handful of historians studying World War Two, the Holocaust in particular. In these words, Michał Głowiński begins his book "Mother to the Children of the Holocaust: the Story of Irena Sendler".

Asked about her motifs, she replied simply: "Probably it was rooted in my family home. My father regarded himself as one of the first Polish socialists. He was a doctor. We lived in Otwock. Most of his patients were poor

Jews. (...) Neither their customs nor their destitute homes were strange to me."

As the occupation began, Irena Sendler, an employee of the Warsaw Social Welfare Department, resolved to help the Jews. The charity organisation she worked for had previously supported the poor, the elderly and orphans, e.g. by distributing meals. She decided to allocate some of the funds to aid Jewish people as well. By the time the Germans established the Warsaw Ghetto, Sendler had helped about 3,000 people. Yet with the Jews now isolated from the rest of the capital, the aid system had to be built from scratch. A creative young lady, Irena persuaded some infectious disease doctors to issue credentials for her and



for her co-worker. This allowed them to move freely in the ghetto area. They managed to renew some ties from the past and resumed their charity work by delivering food, clothes, medicines and money obtained from the Welfare Department. "1942 saw mass expulsions and it was clear to everyone

that all those in the ghetto were doomed," she said. "Hence a new, urgent task for us. We resolved to smuggle as many Jews outside the walls as possible, especially children. But our financial resources were diminishing. We would probably not have been able to continue but for the emergence of the Polish Council to Aid Jews." In December 1942, Sendler met "Trojan", Julian Grobelny, at an address she had been given. "Together, we'll do wonders. You have a network of trusted friends, and we have the money," he said. "I was tasked with heading the department for rescuing Jewish children," Irena recalled. "And so I became an eager activist of the Konrad Żegota Provisional Committee."

"That is how the legendary smuggling of Jewish children began. She had to face terrible risks all the time, but she took it upon herself to continue. Inattention meant death. Irena escaped it several times. She witnessed Janusz Korczak marching to death along with the orphaned children.

Sendler survived detention herself, but she managed to stay calm and avoided being exposed. She successfully protected documents which could help Germans identify and locate the Jewish children who had been rescued. The SS soldier who was supposed to execute her was bribed and set her free instead.

Thanks to her actions, about 2,500 children were rescued from the Warsaw Ghetto.

For decades his actions were not known to the general public. The time has now come to make amends

# SŁAWIK, The Righteous one from Silesia

Tomasz Kurpierz, PhD  
IPN Katowice

July 1944. Budapest Gestapo prison. "We stood in front of them and listened to them read the indictment against me. And then they asked questions. (...) Henryk Sławik denied all accusations, insisting I had no idea about the action. They assured him he would be free immediately if he told the truth. But he was adamant. (...) After a while, they resumed the interrogation. The same picture, but Sławik himself was different. His face and head covered in blood. (...) He glanced at me like a devoted friend would and straightened up briskly. «I object," he said, «in the name of

international law, morality and justice. Do not indict him!" The interrogation was brought to a halt. They put down something in red in Sławik's file. I was not to know at that time that red meant blood. Death. (...) I reached for his hand to thank him for saving my life. He pressed my hand. "That's on Poland." These are the words of József Antall, a senior officer of the Hungarian Interior Ministry, on his last meeting with Henryk Sławik in July 1944.

On behalf of his government, Antall provided help to tens of thousands of Polish refugees who had been arriving in Hungary since 1939, several thousand Jews among them. A socialist journalist hailing from Upper Silesia,



a participant of the Silesian Uprisings and a social activist, Sławik himself had to flee from the Germans in September 1939. Upon arriving in Hungary, he headed the Civilian Committee for the Welfare of Polish Refugees in Hungary.

As an official ally of the Axis powers, Hungary was an extremely dangerous place to help Jews. The committee's activity primarily involved providing Jews with forged identity documents that would look genuine. It would not have been possible without the help of Polish priests. In close cooperation with Antall and Sławik, they initiated the mass production of false baptism certificates and other documents. The second half of 1942 saw a second wave of Polish refugees hoping for life in Hungary. Many of the several thousand Jews were children. Some of them had been thrown out of trains headed for the extermination camps. It was for them that Sławik and Antall established an orphanage in the town of Vác, together with people like Isaac Brettler, a Polish teacher. It was a house for almost a hundred children. They attended a kindergarten and a

primary school. In secret, they were also taught Hebrew and the Old Testament. The children in Vác managed to survive the war.

The exact number of all the Polish Jews rescued by Sławik, Antall and their associates is not known. It may have reached several thousand, which would place them at the top of the Righteous. At the end of 1943, Sławik's wife Jadwiga and their daughter Krysta arrived in Hungary. Unfortunately, the family was not to remain reunited for long. When German troops moved into Hungary in 1944, Sławik went into hiding in the vicinity of Balaton Lake. Eventually, he and Antall were arrested. Although tortured and tormented, Sławik did not betray his friend and assumed the entire responsibility. He was taken to Mauthausen and murdered on 23 August 1944. József Antall survived. He was persecuted by the communist regime, but he remembered Henryk and remained a close friend to Polish people until his death in 1974.

For decades, both of them were erased from history. It was only recently that their story has been revived.

Many Jews were also involved in fighting for the freedom of the city. Most of them had already participated in the Ghetto Uprising

# WARSAW.

## The city of two uprisings

Jan Duda  
Stawczyński/Polskie

**A**sked if he believed in God, Marek Edelman once said: "Leave him be. He's sleeping". On the eve of Pesach, 19 April 1943, when German troops entered the Warsaw Ghetto, many people may have been of the same opinion.

In war-torn Europe, Warsaw was the first city to raise arms against the German. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising had no military objective as such, and from the very beginning it was doomed to fail. However, the soldiers of the Jewish Combat Organization and the Jewish Military Union were unyielding in their decision to fight the German occupation, as a token of protest against the genocide. The sudden resistance was quite a surprise for German troops. Despite their enormous advantage in troop numbers and equipment, it took nearly a month to crush an uprising staged by only 1,500 people.

Throughout the entire uprising, from the moment it began, the Home Army ran the "Ghetto" operation aimed at evacuating its residents and supporting the resistance unit of the Jewish Combat Organization and the Jewish Military Union. It provided Jewish fighters with weapons and other supplies, and mounted its own armed assaults on the German SS. Eventually, the uprising was put down and the Warsaw Ghetto destroyed on 16 May 1943. Thousands of people died, most of them murdered by SS troops or sent to the extermination camp in Treblinka. Few managed to leave the Ghetto alive through the sewers with the help of the Polish Underground State.



The fight was not over with the Ghetto Uprising...

The fight was still not over, with 1 August 1944 marking the beginning of the Warsaw Uprising. The atmosphere was completely different from the Ghetto Uprising. The citizens of Warsaw were filled with euphoria and hope for their cherished independence. Everybody joined in, regardless of their political and religious beliefs or affiliation. Many Jews were also involved in this fight for the freedom of the city. Most of them had participated in the Ghetto Uprising, but numerous Jews who had been hiding in various

corners of the capital emerged to engage in battle as well. Given that they often used false names, it is extremely difficult to determine their exact number, but it is estimated at over 2,000 people.

In the initial stage of the Uprising, soldiers of the Polish Underground State claimed some victories, which greatly boosted the morale of the fighters. They even managed to capture a number of armoured vehicles, including a Panzerkampfwagen V Panther, dubbed simply "Magda". As part of the heavy weapons

platoon of Lt. "Wacek", "Magda" breached the gate of the Warsaw concentration camp on 5 August 1944. The Uprising fighters freed 384 Jews kept in the infamous Gęsiówka camp, who originated from France, Greece, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands and Norway, as well as some Polish citizens, participant of the 1943 uprising. Many of the freed prisoners immediately volunteered to fight in the Uprising army. According to Lt. "Wacek", a group of 100 former inmates came to him after the camp was liberated. Lined up

dutifully in a double file, they were headed by Henryk Lederemann, a pre-war infantry cadet of the Polish Armed Forces. Among them, Henryk Pieniążek, nom de guerre "Bystry", who transferred units of the Uprising through the sewers many times. He also helped evacuate the Home Army commanders, including General Tadeusz Bor-Komorowski. Another remarkable figure in the Gęsiówka squad was Zoltan Sáfery, a Jewish Turk and a former captain of the Red Army. He served as a doctor and surgeon in Battalion Parasol. On 22 September 1944, while he was acting as a parliamentaire and negotiating the terms of capitulation of one of the points held by the resistance, he was murdered by the Germans. Another Jewish participant of the Uprising was Józef Wisniewski, a quartermaster. After the Uprising he hid in the ruins of the capital under a different name. Just like countless other Jews involved in fighting the occupier in 1944, he survived by changing his identity.

The Uprising failed. The German turned Warsaw into a pile of bricks and stones, and the camp on Gęsi Street resumed operation. For almost half a century, the story of a fight for freedom lay buried under the debris of uprisings lost. But, as Zbigniew Herbert said: "...and if the City falls but a single man escapes, he will carry the City within himself on the roads of exile, he will be the City". And so the memory of fighting hand in hand remained.

On 5 August 1994, a commemorative plaque was placed on the building in 34 Anielewicz Street to immortalize the bravery of Jewish volunteers fighting for the Polish cause in the Warsaw Uprising.

### EVENT TIMELINE

**1 March 1941**  
Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler orders the creation of the Auschwitz II camp in Brzezinka near Oświęcim, which is initially intended for Soviet prisoners of war.

**3 March 1941**  
The Germans order the establishment of a ghetto in Kraków. It is closed on 20 March.

**April 1941**  
The Independent State of Croatia (NDH) is established by Ante Pavelić, the leader of Croat fascists (Ustaše), with the consent of the Third Reich and Italy.

**24 April 1941**  
The Lublin Ghetto is closed.

**22 June 1941**  
Operation Barbarossa begins. Einsatzgruppen starts its operations. Specially designated units of SS and SD are tasked with removing the "undesirable element" in the territories occupied by the Wehrmacht. The population of the Soviet Republics (mainly communist activists and then Jews) is executed in large numbers, and there are also cases of incredibly brutal murders, such as burning people alive in barns.

**June 1941**  
The extermination of the Jewish population of the eastern lands of the Second Polish Republic begins. In June 1941, German troops seize the borders of the Second Polish Republic, occupied by the USSR, continuing the pogroms started by the communists. The collaborating Lithuanian government play a significant role in the roundups, in particular Ypatingas Būrys, a Lithuanian SD squad, which is responsible for the Ponary massacre.

**25-29 June 1941**  
The Kaunas pogrom. This is orchestrated by Franz Stahlecker, commander of Einsatzgruppe A. The Lithuanian auxiliary units led by Algirdas Klimaitis murder 3800 Jews. The Lithuanians extensively cooperate with German forces, fighting against Polish guerrillas.

**29 June 1941**  
The start of "self-cleansing" measures. Pogroms of Jews occur, provoked and organised by Einsatzgruppen in USSR territories seized by the Wehrmacht.

**1940-1942**  
Antisemitic policies in Romania. Ion Antonescu, influenced by Germany, pursues large-scale antisemitic policies. A concentration camp is

## Read the document. KWC Statement. 1943

Statement of the Directorate of Civil Resistance published in underground press: in "Rzeczypospolita Polska" on 17 March 1943 and "Biuletyn Informacyjny" on 18 March 1943.

Directorate of Civil Resistance announces the following: It is with horror and grief that the Polish society, a victim of terror itself, is witnessing the annihilation of the last Jews in this country. The news of the

protest of Poles against this atrocity have reached the entire free world. Those Jews who managed to escape from the Ghetto or camps have received great help and support in Poland, to the extent that the occupier

issued a regulation whereby any Poles who dare aid the Jews in hiding are to be executed. There are, nevertheless, individuals who make profit by blackmailing Jews and those who hide them. These criminals have no morals

or integrity. Be warned: such cases shall be reported and the perpetrators punished with all the severity of the law as soon as possible.

established in Calarasi-Ialomija. It is intended for Jews who are then to be deported from Romania. Many Jews perished en route to the camp. The many pogroms, especially in Bessarabia and Bukovina, and transports of prisoners to camps result in the deaths of more than 297,000 people.

**June/July 1941**

Hermann Göring authorises Reinhard Heydrich to develop a detailed plan for a "Final Solution to the Jewish Question".

**1 July – 31 August 1941**

The Romanian Army carries out the pogrom of Jews in Bessarabia.

**7-10 July 1941**

The German policy intended to spread hatred is effective.

On 7-10 July 1941, the Polish population, inspired by the Germans, carries out pogroms of Jews in Radziłów and Jedwabne.

**30 June – 25-27 July 1941**

The so-called Petura Days take place on 30 June and 25-27 July 1941. These are two major pogroms of Polish Jews in Lviv, organised by Ukrainian nationalists. Four thousand Jews die as a result of these pogroms.

**1 August 1941**

The Germans establish a ghetto in Białystok.

**August 1941**

The first concentration camp in Croatia is established, run by Croatian fascists (Ustaše). It is created in Jasenovac and is the second largest concentration camp in Europe. It is referred to as the "Auschwitz of the Balkans". More than 100,000 people perish there, of which over 20,000 are Jews.

**3-4 September 1941**

The first prisoners of KL Auschwitz (Soviet prisoners of war) are killed with Zyklon B gas.

**3-6 September 1941**

Ghettos are established in Vilnius.

**30 September 1941**

The Babi Yar massacre. The Germans murder more than 33,000 Jews.

**1 October – 22 December 1941**

The Jewish population of Vilnius is exterminated.

**14 October 1941**

The Germans start to deport Jews from Western Europe en masse.

**15 October 1941**

Hans Frank orders any Jews who leave the ghetto and the Poles who aid them to be punished by death in the General Government.

Real people, real tragedies. The story of a few families show how cruel Germans were towards simple Poles who dared to help Jewish people

# DEATH TO ENTIRE FAMILIES

## for a small act of kindness

Sebastian Piątkowski, Doctor  
habilitatus  
IPN in Radom

**G**mina Ciepłówek, central Poland. Along the road from Radom to Sandomierz. The period of occupation was the most tragic in its entire rich history. The list of crimes committed by Germans in this area is topped by the events of the years 1942 and 1943. A total of 40 Poles were killed for helping Jews.

These were the poorest regions of the Kielce Voivodeship in the inter-war period. Towns and villages were the centre of trade and crafts. Iłża, Lipsko, Sołec, Tarłów and Zwolen, and Ciepłówek itself are all places where Polish farmers had contact with large numbers of Jewish vendors and craftsmen. Business partnerships often turned into closer relations, sometimes even friendships.

The war did not manage to change this, even though the region saw the first effects of military operations as early as in September 1939. Criminal actions against civilians followed. Over the following months, more and more villages and towns experienced the tragedy as it spread over central Poland in the Radom district of General Government. Poles were subject to repression. Jews – to extermination.

The main perpetrators were German Gendarmarie troops assigned to posts in Iłża, Lipsko and Zwolen. Ruthless and unscrupulous, they evaded any punishment. On the constant hunt, they scoured all farms in their territory for fugitives, weapons, military equipment, clandestine press, as well as illegally produced meat and flour. These inspections often culminated in murder, battery, imprisonment and deportations to concentration and labour camps.



The Kowalski family from Górkki Ciepłowski, murdered by Germans as an act of revenge for aid provided to Jews in hiding

This coincided with the liquidation of ghettos established in the Radom district. The Jews who inhabited them were ousted from their homes, brutally murdered or crammed like cattle into freight trains and taken to the extermination camp in Treblinka. The operation finished in October 1942. The last ghetto was in Tarłów, home to nearly 10,000 people.

Those who chose not to believe the Germans fled the ghettos before their liquidation. They found refuge in a large forest nearby, where they set up dozens of primitive camps. Hundreds of people waited for better times in relative safety. They foraged for wild berries and mushrooms. Polish farmers often brought them food and clothes. One of the biggest camps was located on the Klamocha Island. The swamps and water both surrounded and protected them.

But the situation was much graver when winter came. The Jews begged the farmers to spend a night indoors, in the houses, barns or stables. It was not uncommon for the Poles to provide them with shelter and food for a longer time.

At the end of November 1942, the German police commanders resolved to "cleanse" the woods of the Jews. Gendarmarie units scoured the forest sector by sector. They destroyed the dugouts and huts, slaughtering those who they found inside. With the swamp around Klamocha now frozen, the main camp was wiped out. Most likely 120 people were murdered during the whole operation, but a few of them were captured alive and interrogated. The Germans promised to spare them, provided that they would inform on the families who had helped them. Subsequently, they prepared a large-scale reprisal actions

against the Poles. Its objective, however, was not to merely take revenge on those who directly defied the barbarous policy. It was intended as a gruesome "crime show", a tool to intimidate the local people. The Gendarmarie received orders to kill all members of families which had provided Jews with help of any sort, possessed weapons or supported underground organisations. Every building belonging to them was to be set on fire. This way, the column of smoke would let the neighbours know the fate awaiting any family to defy the German rule. Moreover, the victims of this operation could not be buried in graveyards.

On 6 December 1942, the vengeance for aiding the ghetto refugees began. The Gendarmarie from Górkki Ciepłowski came to Ciepłówek Stary early in the morning and surrounded the households of the Kowalski, Obuchiewicz and Koster families. Almost everyone from the Kowalski family was home: Adam and his wife Bronisława as well as five children aged one to sixteen years. Only Jan, the son, escaped. He had left the house before dawn and gone to one of the nearby villages. In the house of the Obuchiewicz family, the Germans found Piotr and Helena along with their five children, the youngest being 7 months old. Władysław and Karolina Koster were apprehended together with their six children. They had probably been hiding two Jews in their household.

The fate of all three families was sealed. In the afternoon, the Germans took the Kostors with their children and two Jews to the barn. They locked the door and incinerated the building. A while later, the Gendarmarie took the Kowalskis to the house of the Obuchiewicz family and locked everybody inside. Then, they unleashed a barrage of machine-gun fire

at the house and set it ablaze. Some of the people trapped inside tried to escape, the children in particular. But the merciless Germans were waiting for them. They killed them and threw their bodies back into flames.

At the same time, another Gendarmarie unit arrived in Rekówka. They surrounded the house of two related families, the Kostors and the Skoczylas. They seized 9 people altogether: Stanisław and Zofia Kosior and their four children, the youngest being 2 years old, as well as two teenage girls, Leokadia Skoczylas and her friend Henryka Kordula. After several hours, everybody was taken to the barn and executed with a machine gun. The building burnt down afterwards.

6 December 1942 was a sad day for Ciepłówek Stary and Rekówka. It was marred by the death of 31 Poles and 2 Jews. The youngest victim was 7 months old, the oldest one was over 70. The actions of the Germans imply that they wanted to eradicate entire families and erase their names. Their aim was to wipe out the "Polish bandits" from the Gendarmarie-supervised territory. They succeeded, indeed, especially in the case of the Obuchiewicz family, all murdered on that day. As to the Kowalski family, only Jan survived, orphaned of his parents and all siblings. The Kosior and Skoczylas families were torn by a terrible tragedy as well.

But this was not the end of crimes against Poles as time would soon tell. Similar atrocities occurred in the villages of Świecice, Boiska near Sołec nad Wisłą, and Zajączków.

This account is in no way exhaustive of German wrongdoings against people from the Ciepłówek area who helped Jews. It is a story of woe and courage, pertaining to something much wider than local history. And it is definitely worth recounting.



they are transported to KL Auschwitz. Slovakia is the only country to pay the Germans for deporting Jews from their territory (500 marks per Jew). Another wave of roundups and deportations of Jews take place in 1944. Of a total of 136,000 Slovak Jews, more than 100,000 perish in concentration camps.

**16/17 July 1942**

The Vel' d'Hiv Roundup. The French police, aided by volunteers from fascist organisations led by Jacques Doriot, conduct the greatest roundup of Jews living in the Paris area. More than 13,000 people are detained at the Vel' d'Hiv velodrome in Paris and await transport to concentration camps. Only 25 of those caught during the Vel' d'Hiv Roundup survive their "stay" at the concentration camps.

**19 July 1942**

Himmler orders that the extermination of Jews in the General Government be complete by the end of the year.

**22 July 1942**

The Germans begin to deport Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto (Grossaktion). All residents of the Ghetto are to be transported to the Treblinka extermination camp and murdered there.

**28 July 1942**

The Jewish Fighting Organization is established, led by Mordechai Anielewicz. The organisation is supplied with weapons by the Home Army and receive political support from the Government Delegation for Poland. The combatants of the JFO are organised in 22 units (around 600 people) and fight under Polish banners.

**16-23 August 1942**

The uprising of Jews in the Białystok Ghetto.

**4 October 1942**

All Jews imprisoned in the concentration camps in Third Reich are to be transported to the KL Auschwitz and KL Lublin (Majdanek) concentration camps and exterminated there.

**25 November 1942**

The Government of the Republic of Poland in exile presents the US and British governments a letter about the Holocaust, which Jan Karski has carried out of Poland.

**4 December 1942**

Zegota, the Council to Aid Jews, is established within the Polish Underground State.

**4 January 1943**

Jews from the Czestochowa Ghetto take up arms to fight

Poles rescuing Jews in the Rzeszów region  
Selected examples and difficulties regarding their verification

# IN THE EAST.

## *Poles rescued Jews here as well*

Edyta Rączy, PhD  
IPN in Rzeszów, University of Rzeszów

**P**oles rescuing Jews during the war have become a subject of historical research. The studies, however, do not encompass all the areas of the Second Polish Republic. Its Eastern part, known as the Kresy, has been covered only to a small extent. This should not come as a surprise. The sources are largely dispersed and so are the Polish families who helped Jews in the Eastern districts of the country. The majority of those who were directly involved are now dead. Their families may not be aware of the events in question. Numerous major issues regarding the aid administered to Jews are still open. They are subject to debate even in those areas where research is at an advanced stage, e.g. in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship.

The exact number of people who rescued Jews in the area is unknown and probably will never be determined. Neither is the number of Jews who survived the war thanks to the help they received. New stories come to light all the time. Stories of people who helped Jews in various ways. It is mostly relatives and second- or third-generation descendants who come to us with such information. It is, however, impossible to verify. The other participants in those events are dead. The families have long lost the contact with the Jews involved. The reports we receive from the relatives are often very sketchy and scant. Even if there had been any kind of proof, such as statements of the rescued or any correspondence, families often failed to see their value and destroyed them after those people died. It is also extremely difficult to confirm whether those who helped Jews were actually repressed.

Regional Commissions for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation investigated these matters after the war. Rarely did they appear in the common courts. Sometimes they were mentioned in relation to trials for the perpetrators of crimes against Jews, such as the gendarmes or the Blue Police. The role of the court, however, was to pass judgements, so the details of cases which did not pertain directly to the indicted were irrelevant. For this reason, many crucial details or even the actual grounds for repression were never revealed. These are the blanks one cannot fill.

This article presents selected cases of Jews rescued by Poles in the area of today's Podkarpackie Voivodeship. It also sheds light on the extent of the difficulties a historian must face in order to obtain data on the aid administered to Jews by Poles.

A story which deserves wider recognition is that of Mikolaj Chanas. During the occupation, he lived in Zagórze, near Sanok, together with his two children, Anna and Michal. His oldest daughter, Maria, lived with her husband in Sanok. His wife had been deported to a labour camp. There was a provisional camp in Zastaw for the Jewish inhabitants of Sanok County, from where they were deported to the death camp in Bełżec. Only a few were capable of work and remained. Among them were Banka Lew and the two Margulies brothers. The three of them managed to escape from the camp and found refuge in the household of Mikolaj Chanas. He hid them in his cellar under his carpentry workshop. But a manhunt was underway for the three fugitive Jews. The Germans forced the head of the village to select a group of men who were to look for the Jews under pain of death. They were to be accompanied by Ukrainian policemen. Three of the Poles

participating in the manhunt uncovered the hideout. The Jews attempted to escape, but it was not possible. All three of them died. The Germans arrested Mikolaj Chanas and his two children. Although all of them were supposed to be executed, the Gestapo killed Mikolaj only. A German friend of his managed to persuade the Gestapo agents to change their minds and save the children. The household buildings were burned down. There was no sustenance left for Anna and Michal. For many years, the only thing people knew about Mikolaj Chanas was that he was murdered for hiding Jews. Nobody talked about the person who turned him in. But his oldest daughter knew his name. The investigation of the Regional Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, however, took a different course and that point remained open. As was the question of Mikolaj's nationality, since Zagórze near Sanok was ethnically mixed, inhabited by both Poles and Ukrainians. Some sources claimed he was Ukrainian like his wife, whose first name was Paraska. On the basis of the accounts of the living family members, it was determined that Mikolaj Chanas was, in fact, Polish. In addition, some documents misspelled his name as Hanas.

Another example of Poles rescuing Jews was the imprisonment of Michal Wasser and his wife Magdalena. The couple lived in Cisna, Lesko County. They hid a young Jew called Samuel Pechter in their attic. He was waiting for an opportunity to cross the border. His two brothers had already managed to escape the General Government. Just a few weeks after Pechter appeared at their house, Michal and Magdalena were arrested and deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where both of them probably died. But their three-year old son, Pawel, stayed at home. His relatives took care of him

at first and later sent him to Terka where he could receive an education. It was only after he graduated from school, already as an adult man, that Pawel returned to Cisna and learned what had actually happened to his parents.

The crux of their case is providing a final and undeniable proof of German repression for aiding Jews. According to their relatives, the couple were arrested after a Ukrainian neighbour reported them. This information cannot be verified today as there are no court documents to confirm it. It is also difficult to obtain any information on this subject from the present inhabitants of Cisna since many of them are newcomers. Cisna was a village with a mixed ethnic composition during the German occupation, home to Poles and Ukrainians. The latter were later transferred and only a few returned. The Poles who witnessed these events are no longer alive, and their families are scattered all over the country. But the memory of Wasser's imprisonment for helping a Jew remained among some Polish citizens of Cisna. The documents left in the former Auschwitz-Birkenau camp mentioned that the couple arrived there on 29 January 1943 and that Magdalena died a few weeks later, on 16 March 1943. At an advanced stage of pregnancy, she had little chance of survival. There is no information about her husband in the camp documentation. With these scarce materials, it is not possible to clearly confirm why the couple were arrested and what happened to Michal in the camp.

The last of the examples concerns the Jewish population who received aid from three villages: Jodłowa, Lubcza and Przeczycza. 27 Jews survived the war there. At least 10 Poles supported them on an ongoing basis. There were also several people who

helped them in the short term as well.

From the moment the ghetto in Jodłowa was established, some people sneaked out to ask local residents for food. Some of them stayed in the Polish houses for good. One of them was a young woman called Stasia, who managed to survive the war in hiding. After the war, she was baptised, got married, and headed for the USA. An entire Jewish family of five, the Parisers, survived the German occupation with the help of two other families, the Świerczek from Jodłowa and the Porębski from Przeczycza, as well as from Jakub Świętoń from Jodłowa. Jakub Schenker also survived thanks to the residents of those villages. Hersh Gelb also owed his life to Poles. Together with Jozek Lasur, he managed to escape execution in Przeczycza. The locals called him Heszek (Herszek). He usually hid in the forest. Sometimes he went to the villages to ask for food and slept inside household buildings in the winter. It is much more difficult, however, to determine how Lasur survived the war, as the older village dwellers have only a vague recollection of someone like him. They were children at that time and knew little of those events. A recurring name in their stories is Ruser or Raser (which is probably the same person, but the name has been distorted). He had to hide in the woods along with an armed group. They supposedly stole food in order to survive and not to die of hunger. This information still remains unverified. The fate of the Jews who temporarily hid in the outbuilding of the bell tower in Jodłowa (with the consent of the local priests) is also not certain.

Research on the issue of Jews rescued by Poles in the Rzeszów region is still incomplete. Some information may yet be confirmed, but many situations will most probably never be explained.

**Interview with Tadeusz Jakubowicz, leader of the Jewish Religious Community in Kraków, by Przemysław Miśkiewicz, Stowarzyszenie Pokolenie.**

**You claim to have never uttered the words anti-Semitism or anti-Semites. Why?**

That would hurt those whom I owe my life.

**You were born in 1939. I suspect you probably remember very little from the first years of the occupation?**

I remember some things very clearly. I recall walking from Plac Zgody to the camp in Płaszów after the ghetto was liquidated in March 1943. My mother was carrying all our possessions in a little blue suitcase. My legs hurt and I started to cry, so she picked me up. I saw a man lying on the street on our way. I asked my mother what was wrong with him and she told me that he had fallen. Now I know he was probably dead. My mum was a beautiful blue-eyed blonde of purely Aryan features. She did not look like a Jew at all, which made it easier for her to cross the border. When she took off her armband with the Star of David, she could easily blend in with the crowd outside the camp. When we needed anything, she went to see Mr Jaśko, a lawyer. He was a wonderful person. We had deposited our money with him. Mum just took some of it and bought whatever was necessary for us to survive. My father worked for a German named Madritz on the other side of the camp.

**I know your father spoke highly of his employer. But he had a different opinion concerning Schindler.**

Let me put it this way: I don't know who is a "saint" and who isn't any more. There were "saint" Mariks, Engels, Lenin, and now there's "saint" Schindler. He did rescue many Jews, that's true, but it was just cheap workforce for him. I'd say there were lots of people who were truly selfless and put their lives to a much greater risk to save Jewish people. But that's just my opinion.

**You were only a few years old. All you knew was danger and insecurity. What do you remember from the camp?**

I lived in a barrack together with my mum. I was too small to be in the children's barracks by myself. When Governor-General Hans Frank issued a decree requiring all children to be eliminated, it was clear we had to flee. The darkest day in the camp was when the lorries came and the Germans started to take the children away. Everybody was crying.



**Tadeusz Jakubowicz: I have never heard a hurtful word just because I am a Jew**

Tadeusz Jakubowicz, a Holocaust survivor, on Shoah, anti-Semitism and the Poles' stances

**I OWE THEM MY LIFE, they are my heroes**

but I didn't know what it was all about. I can still hear the children weeping and the parents shrieking. I think it was then that we decided to run away. They hid me among human waste that a Pole, Mr Kajdas, took away from the camp. We reached the house where Ms Katarzyna Świąk lived, and then in the evening we went to the woods. We kept in touch with both of them after the war. But the place where we were staying turned out to be unsafe, so we left a few days later and headed for the forests near Dobczyce.

**It was 1943 and you were four. What was it like for a small boy?**

I knew there was a different, normal life somewhere. We hid in dugout shelters, but from a hill in the woods we could see Polish kids running carefree in the fields or playing football. We were hiding in a village called Komatka and there were more than ten other people hiding nearby. But it was better to remain in little groups and not form a single larger one for the sake of our safety. All day we just lay there still, invisible. Only in the evening did we crawl out and dare to stretch a bit. Virtually everyone in the village knew about us. Can you imagine that even the priest in his sermon said: "You know there are Jews hiding in these woods. You have to help them, not turn them in to Germans." And they did help us. But for them, we would not have had a chance to survive. Still, they were really poor. When my mum went to Kraków with her Aryan face and proper documents, she bought food and shared it with those people. I remember many people who helped us. For me, they are true heroes.

**It is not easy for me to imagine all this in the summer, not to mention the conditions you had when winter came...**

Winter 1943/1944 was particularly cold, up to minus 30 degrees. It was the villagers that helped us again. They took us inside for the night. I slept in the stables with the animals. It was terrific to feel the warmth of their bodies. And I could pet the calves and the rabbits. As long as the temperature was below zero, we spent every night there. Someone always had to keep guard and watch out for the Germans. When I hear someone saying that Poles behaved dishonourably, I cannot agree. There is, of course, not a single community which would be perfectly faultless. Whether it is Poles, Jews or Russians. There are Jews who don't deserve to be called Jews, and there are, indeed, Poles who were wicked enough to turn in Jews to Germans, murder them and loot them. But these are not the

people my family received help from. We met marvelous people who saved us from slaughter.

**You had been living in the woods for a year and a half when the war was finally over. How do you remember that moment?**

We were in the house of Mr and Mrs Krupa when a Soviet soldier arrived. My father was sitting on a stool and mumbled something in Yiddish. "Vy yevrey!" the soldier asked him. Father nodded his head. And the soldier replied: "Ya tozbe". That was the day of freedom for us. I remember my mum rationing food for me when all I wanted was to eat till I was full. But she knew I could easily get sick after such a long time without a proper meal.

**Was Poland a safe home for you when the nightmare of war and occupation was over? When you did not have to hide or be afraid any longer?**

I am 79 now. After the war, I went to school with Polish children and for all my life I have never heard a hurtful word just because I am a Jew. I ask myself sometimes, what I would do if the Milicja or the police were after someone and that person, probably innocent, knocked on my door asking me to hide him. To be honest, I'm not sure. I went to the US a few years ago to meet Jewish immigrants who left Kraków at different times in history. Even before the meeting started, I heard people everywhere shouting about Polish anti-Semitism and anti-Semites. Poland, someone said, was where the most Jews were killed. And I knew I had to say something. I asked them: "Was Poland home to so many Jews because it was such a terrible place for them to live in? Why did they choose to settle there? They could have gone to France, Romania, Bulgaria and live there instead... But they stayed in Poland. If it had been so bad, they would have left, run away. There were over 200 people in the room. I asked them what they would do if they were to help someone, but the price for that help would be death for them and their family? Everyone went silent and tense. So I said: I know you would not turn that person in. And everyone cheered up. They started to ask me about Kraków. I could feel how nostalgic they were about it.

**It has been 70 years since the war finished. Is it a part of the past for a little boy who has grown up?**

I don't know if we were just so lucky to meet all those wonderful people. I visit their graves and light a candle for them whenever I can. I will do my best to keep the tombstones of those commemorated with the Yad Vashem medals intact. In line with Jewish tradition,

**EVENT TIMELINE**

- the Germans.
- 18-22 January 1943**  
The January revolt in the Warsaw Ghetto, where armed Jews oppose the Germans.
- 5-12 February 1943**  
The Germans deport people living in the Białystok Ghetto. The Jews muster resistance.
- 13-14 March 1943**  
The liquidation of the Kraków Ghetto.
- 18 March 1943**  
The Directorate of Civil Resistance declares collaboration with the Germans (szmalcownictwo) a "grievous crime against the Republic of Poland". Perpetrators face the death penalty, enforced by Polish Underground State executioners.
- 19 April - 16 May 1943**  
The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The Jewish Fighting Organization and Jewish Military Union combatants (approx. 1000 to 1500 people), supported to some extent by the Home Army, resist the Germans for about 30 days.
- June 1943**  
Armed attempts to resist the liquidation of ghettos in Częstochowa and Lviv.
- 1 August 1943**  
The Jews muster resistance during the liquidation of ghettos in Łódź and Sosnowiec.
- 2 August 1943**  
Prisoners launch a revolt in the Treblinka extermination camp, with some of the prisoners escaping.
- October 1943**  
The "evacuation" of Danish Jews. Up until October 1943, Jews who lived in the territory of occupied Denmark were not persecuted thanks to the autonomous local government. As the Third Reich's policy became sharper, causing a surge in strikes which the Danes organised against the occupier in August 1943 (the government was dismissed and the king was interned), and the threat of Jews being interned in concentration camps, the Danes evacuated about 8,000 Jews from the occupied country (mainly to Sweden).
- 14 October 1943**  
A revolt at the Sobibór extermination camp, with some of the prisoners escaping.
- November 1943**  
The extermination of Italian Jews begins. As long as Benito Mussolini remains in power, Italian Jews did not have to fear for their lives and property. Only after his rule was overthrown and the Germans seized real

The themes of the features include: Poles saving Jews under German occupation, the "Żegota" Council for Aid to Jews, Auschwitz German concentration camp, Polish diplomats in Bern saving Jews, Irena Sendler, Henryk Ślawik, Rutka Laskier (Polish Anne Frank), the Warsaw

Ghetto Uprising, the Warsaw Uprising and more.

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