

# Resistance and Rescue

Resistance and rescue are an integral part of the history of the Holocaust. Although resistance and rescue activities were taking place throughout Europe, the numbers saved were very small in comparison to those who perished. The Nazis employed a policy of collective retribution, which was an effective deterrent to resistance. Also, anyone caught in an act of rescue was often subject to the same fate as the intended victim(s).

Resistance was taken up by partisans, against the German military; by Jews in the ghettos; and by prisoners in the concentration camps. Jewish and non-Jewish partisan and resistance attempts could be found in every occupied country, beginning in 1938. These included assassination attempts, sabotage, distribution of anti-Nazi literature and armed uprisings.

The Warsaw Ghetto, the largest ghetto in Poland, was the site of both passive and active resistance. One act of passive resistance, the *Oneg Shabbat*, was organized by the leader of the ghetto council, Emanuel Ringelblum. He asked the people to record minutes of meetings, diary entries, German proclamations, etc. These items were stored in large milk cans and tin boxes, then buried underground. Surviving members of the *Oneg Shabbat* retrieved several containers in 1946 and 1950.

Warsaw was also the site of the largest effort of armed resistance. Against overwhelming odds, Jews fought the SS during liquidation of the ghetto with home-made or smuggled in weapons, holding out for 28 days in the spring of 1943, before they were finally burned out and captured.



Map of Jewish Revolts  
Courtesy of The Holocaust Chronicle

Rescue took a variety of forms as well. Rescuers came from all walks of life, many putting their careers, and lives, in jeopardy to do what they felt was right. Many families and individuals risked their lives in order to hide neighbors, business associates, and strangers.

Denmark was the only country that worked from top to bottom to save all its Jewish citizens. Alerted by German shipping attaché, Georg Duckwitz, of the upcoming aktion against the Jews, the Danish underground organized the transport of Jews across the channel into neutral Sweden. Nearly all of Denmark's Jews were saved and welcomed home after the war.

Many diplomats used their positions, against the wishes of their governments, to provide visas and travel papers to the persecuted, saving 250,000 lives. In spite of their courageous actions, many were ostracized by their governments and lost their jobs. For some, it was not until after their death that their selfless acts were recognized and honored.



Photo of Renée Beddouk's (second from left in second row) school in the town of Estandeuil, France. As a young child, Renée was sent to Free France and sheltered by a Catholic couple until the end of the war. Renée's parents were killed by the Nazis and she was raised by her aunt.  
HMSWFL, Courtesy of Renée Beddouk

“During the time span of 1939 – 1945, thousands of Jewish children across Europe escaped Adolf Hitler’s plan for systematic genocide. They hid in basements, sewers, joined Christian families, and took refuge in convents, monasteries and orphanages, where they concealed their identities from all but a few.

...Instead of playing with dolls as a young Jewish girl, I was learning to recite the rosary. Instead of singing, I was learning prayers. Instead of going to school, I was hiding. Instead of being with friends and family, our families plotted evading the Gestapo’s spontaneous searches in a series of never-ending raids.”

Renée Fritz

“I Was Only Three Years Old”

*Childhood Memories: Jewish Children Who Survived the Nazi Peril Speak*



Veil worn by Renée Fritz at her First Communion at Convent Saint Michel. Renée was known by the name “Suzanne” while in hiding.  
HMSWFL, Courtesy of Renée Fritz

