

Resistance - Overview

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In the face of Nazi terror, many Jews resisted the Germans and their collaborators.

In ghettos throughout Nazi-occupied Europe, Jews defied the indignity and dehumanization of Nazi terror through spiritual resistance and attempts to preserve their communal and cultural life. They held clandestine religious services, established schools and libraries, and maintained cultural traditions through secret publications, lectures and performances. Secret archives of art and written documentation recorded conditions in some of the ghettos. Underground networks of forgers and smugglers supplied life-saving official documents and food to people in ghettos and in hiding throughout Europe.

Organized armed resistance, though, was the most direct form of Jewish opposition to the Nazis. In western Europe, Jewish partisans smuggled endangered people to safety and aided those in hiding. They also joined non-Jewish resistance units and sabotaged German military operations. Despite minimal support and even hostility from local populations, armed resistance units also formed in more than 100 ghettos. In April 1943, the Jews of Warsaw, outgunned and outnumbered, launched the largest ghetto uprising. After almost a month, the Germans suppressed the uprising. Jews fought the Germans both in the ghettos and behind the front lines in nearby forests. In many cases, resistance members also joined partisan units outside the ghettos of eastern Europe. Prisoner revolts even took place in Nazi camps, including 1943-1944 uprisings in the Treblinka, Sobibor and Auschwitz-Birkenau killing centers.

The spirit of these and other efforts transcends their inability to halt the genocidal policies of the Nazis.

There was also a variety of non-Jewish groups which offered resistance to the Nazi regime, both in German and in German-occupied territory.

Examples of non-Jewish resistance include:

- Among the earliest domestic opponents of Nazism were Communists, Socialist and trade union leaders.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German theologian, broke from mainstream church hierarchies that supported or acquiesced to the Nazi regime by opposing it.
- There were several failed assassination attempts against Hitler.

- The White Rose, a small resistance group of Munich university students, sought to directly expose Nazi atrocities against Jews and the country itself, and to urge Germans to actively oppose the Nazi regime.
- French General Charles de Gaulle openly refused to swear allegiance to the Nazi-supporting Vichy regime and advocated open resistance. Resistance movements there committed acts of sabotage and assaults on German officials.
- Resistance movements also formed in countries like Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands, resulting in raids, sabotage and the murder of informants.
- In May 1942, Czech agents assassinated Reinhard Heydrich, the architect of the plan for the “Final Solution” of the Jewish question.
- Armed partisan resistance was widespread, particularly in the Soviet Union.
- In August 1944, Poles mounted an uprising against the German occupation. There was also non-violent resistance, including sheltering Jews and listening to forbidden Allied radio broadcasts.

Holocaust Survivors - Video Clips

The survivors featured below live or have lived in Washington State. The country listed in parentheses is the country in which they were living during the Holocaust. These survivors, with their history and stories, have shaped our community, contributing to its richness and diversity. They challenge us to understand history through personal narrative - to see complex human beings behind the facts.

Thomas Blatt (Poland) - <https://youtu.be/rdrxH8OGVWw>

The transport arrives from the Ghetto of Minsk, and a lot of former prisoners of war -- Jewish people, officers, soldiers were in this transport. And ... again they needed a few people, the Germans, and they picked up about 70 healthy people, most of them former prisoners of war. They didn't even know about this -- they didn't even know about guns, about rifles, about mines.... And with their help, with an officer called Sasha Pechersky, a Jew -- only Jews were there -- very fast, a fighting group was organized. And as I said before, the plan was to lure the Nazis to a killing place; kill them with knives, don't use the weapons until the last minute and we make an open revolt.

The plan was, the camp should work normally like every day.... And so, it started. I was the guy who -- one of the guys who was used to lure the Nazis. I went to a guy, Wolf, “*Herr Unterscharfuhrer*, we found a beautiful leather coat exactly your size. Will you go and try it on?” And he left. He was killed over

there with knives. And we had the other guns -- we can't use them. And so, about 5 o'clock, was the end of work and we did return to the living quarters -- the so-called Lager 1, and over there I was shocked. This was why we succeeded actually. I was shocked because at that time when you returned to the quarters you go immediately to the kitchen, you stay in the line for coffee. And I didn't believe it. Practically everybody stood in the line except a few people which were in the organization. And the organization was about 10 per cent, which meant about 30 people. And finally, Sasha jumped on a table and had a short speech: "Now is the time we should take revenge. We should kill the murderers. We should tell the world what has happened here. And who ever will survive, his duty is to do it; to tell the world about the crime of the German people."

We didn't say at that time, 'Nazis,' we said, 'German' people. Now it's a style, we talk about them as Nazis. Anyway, I'm finishing now. I had a talk, and I again start to pray to God, God help me and I will never forget to tell my world. And this is the reason I'm here with you, too, I'm never stop telling if I have a chance....

Ed Kaye - <https://youtu.be/MVgrsxQRJCU>

We managed to convince him that they should take a couple of us into the other area that they were going to, to get -- to get integrated with a regular partisan group; with a regular partisan unit.

Q. Did you want to do that?

A. Yeah.

Q. Why?

A. Because, first of all, in numbers there's strength. Second, they were better organized, they knew where to find food and they -- the reason we went out is to fight, and not to just hide, but to fight. We were young, maybe idealistic too, but every one of us said, 'Before I go, I'll take a couple of them with us -- with me,' and *them* meant the German; the enemy. It didn't matter there was a Polish policeman or a Russian turncoat, or it was a German -- as long as he was a Pro-Nazi. And that was our objective, and most of us wanted to go fight, men over men.

Q Thank you for taking the time to ... to do this....

A. If I tell you it was my pleasure, I'd be lying. It was my obligation to say a few words, to let others know that Jews weren't sitting on their hands. Some of us fought -- and fought dearly, and spilled our blood and laid our life while we were destroying the Nazi beast.

Q. Thank you Mr. Kaye.

A. Thank you.

Peter Metzelaar (The Netherlands) - <https://youtu.be/iHSn2RAZ3hc>

They lived on a small farm. Their only means of sustenance was what they grew on the farm. The entire farm constituted of a couple of cows, a couple of chickens, a couple of pigs ... that was it. They lived on what they can raise on the small amount of land that they had. And yet with this small house, they were willing to share this with two total strangers. As I get older I recognize, even more so, not only were they willing to share this meager house they had, but doing what they did meant that they were risking their lives and their entire family's lives. Because should the Germans capture us, or find out that they were hiding us, not only would that be the end of us but it would be the end of Klaas and Roefina, as well as their entire family. They would be shipped to a concentration camp.

Martin Metzson (Denmark) - <https://youtu.be/2pVkrIZP1DA>

Q. Did you read the underground newspapers?

A. Oh ya, I was involved in the distribution of them.

Q. Would you tell me about that?

A. Oh ya, ha ha. Well, I was involved in several groups, and the biggest job was not only to print the papers, but to get them distributed. So one evening I had picked up a whole briefcase full of papers, and was on my bicycle on the way home. And in one of the streets there was standing a guy by the sidewalk and (he) says, 'careful, there is a German roadblock two blocks up.' So I was able to turn off – there was one of the people from the underground that was standing there, so I was able to drive around the roadblock. Otherwise, if he wouldn't have been there I would have been going right into that roadblock.

Q. What did you do (in terms of sabotaging German efforts)?

A. Um, just being out on some of the sabotage actions in Copenhagen. One of them, I was really lucky. Our group was going out and do a sabotage, at a ... well, there was actually a cleaning place and they ... cleaned all the German uniforms and did some things and so we were going to blow up that factory and, at the last minute I couldn't go. But the group got ambushed that night, and got partially ... I don't remember whether anyone got killed but most of them got arrested. So I was lucky -- the last minute, I couldn't make it.

Questions

- 1) Resistance comes in many forms, both violent and non-violent. Consider/discuss the many factors which may lead an individual or group to resist an oppressive regime.
- 2) What risks might a group or individual face when resisting the actions of government or society?
- 3) How did the risks of resistance to the Nazis differ from country to country and/or as the war proceeded?
- 4) Ed Kaye and Thomas Blatt both discuss that it's important for people to learn and know about what they and others did to resist the Nazis. Why do you think this is so important to them?