

Resistance: Case Studies

Henryk Ross

Born in 1910, Henryk Ross was a talented photographer for various Polish newspapers. Henryk was imprisoned in the Łódź ghetto soon after it opened, and at the end of 1941 he began working in the Statistics Department of the Judenräte as an official photographer. In this role Henryk took photographs for a variety of purposes including identity cards for inhabitants, coverage of formal events and providing evidence to the Nazi occupiers of the ghetto's usefulness.

However, Henryk and his colleagues also took other, non-official photographs too. Over the years, he photographed the living conditions of the ghetto – from children playing, through to starvation, deportation, and death. As the ghetto was being liquidated in 1944 Henryk buried a box containing thousands of negatives.

After surviving the last months of the war, Henryk returned after liberation to recover the box with images like those shown on the right here. He then gave evidence at the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961 and lived for another forty years.

“Having an official camera, I was secretly able to photograph the life of the Jews in the ghetto. Just before the closure of the ghetto in 1944 I buried my negatives in the ground in order that there should be some record of our tragedy, namely the total elimination of the Jews from Łódź by the Nazi executioners. I was anticipating the total destruction of Polish Jewry. I wanted to leave a historical record of our martyrdom.”



Photo: Yad Vashem



© Archive of Modern Conflict/Chris Boot

Thomas Veres



Thomas Veres was a Hungarian Jew with a passion for taking photographs. His father Paul was a professional photographer who had his own studio and took pictures for the leading figures in Hungary. In 1939-1940 aged just sixteen, Thomas started to work with his father—including taking photographs of foreign dignitaries. It was through this work that he met Per Anger, an important official at the Swedish Embassy.

In March 1944 the Nazis occupied Hungary, bringing in their wake a dangerous new threat to the largest surviving Jewish community in Europe. After spending the next seven months in the labour service, Thomas approached Per Anger in October for help in avoiding the antisemitic Arrow Cross Party. Thomas was offered the opportunity to become an official photographer for a fellow Swedish diplomat named Raoul Wallenberg. Thomas' job mainly entailed taking photographs for Swedish passports – *Schutzpässe* - but as the persecution of Hungarian Jews worsened, Raoul instructed his photographer to document what was happening. With his camera Thomas started to take secret photographs of the atrocities and deportations. In January 1945, as Raoul went to meet with the Red Army, Thomas tried to find what was left of his family. He eventually emigrated from Hungary to the United States in 1956.



“I climbed into the backseat of the car and took out my pocketknife. I cut a small slit in my scarf and positioned the camera inside it. I got out and walked through the train yard as calmly as possible, snapping pictures.”

Alice Herz-Sommer

Alice was born in 1903 in the city of Prague and from an early age showed exceptional musical talent. She was an enthusiastic pianist, and as a teenager was already teaching others how to play the instrument. As an increasingly famous musician Alice spent a lot of time on tour, but in 1931 she met and married Leopold Sommer and their son – Raphael – was born six years later.

Life for Alice and her family changed dramatically in 1939 when Nazi Germany occupied Czechoslovakia. Although Alice's family was not religious, their Jewish background meant they like other Jews faced escalating persecution. While a number of relatives left the country, the Sommers stayed behind. Alice was no longer allowed to play in public, but for a while she earned some money teaching.

In 1943 Alice, Leopold and Raphael were sent to the camp-ghetto Theresienstadt. Alice began playing again, and with other musicians assumed an important role: together they performed concerts for the other prisoners, some of which were used by the Nazis to mislead the International Red Cross that the Jews were being treated humanely.

In September 1944 Leopold was sent to Auschwitz, and then on to Dachau where he died of an illness. Alice and Raphael managed to survive and were liberated in 1945. After the war they emigrated to Palestine, where Alice lived for a further 40 years. In 1986 Alice joined Raphael in London, where she continued to teach and play. She lived in Belsize Park, where she practiced piano for three hours a day. In 2014 Alice passed away — she was 110 years old, and at the time of her death, the world's oldest known Holocaust survivor.

“People ask, 'How could you make music?' We were so weak. But music was special, like a spell, I would say. I gave more than 150 concerts there. There were excellent musicians there, really excellent. Violinists, cellists, singers, conductors and composers.”



© BBC

“‘Are you Frau Sommer?’
The Nazi officer asked. ‘I
can hear your concert from
the window. I come from a
musical family and
understand music. I thank
you from the bottom of
my heart.’”



“I am tormented by the thought that I have caused you great worry. Don’t worry. Nothing bad has happened to me. I swear to you that you will have no further unpleasantness because of me. If you can, please send me my dress, my green blouse, and white socks. I want to be dressed decently when I leave here.”

Masha Bruskina's last note to her mother

In late June 1941, the rapid invasion of the Soviet Union moved German forces to the city of Minsk – the capital of Belorussia, modern-day Belarus. Within a month the Nazi authorities had established a ghetto, but unlike in other parts of occupied Eastern Europe the occupiers antisemitic policies were not wholly supported by the non-Jewish population. In a short period of time a number of Jewish and non-Jewish groups emerged who were committed to opposing the Nazis.

Masha was a teenage girl who initially moved in to the ghetto with her mother. Soon afterwards she escaped to the non-Jewish side, and tried to hide her Jewish identity by dying her hair and using her mother’s maiden name. A fierce Communist, Masha joined a resistance group and started working in the hospital nursing wounded Soviet soldiers before helping them escape into the forests.

On 14 October Masha was arrested after a patient told the Nazis what she was doing. Along with other prisoners she was tortured, but Masha refused to submit. Twelve days later the Nazis paraded Masha and two other prisoners through the streets of Minsk. A placard was hung around Masha’s neck saying “We are partisans who shot at German soldiers”. The three were lead to a set of gallows, but as the noose was placed around her neck Masha refused to face the crowd. She was then hung, and her body was left hanging alongside the other two for three full days. Masha was 17 years old.

Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira

A Rabbi, a writer, and a teacher, Kalonymus acquired a reputation during the inter-war period as someone staunchly committed to young people and their education. Kalonymus came from a lineage of significant Hasidic figures and while his intellect brought him rapid academic achievements, his skill with people also allowed him to emerge as a religious leader.

Kalonymus had strong religious beliefs and he was disillusioned with the increasing secularisation. This, together with his passion for learning, led him to establish a prestigious yeshivot – religious school – which became the largest in inter-war Warsaw. For Kalonymus, students had to be active in their own learning and have a vision of their “potential greatness”.

The Nazi invasion of Poland in September 1939 brought tragedy to the Rabbi as his wife, son and close family were all killed in a bombing raid.

Kalonymus was given opportunities to flee Warsaw, but he instead chose to stay and was interned in the ghetto. There, he worked tirelessly to maintain Jewish cultural life and act as a spiritual leader. He upheld various social customs, created a secret synagogue, and delivered sermons to a small congregation.

In early January 1943 Kalonymus buried his writings. A couple of months later he was deported from the ghetto and after passing through various camps was killed in Operation Harvest Festival, November 1943.



“Who knows how long this will go on? Who knows if we’ll be able to endure it...The person is overwhelmed with terror, the body is weakened, one’s resolve flags. Therefore the most basic task is to strengthen one’s faith, to banish probing questions and thoughts, trusting in God that He will be good to us, saving us and delivering us.”



“This ring was for me a symbol of love and hope. And I was determined to survive so we could meet again and live together forever.”

In the August 1940, eighteen year old Zdenka received a letter from her grammar school in Czechoslovakia. The letter stated that she would not be allowed to return to school at the start of the new academic year.

Zdenka was determined to continue her education and, after hearing Fred Astaire singing the song ‘You are my lucky star’ in a new film, she was also keen to improve her English. She moved to Prague to study for a year at an international school run by the British Council.

On 16th January 1942 Zdenka was forced to say goodbye to her boyfriend Arno, who was deported to an unknown destination. Four days later Zdenka and her remaining family were sent to Theresienstadt, where she discovered Arno had also been imprisoned.

The couple lived in separate barracks so it was both difficult and dangerous for them to see each other. In June, Arno was told he was being taken to ‘the East’. In their final meeting, Arno gave Zdenka a ring made of tin, which he said was for their engagement.

The ring was engraved with the words: “Arno. 13.6.1942”. For the rest of the war the ring became very important to Zdenka. In October 1944 she was deported from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where on arrival her transport was told to undress and remove all jewellery. Zdenka decided to hide the ring by slipping it under her tongue. Fortunately when her turn came for further inspection, the SS guard hurried her along.

Zdenka was eventually liberated in April 1945 at Bergen-Belsen. Although Arno did not survive, his tin ring did.

Yitzhak Wittenberg

Born in 1907, Yitzhak was the charismatic leader of a Jewish resistance movement known as the United Partisan Organization (UPO), formed in January 1942 in the Vilna ghetto. Members of the UPO came from a variety of political backgrounds, and were dedicated to arming themselves in order to protect the inhabitants of the ghetto by rising up against the Nazis.

In summer 1943, a Polish communist in contact with the UPO was captured and tortured by the Nazis. He gave his captors Yitzhak's name, and they in turn demanded that the head of the ghetto – Jacob Gens – hand the resistance leader over. A week later on 15 July 1943, Gens invited Yitzhak to a meeting and arranged for the Gestapo to arrest him. As Yitzhak was being lead away, the UPO attacked the Nazis and rescued him; hiding their leader in the ghetto. The Nazis insisted that Yitzhak be captured or suffer reprisals, which Gens relayed to the ghetto at a mass meeting. A massive man-hunt began, prompting leading figures in the underground movement to reluctantly vote for Yitzhak's surrender. On hearing this, Yitzhak chose Abba Kovner as his successor and gave himself up to the ghetto police. The date was 16 July 1943 – a day which became known as “Wittenberg Day”. A few hours later Yitzhak was found dead in prison, having used poison to commit suicide.

“The ghetto is restless, and Gestapo threatens our Commander-in-Chief! Then Itzik spoke to us, his words like lightning – ‘Don’t take any risks for my sake, your lives are too precious to give away lightly.’ And proudly he goes to his death!”

Popular Yiddish song, written by UPO member Schmerke Kacerginski,

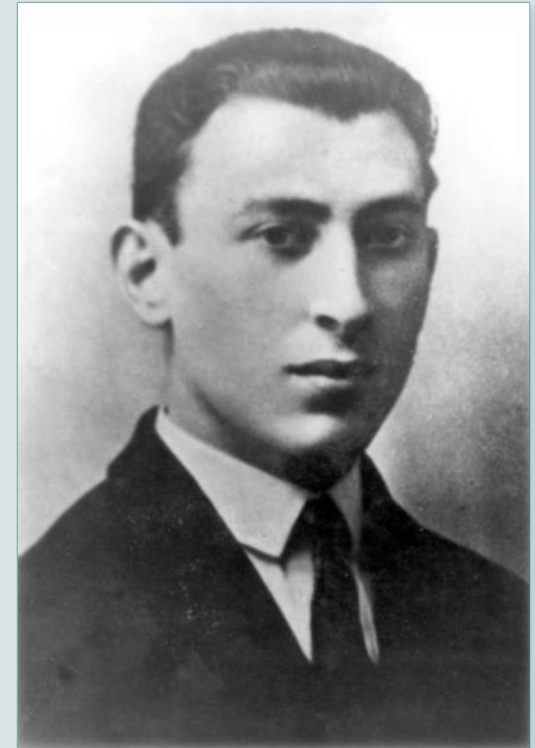


Photo: Yad Vashem

Nahum Remba



Nahum was the Secretary of the Judenräte in the Warsaw ghetto who acquired a reputation for fighting corruption within the administration and supporting cultural activities. Perhaps Nahum's most significant actions came however during the mass deportations from the ghetto during 1942. As part of the deportation process, Jews would be rounded up and "collected" within the Umschlagplatz – a sealed-off area adjacent to the railway station – where they would be held for an indeterminate amount of time before being taken to the death camp at Treblinka.

"I understood Remba's real value as a man and a colleague in the hours of supreme test...His composure and endurance, his great kindness and thoughtfulness, and above all his crystalline honesty and selfless devotion began to shine in all their grandeur."

Stanislaw Adler, eyewitness

Within the Umschlagplatz the Judenräte established a first-aid station, although the amount of aid it was allowed to offer was severely limited. As the deportations began in earnest in July 1942 Nahum positioned himself at this station, and took to wearing a white doctors' coat. He then went around the area identifying people he claimed were too ill to travel, and convinced the guards to allow them into his "clinic". Once they were inside, the Jews were then "treated" on one of the hospital beds before being smuggled back to the ghetto in so-called ambulances. By the spring of 1943 the Nazis had discovered Nahum's activities, and he was eventually deported himself following the Warsaw Uprising. He ended up at Majdanek, where he was killed in Operation Harvest Festival, November 1943.



The Umschlagplatz, Warsaw, 1943

Adam was a chemical engineer based in Warsaw who also taught at a Jewish vocational school. Unlike many Polish Jews, Adam was quite assimilated; in the late 1920s he entered local politics, and even won a seat on the Polish Senate in 1931. Within the Jewish community however, Adam was not seen as a particularly important figure or leader.

Following the Nazi invasion in 1939, the mayor of Warsaw asked Adam to become the main representative of the Jewish community. He was ordered by the Nazis to form a Jewish council (Judenräte) which would implement their orders and oversee the daily running of the ghetto which was formally sealed off in November 1940.

Over the next two years Adam struggled to balance the demands of the Nazis and the needs of an ever-increasing ghetto population. In so doing he frequently faced violence and intimidation from the Germans, and condemnation and criticism from the Jews inside the ghetto walls. Adam recorded his daily dilemmas in a diary.

In 22 July 1942 the Nazis decided to begin mass deportations of Jews from Warsaw to Treblinka. Adam and the Judenräte were told to help with this process, by drawing up lists of people to be deported. On 23 July Adam decided to take his own life by swallowing cyanide.

22 July 1942

We were told that all Jews irrespective of sex and age, with certain exceptions will be deported to the East. By 4pm today a contingent of 6,000 people must be provided. And this at the minimum will be the daily quota.

...

Sturmbannführer Höfle in charge of the deportation asked me into his office and informed me that for the time being my wife was free, but if the deportation were impeded in any way, she would be the first one to be shot as a hostage.

23 July

Throughout the town a great rush to start new workshops. A sewing machine can save a life. It is 3 o'clock. So far 4,000 are ready to go. The orders are that there must be 9,000 by 4 o'clock



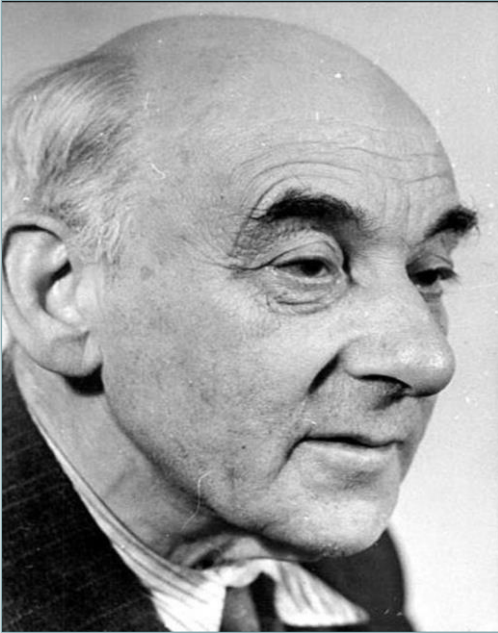
Photo: Yad Vashem

“They are demanding that I kill the children of my people with my own hands. There is nothing for me to do but die.”

Adam Czerniakow, last letter to his wife

Victor Klemperer

Photo: Bundesarchiv



“I am fighting the hardest battle for my Germanness now. I must hold on to this: I am German, the others are un-German. I must hold on to this: The spirit is decisive, not blood.”

11 May 1942

Victor was born in 1881, and was a professor of French literature at the Technical University of Dresden when the Nazis came to power in 1933. Although his father was a Rabbi, Victor had decided to convert to Protestantism and married his non-Jewish wife Eva in 1906. He had given up his academic career during the First World War and volunteered to fight for Germany.

Although one of the Nazis' first acts was to remove all Jews from public offices, Victor was able to keep his job because of he was a war veteran. However, such a policy deeply unsettled Victor who was disillusioned by the idea that despite considering himself to be German others may not. By 1935 Victor had been forced to retire, and although he benefitted from his wife being considered an “Aryan”, life for them both became progressively worse. Victor recorded this deterioration in detail in his diaries which we have today.

As the 1930s turned in to the 1940s, the persecution suffered by German Jews increased. Victor charted daily impact of these measures on him and other Jews, all the while struggling to understand what had happened to his beloved Germany. In February 1945, Victor's luck seemed to have run out as he was instructed by the Jewish community to help deliver deportation notices. However, the Allied bombing of Dresden created a fire-storm which engulfed the city and disrupted deportations. Victor's own records were lost in the fire, and he and Eva lived out the last months of the war by making their way westwards, before running into American soldiers. After the war, Victor published a book on the Nazi abuse of language and became a prominent public figure.

Mordecai Anielewicz

Mordecai Anielewicz led the first armed uprising against the Nazis in any town or city anywhere in German-occupied Europe. He wrote to his friend, Yitzhak Zuckerman:

It is impossible to put into words what we have been through. One thing is clear, what happened exceeded our boldest dreams. The Germans ran twice from the ghetto. One of our companies held out for 40 minutes and another for more than six hours... Several of our companies attacked the dispersing Germans. Our losses... are minimal. That is also an achievement. Yechiel fell. He fell a hero, at the machine-gun. I feel that great things are happening and what we dared do is of great, enormous importance...

It is impossible to describe the conditions under which the Jews of the ghetto are now living. Only a few will be able to hold out. The remainder will die sooner or later. Their fate is decided. In almost all the hiding places in which thousands are concealing themselves it is not possible to light a candle for lack of air...

We heard the marvellous report on our fighting by the Shavit radio station. The fact that we are remembered beyond the ghetto walls encourages us in our struggle.

Peace go with you, my friend! Perhaps we may still meet again! The dream of my life has risen to become fact. Self-defence in the ghetto is a reality. Jewish armed resistance and revenge are facts. I have been a witness to the magnificent, heroic fighting of Jewish men in battle.

23 April 1943

On 8 May 1943, after holding out for several weeks with just a few smuggled guns and homemade grenades against German soldiers armed with tanks, machine guns and flamethrowers, 23 year old Anielewicz took his own life rather than surrender.

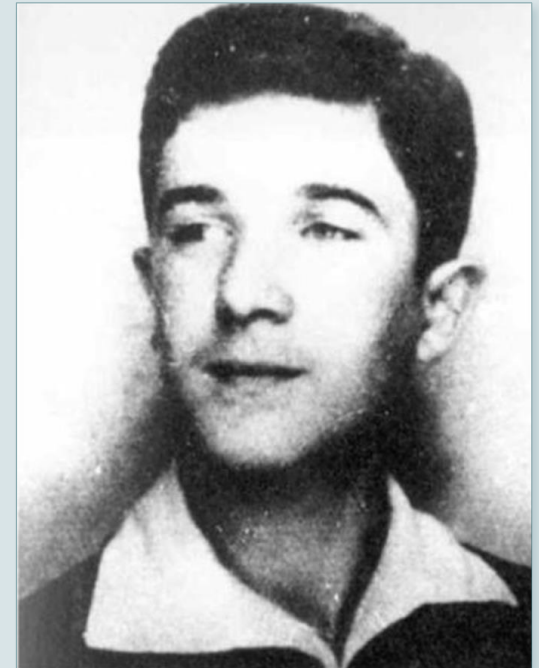


Photo: Yad Vashem

Emanuel Ringelblum

Photo: Yad Vashem



Ringelblum's archive, buried in tins and milk churns was discovered under the ruins of the ghetto after the war.



Photo: Yad Vashem



Photo: Yad Vashem

The historian Emanuel Ringelblum led a group who kept a record of daily life and death inside the Warsaw ghetto. This secret archive was codenamed *Oneg Shabbat*.

As news reached the ghetto about killings in Vilna, Chelmno and Belzec, Ringelblum tried desperately to get news of the mass murder of the Jewish people to the outside world. On Friday 26 September 1942, Ringelblum wrote in his diary:

“A great day for the Oneg Shabbat. This morning, London radio broadcast to the Jews of Poland. We know about everything: the radio transmitted about Slonim, Vilna, Lemburg, and Chelmno and more.

Thus the Oneg Shabbat has fulfilled its great historical mission, by alarming the world, by telling about our fate...

I do not know who will remain alive from among us, who will be privileged to edit the material we have accumulated. But one thing is clear to us all: Our toil, our efforts, our sacrifice and the constant living in fear, these have not all been in vain.”

In March 1943, Ringelblum and his family escaped the Warsaw ghetto and went into hiding. Ringelblum returned to the ghetto a month later to join the uprising. He was captured but escaped and rejoined his family.

In March 1944 their hideout was discovered. Emanuel Ringelblum, his wife, 13 year old son, and about 30 other Jews they had been hiding with were taken into the ruins of all that was left of the ghetto, and murdered.

Abraham Lewin

From the diary of Abraham Lewin, written in the Warsaw ghetto in the summer of 1942, as 300,000 Jewish people were sent to their deaths in the gas chambers of the death camp Treblinka:

Wednesday 12 August

My Luba was taken away during a blockade... To my anguish there is no chance of rescuing her. It looks like she was taken directly into the train. Her fate is to be a victim of the Nazi bestiality, along with hundreds of thousands of Jews. I have no words to describe my desolation. I ought to go after her, to die. But I have no strength to take such a step. Ora – her disaster. A child who was so tied to her mother. And how she loved her...

Thursday 13 August

The 23rd day of the slaughter of the Jews of Warsaw. Today about 3,600 people were taken... mainly women and children. Today is Ora's 15th birthday. What a black day in her life and in my life. I have never experienced such a day as this... In my pain I lay in the attic and could not sleep. Ora was talking in her sleep – 'Mother, Mama, don't leave me'. ...I will never be comforted as long as I live. If she had died naturally, I would not have been so stricken, so broken. But to fall into the hands of such butchers. Have they already murdered her? ... How tragic it is! A life together of over 21 years... has met with such a tragic end.

Saturday 15 August

The pain of the loss of Luba is becoming more intense. My soul can find no peace, for not having gone after her, when she was in danger, even though I could have also disappeared and Ora would have been left an orphan...

Wednesday 19 August

Today is the seventh day since the great disaster that befell me. If only I could die and be free of the whole nightmare. But I am still tied to life and it is still difficult for me to take my own life.



Abraham Lewin and his daughter, Ora, before the war.



Abraham's wife, Luba.

Zalman Gradowski



In the death camps, Jewish prisoners led thousands of Jewish men, women and children into the gas chambers. Then they dragged out the dead bodies, pulled gold teeth from their mouths, and burned their bodies.

After the war, documents were found buried in the soil of Auschwitz-Birkenau, written by some of these Jewish prisoners – the *Sonderkommando*. Among them were the writings of Zalman Gradowski:

Dear Finder Search everywhere, in every inch of soil. Tens of documents are buried under it – mine and those of other persons – which will throw light on everything that was happening here.

Great amounts of teeth are also buried here. It was we, the *Sonderkommando*, who have strewn them all over the ground, as many as we could, so that the world should find material traces of the millions of murdered people. We ourselves have lost hope of being able to live to see the moment of liberation...

The *Sonderkommando* knew that the Nazis would try to hide all trace of their crimes, and that they would be murdered to stop them telling what they had seen. So they hid these papers in the human ashes they were made to bury, in the hope that one day the truth might be discovered.

Zalman Gradowski was also one of the leaders of the *Sonderkommando* revolt of 7 October 1944. He was killed after the *Sonderkommando* attacked their SS guards and blew up one of the crematoria in Auschwitz-Birkenau.



This aluminium flask was found after the war, buried in the ashes of the Auschwitz-Birkenau crematoria. It contained eyewitness accounts of mass murder, written by the Jewish *Sonderkommando* forced to work in the gas chambers.

Dosia Farbiarz was still a child when she was forced into a ghetto with her mother and the other Jewish people of their town.

Dosia's best friend, Marysia, a Catholic girl, sneaked into the ghetto to visit Dosia, even though it was forbidden. The two friends played together in the ghetto, drew pictures, and wrote poems.

When the Nazis started to send Jewish people to the death camps, Dosia and her mother found a hiding place in the ghetto.

Marysia still visited Dosia and was with her when the hiding place was discovered by the Nazis.

Incredibly, Marysia was allowed to go free. But Dosia and the others were taken away and never heard from again.

No photos of Dosia have survived. All that is left are a few poems and drawings that she wrote inside the ghetto, such as those opposite, that she gave to her friend Marysia.



When after friendship lasting years
We part and you've forgotten me,
Somewhere in a corner
You'll find this little souvenir
And you'll remember we were
friends.

You'll remember our special secrets,
The diary, the treasure box, our
angry little scraps,
And onto this book's pages
A tear will fall, perhaps, perhaps.

And as you turn each yellow page
You will recall when you were young
And recollect those golden days
So full of summer sun

The Auschwitz revolt

In 1944, the Jewish *Sonderkommando* – prisoners working at the gas chambers of Auschwitz – plotted to fight back against their SS guards. Rosa Robota, a young Jewish prisoner aged just 23 years old, had the task of getting explosives for the *Sonderkommando* to blow up the crematoria buildings.

Rosa persuaded Jewish women prisoners to steal gunpowder from a factory where they worked making weapons for the German army.



Rosa Robota



Ella Gärtner



Esther Wajsblum



Regina Safirsztajn

Seventeen year old Esther Wajsblum, her 15 year old sister, Hanka, and their friend Regina smuggled out tiny amounts of gunpowder from the factory, wrapped in pieces of paper or cloth and hidden in their clothing. They gave these little packages to Ella Gärtner, who then handed them to Rosa. Rosa in turn passed the packages to other members of the Auschwitz resistance, hidden in the false bottom of a food tray. Homemade bombs were made with the gunpowder, small pieces of stone and crumbled brick. These were then smuggled to the *Sonderkommando*.

On 7 October 1944, the *Sonderkommando* attacked their SS guards with hammers, stones and axes. With their homemade bombs they blew up the crematoria then cut the barbed wire surrounding the camp and fled into a nearby wood. Hundreds of prisoners escaped, but all were soon recaptured and killed.

The SS discovered that Rosa, Regina, Ella and Ester had stolen the gunpowder. Despite being tortured they refused to give the names of others in the resistance. The four women were taken to the gallows to be hanged in front of the other inmates.

At the last moment of her life, Rosa cried out to the crowd, Hazak Ve'ematz: 'Be strong and have courage!'

Primo was a talented chemist from Turin who was arrested in 1943 for being involved in the partisan movement. After being told he would be shot, he confessed to being Jewish. He was sent to an internment camp for Jews, but in February 1944 was deported to Auschwitz-Monowitz.

I entered the camp as a nonbeliever, and as a nonbeliever I was liberated and have lived until this day ...I must nevertheless admit that I experienced (...only once) the temptation to yield, to seek refuge in prayer.

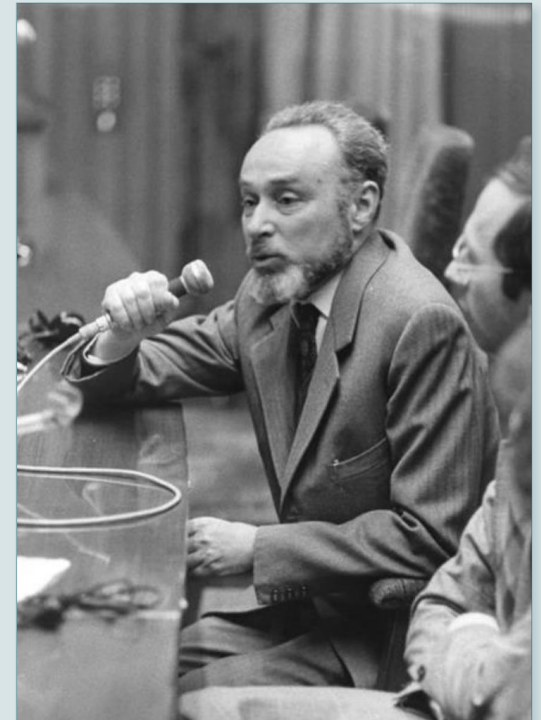
This happened in October 1944, in the one moment in which I clearly saw the imminence of death: when, naked and packed in among my naked companions... I was waiting to file past the 'commission' that with one glance would decide whether I should go immediately into the gas chamber or was instead strong enough to go on working

For one instant I felt the need to ask for help and protection; then, despite my anguish, I regained my self-control: one does not change the rules of the game at the end of the match, not when you are losing.

A prayer under these conditions would have been not only absurd but blasphemous, obscene, burdened with the greatest sin of which a nonbeliever is capable. I rejected that temptation. I knew that otherwise, were I to survive, I would have to be ashamed of it.

From Primo Levi's The Drowned and the Saved first published in 1986 (The translation here has been slightly edited)

In January 1945 as Auschwitz was being abandoned by the SS, Primo fell seriously ill. Unable to walk, he was left in the camp to eventually be liberated by the Red Army. After returning to Italy he began working at a factory and started to write about his experiences, but Primo had difficulty in finding someone to publish his book. In time, Primo became famous for his writing.





Jack and a fellow partisan after the war

Jack was 14 years old when in September 1943 he found himself in a labour camp in Nowogrodek, Poland. Jack decided to join a group of Jews who planned to escape from the camp through a dug-out tunnel and meet up with local partisans. On the day of the escape Jack was one of 200 who fled the camp, but as he crossed a frozen river the ice broke and his boots were drenched with frozen water. Although he was eventually able to get out, he missed his rendezvous with the partisans.

Jack came across a small farm house, but the lady living there was too frightened to give him shelter. With options running out Jack made his way back Nowogrodek and sneaked into the camp on a horse-drawn cart. There he found that his toes had become black with frost bite so a dentist amputated his toes with a scalpel.

As Jack lay recovering, those remaining in the camp began digging a new tunnel through which to escape. Once the tunnel was completed Jack was one of the last to get out before the tunnel was discovered, but this time he did manage to meet with the partisans and joined the Bielski brothers. Jack survived the war as one of the 30,000 Jews who fought the Nazis in the forests of Eastern Europe.

In 1944, the ferocity of killing at Auschwitz-Birkenau reached its peak. Despite working at their full capacity, the gas chambers and crematoria began to struggle to keep up with numbers of Jews being sent to their deaths. With the ovens unable to burn bodies quick enough, open pits were dug close to Crematoria V so that the dead could be “disposed” of more quickly.

Around the autumn of 1944 some members of the *Sonderkommando* – Jewish prisoners working in the gas chambers and crematoria – came to acquire a camera. Whilst we don’t know precisely when or how, what we do know is that this camera was then used by one or two of the *Sonderkommando* to take secret pictures. The film was then smuggled out of the camp, developed, and eventually four photographs reached the Polish underground resistance in Krakow. They were accompanied by a note, the text of which is provided below:

“Urgent. Send two iron reels of film (2 1/2 x 3 1/2 in.) as soon as possible. It is possible to take pictures. We send you photographs from Birkenau – people who have been gassed. The photograph shows a heap of bodies piled outdoors. Bodies were burned outdoors when the crematorium could not keep pace with the number of bodies to be burned. In the foreground are bodies ready to be thrown on the heap. Another photograph shows one of the places in the forest where people were told to undress, allegedly for a bath, but in fact before being driven to the gas chambers. Send a reel as soon as possible.”



State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau

Rudolf Vrba & Alfred Wetzler



Rudolf Vrba



Alfred Wetzler

On 7th April 1944, Rudolf and Alfred – two Slovak Jews – began their escape from Auschwitz-Birkenau. Wearing clothes taken from the “Canada” warehouses, the men initially hid in a hollowed-out wood stack close to where inmates worked during the day, just inside the external perimeter fence of the camp. After staying there for three days as the SS searched for them, the pair made their way on foot towards the Polish border with Slovakia to spread the word about what was in store for the Jews of Hungary. Over a week later they finally reached the town of Žilina, where they made contact with local Jewish leaders and told them about their experiences. The men set about compiling a written report, complete with sketches, which was finished by the end of April and translated into German.

“The strength of the Final Solution was its secrecy, its impossibility. I escaped to break that belief that it was not possible. And to stop more killings.”

Rudolf Vrba

The Vrba-Wetzler report, as it became known, confirmed previous accounts of what was happening at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The Jewish leaders in Slovakia passed the report on to others, but it was not until June that the document reached the Allies and started to be publicised. In between this time deportations from Hungary to Auschwitz had intensified. On 7th July 1944, the Hungarian head of State halted deportations. The report was finally published in full in November 1944.

“I want people to know that there was resistance. Jews did not go like sheep to the slaughter. I was a photographer. I have pictures. I have proof.”

Faye was born in 1919 into a large, orthodox Jewish family and lived in Lenin – a small Polish shtetl close to the border with the Soviet Union. In 1935 at the age of just sixteen, Faye took over the running of the family's photography business.

With the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, Lenin fell under Nazi occupation. Soon afterwards all able-bodied men were deported from Lenin, before a ghetto was established in May 1942. By August, the Nazis had decided to liquidate the ghetto and killed 1,850 Jews who had been living there – including Faye's family. Only a handful of people were spared, one of whom was Faye who was ordered by the Nazis to develop their rolls of film documenting the massacre. This she did, making copies for herself.



Faye fled the town during a partisan raid, and found refuge in the forest where she joined a group of partisans and worked as a nurse. A little while later Faye retrieved her camera and other equipment, and over the next two years took thousands of pictures documenting life as a partisan.



Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation

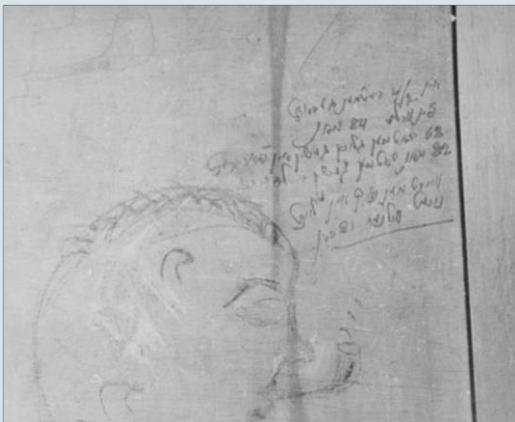


The Ninth Fort – Messages & Escape

The Ninth Fort was a military fortress built in Kaunas, Lithuania in the 19th Century. From June 1941 to summer 1944 the Fort functioned as a prison and execution centre for Jews living in the nearby ghetto, but also received deportees from further afield. In late November 1941, around 5,000 Jews were executed during in two mass shootings.

The Fort quickly acquired a reputation for brutality. It was not unusual for prisoners prior to their execution to be subjected to various forms of torture, but this did not stop some inmates from spending energy on carving messages into the prison's walls. One such message shown below reads: 'On July 4th, 84 men were brought from Vilna; 60 were killed right away (shot) and burned, 82 were shot later'.

In autumn 1943 orders were issued for the all bodies buried at the Ninth Fort to be dug up and burnt. A small Jewish *Sonderkommando* was formed for the task; some were responsible for unearthing the bodies, others for removing any valuables, and the remainder with manning the pyres. Fully aware of the fate which awaited them, some members of the group set about planning escape. A plan was devised which included making copies of sets of keys and tunnelling beneath the walls of the Fort. On Christmas Eve 1943 the plan was put in to action, and 64 men successfully escaped. Some of these men reached the Kaunas ghetto where they spread word of the atrocities committed at the Ninth Fort.



Abba Kovner

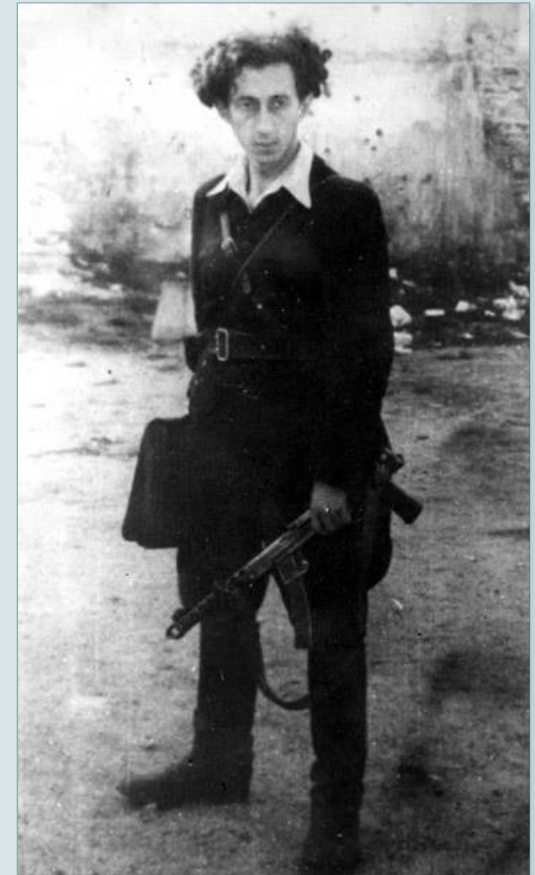
Born in 1918, Abba moved to the city of Vilnius, Lithuania, as a young child. Shortly before the outbreak of World War Two he was an art student at university where he developed a passion for poetry and joined a young Zionist movement.

Soon after the Nazis invaded Vilnius mass killings began. Within weeks around 5,000 Jews were shot at Ponary just outside the city. As the shootings continued two ghettos were established in Vilnius. Abba and a few others managed to escape the city finding refuge in a nearby convent. There he wrote what would become known as his manifesto - a passionate call to arms, which Abba read to a crowd when he returned to the ghetto at the end of 1941. Within hours the various different youth movements agreed to join together as the United Partisan Organization (UPO).

For the next 18 months the organisation worked to sabotage the Nazi forces and prepare for armed resistance. After the head of the UPO Yitzhak Wittenberg turned himself over to the ghetto police in the summer of 1943, Abba became the new leader of the movement. In September, when the Nazis began to liquidate the ghetto, Abba tried to warn the Jews that they would not be resettled but murdered. Few believed him. When deportations began Abba and the UPO escaped from the city and made contact with Soviet partisans.

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

Abba Kovner, manifesto, December 1941



Yad Vashem



Kurt was a German Jew born in 1902, who fled Nazi Germany after Kristallnacht in November 1938. Initially Kurt escaped to the Netherlands, but his ultimate intention was for him and his family to leave Europe and start again in South America.

With the outbreak of war in 1939, Kurt's plans collapsed. In October, the Dutch government established an internment camp near to the town of Westerbork specifically for Jews who had entered the country illegally. In February 1940 Kurt was arrested, and taken to Westerbork where he was given administrative duties. When the Nazis invaded the country in May 1940, Kurt was one of 750 Jews held in the camp but gradually the population increased as Jews from other camps were interned there.

In late 1941 Westerbork's function changed. Now it was to be a transit camp for those being sent to 'the East' as well as housing around 2,000 "permanent" prisoners. Despite the camp being controlled by the SS the prisoners themselves were responsible for day-to-day affairs, and in August 1943 Kurt was appointed to the head of this administration. In this role, Kurt fulfilled the important function of ensuring that order was maintained among prisoners and deportations to the death camps ran smoothly. He became known as the "King of the Jews".

In April 1945, the camp commandant handed Westerbork over to Kurt and he then placed the camp into the control of the Red Cross. Kurt later offered a sympathetic testimony at the trial of the Westerbork commandant.



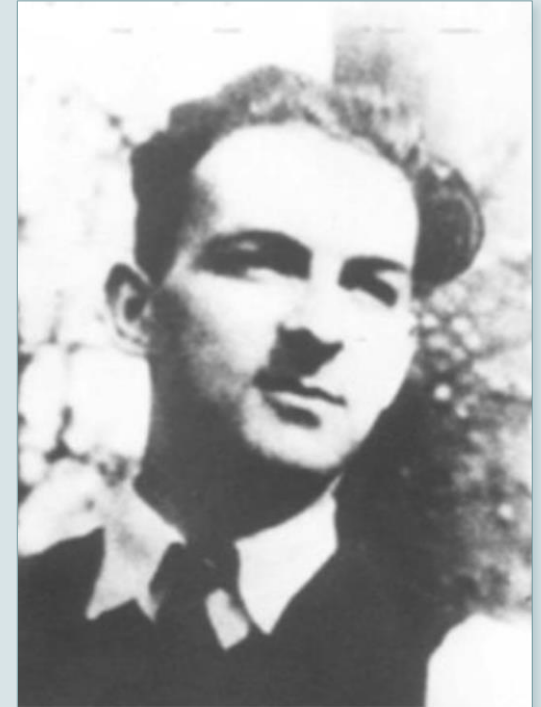
Georges was a young Jewish doctor who was a member of a resistance group working in occupied Belgium. Jews were particularly active in the Belgian resistance, and in 1942 the Jewish Defence Committee (CDJ) was established to help those Jews living in the country.

The work of the CDJ was wide-ranging and varied – from publishing anti-German literature and forging documents, through to hiding Jews and direct sabotage. In the spring of 1943 the group decided to try and stop a train of deportees heading for Auschwitz. On the evening of 19 April 1943, Georges and two of his comrades forced the train to stop by standing on the tracks and waving a red lantern. When the train came to a halt, Georges threatened the driver with a pistol whilst his colleagues opened the doors to the wagons. The German guards opened fire on the resisters and 17 prisoners as they escaped, before continuing the journey. By the end of the night 231 Jews had managed to escape from the train.

Georges was executed in February 1944.

“He was the leader of a band of terrorists and participated in the attack [sic] of 19 April 1943 against the Jewish deportation train. The accused admits that after his flight he shot at the soldiers who pursued him. He was arrested for the first time on 14 May 1943 but succeeded in seizing the revolver of a guard in the cellar of a local police office. He grievously wounded the guard and managed to escape. On his subsequent arrest he was sent to Breedonck [a concentration camp in Belgium].”

Report of Georges' trial, 2 June 1943



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By the summer of 1943, the number of transports to Sobibór was decreasing sparking concern among those Jews imprisoned in the camp that the end was imminent. In July an underground organisation was formed, but it was the arrival of Soviet Jewish POWs from Minsk in September which galvanised activity.

A prominent individual was Lieutenant Aleksandr “Sasha” Aronovich Pechersky, who was appointed to the head of the underground. Soon a daring escape plan was devised, whereby SS officers would be lured into storehouses on the pretext that they were to be given new coats and boots. Once inside they would be attacked and killed with axes and knives. The camp’s weapons would then be seized, before the camp was set ablaze. Prisoners would then have a chance to flee the camp.

At 4pm on October 14, 1943, the first SS soldier was killed with an axe. Ten more SS men were killed, as well as some Ukrainian guards. Telephone wires and electricity lines were cut. Within an hour, the camp was burning, guns were aimed at the guard towers, and the first group of prisoners fled across the German mine fields surrounding the facility.

By dusk more than half the prisoners – about 300 people – had escaped. Most were killed by their Nazi pursuers or died crossing the minefields. After the revolt, some joined partisan units; others found shelter among sympathetic Poles. It is estimated that just 50 of the escapees survived the war.

After the uprising, the Germans destroyed all traces of Sobibór. By the end of 1943, the death camp was levelled and crops were planted.

Treblinka Revolt

As Nazi Germany's fortunes changed from the beginning of 1943, the inmates at Treblinka became increasingly concerned at what this meant for their own fate. In response, plans were made for an uprising and mass escape.

A committee was formed and attempts to acquire weapons began. Plans were thrown in to jeopardy when the man in charge of this task was caught by the SS with a large amount of money and decided to commit suicide rather than risk being tortured.

The committee continued with their preparations nonetheless, and were emboldened by news of the uprising in Warsaw ghetto. A key for the weapon storeroom was acquired, and on 2 August 1943 the revolt began.

With leading SS figures momentarily away from the camp, the revolt began with prisoners seizing weapons from the storeroom. The German and Ukrainian guards were attacked, and some of the buildings set on fire. In the chaos that followed, the resistance fought with the guards whilst other prisoners broke through the camp's fences. The alarm was soon raised, but by the time reinforcements arrive a number of prisoners had escaped.

“Many of the prisoners who tried to escape were killed trying to climb over the wires, and in order to escape I actually had to climb over the bodies of my friends.”

Samuel Willenberg, escapee

In the days that followed a massive manhunt began, during which two thirds of the escapees were found. The remaining 100 managed to survive the search.



Yad Vashem

Yitskhok Rudashevski

Yad Vashem

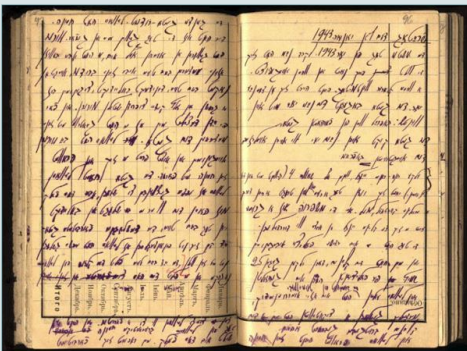


Born 10 December 1927 in Vilnius, Lithuania, Yitskhok's childhood was disrupted by the outbreak of World War Two. After a period of living under Soviet rule, Vilnius fell to the Nazis in the summer of 1941 and soon afterwards young Yitskhok began to keep a diary which he continued to write after the family had been moved into the Vilna ghetto.

“The first ghetto day begins. I run right into the street. The little streets are still full of a restless mass of people...I feel as if I were in a box. There is no air to breathe. Wherever you go you encounter a gate that hems you in.”

Yitskhok quickly adapted to ghetto life, taking on adult roles and responsibilities. Nevertheless he also found time to attend various clubs, and when the ghetto school was established in October 1942 he wrote about it enthusiastically in his diary. In September 1943 as the ghetto was being evacuated, 15 year-old Yitskhok and his family went into hiding. Two weeks later they were discovered and were murdered in mass graves at Ponary. Yitskhok's cousin Sarah, who had managed to escape the ghetto, discovered his diary when she later returned with partisans. No one had known about the diary.

Yad Vashem



Yitskhok's diary today

“In our group two important and interesting things were decided. We create the following sections in our literary group: Yiddish poetry, and what is most important, a section that is to engage in collecting ghetto folklore. This section interested and attracted me very much... I feel that I shall participate zealously in this little circle, because the ghetto folklore which is amazingly cultivated...must be collected and cherished as a treasure for the future.”

In the main picture on the right of this card we see Ursula in 1937 on her first day at school. She is holding her *Schultuete* - school cone. Below this picture we see Ursula and her mother standing with some of the Sisters from the Soeurs de Sainte Marie convent, near Braine-l'Alleud, Brussels.

Ursula was born in Plauen, Germany, on 7 December 1930 to her parents Irma and Leo. As the situation for German Jews deteriorated throughout the 1930s, the family waited in vain to receive visas to travel to America. In February 1939 Ursula was put onto a Kindertransport train from Cologne to Brussels, where she stayed in an orphanage until her parents arrived later.

For the next few years the family lived with the help of the Belgian underground before going into hiding with a Belgian family in 1942. A few months later, Irma and Leo were arrested after being denounced as Jews. Remarkably Ursula was left unharmed, as the police believed that she was the child of a Dutch neighbour.

In desperation, Ursula turned to a family friend who helped the twelve year-old find refuge in a nearby convent where other Jewish children were already in hiding.

Ursula was forced to change her name to Janine Hambenne, and from June 1943 until liberation in September 1944 lived undetected in the convent. After the war she was reunited with her parents. The family emigrated to the United States in 1947.



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Received alarming report that in Fuhrer's headquarters plan discussed and under consideration, according to which all Jews in countries occupied or controlled by Germany, numbering 3.4 to 4 million, should, after deportation and concentration in East, be exterminated at one blow to resolve once and for all the Jewish question in Europe.

"Action reported planned for autumn; methods under discussion including prussic acid. We transmit information with all necessary reservation as exactitude cannot be confirmed. Informant stated to have close connections with highest German authorities and his reports, generally speaking, reliable."

Gerhart was born into a German Jewish family in 1911, and pursued a career as a lawyer. After leaving Germany in 1933 Gerhart worked as a representative for the World Jewish Congress, and in the summer of 1942 was based in Geneva when he received alarming intelligence from an anti-Nazi German industrialist named Eduard Schulte.

Schulte, who had contacts within the Nazi elite, claimed that a plan had been drawn up to annihilate the Jews of Europe. After hours of deliberation, Gerhart decided to relay this information in a telegram sent on 8 August 1942 to Rabbi Stephen Wise in Washington, and the Jewish MP Stanley Silverman in London.

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8/29/42

HAVE RECEIVED THROUGH FOREIGN OFFICE FOLLOWING MESSAGE FROM
 RIEGNER GENEVA STOP (RECEIVED ALARMING REPORT THAT IN FUHRERS
 HEADQUARTERS PLAN, DISCUSSED AND UNDER CONSIDERATION ALL JEWS
 IN COUNTRIES OCCUPIED OR CONTROLLED GERMANY NUMBER 3-1/2 TO
 4 MILLION SHOULD AFTER DEPORTATION AND CONCENTRATION IN EAST
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CFM 3-1/2 4. CHEAPEST, SUREST AND SAFEST WAY TO SEND MONEY IS BY TELEGRAPH OR CABLE

Jacob Radar Marcus Center of the American-Jewish Archives

While the American State Department failed to pass on the message, Silverman was warned not to publicise the matter in case it antagonised relations or worsened the situation. Exasperated, Silverman contacted Wise himself at the end of August, but the Allies refused to publish the information until it was verified and did not publically condemn its findings for a further four months. Although the telegram contained inaccuracies, its general warning of systematic murder was correct.