

Exhibition



Karl Plagge

Righteous Among
the Nations

A Guide To The Exhibition

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- A Guide To The Exhibition -

**Published by the Darmstadt History Workshop
(Darmstaedter Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.)**

Karl Plagge: Righteous Among the Nations – Exhibition

Published by the Municipality of Darmstadt, City of Science.

Project by the Darmstadt History Workshop (Darmstaedter Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.).

Supported by:

Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum, Vilnius German Resistance Documentary Archives, Frankfurt a.M. (Studienkreis Deutscher Widerstand 1933–1945 e.V.), Support Fund for Surviving Baltic Jews, Freiburg i. Br. (Hilfsfond 'Juedische Sozialstation' e.V. Ghetto-Ueberlebende Balitkum). Sponsored by the Municipal Savings Bank Darmstadt (Stadtsparkasse Darmstadt) and other nameless donors.

The exhibition is chiefly designed for work in schools and educational institutions. Easy to transport and handle. Six double-sided exhibition boards (2.2 x 1.1 yd), along with the assembly system stored in a transportable box. Exhibition space required 5.5 x 11 yd.

The issue to schools and educational institutions is free of charge but must be collected; issue to other establishments on payment of a deposit.

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Darmstaedter Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.

Editors: Hanni Skroblies, Christoph Jetter

Exhibition design: archetmedia GbR, Darmstadt (www.archetmedia.de)

Printing of exhibition boards: roboplot Darmstadt (www.roboplot.de)

Imprint:

Guidebook to the exhibition 'Karl Plagge – Righteous Among the Nations'

Published by: Darmstadt History Workshop (Darmstaedter Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.)

c/o Hanni Skroblies, Elisabeth-Selbert-Strasse 10a, 64289 Darmstadt, Germany

– First german edition: Darmstadt, August 2007 –

– First english edition: Darmstadt, October 2008 –

– Second english edition (based on the third German edition): Darmstadt, December 2008 –

e-book-edition, color, with low quality images, downloaded from:

www.searchformajorplagge.com / www.darmstaedter-geschichtswerkstatt.de

Sponsored by: Darmstaedter Foerderverein Kultur e.V.

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Guidebook-cover design: archetmedia GbR, Darmstadt, using a detail from Samuel Bak's painting 'Ghetto' (1976)

Composition and layout: Lennart Bartelheimer

Introduction

This booklet to accompany the Exhibition 'Karl Plagge – Righteous Among the Nations' contains all the written text of the twelve exhibition boards, text and picture credits, glossary, further reading and references to audio-visual media. A second edition in A4 DIN Format suitable for photocopying is available for schools and other institutions who borrow the exhibition.

The exhibition is chiefly designed for teaching and project work in schools. It is also available to other educational institutions and interested people. The overall aim is to access the biography of Karl Plagge and his humanitarian activities with regard to the Jewish population during the time of the German occupation of Vilna and during the Holocaust in Lithuania 1941–1944.

It is above all thanks to the results of the research undertaken in recent years by the survivors of the forced labor camp in Subocz Street in Vilna and their descendants that it has been possible to present these historical events in the framework of an exhibition. It is to all of them that this exhibition is dedicated.

Special Thanks for Support and Assistance

We could not have staged this exhibition without manifold help from all sides and we would like to acknowledge our gratitude.

We received financial assistance from the Municipal Savings Bank Darmstadt (Stadtsparkasse Darmstadt) through the agency of the Lord Mayor Walter Hoffmann. This was further increased by archetmedia GbR Darmstadt, the Darmstaedter Foerdereverein Kultur e.V., and other contributors.

Survivors and descendants of the Plagge and Hesse families as well as members of the Plagge Group furnished us with valuable photographs from their private collections.

We are indebted to the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum, Vilnius, for generous permission to use publications and media published there.

The Support Fund for Surviving Baltic Jews, Freiburg i. Br. (Hilfsfond 'Juedische Sozialstation' e.V. Ghetto-Ueberlebende Balitkum) placed pictures and information at our disposal.

The German National Archives, Branch Ludwigsburg (Bundesarchiv Aussenstelle LB), the Main Archive of the State of Hesse in Wiesbaden, the Darmstadt Municipal Archive, the archives of the Technical University of Darmstadt, the German Resistance Documentary Archives, Frankfurt a.M. (Studienkreis Deutscher Widerstand 1933–1945 e.V.), and the Alexander-Haas-Library in Darmstadt were most helpful and provided access to documents and pictures of prime importance and to literature difficult to achieve.

Beltz Publishers gave us free access to the book 'The Search for Karl Plagge, the Nazi who saved Jews' by Michael Good, translated into German by Joerg Fibelkorn (Beltz Publishers, Weinheim and Basel, 2006).

We owe a special debt of gratitude to Michael Good (Connecticut/USA) whose book, which appeared in German translation in 2006, laid the groundwork for this exhibition. We are likewise extremely grateful to Samuel Bak (Boston/USA) for generously allowing us to use and reproduce his drawings and paintings.

Content

The Display Boards	5
Display Board 1: The Search For Karl Plagge	5
Display Board 2: Karl Plagge – until 1941	9
Display Board 3: Lithuania and Vilna	14
Display Board 4: Attack on the Soviet Union	19
Display Board 5: The Vilna Ghetto	24
Display Board 6: Holocaust in Lithuania	29
Display Board 7: Jewish Resistance	34
Display Board 8: ‘Military Vehicle Repair Park’ East 562	40
Display Board 9: Rescuers	45
Display Board 10: The Survivors	50
Display Board 11: German Army Officer and Hero?	55
Display Board 12: Awards and Encounters	60
Glossary	65
Media	70
Bibliography	71

Where information in the guide differs from that on the exhibition boards (photo captions, dates or similar), it represents a later correction and is the valid one.

Die Suche nach Karl Plagge

Die Plagge-Gruppe und Yad Vashem

Zivilcourage in der Zeit des Holocaust

Eine Rückkehr nach Włocław

Entscheidende Archivreife

Frühe Spuren

Die Suche beginnt

Yad Vashem – Ablehnung und Zustimmung

1943–1944

**„Wer war Plagge, warum versuchte er, seine jüdischen Arbeiter zu schützen ...?“
(Michael Good)**

The Search For Karl Plagge



Pearl Good, 2005

Return to Vilnius

We would not have known about Karl Plagge's deeds, nor would he have been awarded the honorary title 'Righteous Among the Nations' by the Israeli Holocaust Memorial Yad Vashem in 2005, had it not been for the survivors of the Vilna Holocaust keeping alive the memory of Karl Plagge as their savior. In the summer of 1999, Michael Good, a physician from Connecticut / USA, accompanied by his wife, teenage children, and parents, made a trip to visit his parents' country of origin. Pearl and William Good were both survivors of the Lithuanian Holocaust. During their conversations at places of harrowing memories he heard his mother mention she owed her life to a certain 'Major Plagge.'

*"My mother remembered him as an older man; ... She did not know of anyone who had actually conversed with him, but she did note that, unlike the other Germans, the Jewish workers felt safe in his presence."*¹

Encounters with local Polish-Lithuanian families who had contributed to his father's rescue would not let Michael Good rest. He began to search for Major Plagge. What if Plagge's family merely knew that he ran a labor camp but had no idea about him rescuing the lives of numerous Jews and their families?



Pearl, William, and Michael Good in 2005

Early Traces

There were references to Karl Plagge well before 1999. Records from the Vilna Ghetto as well as testimonies given in court hearings later on mentioned that Plagge, as commander of the Heereskraftfahrpark (HKP) 562 [Military Vehicle Repair Park] in Vilna (1941–1944), had treated the Jewish forced laborers decently and humanely. Plagge has also been remembered by survivors in Israel and Lithuania. In 2000, the Freiburg Support Fund for Surviving Baltic Jews received an impressive report by two brothers named Rechtes describing their story of survival and Plagge's part in it.

*"To him our family and another 250 people are deeply indebted for he saved us."*²

The Search Begins

'Major Plagge, Commander of a HKP in Vilna from 1941 to 1944' were the only clues Michael Good was able to obtain from his mother and grandfather Samuel Esterowicz. He therefore started an internet request: *"To Whom It May Concern: My name is Michael Good. I am the son of two Holocaust survivors from Vilna, Poland. I am writing to ask for any help that you can give as I try to discover the fate of a German army officer named 'Major Plagge' who was instrumental in saving the lives of my mother and her family during the Holocaust. ..."*³



Michael Good at his computer in Durham, Connecticut

Plagge-Group and Yad Vashem

It was a year before this request reached Salomon Klaczko in Hamburg. His business partner, Joerg Fiebelkorn, a retired German Army Colonel, was finally granted detailed information by the Bundesarchive files and the municipality of Darmstadt: Karl Plagge, born July 10, 1897, home address: Darmstadt, Hoffmannstasse 22, graduate engineer, married to Anke Madsen, deceased June 19, 1957, no children, one unmarried sister, further family members unknown. Plagge's spouse and sister had since died. Michael Good and his mother, Joerg Fiebelkorn and Salomon Klaczko, as well as William Begell from New York and Simon Malkes from Paris, joined together and formed the Plagge-Group. They collected other survivors' memories with the aim of getting the Israeli Holocaust Memorial Yad Vashem to honor Karl Plagge as rescuer of Jewish lives during the war.



William Begell, Simon Malkes, Salomon Klaczko, Joerg Fiebelkorn

"If Plagge had no family to carry on his memory, then it was the duty of the HKP survivors and their descendants to create some kind of memorial to carry his story into the future."⁴

Important Discovery in Archives

In 2001, the Plagge-Group established contact with Marianne Viefhaus, then head of the Technical University's archives in Darmstadt. She not only found his engineer's graduation diploma dated 1924 but also evidence of his employment by an engineering firm called 'Hessenwerke' in Darmstadt during the 1930s. In the State of Hesse archives in Wiesbaden she discovered Plagge's denazification trial transcript from 1947. She traced Plagge's godson and cousin who both provided valuable information as to Plagge's biography. Her approach to Wolfram Wette, military historian of the University of Freiburg, and to Margot Zmarzlik, founder of the Freiburg Support Fund for Surviving Baltic Jews, brought to light the survival story of the Reches brothers from Vilnius.



Marianne Viefhaus, showing Karl Plagge's graduation diploma, 2002

Yad Vashem – Refusal and Approval

The request to Yad Vashem for honoring Karl Plagge as rescuer of Jews during the Holocaust was refused twice as the dangers and risks faced by the rescuer – according to the commission – were not proven. The Plagge-Group compiled more facts to substantiate their claim, and in 2004, the Israeli Holocaust Memorial Yad Vashem granted the title of 'Righteous Among the Nations' to Karl Plagge. Documents published by the



Margot Zmarzlik (Support Fund for Surviving Baltic Jews, Freiburg) and Tobias Jafetas (Union of Former Ghetto and KZ Prisoners, Lithuania), 2006

Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum in Vilnius in 2002 played a crucial role in the approval. These documents, discovered by Irina Guzenberg in the Lithuanian Central Archive, gave evidence of Plagge's endeavors to protect the Jewish prisoners assigned to the HKP labor camp under his command. Also of significance were testimonies stating that Plagge had warned the prisoners in July 1944 about an HKP takeover by the SS as soon as the Wehrmacht (German Army) had retreated. Plagge's warning enabled a great many to escape and survive.



*Irina Guzenberg (L), research assistant at Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum, 2005
Eliezer Greisdorf (R), found letters of Karl Plagge in his father's legacy*

Display Board 1: The Search For Karl Plagge



"The H.K.P. Jewish Labor Camp 1943-1944" by I. Guzenberg, 2002



Memorial Plaque honoring Karl Plagge, Yad Vashem

Civil Courage in times of the Holocaust

"This is a story about victims, offenders, and one of very few who opposed the inhumane cruelty of the Holocaust bravely. The essence of the story has remained undetected for decades. What started as the initiative of some survivors in 2001, to rescue the story bit by bit from oblivion, resulted in the formation of a group of people working together beyond the bounds of states and continents. They wanted to reconstruct the story for posterity as a warning and a reminder, but also as a sign of hope for the strength of humanity in the future. For those involved it has been very emotional and fascinating but before long it also caused a public stir internationally. The story teaches about the dangers we face when society neglects – in small or large part – the norms and values of humanitarian and mutually supportive behavior and submits to a system of terror, hate and violence. Two places, Vilna and Darmstadt, a thousand miles apart, with no direct historical or cultural ties, constitute the story's coordinates. Not even the graves remain of those for whom Vilna used to be home; home, too, for a few survivors who with great hardship had to start a new life somewhere in the world. Vilna was at one and the same time the place for offenders, helpers and rescuers. The story revolves around a man from Darmstadt who tried to remain true to the principles of humanity in inhuman times. He was able to admit his mistakes and to regret his failures as well as exploit his scope for action in a clever, capable, and discreet way. His name is Karl Plagge. His biography is associated with incredible crime long concealed but brought to light again in our day and age. This should be handed down to coming generations to ensure that something like this will never ever happen again."⁵

"Who exactly was Plagge? Why did he try to protect his Jewish workers ...?" (Michael Good)⁶

Footnotes:

- 1) Michael Good, p. 89
- 2) Josif Reches, in: Viefhaus, p. 46
- 3) Michael Good, p. 87
- 4) Michael Good, p. 104
- 5) Marianne Viefhaus, manuscript 2003
- 6) Michael Good, p. 88

Picture Credits for Display Board 1 'The Search For Karl Plagge'

- Fig. 1:** Pearl Good, Darmstadt 2005, private collection
Fig. 2: Pearl, William, and Michael Good, 2005, private collection
Fig. 3: Michael Good, 2005, private collection
Fig. 4: William Begell, private collection
Fig. 5: Simon Malkes, private collection
Fig. 6: Salomon Klaczko, private collection
Fig. 7: Joerg Fiebelkorn, private collection
Fig. 8: Marianne Viefhaus, 2003, private collection
Fig. 9: Irina Guzenberg: The H.K.P. Jewish Labor Camp 1943-1944, cover page
Fig. 10: Irina Guzenberg, Vilnius 2005, private collection
Fig. 11: Eliezer Greisdorf, private collection
Fig. 12: Margot Zmarzlik (Support Fund for Surviving Baltic Jews, Freiburg), Tobias Jafetas (Union of Former Ghetto and KZ Prisoners, Lithuania), 2005, private collection
Fig. 13: Memorial Plaque honoring Karl Plagge, Yad Vashem
Background Picture:
Pearl Good and grandson Jonathan in the former Vilna Ghetto, 1999, private collection



Karl Plagge - bis 1941



Familie und Schulzeit

Der Plagge entstammte einer angesehenen, im Ort bekannten Familie. Karl Plagge wurde am 20. April 1914 in Bielefeld geboren. Er war das dritte Kind von Carl Plagge, einem Kaufmann, und seiner Frau Marie. Die Familie lebte in der Straße ...



Eintritt in die NSDAP

Der Plagge trat am 1. September 1933 in die NSDAP ein. Er wurde Mitglied der SA (Sturmabteilung) und war an der Organisation der Reichspogromnacht beteiligt. Er war ein aktives Mitglied der Partei und wurde für seine Arbeit in der SA belohnt.



Zeitgeschichte in Stichworten

- 1914: Beginn des Ersten Weltkriegs
- 1918: Ende des Ersten Weltkriegs
- 1933: Beginn der NS-Diktatur
- 1939: Beginn des Zweiten Weltkriegs
- 1945: Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs

Freundschaft in schwerer Zeit

Während des Zweiten Weltkriegs wurde Karl Plagge in ein Konzentrationslager deportiert. Dort traf er auf einen jüdischen Gefangenen, mit dem er eine Freundschaft schloss. Diese Freundschaft überlebte den Krieg und wurde ein wichtiger Teil seines Lebens.

Soldat im Ersten Weltkrieg



Im Alter von 18 Jahren wurde Karl Plagge zum Soldaten eingezogen. Er kämpfte an der Westfront des Ersten Weltkriegs. Er wurde mehrfach verwundet und erhielt das Eiserne Kreuz.

Abkehr von der Partei

Nach dem Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs wurde Karl Plagge als Kriegsverbrecher angeklagt. Er wurde freigesprochen, aber seine Freundschaft mit dem jüdischen Gefangenen wurde ein wichtiger Teil seines Lebens.

Studium - erste Berufsjahre - Heirat



Nach dem Krieg studierte Karl Plagge in Bielefeld. Er wurde als Ingenieur ausgebildet und arbeitete für ein Unternehmen. Er heiratete im Jahr ...

Zweiter Weltkrieg

Während des Zweiten Weltkriegs wurde Karl Plagge in ein Konzentrationslager deportiert. Er wurde dort inhaftiert und erlebte die Schrecken der Lagerhaft.



„... ich glaubte damals den sozialen Versprechungen und Friedensbeteuerungen ...“
(Karl Plagge)

Karl Plagge – until 1941



Plagge family around 1897

3rd from R: Karl's father Theoderich Plagge; the baby is Karl, held by his mother

Family and Schooldays



*Grandparents' house
Hoffmannstr. 32, Darmstadt*

Karl Plagge was born on July 10, 1897 in Darmstadt. The family on his father's side originated from Frisia and Prussia. Karl's father was a doctor; his grandfather was a military surgeon in Darmstadt. His mother Marie, neé von Bechtold, came from a family of conservative Grand Ducal officers (her father was a captain, her grandfather a colonel). Karl's grandparents lived on Hoffmannstrasse 32, his parents just a few houses apart on Hoffmannstrasse 22. When his father died in 1904, the upbringing of six-year-old Karl and his older sister fell entirely to his mother. Karl attended the Ludwig-Georgs-Gymnasium in Darmstadt and was drafted into military service straight after highschool graduation in 1916 to fight in World War I.

First World War Soldier

Young second lieutenant Plagge participated in the battles of the Somme and Verdun, and in Flanders. In 1917, he was taken prisoner of war by the British and not released until 1920. His decision to join the NSDAP Party some time later suggests that he – like so many others of the war-time generation – was not willing to accept the 'punitive armistice' of Versailles.



*Darmstadt 1916, decamping
soldiers*



*Karl Plagge, age 20,
seen as a
2nd Lieutenant
during WWI*

University – Profession – Marriage

Early in 1920 he began to study engineering at the University of Technology in Darmstadt. He graduated in 1924 with a degree in technical-chemical engineering. As a delayed result of war and imprisonment he developed polio that same year and suffered from lifelong disability in his left leg. In the following years Plagge worked freelance for a company in Kronberg i. Taunus. At the beginning of the 1930s he continued his education at Frankfurt University and graduated in medical chemistry. During this time he got acquainted with Mrs. Anke Madsen whom he married in 1933. Together they ran a chemical-medical research laboratory in his parental home.



Wedding day in 1933

Karl Plagge (seated far left) sitting next to his bride Anke, flanked by mother Marie and mother-in-law Dora Madsen; standing 1. from left: Hans Madsen; 3. from left: sister Maria; 4. from left: father-in-law Martin Madsen

NSDAP Entry

Mass unemployment, economic and social distress were – in addition to the prevailing political unrest and everyday riots – terrifying for nationalistic conservative families like the Plagges who were politically opposed to the Weimar Republic. Karl Plagge believed the promises made by the National Socialists (i.e. reestablishment of order, return to economic prosperity and national pride). He joined the NSDAP Party even before Hitler seized power [NSDAP: Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei / National Socialist German Workers Party].

*“Concerned by the steady growth of unemployment in 1931 and the increasing misery throughout the population, I joined the NSDAP Party in about January 1932. ... At that time I really believed in Hitler’s social promises and declarations of peace and I thought I was fighting for a good cause ...”*¹

Plagge took over the organizing of work at the local Nazi Party level, he gave scientific lectures and was finally asked to head the Nazi Party Educational Institute [Volksbildungsstaette der Deutschen Arbeitsfront (DAF)]. He was, however, increasingly in conflict with the Party.

*“Very soon after Hitler came to power I realized that I couldn’t always agree with some of the Party’s measures. First of all as regards staff policy, I always insisted on mediating compromise between conflicting human interests, and the ruthless treatment of all defeated opponents was totally contrary to my principles. I also repudiated the loud mouthed, overbearing behavior of many of the Party members and the unscientific arrogance with regard to the racial question that was coming to a head at that time.”*²

The break came when Plagge refused to accept speakers assigned to his institute because of their ‘ideological intransigence.’

*“There followed a serious confrontation with the Kreisschulungsleiter [district education superintendent] who accused me of “diluting the idea.” ... he also accused me of socializing almost exclusively with Jewish people and freemasons and that I dealt with Jews in my laboratory.”*³



Nazi election poster on front page of the Darmstaedter Wochenblatt, 1936

Friendship in Difficult Times

The Nazi Party reproached Plagge above all with his friendship to Kurt Hesse who was married to a Jewish woman. Hesse was the owner of the electrotechnical engineering firm called Hessenwerke Ltd. founded in 1910. In 1934 he hired Plagge as consulting engineer because he had hoped that having a National Socialist within his company would give him some measure of protection against the anti-Jewish measures committed by the Nazis.

*“The more the brutally antisemitic policies of National Socialism became apparent, the more I tried to help my friend Kurt Hesse, who was suffering a lot under these circumstances. In protest against the racial harassment and the moral and psychological torture which Mrs. Erika Hesse had to endure because of her non-Aryan origins, I became godfather to their son, born shortly after the burning of the synagogues.”*⁴

Kurt Hesse affirmed this friendship:

*“I was under increasing pressure because of this. Plagge always advised and influenced me to the good. He supported me emotionally and put fresh heart into me. He never tried to excuse the crimes committed by the Nazis. He believed they were only transitional. They would disappear after a while. In 1938 I needed to hire a full time engineer. I needed someone in a high position who would give us cover as far as the Party was concerned. But I didn’t want someone who would bring propaganda into my firm. I knew I could trust him not to do that. He was extremely well liked. ... In 1938 when the synagogues were burned down throughout Germany, he told me how despicable and abhorrent he thought it was. He was facing a crisis of conscience; I could see that. In 1938 he was also very worried about the future, shortly after the attack on the Czech part of Czechoslovakia [in German: ‘Bohmen und Maehren’ (Bohemia and Moravia)]. He was openly critical in his conversations with me. He had some misgivings about speaking so frankly.”*⁵

Renunciation of NSDAP

Still traumatized by his WWI experiences, it was the blatant war propaganda that finally drove Karl Plagge to sever his links with the National Socialists.

“I was, however, deeply shocked by the direction the Party was taking when, in the spring of 1939, I was sent as representative of the Hessenwerke to a specialist conference ‘Iron and Metal’ in Stuttgart and I heard the speech of Doctor Ley. Here I clearly realized that this man was inciting war in a criminal manner.”⁶

Kurt Hesse, who had accompanied Karl Plagge to the conference of German engineers in Stuttgart, recalled later:

“I hardly recognized him. I didn’t know what to say to him. He was extremely agitated. He couldn’t get over the fact that Dr Ley had said in the most unabashed way, that in three years’ time the German flag would fly over Warsaw. He just couldn’t get over that. He had severed all connection with the Party. And his anti-Nazi views were getting stronger. At the beginning of the war he got drafted. We wrote to each other. I saw that he had completely changed. He had distanced himself completely from his earlier views.”⁷

Second World War



Major Karl Plagge, ca. 1942

At the beginning of WWII Plagge was posted to Darmstadt as Garrison Commander. He exercised his right as a soldier to suspend his NSDAP membership payment even though he had never formally left the Nazi Party. After the German attack on the Soviet Union in June of 1941, Plagge was transferred to Vilna, the Lithuanian capital, and was given command of a vehicle repair unit and of the HKP 562.

“When as head of the Kraftfahrpark [motor vehicle repair park] I came to Poland and Russia, I saw the civilian population had no rights or legal protection. So-called ‘soldier’s letters’ informed the members of the German army that the Polish people were racially inferior and that the German soldier had to act as a “Herrenmensch” [master man], a superior human being. I never understood this attitude as specified in our orders. For my part I took the decision under no circumstances to adopt the prescribed attitude and determined that I as well as all the soldiers under me should act in the most humane manner towards the civilian population in conscious opposition to Nazi principles.”⁸

Brief Chronology of Events

Around 1900

- European Great Powers compete for dominance in the subdivision of the world
- Monarchy and bourgeoisie struggle to resist the increasing social democracy

First World War (1914–1918)

- Arms race of European Great Powers; beginning of WWI (August 1914)
- War fever; militarizing of society; political truce agreed upon by the political parties
- German, French, and British Armies suffer heavy losses on battlefields
- Shortage of supplies in 1916/17;

labor force demanding peace; anti-war sentiment

- US entry into the war
- Capitulation of Germany in November 1918

Revolutions of 1917–1919

- 1917 February- and October- Revolution in Russia; peace treaty with Russia 1918
- November 1918: armistice with the Western Allied Powers
- July 1919: Treaty of Versailles: territorial losses, rearmament restrictions, reparations, acceptance of war guilt
- November 1918–1919: overthrow of the monarchy; revolution, riots

Weimar Republic (1919–1933)

- ‘Weimar Coalition’ consisting of moderate middle-class forces and the Social Democratic Party; political instability
- Right-wing paramilitaries, nationalist units, and the Communist Party oppose the Republic
- 1923 hyperinflation
- Middle to end of the 1920s: period of relative political stability, beginnings of economic recovery
- 1928–1933: Great Depression, mass unemployment, split in the working class’ movement, growth of the NSDAP to become the largest party

Display Board 2: Karl Plagge – until 1941

Fascism (1933–1945)

- January 1933: Hitler is put into power, one-party-dictatorship begins; purge of opponents; Jews deprived of their rights as citizens
- Militarization of society; military buildup and war preparation
- Nuremberg Racial Laws 1935; Pogrom Night 1938 (Night of Broken Glass)
- Reign of terror by Gestapo (secret state police) and SS (Schutzstaffel or protective squadron); persecution of any opposition; concentration camp system

Second World War

- September 1939: German attack on Poland and invasion; conquest and exploitation of almost all European countries with the aim of Nazi hegemony in Europe
- Persecution of the Jews culminating in the Holocaust, the systematic killing of approximately six million European Jews during WWII
- May 8, 1945: victory in Europe

Post 1945

- Potsdam Conference 1945: Four occupation zones under military

administration during the period 1945-1949

- Nuremberg Trials in 1946 against major war criminals followed by subsidiary trials against military, judges, and doctors; beginning of the Cold War
- In 1949 military occupation zones controlled by France, the UK, and the US were merged to form the Federal Republic of Germany; the Soviet zone established the German Democratic Republic
- The Bundeswehr (Federal Defense Force) established in 1956; West German re-armament

“At that time I really believed in Hitler’s social promises and declarations of peace ...” (Karl Plagge)⁹

Footnotes

- 1) Plagge 1947, Political Curriculum Vitae. Denazification File of Karl Plagge, Main Archive of the State of Hesse, Wiesbaden (4.1.3 Abt. 520 Spruchkammer/DI/Plagge, Karl). Denazification records in Good, p. 221–250; (cit. p. 227); see also Plagge related documents: <http://www.searchformajorplagge.com>
 - 2) Plagge 1947, Political Curriculum Vitae. Ibid document, p. 227
 - 3) Plagge 1947, Political Curriculum Vitae. Ibid document, p. 228
 - 4) Plagge 1947, Political Curriculum Vitae. Ibid document, p. 229
 - 5) Hesse 1947, Witness Statement. Ibid document, p. 246
 - 6) Plagge 1947, Political Curriculum Vitae. Ibid document, p. 229
 - 7) Hesse 1947, Witness Statement. Ibid document, p. 246–247
 - 8) Plagge 1947, Political Curriculum Vitae. Ibid document, p. 229
 - 9) Plagge 1947, Political Curriculum Vitae. Ibid document, p. 227
- Footnote 1–9:** Denazification records are translated by Marcus Schneider in Good, p. 221–250; citations here offer a slightly different translation.

Picture Credits for Display Board 2 ‘Karl Plagge – until 1941’

- Fig. 1:** Plagge family around 1900, private collection
Fig. 2: Hoffmannstrasse, private collection
Fig. 3: Marching soldiers, municipal archive Darmstadt
Fig. 4: Plagge during WWI, private collection
Fig. 5: Wedding day Plagge, private collection
Fig. 6: Hitler poster, municipal archive Darmstadt
Fig. 7: Karl Plagge ca. 1942, private collection
Background Picture: Highschool Ludwig-Georgs-Gymnasium around 1900, municipal archive Darmstadt



Litauen und Wilna



Die provisorische Hauptstadt Kaunas
Die provisorische Hauptstadt Kaunas wurde im Jahr 1919 von den Litauern als Hauptstadt der neu gegründeten Republik Litauen ernannt. Kaunas war die zweitgrößte Stadt des Landes und wurde als provisorische Hauptstadt gewählt, da Wilna von den Polen besetzt war.

Wilna, das „Jerusalem des Ostens“
Wilna war eine der größten Städte des Ostens und wurde als „Jerusalem des Ostens“ bezeichnet. Die Stadt war ein Zentrum der litauischen Kultur und Wissenschaften. Sie wurde im Jahr 1919 von den Litauern als Hauptstadt der neu gegründeten Republik Litauen ernannt.

Litauische Geschichte in Stichworten

- 1116-1252: Erste Erwähnung Litauens in den Quellen.
- 1252-1279: Erste Erwähnung Litauens in den Quellen.
- 1279-1385: Erste Erwähnung Litauens in den Quellen.
- 1385-1569: Erste Erwähnung Litauens in den Quellen.
- 1569-1795: Erste Erwähnung Litauens in den Quellen.
- 1795-1918: Erste Erwähnung Litauens in den Quellen.
- 1918-1940: Erste Erwähnung Litauens in den Quellen.
- 1940-1991: Erste Erwähnung Litauens in den Quellen.
- 1991-2004: Erste Erwähnung Litauens in den Quellen.
- 2004-2020: Erste Erwähnung Litauens in den Quellen.
- 2020-2023: Erste Erwähnung Litauens in den Quellen.

Doppelstaat Polen-Litauen



Das Doppelreich Polen-Litauen wurde im Jahr 1569 gegründet. Es umfasste die Länder Polen und Litauen sowie die angrenzenden Gebiete. Die Hauptstadt war Warschau.

Hückerziehung der Selbstständigkeit

Die Hückerziehung der Selbstständigkeit war ein wichtiger Bestandteil der litauischen Kultur. Sie wurde im Jahr 1569 durch den Vertrag von Lublin festgelegt.

Litauen und Wilna im Zweiten Weltkrieg




Die Zerstörung

Die Zerstörung der Stadt Wilna während des Zweiten Weltkriegs war ein Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit. Die Stadt wurde fast vollständig zerstört.

VERORDNUNG Nr. 1

Die Verordnung Nr. 1 wurde im Jahr 1941 erlassen. Sie regelte die Verwaltung der besetzten Gebiete.

„Es gibt Städte, die zerstört sind, obwohl sie unversehrt erscheinen.“
(Karl Schlögel)

Lithuania and Vilna



Vilna, ca. 1942

Poland-Lithuania

In the 14th to 15th century the Grand Duchy of Lithuania stretched from the Black Sea to the Baltic Sea. It was personally linked with the Kingdom of Poland and was Christianized at this time. The rulers fought bitter battles not only against the Teutonic Knights but also against the Grand Princes of Moscow. In the 16th century the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland united and became a two nation state; Lithuania became part of the Polish Catholic Aristocratic Republic. Vilnius University, founded by Jesuits in 1569, soon developed into a Catholic outpost in Eastern Europe and into the intellectual center of the region. The Third Partition of Poland (1795) brought an end to the Polish-Lithuanian state. Russia, Prussia, and Austria divided up the territory among themselves. Lithuania fell to the share of Russia until 1918.



Polish-Lithuanian Empire at the end of the 15th century

Independence Regained

After the Russian revolution in 1917 and the defeat of Germany in 1918, the country that Germany had occupied in the First World War regained its independence. Its sovereignty was threatened, however, by the demanding territorial interests of Germany, Russia and Poland. The city of Vilna experienced a short period of Lithuanian-communist governance. Thereafter Soviet and Polish troops alternated the occupation several times until – in 1920 – the city itself and the Vilnius region fell under Polish rule. The annexation of Lithuania's southern parts by Poland was de facto accepted by the League of Nations but not by Lithuania.

“There is hardly another town in the 20th century that, like Vilna, has changed hands thirteen times. As a result, Vilna's inhabitants have learned to react to invasion by different armies the way one reacts to natural catastrophes – by endeavoring to carry on with the daily routine, interests, and diversions as normal. Unfortunately, this internal disengagement was rendered impossible the moment totalitarian states began to fight with one another over this part of Europe.”¹

Kaunas, the Temporary Capital of Lithuania

When Vilnius was seized by Poland, Kaunas became the interim capital of the Lithuanian government. The country's liberal-democratic development faced a crisis in the mid 1920s which boosted nationalist and antisemitic forces. After the coup d'état of 1926, Antanas Smetona came to power and remained dictatorial head of state until 1940.

Lithuania and Vilna During World War II

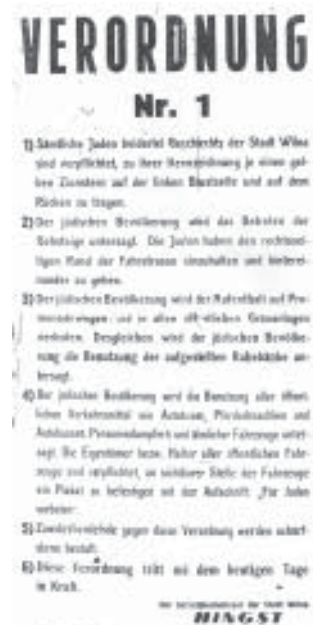
In September of 1939, after the German attack on Poland, Hitler and Stalin agreed to partition Poland. The Western part was apportioned to the German sphere of influence, while the Soviet Union occupied the



Generalkommissariat Lithuania

Eastern territories of Poland. Being incorporated into the Soviet Union inaugurated a phase of heavy repression: nationalization of private enterprises, banks, and real estate, mass detention and deportation of approximately 10,000 to 20,000 ‘anti-Soviet’ elements. That is why many people considered the German army as liberators when Germany invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. The Red Army was rapidly over-

run on the Eastern front, throwing the Soviets into a chaotic retreat. German occupied territories of the Baltic states and Belorussia were merged into the ‘Reichskommissariat Ostland’ which was subdivided into local administrative units. On June 24, 1941, Hans Christian Hingst, former Nazi area leader of Neumuenster, took over administrative command of Vilna.



Edict no. 1 by Hingst, Vilna August 2, 1941

Vilna, Jerusalem of Lithuania

Vilna had always been a city with a mixed population. In 1941, the 70,000 Jews made up one third of the general population of about 200,000 – Poles representing the largest group and less than 40,000 were Lithuanians. As early as the late Middle Ages the Lithuanian-Polish state had granted refuge to Jews from France and the



L: Memorial plaque for Max Weinreich, founder of the YIVO Institute, Vilna; R: Eliyahu ben Zalman, Vilna Gaon (1720–1797)



Rhineland who soon developed into a strong minority. Under Eliyahu ben Zalman, known as the Vilna Gaon (1720–1797), the city became a world center for the study of the Torah and Talmudic scholarship, over a hundred synagogues were built, and the Yiddish language became highly respected. The 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed a new type of political and cultural movements, influenced by Western Europe and Russia, and leading to increased expressions of Jewish self-confidence, such as: the socialist General Jewish Labor Union, generally called the Jewish Labor Bund, founded in Vilna in 1897; the 1896 Strashun Library, said to be the largest library of Jewish learning in Europe; and YIVO (Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut), established 1925 for the study and maintenance of the Yiddish language and culture of Central and East European Jewry.

Destruction

Initially, when Lithuania regained sovereignty in 1918, the Jewish minority was guaranteed civil liberty as well as religious, cultural, and administrative autonomy. During the 1920s, however, political and public powers shifted to the disadvantage of Jews. Nationalistic and antisemitic forces intensified, demanding a ‘Solution of the Jewish Question.’ Within the short period of Soviet-Lithuanian governance (1940/41), all religious and cultural Jewish institutions like synagogues, schools, and cultural organizations were dissolved. Jewish educational establishments along with the bulk of Jewish enterprises were nationalized and substantial Jewish farmers lost their land. At the same time, though, Jews were allowed to assume significant roles in the public, cultural and economic sectors of society which was unprecedented. When German troops occupied Lithuania in June 1941, they immediately started the deliberate total annihilation of Jews, and Vilna, as the honored spiritual center of Jewish culture and the Jewish life of Lithuania, ceased to exist. Before the Holocaust, Lithuania was home to more than 200,000 Jews. During perestroika in the 1980’s the Jewish community counted 20,000; today there are about 5,000 Jews remaining in Lithuania.

“At the close of the 20th century, the history of the Jewish community of Lithuania ... comes to an end.”²

Display Board 3: Lithuania and Vilna



L: Courtyard and Strashun Library, ca. 1929

R: Great Synagogue of Vilna, ca. 1930

“There are cities which are destroyed although they appear intact. There are urban spaces, surmounted by the domes of churches, monasteries, synagogues and mosques, which would seem to offer a protective shelter and yet they are powerless. There are cities, whose narrow alleys disclose that they once lodged a densely packed mass of people. There are cities which cannot be found by topography or travelogue; no travel guide can provide information. It can be found only in court documents, in the notes of those who were incinerated, in letters that were never sent. Vilna is such a city.”³

History of Lithuania – Brief Chronology

13th/14th Century

Lithuania’s rise to power (Kingdom of Lithuania)

1385

Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland joined into a personal union (Polish-Lithuanian Union)

1569–1795

Polish-Lithuanian State, also known as Republic of the Two Nations

1700–1720

The Great Northern War devastating Lithuania

1772–1795

Three Partitions of Poland: Prussia, Russia, and Austria divided up the Polish-Lithuanian State lands among themselves; Lithuania was incorporated into the Russian Empire

1812

Napoleon’s invasion of Russia caused devastation in Lithuania

1831

Policy of repression as a result of Lithuanian support for the November Uprising (1830–1831), an armed rebellion against Russian rule in Poland

1836

Suppression of the January uprising and implementation of Russification policy; ban on the

Lithuanian-Latin alphabet (Lithuanian press ban)

1880s

Lithuanian National Revival; Lithuanian nationalism

1905

The revival spearheaded the independence movement; claim for autonomy; Lithuanian press ban was lifted on April 24, 1904

1914–1918

First World War – 1915: occupation by Germany – 1917: Russian Revolution – overthrow of Czarism of Russia – 1918: surrender of Germany and Austria – foundation of the Republic of Lithuania with Vilna as its capital

1920/23

Poland annexed Vilna and Southern Lithuania; Memel Territory (Memelland) became part of Lithuania as Klaipeda Region

1926

Coup d’état, dissolution of parliament, Antanas Smetona first president with dictatorial powers (remained in office until 1940) – wave of Jewish and non-Jewish emigration

1939

Second World War (1939–1945) – forced cession of the Memel Territory to Germany – German attack on Poland – Treaty of non-aggression between Germany and

the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Hitler-Stalin Pact)

1940

Soviet Union occupied and annexed Lithuania under provisions of the Hitler-Stalin Pact – deportation of ‘anti-Soviet elements’

1941

German invasion of the Soviet Union – German occupied territories of the Baltic states and Belorussia became the Reichskommissariat Ostland – subordinated was the Generalkommissariat Litauen (Lithuania)

1944

Liberation – Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (Lithuanian SSR) – armed anti Soviet resistance, political cleansing, internment, deportations to Gulags

1944–1953

Activities and smashing of anti-communist opposition

1970–1990

Moderate political opening culminated in perestroika and glasnost

1990/91

Free elections – sovereignty of Lithuania was restored in 1991

2004

Lithuania became NATO member (March) and joined the European Union (May)

“There are cities which are destroyed although they appear intact.” (Karl Schloegel)⁴

Footnotes

- 1) Czeslaw Milosz, p. 44
- 2) Markas Zingeris, p. 293
- 3) Karl Schloegel, p. 40
- 4) Karl Schloegel, ibidem

Picture Credits for Display Board 3 ‘Lithuania and Vilna’

- Fig. 1:** Vilna ca. 1942, private collection
Fig. 2: Map showing Polish-Lithuanian Empire: Werner, p. 16
Fig. 3: Map showing Generalkommissariat Lithuania: Weeks, fig. 5
Fig. 4: Edict no. 1 by Hingst, Vilna 1941: www.juden-in-europa.de/images/wilna/hingst.gif (Facsimile of the original published in Shmerke Kaczerginski, Churbn Vilne, New York 1947)
Fig. 5, 6: Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum, Memorable Sites, p. 12, 31
Fig. 7: Courtyard and Strashun Library, ca. 1929: Kostanian, p. 25
Fig. 8: Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum, Memorable Sites, p. 6
Background Picture: Vilna, information leaflets by the city of Vilna

Überfall auf die Sowjetunion

Unternehmen Barbarossa

Am 22. Juni 1941 brach die Wehrmacht mit drei Millionen Soldaten in die Sowjetunion ein. Dies war der größte militärische Einsatz der deutschen Wehrmacht bis zum Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs. Die Operation Barbarossa war ein Verstoß gegen das Molot-Ribbentrop-Abkommen von 1939, das die Nichtangriffspakte zwischen Deutschland und der Sowjetunion festlegte.

Grigorij Schur berichtet:

Der russische General Grigorij Schur berichtete über die ersten Tage der Invasion. Er schildert die Verwirrung und die massiven Verluste der sowjetischen Streitkräfte. Schur war einer der wenigen Offiziere, die die deutsche Seite während der Invasion überlebte.

Wehrmacht und Einsatzgruppen

Die Wehrmacht wurde von den Einsatzgruppen der SS begleitet, die die Aufgabe hatten, die jüdische Bevölkerung der besetzten Gebiete zu vernichten. Diese Gruppen waren ein zentraler Bestandteil der 'Endlösung der Judenfrage'.

Litauische Kollaboration

In Litauen arbeiteten viele Menschen mit den deutschen Besatzern zusammen. Diese Kollaborateure halfen bei der Identifizierung von Juden und anderen 'Feinden des Reichs', die dann in Ghettos oder Konzentrationslagern deportiert wurden.

Stahlacker-Bericht:

Der Bericht des Generalleutnants Stahlacker beschreibt die Situation in den besetzten Gebieten. Er enthält Informationen über die Zusammenarbeit mit der lokalen Bevölkerung und die Maßnahmen der Wehrmacht zur Sicherung der Region.

**„Das jüdisch-bolschewistische System muss ein für allemal ausgerottet werden“
(Generaloberst von Manstein)**

Attack on the Soviet Union



Invasion of Vilna, 1941

In 1941 the German army (Wehrmacht) launched an attack on the Soviet Union without declaring war. With this, Germany broke the non-aggression treaty (Hitler-Stalin Pact) which had been signed between Berlin and Moscow in August of 1939. In the early hours of June 22, Army Group North (Heeresgruppe Nord) crossed the frontier to the Lithuanian Soviet Republic and overran the Baltic states in its quick drive east. On June 24, two days after the attack, German troops entered the Lithuanian capital of Vilna. The temporary military administration was replaced by a German civil administration after only a few weeks. It was intended in the short term to satisfy the Wehrmacht's economic and military demands for supplying and securing the hinterland. In the long run, the occupation was to prepare it for incorporation into the German Reich [Hinterland, literally meaning the land behind, is an economic and ideological concept of German expansion and hegemony. Nazi policy considered the countries of Eastern Europe as (informal) colonies to exploit for raw material and slave workers].



Wehrmacht attack on the Soviet Union, 1941

Operation Barbarossa

Operation Barbarossa – codename for the attack on the Soviet Union – was prepared by the German Wehrmacht under utmost secrecy. The operational goal of the so-called blitzkrieg was the rapid conquest of the Soviet Union and the destruction of its armed forces. Once the European territories had been occupied, it was important to secure their resources for the great German colonial empire. The Slavic people were to be used as slave labor, and the Jewish population was to be wiped out. Many Lithuanians welcomed and cheered the Germans as liberators from Soviet rule. For the Jews of Lithuania, however, it was the beginning of persecution which escalated before long into systematic extermination [Nazi policy of Lebensraum (living space): Eastern Europe repopulated with Germanic people after the original inhabitants had been killed, deported or enslaved, to achieve the creation of Greater Germany].

Wehrmacht and Einsatzgruppen

Along with the Wehrmacht/German army came the Einsatzgruppen. These were mobile special force units (killing squads) composed of members of the Security Police (Sipo) and Security Service (SD), the Nazi Party intelligence service. Their mission was to annihilate Jews, communists, Roma, and other 'hostile elements.' The Wehrmacht High Command had given the Einsatzgruppen a free hand during Operation Barbarossa. This meant that they could carry out the killings, euphemistically known as special tasks, on their own responsibility and independent of military opinions. The Baltic states had been ravaged by Einsatzgruppe A commanded by SS-Brigadefuehrer Dr. Walter Stahlecker. In the autumn of 1942 he was succeeded by SS-Oberfuehrer Humbert Achamer-Pifrader, head of Gestapo in Darmstadt from 1939 to 1942. A subunit of Einsatzgruppe A was Einsatzkommando 3 under SS-Standartenfuehrer Karl Jaeger. It was stationed in Kaunas

Display Board 4: Attack on the Soviet Union

and set out systematically to exterminate all Jews in Lithuania. The German Wehrmacht and the Einsatzgruppen cooperated smoothly, their collaboration was:

“generally good, in some cases ... it was very close, almost cordial.”¹

The Wehrmacht High Command readily accepted the hostile image of a Jewish-Soviet world conspiracy: Jews and communists were to be exterminated. Even before the Soviet campaign and still during it, Hitler himself and the Wehrmacht High Command had issued their criminal instructions to that effect. The order to annihilate ‘Jewish-Bolshevist subhumans’ (Untermenschentum) explicitly comprised the genocide of the Eastern European Jews and the mass murder of the civilian population of the countries attacked.

“The first German units marched into the city at dawn. They were followed by motorcycles holding three soldiers each with machine guns. It was followed by the German army which rolled through town day and night continuously, like a steel-avalanche. ... With the arrival of the first German units in the town, the so-called Lithuanian ‘activists’ began to hunt down Bolsheviks and Jews. The activists seemed to be well armed, they all wore swastika armbands. In the streets of Vilna and at the railroad station they battered and arrested anyone they fancied. Some of those detained were shot on the spot without trial.”²



German poster inciting against Jews and communists: ‘The Jew – your eternal enemy! Stalin and the Jews – that is a gang of scoundrels!’

... ruthless and energetic intervention

“1. Bolshevism is the mortal enemy of the National Socialist German People. It is in the struggle against this corrosive ideology and those who bear it, that Germany is engaged.

2. This struggle requires ruthless and energetic intervention against Bolshevik instigators, partisans, saboteurs and Jews, and the total elimination of all resistance, active or passive.”³



Balance of executions, Einsatzgruppe A zone, at end of 1941

Juedisches Untermenschentum (Subhuman Jewry)

“The soldier in the Eastern territories is not merely a fighter according to the rules of the art of war but also a bearer of ruthless national ideology and the avenger of the bestialities inflicted upon German and racially related nations. Therefore the soldier must fully understand the necessity of a severe but just revenge on subhuman Jewry.”⁴

“I can state today that the goal of solving the Jewish problem for Lithuania has been achieved by Einsatzkommando 3. In Lithuania, there are no more Jews other than the Work Jews and their families. In Schaulen there are ca. 4500, in Kaunas ca. 15000, in Vilnius ca. 15000. I also wanted to kill these Work Jews and their families, but I was severely challenged over this by the civil administration (the Reichskommissar) and the Wehrmacht and the prohibition was issued: these Work Jews and their families are not to be shot. The goal of making Lithuania free of Jews could only be attained through the deployment of a raiding commando with selected men under the leadership of SS First Lieutenant Hamann, who completely and entirely adopted

my goals and understood the importance of ensuring the co-operation of the Lithuanian partisans and the relevant civilian positions.”⁵

Lithuanian Collaboration

The Nazi-propaganda of ‘Jewish-Bolshevism’ encountered common assent and merged with Lithuanian antisemitism. Since the Soviet annexation in 1939/40, anti-Jewish prejudice had increased and had prepared the ground for physical violence against Jews. The instigator was among others the antisemitic Lithuanian

Display Board 4: Attack on the Soviet Union

Activist Front (LAF), an underground organization with its head office in Berlin. Demagogic slogans like ‘Hit the Jews, save Lithuania!’ signaled the willingness to collaborate in the subsequent extermination of Jews. As early as the first days of German occupation, so-called Lithuanian partisans carried out cruel pogroms, killing thousands of Jews. Soon after that, the German SS authorities transformed the bands of militant collaborators into auxiliary police units. Under German command those Lithuanians – as well as the wildcat denunciators and murderers – were foremost in tracking down and killing Jews, inflicting brutal violence on their longtime Jewish neighbors.



Lithuanian ‘partisans’ driving Jewish women through town

... to get rid of all the Jews

“For the ideological maturation of the Lithuanian nation it is essential that anti-communist and anti-Jewish action be strengthened. ... It is very important that this opportunity be used to get rid of the Jews as well. We must create an atmosphere that is so stifling for the Jews that not a single Jew will think that he will have even the most minimal rights or possibility of life in new Lithuania. Our goal is to drive out the Jews along with the Red Russians. The more of them that leave at this time, the easier it will be to get rid of the rest later.”⁶

Grigorij Schur Chronicle

“The lightning-fast sequence of events took the country entirely by surprise. On the night of Saturday, the 21st of June of 1941, German army without prior declaration of war crossed the borders to Lithuania and rapidly advanced inland. ... The local Nazi organizations played a major role in preparing the German invasion. A wide-spread intelligence system had for a long time existed throughout the Baltic States, carried by local supporters of Nazi Germany. German general staff was, of course, well-informed about the country’s military and civilian life and about the number and location of the Soviet troops. During the first months of Soviet rule in Lithuania, local Nazis had filled key positions in organizations, commissions, factories, and businesses. ... Moreover, the general mood of the population had been depressed by the deportation of a vast number of people to the Eastern Soviet Union. Eight days before the war offensives began and on the basis of previously compiled lists, the mass arrest and deportation of all those declared ‘undesired elements’ by the Soviet Union had taken place throughout the Baltic States, in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. The deportations lasted one whole week during which the Baltic peoples lived in fear and terror. ... For the close observer it was easy to see that antisemitism in 1941 in the Baltic States was on the increase. The existence of concealed nationalistic organizations sympathizing with Nazi-Germany was no secret.”⁷

Stahlecker Report

“Following orders, the security police was determined to solve the Jewish question by all possible means and most decisively. But it was better if the security police did not put in an immediate appearance, at least in the beginning, since the extraordinarily harsh measures might cause alarm even in German circles. It had to be shown to the world that the native population had of itself carried out the first measures in a natural reaction against the decades of oppression by Jews and against the terror exercised by the communists during the preceding period. ... It was the duty of the security police to set in motion these self-cleansing movements and to direct them into the correct channels in order to accomplish the purpose of the cleansing operations as quickly as possible. It was no less important in view of the future to establish the unshakable and provable fact that the liberated population themselves took the most severe measures against the Bolshevist and Jewish enemy quite on their own, so that the directive by German authorities could not be found out. ... These self-cleansing operations went smoothly because the army authorities, who had been informed, showed understanding for this procedure. From the beginning it was obvious that only the first days after the occupation would offer the opportunity for carrying out pogroms.”⁸

“the Jewish Bolshevik system must be wiped out once and for all” (Colonel General von Manstein, November 1941)⁹

Footnotes:

- 1) SS-Brigade Leader Walter Stahlecker Comprehensive Report up to October 15, 1941. In: Klee et al, *The Good Old Days*, p. 24–27. English translation see <http://www.mazal.org/archive/nmt/04/NMT04-T0155.htm>
- 2) Grigorij Schur, chronicler of the Vilna Ghetto, sent to Kailis slave labor camp, murdered in Stutthof concentration camp in 1945, p. 37 et seq.
- 3) Wehrmacht High Command Special Order, dated May 19, 1941. In: Longerich 1989, p. 136. English translation see <http://www.mazal.org/Klarsfeld/Mythomania/T048.htm>
- 4) Field Marshal Walther v. Reichenau Secret Order, dated October 10, 1941. In: Longerich 1989, p. 137 and (facsimile): <http://www.ns-archiv.de/krieg/untermenschen/faksimile/reichenau-1-1.php>. English translation see <http://www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/genocide/USSR2.htm>
- 5) Karl Jaeger Report, dated December 1, 1941. In: Bartusevicius et al, p. 309. English translation see Klee et al, *The Good Old Days*, p. 46-58; also <http://www.holocaust-history.org/works/jaeger-report/htm/img001.htm>
- 6) Directives for Lithuania’s Liberation issued March 24, 1941 by the LAF. In: MacQueen, p. 34
- 7) Grigorij Schur, p. 33 et seq.
- 8) SS-Brigade Leader Walter Stahlecker Comprehensive Report up to October 15, 1941 (as footnote 1)
- 9) Generaloberst Erich v. Manstein Secret Order, dated November 20, 1941. In: Ueberschaer et al, p. 290. English translation see <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/08-10-46.asp>

Picture Credits for Display Board 4 ‘Attack on the Soviet Union’

- Fig. 1:** Invasion in Vilna, 1941: Bartusevicius et al, fig. 8
Fig. 2: Balance of executions: Bartusevicius et al, fig. 20
Fig. 3: Attack on Soviet Union: Gilbert, p. 65
Fig. 4: Antisemitic poster: Bartusevicius et al, fig. 15
Fig. 5: Lithuanian ‘partisans’: Bartusevicius et al, fig. 17
Background Picture: Advancing into Lithuania: Bartusevicius et al, fig. 5

Das Wilnaer Ghetto

Die Errichtung des Ghettos

Außenrat – Jakob Gens – Ghettopolizei

Selbstbehauptung

Die Herren über Leben und Tod

Arbeitsdienste und Aktionen

Die Liquidierung des Ghettos

Ghetto Chronik

1941

1942

1943

1944

„... dass das Ghetto von den Deutschen nur eingerichtet wurde, um die Bevölkerung bequemer zu vernichten.“
(Abraham Sutzkever)

The Vilna Ghetto



Model of the 'large' Ghetto made by Ghetto prisoners on the order of the Gestapo

Formation of the Vilna Ghetto

The Vilna Ghetto was established by order of the Gestapo on September 6, 1941. The designated area was the old Jewish quarter in the center of the city whose inhabitants had been driven out of their homes and, for the most part, murdered. All the remaining Jews in Vilnius and suburbs were forced into the vacated old Jewish quarter. In the end there were approximately 40,000 people crammed into the Ghetto which was split into two separated ghettos with a non-ghetto corridor running through. The brutal circumstances of the forced eviction claimed thousands of victims. The so-called smaller second ghetto was abolished in October after the Nazis had murdered its non-productive prisoners and sent the employable ones to the larger ghetto.

*"The Gestapo, with yells and threats chased us onto Strashuna Street. ... Tall brick walls blocked off all the outlets of the streets connecting the ghetto with the rest of the city. The Germans placed a placard on the gate bearing a large warning to the rest of the population which said: DANGER of CONTAGION [SEUCHENGEFAHR]."*¹

Judenrat – Jacob Gens – Ghetto Police

A Judenrat (Jewish Council) was set up by the Gestapo to help them rule the Ghetto and establish order. In the last analysis – like Jewish leadership councils in other ghettos – it was instrumental in aiding and abetting the annihilation step by step. At first the Judenrat consisted of notabilities but, in July of 1942, it was replaced by the former head of the ghetto police, Jacob Gens – Saul Dressler succeeded him as the new police chief.



*Jacob Gens,
head of the
Vilna ghetto*

Gens was in the Gestapo's confidence. He pursued a policy of barter which developed into a sneaking method of selection: by surrendering some Jews, he was saving others in the Ghetto from extinction. Eventually, Gens' policy of collaboration failed and he was executed by the Gestapo shortly before the Ghetto's liquidation. Amongst the survivors there is still no agreement on how to judge Jacob Gens. To his defenders, he is a tragic figure while his detractors view him as a traitor and collaborator. The tasks of the Jewish ghetto police were among others to guard the Ghetto gates and to check the columns of slave workers who were absolutely forbidden to bring food and other goods into the Ghetto. The Gestapo demanded severe penalties so that the Ghetto police frequently mistreated their fellow Jews in the hope of protecting their own survival. All too often its



*Saul Dressler,
police chief*

members were corrupt; they confiscated smuggled goods and rounded up the victims for the Nazi extermination 'operations' (aktionen). Individual policemen, however, did help the victims as well as members of the resistance.

Display Board 5: The Vilna Ghetto

Self-Expression

Shortly after the Ghetto had been established, the Jewish intelligentsia, artists, writers, teachers, scientists, and physicians began to organize a counterculture. Pedagogues formed schools, medics built up a basic health care system, and under Herman Kruk a lending library was established. Theaters, a music school, literary groups, and scientific circles sprang up. Preserved placards still bear witness to the diversity of cultural events. This counterculture became a symbol of self-esteem and dignity amidst humiliation, despair, and death.



Herman Kruk,
administrator
of the ghetto's
library

*"The future historian, the future cultural scholar will often ponder this cultural wonder of the Vilna Ghetto."*²



Bearers of cultural life and members of the avant-garde artist group 'Jung Vilne' or 'Young Vilna' formed in the 1930s (Shmerke Kaczerginski, Abraham Sutzkever back row, R to L)

Masters of Life and Death

The ones organizing the Vilna holocaust had names and faces:

*"The Vilnius Gebietskommissar and SA-Sturmbannfuehrer, Hans Christian Hingst, was head of the rapacious civilian administration which demanded high contributions on part of the Jews. Obersturmfuehrer Rolf Neugebauer was chief of the Gestapo and Sipo [Security Police] in Vilnius. SS-Oberscharfuehrer Horst Schweinberger commanded the [Lithuanian] murderers and conducted the executions in Ponary until 1942. ... SS-Hauptscharfuehrer Martin Weiss was in charge of the prisons in Vilnius and was appointed chief of the Sonderkommandos in 1942. He was called 'Master of Ponary.' Bruno Kittel, who used to be an actor and saxophonist before the war, was head of the Jewish section of the Gestapo. His deputy was August Hering. ... Twenty-nine-year-old Franz Murer was deputy for Jewish affairs to the Gebietskommissar."*³



Hans Bruno
Kittel



Invitation to the 48th
workers' auditorium
on June 20, 1943



Hans Christian Hingst (L) and
Franz Murer (R)



Martin Weiss

Hans Christian Hingst

SA-Kreisleiter in Neumuenster, 1941–1945 Gebietskommissar of the Vilnius municipality, destination after 1945 unknown.

Franz Murer

Austrian farmer from Styria, SS-officer, Hingst's deputy for Jewish affairs. He was called by survivors 'The Butcher of Vilnius'; at the conclusion of a scandalous trial in 1963 in Graz/Austria he was acquitted.

Martin Weiss

Born in 1903, master craftsman from Karlsruhe, chief of a SS-Sonderkommando in Vilna and responsible for numerous aktions. He was tried and sentenced to life imprisonment in 1950.

Hans Bruno Kittel

Born in Austria in 1922, used to be an actor and musician. SS-Oberscharfuehrer and bloody liquidator of the Vilna ghetto in September of 1943; disappeared at the end of the war and was never prosecuted.

Work Permits and Aktions

Ghetto prisoners who were able to work were exploited as slave laborers within and without the Ghetto confines. They lived under cruel conditions and in constant fear of the so-called aktions during which Jewish victims would be captured and taken to be liquidated at Ponary, the mass murder site in the vicinity of Vilnius. 'Work permits' constituted an instrument to incrementally decrease the number of Jews remaining in the

Display Board 5: The Vilna Ghetto

Ghetto. They were issued at short intervals, always differently marked, and in ever smaller quantities. In September and October of 1941, white permits were issued, at first without then with 'Facharbeiter' (craftsman) stamped on them. The next were yellow work permits (Gelbe Scheine or gele shaynen) for the skilled workers, and pink ones for a limited number of family members. All those found without a work permit were transferred to Ponary.

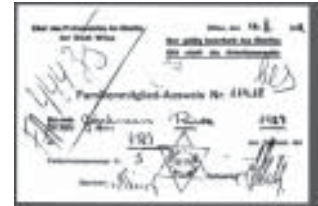


Supervision at the ghetto gate

"They did not deport all at the same time but set up categories instead and distinguished between the privileged and non-privileged. The owners of the white work permits initially considered themselves as the chosen ones, the lucky ones whose lives would be spared because they worked for the Germans. ... As is well known, the lucky ones pretty soon felt they had been deceived. The 'Facharbeiter' stamps were introduced and now yesterday's privileged ones, like useless elements, were led to the slaughterhouse. After that, the lucky ones bearing the 'Facharbeiter' impress were liquidated as well and those who owned the 'Gelbe Scheine' now became privileged. Thus thousands of people were herded together and executed by the Germans."⁴



Craftsman work permit



Family certificate

The Vilna Ghetto Liquidation

"The Vilna branch is to be dissolved with immediate effect and all files and records etc. are to be destroyed. Ghetto prisoners are to be liquidated at once. Any remaining Jews in the prison house are also to be given 'Sonderbehandlung' [special treatment]. If any difficulties arise, the Ghetto is to be blown up. An immediate report that this has been accomplished is expected. Sgd. Schmitz, SS-Hauptsturmfuehrer."⁵

Ghetto Chronicle

1941

September 6th: The 'large' and the 'small' ghettos were set up; Judenrat and Jewish ghetto police were established the day after; Jewish 'working brigades' were impressed for forced labor; masters of life and death were: Hans Hingst, Franz Murer, Martin Weiss, Hans Bruno Kittel.

September/October: Liquidation of the small ghetto by killing the 'un-productive' Jews and transferring the 'employables' to the large ghetto.

October/December: Out of 70,000 Vilna Jews approximately 30,000 were still alive.

1942

January: The Jewish resistance organization FPO (Fareynegte Partizaner Organizatsye – United Partisan Organization) was formed.

July: SS appointed Jacob Gens as

the head of the ghetto, dissolving the Judenrat.

August: Intensified preparation of hiding places (called 'malines').

1943

March: Jews from the surrounding ghettos were driven to the Vilna Ghetto; 'surplus' Jews were taken to Ponary for execution.

April/May: Incoming news about the Warsaw ghetto uprising; increasing flight to the forest to join the partisans.

July: Arrest and torture of FPO members; forced extradition of FPO leader Yitzhak Wittenberg who subsequently committed suicide; Abba Kovner took over FPO command.

July/August: The Vilna Ghetto liquidation began with transportations to Ponary, concentration and extermination camps.

September: Attempted revolt by FPO suppressed.

September 14th: Jacob Gens is arrested and executed by the Gestapo.

Mid-September: Workshops were set up at several locations in Vilnius like the Heereskraft-fahrpark Ost (Army's Vehicle Repair Park/HKP), Kailis fur factory, the military hospital, and the Gestapo.

September 23rd/24th: Final liquidation of the Vilna Ghetto. Almost all Ghetto inmates were deported to concentration camps in Estonia and Latvia, to Majdanek death camp, and to Ponary. Approximately 1,500 Jews were left at Kailis fur factory, ca. 1,200 at the HKP unit, and approx. 100 in the military hospital and Gestapo camps. A few hundred FPO fighters escaped through the town's sewers. Most of the Jews in hiding inside the ghetto were caught and executed.

1944

Early July: Almost all prisoners in the labor camps were killed in Ponary – approximately 250 managed to survive in the HKP camp. Vilna was liberated on July 13th.

“... the Germans organized the ghetto only in order to exterminate the Jewish population with greater ease”

(Abraham Sutzkever)⁶

Footnotes

- 1) Pearl Good, in: Michael Good, p. 23; a full account of Pearl Good's memoirs can be found at <http://www.searchformajorplage.com>
- 2) Herman Kruk, in: Harshav, p. 489
- 3) Arno Lustiger 2003, p. 195
- 4) Grigorij Schur, p. 92 et seq.
- 5) Einsatzkommando Kaunas Order dated July 1, 1943. Federal Archive (Barch B) B 162 / 2509, p. 4431
- 6) Testimony of Abraham Sutzkever at Nuremberg Trial Proceedings vol. 8 (February 27, 1946). English translation see: <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/02-27-46.asp>

Picture Credits for Display Board 5 'The Vilna Ghetto'

- Fig. 1:** Model of the large Ghetto: Kostanian-Danzig, p. 61
Fig. 2: Jacob Gens: Schur, p. 55
Fig. 3: Saul Dressler: Schur, p. 50
Fig. 4: Hingst, Murer: Bartusevicius et al, fig. 24
Fig. 5: Weiss, Kittel: Bartusevicius et al, fig. 25, 26
Correction to the photo caption on the board: Martin Weiss was condemned in 1950 (not 1959)
Fig. 6: Herman Kruk: Kostanian-Danzig, p. 29
Fig. 7: Placard announcing workers' auditorium: VGJSM, Vilna Ghetto Posters 1999, fig. 14
Fig. 8: 'Jung Vilne' group: Kaczerginski in Heuberger 2002, p. 123
Fig. 9: Craftsman work permit (gele shayn): Kostanian-Danzig, p. 32
Fig. 10: Family certificate: Bubnys, p. 30
Fig. 11: Supervision at the ghetto gate: Schur, p. 55
Background Picture: Samuel Bak: Ghetto, 1976

Holocaust in Litauen

Die Juden Litauens 1941
Vor der Invasion Litauens lebten ca. 200.000 Juden in Litauen. Die meisten lebten in den Städten, vor allem in Litauen. Die Juden Litauens waren sehr gebildet und hatten eine hohe soziale Stellung. Sie waren in allen Bereichen des Lebens tätig, von der Landwirtschaft bis zur Wissenschaft. Die Juden Litauens waren sehr loyal gegenüber Litauen und hatten eine tiefe Verbindung zum Land. Die Juden Litauens waren sehr tolerant gegenüber anderen Religionen und Völkern. Die Juden Litauens waren sehr fleißig und hatten eine hohe Arbeitsmoral. Die Juden Litauen waren sehr intelligent und hatten eine hohe Bildung. Die Juden Litauen waren sehr kreativ und hatten eine hohe künstlerische Begabung. Die Juden Litauen waren sehr tolerant gegenüber anderen Religionen und Völkern. Die Juden Litauen waren sehr fleißig und hatten eine hohe Arbeitsmoral. Die Juden Litauen waren sehr intelligent und hatten eine hohe Bildung. Die Juden Litauen waren sehr kreativ und hatten eine hohe künstlerische Begabung.

Der Weg in die Vernichtung
Die Juden Litauens wurden in die Ghettos deportiert, wo sie in Isolation lebten. Die Ghettos waren Orte der Unterdrückung und der Verarmung. Die Juden Litauens wurden gezwungen, ihre Häuser zu verlassen und in engen, überfüllten Ghettos zu leben. Die Ghettos waren Orte der Unterdrückung und der Verarmung. Die Juden Litauens wurden gezwungen, ihre Häuser zu verlassen und in engen, überfüllten Ghettos zu leben. Die Ghettos waren Orte der Unterdrückung und der Verarmung. Die Juden Litauens wurden gezwungen, ihre Häuser zu verlassen und in engen, überfüllten Ghettos zu leben.

Neues Fort Kaunas
Das neue Fort Kaunas wurde als Lager für Juden errichtet. Die Juden Litauens wurden in das Fort Kaunas deportiert, wo sie in Isolation lebten. Das Fort Kaunas wurde als Lager für Juden errichtet. Die Juden Litauens wurden in das Fort Kaunas deportiert, wo sie in Isolation lebten. Das Fort Kaunas wurde als Lager für Juden errichtet. Die Juden Litauens wurden in das Fort Kaunas deportiert, wo sie in Isolation lebten.

Tötungsbilanz
Die Tötungsbilanz zeigt die Anzahl der Juden, die in Litauen ermordet wurden. Die Tötungsbilanz zeigt die Anzahl der Juden, die in Litauen ermordet wurden. Die Tötungsbilanz zeigt die Anzahl der Juden, die in Litauen ermordet wurden. Die Tötungsbilanz zeigt die Anzahl der Juden, die in Litauen ermordet wurden.

Holocaust in Litauen – Chronik in Stichworten
1941 Juli 1941
1941 August 1941
1941 September 1941
1941 Oktober 1941
1941 November 1941
1941 Dezember 1941
1942 Januar 1942
1942 Februar 1942
1942 März 1942
1942 April 1942
1942 Mai 1942
1942 Juni 1942
1942 Juli 1942
1942 August 1942
1942 September 1942
1942 Oktober 1942
1942 November 1942
1942 Dezember 1942
1943 Januar 1943
1943 Februar 1943
1943 März 1943
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1945 Januar 1945
1945 Februar 1945
1945 März 1945
1945 April 1945
1945 Mai 1945
1945 Juni 1945
1945 Juli 1945
1945 August 1945
1945 September 1945
1945 Oktober 1945
1945 November 1945
1945 Dezember 1945

**„Doch wie kann man erzählen von diesem totalen Grauen ...?“
(Grigorij Schur)**

Holocaust in Lithuania



Jocheles family, ca. 1940

From all family members, only Fania Brancovskaja-Jocheles (kneeling left) and a cousin (standing, second from left) have survived the Holocaust

The Jews of Lithuania in 1941

In September of 1939, there were approximately 150,000 Jews living in Lithuania. With the annexation of Vilna, Vilna region, and parts of Belorussia, as well as Jewish refugees from Poland, Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia, the number of Jews in Lithuania increased by another 90,000. Taking into account the deportation of several thousand Jews to Siberia as late as June 1941 and the successful escape of thousands along with the retreating Soviet troops, the estimated total Jewish population of Lithuania amounted to roughly 230,000 at the time of the German invasion [figures on the Jewish population prior to occupation, the holocaust victims, and the survival rates vary].

“Lithuania 1941 – that was the Holocaust within the Holocaust. In the few months between the German attack on the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941 and the end of the year, all the Jews of Lithuania apart from a small remnant were murdered – 200,000 men, women, and children. The totality, timing, and atrocity of the Lithuanian part of the Shoah are unprecedented in the history of genocide in the German occupied countries of Europe during WW II: On a comparatively small territory more than two hundred killing sites are known.”¹

The Holocaust Takes Shape

The road to extermination started with the segregation of Jews from the rest of the population: armbands, Star of David patch, deprivation of rights, humiliation, assembly points, imprisonment in ghettos. The killing began. The first ones to be murdered were the representatives and spokesmen of the community and its young men.

“During the month of July, Lithuanian policemen and German SS officers roamed the streets and arrested young able-bodied Jewish men, who were told that they were needed for labor details but were actually taken to Ponary and executed. ... During the first week of July 1941, 300 community leaders and over 500 young men were thus captured and killed. ... By August 1941, having executed the leaders of the Jewish community as well as many of the young Jewish men, the Nazis had deprived the Jewish community both of its political leadership as well as its practical ability to put up any physical resistance.”²

Ninth Fort Kaunas

The Ninth Fort, an old czarist fortress-like structure in Kaunas (Kovno), was used by the German occupiers as the site for the mass execution of about 30,000 Jews of all ages between June 1941 and the summer of



Ninth Fort Kaunas, 2005

Display Board 6: Holocaust in Lithuania

1944. The majority came from Kaunas although deportees from Germany and France were also among the victims. In late October 1941, some 9,000 Jews – half of them children – were murdered in one single massacre by SS and their Lithuanian auxiliaries. In the autumn of 1943, as part of a coordinated effort to destroy the evidence of their crimes, the Germans ordered a Jewish Sonderkommando to exhume and cremate the human remains at the Ninth Fort. 70 of the prisoners detailed for this work managed to escape, unfortunately only half of them survived.

“They had surrounded the small Ghetto [in Kaunas] and began driving all the inmates from their houses to the Sajungos Square where Hauptsturmfuehrer Alfred Tornbaum and Lithuanian Air Force Colonel Simkus conducted a selection. Those in the possession of a ‘life certificate’ or other work permits were singled out along with their families and assembled at a certain place. All the others were driven under close guard along Sameter Alley to the Ninth Fort.”³

Vilna Suburb Ponary

In a forested place near Ponary [Ponary: Polish, Panierai: Lithuanian, Ponar: Yiddish], a favorite destination for excursions before the war, the Soviet authorities had in 1940 commenced the excavation of large circular pits in the sandy soil for the foundations of oil storage tanks. It was there that SS, Gestapo, and their Lithuanian



*In an execution pit, Ponary 1941
(pictures taken by German Army soldier)*

collaborators murdered approximately 100,000 men during the period from June 1941 to July 1944: the vast majority of them – some 70,000 – were Jews, many from nearby Vilnius; as well as 20,000 Soviet prisoners of war; 10,000 Poles; and several hundred Lithuanians. The victims were brought to Ponary either in trucks, in railway carriages or on foot. They were ordered to undress, and then – in groups – were led to the pits, lined up and shot. Then the corpses were covered with sand or lime, and the next group was summoned. Not all shots were fatal and some people were able to escape and give an account of the horrors. There are also eyewitness reports from members of the German Army (Wehrmacht) who observed the killings.

Eyewitness Reports

“Approximately 20 to 25 male civilians were standing to the left and right of the execution ditch, all heavily armed. ... Then the people had to tie their shirt around their head so that they could not see what was happening to them. Subsequently, the delinquents were ordered to line up and put their hands on the shoulders of the person in front. ... The group was then shot with machine gun fire. Delinquents who were not killed outright were shot with rifles by the civilians standing about ... my comrade H. from K. said: ‘This will be bitterly avenged.’”⁴

“When we came to Ponary there was a huge mass grave excavated, ready for us. There were two machine-guns standing in front of the truck. The first thing they told us was we couldn’t talk, scream or move ... They took us one at a time from the truck to the grave, shooting each one in the back of the head. ... When my turn came ... just a few feet before the grave, I fell. ... I happened to fall not as a consequence of his [Lithuanian executioner] shooting – I just fell ... The next victim ... fell on top of me and soaked me with his blood. ... After everything was finished, the machine guns sprayed the bodies in the grave and around the grave because not everybody was quite dead, a lot of people were still moaning. ... I have no exact recollection of when the shooting stopped ... I may have passed out. When I opened my eyes, I ... saw nobody around. I got up and started to walk towards the gate ... There were two guards at the gate who saw me and one of them took a shot at me, but ... he did not hit me. ... My only chance of getting out was to dig under the barbed wire. I dug with my bare hands, scared that if I was not fast enough they would catch me. ... I don’t know how long it took me, but I

Display Board 6: Holocaust in Lithuania

*squeezed through and ran away. ... None of the Jews who lived in our apartment building believed me ... My father believed my story and he said: 'They are out to kill us all!'"*⁵

Death Toll

Under the German occupation virtually the entire Jewish population of Lithuania had been annihilated – way above 200,000 people. The genocide was administered by the SS Einsatzkommando A in Riga, specifically by its subunit Einsatzkommando 3 stationed in Kaunas under SS Standartenfuehrer (Colonel) Karl Jaeger. Mass executions took place in more than 200 sites; during the entire period of occupation, Kaunas Ninth Fort and Ponary were constantly used as extermination sites. Fewer than 10,000 Lithuanian Jews did survive, some in hiding places, rescued by helpers, in the Soviet army, or with the partisans.

L: Karl Jaeger (1888–1959), SS-Colonel, head of Einsatzkommando 3, committed suicide in detention pending trial; R: Jaeger wrote on Dec-1-1941 that Einsatzkommando 3 under his command had so far executed 137,346 Jews



Holocaust in Lithuania – Brief Chronology

June/July 1941

First to be killed were young men, the intelligentsia, and representatives of Jewish communities in order to eliminate all resistance. At the same time German authorities recruited Lithuanian collaborators. The Command of Einsatzgruppe A began to covertly instigate 'spontaneous' pogroms against Jews – like the one in Kaunas where Lithuanian militant auxiliaries murdered some 5,000 Jews within five days while German soldiers and civilian spectators watched – it then proceeded to take over the organization of the killings itself. Einsatzkommando 9 was moved to Vilna where on July 4 it began mass executions at Ponary; on July 20, Einsatzkommando 3 assumed the killing operations in the Vilna area.

July/August 1941

At first the Jewish population was 'concentrated' in provisional ghettos. In Kaunas, Vilna, and Siauliai large ghettos were established. Lithuanian auxiliaries acted as ghetto guards; they also 'snatched' Jews and handed them over to the SS. The 'concentrated' Jews in the

'provisional' ghettos were liquidated by the raiding commando under the leadership of SS Obersturmfuehrer (First Lieutenant) Joachim Hamann in collaboration with other men from Einsatzkommando 3 and Lithuanian auxiliaries.

September–December 1941

Ghettos were hit by numerous waves of mass murder designed to separate the 'useless' from among the remaining workforce and their families, assigning the latter – the old, the sick, intellectuals, redundant forced laborers, children, women – to immediate death.

The Jaeger-Report of Dec 1, 1941 stated that the goal of making Lithuania free of Jews (judenfrei) had been achieved: other than 35,400 'Work Jews' there were no more Jews in Lithuania.

1942

During the period of temporary 'stability,' the exploitation of the remaining Jews deployed in forced labor was the prime objective for the German authorities. At the same time, the decimation of ghetto inmates through punishment and

selection measures continued; each successful flight out of the ghetto resulted in the arbitrary shooting of Ghetto prisoners as collective penalty.

1943

German forces completed the final destruction of the major ghettos between July and September; at that time, no small ghetto in the Vilnius district was left. They deported the ghetto prisoners to concentration camps in Estonia and Latvia, to labor camps of the German occupiers, or straight to the extermination camps. Thousands were immediately massacred at Ponary.

1944

On March 27, a centrally organized children's roundup (Kinderaktion) was carried out: SS and their Lithuanian henchmen combed through the labor camps still in existence after the destruction of the former ghettos in search for the camp's children to be removed and killed.

By the end of June and the beginning of July with Soviet troops approaching, most of the Jews re-

maining in the labor camps were collectively exterminated. Only a few survived in hiding places when Vilna was liberated on July 13. Jewish Lithuania does not exist any more.

“How can one possibly tell about the horrors ...?”

(Grigorij Schur)⁶

Footnotes

- 1) Ralph Giordano in Bartusevicius et al, p. 2
- 2) Michael Good, p. 28–29
- 3) Faitelson 1998, p. 66 et seq.
- 4) Eyewitness Reports in the Karl Jaeger Preliminary Investigation, Federal Archive (Barch B) B 162 / 2502, p. 1155 et seq.
- 5) William Good’s memoirs, p. 9–10, at: <http://www.searchformajorplagge.com>
- 6) Grigorij Schur, p. 30

Picture Credits for Display Board 6 ‘Holocaust in Lithuania’

- Fig. 1:** Jocheles Family ca. 1940, private collection
Fig. 2: Ninth Fort Kaunas, 2005, private collection
Fig. 3: In an execution pit, Ponary 1941: Federal Archive (Barch B) B 162, pictures 85, 86
Fig. 4: Karl Jaeger (1888–1959), SS-Standartenfuehrer, head of Einsatzkommando 3. Main Archive of the State of Hesse, Wiesbaden, dep. 461, no 32438. Also: Gutman, vol. 2, p. 733
Fig. 5: First page of Karl Jaeger Report (Dec-1-1941), Federal Archive (Barch B) BR 70 SU/15. Facsimile see <http://www.nizkor.org/ftp.cgi/orgs/german/einsatzgruppen/jaeger-report/images/jaeger1.gif>; English translation: Klee et al, *The Good Old Days*, p. 46–58; also <http://www.holocaust-history.org/works/jaeger-report/htm/img001.htm.en>
Background Picture: Ponary Memorial Site, private collection



Jüdischer Widerstand



Partisanen

Die Partisanen waren die bewaffnete Widerstandsbewegung der Juden in den Ghettos und im Untergrund. Sie kämpften gegen die Nazis und die Kollaborateure.

Die Partisanen-hymne

„Sog nit keijnmol
as du geisst dem letztn weg ...“
(Hirsch Glik)



„Nicht wie Schafe zur Schlachtbank“

Ein Zitat von Hirsch Glik, das die Entschlossenheit der Juden zum Widerstand ausdrückt.

Frauen im organisierten Widerstand



Die Frauen spielten eine zentrale Rolle im Widerstand, sowohl in der Organisation als auch in der Durchführung der Aktionen.

Die FPO



Die FPO (Förderung der Polnischen Organisation) war eine der ersten jüdischen Widerstandsbewegungen in Warschau.

Verbindung nach Białystok und Warschau

Die Verbindung zwischen den Ghettos und dem Untergrund war ein entscheidendes Element für den Widerstand.

„Tod dem Faschismus“



Ein Slogan, der die absolute Notwendigkeit des Widerstands gegen den Faschismus betonte.

Geschlehter Aufstand



Die geschlechtliche Verbindung zwischen den verschiedenen Widerstandsbewegungen war entscheidend für den Erfolg.

„Alta ruft“

Ein Slogan, der die Verbindung zwischen den Eltern und den Kindern im Widerstand symbolisiert.

„Sog nit keijnmol
as du geisst dem letztn weg ...“
(Hirsch Glik)

Jewish Resistance



Jewish Partisans, 1944: standing L to R: Elchanan Magid, Jakob Prener, Bluma Markowicz, Abba Kovner, Rozka Korczak, Leib Sapirsztein, Vitka Kempner; kneeling L to R: Gershon Griner, Pesach Miserec, Motl Shames

“We will not be led like Sheep to the Slaughter”

The assumption that Jews had accepted their fate without resistance has long been confuted. Notably the Jewish youth resisted at great sacrifice: they fought underground in the occupied countries and in the ghettos, resisted in partisan groups, joined the Red Army and the armed forces of the Western Allies. Multiple forms of resistance developed into a strong symbol of the will to survive – be it armed or spiritual resistance such as acts of cultural and religious self-assertion under the horrible conditions in the ghettos and camps.

The FPO

Against the terror systematically exercised by the Nazis, open resistance and direct struggle had no chance. Sweeping east, the invading German Army occupied the communities and homelands of Eastern European Jews within a short time. SS-Einsatzgruppen were to follow and, joined by their local collaborators, these killing squads rounded up and killed the defenceless Jewish population. When news of the mass executions in Ponary reached the Vilna Ghetto, it was initially met with disbelief because of the horrendous nature of the atrocities. By January 1942, the mass killing of Jews was beyond doubt, and representatives of the major youth groups decided to form an underground fighting organization called Fareynegte Partizaner Organizatsye – FPO (United Partisan Organization). The FPO fighters organized and performed a wide range of activities and heavy losses were often incurred. They acted as underground couriers, forged documents, planned escape routes, obtained weapons, and offered weapon training.

“Even if the answer is gruesome, we need to say: There is no rescue ... Is there an alternative? Yes, and that is: Revolt and armed resistance.”¹

Yitzhak Wittenberg (1907–1943)

Tailor by trade and active trade unionist; member of the Communist Party; since January 1942 elected commander of the FPO; he was betrayed to the Gestapo in July 1943 and arrested, but freed by armed FPO members; after the threat to destroy the Ghetto unless Wittenberg was handed over, he turned himself in to the Gestapo and was killed while in custody.

Abba Kovner (1918–1987)

Poet and writer; member of the socialist-Zionist youth movement Hashomer Hatzair; took up FPO command following



Yitzhak Wittenberg



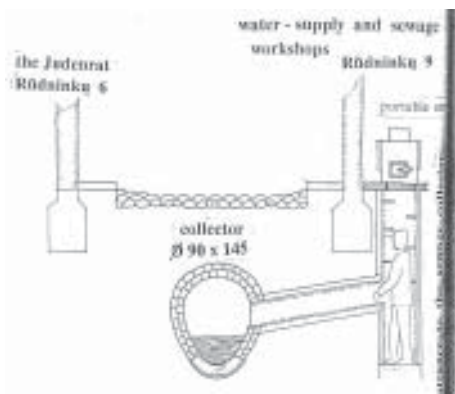
Abba Kovner

Display Board 7: Jewish Resistance

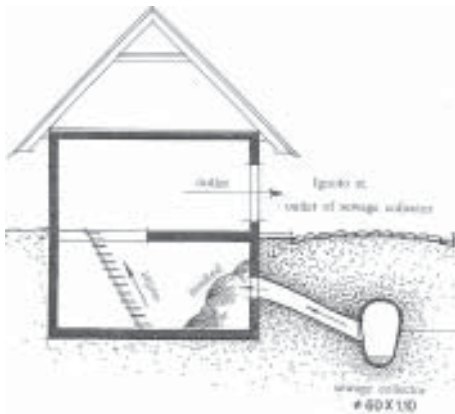
Wittenberg's death; composed and proclaimed the FPO's manifestos calling for revolt; escaped from the Ghetto liquidation to the forest and created a partisan group; after liberation took part in the Bericha movement which smuggled Jewish Holocaust survivors mainly from Eastern Europe across international borders into DP camps and to Palestine; testified in the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem 1961; Kovner was elected chairman of the Hebrew Writers' Association in Israel.

Ties to Bialystok and Warsaw

"Once our partisan organization had been consolidated, we decided to send reliable couriers into the cities with a large number of Jews in order to strengthen their resistance movements. There were approximately 40,000 Jews who languished in the Bialystok Ghetto and about half a million in the Warsaw Ghetto. Those from Bialystok refused to believe that mass executions were being carried out in Vilna. The Warsaw Jews were convinced that it would not be possible to kill off half a million people. We were able to establish a connection to Anton Schmid in February of 1942, a draftee to the German Army then. He took three of our comrades to Bialystok and to Warsaw in his car. They spread the truth about the monstrous extermination of the Vilna Jews."²



Escape route into the sewers



Escape route out of the sewers



Shmuel Kaplinski

Yechiel Scheynboym

Failed Revolt

In the event of the Ghetto's final destruction, the FPO had planned to move into battle and – supported by a Ghetto population in revolt – fight its way to the forest and take along as great a number of Jews as possible. The plan, however, failed. Previously, the FPO had suffered the loss of its commander, Yitzhak Wittenberg, who was betrayed to the Gestapo; following his death, Abba Kovner took up command. On September 1, the FPO mobilized its forces when German SS troops entered the Ghetto to round up Jews for deportation. The Jewish underground called for an uprising but the Ghetto's population did not heed the FPO's call to arms. The resistance was put down bloodily and the FPO headquarters blown up. During the Ghetto's final liquidation, some hundred FPO members escaped through the city's sewers and other outlets. They fled to join partisans in the forests outside the city.

Partisans

"In the Vilna region there were two partisan units. One was around Lake Narocz ... the other one near Sorok Tatory in the Rudniki Forest. From the very beginning, these were mixed units made up of Lithuanians, Poles, Belorussians and Jews under the leadership of Soviet paratroopers. Later special Jewish units branched off under the leadership of Jewish ghetto fighters. Thus three separate Jewish partisan units developed in the Vilna region that operated as part of the general partisan movement. The first group called 'Death to Fascism' was commanded by ghetto fighter Abba Kovner and Chjenka Borowska, the second was led by Resel Abrazka, the third by Kriaklis."³

Shmuel Kaplinski (1913–2000)

As a former engineer of the Vilna waterworks he knew the city's sewer system well and organized the escape route out of the Ghetto.

Display Board 7: Jewish Resistance

Yecheil Scheynboym (1914–1943)

Member of the FPO; commanded a fighting battalion and was shot on September 1 during the FPO's armed resistance against incoming SS troops.

Shmerke Kaczerginski (1908–1954)

Writer; participated in the rescue of Jewish cultural treasures from Vilna together with A. Sutzkever; FPO member and partisan fighter; composer of numerous songs in the Ghetto (e.g. 'Shtile, shtile'); emigrated to Argentina; author of important treatises on Jewish resistance.

Abraham Sutzkever (born 1913)

Yiddish poet; FPO member and partisan fighter; staunch supporter of cultural life in the Ghetto; was the first to report the struggle and extermination of the Vilna Jews in 1944; testified at the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials (1946); emigrated to Israel.



Kaczerginski (L) and Sutzkever in the Ghetto, 1943



Ten-year-old Samuel Bak, renowned artist today, on Abraham Sutzkever's lap, 1944

Women in Resistance

Fania Brancovskaja-Jocheles (born 1922)

A young teacher when she and her family were imprisoned in the Vilna Ghetto; FPO member and active leader of a youth group; escaped to the partisans the day of the Ghetto liquidation.

Rozka Korczak (1921–1988)

Joined the leadership of the Hashomer Hatzair left wing Zionist youth movement along with Abba Kovner and Vitka Kempner; co-founder of the FPO; partisan fighter; emigrated to Israel where she copublished a series of fundamental reports on the Jewish resistance movement.

Liza Magun (1921–1943)

Working as FPO courier; she was sent to warn the Jews of Ašmena of the impending Ghetto liquidation early 1942; after her return to Vilna arrested and tortured to death by the Gestapo; the watchword 'Liza is calling' became FPO's mobilization order.

Sonia Madeysker (1914–1944)

Communist; part of the nucleus of Jewish resistance in the city and Ghetto of Vilna; FPO courier and liaison who organized escape routes to the partisans; remained active underground after the Ghetto's liquidation but was caught by the Gestapo and murdered.

Vitka Kempner (born 1922)

Active member in the left-wing Zionist youth movement Hashomer Hatzair along with Abba Kovner and Rozka Korczak; one of the founding members of the FPO and contact person to the resistance outside the Ghetto; as partisan fighter responsible for numerous spectacular sabotage attacks; married to Abba Kovner; now a widow she still resides in Israel.



Rozka Korczak



Sonia Madeysker



Liza Magun



Fania Brancovskaja (1966)

"Liza is Calling"

"Liza was tortured in the Gestapo dungeons; they tortured her with red-hot iron but she gave nothing away. Liza was able to send us a secret message from prison: 'I know exactly what to expect. Yet it is hard for me to get used to the idea that I'll be taken to Ponar. I am calm. My greetings to all the

Display Board 7: Jewish Resistance

*comrades. What's the news from Bialystok? Be strong and of good courage! Liza' ... This courageous girl's name was chosen as cri de guerre by FPO staff. The password 'Liza is calling' became the code signal for the partisans' general mobilization of the Vilna Ghetto."*⁴

Hymn of the Partisans

Hirsh Glik (1922–1944)

Member of the literary artistic circle 'Jung Vilne' (Young Vilna) and active in the resistance movement; his song 'Zog nit Keynmol' (Never Say) soon became the hymn of the partisans; during the armed FPO revolt on September 1, 1943 taken captive and deported to Estonian concentration camps; in 1944 he escaped to join the partisans and was killed in action.



Hirsh Glik

*Never Say*⁵

*Never say that you are going your last way,
Though lead-filled skies above blot out the blue of day.
The hour for which we long will certainly appear,
The earth shall thunder 'neath our tread that we are here!*

*From lands of green palm trees to lands all white with snow,
We are coming with our pain and with our woe,
And where'er a spurt of our blood did drop,
Our courage will again sprout from that spot.*

*For us the morning sun will radiate the day,
And the enemy and past will fade away.
But should the dawn deity or sunrise wait too long,
Then let all future generations sing this song.*

*This song was written with our blood and not with lead,
This is no song of free birds flying overhead.
But a people amid crumbling walls did stand,
They stood and sang this song with rifles held in hand.*



Fania (R) in a former partisan dugout, 2005

The Avengers

Following the successful escape of a good number of FPO members from the Ghetto in September 1943, the escapees who stayed with Abba Kovner became the partisan brigade known as the Avengers in the Vilna forests. They continued their sabotage operations and were involved in the battle for Vilna's liberation.

*"I remember the first time I blew up a train. I went out with a small group, Rachel Markevitch accompanied us. It was New Year's Eve The train appeared on the tracks; a line of large, heavy-laden trucks rolled on toward Vilna. My heart suddenly stopped beating for joy and fear. I pulled the detonator with all my strength, and in that moment, before the thunder of the explosion echoed through the air and twenty-one trucks full of troops hurtled down into the abyss, I heard Rachel cry: 'For Ponar!'"*⁶

Call for Resistance by Abba Kovner

"Let us not go like sheep to the slaughter, Jewish youth! Do not trust those who are trying to deceive you. Out of the eighty thousand Jews in the 'Jerusalem of Lithuania' only twenty thousand are left. In front of your eyes our parents, our brothers and our sisters are being torn away from us. Where are the hundreds of men who were snatched away for labor by the Lithuanian kidnappers? Where are those naked women who were taken away on the horror-night of the provocation? Where are those Jews of the Day of Atonement? And where are our brothers of the second ghetto? Anyone who is taken out through the gates of the ghetto, will never return. All roads of the ghetto lead to Ponary, and

Display Board 7: Jewish Resistance

Ponary means death. Oh, despairing people, tear this deception away from your eyes. Your children, your husbands, your wives – are no longer alive – Ponary is not a concentration camp. They have all been shot there. 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 defenseless, 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!
January 1, 1942, Vilna Ghetto.”⁷

“Sog nit keijnmol as du gejsst dem letztn weg ...”

(Hirsh Glik)⁸

Footnotes

- 1) Abba Kovner quoted in Sutzkever quoted in Grossman/Ehrenburg/Lustiger, p. 504
- 2) Sutzkever 1944 quoted in Grossman/Ehrenburg/Lustiger, p. 517 et seq.
- 3) Testimony Moshe Feigenberg 1946, Federal Archive Ludwigsburg (Barch B) B 162 / 2506, p. 3187
- 4) Sutzkever 1944 quoted in Grossman/Ehrenburg/Lustiger, p. 520; also <http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Oshmyany/osh032.html>; see also Kovner before the Eichmann Trial May 4, 1961: <http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/Sessions/Session-027-09.html>
- 5) Hirsh Glik quoted in Lustiger, Sog nit keijnmol, p. 10; for English lyrics and music clips see http://epyc.yivo.org/content/11_7.php and <http://savethe-music.com/bin/archives.cgi?q=songs&search=title&id=Zog+Nit+Keynmol>
- 6) Abba Kovner, p. 90
- 7) Proclamation of the FPO quoted in Berenbaum, Witness to the Holocaust, p. 154; also quoted in Arad, Ghetto, p. 411–412; see also <http://www.jewish-virtuallibrary.org/jsources/Holocaust/Vilna2.html> and <http://www.holocaust-survivors.org/data.show.php?di=record&da=texts&ke=1>
- 8) Hirsh Glik quoted in Lustiger, Sog nit keijnmol, p. 10

Picture Credits for Display Board 7 ‘Jewish Resistance’

- Fig. 1:** Jewish partisans: Bartusevicius et al, fig. 41
Fig. 2: Yitzhak Wittenberg: Kostanian-Danzig, p. 24
Fig. 3: Abba Kovner: Kostanian-Danzig, p. 24
Fig. 4: Yechiel Scheynboym: Kostanian-Danzig, p. 24
Fig. 5: Shmuel Kaplinski: Kostanian-Danzig, p. 24
Fig. 6: Escape route into the sewers: VGJSM, no further particulars
Fig. 7: Escape route out of the sewers: VGJSM, no further particulars
Fig. 8: Jewish partisans ca. 1943/44: Freund/Ruttner/Safrian, p. 55
Fig. 9: Warning against partisans: Heuberger 1995, p. 215
Fig. 10: Rozka Korczak: Bartusevicius et al, fig. 41
Fig. 11: Sonia Madeysker: Kostanian-Danzig, p. 24
Fig. 12: Liza Magun: Heuberger 1995, p. 241
Fig. 13: Fania Brancovskaja, ca. 1966, private collection
Fig. 14: Sutzkever and Samuel Bak, 1944: Bak, Memoir, no page reference
Fig. 15: Kaczerginski and Sutzkever, 1943, Harshav/Kruk, no page reference
Fig. 16: Fania Brancovskaja in a former partisan dugout, Vilnius 2005, private collection
Fig. 17: Hirsh Glik: Jewish Community of Lithuania, p. 38
Background Picture: Jewish partisans ca. 1943/44: Freund/Ruttner/Safrian, p. 55



Heereskraftfahrpark Ost 562



Die HKKP-Werkstätten



Menschliche Behandlung

Lebende in den Werkstätten...
 Die HKKP-Werkstätten...
 Die HKKP-Werkstätten...
 Die HKKP-Werkstätten...



Das HKKP-Arbeitslager



Das HKKP-Arbeitslager...
 Das HKKP-Arbeitslager...
 Das HKKP-Arbeitslager...



Arbeit und Leben im Lager

Arbeit und Leben im Lager...
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 Arbeit und Leben im Lager...
 Arbeit und Leben im Lager...

Grenzen des Schutzes

Grenzen des Schutzes...
 Grenzen des Schutzes...
 Grenzen des Schutzes...



Widerstand

Widerstand...
 Widerstand...
 Widerstand...

Widerstand...
 Widerstand...
 Widerstand...

Die Auflösung des HKKP-Arbeitslagers

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Handlungsspielräume

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„Ich tat das, weil ich es für meine Pflicht hielt.“
 (Karl Plagge)

'Military Vehicle Repair Park' East 562



Main HKP work area in Olandu Street

HKP Workshops

HKP East 562 in Vilna used to be a military vehicle repair unit with several workshops. In June 1941, Karl Plagge became head of the HKP. Under him were 250 members of the German Army (Wehrmacht) as well as Polish foreign workers and Jewish slave laborers [HKP stands for 'Heereskraftfahrpark' which means 'Military Vehicle Repair Park' in German].

*"I came to Vilna at the end of June 1941 under orders to build up a military vehicle repair unit there. ... I left the city when Vilna was evacuated in summer 1944. Even before the Vilna Ghetto had existed, Jews had been working at the newly established HKP. Upon the arrival of the Gebietskommissar [area commissioner], a Ghetto was formed and I had the Jews be taken to work and brought back again in closed formation ..."*¹



Vilna map including Ghetto and HKP locations, 1941



Work permit of Abram Malkes



Entrance to the HKP main area, Vilna 1942



Karl Plagge (C) with army officers in Vilna, ca. 1942



Road signs, Vilna 1942

Humane Treatment

The fact that Plagge did not take into consideration mechanical skills when choosing force laborers had apparently not caused major complaints.

Display Board 8: 'Military Vehicle Repair Park' East 562



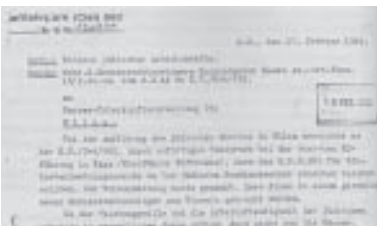
Isaac Reches in the former HKP Labor Camp pointing to where his family lived and survived

*"Mister Plagge employed in his factory Jewish workers in great numbers. ... There were a great number of Jews that weren't really useful or necessary for the work that had to be done."*²

An unwritten principle prevailed in the HKP that all laborers should be treated humanely.

*"Mr. Plagge himself always treated the Jews in a very proper and humane way and saw to it that his subordinates did so as well."*³

This view is confirmed by Isaac Reches in his father's accounts and his own experiences as a teenage child imprisoned in the HKP. Plagge ensured that all workers had access to the park-owned hospital, medicines, food, and work clothes supplied by the army. He also founded a motor vehicle workshop school for the education of young Polish workers and thus protected them from being deported to German slave labor camps. In all, Plagge organized the HKP as a safeguard and, at the same time, maintained the impression that the slave workers were urgently needed to keep up the HKP business.



Letter by Plagge to the army's Housing Administration, Vilna 1944



Excerpt of a list showing workers employed at the HKP, early 1944

HKP Labor Camp

At the beginning of September 1943, Plagge convinced the SS command in Riga to approve a 'closed concentration camp' for the HKP workers. Shortly before the Vilna Ghetto was liquidated, he rescued more than a thousand Jews from the Ghetto and took them to the newly formed HKP labor camp on Subocz Street.

*"I ... drove at night with trucks to the Ghetto entrance and, with the help of the Judenrat, succeeded in bringing out a large number of Jews from the Ghetto. A selection was not possible. Among these Jews were also women and children."*⁴

The Camp was guarded by SS and Lithuanian police. The German Army (Wehrmacht) was paying hire fees to the SS for the slave workers and Plagge's efforts to have them assigned to the Wehrmacht failed.



HKP Labor Camp on Subocz Street, Vilna 1945

Work and Life in the Camp

Karl Plagge involved the camp with the maintenance of the HKP facilities. Since there was hardly any work in the camp to begin with, Plagge developed new work projects to put the Jews to work as 'useless' Jews faced annihilation.

*"When they wanted to carry away the Jewish women as being useless mouths to feed, there suddenly appeared 100 Dutch sewing machines for repairing armed forces materials. It was a trick I prepared as I foresaw this development. Henceforth, no one dared to interfere with such an organized war economy."*⁵

Besides the tailor shop, the camp had workshops for cabinetmakers, locksmiths, cobblers, fine mechanics, and even watchmakers. Jewish women and girls were also employed in the kitchens and gardens; younger children looked after the animals that were kept to supplement food and furnish winter clothing for the Wehrmacht. In the end, everyone in the camp and the HKP workshops was working for the benefit of the Wehrmacht and was vital to the war effort.

Limits to Protection

Apparently Karl Plagge made use of the complicated bureaucratic proceedings; he kept accurate listings and prepared accurate reports. Thus he managed to disguise his protective efforts behind the conflicting responsibilities of SS, Wehrmacht, and civil administration. In this way he was able to protect the prisoners in general but could not prevent single murder actions. Plagge was deeply troubled by the fact that he was not present in Vilna during the 'Kinderaktion' on March 27, 1944 when 246 women and children were taken from the HKP camp to Ponary and executed.

Display Board 8: 'Military Vehicle Repair Park' East 562

*"However, I was unable to prevent the murder of the children. I was on leave at that time. Whether they would have dared to carry it out and succeeded had I been there, I do not know."*⁶



Painting by 14-year-old Samuel Bak: 'Kinderaktion' (1947)

Resistance

In the HKP camp, too, there was an underground group. Its members were killed when they put up armed resistance at the liquidation of the camp.

*"Special SS troops wearing black uniforms and wearing a skull insignia on their caps arrived for roll-call on Monday, July 3. The 500 inmates who, having no where to hide, appeared at roll-call were taken to Ponary and killed. Seeing that there were almost 500 missing prisoners, the Germans began a systematic search and captured an additional 200 Jews who were executed in the camp courtyard. Included in this number were my mother's cousin Eva and her husband Lolek. Lolek had obtained a gun, joined a resistance group within the camp, and insisted on leaving the hiding place in order to fight the Germans. Eva reluctantly accompanied her husband. Both Lolek and Eva were killed in the ensuing fighting."*⁷

HKP Labor Camp Dissolved

When the Red Army reached the city limits of Vilna in July 1944, the German army and with it the HKP units had to retreat.

*"When in the summer of 1944, HKP was ordered to relocate to Eastern Prussia, we wanted to take the Jews with us ... In the middle of the chaotic retreat I learned that there was a clearance gang of SD in the camp and that there was shooting ... When I drove there they refused me admission. I only learned afterwards from a Jew that some managed to save their lives."*⁸

Scope For Maneuver

On the occasion of a ceremony honoring Karl Plagge in Darmstadt in April 2005, Professor Wette, a military historian from the University of Freiburg, summarized Plagge's rescuing deeds as follows:⁹

"Unlike most of the officers, soldiers, and military clerks of the German Wehrmacht stationed in Vilna, Major Karl Plagge did not just go along with what was happening around him. He decided for himself to follow his conscience, well aware of the dangers to which he was exposing himself. The military courts were very quick, at that time, to hand down the death penalty for favoring the enemy or for betraying military secrets. It is worth pointing out that what Plagge did was not a one-off spontaneous action, but a long term considered, coolly calculated continuous action over years. It was not always successful but yet frequently it was. He did not overstretch the risks but acted cleverly within the possibilities available to him. We can learn from his example something of the room for maneuver that an army officer could create if he so wished.

- *As commander of the HKP 562 in Vilna, Plagge tried to ensure that the workforce was mainly Jewish. This removed them at least temporarily from the danger zone and saved them from the shootings that were carried out at regular intervals.*

- *He saw to it that even Jews who had absolutely no understanding of motor vehicle repair were employed and thus protected.*

- *He ensured that 'his' male and female Jewish workers were well cared for, medically. He could always justify this to the authorities with the relevant argument that without strong and healthy workers, no successful work for the military would be achieved.*

- *He allowed confidential information that he received concerning planned deportations to Ponary to filter through to those under threat so that they could try to hide in their chosen hiding places and escape the attack of the SS and their Lithuanian auxiliaries.*

- *Plagge had to be very careful in his dealings with his 'comrades' ... who were more likely to be a hindrance than a help in rescue operations. Comradeship was after all a matter of security and not in any way a bond of friendship.*

- *Plagge had to conceal his humane intentions even in that final roll-call on the 30th June 1944 to which, as commander of the HKP, he summoned many of his Jewish workers and their dependants.*

Choosing carefully coded words he said: "You all know how concerned the SS is to protect its Jewish prisoners." The warning was immediately understood and resulted in at least some of those threatened with execution managing to escape into hiding.

"I did that because I thought it was my duty"

(Karl Plagge)¹⁰

Footnotes

- 1) Testimony of Karl Plagge before the civil chamber in Stuttgart (Germany) at the compensation proceedings Zwi Hirsz Klejnberg et al against the State of Baden-Wuerttemberg on April 24, 1956. Federal Archive Ludwigsburg (Barch B) B 162 / 19947, p. 23
- 2) Alfred Stumpff 1947, Witness Declaration. Denazification File of Karl Plagge, Main Archive of the State of Hesse, Wiesbaden (4.1.3 Abt. 520 Spruchkammer/DI/Plagge, Karl). Denazification records translated into English by Marcus Schneider in Good, p. 221–250 (cit. p. 224); see also Plagge related documents at <http://www.searchformajorplagge.com>
- 3) Alfred Stumpff 1947, Witness Declaration. Ibid document, p. 224 (slightly different translation is offered)
- 4) See footnote 1
- 5) Letter by Karl Plagge to Attorney R. Strauss, April 26, 1956. Letter translated into English by M. Sherwin, J. Fiebelkorn, P. and M. Good in Good, p. 251–255 (cit. 253–254); see also Plagge related documents at <http://www.searchformajorplagge.com>
- 6) Letter of Karl Plagge to Attorney Strauss. Ibid document, p. 254 (slightly different translation is offered)
- 7) Michael Good, p. 81
- 8) See footnote 1
- 9) Wolfram Wette quoted in Viefhaus, p. 111
- 10) Testimony of Karl Plagge before the Denazification Court in Darmstadt on February 9, 1948. Denazification File of Karl Plagge, Main Archive of the State of Hesse, Wiesbaden (4.1.3 Abt. 520 Spruchkammer/DI/Plagge, Karl). In Good, p. 240; see also Plagge related documents: <http://www.searchformajorplagge.com>

Picture Credits for Display Board 8 'Military Vehicle Repair Park East 562'

- Fig. 1:** Main HKP work area in Olandu Street, ca. 1942, private collection
Fig. 2: Vilna map including Ghetto and HKP locations, 1941 <http://www.death-camps.org>
Fig. 3: Road signs in Vilna, ca. 1942, private collection
Fig. 4: Karl Plagge with army officers in Vilna, ca. 1942, private collection
Fig. 5: Entrance to the HKP main area, ca. 1942, private collection
Fig. 6: Work permit of Abram Malkes: Irina Guzenberg 2002, p. 32
Fig. 7: Isaac Reches within the former HKP Labor Camp, 2005, private collection
Fig. 8: HKP Labor Camp on Subocz Street, 1945: Irina Guzenberg 2002, p. 30
Fig. 9: Letter by Karl Plagge to the army's Housing Administration in February 1944: Irina Guzenberg 2002, p. 140
Fig. 10: Excerpt of a HKP work list, early 1944: Irina Guzenberg 2002, p. 140
Fig. 11: Samuel Bak: 'Kinderaktion' (1947)
Background Picture: Main HKP work area in Olandu Street (see fig. 1)



Retterinnen und Retter



„Hilfskommando“ in der „Kleinen Synagoge“ Wien

Die Rettung von Juden

„Ich habe die Judenrettung nicht als Akt der Barmherzigkeit, sondern als Akt der Gerechtigkeit gesehen.“
Die Rettung von Juden war ein Akt der Gerechtigkeit, der die Würde des Menschen wiederherstellen sollte. In der „Kleinen Synagoge“ in Wien wurden viele Juden versteckt und gerettet.

Retter in Uniform



„Ich habe die Judenrettung nicht als Akt der Barmherzigkeit, sondern als Akt der Gerechtigkeit gesehen.“
Einige Retter trugen eine Uniform, um ihre Taten zu verheimlichen. Sie nutzten ihre Position, um Juden zu verstecken und zu retten.

Männen als Rettungsort



„Ich habe die Judenrettung nicht als Akt der Barmherzigkeit, sondern als Akt der Gerechtigkeit gesehen.“
Einige Männer nutzten ihre Arbeitsplätze als Rettungsort für Juden. Sie versteckten sie in ihren Büros oder in anderen Räumen.

„Sie waren stille Helden“



„Ich habe die Judenrettung nicht als Akt der Barmherzigkeit, sondern als Akt der Gerechtigkeit gesehen.“

Alfons von Deschwanden



„Ich habe die Judenrettung nicht als Akt der Barmherzigkeit, sondern als Akt der Gerechtigkeit gesehen.“
Alfons von Deschwanden war ein Schweizer, der viele Juden in der Schweiz versteckte und rettete. Er nutzte seine Position als Beamter, um die Rettung zu ermöglichen.

Anton Schmid



„Ich habe die Judenrettung nicht als Akt der Barmherzigkeit, sondern als Akt der Gerechtigkeit gesehen.“
Anton Schmid war ein Schweizer, der viele Juden in der Schweiz versteckte und rettete. Er nutzte seine Position als Beamter, um die Rettung zu ermöglichen.

Retterinnen und Retter aus Litauen



„Ich habe die Judenrettung nicht als Akt der Barmherzigkeit, sondern als Akt der Gerechtigkeit gesehen.“
Viele Retterinnen und Retter aus Litauen haben die Juden in ihrer Heimat versteckt und gerettet. Sie nutzten ihre Position, um die Rettung zu ermöglichen.

Diplomaten als Helfer



„Ich habe die Judenrettung nicht als Akt der Barmherzigkeit, sondern als Akt der Gerechtigkeit gesehen.“
Einige Diplomaten haben die Juden in ihrer Heimat versteckt und gerettet. Sie nutzten ihre Position, um die Rettung zu ermöglichen.

„... ein humaner Schatztag“

„Ich habe die Judenrettung nicht als Akt der Barmherzigkeit, sondern als Akt der Gerechtigkeit gesehen.“
Ein humaner Schatztag war ein Tag, an dem die Retter ihre Taten preisgaben. Sie wollten zeigen, dass die Rettung ein Akt der Gerechtigkeit war.

„... Stern in der Dunkelheit“

„Ich habe die Judenrettung nicht als Akt der Barmherzigkeit, sondern als Akt der Gerechtigkeit gesehen.“
Ein Stern in der Dunkelheit war ein Retter, der in einer Zeit der Dunkelheit die Rettung ermöglichte. Er war ein Licht in der Dunkelheit.

„Sie waren stille Helden“
(Johannes Rau)

Rescuers



Monument for Chiyune Sugihara in front of the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum

The Rescue of Jews

In times of pogroms and Holocaust, only very few people took the risk of denunciation, imprisonment, and danger to their own lives to help Jews and rescue them. Many of those who did, paid for it with their lives. The exact number of rescuers in Germany and in the occupied territories is not known. By 2007, Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority in Israel, had bestowed the 'Righteous Among the Nations' award to more than 21,000 people who risked their lives to save Jews. The number of those wearing the uniform of the German Wehrmacht who had dared to save Jews was especially small.

*"Approximately 18 million men belonged to the German Wehrmacht. The number of rescuers in uniform known so far is less than 100."*¹



Karl Plagge (1897–1957)

Rescuer in Uniform

Karl Plagge protected the Jewish workers at the HKP and their families principally by obtaining work permits (life certificates) for them from the Judenrat (Jewish Council), by the formation of a HKP camp separate from the ghetto, and by ensuring the provision of a food supply, but also through personal intervention when he freed Jews from prison or averted their deportation to Ponary.

*"Under the guise of the earnest Wehrmacht commander committed to supporting the war effort, he was able to use the German wartime bureaucracy's own rules to save lives. ... But his methods were subtle, not the methods of a swashbuckler who, along with his protectees, would have all too easily been discovered and killed."*²

In this way the HKP became a relatively protected area, even though when he had to withdraw in 1944, Plagge was not able to do any more than warn the inmates of the impending liquidation of the camp and the danger posed by the SS. This warning saved the lives of approximately 250 Jews. A small number managed to escape, the majority survived in hiding in so called malines.

Malines as Refuge

Malines were hiding places for the purpose of providing a well concealed refuge, secure from discovery by SS and their collaborators whenever 'aktionen' were carried out. Nevertheless, malines were often detected in systematic searches and all those hiding there were killed. Some of the



Drawing by Gary Gerstein showing HKP malines where ca. 100 people survived, among them Perella Esterowicz/Pearl Good and her parents, their relatives Nina and Mula Gerstein with son Gary, and Simon Malkes with his father Abraham

Display Board 9: Rescuers

malines, however, achieved their purpose albeit under excruciating physical conditions: total darkness, a severe lack of oxygen, water and food, and the imperative necessity for complete silence. The 'Kinderaktion' of the 27 March 1944, when over two hundred children along with many of their mothers were hauled out of the HKP camp, has remained a traumatic memory for all camp prisoners. In his letter to the attorney Strauss, Plagge also refers to this terrible event.

*"However, I was unable to prevent the murder of the children. I was on leave at that time. Whether they would have dared to carry it out and succeeded had I been there, I do not know. The remaining children were concealed in previously prepared hiding places and survived until the final evacuation of the park."*³



Entrance to a children's hideout

Alfons von Deschwanden

Alfons von Deschwanden was born in 1922. He was drafted into the Wehrmacht in June 1941 and was sent to the newly created HKP 562 engineering unit in Vilna. There he was assigned to a spare parts workshop that was part of the HKP's main work area. Alfons treated the Jewish slave laborers under him with respect and although this put his own life in danger, he helped them in many ways: for instance by giving them food and accompanying them during times of danger. For three days he even hid a Jewish woman and her two-and-a-half year old daughter in the workshop. At the end of June 1944, the spare parts workshop was ordered to pack up its stock in preparation for the forthcoming retreat. However, on the night of July 1, 1944 something very unusual occurred. Alfons von Deschwanden was ordered – for the first time and presumably at the instigation of Major Plagge – to stand guard duty at the HKP camp Subocz Street. He was put in charge of the machine gun and with two other privates was to keep watch because of anticipated attempts at escape. Von Deschwanden was determined not to shoot any fleeing Jews and enabled at least 25 – one of them being William Begell – to escape through the camp's locksmith shop. During the head count the next morning, the SS discovered that there were Jews missing. Before the SS could begin investigation, the three privates were relieved and commanded back to the HKP main workshop at Olandu Street.



Alfons von Deschwanden, 1943

"... a shining star in the darkness"

"Dear Mr. von Deschwanden!

*I was very happy to get news from you. It was pure chance that I found your address. I could only remember your name ... I have often thought of you and mentioned your name every time when I told about our amazing rescue. You were for us a shining star in the darkness. ... About us I can write you that we (I and my husband) are among the few individuals from the H.K.P that remain alive. Most were not able to save themselves. Also my sister-in-law is no longer alive ... I and my husband ... succeeded in escaping and for thirteen days, hungry and thirsty, we hid in the bushes and ruins. After the liberation, we went to Israel."*⁴



Former HKP blacksmith's shop, 2005

"Dear Mr. von Deschwanden!

*I think, you remember, that one day the HKP Jews came to their work place together with their wives and children. The reason was that we were ordered to leave the ghetto. Where should we go? We simply had nowhere on earth to go to. So everyone went to his work place. You and NCO Mr. Goetz treated us in such a friendly and sympathetic manner, that my wife – finding herself suddenly in a clean and lighted room and experiencing so much friendliness – began to cry. ... it is quite difficult even to remember that time! In the work camp at Subocz Street, where we were moved to in 1943, the children and old people were taken out one day and shot. My wife lost her mother then but fortunately saved the children by hiding them in the oven. I was glad that I had prepared the hiding place in time. When Major Plagge visited the work camp to say farewell, I immediately prepared a hiding place, where we succeeded in waiting until after the liquidation of the camp and coming out alive."*⁵

Display Board 9: Rescuers

Anton Schmid

Sergeant Anton Schmid, born on January 9, 1900 in Vienna, was head of a Wehrmacht unit whose task it was to gather soldiers who had been cut off from their units (Versprengten-Sammelstelle). He hid Jews in the workshops and helped them escape. He also supplied forged papers to the Jewish underground and transported arms and members of the resistance. Arrested in January 1942 and summarily tried before a Nazi military court on February 25, Anton Schmid was executed on April 13. In the year 2000, Germany renamed a military base 'Feldwebel Anton Schmid Kaserne' in his honor.

*"The deeds of Anton Schmid are among the most amazing and rare episodes in the history of those days."*⁶



Anton Schmid
1900–1942

Rescuers from Lithuania

There were very few uniformed German rescuers as opposed to numerous Lithuanians, Poles, and Russians who helped Jews during the Nazi time. The Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum has, up to the year 2007, documented the names of more than 700 rescuers, men and women alike: peasants, former neighbors, middle-class people as well as priests, nuns, craftsmen, and academics. They constructed hideouts, forged documents, organized escape routes, or claimed Jewish children were their own. A considerable number also supported the Jewish resistance movement: ordinary people who became extraordinary through their acts of humanity and courage. Three examples to name but a few:

Ona (Anna) Simaite (1899–1970), a librarian at Vilna University, used her position to help Jews in the Vilna Ghetto and labor camps. She smuggled in food, false papers, and other necessary items and smuggled out valuable literary works by Jewish authors and historical documents. She hid Jewish refugees and founded an illegal network to rescue Jewish children. She saved the ghetto diary of Grigorij Schur – later to be published as 'Die Juden von Wilna' – by hiding the manuscript beneath the floorboards of the library. She was arrested in 1944 and then deported to the Dachau concentration camp. She settled in France and Israel following her liberation.⁷

*"Anna Schimaite was a wonderful person. When she came to the Ghetto or to the blocks of Kailis, it felt like a ray of sunshine in the darkness."*⁸

Helene Holzman (1891–1968) was a German artist married to a publisher and bookseller in Kaunas. When Nazi Germany invaded the country, her Lithuanian-Jewish husband and oldest daughter were arrested and murdered. Mrs. Holzman managed to rescue her younger daughter and many other children from the Kaunas Ghetto. After the war she and her daughter lived in Germany.⁹

The Gasperowicz and the Paszkowski Families: In 1999 William Good traveled to Lithuania and met the families Gasperowicz and Paszkowski who through their courage had helped to save his life and his father's. They had warned them of impending dangers and sheltered them at great risk. His son Michael describes the emotional reunion:

*"Tragic tales from the Holocaust juxtaposed with the faces of families who bravely opened their homes to my father in 1942 and warmly welcomed him back 57 years later."*¹⁰



Paszkowski Family and William Good (R), 1999



Ona (Anna) Simaite
1899–1970



Helene Holzman
1891–1968

Diplomats as Rescuers

Chiyune Sugihara was the Japanese Consul in Kaunas from 1939 till 1940. Against the orders and violating the strict guidelines of his government, he issued transit visas to Japan to approximately 6,000 Lithuanian, Polish, and German Jews.

*"They were humans and needed help. I am glad I found the strength to help them. ... There was no place else for them to go."*¹¹



Chiyune Sugihara
1900–1986

Display Board 9: Rescuers

The Dutch Consul in Kovno, Jan Zwartendijk, assisted Sugihara in trying to find final destination countries for the Jewish refugees. Both are credited with saving thousands of lives.

“... a humane chess move”

“Toward the early evening – about seven o’clock – on July 1, 1944, it was still light and Major Plagge gathered a group of the HKP inmates and proceeded to speak. It was not an official speech, people just gathered around him. Plagge said: ‘You all must have heard that the front line is moving west and that HKP’s assignment is to always be a certain number of kilometers behind the front line. Therefore, HKP is being moved away from the front. As a result, you the Jews and workers will also be moved. It is natural to think that since all of you are highly specialized and experienced workers in an area of great importance to the German Army, you will be reassigned to a HKP unit. I cannot assure you that it will again be my unit, but it will be a HKP unit. You will be escorted during this evacuation by the SS which, as you know, is an organization devoted to the protection of refugees. Thus, there’s nothing to worry about.’ This is my recollection of the speech. I have repeated it to myself hundreds of times over the years. I remember thinking that this overt warning to us that we were about to be killed (by mentioning the SS as an organization for the protection of refugees) was made with a human stroke of the pen, so to say, because – and I repeat – because he didn’t have to say it at all.”¹²

“They were quiet heroes” (Johannes Rau)¹³

Footnotes

- 1) Wette quoted in Viefhaus, p. 118
- 2) Michael Good, p. 174
- 3) Letter by Karl Plagge to Attorney R. Strauss, April 26, 1956 in Good, p. 251–255 (cit. 254 with a slightly different translation offered); see also Plagge related documents: <http://www.searchformajorplagge.com>
- 4) Letter from Shoshana Uspitz to Alfons von Deschwanden of July 2, 1971. She and her husband escaped the camp on July 1, 1944 via the blacksmith’s shop. Correspondence between S. Uspitz and v. Deschwanden (scans of the original letters, German transcript, English translation) can be found under: Documents Related to the Testimony of Alfons von Deschwanden: <http://www.searchformajorplagge.com>
- 5) Letter from Samuel Taboryski to Alfons von Deschwanden in June 1977. Taboryski’s wife and two-and-a half year old daughter were hid by A. v. Deschwanden in the spare parts workshop. Correspondence between S. Taboryski and v. Deschwanden (scans of the original letters, German transcript, English translation) can be found under: Documents Related to the Testimony of Alfons von Deschwanden: <http://www.searchformajorplagge.com>
- 6) Kovner quoted in Lustiger 2003, p. 193; also Kovner before the Eichmann Trial May 4, 1961: <http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/Sessions/Session-027-08.html>
- 7) A bundle of about 15 pages of letters by Ona Simaite introduced and translated by Julija Sukys.
- 8) Miriam Povimonskaja-Schur quoted in Schur, p. 21. See also Sukys, 2003
- 9) Not before the year 2000, a book based on Helene Holzman’s diary of the events 1941–44 was published by her daughter Margarete Holzman and Reinhard Kaiser.
- 10) Michael Good, p. 18; a full account of William Good’s memoirs can be found in the Plagge Documents Depository at <http://www.searchformajorplagge.com/>
- 11) Chiyune Sugihara: Information leaflet by the Sugihara House, Kaunas
- 12) Testimony of William Begell, quoted in Good, p. 59; see also see also Testimony of William Begell at <http://www.searchformajorplagge.com/>
- 13) Johannes Rau quoted in Wette 2004, p. 11

Picture Credits for Display Board 9 ‘Rescuers’

- Fig. 1:** Sugihara Monument in front of the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum, 2005, private collection
- Fig. 2:** Major Plagge, ca. 1942, private collection
- Fig. 3:** Transverse view of HKP malines by Gerstein: Good, no page reference
- Fig. 4:** Entrance to a children’s hideout: Irina Guzenberg 2002, p. 31
- Fig. 5:** Alfons von Deschwanden 1943, private collection
- Fig. 6:** Blacksmith’s shop at former HKP labor camp, 2005, private collection
- Fig. 7:** Anton Schmid (no date), copyright Ullstein Press
- Fig. 8:** Ona Simaite: Kostanian-Danzig, p. 77
- Correction to the photo caption on the board:** Ona Simaite was born in 1899 (not 1901)
- Fig. 9:** Helene Holzman (no date), private collection
- Fig. 10:** William Good and the Paszkowski Family, Lithuania 1999, private collection
- Fig. 11:** Chiyune Sugihara: Information leaflet by the Sugihara House, Kaunas
- Background Picture:** Sugihara Monument in Vilnius, (see fig. 1)

Die Überlebenden

Simon Malkas
 Simon Malkas, 27 Jahre alt, wurde im Sommer 1942 in das Ghetto Theresienstadt deportiert. Er überlebte die Shoah und emigrierte nach England. Heute wohnt er in London.

Eliezer Grolsdorf
 Eliezer Grolsdorf wurde im Jahr 1942 in das Ghetto Theresienstadt deportiert. Er überlebte die Shoah und emigrierte nach Israel. Heute wohnt er in Tel Aviv.

Wilhelm Biegel / William Biegel
 Wilhelm Biegel wurde im Jahr 1942 in das Ghetto Theresienstadt deportiert. Er überlebte die Shoah und emigrierte nach Kanada. Heute wohnt er in Toronto.

Michael Schemelwitz
 Michael Schemelwitz wurde im Jahr 1942 in das Ghetto Theresienstadt deportiert. Er überlebte die Shoah und emigrierte nach Amerika. Heute wohnt er in New York.

Isak und Jasit Seches
 Isak und Jasit Seches wurden im Jahr 1942 in das Ghetto Theresienstadt deportiert. Sie überlebten die Shoah und emigrierten nach Amerika. Heute wohnen sie in New York.

Steve Rotschild-Galerkin
 Steve Rotschild-Galerkin wurde im Jahr 1942 in das Ghetto Theresienstadt deportiert. Er überlebte die Shoah und emigrierte nach Amerika. Heute wohnt er in New York.

Samuel Bah
 Samuel Bah wurde im Jahr 1942 in das Ghetto Theresienstadt deportiert. Er überlebte die Shoah und emigrierte nach Amerika. Heute wohnt er in New York.

Vorka Good / William Good
 Vorka Good wurde im Jahr 1942 in das Ghetto Theresienstadt deportiert. Sie überlebte die Shoah und emigrierte nach Amerika. Heute wohnt sie in New York.

Samuel, Ida und Perella Esterowicz / Pearl Good
 Samuel, Ida und Perella Esterowicz wurden im Jahr 1942 in das Ghetto Theresienstadt deportiert. Sie überlebten die Shoah und emigrierten nach Amerika. Heute wohnen sie in New York.

Dank an die Gerechten
 Ein besonderer Dank geht an die Gerechten, die während der Shoah ihre Leben riskierten, um Juden zu retten. Ihre Taten sind ein Vorbild für alle Menschen.

Erinnerungen von HRP-Überlebenden
 Die Erinnerungen der Überlebenden sind ein Schatz, der uns lehrt, wie wir mit Widrigkeiten umgehen können. Sie sind ein Mahnmal für die Zukunft.

**„Wie überlebten wir, obwohl doch so viele Tausende starben?“
 (Michael Good)**

The Survivors



Samuel Bak: *The Family*, 1974

Gratitude to the Survivors

Many survivors of the Holocaust never talked about their wartime experiences and rescue stories, not even to their children. They were too afraid of reliving the traumatic horrors from which they had narrowly escaped. We are grateful to those who, in spite of all the pain of recollection, gave their accounts, in most cases including the names of their rescuers, whom they held in high esteem and to whom they were immensely grateful. First and foremost the HKP survivors thank Karl Plagge. His fellow-feeling for them and his courageous behavior enabled them and their descendants to have a life after the Holocaust. Their memories helped in large measure to reconstruct the events that took place in Vilna during the years 1941 to 1944.

Samuel, Ida and Perella Esterowicz/Pearl Good

Samuel Esterowicz, lawyer and economist, obtained work in the HKP's workshop for vehicle seat-repair. In his memoirs he tells of Karl Plagge's efforts to arrange for bearable working and living conditions as well as



Ida und Samuel Esterowicz,
1954

his desire to protect the Jewish HKP workers. His wife Ida and fourteen-year-old daughter Perella both worked in the textile workshops where army clothes were repaired. The family survived under excruciatingly cramped conditions, in a maline, short of food, water and oxygen along with almost a hundred fellow sufferers. In 1951, Samuel, Ida, and Perella – who had gained a degree in chemistry in Italy – emigrated to the United States.

“For the lucky Jews working for HKP 562, it appeared that Major Plagge ... had performed a miracle. It was said that he had traveled first to Kovno ... to demand that his workers be spared from the approaching liquidation. ... It was thanks to the endeavors of Major Plagge, who was guided by his desire to protect his



Perella Esterowicz,
1947

Jewish workers, that the 1000 dwellers of HKP were able to avoid, at least temporarily, the fate of those Jews who remained in the ghetto. Therefore it was not surprising that Major Plagge, our protector, was much beloved and respected by us.”¹

“On Saturday, July 1st, 1944 Major Plagge, the kind head of the HKP 562, came to talk to us. ... Major Plagge warned us that the German army was leaving Vilna and our camp would be evacuated

Display Board 10: The Survivors

*westward in connection with the nearing of the Russians. ... This speech of Major Plagge aroused terrible fear in us. ... The vast majority of us understood, especially after Major Plagge's veiled warning, that for our camp the moment had come which we all feared and for which the dwellers of our landing had made feverish preparations."*²

Vovka Gdud/William Good

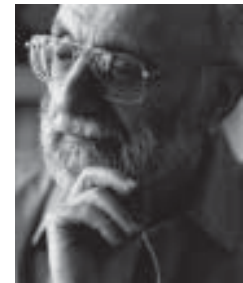
Vovka Zev Gdud, born in 1924, grew up in a small village called Niemenczyn about 20 kilometers away from Vilna. In July 1941, he survived a mass execution in Ponary. Two months later his mother and younger brother and all the Jews from Niemenczyn were executed. Vovka and his father Dov escaped to the forests where they survived with the active help of local peasants until the liberation in 1944. Via a displaced persons camp Vovka reached Italy where he studied medicine and met his future wife Perella Esterowicz. They emigrated to the US and settled in California where Vovka set up as a general practitioner. William and Pearl Good still reside in California.



Vovka (L) and Dov Gdud,
1945

Samuel Bak

Samuel and his parents were moved to the HKP labor camp in 1943. His extraordinary artistic talents had already caused a sensation in the Vilna Ghetto where he had the first exhibition of his drawings in 1942 at the age of nine. His father smuggled him out of the HKP camp following the 'Kinderaktion.' His mother also managed to escape. Samuel and his mother survived the war hidden in a Benedictine Convent. His father was murdered by Germans only days before the Red Army liberated Vilna in July 1944. Mother and son managed to reach the displaced persons camp in Landsberg/Lech, Bavaria, from where Samuel, his mother, and stepfather emigrated to Israel. According to Samuel Bak, his paintings are meant to bear personal testimony to the trauma of surviving. He names Karl Plagge as one of his 'miracles of survival.'



Samuel Bak, 2006

Simon Malkes

Simon Malkes, born in 1927, worked in the HKP labor camp along with his father, a car mechanic; his mother worked in the camp tailoring workshop. A few months before liberation, she became acutely ill and was in urgent need of an operation. Disguising her identity, Karl Plagge accommodated her in the hospital outside the camp which was reserved only for 'Aryans,' where she remained until Vilna was liberated by the Red Army. Simon and his father witnessed the liberation hiding in the same maline as the Esterowicz family. He later studied electrical engineering at the University of Munich. Simon Malkes is now retired and living in Paris, France.



Simon Malkes, 1947 / 1990

*"My father talked to Major Plagge and our German inspector at the repair workshop, Mr. Grammer (a decent man), and also to Kolish, the Jewish 'head' of the HKP. The result was positive: Major Plagge took my mother to the [gentile] Vilna hospital. He was the only one who had the power and authority to achieve something like that."*³

Eliezer/Lazar Greisdorf

Eliezer Greisdorf was eight years old, when he, along with his older brother, parents and uncle came to the HKP camp. He survived the Kinderaktion hidden in a trunk where he was kept concealed for three months. The family survived the camp's liquidation and, after years in a German DP camp, they eventually emigrated to Canada. The mounds of corpses of Jewish neighbors executed by the SS, which young Eliezer had seen in the HKP's courtyard, have haunted him all his life. After his father died, Eliezer found among his belongings letters from Karl Plagge to his father. Mr. Greisdorf worked as technician at CBC Broadcasting and is now retired.



Eliezer/Lazar Greisdorf,
1947 / 1990

Display Board 10: The Survivors

"It was during our incarceration in HKP that my family became aware of Major Plagge as an unusually decent soldier. On several occasions, he came to inspect the camp and to speak to us. Why he took an interest in us, only he knew. During those visits, it became known that he always instructed the camp administrator that he wanted no cruelties or punishments to take place while he was there."⁴

Wilhelm Beigel/William Begell

William Begell was 16 years old when his family was transferred from the Ghetto to the HKP labor camp. He escaped through a window in the blacksmith's workshop the night before the camp was liquidated. William Begell attributes his survival directly to Major Plagge and his warning speech on July 1, 1944.

"All my adult life I have thought about it constantly, as an act of humanity and bravery, at the risk of Plagge's own life."⁵

Out of a large family, only William Begell survived the Holocaust. He emigrated to the US, became a nuclear physicist and now runs a scientific publishing company in New York.



Wilhelm Beigel, 1943
William Begell, 2005

Michael Shemiavitz

Michael Shemiavitz and his mother were discovered in their shelter by the SS and local police during the Ghetto liquidation. They were taken to the Gestapo headquarters and together with fellow sufferers awaited their execution. The elderly, the women and children were taken away and executed but Karl Plagge managed to free more than a hundred male prisoners and sent them to the HKP labor camp. Michael Shemiavitz survived thanks to Plagge's warning and emigrated to Israel.



Michael
Shemiavitz, 2005

Isaak and Josif Reches

Isaak was 9 years old and Josif only 11 months when the family was forced into the Vilna Ghetto in 1941. Their father, a plumber and roofer, was employed by Plagge as foreman in the HKP. Both children survived the 'Kinderaktion' of March 1944 and, with their parents, they also survived the liquidation of the camp in July 1944. Walled up in a maline, they almost suffocated and endured days of agony until Vilna was liberated. Isaak became a physician and Josif an electrical engineer. Both are now retired and live in Vilna.

"The first soldier whom my father saw was a common Russian soldier. ... The Russian soldier was really shocked when he first saw us. He didn't expect to find anyone still alive. ... After the war my father tried very hard to find out what happened to this man [Plagge] who saved the lives of about 300 Jews. ... He was a German Wallenberg ..."⁶



Isaak (L) and Josif (R) Reches

Steve Rotschild-Galerkin

Steve was ten years old when he, his younger brother, and their mother came to the HKP camp. They all survived and emigrated to Canada. Steve remembered a young boy of great artistic talent who, he feared, had been murdered during the Kinderaktion in March 1944. His fears proved unfounded through his contact with Michael Good in 2005. His playmate back then had survived and meanwhile become the world-famous painter Samuel Bak.



Steve Rotschild-Galerkin,
1945 / 2007

Marek Swirski

HKP survivor Marek Swirski, who now lives in Israel, testified to Yad Vashem how Plagge saved his father David from the SS:

"When leaving the kitchen after work one day, an SS officer searched a few Jews and found on my father and one other some food hidden in their trousers. The SS man became furious and started screaming. He took out his pistol ... when suddenly Plagge saw the scene ... and asked the SS to hand the Jews over to him. ... Plagge ... took the two Jews into a nearby barracks. He struck his whip on

Display Board 10: The Survivors

a table and asked the Jews to cry loudly and then had them cut their faces with a razor to draw blood. The two Jews, one of them my father, were then presented to the SS who allowed them to leave and return to the Ghetto.”⁷

“How did we survive when so many thousands died?”

(Michael Good)⁸

Footnotes

- 1) Samuel Esterowicz in Good, p. 69, 71. The detailed memoirs of Samuel Esterowicz can be found at <http://www.searchformajorplagge.com/>
- 2) Pearl Good in Good, p. 77; see also Pearl’s story at <http://www.searchformajorplagge.com/>
- 3) Simon Malkes quoted in Viefhaus, p. 53
- 4) Eliezer Greisdorf quoted in Good, p. 161. The German version and English translations of the Plagge-Greisdorf letters can be found at Michael Good’s website in the Plagge Document Depository at www.searchformajorplagge.com/
- 5) Testimony of William Begell at www.searchformajorplagge.com/
- 6) Josif Reches quoted in Viefhaus, p. 46–47. See also testimony of the Reches brothers at www.searchformajorplagge.com/
- 7) Marek Swirski quoted in Good, p. 125
- 8) Michael Good, p. 19

Picture Credits for Display Board 10 ‘The Survivors’

- Fig. 1:** Samuel Bak: The Family, 1974
Fig. 2: Ida and Samuel Esterowicz, 1954
Fig. 3: Perella Esterowicz, 1947
Fig. 4: Vovka and Dov Gdud, 1945
Fig. 5: Samuel Bak, 2006
Fig. 6: Simon Malkes, 1947 / 1990
Fig. 7: Eliezer/Lazar Greisdorf, 1947 / 1990
Fig. 8: William Begell, 1943 / 2005
Fig. 9: Michael Shemiavitz, 2005
Fig. 10: Isaak and Josif Reches, no date
Fig. 11: Steve Rotschild-Galerkin, 1945 / 2007
(Pictures 2–11 all privately owned)
Background Picture: Samuel Bak: The Family, 1974 (see fig. 1)

Wehrmachtsoffizier und Held?

Karl Plagge 1911

Karl Plagge 1945

Rückkehr nach Darmstadt

Das Schweigen nach 1945

Entnazifizierung

Zweifel und Selbstbefragung

Plagge im Urteil von HKP-Überlebenden

... in das Bewusstsein eingegraben

Die Pest

„ ... denn ich bin im Grunde kein ‚Held‘, sondern ein recht ängstlicher Mensch ...“
(Karl Plagge)

German Army Officer and Hero?



Karl Plagge, 1942



Karl Plagge, 1956

Return to Darmstadt

In the months after the withdrawal from Vilna, Karl Plagge managed to bring the men of his HKP unit over to the west through all the confusion of the end of the war and to surrender to American forces on May 2, 1945 without incurring any losses. He was briefly imprisoned and then returned to Darmstadt. As the parental house in the Hoffmannstrasse had been destroyed in September 1944, he lived initially in the little village of Neunkirchen in the Odenwald. In 1948 he returned to Darmstadt, to No. 4, Otto-Hesse-Strasse, and resumed the work at the Hessenwerke that had been interrupted by his denazification hearings. Right up until his death he remained a member of the business management and a close friend of the Hesse family. Not much is known about his private life. It is evident from the few letters extant that he was full of doubts and guilt feelings with regard to the experiences and his own role in them during the occupation in Vilna. He died on 19 June 1957, barely 60 years old.



Karl Plagge (C) and the Hesse family with godson Konrad, 1947

"...engraved into one's consciousness"

"When I returned from the war, there were also difficult times for me as I had lost everything and I had to build my existence again anew. Nevertheless, how much more fortunate I was than the Jewish families that I visited at that



Management of the Hessenwerke: Kurt Hesse (center), Karl Plagge (2nd from left)

time in Stuttgart. Mr. Leo Greisdorf told me then: 'You have lost everything, as have we, but you can walk through the streets that you walked as a child. We, however, have become homeless and will always be full of longing, thinking back on the



Greisdorf family, HKP survivors, Stuttgart 1948 (L to R, front row: aunt Emma, Eliezer, mother Mina; back row: father David, brother Boris, uncle Leo)

Display Board 11 : German Army Officer and Hero?

streets of our hometowns.’ I then became very quiet, thinking about what I expected from the world and its people. What one experiences becomes engraved into one’s consciousness but remains in a different form from the way that is seen in today’s politics, literature, and contemporary history.”¹

The Post-1945 Silence

The shock of enlightenment lasted briefly. In the post-war society, for the majority of Germans memories of the ‘Third Reich’ were forgotten, superseded and relativized. It was “Hitler, Himmler & Co” who were responsible for the crimes – “we couldn’t have done anything ourselves” was the way people exonerated themselves. It was exceptional for anyone to admit to complicity, and resistance to the National Socialists was largely denounced as ‘betrayal of the fatherland.’ This also held true for efforts to save those who were persecuted.

“Precisely because they were in the main not part of the leadership elite but ordinary people, the helpers and rescuers acted like a mirror posing the uncomfortable question to everyone: ‘And what did you do?’”²

Denazification

Like all other Nazi Party members, Karl Plagge had to be released from his employment and present himself to a denazification hearing. He gave the Darmstadt Denazification Court (Spruchkammer), where he was



Extract of the Tribunal documents, 1948

accused, a detailed CV, i.e. his biography, his history of activity within the Nazi Party, and an explanation of his conduct during the war. Kurt Hesse, the proprietor of the Hessenwerke and a good friend to Karl Plagge, was called as witness, as were a great many members of his former army unit, who testified as to his exemplary conduct toward them and his prisoners, and how he had protected them during the war. The hearing ended in February 1948 with the verdict of ‘fellow-traveler,’ the lowest incrimination apart from not guilty, that Plagge himself through his lawyer had asked for. Determining factors in reaching this verdict were not only that Plagge rejected the Nazi

movement even before the beginning of the war, but also his subsequent involvement on behalf of the Jews in Vilna. Most convincing to the Court was the surprise appearance of a witness who had traveled from Stuttgart, wanting to testify on behalf of some Jewish residents of the Displaced Persons camp at Ludwigsburg who were survivors of the HKP. On their behalf she was commissioned to find Karl Plagge and bring him their thanks for his involvement in saving their lives and to offer him help.

“The help offered by the deported Jews in Ludwigsburg shows that the person in question participated in an uncommon manner in the saving of lives of persecuted people.” – “The explanations of the witness Hesse prove that despite his membership of the NSDAP, he never left his way of humanity and tolerance.”³



Plagge's dismissal, 1945



Plagge's reinstatement after conclusion of Denazification Trial, 1948

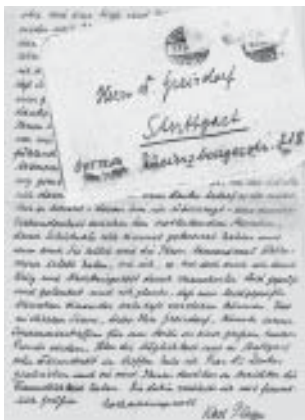
Doubts and Self-examination

In a letter to his wife written shortly before the withdrawal from Vilna in June 1944, and which escaped the censor, Karl Plagge speaks of his inner conflicts.

“... the worst conflict is, that all this [the HKP] is in complete contrast to what leading men wish and strive for: to be masters, ... to wield the lash, to subjugate the East and make them dependant on us. ... And how differently, how completely differently I see the things.”⁴

In the same letter he is critical of his membership of the NSDAP and describes his estrangement from the Nazi Party: he could never endorse a policy of “mass slaughter” for he could see “that it was madness and it was all bound to lead to utter ruin” – precisely because he was a former National Socialist, he felt responsible for everything that was happening.

Display Board 11: German Army Officer and Hero?



Letter from Karl Plagge to David Greisdorf, 1948

In his letters to the attorney Dr. Raphael Strauss, a Jewish lawyer involved in the compensation hearings, and to HKP survivor David Greisdorf, Plagge discusses some of his recollections of his time in Vilna during the war and his thoughts on his own part in it. Writing to Strauss in 1956 he says:

*“So it was possible for me, in an inconspicuous way, out of the stillness and darkness – perhaps as a ‘negative hero’ with the tenacity of the inferior (in the sense of that time), out of the weakness – to become a helper. My courage was perhaps only a forward-directed fear of not to be able to live up to my own moral standards, or of shame ...”*⁵

Karl Plagge in the Judgement of the HKP Survivors

Some survivors were somewhat reserved in their assessment of Plagge’s role. Some questioned the selflessness of his motives and assumed he was more concerned to maintain the ability of the HKP workshop to function for the sake of the army. Even today, some cannot conceive of the idea that any German would want to rescue Jews. But for many of the survivors, Karl Plagge is the hero who saved their lives:

*“He is indeed and will always remain, in my eyes and in the eyes and hearts of all the Jews who escaped from the HKP, the Righteous Man, the man who deserves to be so honored by Yad Vashem.”*⁶

Some compare him to Oscar Schindler and Raoul Wallenberg, without overlooking the fact that he was not a businessman, nor did he have the possibilities available to a diplomat. For them what counts and what makes him a hero is that he stood in front of the Jewish slave laborers and, whenever possible, protected them from the murderous incursions of the SS.

The Plague

In a letter from Karl Plagge to attorney Dr. Raphael Strauss on April 26, 1956 he writes:

*“I do not know if you are acquainted with the book by Albert Camus, ‘The Plague’. This book describes the story of a physician, Dr. Rieux, who lived in a city where suddenly there was an outbreak of the bubonic plague. In case you may have read this book, I would like to say that it was, and is, my endeavor to perhaps emulate Dr. Rieux. When I read the book for the first time after the war, it was as if I was reading my own thoughts that, during the war, kept going through my head again and again. The fate of the hapless Jews and the pain that these people had to endure never appeared to me to be other than what it in reality was, namely a disgraceful outrage. But this indignation is not directed equally, as a political person feels, towards those who allowed themselves to be used and become murderers. I wasn’t able to recognize the boundaries where the limit of guilt began or ended and, in a broader sense, as a German, I myself bear this guilt. There was no island escape from this plague. One had to be a witness of this outrage, in the course of which the only choice that remained was to hate or love the God who permitted all these things. This was the cause for me to revise my religious views, and I resisted loving a creation that martyred people and would even gas children and would let people be guilty as happened here. If the world order was determined through death, then it was perhaps better for God not to believe in Him and, instead, to struggle against death with all one’s strength, without lifting one’s eyes to heaven, where God was silent. If on earth there should only be ‘Scourges and Victims,’ then it is an obligation to stand, not on the side of the castigator, but to espouse the cause of the victim.”*⁷



La Peste (The Plague) by Albert Camus, published in 1947

“... because basically I am no ‘hero’ but a really timid person ...” (Karl Plagge)⁸

Display Board 11 : German Army Officer and Hero?

Footnotes

- 1) Letter from Karl Plagge to Attorney R. Strauss, April 26, 1956. Plagge's two letters to Strauss can be found in its entirety in Good, Appendix B, p. 251–260 (cit. p. 254). For the German transcript incl. English translation refer to the Plagge related Documents section at <http://www.searchformajorplagge.com/>
- 2) Wolfram Wette in Viefhaus, p. 116
- 3) Decision of the Denazification Court in Darmstadt on February 9, 1948. Denazification File of Karl Plagge, Main Archive of the State of Hesse, Wiesbaden (4.1.3 Abt. 520 Spruchkammer/DI/Plagge, Karl). In Good, p. 221–250 (cit. p. 250). Complete German transcript and English translation at <http://www.searchformajorplagge.com>
- 4) Letter from Karl Plagge to Anke Plagge, June 21, 1944 in the Plagge document depository at <http://www.searchformajorplagge.com> (slightly different translation offered)
- 5) Letter from Karl Plagge to Attorney R. Strauss, July 17, 1956. Translated by Mimi Sherwin and Irmgard, and published in Good, p. 256–260 (cit. p. 258–259). For further reference see footnote 1
- 6) Letter from William Begell to Yad Vashem, 2002, quoted in Viefhaus, p. 54–56. See also <http://www.searchformajorplagge.com>
- 7) Letter from Karl Plagge to Attorney R. Strauss, April 26, 1956; (Good, p. 251–252); see footnote 1
- 8) Ibidem, Good, p. 253: "... because I am basically no 'hero' but actually quite a nervous person ..."

Picture Credits for Display Board 11 'German Army Officer and Hero?'

- Fig. 1:** Karl Plagge ca. 1942 / Karl Plagge 1956; the date of the 1956 photo is not certain, possibly 1952 on the occasion of Kurt Hesse's confirmation
- Fig. 2:** Hessenwerke Darmstadt: dismissal of Plagge, 1945
- Fig. 3:** Karl Plagge (center) with his mother (on his right) and the Hesse family with godson Konrad; picture taken in 1947
- Fig. 4:** Hessenwerke Darmstadt: reinstatement of Plagge after conclusion of Denazification trial, 1948
- Fig. 5:** Management of the Hessenwerke: Kurt Hesse (center), Karl Plagge (second from left)
- Fig. 6:** Greisdorf family, Stuttgart 1948
- Fig. 7:** Darmstadt Spruchkammer Minutes and Decree, 9 February 1948, from the Karl Plagge Denazification File 1947/48 (see footnote 3)
- Fig. 8:** Letter from Karl Plagge to David Greisdorf, 20 February 1948
- Fig. 9:** La Peste (The Plague) by Albert Camus, published in 1947 (Pictures 1–8 all privately owned)
- Background Picture:** Karl Plagge, 1956 (private collection)

Awards and Encounters



Pointing at Karl Plagge's name engraved on the Wall of Honor at Yad Vashem, 2005 (L to R: Lazar Greisdorf, Simon Malkes, Hanni Skrobliès / Darmstadt History Workshop, Joerg Fiebelkorn, Marianne Viefhaus, Michael Good, Bill Begell, and Pearl Good)

Honored by Yad Vashem

It was the testimony of HKP survivors, the discovery of informative documents as well as the dogged efforts of Michael Good that finally produced a convincing overall picture of Plagge's selfless conduct in rescuing Jews. On July 22, 2004 the relevant commission of Yad Vashem honored Karl Plagge as Righteous Among the Nations, in recognition of the fact that during World War II he had helped Jews at the risk of his own life.



Pearl and her son Michael Good stand with members of Karl Plagge's family at the Wall of the Righteous at Yad Vashem; L to R: Erika Vogel, Werner Luetgert, Michael Good, Pearl Good, Konrad Hesse

On April 11, 2005 in the solemn Hall of Remembrance and the Garden of the Righteous, many guests gathered for the ceremonial public proclamation of this honor. For one day they were intimately bound together around the honoring of Karl Plagge: survivors and their descendants from various lands and continents; relatives of Karl Plagge from Germany; representatives of the town and university of Darmstadt; the German ambassador to Israel; many members of the alliance of Vilna Jews in Israel. The Yad Vashem representative, Dr. Mordechai Paldiel, gave especial thanks to Pearl Good in particular because she had

*"made the difficult journey with her family to Vilnius in 1999 and told the story of Karl Plagge to her children."*¹

And it was she who unveiled Karl Plagge's name on Wall of the Righteous.

Beit Vilna

Following the ceremony in Yad Vashem, the Association of Holocaust Survivors from Vilna and their descendants welcomed the guests to a joint celebration in 'Beit Vilna' (Vilna House) in Tel Aviv. The president of the alliance is Michael Shemiavitz, who is himself one of the survivors of the HKP labor camp. In his address on the occasion of the commemoration in Darmstadt in April 2005, he described how Karl Plagge had rescued him, removing him as a youth from the Vilna prison and saving him from execution.



HKP survivors in Beit Vilna, 2005



Memorial Plaque honoring Karl Plagge at the TUD, 2003

Technical University

In 2002, Pearl, William, Susan and Michael Good, along with Bill Begell paid a preliminary visit to Darmstadt, and as a result, at the suggestion of Marianne Viefhaus, the Senate of the Technical University of Darmstadt (TUD) erected a memorial plaque in 2003 in honor of their erstwhile student Karl Plagge.

Darmstadt

A few days after the honoring by Yad Vashem, the town of Darmstadt and the TUD honored Karl Plagge with a huge commemorative public ceremony held on April 15, 2005. Guests from Vilna came together with the group who had traveled from Yad Vashem. In February 2006, the

Ludwig-Georgs-Gymnasium (Grammar School) honored Plagge who had been a student there before WWI. Afterwards, on the initiative of ret'd. Colonel Manfred Foehr, the 'Frankenstein Barracks' near Darmstadt was renamed the 'Major-Karl-Plagge-Kaserne.'



Commemorative Ceremony at the Darmstadt Central-station on April 15, 2005



Memorial Plaque at the Ludwig-Georgs-Gymnasium in Darmstadt, 2006



Meeting at the TUD (L to R, first row: William and Pearl Good, Marianne Viefhaus; top row: Michael and Susan Good, head of the city parliament of Darmstadt Kurt Weidmann, TUD chancellor Hanns Seidler, and William Begell), Darmstadt 2002



Guests in Darmstadt, 2005



Renaming the barracks into 'Major-Karl-Plagge-Kaserne' (L to R: Alfons von Deschwanden, Lord Mayor of Darmstadt Walter Hoffmann, Major General Treche, Colonel ret'd. Manfred Foehr, Joerg Fiebelkorn, Mayor of Pfungstadt Horst Baier, Lieutenant Colonel Gabler), Darmstadt 2006

Alfons von Deschwanden

In 2005 the news that Plagge was being honored in Jerusalem reached the ears of Alfons von Deschwanden, who was a member of Plagge's HKP unit in Vilna from 1941 to 1944. Through his daughter Irmgard he contacted Michael Good and the Plagge group. He was able to authenticate and considerably amplify the research undertaken so far with detailed recollections and photographs taken in Vilna.



Alfons von Deschwanden and Michael Good, 2006

The Plagge Network

What had started as a small Plagge Research Group became a ramified network which now also embraced descendants of the next gen-



Paul Schwartzberg



Haya Haviv



Efroim Schuster with Haya, 1946

Display Board 12: Awards and Encounters

eration: Irmgard, the daughter of Alfons von Deschwenden, Paul Schwartzberg, the son of Jakov Schwartzberg, and Haya Haviv, the daughter of Efroim Schuster who, like Jakov Schwartzberg, survived the HKP liquidation and later emigrated to Israel. The Darmstadt History Workshop is also part of the network.

Recollection and Present Day

The Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum of Lithuania became a focus for the memories of Jewish Vilna and its demise. The Freiburg Support Fund for Surviving Baltic Jews supports the Union of Former Ghetto and KZ



Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum, The Green House, 2005

Prisoners in Vilna looking after the welfare of Holocaust survivors in Lithuania. The Darmstadt History Workshop maintains friendly contact with survivors in Lithuania and in other countries. In other places, too, friendly relations have developed with the survivors in Lithuania and elsewhere.



Union of Former Ghetto and KZ Prisoners in Vilna, 2005

“Our Actions Count”

At the end of his account of the successful search for Karl Plagge and impressed by the letters Plagge wrote to David Greisdorf in February and March 1948, Michael Good pays this tribute to Plagge’s character:

“After reading these letters I could see that ... they could only have been written by a good man. Plagge’s efforts to overcome the evil he saw around him had been successful, and, just as my father had been able to reunite with the Niemenczyn peasants who saved him, Plagge had seen the fruition of his efforts in this meeting with his former prisoners. He was not a perfect man. He may have joined the Nazi Party and helped bring them to power. He may or may not have risked his life, being careful to always play by the rules. He did not save the majority of his workers. But following his heart, he did what he thought he was able to do. He did not take the suicidal path of a martyr; neither did he follow the less difficult path of conformity taken by so many other Germans. He carefully stepped onto a new path that rang true to his sense of duty, of right and wrong. It was a path that would keep him, his men, and a large number of his prisoners alive through the war. His words rang clear to me: ‘What I was able and permitted to do for you and your friends was only the obvious duty of any feeling person towards his fellow human beings in distress.’ Characteristically humble, he downplayed his acts of heroism, calling them ‘inadequate’ in comparison to the horrors endured by the Jews of Vilna. But those of us looking back on those years are not misled; he saved hundreds of lives by his actions, and there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people alive today due to his courage. The Talmud teaches us that to save one life is to save a world. Karl Plagge teaches us that our actions do matter, that following one’s conscience can cause ripples of goodness and life to flow through the years and across the generations. It is a testament to his own humility that after visiting with the Greisdorfs, Plagge quietly went back home. Without fanfare, he lived the final ten years of his life in Darmstadt, slipping into obscurity and almost vanishing from history’s view.”²

In order that Karl Plagge’s name should never fade from memory, the Yad Vashem Certificate of Honor concludes with the words:

“His name shall be forever engraved on the Honor Wall in the Garden of the Righteous at Yad Vashem, Jerusalem.”³

“Whoever saves one life is as though he had saved the entire world.” (Talmud)

Display Board 12: Awards and Encounters

Footnotes

- 1) Michael Good, p. 190
- 2) Michael Good, p. 166–167
- 3) Certificate of Honor awarded to Plagge posthumously on October 14, 2004

Picture Credits for Display Board 12 ‘Awards and Encounters’

- Fig. 1:** Members of the Plagge group gather at the Wall of Honor, Yad Vashem 2005 (left to right: Lazar Greisdorf, Simon Malkes, Hanni Skroblied, Joerg Fiebelkorn, Marianne Viefhaus, Michael Good, Bill Begell, and Pearl Good), private collection
- Fig. 2:** Pearl and Michael Good stand with members of Karl Plagge’s family at the Wall of Honor at Yad Vashem, 2005 (left to right: Erika Vogel, Werner Luetgert, Michael Good, Pearl Good, Konrad Hesse), private collection
- Fig. 3:** HKP survivors in Beit Vilna, Tel Aviv 2005, private collection
- Fig. 4:** Members of the Plagge Group meet with Chancellor of the Technical University of Darmstadt Hanns Seidler, and City’s representative Kurt Weidmann, Darmstadt 2002, TUD Archives
- Fig. 5:** Memorial Plaque honoring Karl Plagge unveiled in 2003 at the Technical University of Darmstadt, TUD Archives
- Fig. 6:** Commemorative Ceremony in Darmstadt 2005, visiting Karl Plagge’s grave at the Darmstadt Old Cemetery (L to R, front row: Pola Shemiavitz, Pearl and William Good, Fania Brancovskaja, Michael Shemiavitz; top row: Simon Malkes, William Begell, Isaak Reches, Tobias Jafetas), private collection
- Fig. 7:** Commemorative Ceremony at the Darmstadt Centralstation on April 15, 2005, TUD Archives
- Fig. 8:** Commemorating Plagge at the Ludwig-Georgs-Gymnasium, Darmstadt 2006, private collection
- Fig. 9:** Unveiling the Honor Plaque renaming of the barracks into ‘Major-Karl-Plagge-Kaserne,’ Darmstadt 2006, private collection
- Fig. 10:** Alfons von Deschwanden and Michael Good, 2006, private collection
- Fig. 11:** Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum, The Green House (the Holocaust Exhibit), 2005, private collection
- Fig. 12:** Union of Former Ghetto and KZ Prisoners in Vilna, 2005, private collection
- Fig. 13:** Irmgard, private collection
- Fig. 14:** Paul Schwartzberg, private collection
- Fig. 15:** Haya Haviv, private collection
- Fig. 16:** Efraim Schuster with Haya, 1946, private collection
- Background Picture:** Honoring Ceremony for Karl Plagge at Yad Vashem, 2005, private collection

Glossary

For more detailed information we recommend *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* by Gutman, *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* by Rozett et al (eds.), and other general books of reference. We also sought valuable information from the Yad Vashem and the Jewish Virtual Library websites (see references for literature and media).

‘Aktion 1005’

Under the code name ‘Aktion 1005’ the Germans tried to cover all tracks of Nazi extermination policy in occupied Europe. It began in mid-1942 in strict secrecy and was conducted throughout 1944. All units involved were given the name ‘Sonderkommando 1005’ (special command 1005), each one consisted of several SD officers, members of the Sipo, and scores of German police guards. It was mainly Jews who were forced to open the mass graves, exhume and burn the bodies, and examine the ashes for valuables. They were killed when the cremation process was completed. In Ponary and Ninth Fort Kaunas some Jewish slave laborers managed to escape the Sonderkommando 1005; some survived and told about the atrocities.

Ashkenazim

Hebrew word origin describing the descendants of Yiddish speaking Jews primarily from the Rhineland and Franconia. They fled pogroms and persecution in the 13th and 14th centuries and migrated to Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, and Russia. The Ashkenazi Jews differ from the Sephardi Jews (Sephardim) and their descendants, who originated in the Iberian Peninsula and were expelled from Spain and Portugal after 1492.

The Bund / Bundist

The ‘General Jewish Labor Union of Lithuania, Poland and Russia’ – commonly abbreviated to ‘The Bund’ – was founded in Vilna in 1897. It was a socialist party and labor movement opposed to both czarist repression and feudal reactionary structures within the Jewish communities. The Bund represented a social, cultural and pedagogical mission in the sense of a modern Jewish enlightenment and ‘ethics of brotherliness.’ As opposed to Zionism, the Bund rejected emigration and sought to fight for equal rights ‘at home’ – i.e. then czarist Poland, Lithuania, and Belarus. In World War II, the Bund operated as an underground organization in the occupied territories; numerous Bundists joined the Jewish resistance movement.

Chassidism / Hasidism

The Jewish mystic movement was founded in the eighteenth century in Eastern Europe by Rabbi Baal Shem Tov in response to the intellectual scholarliness and religious formalism of Talmudic learning. He assigned the first place in religion not to mastery of scholarly texts and intellectual pursuits, but to an individual’s personal relationship with God, the sentiment and the emotion of faith. The movement emphasizes emotional values, piety, but also joy and exuberance. In its initial stages, a serious schism evolved between the hasidic and non-hasidic Jews; the most notable opponent being the Vilna Gaon. The Holocaust brought destruction to the Hasidic centers of Eastern Europe. Most survivors moved eventually to Israel or to America and established new centers of Hasidic Judaism.

The great Jewish philosopher, author, translator, and educator, Martin Buber (1878–1965), formulated much of his theories and teachings around Chassidism and Jewish mysticism. In 1938 Buber emigrated from Germany to Palestine/Israel where he taught at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; he passed away in 1965.

Criminal Orders

Commands issued by Hitler, the German army leadership, and individual commanders, which ordered, condoned or covered up crimes – to some extent even before the attack on the Soviet Union. These orders included among others the murder of Jews and the Slav civilian populations, communist ‘commissars,’ and prisoners of war.

DAF / German Labor Front

The German Labor Front (Deutsche Arbeitsfront; DAF) was the amalgamated Nazi trade union organization which replaced the free and diverse Weimar Republic trade unions outlawed in 1933. In order to ‘overcome class struggle’ and ensure smooth operations of all German industry and commerce, DAF members were not only workers but entrepreneurs as well. Thanks to mandatory membership fees – membership was theoretically voluntary – the DAF under its leader Robert Ley became the largest Nazi organization in the Third Reich. Propaganda, education, and leisure time activities were specifically directed towards the working class to promote the advantages of National Socialism. Kraft durch Freude’ (KdF; literally: Strength through Joy) was one of the DAF institutions that was very effective with the masses. It was a state controlled leisure organization that popularized the idea of the German ‘Volksgemeinschaft’ (the propagated Nazi society), through various cultural and tourist offers mainly for the German workers, such as trips, cruises, concerts, sporting and cultural activities.

Denazification

After the defeat of Germany in May 1945, the Allied Powers introduced a denazification program with the stated aim of eradicating Nazism and Militarism in Germany. All former members of the Nazi Party were systematically screened by so-called Denazification Courts (Spruchkammern). In this way their personal responsibility or blame for the crimes of the Nazi era were to be established and they were classified in five categories: 1. Major offenders; 2. Offenders (activists, militarists, profiteers); 3. Lesser offenders (on parole); 4. Fellow travelers; 5. Exonerated persons. Members of the Nazi Party were made to fill out questionnaires and classify themselves – too many offenders lied about their participation in the Nazi system and were not punished at all.

Displaced Persons / DP Camp

Those who survived the extermination and concentration camps and the death marches (Jews and non-Jews) were pooled together in camps for displaced persons. The DP camps were set up in Germany, Austria, and Italy after the war to repatriate the DPs to their countries of origin or transfer them to destinations for emigration. The facilities were administered by Allied military authorities and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). Between May and December 1945, most DPs from Western Europe were successfully repatriated. Jews mostly from Eastern Europe, who refused to return to the lands where their families had been murdered and where antisemitism still ran rampant, became long-term wards of the DP camps. Restrictive U.S. and British immigration quo-

tas encouraged Zionist agencies to assist DPs in organizing emigration to Palestine / Israel and the United States. By 1952 almost all DP camps were closed; Fohrenwald in Bavaria, being the last one, closed in 1957.

Einsatzgruppen

Einsatzgruppen were mobile killing squads composed primarily of German SS, Security Service (SD) and Security Police (Sipo). They had among their tasks the murder of those perceived to be racial or political enemies behind German combat lines in the occupied territories. Einsatzgruppen received assistance from the advancing German Wehrmacht and drew on local police support and collaborators when carrying out mass-murder operations. For the German attack on the Soviet Union, four Einsatzgruppen were formed (A, B, C, D) which became vital in the Nazi program to murder all European Jews. The Einsatzgruppen, under the direct command of the Reich Security Main Office (Reichssicherheitshauptamt) in Berlin, were to operate regionally, and Einsatzgruppe A, being the largest one, fanned out across the Baltic (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia) towards Leningrad (now St. Petersburg). Each Einsatzgruppe was divided into smaller units referred to as Einsatz- or Sonderkommandos and consisted of about 600 to 1.000 persons.

Einsatzstab Rosenberg (ERR)

In 1940, a Nazi looting organization known as the 'Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg' (The Reichsleiter Rosenberg Institute) was formed. It was named after Alfred Rosenberg, the official chief Nazi philosopher, head of the Nazi Party's foreign affairs department, and Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories. Authorized by Hitler himself, the ERR plundered, seized, and stole art objects and cultural items from every German-occupied territory. Archives, libraries, cultural and religious valuables from Jewish communities and proprietors were especially targeted. All Lithuanian synagogues and Jewish cultural institutions were affected, in Vilna most notably the YIVO and the Strashun-Library.

Fareynegte Partizaner Organizatsye (FPO)

Fareynegte Partizaner Organizatsye (United Partisan Organization) was a Jewish resistance organization established in 1942 in the Vilna Ghetto by various Zionist, socialist, and communist youth groups. They engaged in sabotage, instigated ghetto uprisings, liaised and fought with the partisans in the forests.

Gaon

Hebrew honorific for a prominent Talmudic scholar to indicate greatness and wisdom. Renowned to this day is the Vilna Gaon, Eliyahu ben Zalman (1720–1797). He rejected mystical Hasidism as well as the ideas of Jewish Enlightenment represented by Moses Mendelssohn. He was convinced that the study of the Torah is the very life of Judaism, and that this study must be conducted in a scientific and not in a merely scholastic manner.

Geheime Staatspolizei / Gestapo

The Secret State Police (Gestapo) under Hermann Goering was formally organized after the Nazis seized power in 1933 to investigate and combat all tendencies dangerous to the state. The Gestapo came under Heinrich Himmler's authority and SS control in 1934; later in 1936, the Gestapo merged with the Kriminalpolizei (Kripo; Criminal Police) to become the Sicherheitspolizei (Sipo; Secret Police). When the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA; Reich Security Main Office), a subordinate organization of the SS, was created in 1939, the Sipo joined the Sicherheitsdienst (SD; Security Service) under Reinhard Heydrich, then head of the RSHA.

German Revolution 1918–1919 / November Revolution

The revolutionary uprising that spread throughout Germany was carried out by workers' and soldiers' councils. The events eventually led to the end of the monarchies in Germany and Austria-Hungary and the establishment of parliamentary Republics.

'Hapunes' / 'Khapuny' / Snatcher

Along with paramilitary Lithuanian auxiliary units, the so-called snatchers or grabbers (Yiddish: Hapunes; Lithuanian: Ypatingas Burys) belonged to a dreaded SS-Sonderkommando. They tracked down Jews in hiding and turned them over to the Gestapo where they received head-money for each kidnapped Jew.

Hitler-Stalin Pact / Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

Refers to the officially titled 'Treaty of Non-aggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics' signed in August of 1939. The treaty included a secret protocol dividing the independent countries of Poland and the Baltic states into Nazi and Soviet spheres of influence. When Germany finally invaded Poland, the eastern part was occupied by Germany, the western part and the Baltic States by the Soviet Union. The Pact remained in effect until Nazi Germany attacked and invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941 in Operation Barbarossa.

Holocaust

When the Hebrew Bible was translated into Latin, they borrowed the term *holokaustum* from Greek and rendered the Hebrew *olah* for whole-burnt offering as *holocaustum*, from which the English derives. Holocaust, in the sense of the Jewish disaster, was in general English use by the 1960s. By the early 1980s – mainly as a result of the popularity and impact of NBC's 1978 series *The Holocaust* – the term had internationally become the prevalent and readily recognized word referring to the systematic Nazi mass murder of Jews. In Israel and among many Holocaust scholars though, the Hebrew word *shoah* (catastrophe) has always been the word chiefly used for the Nazi-organized destruction of European Jewry.

Jaeger Report

Named after SS Colonel Karl Jaeger, who as commander of the Einsatzkommando 3, one of the subunits of Einsatzgruppe A (Stahlecker), was responsible for the massacres of the Lithuanian Jews. In his report dated December 1, 1941, Jaeger provides a very detailed list of the murders carried out by EK 3 under his command according to date, place, number of victims ('Jews and communists') as well as sex and age of those murdered. The total number of victims during the period from 4 July to 27 November 1941 is given in the report as 137,346 men, women and children – to understand the magnitude: this is for one Einsatzgruppe, in a five month period, in one area. Neither Jaeger nor Stahlecker ever stood trial for their crimes. Stahlecker was mortally wounded by Soviet partisans in March 1942. Jaeger survived the war and lived in Germany under his own name until he was discovered and arrested, even before the Soviet Union handed over the report, which had fallen into their hands on the liberation of Lithuania in 1941, to the German judiciary in 1963. Karl Jaeger committed suicide in prison (1959) while he was awaiting trial. The Jaeger Report subsequently became public in Germany only in 1963.

Jewish Resistance

In the Jewish resistance of Eastern Europe, the ideologically and politically very different youth organizations formed a close alliance. In Vilna the FPO was supported as much by religious-Zionist and socialist-Zionist organizations as by non-Zionist Bundists and the communist youth movement. Jewish armed

Glossary

resistance was offered in over 100 ghettos in occupied Poland and the Soviet Union and was the most forceful form of Jewish opposition to Nazi policies. Thousands of mainly young Jews resisted by escaping from the ghettos into the forests to join Soviet partisan units or form separate partisan units. Jews in the ghettos and camps also responded to Nazi oppression with various forms of spiritual resistance. They made conscious attempts to preserve the history and communal life of the Jewish people despite Nazi efforts to eradicate the Jews from human memory.

Judenrat

Within most of the ghettos in Nazi occupied Eastern Europe, a governing council of Jewish leaders was formed and called Judenrat (plural: Judenraete). These councils were established by Nazi officials to govern the ghettos and to enforce Nazi rules. They were responsible for benevolence, health and welfare, and general civic concerns of the community, right down to organizing the orderly deportation to the death camps. Judenraete, generally composed of notabilities with strong ties in the Jewish community, held a desperate position, torn between enforcing the orders of the Nazis and protecting the ghetto prisoners. They were condemned to fail as they were ultimately a mere extension of Nazi Judeocidal policies.

Jung Vilne / Young Vilna

Jung Vilne was a group of young avant-garde Yiddish writers and artists in Vilna in the 1930s who were also committed to political activism. Their members were the ones to build up and maintain a rich cultural life in the Vilna Ghetto. Numerous Jung Vilne members were involved in the resistance movement and several fell victim to annihilation. Surviving members continued their literary activity around the world and include the poets Chaim Grade, Abba Kovner, Shmerke Kaczerginski, Abraham Sutzkever, and others.

Litvakes

Ashkenazi Jews who in the 13th and 14th centuries settled in the lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, especially present day Lithuania, Belarus, Latvia and northern Ukraine, came in time to be called Litvakes (English usage: Litvaks). Litvakes is also the self-determination of Jews in Lithuania today and of those dispersed around the world with Lithuanian ancestry. Although there are a number of historically Lithuanian Hasidic groups, Litvakes are by their heritage Misnagdim (anti-Hasidim) and continue to be followers of the Vilna Gaon. They have always been characterized by their rational approach to learning and exceptional dedication to education and knowledge. Many prominent contemporary yeshivas in the USA and Israel are continuations of the early Lithuanian institutions for the study of Thora and Talmud and often bear the same names. The Litvakes share a common language known as Litvish (Lithuanian Yiddish). In Vilna, the First World Litvak Congress convened in 2001 with the Second following in 2004; the Third World Congress of Litvaks is planned for August 2009."

Memel Territory / Memelland

Memelland, German for Memel Territory, applied to the district of former German East Prussia situated on the east coast of the Baltic Sea and the northern bank of the Neman River. After WW I, the Treaty of Versailles placed the district under the control of the League of Nations until Lithuanian troops annexed the area in 1923, and Memelland became an autonomous region within Lithuania. Among the German population, a strong Nazi movement soon began to surge and culminated in the 1938 electoral victory of the Lithuanian Nazi Party, which had been forbidden between 1934 and 1938. This was followed by an ultimatum, issued by Nazi Germany on March 1939,

demanding Memelland's return into the Reich which Lithuania had to comply with.

Nationalistic Organizations in Lithuania

Violently antisemitic and nationalistic organizations began to increase by the end of the 1920s and during the 1930s, among them the 'Iron Wolf' (1927), the 'Lithuanian Businessmen' (1930), the 'Society for the Revival of Lithuania' (1933), and others. Antisemitism became well established within society. When Lithuania was occupied and subsequently annexed by the Soviet Union (1939-1941), nationalistic Lithuanians, who had fled to Nazi-Germany, founded the anti-communist and antisemitic Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF) in Berlin. With German support the LAF agitated widely in Lithuania against the 'Jewish-Soviet regime,' launching antisemitic propaganda and organizing underground units. The bogeyman of a 'Judeo-Bolshevik threat' matched the German Nazi propaganda and turned the nationalistic groups into helpers of the murderous Einsatzgruppen. These anti-communists called themselves 'partisans' and after the arrival of German forces in Lithuania they carried out pogroms against the Lithuanian Jewish population. This was tolerated by the German Wehrmacht and actively encouraged by the SS-Einsatzgruppen. By the end of July 1941, Lithuanian 'partisans' were organized into auxiliary police battalions under SS command; these units became ruthless and reliable collaborators in carrying out the annihilation of the Jews of Lithuania.

November 1938 Pogroms / Reichskristallnacht

November 9, 1938, the Nazis unleashed a wave of pogroms against Germany's Jews. More than a thousand synagogues and thousands of Jewish businesses and homes were damaged or destroyed, nearly one hundred Jews were killed, thousands of them were brought into concentration camps. This event came to be called 'Reichskristallnacht' ("Night of Broken Glass") for the shattered store windowpanes that carpeted German streets. The pretext for this violence was the November 7 assassination of a German diplomat in Paris by Herschel Grynszpan, a Jewish teenager whose parents, along with 17,000 other Polish Jews, had recently been expelled from the Reich. Though portrayed as spontaneous outbursts of popular outrage, these pogroms were calculated acts of retaliation carried out by the SA, SS, and local Nazi Party organizations. The pogroms were the prelude to the total disenfranchisement of Jews within Germany's sphere of power and forerunners of the Nazi extermination policy implemented with the start of the war.

Nuremberg Laws

At the annual Party rally held in Nuremberg in September 1935, the Nazis announced new laws which – consistent with the Nazi Party program – stripped German Jews of their citizenship and denied access to due process. The Nuremberg Laws, as they became known, also outlawed marriage and extramarital sexual relations between 'Aryans' and Jews, and defined genetic determinants of 'Jewishness.' After the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, a dozen supplementary Nazi decrees were issued that eventually outlawed the Jews completely, depriving them of their rights as human beings.

Nuremberg Trials

The term refers to two sets of trials of Nazi war criminals conducted after the World War II. The first and best known of these trials was the 'Trial of the Major War Criminals' held from November 1945 to October 1946 before the International Military Tribunal (IMT), which was made up of representatives of France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States. Twenty-two of Nazi Germany's political, military, and

economic leaders were charged with crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. Twelve of the defendants were sentenced to death, among them: Goering (second man behind Hitler), Kalten-brunner (chief of the RSHA), Rosenberg (chief ideologue for the Nazi Party), Ribbentrop (minister of foreign affairs), et al. The most prominent Nazi figures (Hitler himself, Himmler, head of the SS, and Goebbels, minister for propaganda) – had shirked responsibility and avoided trial by committing suicide.

The second set of trials, known as the Subsequent Nuremberg Proceedings, were conducted before U.S. military tribunals (NMT) between December 1946 and April 1949 and comprised twelve subsequent trials. Physicians, army officers, jurists, politicians, and leading German industrialists and bankers were among the groups who stood trial.

October Revolution

The Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917 (by the Julian calendar still in use in Russia at the time) under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky laid the foundation for a new political order which would eventually lead to the creation of the Soviet Union in 1922.

Partitions of Poland (1772–1795)

The Partitions of Poland, which were decisive points in the history of Lithuania, took place in the second half of the 18th century and ended the existence of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Altogether three partitions were carried out dividing up the Commonwealth lands among czarist Russia and the monarchies of Prussia and Habsburg Austria.

Pogrom

Pogrom is a Russian word describing a form of extreme violence directed against the persons and property of a religious, racial or national minority, characterized by looting, mistreatment, murder or even genocide. Since the late 19th century, the term is usually applied to denote extensive violence against Jews.

Potsdam Conference

At the last World War II conference held in Potsdam, a place with a very Prussian tradition near Berlin, in July/August 1945, the three heads of governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union gathered to discuss post-war arrangements and peace settlements in Europe. This included working out the details regarding the division of Germany and the creation of a four-power Allied Control Council to administer the agreed upon zones of occupation. Other decisions reached by the participants related among others to the abolishment of all Nazi organizations and the German Wehrmacht, as well as to denazification programs.

Reichskommissariat Ostland

Reichskommissariat Ostland was one of the two major administrative units of the German civil administration in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union; the other was Reichskommissariat Ukraine. Reichskommissariat Ostland included the three Baltic States – Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia – as well as parts of Belorussia. It was commanded by Hinrich Lohse, a former Nazi district leader of Schleswig-Holstein, with local administration based in Riga. Ostland was sub-divided into four 'General Regions' (Generalkommissariats) and Lithuania became the Generalkommissariat Litauen. Commissioner of Vilna (Stadtkommissar) was Hans Hingst, a Nazi official also from Northern Germany. The political objectives of the German administration were first and foremost the economic exploitation for the benefit of the German Wehrmacht as well as the deportation of slave laborers to Germany. The civil

administrations of the Reichskommissariats were directly involved in the annihilation of Jews and the persecution of all those opposing the Nazi regime. The responsible Nazi official on the highest level was Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories, Alfred Rosenberg, the chief ideologue of the Nazi-movement. He was sentenced to death in the Nuremberg Trial in 1946.

SA

The Sturmabteilung (abbreviated SA), also known as Stormtroopers or Brownshirts, was the militant wing of the Nazi Party to terrorize political opponents. Formed as Hitler's own private army and bodyguard units in the early 1920s, directed against socialist groups and to keep them from disrupting Nazi Party gatherings, the SA under its leader Ernst Roehm developed into a powerful multi-million man militia. In 1934, the SA was superseded and replaced as dominant force by the SS under the leadership of Himmler. The SA remained active as the mass organization of the Nazi Party, organizing antisemitic operations and maintaining military training units.

Schutzmannschaften / Protective Forces

When the German Wehrmacht invaded the Soviet Union, collaborating non-German forces were organized into units collectively called Schutzmannschaften which fell under the SS command structure. These local auxiliary units, mostly made up of nationalistic and antisemitic volunteers and organizations, were built up to become strong paramilitary forces in the German occupied territories. In Lithuania as part of the Reichskommissariat Ostland, German authorities organized antisemitic and anti-communist Nazi collaborators into auxiliary police battalions and employed them in surveillance, persecution and assassination operations.

Security Service (Sicherheitsdienst – SD) and Security Police (Sicherheitspolizei – SiPo)

The SD was an SS agency which served as the political intelligence service of the Nazi Party. It was set up in 1931 to detect political opponents and seek out information about the population. Under Reinhard Heydrich, the SD created a wide network of agents and by 1940, the organization consisted of over 3,000 full-time agents and informants. The key departments of the Gestapo and Kripo were commanded by SD officers, since Heydrich had meanwhile taken command of the Gestapo while remaining chief of the SD. In the occupied territories, the SD played a central role in oppression and annihilation. The SiPo was formed in 1936 through the amalgamation of the Gestapo and Criminal police (Kripo) and their incorporation into the SS. In 1939, the SiPo was joined with the Sicherheitsdienst (SD) to form the Reich Security Main Office (Reichssicherheitshauptamt – RSHA) commanded by Heydrich and, later, Ernst Kaltenbrunner. Eventually, all services were centralized within and organized as the central terror apparatus RSHA in Berlin.

SS

The abbreviation for Schutzstaffel (literally protection echelon), originally conceived as the black-uniformed elite corps of the Nazi Party with the SS personnel supposedly as the model for the Nazi vision of a 'master race.' Under the leadership of Heinrich Himmler, the SS grew from a small paramilitary formation to become the central terror organization of the Nazi regime. With the establishment of the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA), the SS took charge of political intelligence gathering, the German police, and the central security apparatus – that is the concentration camps, and the systematic mass murder of Jews and other victims.

Glossary

Stahlecker Report

Named after Walter Stahlecker, SS Brigadier General and chief of the SS Einsatzgruppe A, this lengthy report – dated October 15, 1941 – was directed to the leadership of the SS and described in detail the methods employed in carrying out the mass murders between June and October 1941 in the Baltic lands. It later served as proof of evidence in the Nuremberg trials to prosecute Einsatzgruppen membership which was declared criminal by the International Military Tribunal.

Strashun Library

Established in 1892 through the endowment of the renowned Jewish scholar, philanthropist, and book collector Mattit-yahu Strashun (1817–1885), this was the largest collection of manuscripts and books in Yiddish in the whole of Europe. Before the Holocaust, the library served as one of the most important cultural institutions of Vilna.

Treaty of Versailles

This treaty, concluded in June 1919 between Germany and the more than twenty allied powers, marked the internationally legal end of the First World War. It contained the charter of the League of Nations, settled the transfer of territories including Alsace-Lorraine to France, and others to Poland (reestablished after 150 years) and the newly formed state of Czechoslovakia; it circumscribed German military power and laid down reparation payments calculated on the basis that Germany alone was responsible for the war. The anti-democratic forces like the strengthening Nazi Party in Germany disputed the treaty as a shameful peace (*Schand-frieden*) dictated by the victors. In 1937 Nazi Germany revoked the treaty.

Vilna

(Lithuanian: Vilnius; Polish: Wilno; Yiddish: Vilne.)

From 1918–1920 this was the capital of the Republic of Lithuania that had become independent from Russia; from 1920–1939 it came under Polish rule; 1939–1941 and 1944–1989 it was the capital of the Soviet Republic of Lithuania. Since 1990 it is the capital of the independent Republic of Lithuania.

Weimar Coalition

The Weimar Coalition is the name given to the coalition of the Social Democrats, the Liberals (DDP), and the Catholic Center Party. They approved the parliamentary constitution of the Weimar Republic in contrast to the right-wing extremists and communists.

Yad Vashem

Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, was established in Jerusalem in 1953 by an act of the Israeli Knesset. Yad Vashem (Hebrew: a memorial and a name) is the Jewish people's memorial to the murdered six million; it contains the world's largest repository of information on the Holocaust.

Yiddish

Yiddish originated in the Ashkenazi culture that developed from about the 10th century in the Rhineland as a variety of Middle High German and then spread to Eastern Europe in the 13th and 14th centuries. Yiddish is written with the Hebrew alphabet and is marked by the extensive inclusion of words of Slavic and Hebrew origin. The most frequent use of Yiddish as a highly sophisticated language in literature and science is largely due to the houses of study, usually adjacent to the synagogues, and the widespread Lithuanian Talmudic schools (*yeshivas*) in the 18th and 19th centuries. The Holocaust, however, stripped the language of its native speakers, as the extensive Jewish commu-

nities that used Yiddish in their day-to-day life were largely destroyed. Reports of the number of current Yiddish speakers vary significantly, but do agree that the number of speakers within the widely dispersed Orthodox Jewish communities has been increasing.

YIVO

The Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut or Yiddish Scientific Institute was founded in Vilna by Max Weinrich in 1925 to research and systematize the Yiddish language and culture. Within a few years it had collected 40,000 Yiddish volumes and manuscripts. The young writers Abraham Sutzkever and Shmerke Kaczerginski were closely involved with YIVO and, at risk to their own lives, rescued manuscripts, books, and cultural treasures during their time as ghetto prisoners. After liberation the hidden treasures were smuggled out of the sphere of Soviet administration to New York or remained in Vilnius until they were catalogued in the 1990s. A significant part of the YIVO and Strashun Libraries, both taken over and looted by the Einsatzstab Rosenberg, were discovered in Germany, reclaimed and brought to New York, where the YIVO headquarters had moved in 1940.

Zionism

Zionism derives its name from 'Zion,' the name of the temple mount in Jerusalem. It arose in the 19th century as a social and political movement whose aim was to establish a 'safe home' for Jews in Palestine. Thanks to Theodor Herzl (1860–1904) and his Zionist World Organization, it gained increasing political significance as a religious idea (return to Zion), a secular idea of a nation state, and as a response to discrimination and persecution.

Media

Film

Out of the Forest by Limor Pinhasov and Yaron Kaftori. Premiered in 2004 at the Berlin Film Festival; Original: Mekivun hayaar, Israel 2003. [Documentary about the massacres at Ponary based on the diary of local Polish resident Kazimierz Sakowicz.] Hebrew, Russian, Polish, English, English subtitles.

View trailer: http://www.livecity.co.il/40420/Out_Of_The_Forest

Shoah by Claude Lanzmann. Nine-hour film completed in 1985 about the Holocaust. English subtitles.

<http://www.eurekavideo.co.uk/moc/catalogue/shoah/>

The Lovely Faces of the Murderers by Saulius Berzinis in co-operation with the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum. Documentary premiered in 2005 in Vilnius.

See announcement in VGJSM newsletter: <http://media.search.lt/GetFile.php?OID=162441&FID=474301>

Stiller Held: Der deutsche Major Karl Plagge rettete einst Hunderte von Juden vor dem Tod (Quiet Hero: The German Major Karl Plagge once saved hundreds of Jews from death). Feature at 3Sat Kulturzeit on November 16th, 2006.

http://www.3sat.de/3sat.php?http://www.3sat.de/film_index.html

Partisans of Vilna: The Untold Story of Jewish Resistance During World War II. Directed by Josh Waletzky and produced by Aviva Kempner, the film had its world premiere at the Berlin Film Festival in 1986.

<http://www.docurama.com/productdetail.html?productid=NV-NVG-9614>

Sag Nie, Du Gehst den Letzten Weg (Never Say, You are Walking Your Last Road). A Documentary film by Sabine Friedrichs und Roswitha Dasch. Produced by Mizwa – Zeit zu Handeln, e.V., Germany, 2002.

Ghetto by Audrius Juzenas. Adaptation from the play from Joshua Sobol of the same name (Ghetto). Release date in Germany in 2006 by Stardust Filmverleih.

<http://www.stardust-filmverleih.de/index.aspx?target=MovieDetail&id=68>

The World was Ours by Mira Jedwabnik Van Doren. A 58-minute documentary depicting the Jewish community of Vilna before its destruction in World War II. <http://www.thevilnaproject.org/film.html>

Wir Leben Ewig (We will live forever). Documentation by Carla Knapp with survivors of the Vilna Ghetto Rachel Margolis, Shoshana Rabinovici, Masha Rolnikaite, Fania Brancovskaja, et al. German-Yiddish Original with German subtitles, Austria 2000.

<http://wolfsmutter.com/artikel222>

Websites

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: <http://www.ushmm.org/>

The Jewish Virtual Library: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/index.html>

Yad Vashem: <http://www.yadvashem.org/>

Jewish Community of Lithuania: <http://litvakai.mch.mii.lt/index.en.htm>

Aktion Reinhard Camps: <http://www.deathcamps.org/>

Holocaust Survivors: <http://www.holocaustsurvivors.org/>

Documents related to the Holocaust and National Socialism (Nuremberg Trials, Jaeger Report, Stahlecker Report, Eichmann Trial etc.):

The Avalon Project at Yale Law School (http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/imt.asp)

The Nizkor Project (<http://www.nizkor.org/>)

Mazal Library (<http://www.mazal.org/archive.htm>)

Documents and stories relating to Karl Plagge compiled by Michael Good: <http://www.searchformajorplagge.com/>

Education About Holocaust: www.shoah.smm.lt

Centropa Student (e-books): www.centropa.org

Holocaust Education & Archive Research Team: www.holocaustresearchproject.org

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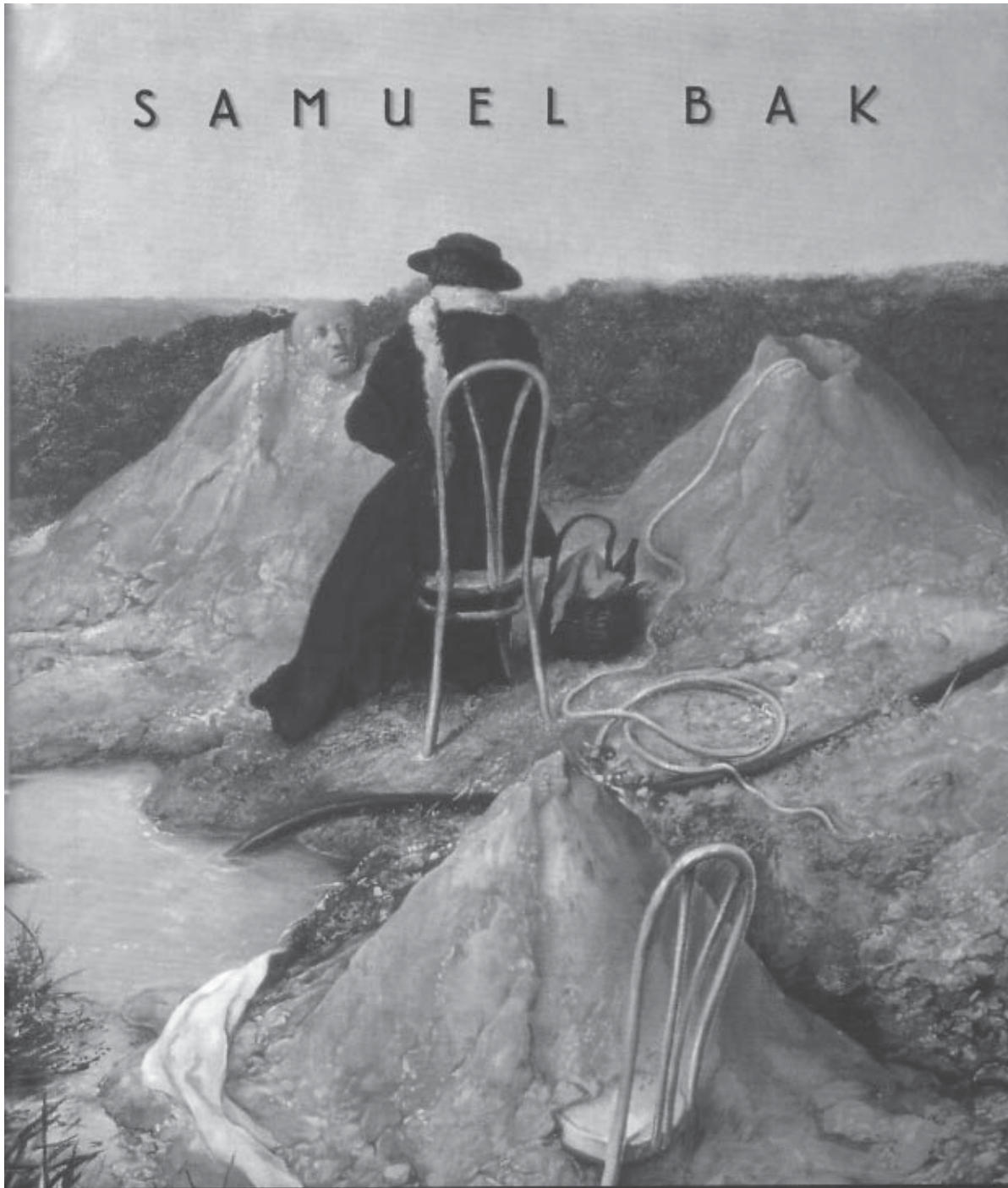


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