



## Jews go into Hiding in Berlin 1943–45

### **ETERNAL ECHOES**

Teach and Learn About the Holocaust

# Jews go into Hiding in Berlin 1943–1945

## Berlin Jews Threatened by Deportation

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The Friedrichstrasse station. (The original photo from 1938 has been slightly retouched.)

In early 1943, while Jewish communities in most German towns had already been eradicated, about 33 000 Jews were still living in Berlin. Only Jews in so-called “mixed marriages” were exempted from the deportations. Although deportations proceeded heavily in Berlin, many Jews were still employed as forced labourers in the war industries there. But the authorities were keen to deport them as well. Polish forced labourers were to be transported into the Reich to take over their work. Some managers and foremen in the local factories who came to know about this replacement early enough decided to forewarn their Jewish workers, which resulted in even more Jews going into hiding

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Gestapo Headquarters in Berlin located at No. 8 Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse – a frightful address from 1933 onward.

On February 27, 1943, the Gestapo, local police and even armed SS organised a massive raid against the Berlin Jews. Almost in an instant, thousands of Jewish workers had been arrested in their factories and brought to local collection camps. The raids continued for a week. 7 000 Jews were deported to Auschwitz within days. But about 4 000 Jews managed to escape and tried to go underground in the city.



Postcard of the Friedrichstrasse, Berlin around 1940.

search for lodging forced Jews in hiding to change their locations frequently. References to reliable helpers were given by word of mouth among the persecuted Jews, and that way many Jews in hiding played an active role in saving others as well.

Jews in hiding had to become invisible from the first moment. Many tried to slip into false identities, so they did not have to stay in hiding day and night. Nevertheless, they needed somewhere to sleep, food, money, a place to wash, neat clothing and many other facilities in order to give the appearance of living like any other citizen. Therefore they had to find non-Jewish helpers. But few of the Berlin Jews still had contact with non-Jews at that time. At first, many others sought refuge with Jews who lived in “mixed marriages”. These friends were often helpful, but they were themselves under surveillance, seriously exposed, and subject to severe punishment for even the smallest infractions.

Therefore further contacts had to be made, and the

## Courageous Helpers and Acts of Resistance



The chemist Arthur Ketzer took in the whole Frankenstein family in Berlin. Edith Berlow, later Hirschfeldt, gave shelter to Walter and several other Jews in her Berlin apartment.

In the city of Berlin there were still some non-Jewish groups and individuals who did not support the Nazi regime. They were found among members of the workers’ movement, intellectuals, artists as well as some devout Christians. Many helpers had already experienced persecution under the Nazi regime themselves. And there were also “ordinary” citizens who still didn’t agree with Nazi ideology. Some felt obliged to help Jews in need, and regarded this as a possibility to realise their silent opposition as well. But only few such as the circle of Walter’s helpers Arthur Ketzer and Edith Berlow linked helping persecuted Jews with other acts of active resistance. Through links among such people some Berlin Jews managed to escape to other German towns and villages, and a few were even able to secretly escape into Europe’s only two neutral—and therefore safe—countries in Europe: Switzerland or Sweden.



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Private photo of the German Military Police on a train station in 1943. The man is wearing the characteristic metal emblem of the unit on a chain around his neck. The Military Police therefore was given the nickname “bandog” (“the Pit Bull”), in German *Kettenhund*.

Jewish men hiding in Germany faced greater challenges than women. They had to be careful to avoid arrest as deserters. As German men were subject to conscription, military police patrols frequently checked passers-by in the streets or on public transport. If Jewish men appeared as “Aryans” in the public, they could be stopped and asked for their identity papers, as Walter once discovered. Although false military identity documents were sold on the black market, few Jews could afford them since forgers demanded extremely large sums far in excess of that needed to obtain other forged documents also in circulation.

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Criminal Commissar Jean Blome questions Stella Kubler (alias Issakson) about her wartime activities in Berlin denouncing Jews to the Gestapo.

Everybody involved in rescue attempts was constantly in danger. Suspicious neighbours could betray hiding places to the police. Another major threat came from Jewish collaborators, of which there were roughly twenty in Berlin. Hoping to be exempted from deportations, they gained the trust of Jews in hiding, took advantage of mutual advice, and finally forwarded information to the Gestapo. And, once Jews were caught in hiding, the Gestapo tried to force out further information about secret underground networks.

Serious punishment also threatened the helpers. Although there was no law prohibiting aid to Jews, they could be taken into police custody and even be sent to a concentration camp, as happened to chemist Arthur Ketzer a while after he had taken in the Frankenstein family.

## Berlin Hit by Air Raids

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Berlin 1945.

more, the fears and strains of such a life were so heavy on some of them that they took their own lives. After the war had ended, only about 1 700 Jews surfaced from the underground in Berlin.

Arrests and the impact of war reduced the opportunities to find help. Lots of potential homes were lost due to the increasingly severe air raids on Berlin and other cities. But the chaos in the destroyed towns also created new opportunities for those in hiding. Since many people became homeless and local offices were destroyed, it became easier to slip into a false identity and, as Leonie did, to pass off as a victim of war under a false name.

It is not known exactly how many Berlin Jews tried to go underground. A fairly reliable estimate is at least 6 000. Only about a third of them managed to survive in this way. The rest were eventually captured and deported; others were killed in air raids. Others still fell seriously ill, could not receive medical attention and died in hiding. Further-

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