WHAT WE COULD NOT SHOUT OUT TO THE WORLD, WE BURIED IN THE GROUND.
COMMEMORATION OF THE RINGELBLUM ARCHIVE

CONCENTRATION CAMP BARRACKS TO BE DISPLAYED AT NEW IWM HOLOCAUST GALLERY
CONSERVATOR’S RENOVATION OF BATH BARRACKS AND GAS CHAMBERS AT MAJDANEK
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"IF THIS IS A MAN – EXCLUSIONS IN THE MODERN WORLD". INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE. REGISTRATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

OBJECTS CARRY MEMORIES

JEWS IN THE RED ARMY, 1941–1945. YAD VASHEM RESEARCH PROJECT

DEATH MARCHES: EVIDENCE AND MEMORY
We invite all of you to work closely with us. We would be grateful to receive information about events, projects, publications, exhibitions, conferences or research that we should share with our readers. We also accept proposals for articles.

Paweł Sawicki, Editor-in-Chief

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All editions: memoria.auschwitz.org
Survivor testimony has played an integral role in Holocaust education for the past several decades. Recognized worldwide by leading organizations as a best practice, survivor testimony has personalized the history of the Holocaust, allowing us to understand the human cost of antisemitism, hatred and intolerance.

In order to preserve survivor testimony for future generations, Michelle Glied-Goldstein has been working with survivors in Toronto, Canada, along with their children and grandchildren to create a program, Carrying Holocaust Testimony, that will ensure survivor voices remain at the forefront of Holocaust education as we face a world without in-person survivor testimony.

Melissa Mikel (MM): What is the Carrying Holocaust Testimony program?
Michelle Glied Goldstein (MGG): In this program, descendants of Survivors share their families’ personal histories with students and other audiences using their own voices, first-hand video testimony from a filmed personal interview with their parent or grandparent who survived the Holocaust, artifacts, photos and their own personal history of growing up in the shadows of the Holocaust.

MM: What are the goals of Carrying Holocaust Testimony?
MGG: As an organization, our primary goal is to become a resource for other Holocaust education centres, just as our parents were. We envision having a list of descendants who would each be available to share their parent’s history with students. Ideally, Holocaust centres or schools will simply call on people from that list when they want to include “Survivor Testimony” as part of an educational program.

From an educational perspective, our goal is to help our learners understand what actually happened to individual people, how it was able to happen, and what they can do to help ensure it never happens again. Our presentations include life before the war, during the Holocaust, and after liberation – and help students understand the long-term repercussions of crimes against humanity. We include artifacts and photos that correlate
directly to the individual histories and help provide support in the defence against Holocaust deniers.

**MM: What did this project mean to your dad?**

**MGG:** My father believed that the only way to prevent history from repeating was for each of us to stand up when we see wrong in the world. One of the reasons he shared his history with students, despite how difficult it was each and every time, was that it was one of the ways he could “stand up.” I think it meant a lot to him to know that he was doing his part to ensure the next generations would continue to learn the lessons of the Holocaust and know the importance of standing up.

I also believe seeing this project come to fruition meant that our family’s history and the histories of other survivors, would not be forgotten. He once said that the blood of my grandparents and the aunt I never knew continue to run through my blood, and now, through this project, their histories, along with my father’s, remain strong in my heart and memory. With the creation of this project, he could depend on the fact that I will remember, and I will play my part in making sure the rest of the world does too.

**MM: What does this project mean to you?**

**MGG:** This project is my small way of honouring the memory of the 6,000,000 Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust and the survivors who tried to continue meaningful lives despite their incredible loss. It is my constant reminder of my responsibility to stand up, to remember, and most importantly, to help make the world a better place. It is my opportunity to show students not only the horrors of the Holocaust but also the strength and resilience of survivors – and to show them that they too can find strength, overcome challenges and make the world a better place. Finally, it allows me to honour my father’s memory in a way that was so meaningful to him.

To learn more about Carrying Holocaust Testimony you can visit [https://testimonyfromgenerationtogeneration.com](https://testimonyfromgenerationtogeneration.com).

You can reach Michelle directly at info@carryingtestimony.ca.
Museum bosses have unveiled details of the £30m project and announced it will open on 20 October. Part of a concentration camp barracks will go on display for the first time in the UK as part of the Imperial War Museum’s new Holocaust Gallery set to open this autumn.

The artefact is likely the last remaining part of Velten, a sub-camp of Ravensbrück and Sachsenhausen, which housed Jewish, Roma and Sinti women, and political prisoners of various nationalities.

In a £30.7m project, alongside the Holocaust Gallery will be a Second World War Gallery, making the IWM the first museum in the world to have dedicated galleries to the two subjects under the same roof.

Among the major donors to the galleries are Chelsea’s owner, Roman Abramovich, who held a fundraising dinner for the project at the club in partnership with the Jewish News. They are set to open on 20 October, and have been almost seven years in the making.

As well as the barracks, the Holocaust Gallery will showcase more than 2,000 photos, books, artworks and letters to tell the story of the horror of the Shoah and the lives of its victims and survivors, and its connecting history with the War.

Speaking to Jewish News, senior curator on the Holocaust Gallery, Lauren Wilmott, revealed how the barracks had actually been part of someone’s house until being acquired by the museum.

“We know that two sisters ended with these pieces of the barracks and used it to build a house,” she said. “Given the housing shortages, it was kind of a case of using whatever materials you could get your hands on.”

She hopes it will shed light for many on the extent of the camp system. “Between 1933 and 1945, there were 44,000 camps established … in Linz, in Austria, there was one prisoner for every five inhabitants, and it kind of hits home how visible the camp system was. The idea that no-one knew what was happening just isn’t true.”

The gallery will use the latest research, including archive material only opened to the public since the end of the Cold War.

Other never-seen-before items include the wedding dress of Gena Turgell, a survivor of Belsen, who married a British officer who liberated her from the camp.

The delicate item, made from parachute silk, will serve to highlight that the effects of the Holocaust did not end when camps were liberated.
Another item out of the many which will move viewers is a coat, gifted by a father to his son, who was on the Kindertransport.

“We have a case of a child’s coat, a boy who was fourteen at the time, and his father bought it for the journey,” said Wilmott.

“He bought it several sizes too big, knowing that he was never going to see his son again, so that he would grow into it – it was a parting gift, almost.

“That’s a particularly moving one for me – it’s remembering that many of the parents were often not allowed to come with them, and many of them later ended up being murdered.”

Before the opening, the museum is embarking on a fundraising drive of £250,000 which will go towards the conservation of the barracks and installation work that has yet to be completed.

Diane Lees, Director-General of the museum, said: “It has never been more important to learn about the Second World War and the Holocaust and to understand this defining period of the 20th century, which dramatically shaped the world we live in today. “Though this conflict will soon pass out of living memory, leaving us without the first-hand testimony of its veterans, eyewitnesses and survivors, IWM will ensure that the experiences of those generations are never forgotten through our incredible new galleries, which have been almost seven years in the making.”
The activity of German concentration camp in Lublin was inaugurated in the autumn of 1941 by the incarceration of Soviet POWs. The inmates would erect the buildings in which they were accommodated themselves and the number of sanitary units was insufficient. Initially, compulsory disinfection would take place in timber barrels filled with water with lysol. The construction of barracks, which according to the designs from July 1942 are called delousing facilities, and only a few months later barracks, finished in the second half of the year 1942. Barrack number 41 served the function of a men’s bath, and number 42 of women’s facility. The buildings included among others a changing and hairdressing room, a space with showers and disinfection chambers. In barrack 41, disinfection was carried out with the use of Zyklon B, while in barrack 42 hot air was applied. Due to big quantities of clothes for disinfection, it was decided in August 1942 to erect another facility, the design of which was modified within the execution stage and the gas chambers were supposed to serve not only disinfection, but also extermination purposes. The facility was erected at the back of barrack number 41. The chamber adapted to the use of Zyklon B was divided into two smaller units in order to additionally enable the application of carbon oxide in one of them. It was performed via the system of pipes installed right above the flooring and a trained SS officer used to let the gas inside. Soon after, one more chamber was added to the existing ones on their left side. It was a so called big chamber adapted exclusively to the use of carbon oxide. The chambers were closed with heavy metal doors with a sight glass making it possible to look inside. Jewish men and women classified according to SS criteria as unable to work were mainly murdered in the gas chambers. Until late spring 1943, selected ill men from the camp hospital of various nationalities, mainly Polish, were also exterminated there.

The renovation of barrack number 42 was divided into two stages. The first of them (from July until December 2014) covered the structure of the facility, while the second (from August to December 2016) was devoted to conservation works. When it comes to barrack number 41, both construction as well as conservation works were carried out simultaneously from February 2019 to October 2020. Timber barrack components were demounted, the cavities filled, reinforced and impregnated. New foundations were laid in barrack number 42, while the foundations in barrack number 41, previously reinforced in the 1960s, were fixed and insulated. Timber sill plates and tar roof covering were replaced in both facilities. Plasters and floors in the barracks and the gas chamber facility were cleaned and disinfected, crack edges and breaking off components were stuck and filled fragments were marked by lowering the surface with reference to the original. Timber window
frames and concrete bathtubs were also subject to conservation, together with metal barrack equipment. Secondary and accidental wall fillings in the gas chamber building were replaced with historical bricks inserted in mortar in the color differentiating from the original. Horizontal insulation of walls was performed following the injection method and scratched components were reinforced with metal tie-beams. A new connector was performed. Brick foundation was replaced with the concrete structure and timber wall panelling was performed horizontally, painted in black. An extension was performed analogically, with air heating stove exposed inside it.

Wheelchair ramps and platforms constitute the complementation of the abovementioned works. They facilitate the access to the interior, expose its historical flooring and protect the surface within the visit route.

The performance of renovation works influences not only preservation condition of the facilities, but also creates the opportunity to obtain new movable historical objects. Deconstruction of facility components together with the performed excavations have revealed the items hidden from human sight for years. In the case of barrack number 42, the most interesting discovery was constituted by an oval holy medal with the portrait of Virgin Mary with the Infant Jesus on one side and of Jesus with Joseph on the other,
hidden in a crack in concrete flooring of the shower section, cast from a tin alloy.

The renovation of barrack number 42 enriched museum collections with 38 new movable objects. When it comes to the renovation of barrack number 41, 88 new items were discovered. They include among others structural beams with carpentry markings, metal building equipment components, bricks, a wheel from the little railway car, a Mauser pistol cartridge, a Mosin rifle case and three fragments of paper sheets with the text in Hebrew written on them. What is more, there is a group of 30 personal items: steel keys, combs, a fragment of glasses frame, buttons, a lid of aspirin box, a German 10 Pfennigs coin from the year 1942 as well as a Polish 5 grosz coin from 1936, a steel table spoon, cooking pots, 0.5 l and 0.25 l bottles and two pharmaceutical bottles. Two items of gold jewellery discovered within the site represent high value not only from the historical point of view.

Even if the main objective of renovation works is to stop destruction, repair the defects and secure the objects from further damage, they also make it possible to open the buildings for as wide group of visitors as possible. It is carried out not only through limiting architectural barriers, but also by educating to what extent the objects have remained untouched, which is proved by visual and material differentiation between original and secondary elements introduced into the facilities during the works. What is more, the studies and discoveries made are the source of new information both about the facility itself, as well as about the objects hidden there, being the witnesses of past events and carriers of historical and emotional values.
The Ringelblum Archive is one of the most valuable documents on the Holocaust. It contains over 35,000 pages of documents comprising, among other things, files of official institutions, diaries, letters, posters and photographs that document the life and death of Polish Jews. The archive was created from November 1940 to 1943 on the initiative of the historian Emanuel Ringelblum, PhD, along with the participation of the underground organisation called Oneg Shabbat (in Hebrew. Joy of Saturday).

In August 1942, two teenagers and their teacher buried the Archive in the basement of their school at 68 Nowolipki Street shortly before the Liquidation Operation. Dawid Graber, Nachum Grzywacz and Izrael Lichtensztajn managed to place their wills, written on sheets of ordinary notebooks, into boxes from the Archives just before they were buried. Unfortunately, none of them survived the war.

Only three members of the Oneg Shabbat survived the war - Hersz and Bluma Wasser, and Rachela Auerbach. Through their efforts, the Archive was found in 1946 and 1950 in the ruins of Warsaw and preserved for future generations. In 1999 the Archive was inscribed in the UNESCO list called "Memory of the World". The Ringelblum Archive belongs to the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland, which has been working for years to preserve, maintain and promote the work of Emanuel Ringelblum and members of the Oneg Shabbat group.

Memorial to the Ringelblum Archive and the Oneg Shabbat Group

The Ringelblum Archive is on deposit at the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute, where it has been the centrepiece of the permanent exhibition "What we couldn't shout out to the world" since 2017. Following cooperation between the Jewish Historical Institute and the Association, the entire Archive is digitised and available online on the Delet portal. It has also been published in print in Polish and is currently being published in English.

However, what was missing was a commemoration of the Archive and members of the group in their home town.

In 2009, architects Łukasz Mieszkowski and Marcin Urbanek, inspired by Professor Jacek Leociak's lecture, designed a memorial made of glass and concrete to honour the Archive's creators at the site where they risked their lives to hide it - in Warsaw's Muranów district. In 2015, the Social Committee for the Commemoration of the Ringelblum Archive was established and, since then, has been working with the Association for Social and Cultural Initiatives "Stacja Muranów" to construct the Memorial.

19 April 2021, on the 78th anniversary of the outbreak of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, a symbolic memorial to the Oneg Shabbat group was unveiled at the exact site where the Underground Warsaw Ghetto Archive, the so-called Ringelblum Archive, was discovered, at 28 Nowolipki St. in Warsaw.
In 2020, the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland joined the project and was tasked with raising funds and coordinating the construction of the memorial. Backed by more than 40 donors from Poland and around the world, it was possible to raise the necessary funds for the construction of the memorial.

On 19 April 2021, the Ringelblum Archive Memorial was erected at No. 68, currently 28 Nowolipki Street. It consists of three parts - a visible glass cube with a replicated fragment of 19-year-old David Graber’s testament, an underground concrete chamber symbolising the cellar where the Archive was hidden, and a narrow black shaft that runs deep into the ground. The path to the memorial is marked by plaques with a quote from David Graber’s testament and information about the history of the Oneg Shabbat group.

The efforts of the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland do not end with the unveiling of the memorial in honour of the Oneg Shabbat heroes who gave their lives to ensure the truth about the Warsaw Ghetto lives on after the war. In April 2021, the association finished constructing a modern repository at the Jewish Historical Institute, where the Archive is stored. Plans are also in place to build a special display case for objects found in the historical layer of Muranów during the construction of the memorial - cutlery, bottles, pottery fragments.

Similarly, on 19 April, the foundation stone was laid for the construction of a symbolic grave for members of the Oneg Shabbat group at the Jewish cemetery on Okopowa Street, Warsaw. We do not know the burial site of most members of the group. Thanks to the symbolic tombstone designed by Natalia Romik, PhD, we pay tribute to the Ringelblum Archive heroes.

"We and future generations must remember these people. It is our absolute obligation", - said Piotr Wiślicki, Chairman of the Board of the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland, in the film summing up the memorial project.
"The experience of Auschwitz and the Shoah has had a significant impact on people who survived. Many appealed already at the end of the war that their fate should become a warning for the next generations. Primo Levi, an Auschwitz survivor, has entitled one of his books about the Shoah "If this is a man". His words are extremely accurate in the contemporary world, which is why they are a part of the conference title," said Andrzej Kacorzyk, the director of the ICEAH.

Words of another Auschwitz survivor Marian Turksi became a motto of the conference. On January 27, 2020, during the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the German Nazi Auschwitz concentration and extermination camp, he said, "Keep the commandment. The 11th commandment: thou shalt not be indifferent. Unless you do so, in the blink of an eye, another Auschwitz will suddenly fall from the sky."

"Millions of people around the world are persecuted because of their religion, skin color, gender, or sexual orientation. Our history shows that we still haven't learned the lesson of the past. It is a disgrace that today, almost 80 years after the Shoah, public antisemitic speeches, gestures or offensive attacks very often go completely unpunished. It is therefore absolutely imperative to raise awareness about our contemporary responsibility and the impact that our behavior or attitudes have on the process that can lead to a disaster," said the director of the Auschwitz Memorial, Dr. Piotr M. A. Cywiński.

The conference will bring together people who have experienced persecution because of their religious or cultural affiliation, gender or sexual orientation. They will be joined by representatives of various religious groups, minorities, activists of both international and local organizations, who in their work raise awareness about exclusions in the modern world and provide real aid and support to those who have become victims of persecution.

The languages of the conference are Polish and English. The conference broadcast will be simultaneously translated into: English, German, Polish, Russian and Spanish.

In any additional questions please contact: conference2021@auschwitz.org

The program of the conference
IF THIS IS A MAN — EXCLUSIONS IN THE MODERN WORLD

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE

JULY 7-8, 2021

International Center for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust
Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum
OBJECTS CARRY MEMORIES

A multimedia storytelling to mark the 76th anniversary of the end of World War II and the liberation of the concentration camps.

How can we celebrate and commemorate “together” when it is currently impossible due to health restrictions connected to the Coronavirus pandemic, to be physically together? Last year, when the meetings and ceremonies on the 75th anniversary of the liberation had to be cancelled in many memorials places, and performing gestures, meetings and talks were impossible, attempts were made to offer a replacement in the digital world.

In particular, staff members of memorial sites held speeches without audiences and offered livestreams or short video clips. The ritualistic activity of dignitaries (sometimes staff) laying wreaths was broadcasted out to the international community. Memorial sites also launched websites after having asked survivors and relatives to send short video messages to give the online audience the possibility to listen to their words. These were attempts to offer the experience of a commemoration ceremony in the digital world, but it was almost impossible to overcome the experience of distance. Especially in places of former concentration camps, like the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial, today places of pilgrimage, beholding a sense of grief, but are also places where relatives of former prisoners might find comfort, like Thom Kluck, president of the of the Dutch prisoners’ association Stichting Vriendenkring Neuengamme, told us in his feedback.

However, the starting point in 2020 was obviously not the virtual space and its possibilities, instead the analogue format was transferred 1:1 into a digital format in an attempt to reproduce a commemoration. Back then, it was a good idea to be visible in remembering. However, one year later, when the 76th anniversary events had also to be cancelled as well, memorial sites had to come up with new ideas to connect the digital and the analogue space more, while also embracing new, more modern ways of seeing and accessing.

The question remains: How to create closeness and also overcome physical distance? In 2021, the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial also wanted to create something educational and more permanent. So we came up with the idea of creating a special website of “storytelling” – to let survivors and relatives be visible via special objects connected to their very own personal memories. We asked them to send us (photos of) objects which symbolize their memories or are associated with them. Originally, we had the idea to present the objects during an analogue commemoration ceremony. This would have allowed those, who could not travel to Hamburg in person, to be present vicariously through these objects. But objects do not tell the same story to everyone and above that the analogue commemoration could only take place without an audience on-site. So, in the end, we decided to present the stories given to us in the form of objects, in an online reportage. With this multimedia coverage, survivors and relatives are present with their personal memories, thoughts and wishes. We made their stories visible to ensure that their stories will not be forgotten.

Very modern way of storytelling.
Congratulations.

Kristof van Mierop, grandson of Roger Vyvey, former Neuengamme prisoner
For our storytelling we used Pageflow – an open-source software and publishing platform for multimedia storytelling developed for digital journalism. The tool enables the creation of web reports that receive interactive elements in text, image, video and audio. This so called “scrollytelling” is an online storytelling characterised by audio, video and animation effects triggered by simply scrolling the page. With the help of an agency, we created a visual virtual storytelling in three languages (German, English and French). We believe that the merging of various multimedia elements in an easily accessible way, combined with interactive elements, gives virtual visitors an immersive experience and helps to rise interest for stories of survivors and their family members.

Memories are connected to people or places, events or personal encounters and often to objects – for example, an old suitcase. In the beginning of our storytelling “Objects Carry Memories”, Martine Letterie explains in a short video, what the suitcase in her father’s studio is all about. Martine Letterie is the President of the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme and granddaughter of Martinus Letterie, who died in Neuengamme. We learn that Martinus took the suitcase with him when he was deported.

In the course of our digital narrative, we sorted the objects sent to us into five chapters: Imprisonment and Liberation, Stories Passed down through Generations, Encounters with the Past, Remembering Together and Hopes for the Future.
Every item is unique and symbolizes a personal story. Concentration camp survivors often regard objects, letters and photographs as symbols of their memories of persecution. However, the objects also symbolize the carefree life before the deportation and the life after the liberation. Old photographs of family members, who were later murdered upon their arrival at Auschwitz, bring back vivid memories and are therefore particularly important for the survivors. Only a few survivors still have objects from the time of their imprisonment. That is why they are also very precious to them. Dita Kraus, survivor of Auschwitz, Neuengamme and Bergen-Belsen, for example wrote: “I am always willing to attend commemorative events. I still have the metal tag with the number I was given in Hamburg. I wore it around my neck, as we all had to do. I still have a piece of thread it was attached to.”

The objects families choose help them to create a connection with the past. When the objects are passed on to the next generation, so too are the stories they represent. This is the way in which objects pass down stories through generations. Barbara Piotrowska, for example, who was deported with her parents after the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, passed her father’s wedding ring, his pocket watch and the family seal ring, which were very close to her heart, on to the next generations. Personal belongings are also an encounter with people we never met in person, for example, when a grandfather never came back after deportation. In other cases, people learn about the fate of their persecuted relatives only much later, during a visit to an archive or upon having a long-lost family heirloom returned to them.
With our project, we want to make personal stories connected with the imprisonment of family members in concentration camps visible. We want to show the relevance of historical experiences and their effects until today. And we want to make readers curious: What are the stories behind a photograph from a newspaper, a striped handkerchief, a name on a business card, a baby dress, or a flag? Many brief personal stories create a picture of the importance of remembrance. We hope that people will scroll through the website and get to know the many stories behind objects that at first glance seem inconspicuous.

You asked me why I would want to show these photos to and share these memories with the public. I would hope that we could convince our children and grandchildren that prejudice has no place in our world! It leads to no good, only bad.

Helga Melmed, survivor of the Auschwitz and Neuengamme concentration camps

Objects Carry Memories
(English version)

Gegenstände tragen Erinnerungen
(German version)

Des objets portent des souvenirs
(French version)

By continuing to tell stories and share them with the public, we can keep history alive.

Greetje van den Driessche, granddaughter of Urbain Van den Driessche, who died as a prisoner of the Neuengamme concentration camp

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Greetje van den Driessche, granddaughter of Urbain Van den Driessche, who died as a prisoner of the Neuengamme concentration camp
Jews were represented in significant numbers in many of the types of military units that operated in modern warfare – in tank forces, in the artillery, in the air force, and in the submarine fleet. Many Jews served in the ranks of military translators, physicians, military correspondents, and political officers who were attached to the various types of forces. Their noticeable presence in these military professions reflected the high educational level of Soviet Jews. However, the largest representation of Jews was in the 16th Lithuanian and the 201st (from October 1942 – 43rd) Latvian Infantry Divisions formed mainly from former residents of those republics; at certain times the percentage of Jews in those units reached 33 and 17 percent respectively. Nevertheless, initiatives to establish separate Jewish military formations did not yield any results – creation of Jewish units did not correspond to Soviet propaganda purposes of the war period. Jews also served in Cossack units, including as officers up to the rank of commanders of regiments. This situation challenged traditional views about permanently hostile relations between Jews and Cossacks. In 1943 and 1944 many Jewish partisans, as well as young Jews who had survived the Holocaust under false identification documents or in shelters, jointed the Red Army right after the liberation of Soviet territories. Among the Soviet troops were a relatively large number of Jewish women. The majority of them were doctors, nurses, or translators. Often Jewish women were among the medics who evacuated the wounded from the battlefield or served in other units whose members were also often in battle zones. A special category was composed of those Jewish women who participated directly in combat – as pilots or navigators in the Soviet air force, or in artillery units.

Many Jews were awarded government recognition for their military endeavors. According to official Soviet data, as of January 1944 more than 32,000 Jews received such awards. In that respects the Jews were fourth in the country, after the Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians although they were seventh in the USSR in terms of total population. The number of Jews who were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union, the highest level of distinction, was over 100. However, this statistic is evidently understated since, for various reasons, Jews were sometimes listed on their identity papers as Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Tatars, etc.

The very fact of the award, i.e., of official recognition of the military prowess of Jews was important for Soviet Jews, both at the front and in the rear. The poet Alexander Gitovich noted:

From 1941 to 1945 between 350,000 and 500,000 Jews served in various roles in the Red Army during the Soviet-German war of 1941-1945. During the first months of the war a large number of Jews, especially members of the intelligentsia and students, served in the Narodnoe opolchenie (National Guard or militia), the irregular military units whose task was to slow and, hopefully, halt the Wehrmacht assaults on major Soviet cities. The majority of those in the Narodnoe opolchenie, who were poorly trained and poorly armed, were killed in the first months of the war. In the Red Army itself the estimates of the number of Jews killed during the war range from 120,000 to 142,000.
"When I read the lists of those honored, I always look to see if there are any Jewish names and I am very happy when there are." Such knowledge helped Soviet Jews challenge antisemitism (that was increasing during the war among the people and members of the Soviet bureaucracy), which included the view that Jews were "bad soldiers."

A particular role in circulating information about the participation of Jews in combat and about Jewish heroism was played by the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC), which began operating in the spring of 1942. Approximately one third of all the publications prepared by or with the JAC dealt with Jews on the front lines. Some of them were published in the Committee's Yiddish newspaper Eynikayt, the first issue of which appeared in June 1942. Hundreds of other materials were sent to Jewish telegraphic agencies and Jewish newspapers abroad. These articles not only recounted the military exploits of Jews but often put the accounts into their more general ethnic context. The materials stressed the ethnic origin of the heroes and their following of the ancient Jewish heroic tradition, as embodied by Samson, the Macabbees, Bar Kochba etc. Many of the articles were intended to make the point that, in addition to the war they shared with the other Soviet peoples, Soviet Jews had their own war, their own score to settle with the Nazis. In 1942 the Soviet Yiddish prose writer Dovid Bergelson wrote that the Soviet Jews were fighting "Far zayn foterland un zayn yidishn folk," i.e., for their [Soviet] homeland and their Jewish people. As the details of the Nazi mass murder of Jewish civilians became increasing known during the war, the ethnic consciousness of a large proportion of Jewish soldiers and officers grew and increasingly motivated them in their fighting.

The 100 accounts of Jews in the Red Army that are included in the present project highlight those who received formal recognition, primarily as Heroes of the Soviet Union, of their military achievements. However, there are also many biographies of those whose services did not receive such a high level of recognition. Among those included on our website are generals, officers, and privates; tank crew members, submariners, pilots, translators and doctors; men and women; very young people who had recently left their childhoods behind and middle-aged people. These people acted on different fronts: they defended Moscow, took part in the battle for Stalingrad, liberated Ukraine and Belorussia, fought against Axis troops in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia, and participated in the capture of Berlin. The stories tell about their pre-war experience as members of the intelligentsia, professional military men, or factory workers and - for those who survived the war - about events of their post-war life. Such an approach allows us to better understand the effect the war had on Jewish Red Army personnel.

Their biographies, included in the project in alphabetical order, often contain quotations from wartime articles and letters, as well as post-war memoirs. These texts cast light on the Jewish identity of these people and their reaction to the Holocaust.
“The train would pull up, the doors would open, and we had to throw the dead bodies out.”

This is an extract from testimony given by Eugene Black, a Jewish teenager who was deported from Hungary to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944, who survived a death march to Bergen-Belsen.

The death marches resulted in tens of thousands of people dying at the roadside of exhaustion, being shot for failing to keep up, or murdered in seemingly random massacres. The victims were totally at the whim of the guards, who left a trail of blood across Europe.

These “mobile concentration camps” overturn the idea that the brutality of the camps was kept entirely separate from the German population. No one could fail to observe the emaciated, weakened inmates, the dead bodies that littered the roads, and the brutality of the SS guards. Indeed, a broad spectrum of the German population persecuted these evacuated prisoners. Some civilians shot inmates, while others refused food. Local people also denounced prisoners who had escaped from marches to the SS. While there are instances of civilians helping inmates by sheltering them in their homes, resistance was rare.

The Wiener Holocaust Library’s new exhibition, Death Marches: Evidence and Memory, will bring to light this often unknown, overlooked and understudied aspect of the Holocaust and uncover how forensic and other evidence about the death marches has been gathered since the end of the war.
Towards the end of the Second World War, hundreds of thousands of prisoners still held within the Nazi camp system were forcibly evacuated in terrible conditions under heavy guard. Many of these chaotic, and brutal, evacuations became known as 'death marches' by those who endured them. They form the last ruthless chapter of the Nazi genocide, one that is little-known or understood.
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