EUROPE ON TRIAL

The Story of Collaboration, Resistance, and Retribution During World War II

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CHAPTER SIX

The Beginnings of German Decline

The Growth and Many Dilemmas of the Resistance Movements

In the summer and fall of 1942, German power was at its height; all the more dramatic were the great reversals that ensued in the late fall of the same year. From that time on, the road led inevitably to the total defeat of National Socialist Germany. Yet even though the German generals must have known that the war would be lost, they continued to obey the Führer, some for another year, most of them to the bitter end. It is possible to argue, however, that the Casablanca Conference, which took place in January 1943, and at which the Western Allies resolved to demand Germany's unconditional surrender, made it more difficult for German generals to end the war. Unconditional surrender meant delivering one's soldiers as well as oneself to the good graces of the enemy. True, decent treatment could be expected from the Western Allies, but at the time of the Casablanca Resolution the British and the Americans did not have even a foothold in Europe. Meanwhile, the relentlessly advancing Soviet Red Army troops were likely to act wildly revengeful once they reached Germany. Whatever the cause of the German refusal to surrender, we must remember that of the 50 million people who were killed in the war, about 40 million died during the last two and a half years of a six-year war.

The battles of El Alamein and Stalingrad, fought mainly in the fall and winter of 1942 are legendary events, and they have been described thousands of times. It should be enough to say here that at El Alamein, in Egypt, British and Commonwealth troops defeated the famed German

general Erwin Rommel's German and Italian troops, shattering Hitler's dream of reaching the Suez Canal. The battle marked the beginning of the end of the Axis presence in North Africa, and British historiography is justly proud of the great victory won so far from home. As Churchill stated, "Before El Alamein we never won a battle, after El Alamein we never lost one."

In Russia, following the Battle of Stalingrad, the Germans could no longer hope to interrupt traffic on the Volga, Europe's longest river that connected Russia to the oil wells of Baku on the Caspian Sea. Instead, they had to evacuate the entire Caucasus region as well as other huge areas of their southeastern front. The armies of their Hungarian, Italian, Romanian, Croatian, and Slovak allies had been largely wiped out. From then on, Hitler's armed forces had no choice but to retreat or to surrender; unfortunately, except for those in North Africa, only a few chose to surrender.

Meanwhile also, with Pearl Harbor, the conflict had become globalized. Japan's war, although fought separately, mainly because Japan and the Soviet Union had remained on friendly terms until August 1945, nevertheless had an immense influence on the European conflict. The Battle of Guadalcanal, which took place in part on the high seas and in part on an island in the Pacific between August 1942 and February 1943, ended in a clear American victory. Thereafter, Japan, just like Germany, was on the defensive and could no longer hope for victory.

It is worth noting here the crucial differences between the size of the battles in the Pacific and in North Africa, on the one hand, and in Russia, on the other. By its very nature, the Battle of Guadalcanal involved "only" tens of thousands of American and Japanese combat troops, marines, air crew, and sailors. The Battle of El Alamein involved some 300,000 Axis and Allied soldiers and caused the deaths of maybe 10,000 among them. On the other hand, the Battle of Stalingrad, fought between August 1942 and February 1943, was fought by well over 2 million Axis and Soviet soldiers, of whom nearly 1 million died—if not on the battlefield, then in POW camps; it is small wonder that the world, especially the Europeans, perceived the Battle of Stalingrad as the real turning point in the war.

As it should be clear from the above, by 1943 the time had come for the Europeans to prepare for, or even to hasten, the departure of the German troops; the hitherto modest resistance movements began to blossom. But before we go into some detail here, we must ask ourselves what the goals of the wartime resisters were. Their primary aim was to oppose those in

power in occupied Europe, be they Germans or persons in German service. Further aims were to wash off the shame of the initial defeat and to reawaken patriotic sentiments, to provide vital information to the outside powers fighting Nazism, to assist crash-landed Allied air crews in avoiding capture, and to sabotage war production. Note that helping the persecuted was the goal of only small groups within the various resistance movements. The long-term goal of the resistance was to liberate at least a part of the homeland with its own forces in order to establish a native government before the arrival of the liberating armies. All this was to be done with the use of a clandestine press and radio, political action, and weapons. The resistance movements also made plans to punish those responsible for the original defeat as well as collaborators and, even more important, to bring about a new society. Finally, two barely concealed purposes of the resistance were to bring about a social revolution, or at least a changing of the guard, and to expel or to annihilate some, if not all, of their country's ethnic and religious minorities. Needless to say, all these goals and their execution turned out to be extremely controversial.

Problems varied according to location: there was, for instance, the dilemma of how to resist the German authorities when there were hardly any German soldiers to be seen, such as in the countries allied to Germany. If you hated the German Nazis, were you also morally obligated to fight against your own government, which was assisting the German war effort with men and guns, but might be using the arms deliveries to try to protect the country's freedom of choice and, specifically, its Jewish citizens? And what if the German-friendly government was secretly—and often not so secretly—negotiating with the Western Allies? Was a collaborationist government always an enemy? We will analyze this dilemma especially in the next chapter.

LIFE AND DEATH IN THE RESISTANCE

The first thing to remember is that resistance involved illegal activity, illegal not only in the eyes of the German or other occupation forces but also according to international conventions and the laws of one's country. At least initially, resistance was also unpopular among most of the resisters' compatriots, who rightly dreaded the danger and misery that such activity would bring upon their heads. To resist meant to leave the legal path and to act as a criminal, to the point of using the slang and the code

words of the underworld. In order to be able to print and distribute illegal newspapers, one had to steal strictly controlled printing paper and machines and to forge or steal ration cards, banknotes, residence permits, and identity cards. To fight the enemy, the resisters needed to seize arms from military garrisons or from rival resisters. All this required the talents of a burglar, a forger, and a thief. To be in the armed resistance brought the necessity to kill, most often not in open combat but from stealth; thus, the resistance fighter had to be prepared to act as a professional murderer. His or her target was seldom a Gestapo agent or a German soldier; more often the target was a compatriot—a policeman, a factory guard, a railroad engineer, or anyone whom one's superior in the resistance movement suspected of being a traitor, a spy, an obstacle, or a dangerous rival.* The famous Bielski partisans, a Jewish group, which operated in what is now western Belorussia and about whose heroism books were written and films were made, readily admitted having fought Polish and Ukrainian policemen in German service as well as Polish anti-Nazi—but simultaneously anti-Semitic—partisans. Conflicts with German soldiers were rare.

To be in the resistance required distrusting others, hiding, lying, threatening, blackmailing, denouncing, and, if necessary, killing suspects, even if they were your friends. Orders came from higher-ups whom one never met and would not be able to identify but whose emissary had to be blindly trusted. Yet the trust could be tragically misplaced when the emissary turned out to be a police agent.

A resister, especially in an urban setting, could rarely remain long in the same place: he could not sit in a restaurant, cinema, or streetcar without eyeing the door for a quick exit; he had to fear both uniformed policemen and those in mufti who might be from the Gestapo and thus could be much more dangerous. The resister could never be sure that his good friend with whom he had a prearranged meeting in a café had not been "turned around" following unspeakable torture and was now playing the role of Judas. To ring a bell to the apartment of a fellow resister meant to

*In the famous and controversial French film *Army of the Shadows* (*L'armée des ombres*) (1969), the director, Jean-Pierre Melville, himself a former *résistant*, pays moving homage to the heroism, devotion, and self-sacrifice of the French fighters against the German occupiers. Yet the Germans play only a small role in the film: the action is among French people, resisters and collaborators. The resisters spend most of their time just trying to survive. The film as well as the novel on which it is based were inspired by genuine events in the World War II French resistance.

court torture and death if the Gestapo was inside. To call first, provided that the person had a working telephone, was no solution either, for the person answering the phone could have had a gun pointed at his head. In an occupied country, every step required a special permit, and every new pair of socks or loaf of bread necessitated a ration card, which could be obtained only through stealing or forgery.

No doubt, there was a touch of glamour and great excitement in all this, but also endless boredom and anxiety when hiding, often in a filthy, cold, terribly small shelter or when waiting endlessly for instructions. And all through this misery, one had to behave "normally," so as not to create suspicion.

The resister had to be able to melt into the population; Gunnar Sønsteby, perhaps the most famous of the legendary Norwegian resisters, changed his name and identity papers several times between 1940 and 1945 while blowing up German army trucks, shooting German soldiers, and providing the British with vital information. What had made this possible was, according to his reminiscences, that he looked inconspicuous, just like any other Norwegian. But this blond, blue-eyed, athletic young man would have appeared fatally conspicuous had he ventured into a non-Nordic country.*

Urban resisters were constantly playing hide-and-seek with the police and fought battles with the enemy or with rivals; resisters in the countryside were often reduced to terrorizing peasants for food or starved and froze in deep forests that made a blanket or a lean-to worth killing for.

In brief, to be in the resistance was a dog's life, and it is a near miracle that so many Europeans chose it voluntarily. Yet it was still better for one's dignity and the nation's honor—if not for the nation's short-term benefit—to try to undertake something against the Nazis and their allies, better, in the eyes of the resisters, than to sit at home and do nothing.

There existed, of course, great situational and geographic differences: an obedient, nonpolitical "Aryan" Western or northern European had little to fear from the German occupiers; a Pole, a Russian, a Serb, or a Greek as well as—after September 1943—an Italian was never immune to arbitrary arrest by the Germans or by the latter's hirelings. Prisons in

*For a fine documentary film on and by Gunnar Sønsteby, see *Report from "No. 24"* (produced by the Norwegian Armed Forces, 1994). Number 24 was Sønsteby's code name in the SOE, the famous British organization specializing in "setting Europe ablaze."

Poland were full of people who had been picked up on the street. Some of them had never lifted a finger against the occupiers; others in the same group had fought the Germans with arms. The Gestapo rarely made fine distinctions, and it used the same fiendish methods on a "racially superior Nordic" type it suspected of resistance activity as on a "subhuman" Russian Communist Jew. The results were also similar: only a handful of Communists, Jehovah's Witnesses, priests, and other devotees of a supreme ideology were sometimes able to withstand torture. Only slightly less hard to bear were the humiliations visited on the political prisoners: many high-ranking German army officers who, in 1944, were arrested for conspiring to overthrow Hitler could not bear the humiliation; the former godlike members of the "master race" confessed quickly and relinquished names.

As already indicated, resistance grew gradually from nearly nothing in the first year following the German occupation to a sudden blossoming after the battles of El Alamein and Stalingrad all the way to a final enormous growth in 1944 when it became clear that Germany would soon be defeated. We have also mentioned that resistance could take many forms, from symbolic acts of defiance to large-scale armed combat. By 1944 there were important regions in Europe where the Germans and their allies were in constant danger. Years before the German surrender in May 1945, the anti-Nazi partisans were the law in large parts of German-occupied Russia, Poland, Ukraine, Yugoslavia, Italy, and Greece. In occupied Russia, the partisans often owned the night, and the Germans owned the day; in Yugoslavia, Albania, and Greece, the partisans were in command of the mountains and the forests but not of the valleys and the plains, or they were masters of some small towns but not of the larger cities.

From nearly the first day following the German occupation, army officers, who had avoided capture, met secretly in Poland, Norway, and France to discuss how to wipe out the shame of defeat. Some university students did the same, yet they formed tiny groups until joined by escaped prisoners of war, journalists unwilling to follow the dictates of collaborationist editors, and financially independent young aristocrats for whom it was a matter of noblesse oblige to oppose the vulgar and plebeian German SS. They were joined by a number of eccentric loners. So varied and hard to categorize was the makeup of the resistance movements during the early years of the German occupation.

It does not seem that prewar political beliefs were decisive in one's joining the resistance, except perhaps in the case of longtime Communists, Socialists, and monarchists. In Austria, the Netherlands, and Norway, some monarchists opposed the occupiers from the beginning; in other countries, a few left-wing Socialists and Communists turned on the German occupiers in defiance of Soviet instruction. All in all, there were many strange, nearly unexplainable cases.

THE RESISTANCE PRESS AND RADIO

Gradually, anti-German resistance took more concrete forms. In the literate Western and northern European countries, with a public hungry for uncensored information, clandestine newspapers sprang up with no or only tenuous connections to underground political groups. Alternately, resistance groups set up underground newspapers, as in the case of Combat, perhaps the most famous resistance group in France. The group published a sophisticated yet popular clandestine newspaper of the same name. Characteristically, while the Combat group itself never numbered more than a few hundred activists, their newspaper's print run increased from 10,000 late in 1941 to 250,000 in 1944.

It is still unclear how such a broad-based illegal activity, punishable by torture and death in Gestapo or in French police custody, could take place both in the Unoccupied and Occupied Zones of France. Where did the paper, the ink, and the printing presses come from when all these necessities were strictly controlled? Why were the editorial offices and printing presses so seldom raided by the police? Where did the money for printing come from? No doubt, substantial subsidies arrived clandestinely from Britain; still, little could have been achieved without the anonymous and courageous support of thousands. More help must have also come from some collaborationist French authorities than the resistance was later willing to admit.

Combat was not the only French resistance group assembled around a newspaper; the anarchist Libération and the Communist Francs-tireurs et Partisans groups and papers numbered even more militant members, although not more newspaper copies than *Combat*. The latter's world fame was enhanced by the later Nobel Prize–winning author Albert Camus, who was, during the war, *Combat*'s editor.

The underground papers obtained their information from hearsay as well as reading between the lines of officially authorized papers and BBC broadcasts. Listening to the latter was considered a grave crime, punishable by death in several German-occupied countries. Moreover, the BBC was consistently jammed; still, millions of Europeans were able to hear its programs. In German-allied Hungary, Italy, and Finland, for instance, such "perpetrators" were seldom prosecuted. Even in German-occupied countries, the local police often ignored violations; only repeated denunciations by neighbors and office colleagues forced the police to act against those guilty of the crime of listening to the BBC. Here again is an example of the local authorities often being more tolerant of forbidden activity than the resistance later liked to admit.

Denunciations were the plague that hounded wartime Europe, whether or not occupied by German troops, whether before or after the defeat of Nazi Germany. We will learn more about this in the chapters on postwar justice and retribution.

The BBC had its competitors in the Voice of America, Radio Moscow, and the radio stations of Sweden and Switzerland, but educated people much preferred the measured, unhysterical tone and relatively objective reporting of the BBC. Radio London readily admitted British defeats—and there were plenty to admit in the first three years of the war—while German and Italian (and, let us add, Soviet and occasionally American) war reporting was a mixture of truth, lies, and wishful thinking. In 1943, however, German propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels suddenly revised his broadcasting policy. Having concluded that it would be good propaganda to impress on the German people the mortal threat represented by Bolshevik barbarism and Anglo-American colonialism, he proclaimed a "total war" against the enemy. One form of this new type of warfare was to admit the manpower and material superiority of the enemy and to denounce its allegedly satanic determination to exterminate the German people. Radio releases and newsreels were filled with gruesome reports on civilians burned alive by Allied carpet bombing. Later, German media almost triumphantly published photographic reports on the tortured, raped, and murdered civilians in towns the German troops had temporarily recovered from the Red Army. Convinced that defeat would bring total annihilation, the German people, both soldiers and civilians, resisted the enemy onslaught with an iron determination.

No doubt, local clandestine anti-Nazi radio stations have their place in the resistance story, but the great majority of the so-called local broadcasts emanated from Great Britain, whose editors and broadcasters made it sound as if speaking from next door. One of the most popular of the so-called black programs was a secret military radio station, purportedly operating in Germany, which voiced the grievances of discontented soldiers. In reality, the station broadcast its program from Great Britain.

THE SPECIAL OPERATIONS EXECUTIVE

Among the most controversial yet most effective resistance weapons of World War II was the legendary Special Operations Executive (SOE), which Prime Minister Churchill and Minister of Economics Hugh Dalton had called into being in 1940, whose goal was to "to set Europe ablaze." Unlike the equally legendary British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, commonly referred to as MI6), which was run by the Foreign Office and whose gentlemanly agents concentrated on discreet information gathering, the SOE was meant to be and indeed became quite conspicuous. Considering that the outfit's cloak-and-dagger operations have become part of universal folklore, it should be enough to focus here on the connections between the SOE and the European resistance movements.

The SOE, whose headquarters were in Great Britain, trained and sent agents to practically every European country with the aim of gathering intelligence, engaging in sabotage, and setting up secret radio stations for transmitting information to Britain. The SOE was also eager to help in creating resistance movements, to smuggle in weapons, and, if possible, to overthrow and replace collaborationist governments. Over the course of the war, the SOE employed or directly controlled some 13,000 persons and supplied another 1 million with money, food, and weapons. Interestingly, there was no equivalent organization on the German side: the German Abwehr and similar organizations—Hollywood movies to the contrary—never seriously attempted to set Great Britain, the United States, or even the Soviet Union "ablaze."

The SOE's specially trained agents were often marvels of courage and tenacity, if not always of perspicacity. Thousands of Europeans were executed for having helped the SOE men and women, and, in turn, hundreds

of SOE agents died because of their own or their superiors' negligence. It was said that a secret radio operator had a life expectancy of only a few weeks. Many agents, especially in Western and northern Europe, had dual nationality and were thus equally at home in Britain and in France or the Netherlands. Still, they were too often uncovered and arrested by local Gestapo agents (in France called *la police allemande*) due to a minor mistake in appearance or a lack of absolute familiarity with local dialects and conditions.

Famously, the SOE employed many younger women, who could circulate more easily than men of military age. The SOE also successfully used known homosexuals and aristocrats who had personal contacts in Europe. Yet every move was dangerous, mostly because of prying neighbors; this particular danger diminished only toward the end of the war when the Germans and the local police could no longer protect the denouncer from the wrath of the resisters. Note that the purge of the Nazi collaborators began well before the arrival of the liberators. Clearly, by 1944 it was time for many collaborators to try at least a double game. Many were caught between two fires and could no longer escape their fates.

Despite all the secrecy and careful training, the SOE sometimes made tragic mistakes. This was the case of the secret radio operators in the Netherlands who were caught by the Abwehr, the German army's counterintelligence service, and then "turned around." The term meant forcing the captives to send dictated messages to England. Because headquarters in England overlooked the prearranged warning signal that the operator was in German hands, flight after flight of SOE agents, who were parachuted into the Netherlands, would first be followed and then arrested, tortured, and either killed or also "turned around." The Abwehr called it *Englandspiel*, a play with captured British agents.

The Abwehr included a few brilliant intellectuals who wreaked havoc with some of the best-conceived SOE plans, yet the Abwehr also harbored some of the foremost anti-Hitler conspirators. Thanks to these individuals, some of the captured SOE agents survived the war. The head of the Abwehr, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, was one of the last anti-Hitler conspirators to be executed just before the end of the war. By then the functions of the Abwehr had long been taken over by the SD (Sicherheitsdienst), the security service of the SS whose cruelty and ruthlessness were matched by its clumsiness.

RESISTANCE IN THE COUNTRIES EXPECTING BRITISH AND AMERICAN LIBERATION

In the West of Europe, the battle was at first primarily fought with words; only after the beginning of Operation Barbarossa did the Communists enter the fray. They now had orders to weaken the German war machine at all costs. The Communists and their left-wing allies and rivals, such as the anarchists and the Trotskyists, did not hesitate to engage in sabotage and to use weapons, no matter what the consequence for the local population. But resistance became a true mass movement only in early 1943 when Fritz Sauckel, the German minister for labor exploitation, decided that rather than waiting for volunteers from the occupied countries, young West and North Europeans should simply be drafted for labor service in Germany. In France this was called Service de Travail Obligatoire, and although work conditions in Germany were often better than in France, the measure proved unpopular. Droves of young men failed to appear for induction and disappeared from sight, a move supported by the same population that often did not hesitate to denounce a fugitive Jew. As we will see again and again, the public, whether in France or elsewhere, was willing to take risks on behalf of its sons, but not for those judged to be "foreigners."

Some of those who had fled into the high plateaus of southeastern France, called the maquis after the terrain covered with scrub, began to call themselves the maquisards. The name spread rapidly among French resisters, and soon the SOE began parachuting agents, weapons, and radios first into the mountains and then into other parts of France. In the Vercors, a mountain plateau in southern France, some three thousand armed fighters assembled. They were attacked sporadically by Germans and the French fascist *milice* (militia), but only in the spring of 1944 did the fighting become intense. This was after the maquisards of the Vercors had received orders from Britain to attack German military traffic. The purpose was to help the planned Allied invasion in Europe, but it drew a German response of some twenty thousand troops, equipped with modern weapons. Only a small part of this considerable force consisted of Germans or members of the French *milice;* the majority were Ukrainians, Russians, and Caucasians in German uniform.

The conflict on the plateau of Vercors demonstrates persuasively the complexity of the war and especially of guerrilla fighting. In this case, in one camp were young East Europeans who had volunteered for German

service mainly so as to avoid death by starvation as prisoners of war in German hands; in the other camp, one found young Frenchmen, many of whom tried to avoid forced labor service in Germany. The two groups should have been fighting together against the Nazis, but life and fate were not as simple and logical as that.

The French maquisards included a good number of refugees from the Spanish Civil War and East Europeans who had escaped from the terrible French internment camps into which they had been thrown as early as 1939. Thus, this was a civil war as well as a clash of ideologies and a conflict among ethnic groups. The battle of the Vercors ended tragically for the maquisards: the majority were killed; those captured were sent to concentration camps, unless executed. The maquisards' casualty rate was three times that of the "Germans," showing that in an open battle, the poorly trained, undisciplined, and insufficiently armed partisans were the great losers. But then it is also true that the battle of the Vercors drew some twenty thousand men in German service away from the Western front.

Now another irony: while the East Europeans in German uniform would never surrender to the French partisans, mostly for fear of being killed, many of the same men eagerly ran over to the Allies following the Normandy invasion. This saved them not only from the wrath of the French partisans but also, they hoped, from the wrath of Stalin. Yet at war's end, the American and British military authorities handed over thousands of the captured East Europeans in German uniform to the Soviet Union, where they were either executed or sent to the Soviet Gulag.

The peculiar nature of underground activity, the varying aliases of its members, and the many arrests forcing leadership changes make it difficult for us to identify the various resistance groups. Not all were real; some existed only in name or in the imagination of their founders. In France division among resistance groups was either sociogeographic, such as urban groups versus the maquisards of the countryside, or ideological, such as Communists and their left-wing allies versus the moderate republicans and conservative monarchists. Because many of the groups jealously guarded their independence, it is almost a miracle that the French resistance, including even the Communists, was willing to recognize the overall leadership of the previously unknown General Charles de Gaulle in London and his secret delegate in France, Jean Moulin.

Moulin had been a fairly important civil servant both in the prewar period and during the early Vichy years; he had engaged in resistance

activity while still a high-ranking Vichy civil servant. After a secret visit to London followed by his being parachuted back into France, he convoked several meetings of the national resistance leaders. One of these was to be in June 1943, at a hiding place near Lyon in southern France. By then the German army had occupied the entire country. Tragically, the group of eight had been betrayed; all were arrested, and some, including Moulin, were tortured to death by Gestapo officer Klaus Barbie, whom we will meet again. The circumstances of Moulin's arrest and death have remained controversial and have led to typically endless speculation, especially with regard to the name of the traitor. Similar to other resistance movements, those in the Moulin group who had survived arrest and imprisonment came under suspicion. Young René Hardy was accused of having inadvertently or deliberately led the Gestapo to the meeting place. He protested his innocence, and so did his family after Hardy's early death. He was acquitted in two consecutive postwar judicial proceedings, but the rumor persisted even after the aged Barbie, in 1990, exculpated Hardy by pointing a finger at Raymond Aubrac, another famous resister.

Unlike the proper civil servant Jean Moulin, Raymond Aubrac was born into a family of Jewish shop owners; he had undoubted Communist sympathies. Some historians later accused him of having engaged in the allegedly common Communist practice of betraying dangerous political rivals to the Gestapo. Aubrac vehemently protested his innocence, as did his devoted wife, the no less famous resistance heroine Lucie Aubrac. The latter, a high school teacher of history, had managed to combine teaching, family duties, and a very active engagement in the resistance. One of Lucie's legendary exploits was the freeing of her husband from Gestapo captivity. To this end, she had visited Barbie at Gestapo headquarters while her husband was in jail. At her most elegant and beautiful, she pretended to be the pregnant aristocratic fiancée of Raymond Aubrac. In fact, she was pregnant and now claimed to be eager to wash off the shame of giving birth to a bastard by marrying Raymond. All this was to be done in a hurry, before Raymond would be executed. If not Barbie himself, then one of his younger SS officers fell for this "in extremis" argument, allegedly based on French law, and permission was given for the wedding to take place. When Raymond Aubrac and a group of political prisoners were being driven to another prison, armed resistance fighters, led by Lucie, fell upon the German truck. They shot the driver and five German guards and liberated all the prisoners.

Their situation in France having become impossible, the Aubracs were secretly flown in a British plane to London, where Lucie gave birth to their second child. General de Gaulle was the godfather. Somewhat ironically, the leader of the Communist Vietcong's postwar struggle against French colonialism in Indochina, Ho Chi Minh, later became the godfather of the third Aubrac child. Similar to other former left-wing resisters, Lucie and Raymond supported all colonial liberation movements.

In postwar France, Moulin and the two Aubracs became national icons, even while suspicion of their various activities kept occupying the press. Both Aubracs were politically active for the next many decades and were often described as fellow travelers, nonparty members who nevertheless always supported the Communist movement. Lucie and Raymond each died when nearly one hundred years of age, Lucie in 2007 and Raymond in 2012. Jean Moulin, who in a famous photograph is sporting a hat and a big scarf—which hid a scar from an earlier Gestapo arrest and torture—has remained the great symbol of eternal France, or, as General de Gaulle liked to put it, of *France éternelle*.

As for us, we just have to accept the fact that the war and the occupation produced in France, as well as elsewhere, not only open and shadow armies of resistance but also intrigues, internal struggles, incredible heroism, and unbelievable baseness. Regarding many of these developments, we shall never know the truth.

The story of Lucie Aubrac is as good a place as any to mention that while some women played important roles in the resistance movements, not even a handful of them were in a command position. Remember that in France, women received the right to vote only from the provisional government led by General de Gaulle, in October 1944. Yet European women, who were often exempt from the labor-service obligation, were greatly useful to the movement. They aroused much less suspicion when traveling and when carrying forbidden literature, secret messages, and weapons. Unfortunately, women were often not trusted by resisters, who tended to see them as fallible and venal victims of German temptation. Even though groups of young women were used as couriers and even as fighters, for instance, in the great Warsaw anti-Nazi uprising in 1944, women in the resistance were generally expected to act as nurses and helpers. Only the Soviet Red Army went further by employing, for instance, thousands of women to fly combat aircraft—and not only cargo planes, as was the case in the United States. The Soviet, Yugoslav, and Greek Communist partisan

groups included large numbers of armed women. Yet even Communist Party leaderships included only a handful of women.

The National Council of the Resistance (Conseil National de la Résistance [CNR]), which was the umbrella organization that Jean Moulin had created, proved to be resilient and exercised some influence on the action groups, which went by the name of Free French Forces of the Interior (Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur [FFI]). The CNR and the FFI achieved their moment of glory in the summer of 1944 when they effectively helped the Allies to liberate France. The great political parties of the resistance, namely, the Communists, the moderate Socialists, the radicals, the progressive Catholics, and the Gaullists, formed the first governments of *la France Libre*, or Free France.

Resistance in the occupied countries of Western and northern Europe other than France varied according to the terrain, the country's ethnic makeup, the prewar political system, and the nature of the German occupation. In Belgium, the Netherlands, and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, which after World War II constituted the Benelux countries, the terrain was of little use to the resisters, although the Dutch could hide in flooded areas, and Belgium as well as Luxembourg possessed some forests and hills. The crowded cities would have been more useful for the purpose had the superbly efficient national and municipal administrations in all three countries not made it extremely difficult for a person to disappear from sight. The Dutch identity cards, for instance, proved very hard to forge. Moreover, people, especially in smaller towns, knew each other only too well. As political and social identity was traditionally based on religious affiliation,* outsiders were quite conspicuous, which proved especially catastrophic for the Jews.

The Dutch of the Netherlands and the Flemish in Belgium both spoke Dutch; this might have helped in the creation of a united political front against the occupiers, but while the Dutch generally disliked the German occupation, many Flemish, perhaps the majority, welcomed it in the hope that the German presence might allow for Flemish separation from their French-speaking Walloon compatriots.

*Most of the Dutch civic

The venerable, independent Grand Duchy of Luxembourg constituted a special case. Even though most of the grand duchy's inhabitants spoke Luxemburgish, a German dialect that most Germans could not understand (the grand duchy's official languages at that time were French and literary High German; since then, Luxemburgish has also become an official language), most people in the grand duchy resented the unprovoked German invasion. This was incidentally a repeat performance from World War I, but the occupiers in 1914 had not tried to indoctrinate and integrate the locals, nor were young Luxembourgers drafted into German military service. This time all of the above ensued, with the result that thousands of young Luxembourgers went into hiding and some even engaged in partisan activity. Meanwhile, the brothers of the resisters served, fought, and died in German uniform. After the war, the reconstituted Luxembourg government successfully negotiated the early release of its sons from Allied and Soviet captivity. The examples of Luxembourg and of the province of Alsace-Lorraine in France prove, incidentally, that linguistic affinities do not necessarily incline the population toward accepting foreign occupation.

Luckily for the Dutch, Belgians, Norwegians, Danes, French, and Czechs, their young men were not drafted into the German army, so their survival rates were much higher than those of the Luxembourgers, the inhabitants of Alsace-Lorraine, and the German-speaking inhabitants of South Tyrol in Italy (which the Third Reich had annexed in 1943). Involuntary labor service in Germany and participation in the anti-Nazi resistance claimed their victims, but their casualty rates were insignificant in comparison with the suffering and deaths brought about by service in the German army during the war.

Resistance in the Netherlands ranged all the way from showing contempt to enemy soldiers* to armed struggle, but, in general, the Dutch resistance's emphasis was on such things as spreading the good word,

*A patriotic anecdote that all Netherlanders seemed to have enjoyed telling their visitors after the war was how, when asked for directions, they answered in highly refined German: "*Ich bedauere es äusserst Ihre Sprache überhaupt nicht zu beherrschen*" (I deeply regret not to understand a single word of your language). Another much-remembered resistance act was to glue postal stamps not in the right but in the upper-left corner of the envelope so as to show that only stamps displaying the picture of the exiled queen belonged in the upper-right corner. Reality in the Netherlands was, of course, more complicated than that: judging by the number of Dutch volunteers for the SS and young women consorting with and bearing children of German soldiers, many Dutch were not reluctant to collaborate with the occupiers.

threatening collaborators, helping persecuted Jews, expediting Allied airmen back to England, giving information to SOE radio operators, and conducting strikes and sabotage. The most serious and most dramatic of these events was the clash between armed Jewish groups and Nazi militia in Amsterdam in late February 1941, which led to a violent German intervention and a subsequent protest strike by dockworkers, tramway conductors, and others. It was a unique event in the history of the Holocaust that lasted a few days and resulted in imprisonments as well as the deportation of several hundred Jews to concentration camps, from which only two returned alive. The strike, which had led to the first execution of Dutch resisters, had a serious psychological effect abroad, yet we should have no illusions about its having saved lives. As a result of the combined effort of the Dutch administration and the German-appointed members of the Jewish Council, Jews were duly registered, and beginning in 1941 they were ordered to proceed to assembly points. From there, they were gradually deported to German concentration and death camps.

Within Western and northern Europe, the loss of life among Dutch Jews was proportionally the largest: more than 80 percent. It showed that a relatively low level of anti-Semitism did not necessarily improve Jewish casualty rates; more important in the Netherlands was the law-and-order mentality prevailing in society, the conviction among Dutch Jews that salvation lay in obeying the authorities, bureaucratic zeal, and the determination of the German Nazi Party leadership in charge of the Netherlands to create a *judenfrei* country, a Netherlands free of Jews.

In addition to a student, teacher, and physician strike in November 1941, there was an attempted general strike in the spring of 1943 in response to a German order for released Dutch prisoners of war to report for factory labor in Germany. Very much unlike most other places in the West of Europe, the strike attempt led to nearly two hundred killed. It was on this occasion that the father of the well-known American public intellectual Ian Buruma, unwilling to do labor service in Germany, went into hiding as a university student. After being caught, Buruma's father was deported for forced labor in Germany, where he had to work, under very poor conditions, in a Berlin factory until the end of the war. Yet to show that deportation was not necessarily the same thing for an "Aryan" Dutchman as for a Jew, it is worth mentioning that while the Jewish child Anne Frank was killed at Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, Buruma's

father was allowed, and
Philharmonic conducted by Wil
The Dutch resistance had one more great
tle: the Allied airborne landing at Arnhem in September
suddenly seemed that the local resistance would be able to assist General
Montgomery's British, Canadian, Polish, and American troops in a final
push through the northern Netherlands and deep into Germany. The Al-
lies' and Queen Wilhelmina's call for a general strike in German-occupied
areas was a success: the postal and telephone services and especially the
railroads stopped working. But the Allied invasion was stopped in the
winter of 1944, and although the railway strike continued to paralyze
transports, it harmed the Dutch civilians more than it harmed the Ger-
mans. The northern part of the Netherlands did not fall to the Allies until
the last days of the war; meanwhile, thousands of Dutch people died of
starvation.

Divided between its Protestant, Flemish, and Catholic French-speak-
ing Walloon populations, with Brussels as a bilingual capital, Belgium
survived the war with somewhat less trouble and suffering than the neigh-
boring Netherlands and Luxembourg. Perhaps because Belgium was eth-
nically divided—with its French-speaking half less desirable from a Nazi
racial point of view—and perhaps because King Leopold III had personally
surrendered his troops and not fled to England, Belgium was spared Nazi
Party rule, at least until the summer of 1944. The government was in the
hands of the military under General Alexander von Falkenhausen, who at
first was preoccupied with preparations for the invasion of Great Britain
and after Hitler dropped the idea concentrated on the defense of Belgium
against an Allied invasion. For this purpose, Falkenhausen needed a tran-
quil population, a goal that he essentially accomplished.

Falkenhausen as well as his counterparts in France, the related gen-
erals Otto and Carl Heinrich von Stülpnagel, were deeply involved in the
1944 anti-Hitler conspiracy, which had not prevented them from taking
the sternest measures against the resistance groups and from allowing the
Gestapo and the local national police to proceed with the "Final Solution
of the Jewish Question." In Belgium these measures resulted in the deaths
of half of the Belgian Jews. Pro-German Flemish and the Walloon fascist
organizations helped to arrest Jews or handed them over to the Gestapo.
The popul still better than Eastern

Europe, where Jews in hiding were often denounced to the police and where the population generally threw itself on the property of the Jewish deportees.

In defiance of King Leopold's wishes, the Belgian government had fled to England and continued the war from there; the administrative apparatus, however, stayed put and tried to maneuver between German demands and the interests of fellow Belgians. As nearly everywhere else in Europe, society split into three factions: collaborators, a vast majority who were just trying to get by, and a tough nucleus of active resisters. There were always more than enough young men volunteering to fill the ranks of the Flemish and the Walloon SS divisions. Nor did German soldiers lack the affection of Belgian women; meanwhile, Belgian businessmen profited from the needs of the German war industry. Black marketers drove food and clothing prices sky-high, but at least the people in Belgium did not suffer mass starvation. The political views of the resistance movements ranged all the way from a very strong Communist group to a few Rexist fascists who had gone over to the resistance. A no less deep chasm separated the *résistants de la première heure,* those who had opposed the occupation from the first hour, from those who became the *résistants cinque minutes avant minuit,* those who joined the resistance five minutes before midnight.

Problematically for all, the Belgian resisters did not see eye to eye on the future of the country. While the Left demanded that the traitorous King Leopold be made to abdicate after the war, or even that he be arrested, the monarchist anti-Nazi resisters argued that it was thanks to the king, and his personal encounters with the Führer, that thousands of Belgian POWs had been released. There was also the ethnic question: the French-speaking officers, professionals, and intellectuals who dominated the resistance—as they had dominated public life before the war—worked toward social reform or even a socialist revolution; the main concern of the much smaller Flemish resistance was local autonomy and equality in public affairs.

One area in which Walloon and Flemish resistance cooperated was the expediting of thousands of downed Allied pilots back to Great Britain, usually through Spain and Gibraltar. This dangerous activity required the participation of a large number of ordinary citizens, especially farmers, who passed the airmen from house to house or, more accurately, from hayloft to hayloft. Recaptured airmen were generally sent to a stricter prison camp; civilians caught hiding the airmen risked deportation to a

concentration camp, where many perished. Since the treatment meted out to the civilian helpers of the pilots was in agreement with The Hague and Geneva Conventions, the civilians became the real victims of that affair, not the Allied pilots.

As a unique feat in the history of the European resistance, a group of Belgian partisans tried to stop the deportation trains leaving with Jews for the East, and one even succeeded, in April 1943, to derail the famous Twentieth Convoy. A few hundred Jews escaped from that train, but most were hunted down, and ultimately only a handful survived the war. The event only confirmed that Jewish survival was a secondary concern, if that, for the resistance movements in Europe.

In Norway everything preconditioned the growth of a powerful resistance movement, yet, in reality, there was less of it than is generally assumed and as was diligently asserted during and after the war by Norway's numerous friends.* To say that the terrain was varied and often impenetrable to the occupiers is an understatement. Some sixty thousand miles of a craggy coastline, including many deep fjords, lent itself ideally for resisters to hide. They could also sail secretly to British-held islands in the North Sea and return with weapons, provisions, and SOE agents. This so-called Shetland Bus, with its nearly constant traffic by Norwegian- and British-manned speedboats (disguised as fishing boats), has achieved world fame.

Then there were the snow-covered mountains and inland forests and hills, with their widely dispersed ski lodges and the narrow trails that in the winter only the hardiest locals could negotiate. The trails led to Sweden, a friendly neutral that Norwegian resisters regularly visited for rest and recuperation. Note also Norway's ethnically nearly homogeneous population, its great democratic and heroic Viking tradition, as well as the daily reminders of the country's recent defeat and humiliation.

Norway's king and government had fled to London but did not resign; thus, unlike the Pétain regime in France, Quisling's self-appointed government in Oslo lacked legitimacy. The Norwegian exiles were well

*An assiduous herald of the heroism of Danish and Norwegian resistance to Nazism was the famous comedian and pianist Victor Borge, a Danish Jewish refugee, who settled during the war in the United States. What Borge never mentioned in his public performances on behalf of Denmark and Norway was that, before the war, the Scandinavian immigration laws had allowed only a handful of German and Austrian Jewish refugees to settle in their countries.

provided with British money and powerful radio stations; in exchange, the exile government put the entire Norwegian navy, air force, and huge commercial fleet at the Allies' disposal. What more could one ask for the creation of a powerful resistance movement? Yet most Norwegians remained tranquil throughout the war, and, for a long time, such heroic resisters as Gunnar Sønsteby remained badly isolated. Norwegian collaborators and young Norwegians who volunteered for combat duty on the German side far outnumbered the active resisters. But then, admittedly, it was far easier in occupied Norway or elsewhere in Europe to find a Nazi recruiting station than an underground group and, once located, to persuade the resisters of one's honest intentions. Altogether fifteen thousand Norwegian volunteers served the Germans with arms, nor should it be too cynical to mention that, during the war, in Norway, thirty thousand babies were born from German soldier-fathers and Norwegian mothers.

The main Norwegian resistance organization, called Milorg, was led by army officers in hiding, who saw their main task as preserving the country's unity, to prepare for a takeover at the end of the war, and to prevent a Communist coup d'état. And although there was little chance for the latter, territorial unity was a serious problem. Modern, independent Norway was not yet fifty years old at the time, following the country's secession from Sweden. Different regions of the narrow but endlessly long peninsula of Norway had their own traditions, their own written Norwegian language, and their own dialect. Travel from Kirkenes at the Soviet-Finnish border in the far north to the capital, Oslo, in the far-away south was possible only by air and by boat; the sea voyage could take weeks. Far-away regions regarded the capital, Oslo, as an unwanted tax collector and the source of senseless regulations. Resistance to the German occupation in central and northern Norway took off only after it had become clear that the Germans were even more zealous centralizers than the royal government had been.

Though Milorg soon numbered hundreds of members and toward the end of the war trained a regular army, mainly in Sweden, this resistance organization generally abstained from violent action for fear of massive German retaliation. Attacks on the huge German garrison, at times numbering nearly a half-million men, were rare indeed, as were acts of sabotage.

What the Norwegian resistance was excellent at accomplishing were observing and reporting German troop and naval movements and

performing brave and effective commando actions. But all these activities were either under the command of the British army and navy or under the guidance of the SOE.

The most famous commando actions were performed by the combined British and Norwegian naval forces against the Lofoten Islands in northern Norway, especially the action in March 1941. The commandos, which occupied the main islands for a few hours, destroyed all the fisheries, fish-oil processing plants, and arms depots. They also captured the rotor wheels to the German Enigma machine as well as code books that then helped the British to penetrate German military and naval communications. The population of the Lofoten Islands assisted the Allied commandos in every way they could. Also, several hundred volunteers sailed off with the British to join the Free Norwegian Forces. What the chronicles usually fail to mention is that not only did the islanders quietly accept the destruction of their jobs and livelihood, but they were later harshly treated by the German authorities.

Even more famous was the destruction of the German heavy-water installation at Vemork, between Oslo and Bergen, by Norwegian SOE commandos. Heavy water was at that time seen as indispensable for the development of nuclear weapons. Of the five British attempts to destroy the plant, the one by a small group of Norwegians was the most successful. The raiders, all hardened mountain climbers and skiers, stormed the Norsk Hydro Plant via a rock wall. It was a technically perfect operation, but the installation was back in operation within a few weeks. More efficient was the blowing up of a passenger ship that carried heavy water on the way to Germany, but a number of innocent Norwegian passengers were also killed. In any case, today we know that the availability of heavy water did not greatly help the very belated German nuclear energy project.

Norwegians for overseas action were trained in Britain by the SOE; inevitably, then, there were disagreements between the SOE, which wanted to see concrete results even at some cost to both the commandos and the civilians, and the exile government, which tried not to alienate its fellow citizens. The dilemma of costly action versus a wait-and-see position plagued the SOE throughout the war years and typified the dilemma of resistance activity everywhere.

Even though the citizens of Denmark and Norway can understand each other's language, and even though the Germans had invaded the two countries on the same day in April 1940, the two situations differed

fundamentally during the war. As we know already, the Danes did not even attempt to resist the German invasion; they surrendered immediately. Nor did their king and government flee abroad; in appreciation, the occupiers allowed the Danes to keep their king, government, parliament, democratic constitution, army, and diplomatic service. Subsequently, Denmark signed the Anti-Comintern Pact, making Denmark an ally of Germany, Italy, and Japan. Danish and German businessmen cooperated in colonizing occupied Soviet Russia.

Norwegians and Danes provided the Waffen SS, the combat arms of the German Nazi SS organization, with roughly a similar number of volunteers, and their women gave birth to a similar number of half-German babies. The two countries also resembled each other in rejecting the ideology of National Socialism; the Norwegian Nazi Nasjonal Samling and the Danish National Socialist Party were popular failures; the occupying power had no choice but to work with decidedly non-Nazi native bureaucracies. But, and this was very important from the point of view of resistance, the two countries differed greatly in terms of geography and terrain. The highest "mountain" in Denmark is less than five hundred feet high; there are no dramatic coastlines, no fjords, no snowy forests, no hidden chalets. The Danish countryside resembles a garden rather than wild nature. During the war, there were no serious food shortages, young men were not drafted into military or labor service, Denmark had little strategic significance, and the SOE did not try to "set it ablaze"—small wonder then that initially no one called for armed (or any other) resistance. What there was of resistance originated from individuals aghast at the spectacle of Danish collaboration with the occupying power. But, gradually, resistance unfolded in that country also, and by 1943 relations between occupier and occupied had become so bad as to cause the Germans to introduce direct rule. But the king and the slightly modified government still remained in place, and with clever maneuvering the country preserved much of its autonomy.

The obvious cooperation between Danes and local German authorities in sabotaging the "Jewish Question" finally led Heinrich Himmler, in the early fall of 1943, to order the deportation of the country's approximately seventy-eight hundred Jews to the death camps. Yet the local German authorities were reluctant to execute the order; moreover, Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz, a commercial attaché at the German legation in Copenhagen, hurried to inform influential Danish personalities, such as the leader of the Social Democrats and various church dignitaries, of Berlin's plan.

Duckwitz even traveled to Stockholm to obtain permission for the secret transfer of Danish Jews to that country. With permission obtained, the exodus was quickly organized, and when the German policemen began to collect the Jews, most were already gone. This was indeed a magnificent act on the part of the Danes, but it should be seen more as a humanitarian deed than an act of resistance; the latter requires an opponent and involves a great risk for its participants. In this particular case, the local German authorities cooperated with the Danes. Duckwitz had been told about the deportation plans by SS general Werner Best, who was the Reich plenipotentiary for Denmark; Duckwitz could not have traveled to Stockholm without Best's permission. Duckwitz was later rightfully named "Righteous Among the Nations" by the Yad Vashem Museum in Jerusalem. Yet, ironically, his chief, war criminal General Werner Best, whom a Danish court sentenced to death in 1948 but who was later released, deserved the title of righteous even more for this very particular act; after all, Best had taken a great risk by ignoring orders from Berlin.

The transfer of Danish Jews took place in a fleet of fishing boats, and even though it would have been easy for German naval units patrolling the area to stop the exodus, their commanders closed their eyes to the very visible event. Back in Denmark, German policemen had been told to arrest only such Jews who were willing to let them in. At the end, fewer than five hundred (mostly elderly) Jews were deported to the so-called model Theresienstadt concentration camp in Terezín in what is today the Czech Republic. And even there, the Danish Jews enjoyed the protection of their government, whose representatives were allowed to visit. As a result, the only Danish Jews who passed away during the war died of natural causes. The dark side of this heartwarming story is that in order to be able to offer acceptable quarters to the Danish deportees, Adolf Eichmann's SS transported other Jews from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz, where they were gassed.

Does all this mean that meek submission to the German invasion and occupation, and later an appeal to the occupiers' humanity, might have helped to save Jewish lives in other countries as well?* This is conceivable

*One of the persistent popular legends circulating in the Western world is that King Christian X, who surrendered Denmark to the Germans on the day of their invasion, later threatened to wear the Star of David on his uniform in case the Jews in his country were obliged to wear one. According to another version of the legend, he actually exhibited the Star of David on his uniform. Actually, no one in Denmark ever had to wear such a thing.

but not very likely. After all, the extermination of the Jews, as a war goal, at least equaled the goal of winning the war. Witness Adolf Eichmann's ability to commandeer as many railroad cars as he wanted for sending nearly a half-million Hungarian Jews to the gas chambers at Auschwitz between May and July 1944, that is, at a time when the German army needed all the existing rolling stock to try to halt the advance of the Soviet troops. Note also that in Nazi eyes, the Russians and the Poles were mere subhumans; the Jews, on the other hand, appeared to them as superhuman, supernatural fiends whose total destruction was an absolute necessity if Germany was to live. Denmark was a unique case: Germanic, peaceful, economically indispensable, strategically unimportant, and with only a few thousand Jews. Moreover, it so happened that unlike the German military commanders and officials in the East, their equivalents in Denmark happened to be less than radical Nazis. And let us not forget that although Hitler wished to incorporate Denmark into the greater German Reich, in the East he wished to colonize the land and leave only useful slaves in place. In Poland, Russia, and similar countries, submissiveness would not have helped matters.

Toward the end of the war, a specially trained squadron of British fighter planes freed Danish political prisoners by destroying Gestapo headquarters in Copenhagen without hitting the floor where the prisoners were held. (Tragically, some pilots mistakenly attacked a neighboring girls' school, causing heavy casualties among students and teachers.)[2] By that time, the Danish underground press had become one of the most successful in Hitler's Europe. Yet, in general, Denmark remained serene and peaceful to the end, to the great benefit of the civilian population—and of the German war industry. Overall, with all one's admiration for the democratic mentality and practices of the Danish people, we must admit that if everybody in German-occupied countries had behaved the way the Danes did, the war would have lasted much longer. How much longer is, of course, difficult to estimate; it all hinges on how we calculate the military value of the European resistance movement. This we will do when discussing the partisans of Eastern and southeastern Europe, where the real resistance struggles and most of the war in Europe took place.

The question remains open as to what kind of resistance profited the national cause and, alternately, the Allied cause in Western and northern Europe. The two issues should be separated. For instance, leaflets, books, and pamphlets, written by outstanding authors and journalists, lifted national morale, but it is hard to measure how this contributed to the Allied

war effort. Even the most passionate anti-Nazi patriots had to make a living, and thus the vast majority of people toiled away diligently in factories and offices that contributed to the German war effort. Nor does it seem that sabotage in Norway or France or anywhere else in the West and the North greatly weakened the German armed might. In 1944, however, railway sabotage, especially the deliberate entangling of timetables and the misdirecting of military transports, delayed the German response to the Allied landing in Normandy. The price paid by the resisters was high: many French railway workers were shot in 1944 for sabotage.

Armed struggle did, of course, bring some concrete results: a German soldier shot in the back under the cover of darkness was one less German soldier. But the price for this type of killing was usually horrifying: ten "hostages" executed for every single German soldier killed in Rome in 1944, fifty or one hundred civilians hanged or shot for every German soldier killed by partisans in Serbia. Moreover, the hostages were seldom well-known individuals whose execution might have deterred others from acting against the occupiers; more often, they were bystanders arrested after the event. Often the "hostages" were Jews, Gypsies, Communists, or refugees from the East whose demise the population was not likely to regret. Still, many resistance leaders judged hostage killings too great a price to pay for the life of a German soldier, and so rather than ordering the murder of Germans, they ordered the murder of traitors and collaborators. This in turn opened the Pandora's box of internal conflict or civil war within the fight against the occupiers.

The Allies disliked competition and conflict within the resistance, even though the victory of one group over another may have facilitated the creation of a united front against Germany. Doubting the reliability of the French resistance, the British air command was often reluctant to provide the SOE with airplanes for dropping supplies and agents to local groups. Traditionalist politicians in Britain believed such efforts were useless, even immoral; they also feared that the weapons would end up in German or Communist hands. Churchill himself was suspicious of the resisters for their Communist inclinations; still, he sent SOE agents, military officers, and arms to the Communist Josip Tito in Yugoslavia. He also sent agents to the Communist partisans in Greece, at least until the latter clashed with British troops, in 1944, in liberated Greece. In general, Churchill argued that anyone who was likely to harm the Germans deserved help; at least the partisans' sacrifice would spare the lives of British soldiers.

No matter how we look at it, resistance in Western and northern Europe did not abide by the international agreements on the right of armed civilians to oppose an invader under greatly restricted circumstances—unless one considers German aggression a sufficient reason for any kind of violent resistance. Yet the Germans could not be charged with aggression in the matter of France, which had declared war on Germany on September 1, 1939, and had immediately moved its armies to the German frontier. It is true, however, that Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Belgium had provided no grounds for a German invasion; on the contrary, they had made great efforts to demonstrate their neutrality in the coming war.

The Hague Convention states that, once enemy occupation has become a fact, the population has to obey the occupation authorities, unless the latter are committing grave illegalities. There is no proof that, in Western and northern Europe, the invading Germans in 1940 committed such grave crimes as rape, robberies, setting fire to undefended towns, or murdering prisoners of war or ordinary civilians. Such things happened in the form of retaliation and only after the start of violent resistance and of SOE activity, both of which provoked retaliation. From that time on, basically from the summer of 1941, both sides piled illegal acts on illegal acts; the Germans, however, had the means to be more ruthless than the resistance. Also, any halfway intelligent West European must have known that the restraint exercised by the German occupation authorities was only temporary and that there could be no doubt regarding their plan to establish hegemony over Europe.

HELPING JEWS

There was one more act of resistance practiced European-wide although by far too few people: the attempt to save Jewish property and lives. The Jews in Europe, as it is so well known today, were condemned to death by Hitler and his associates sometime in 1941, and the first details of the plan's execution were worked out at the Wannsee Conference, in suburban Berlin, in January 1942. We have already discussed the participation or partial participation in the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" of the governments allied with Nazi Germany. The survival of the Jews was largely in their hands; no government allied with Germany was ever forced to kill or surrender its Jews. The governments of the occupied countries—when there were governments—were in a more difficult situation, but even there

the execution of German orders depended largely on the national authorities; witness the case of Denmark, for instance. Where there was no government, as in the Netherlands or Norway, the local authorities could have helped many if not all, had they taken some risks.

Finally, in every single country, including Germany, much also depended on groups and individuals. Those who helped the Jews were in fact practicing a quiet, unspectacular, but highly efficient form of resistance. By occupation or social background, they ranged from German clerics, Italian diplomats, French bishops, Bulgarian metropolitans, and Hungarian police officers to post office clerks, hotel concierges, and taxi drivers, all the way down to the poorest peasants. And although those at the highest levels of society, as well as those living in Western, northern, and southern Europe, risked little in helping Jews, poor people in the East took the biggest risk on themselves and their families. Père Marie-Benoît, a Capuchin monk from France, procured thousands of forged documents and did countless other things for Jews at first in France and then in Italy, yet he was never arrested by either the German, the French, or the Italian police.[3] In fact, the Italian authorities provided his Jewish wards with a safe haven. On the other side, scores of Polish farmers were executed by the Germans, together with their entire families, for sheltering Jews.*

It has been said that about twenty-five people were needed to protect a single Jewish life under German rule; the figure is not an exaggeration. All over Europe, millions were occasionally involved in protecting a Jew or at least in not reporting him or her to the authorities. Still, millions more could have done the same, especially those outside the areas of the most brutal German occupation.

NOTES

1. Ian Buruma, *Year Zero: A History of 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2013), 3–7.

2. See Robin Reilly, *The Sixth Floor: The Danish Resistance Movement and the RAF Raid on Gestapo Headquarters, March 1945* (London: Cassell, 1969).

3. On the life of Père Benoît, see Susan Zuccotti, *Père Marie-Benoît and Jewish Rescue: How a French Priest Together with Jewish Friends Saved Thousands During the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

*The Polish Institute for National Remembrance in Warsaw has been able to identify slightly more than seven hundred cases of Poles executed for helping Jews in hiding. In reality, there must have been far more similar Polish martyrs. See Jan Grabowski, *Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).