RESISTANCE
AGAINST THE
THIRD REICH
1933-1990

EDITED BY
MICHAEL GEYER AND
JOHN W. BOYER

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operations of the army. In the end, participation in the extermination of “others” might appear to many as the ultimate fulfillment of those cherished notions of “German quality work.”

55 On the invasion of the Soviet Union and the aspects of extermination on the level of political military planning and leadership, see esp. Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg, ed. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (Stuttgart, 1983), 4:18 ff., 413 ff. For the military occupation army in the East, see the excellent account by Theo Schulte, The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia (Oxford, 1989). In my opinion, only historical reconstruction of everyday life provides the opportunity to explain the (relative) attractiveness of the military not only in peace but also in war. This perspective reveals the relationships between and ambivalences of ideology and the daily experiences of people. See Lutz Niethammer, “Heimat und Front: Versuch, zehn Kriegserinnerungen aus der Arbeiterklasse zu verstehen,” in “Die Jahre will man nicht” (n. 3 above), pp. 163–232. See also the critique of this assumed connectedness in Omer Bartov, “The Missing Years: German Workers, German Soldiers,” German History 8 (1990): 46–65.

“In the End I Just Said O.K.”: Political and Moral Dimensions of Escape Aid at the Swiss Border*

Alfred G. Frei
Kulturamt der Stadt Singen

“I helped simply out of compassion,” says Josef Höfler. The eighty-some-year-old sits in the living room of his small house in Gottmadingen, an industrial village located about two miles from the Swiss border. In the years 1943 and 1944, Höfler showed sixteen Jews the way over into Switzerland in order to save them from certain death in the gas chambers of Nazi Germany. Josef Höfler was a refugee helper. He was not the only one to risk his life to assist the large numbers of persecuted people who poured into the region between the southern German industrial city of Singen am Hohentwiel and Schaffhausen, Switzerland; but there were only a few who tried to help the refugees, and most have been forgotten, their traces now difficult to find. In this essay, I will outline the importance of the Singen border region for escape attempts from Nazi Germany and present three different ways in which escape aid (Fluchthilfe) was provided. At the close, I will examine the question of sources and suggest how to interpret the political and moral dimensions of resistance and refugee help in this period.

ESCAPING THE HORROR ON FOOT

In the years between 1940 and 1945, Switzerland was the only country neighboring Germany that was able to negotiate a certain amount of independence. More than 90 percent of the Swiss-German border is determined by Lake Constance and the Rhine, and neither the lake nor the strong currents of the Rhine could be crossed without local knowledge and help. The border police easily controlled the river, but two sections of the Schaffhausen canton extend north of the Rhine and can be reached from Germany by foot. The “green border” of the Schaffhausen canton runs past the cities of Schaffhausen and Stein am Rhein in an erratic course through fields and forests (see fig. 1). Anyone trying to flee Germany needed the help of someone familiar with the confusing features of this border; at the same time, the terrain made escape attempts more difficult to detect.

In his study of escape methods used by RAF airmen during the Second World War, Aidan Crawley writes, “For most pedestrians in the early days of
the war, Switzerland was the usual goal. It was the nearest neutral country and mountain climbers and skiing enthusiasts had a detailed knowledge of some parts of the frontier. In addition, many thousands of Frenchmen, Poles and a few members of the British Army had crossed this frontier in 1940 and 1941 and certain stretches of it, such as the Schaffhausen Salient or the eastern end of Lake Constance, had been carefully mapped. But the geography of the border was not the only reason why so many people sought out the region between Singen and Schaffhausen to escape from Germany: there were at least five other reasons, and these provide points of inquiry into the more particular motivations of local residents who tried to help the refugees.

First of all, in Catholic southern Baden, the National Socialists never succeeded in gaining a clear majority. In the Reichstag elections of March 1933, the Nazis received only 34.7 percent of the vote from Singen’s twenty thousand inhabitants, almost ten percentage points less than their 43.9 percent national average. In the November 1932 election, the difference had been as high as 12 percent. In addition, proximity to the border seemed to provide a sense of hope and relative security. A great number of banned artists, for example, among them Otto Dix and Max Ackermann, withdrew from the cities to the Höri peninsula on Lake Constance between Singen and Radolfzell with its view of Switzerland. Similarly, Rosa and Irma Thälmann, the wife and daughter of Ernst Thälmann, the leader of the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (KPD) who was arrested in 1933 and murdered ten years later, spent almost the entire Nazi period with their comrades in Singen’s working-class district.

In the second place, Singen was home to the factories of three large Swiss firms, Maggi, Georg Fischer AG, and Aluminium Walzwerke, and it had the highest proportion of industrial factory workers in all of Baden. The Singen factory workers remained firmly rooted in their agricultural and Catholic background, however, and they lacked the handcraft traditions from which the workers’ movement in other cities drew its strength and identity. While the socialist workers’ parties in Singen seldom garnered more than 40 percent of

\[1\] Aidan Crawley, Escape from Germany: The Methods of Escape Used by RAF Airmen during the Second World War (London, 1985), p. 56.
\[3\] Andrea Hoffmann, Künstler auf der Höri: Zuflucht am Bodensee in der ersten Hälfte des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts (Konstanz, 1989).
the vote, Singen was by far the "reddest" city in the region. In the November 1932 Reichstag election, for example, the Communists won 23.8 percent and the Social Democrats 14.7 percent of the vote.6 Across the border, the inhabitants of Schaffhausen voted in a Communist town government for most of the period from 1933 to 1945. The workers from the industrial quarters of the historically bourgeois Schaffhausen repeatedly elected Walter Bringolf, a member of the Kommunistische Partei Opposition (KPO), as mayor. Bringolf openly defied Swiss law which, until 1943, refused to accept refugees except in unusual cases.7

Third, the higher wages in Switzerland drew many people from Singen and the surrounding area across the border every day to work. These "border commuters" further strengthened the already close relationships among the socialist parties and labor unions on both sides of the border. The state police precinct of Karlsruhe in its report of January 5, 1938, for example, attributed the "communist activity on the Singen border" to the fact that "many people travel almost daily to Switzerland and read Marxist literature there." German workers were "doubtlessly infected" through contact with Swiss colleagues.8 In particular, the local German branches of the international cultural organization "Friends of Nature" (Naturfreunde) worked closely with their counterparts in the Schaffhausen area. Hiking, canoeing, and other recreational activities of the Naturfreunde produced the knowledge and practical experience that would prove indispensable to those who helped the refugees.

Fourth, since the end of the nineteenth century, Singen was a hub of the railway system. The railroad lines between Zurich and Stuttgart, Constance and Offenburg, and Basel and Munich, along with two other nearby lines, all crossed in Singen. Singen thus attracted the attention of Swiss businesses, which quickly and heavily industrialized what earlier had been a farming village.9 For refugees of the Nazi period, the railroad provided a fast exit, at least as far as the border. Especially crucial was Singen's rail connection to Munich, which at that time served as the gateway to both Berlin and central Germany.

A final important point was that a short train ride from Singen could bring a refugee into the relative safety of Switzerland. This escape route was to prove especially important during the first years of Nazi rule.

**Political and Moral Dimensions of Aid Given to Refugees**

"I come from the BMW plants." With this password, many antifascists, especially Communists, gained entrance into the Harlander family's small house in a residential section of Singen. Until 1933, the Harlanders did not belong to any political party. Their twenty-five-year-old son Xaver was a mason by trade and traveled every day to work in Schaffhausen. Because he first joined the Communist Party in 1933, Xaver was not on the list of political suspects under surveillance by the Gestapo.

Xaver Harlander maintained contact with the "Schaffhausen Red Help" (Rote Hilfe). In the first years of Nazi rule, help for refugees was relatively easy. A member of the Schaffhausen Red Help, such as the textile worker Marie Furrer-Grimm, could buy a round-trip train ticket to Singen from Schaffhausen, conveniently forgetting her passport in order to receive a day pass from the border police—a valid, extra border document good for that day. In the Harlander house in Singen, the refugee was given the train ticket to Schaffhausen along with the extra border papers from the forgetful Marie Furrer-Grimm. She then purchased another train ticket to Schaffhausen in Singen, producing at the border her own passport, which of course she had with her the entire time.10

Born in 1906, Marie Furrer-Grimm is proud of her Communist identity. In an autobiographical account she notes, "To my satisfaction, I grew up in a working-class family; that is, I was raised with a sense of class consciousness. We were also introduced to nature and taught an appreciation of life, as well as its deficiencies in the existing order." When the enemies of the workers' movement came to power in Germany in 1933, she did not hesitate to help or to resist. In a border region, resistance meant bringing fleeing comrades and other threatened people to safety. In the Swiss countryside, the helpers collected money and found people willing to shelter the escapees—if the Swiss government had not already imprisoned them.11

Compared to other political groups, the Communists were relatively well prepared for the German dictator's seizure of power, having founded Red Help as early as 1924. From the beginning the organization was international.

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6 Pickel, pp. 6–7.
7 Walther Bringolf, Mein Leben: Weg und Umweg eines Schweizer Sozialdemokraten (Bern, 1965).

Their comparatively overt and constant political engagement would demand much sacrifice. At least half of the estimated three hundred thousand KPD members in 1933 were imprisoned at least once by the National Socialists. An estimated twenty thousand Communists were murdered. In the years between 1933 and 1939, the National Socialists refined their apparatus of surveillance and repression. Their illusory economic successes led to greater support in the populace, a shift that significantly raised the stakes of refugee help. Tighter border controls circumvented escape attempts by rail and by foot. For their part, until 1943 the Swiss police returned almost every refugee they caught near the border. The fear that Germany would invade its small neighbor, combined with the mounting strength of the pro-Nazi movement, turned Switzerland into a leak-ridden lifeboat. Even in the years between 1942 and 1945, when the Swiss knew the extent of the Nazi terror, the government sent back almost ten thousand people to the National Socialist regime—and these are only the cases that are officially documented and acknowledged by the Swiss government.

The escalating dangers to refugees and refugee helpers also threatened Marie Furrer-Grimm. In the summer of 1935, as she returned to the Harlander house to see if new refugees had arrived, she spotted the Gestapo. She spun around just in the nick of time. The Harlanders and the other German helpers were arrested and incarcerated for years in concentration camps. Marie Furrer-Grimm then took up other contacts in refugee aid. In early 1937, unable to obtain the day off from work, she handed her passport to an associate to pick up a female émigré. He was arrested, and the Gestapo found her passport on him. Marie Furrer-Grimm was ordered to report to the Swiss canton police, but she could no longer cross the border into Germany, and this form of help to refugees ended.

Richard Jäckle, another refugee helper, was born in 1912 into a family with a strong social democratic tradition. His grandfather had lost his job for distributing social democratic pamphlets in the Black Forest. The Jäckles moved to Singen in the hopes of finding work in the new factories. In the 1920s Richard Jäckle’s father worked as a party secretary. Richard Jäckle himself became a typesetter at the social democratic daily paper Volksville, and when the National Socialists banned the paper in 1933 he was out of work until he found employment at another print shop in Wiesbaden. The Jäckles continued their political work for the Social Democrats into the Nazi period. They smuggled social democratic newspapers and propaganda over the border, and Jäckle’s father reported on the situation in the Singen plants for the German Reports of the Social Democratic Party (the SOPADE Reports). During the 1930s, however, the National Socialists succeeded in repressing this form of political work as well.

In contrast to the Communists, the Social Democrats had not developed any functioning and trained resistance networks that could have offered organized help to refugees. All the same, the Nazi machine was not able to alter their inner moral convictions, which had been shaped by the social democratic, working-class milieu of the 1920s. This was also true of Richard Jäckle. When the young typesetter discovered that a business partner in the Wiesbaden firm had to leave Germany with his Jewish wife, he immediately offered his help. Jäckle first brought the woman, who was in particular danger, to stay with his father in Singen; six weeks later he brought her husband. In 1943 he returned to his hometown to lead the couple over the border. From the Gottmadingen cemetery, they studied the terrain for a possible escape route. His father had thought up a good story in case they were interrogated by the border police: they would say they had heard that fabric, a scarce commodity worth any trip, was to be had in a nearby village. The flight of the couple was successful. Even today, Richard Jäckle sees his help to refugees as a moral obligation.

The escape help undertaken by Josef Höfler, mentioned earlier, was not prompted by the same kind of political considerations and identification that inspired Marie Furrer-Grimm and Richard Jäckle. Höfler was born in 1911 in the border town of Bietingen. His parents were poor farmers. He could not inherit the farm, nor could his parents afford to provide him with an apprenticeship. After leaving grammar school he became an unskilled worker in Fahr, a large agricultural equipment factory in Gottmadingen. But Josef Höfler did not resign himself to this fate, and at twenty he apprenticed himself to a blacksmith in the Swiss village of Ramsen. After his apprenticeship and a short stint as a journeyman in the Black Forest, he returned to Fahr as a skilled worker and found a position manufacturing harvesters on the assembly line. In 1943 he was conscripted to work for the war effort in the Singen plant of Aluminium Walzwerke.

Josef Höfler was not politically active and was also very careful. However, it was known that he did not support National Socialism, and another conscript at Aluminium Walzwerke approached him about helping endangered people escape into Switzerland. They spoke several times. Then Luise Meyer,
who directed an escape organization for German Jews in Berlin, visited Höfler in Gottmadingen to enlist him and his excellent knowledge of the border in escape efforts. He thought about it for a long time. In contrast to Marie Furrer-Grimm or Richard Jäckle, helping was no foregone conclusion for him. He had married in 1935, and a year later his in-laws had helped the pair build a small house in Gottmadingen. He and his wife had a son and felt comfortable, even within their modest financial circumstances. They had taken in a lodger to help make ends meet. The lodger turned out to be an extreme National Socialist who repeatedly told his landlord that he would have all enemies of the regime imprisoned in concentration camps.

Should Josef Höfler risk his family’s happiness under such conditions? Asked why he finally did help, he modestly shrugged, “Out of compassion.” He had carefully followed the development of the Nazi regime. The day after the synagogue in nearby Randegg had been destroyed in November 1938, he rode his bicycle over to take a look for himself. Had he dared, he would have taken one of the Torah scrolls with him. Höfler watched the expulsion of the Jews from the village and discovered that Wagner, the especially fanatical Gauleiter of Baden, had ordered that all the remaining Jews of the area be transported to the French concentration camp Gurs on October 20, 1940. Höfler knew that the National Socialists wanted to destroy the Jews. It was the last straw; Luise Meyer and Höfler’s antifascist colleague had carefully followed the development of the Nazi regime. The day after the synagogue in nearby Randegg had been destroyed in November 1938, he rode his bicycle over to take a look for himself. Had he dared, he would have taken one of the Torah scrolls with him. Höfler watched the expulsion of the Jews from the village and discovered that Wagner, the especially fanatical Gauleiter of Baden, had ordered that all the remaining Jews of the area be transported to the French concentration camp Gurs on October 20, 1940. Höfler knew that the National Socialists wanted to destroy the Jews. It was the last straw; Luise Meyer and Höfler’s antifascist colleague were finally able to persuade him to help. “They begged and pleaded for so long that, in the end, I finally said O.K., I would do it once.” He brought a married Jewish couple over the border. Although Höfler became a staunch Social Democrat after the war, today he candidly admits that he probably would not have helped Social Democrats or Communists. He wanted to be certain that the people whom he brought over the border were in immediate danger of losing their lives. On that point, he could be certain only about the Jews. He had seen their plight in villages throughout the Höri peninsula.

Höfler’s promise to help one time was soon renewed. The oppression of the German Jews escalated, while the possibilities of escape diminished rapidly. In 1943 Switzerland finally liberalized its refugee policy. If a refugee could make it across the border, which the Swiss continued to patrol as tightly as the Germans, he or she had a chance to stay. The reward for success made the work of refugee helpers like Josef Höfler even more crucial.

Höfler let himself be persuaded again and again. He forgot his fear. Despite the dangerous lodger, he even sheltered the refugees arriving in the night from Berlin in his home. From there, he guided them across the border by Gottmadingen, where Richard Jäckle had smuggled out the married couple from Wiesbaden. Höfler, who five years before had been afraid to pick up the Torah scrolls from the Randegg synagogue, then convinced two friends—one of them a customs official—to be humane and help. They brought eight more Jews across the border. During 1944 they generally chose the path over the “green border” in the secluded and thinly populated hilly area around Singen. Despite the grave danger, Höfler and his friends continued to work with the refugees, who often were unwilling to follow the advice of their helpers. The point of contention was usually baggage: was it not possible to save the fewest bits of belongings, prized possessions, something to preserve history as well as life in the new country? These were problems not only on the Rhine and Lake Constance: the refugees whom Hans and Lisa Fittko led along the perilous path over the Pyrenees into Spain during these years regularly begged to take just one trunk. As Lisa Fittko wrote in her gripping book, many refugees remained stubborn on this point and refused to heed the warnings.

For Josef Höfler and his helpers the question of luggage finally proved their undoing. As Luise Meyer detailed in her account for the Wiener Library, she had sent a woman accompanied by a fourteen-year-old girl to Höfler in May 1944. They insisted on taking along bulky baggage. When the customs official in Höfler’s group saw the two with their luggage waiting at the rendezvous point, he became anxious and returned home. For the entire night the two women attempted in vain to find the way over the border. In the morning they took the early train back to Singen. A worker in the train noticed their muddy shoes and probably their luggage as well. He denounced them to the police. At her interrogation the woman named names, and the Gestapo arrested the entire refugee help group. Höfler awaited his trial in jail until he was liberated by the French. An unexpected twist of war saved him from the notorious Berlin Volksgerichtshof and, most likely, death: a bombing raid on Berlin destroyed his files and that circumvented the proceedings that had already been prepared.

In the last years of the Third Reich, many people who previously had been indifferent or even sympathetic to National Socialism decided on religious and moral grounds to aid the refugees. The Singen priest August Ruf paid with his life for his decision to help. An imprudent note of thanks fell into the hands of the Gestapo, who incarcerated Ruf and two other priests for bringing Jews over the border. Ruf died as a result of that prison term.

Whereas feelings of altruism motivated the dangerous work of refugee helpers in the Catholic and socialist camps, in a few cases refugee helpers

15 Lisa Fittko, Mein Weg über die Pyrenäen (Munich, 1985).
received some form of payment for their services. The Jewish teacher Jizchak Schwersenz, brought over the “green border” by Josef Höfler’s two friends in February 1944, reported that the people who helped him received RM 4,000 worth of clothing from Berlin. Another escapee disparagingly labeled the Höfler group “smugglers” because they demanded his bicycle, which he had sent by rail, as a “premium.” Had he hoped to be able to take his bicycle with him? He and his friend—Herbert A. Strauss, the director of the Berlin Center for Research on Anti-Semitism—also gave the helpers a camera. This flight occurred in July 1943, when Josef Höfler was still guiding refugees over the border near Gottmadingen.

Against all odds, there seem to have been quite a few successful escapes. According to a report sent by the Constance county commissioner to the border police, “lately . . . a considerable number of people have successfully crossed the green border into Switzerland.” He demanded that “broader circles of the population be mobilized in support” of the flight against refugees and that “the successful cooperation of the population be recognized through praise and rewards.”

**FORCED LABORERS AND PRISONERS OF WAR**

Toward the end of the war, one of every six Singen inhabitants, or about three thousand people, had been unwillingly transported to Singen as forced laborers, among them many prisoners of war. Almost every European nationality was represented, with the majority of people coming from the Ukraine, Poland, or Russia. Most were employed in the three large factories. In keeping with the racist policies of the Nazis, the Eastern Europeans were treated with particular brutality. Work and living conditions depended on the factory. The situation in the Maggi food factory was so poor that the forced laborers went on strike in the summer of 1943. The strikers were physically beaten, and the six Eastern Europeans who had organized the strike were placed in concentration camps. Only three returned.

According to official records, about 15 percent of the forced laborers attempted to escape. It is difficult to determine their chances of success because many of the documents are either unavailable or inaccessible. Capture meant certain incarceration in the Straflager, which were even worse than the concentration camps. The traces of many forced laborers who sought freedom in Switzerland ended up instead in the Straflager of Nazi Germany.

In a memo dated June 2, 1943, the Singen commissariat of the border police for the Gestapo detailed the favorite escape routes for the police in Singen and the surrounding areas. Apparently the forced laborers sought out paths to freedom throughout the border area around Singen. Many attempted to swim across the Rhine. According to Swiss reports, the corpses of escaped foreign laborers or prisoners of war washed up daily along the banks of Lake Constance or the Rhine. The reports also mention that the Swiss authorities returned the corpse of a Russian shot during his escape attempt to the Germans, who displayed it in a labor camp on the border in order to intimidate the Eastern European workers.

There were mass escape attempts in the days just before liberation. On April 15, 1945, one hundred people crossed the border, mostly in the Randen region. The escaped prisoners, from France, Russia, Poland, Croatia, Africa, and Indonesia, filled the border area. Fleeing Russian prisoners stood out among the refugee groups. The denigrating label “SU” they were forced to wear in large letters on their backs made them an object of particularly brutal “special treatment” by the Germans. On the morning of April 16, 1945, one week before the French liberation of Singen, a group of sixty Polish men and women, forced laborers from the countryside, appeared at a border station in the Randen hills. They had organized an escape attempt and even managed to obtain weapons. The two German customs officials stationed at the border wanted at first to prevent the group from leaving but quickly reconsidered their decision and joined forces with the Poles. They marched together with the forced laborers into Switzerland and were put up in the gymnasium of the border town of Schleitheim. Similar cases occurred at other border stations in the region.

Walter Bringolf, the mayor of Schaffhausen, recalled in his memoirs the thousands of freed prisoners who passed daily through the small city. From April 21 to April 25, 1945, approximately 5,500 people were accommodated in Schaffhausen, a canton with around fifty-five thousand inhabitants. According to estimates, by the end of April more than five thousand prisoners of war stopped in the Singen border region, so that altogether there were over ten

17 Ernest Ludwig Ehrlich, September 1959, London, Wiener Library P III d (Berlin), No. 1141/Yad Vashem 02/1067.
Emergency camps by the border and later collected the refugees into an indoor stadium near Zurich in Oerlikon. Approximately five thousand displaced persons passed through this stadium on their way back to their homelands.22

Forced laborers were not the only ones who attempted to cross the green border. From the entire southern half of Germany, many prisoners of war, especially the French and British, made their way toward Switzerland. Many of them were seized and incarcerated in Straflager. Very seldom do we know the details. However, the British Defense Ministry did document the escape attempts and routes of RAF members. These prisoners, usually the crews from downed bombers or fighter planes, had been trained in possible methods of escape. They were equipped with maps disguised as silk handkerchiefs which detailed the region between Schaffhausen and Singen.23

The concentration camp inmates who tried to escape ran an especially high risk. In fact, only one successful escape from the camp near Überlingen is known. In the years 1944–45, approximately seven hundred prisoners were sent from Dachau to Überlingen, on Lake Constance, in order to construct bomb-proof factories for the armaments industry in the city of Friedrichshafen, the center of zeppelin production. Escape attempts were punishable by death. Inmates reported that captured refugees were ripped to shreds by the dogs of the SS. Nonetheless, on March 26, 1945, the Austrian communist and Spanish Civil War veteran Adam Puntschart along with a Russian prisoner escaped over the “green border” in the Randen.24

THE UNMASTERABLE PAST OF ESCAPE HELP: SUPPRESSION AND PROBLEMS WITH SOURCES

In July 1941 the Singen farmer Hermann Denzel helped two French prisoners of war escape over the border. The two Frenchmen reached their Swiss haven, but Hermann Denzel was denounced and arrested by the Nazis. After six months in jail, he was sent as part of a penal company to the eastern front and ended up as a French prisoner of war. After the war, his wife was forced to turn to the authorities in Singen for help because she could not manage the farm and raise her six children without her husband. Only recently did the children of the now deceased farmer learn from a Singen “grass root” historian that their father had saved the lives of two young Frenchmen. That subject had become a family taboo, probably because their father’s jail sentence could have jeopardized the family’s reputation in the 1950s.25

The refugee helper Josef Höfler received a total of DM 1,710 from the German government as compensation for the year he was imprisoned. Höfler had to give most of the money to the lawyer whom he had hired to get the “compensation” in the first place, and he received nothing for his personal possessions confiscated by the Gestapo after his arrest in 1944. In the political climate of the 1950s and 1960s, both refugee helpers and émigrés had to reckon with the peculiar morality of the people who had remained in Nazi Germany. As Peter Steinbach has elaborated, “The émigrés were seen as having taken the easier way out,” and escaping Germany was the first step on this path.26 Like deserters, the refugee helpers must fight even today for social recognition and acceptance of their bravery under the Nazi regime.

In the political climate of the cold war hardly any refugee helpers were encouraged to tell their stories. Even in Singen, the crucial role that the border region had played during the Third Reich was forgotten and suppressed. No one chose to remember that on November 26, 1942, a Jewish couple from Berlin committed suicide by overdosing on sleeping pills in the Singen train station because they saw no other way out, or that on February 15, 1943, a Jewish domestic servant, also from Berlin, hanged herself in the Singen jail after falling into the hands of the Gestapo.27

A fundamental crisis of sources pervades the topic of refugee help. This is especially true for successful escapes because escapes were successful only if they were not found out and documented. Even in Switzerland, files were opened only if the refugees had a difficult fate—that is, if they had been arrested or detained. Files also exist when the Swiss sent the refugees back to Germany. Almost all of these files end in the death registers of concentration camps or Straflager.

In order to create some documentation of a successful escape, the Kulturamt (Office of Culture) in Singen enlisted the help of Jizchak Schwersenz, the Jewish teacher discussed earlier, to reconstruct his escape route over the “green border.” We also recorded the reconstruction on videotape, and it is shown in many German states as part of their political education program. Rather than confine his history to classrooms and lecture halls, Jizchak Schwersenz was willing to reenact his escape from Nazi

23 Crawley (n. 1 above), 1985.
Germany. We had prepared the groundwork for his personal contribution by compiling railway schedules and maps, along with other documents of the period, in order to determine the specifics of his escape. The interaction of scientific research with Jizchak Schwersenz's own memory of the experience resulted in a kind of historical project that can suggest to both participants and viewers some of the consequences of political persecution.28

REFUGEE HELP: COLLECTIVE OR INDIVIDUAL DECISION?

In conclusion, I would suggest that escape aid and resistance fell into two phases, each distinct in the motivations and moral considerations of those involved, which can be explained by the political and social changes wrought by the Nazi regime.

In the first period, lasting until the mid-1930s, those willing to run the risks involved in refugee help were most often already collectively organized through their political orientation; that is, individual moral considerations were an integral part of a larger political awareness. The refugee help undertaken by members of the Red Help in Schaffhausen and Singen exemplified this trend.

In the second phase, this collective and political organization of refugee help gave way to individual acts of assistance and resistance. The decisions of Josef Höfler and his friends, or of the three Singen priests, to help German Jews over the border were motivated by individual moral conviction. This change in refugee help was the consequence of the destruction of the resistance and refugee help networks organized by the left. However, that was not the only or even the most important reason for the change. The constriction in refugee help to instances of individual morality can also be understood as the result of the social modernization which the National Socialists set in motion. As early as 1936, Franz Vogt, a former leader of the miners’ union, identified what he termed an “atomization” of society, capable of fragmenting the milieu of the workers’ movement and bringing about a pattern of behavior that was more strongly determined by the concerns of isolated individuals.29 I would argue that this atomization became the guiding principle of social and political life in the Bundesrepublik.


Lamed-Vovniki of Twentieth-Century Europe: Participants in Jewish Child Rescue*

Deborah Dwork
Yale University

When Catherina Blussé van oud Alblas was a young mother in Amsterdam during the war she remained loyal to her Jewish friend, who also had a child. Catherina had two little boys with curly brown hair at the time; her friend’s son had curly blond hair. Several times a week Mrs. Blussé van oud Alblas went with her pram to fetch her friend’s little boy from their hiding address. She took him on walks with her own children and fed him, changed him, cared for him. In the afternoon, Mrs. Blussé van oud Alblas returned the child to his mother. One day Mrs. Blussé van oud Alblas went to collect the child and he and his mother were gone. They had been betrayed. She returned home with an empty pram.1

There are no written or pictorial records of this event: no letters or diary, no photograph of the child in the pram. Neither the child nor his mother survived.

* For the convenience of the reader, all books that have been translated into English will be cited in the English version. The original language edition will be noted if it was used. N.B. Quality of translation varies greatly. All other translations (of texts, interviews, and archive documents) have been done by the author. The names of the child survivors as they appear in the text are as they were at the time, with the insertion of women's married names, if used. The corresponding names in the notes are those in current use. Thus, for example, Jooske Koppen-de Neve was born Jooske de Neve. Koppen is her married name. Please note that page numbers have been given for the interview transcripts, although neither the tapes nor texts are held in a public repository. It is my hope that eventually they will be made available, and I have provided specific citations with that end in mind.

1 Catherina Blussé van oud Alblas is now suffering from Alzheimer’s disease. She related these events not to her own three sons (two of whom participated as children), but to her daughter-in-law, Dr. Madelon de Keizer, a historian at the Netherlands State Institute for War Documentation. De Keizer recounted this episode in her mother-in-law’s life within the context of a discussion about gender, memory, and resistance work. It is significant, I think, that Mrs. Blussé van oud Alblas’s activities have not become part of the oral tradition of her own family: they have not been incorporated into the history the sons tell about the family during the war nor have they become the basis for homey legends told to grandchildren about their grandmother. This is not unusual. Perhaps another example will help to elucidate both the extent to which clandestine activities remain secret and the degree to which the resistance work of women is unrecognized even by those intimately involved. The philosopher, Solidarity activist, and former registor, Klemens Szaniawski, was a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars in 1984. It was my good fortune also to be a fellow at that time, and I took advantage of this chance contact to record Professor (later