

STAND UP, EUROPE!

**RESISTANCE
AGAINST
NATIONAL SOCIALISM**

**HISTORICAL TEXTS AND BIOGRAPHIES
FROM FOUR EUROPEAN COUNTRIES**



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This book is dedicated to all the students who participated in the Erasmus+ project „The Courage to stand up for diversity in Europe - then and now“.

Thanks to all of you lovely young Europeans who stood up against a pandemic to prove that the true European spirit of friendship is alive.



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**READER AND WORKBOOK
FOR PROJECT WORK AND LESSONS**

RESISTANCE AGAINST NATIONAL SOCIALISM

**A COLLECTION OF TEXTS
ON HISTORY AND SELECTED BIOGRAPHIES
FROM FOUR EUROPEAN COUNTRIES**

**BASED ON THE ERASMUS+ PROJECT
*THE COURAGE TO STAND UP FOR DIVERSITY IN EUROPE - THEN AND NOW***

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INTRODUCTION

This reader and workbook is the result of the cooperation of three (initially four) European schools on the Erasmus+ funded project *The courage to stand up for diversity in Europe - then and now (2019-2022)*. The texts provided here represent one focus of the project only - the courage that made people stand up against the terror regime of National Socialism across Europe (at least in the four countries involved: Czechia, France, Germany and Greece).

The other aspect of the project was the courage to stand up for diversity and European values today. Although standing up for Europe today and offering young people across Europe the opportunity to become active, involved and dedicated builders of the “house of Europe“ is of utmost importance, the aspects we dealt with during our project are but individual examples.

Yet, the texts and biographies presented here are much more than examples but try to provide an overview on the unchanging history that National Socialism imposed on Europe. In times of old and new radical views emerging all over Europe, it is more important than ever to give the young generations an insight in the consequences of staying mute when faced with radical ideas. Focussing on and learning about the era between 1933 and 1945 does not mean to put the load of guilt on any one of the present and future generations of Europeans, not even the Germans. But it all is about making today’s Europeans become aware of the ongoing responsibility that arises from the past.

The reason of publishing this booklet is that it may help both other teachers and students in embracing this responsibility of remembering the past on order to stand up for a Europe in freedom, peace and friendship.

Introduction

The texts were composed by the teachers coordinating the Erasmus+ funded project, taking into account only little of the vast amount of historical literature (a short list is given at the end of the reader). In no way do we claim to be comprehensive or the texts to be of any scientific value. The purpose of the texts and the short biographies on resistance fighters' lives was to supply students with the basic information needed to get an overview of history and allow them an approach much more realistic and touching than any scientific historical data will ever provide.

This reader consists of three parts. The starting point is a chronological historical overview of the National Socialist era in general and in the four countries - Germany, Czechia, France and Greece. Part two deals with resistance against the National Socialist terror based on a number of selected biographies. The third part is considered to give teachers and project coordinators some ideas on how to deal with the topic, be it during lessons or European projects. A list of sources that we used to compose the texts and on further materials concludes the reader.

History, however, is so to speak only one bridgehead. It always needs its counter-balance in reflecting on the present and the future. This is where teachers and project coordinators need to develop their own ideas matching their students' interests. But there is one aspect that ought to be clarified from the very outset of dealing with National Socialism: Dealing with history is but the starting point for jointly creating a peaceful, open, free and diverse Europe. It is not about blaming successive generations with the guilt their forefathers loaded onto their shoulders.

Guilt lies with the past generation of Germans and their international collaborators that brought all the hardship, terror, and death to the other Europeans. This guilt cannot and must not

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be omitted, forgotten, neglected. But guilt cannot be transferred on to new generations.

Still, what must be transferred and consciously taken as an ongoing task is this: learning about the terror regime and the suffering it meant to millions of people all over Europe in order to take over the responsibility and “the courage to stand up for diversity in Europe“ - now and for times to come.

Commemorating those people who risked their lives, were persecuted and murdered by the regime for the only reason that they stood up against terror and inhumanness is the seed to put into young and older people’s hearts for standing up for the European values.

The biggest group of people persecuted, imprisoned and systematically murdered, however, is missing in this reader: the European Jews. The reason for omitting the Jewish holocaust in no way is ignorance or neglect - quite the opposite! We left this topic out because it is so extremely important that it cannot be dealt with along with other victims of the National Socialist terror. The Jewish holocaust, as it is the utmost terror one can think of, deserves to be dealt with on its own.

Part 1

History

PART 1

HISTORY

THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST REGIME IN EUROPE

1

GENERAL ASPECTS

EUROPE UNDER NATIONAL SOCIALISM

AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

HOW IT ALL CAME ABOUT

Trying to understand *how* National Socialism and the rise of Hitler came about is difficult because of the many different causes involved. But even uncovering these causes ultimately doesn't give a satisfying answer to the question *why* Hitler could manipulate the whole German population, using them as instruments for his atrocities, and mislead almost all other European governments.

Some roots of the rise of National Socialism lie in the consequences of **World War I (1914-1918)**: (1) As all Europe lay severely demolished and demoured millions of victims, the *Versailles Treaty* of **1919** blamed Germany with all responsibility and put enormous loads of reparation payments on it. (2) At the end of the war **in 1918**, there had been a severe political crisis in Germany and a revolution which led to the abdication of the Emperor, the abolishment of the monarchy and installation of a democracy, the *Weimar Republic*. (3) Economic crises, mass unemployment, fear of a spread of communism, the people's uneasiness about the new democratic form of government, and a multitude of political parties left most Germans disoriented and socially as well as politically disappointed and unsatisfied, wishing for a new strong leader.

Differing from the other European fascism (Spain, Italy), the rise of national socialism in Germany is closely connected with these special

socio-political tensions, showing in a refusal of parliamentary democracy and in favoring radical, anti-democratic movements.

When in **autumn 1923** hyper-inflation made money almost worthless and radical right-wing organizations became ever more attractive, Hitler, the leader of the small NSDAP in Munich, Bavaria, saw his time come. On **November 8, 1923**, he gathered the men of the *Sturmabteilung* (“storm department”) and armed Bavarians for a march on Berlin to fight what he called the “Jewish-Marxist breed” and to seize power. As this coup attempt was not at all organized the aggressors were arrested and the NSDAP was banned in all Germany. In **February 1924** Hitler was sentenced to 5 years of prison, but due to “good conduct” was released after 9 months. In prison Hitler had written “*Mein Kampf*”, a book in which he put down his goals of extinguishing all Jewish people, fighting communism and installing dictatorship over Europe.

When in **February 1925** the NSDAP was restored, Hitler reinforced his leadership claim as the only “Führer” to put into effect the National Socialist ideas. As the rigid organization of the party, its anti-democratic ideas and the so-called “*Führer* principle” seemed attractive to many people, the party won supporters in all Germany, though still remaining without much influence.

By 1924 however, the Weimar Republic seemed to have established and to do well, international relations improved and economy and society experienced good times (the so-called *Golden 20s*) until **1929** when the great stock exchange crash (*Black Tuesday*) in the US caused a worldwide economic depression. Germany again faced mass unemployment, and a series of political crises radicalized many people which meant an enormous gain of influence and power for National Socialism. In **July 1930**, the parliament was dissolved and the new elections on **September 14, 1930**, made the NSDAP the second strongest party in parliament.

While the crisis continued without the new government – of which the NSDAP was part – being able to cope with ever new negative developments, Hitler constantly stabilized his power, successfully strengthened his organization and managed to ever more infiltrate ordinary people’s minds with his radical anti-democratic, racist ideas.

On January 1933, trying to install a working parliament, President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Hitler as Chancellor, hoping that the conservative forces in parliament would and could control Hitler and keep him within the limits of democratic politics. But Hitler wouldn't have himself controlled and instead set out to radically destroy democracy and establish dictatorship almost immediately after the day he called "seizure of power" (*Machtergreifung*).

Due to shortcomings in the constitution of the *Weimar Republic* the chancellor was given extensive powers which Hitler misused to establish his dictatorship: During the **year of 1933** the oppositional parties were prohibited, communists, social democrats and members of the trade unions persecuted and imprisoned. And Hitler right away began putting his inhumane racist ideas into practice: Jews, Sinti and Roma along with all other people that did not fit with his notion of the "Arian race" were persecuted, imprisoned and sentenced to forced labour.

By the **end of 1933**, all parties, except for the NSDAP, were prohibited, Hitler held all power, and – relying on the brutality his helpers in the National Socialist organizations – went on to consolidate his dictatorship as *Führer*. His aims of making Germany great, rich and influential again and of establishing National Socialist rule over all Europe were consequently put into action both within Germany and internationally, largely without other European statesmen opposing.

Breaking with the Versailles Treaty, Hitler introduced compulsory military service **in 1935**, shortly after the province of French controlled Saarland was "reintegrated" into Germany. In **March 1936** the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland, also under French control, was conquered. Relations with the other two fascist dictators grew stronger, and **in 1936** Hitler Germany side by side with Italian forces under Mussolini supported Dictator Franco in the Spanish civil war.

In autumn 1937, Austria where large parts of the population favored National Socialism became part of the German Reich, and in **1938** Czechoslovakia was annexed in two steps, so that Hitler's "Reich" reached almost the size Germany had had before WW I.

All this happened while the Nazis continued and enforced their atrocities of persecuting, imprisoning and deporting Jews whom Hitler

blamed for all economic and political problems, and took all necessary measures for a war on the Soviet Union in order to gain living space in the east and subdue all the people that Nazis called "subhuman". Before Hitler could attack Russia, however, he had to focus on Poland and therefore, concealing his plans, he and Stalin, the Russian dictator, agreed on a treaty (the so-called "Hitler-Stalin Treaty") of mutual non-aggression in case of attacks by France or Britain and included a secret passage that divided Poland between Germany and Russia. It was this secret passage that Hitler had needed to start the war when on **September 1, 1939** German troops occupied the western parts of Poland.

WHAT HAPPENED WHERE AND WHEN

The **six years of the Second World War** – which only later was to become a world war – started with the vicious attack of the German *Wehrmacht* (army) on Poland on **September 1, 1939**, under the false pretense of Polish aggression against Germany.

On **September 27, 1939**, Poland surrendered, while the Soviet army (in accordance with the *German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact*) had attacked eastern Poland beginning with September 17. It took only 5 weeks to subdue western Poland under the Nazi regime. Even though Great Britain and France, as partners of Poland (followed by Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa – all [former] British colonies), had declared war on Germany already on September 3, 1939, both countries remained in the defensive, trying to secure their own borders.

Without declaring war, Hitler's army then conquered the neutral countries of Denmark and Norway (only a few days before the British had wanted to land in Norway) in a *Blitzkrieg* in **April 1940** in order to gain a good position for war against Britain and to easily get a hold of the Swedish ore (necessary for steel production).

Without waiting for the fights in the north, Hitler gave order to attack the western countries on **May 10, 1940**. In another *Blitzkrieg* the

Nazis overran Luxemburg, occupied Belgium and the Netherlands, and then entered France which was not prepared for attacks from its northern borders. Pushing both the French and the British army (stationed in France to assist France) back to Dunkirk (from where more than 300.000 soldiers were rescued by the British), the Nazis conquered two thirds of France within a few weeks. The French government surrendered on **June 17, 1940**, leaving the northern and western parts of France under Nazi rulership, and being allowed to govern the southern part itself with close German observation.

Warfare against Britain, starting in **August 1940**, however, was unsuccessful despite heavy air raid attacks on British ground and many British victims, also because the USA – not yet directly involved in the war – helped Britain in many respects.

In **September 1940**, the *Tripartite Pact* between Germany, Italy and Japan was signed to form the so called *Axis powers*. Italy's army, however, was weak, and Japan was too far away to become a close partner.

Despite the *Non-aggression Pact*, Hitler's main goal was the war against the Soviet Union, because he wanted to gain living space for so-called Arians, destroy Bolshevism and subdue the humans that he called *Untermenschen* ("subhuman beings"), and extinguish Jews. Stalin, on the other hand, wanted to gain new territory himself in Finland and Hungary, Yugoslavia, Romania as well as Bulgaria. Talks between Russia and Germany for a "peaceful" solution were without success. As lot of these countries were afraid of Stalin and Bolshevism, Hitler first seemed to them the better solution.

Before Hitler could send his troops to Russia he had to assist his ally Italy: By the **end of 1940**, Mussolini's troops were under attack in northern Africa (by the British) and in Albania (which then belonged to Italy), after Greece had called Britain for help. Italy then attacked Yugoslavia and Greece, but suffered heavy losses so that Hitler, starting in **April 1941**, invaded the Balkans and Greece in order to secure the southern parts of Europe from a British invasion. Yugoslavia surrendered on April 17, Greece on **April 21, 1941**.

Then on **June 22, 1941**, 3 million German soldiers opened war against Russia, Hitler thinking that it would be another *Blitzkrieg*. Du-

ring the first 6 months of the war, the Germans made big gains of territory, but as they were not prepared for the Russian winter, it was the weather that stopped them from taking Moscow. The Russian army could finally strike back and there were massive losses in the German army. But Hitler didn't want to back down and withdraw but propagated "total war".

When Japan, Germany's ally, attacked the US fleet in Pearl harbor on **December 7, 1941**, the USA finally entered the war and Hitler declared war on America on **December 11, 1941**.

In **summer 1942**, the Nazis won a few more battles, but in **winter 1942/43** the Russian army succeeded in surrounding the German troops near Stalingrad; 200.000 German soldiers died or were taken prisoners of war. From then on German troops lost almost everywhere.

In **early summer 1943** German and Italian troops had to surrender to the British in northern Africa, allowing British troops to land on Sicily and slowly push to the north to liberate Italy.

After **June 6, 1944** – so-called "D-Day" – when American troops supported by British and French soldiers and French partisans landed in northern France, the "Allies" (USA, Great Britain, France and Russia, having formed an "Anti-Hitler pact") ever more pushed back the Germans, liberating France.

By **August 1944** the Soviet troops had pushed the Germans back to the area from where they had started the war in 1941, and then moved forward into the German mainlands.

By the **end of 1944**, finally the German occupants were also driven out of mainland Greece, though Crete and some small parts of the country only were liberated in 1945.

In autumn and **winter 1944/45** allied troops pushed forward from all sides, defeating the German troops and liberating all European countries from the Nazi regime until in spring 1945, finally – after 12 years of Nazi terror – over all Europe, Germany itself was liberated. Hitler committed suicide on April 30, 1945; and the rest of the political leadership signed the papers of complete surrender in **May 1945**.

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GERMANY UNDER NATIONAL SOCIALISM

Germany was not, as it may seem, only populated by ignorant, fanatic followers of Hitler and his National Socialist party. The majority, though, did not hesitate to support the “Führer” and to take over his ideas of “racial purity” – to mention but one aspect – as well as simply obey orders, thus making themselves guilty of not having stood up for a humane, diverse society. Yet, the chances for a change in political, social and all other realms of life were little and time was short.

Hitler’s plans had been obvious ever since his book *Mein Kampf* had been written, and he had cunningly taken all measures to turn the unstable democracy into a dictatorship right from the start of his rule. The other political parties, especially the conservatives, had largely underestimated Hitler, his ruthless will to power as well as his influence on society and his propaganda machinery.

Within only half a year, the NSDAP had become the only legal political party, almost all opponents had either been imprisoned or muted. Standing up against Hitler then simply came along with the biggest sacrifice one can think of: one’s life.

THE RISE OF HITLER AND NATIONAL SOCIALISM (1919-1932) PROPAGANDA AND DECEPTION

The **DAP** (*Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*/ German Workers' Party) was a very small circle of right-wing, anti-democratic nationalists founded in Munich in 1919 and turned its name to **NSDAP** in 1920. Hitler – born Austrian and unsuccessful former student of arts, ex-soldier in WW I and nationalist, anti-democrat, anti-communist and hater of the Jewish religion – quickly headed towards taking over leadership of the new party. Because Hitler was a brilliant speaker and focussed on propaganda in order to mess up the audience at meetings of other parties, he soon got into conflict with police. But on the other hand, he managed to recruit lots of followers and founded the organization of “**Storm Troopers**” (*Sturmabteilung/ SA*) in 1921 – men who were very willing to exercise brutal force at meetings of democratic parties or in the streets. The *Storm Troopers* and from 1925 onwards the “**Protective Echelon**” (*Schutzstaffel/SS*) formed Hitler’s sort of private army to support and carry through all of his atrocities with utmost brutality, no matter where and what it was.

In 1923 members of the NSDAP under leader Hitler gathered in Munich for a march on Berlin to sweep away the government. However, the attempted **coup failed** and Hitler was arrested and **sentenced to 5 years of prison**, but was released after 9 months because of “good conduct”. The **NSDAP** was dissolved and **forbidden** until 1925.

During his imprisonment Hitler wrote his book “*Mein Kampf*” (“My struggle”) in which he put down all his basic ideas that he later set into practice step by step: These were (1) his deep rejection of any form of democracy which was shared by many Germans who rather wanted back the Emperor or another strong leading figure as they blamed democracy for all the difficulties after WW I; (2) his contempt over against Communism/Marxism which was also shared by

many Germans; (3) his hatred for the Jews whom he blamed for all financial problems in the world.

After the **re-establishment of the NSDAP** in early 1925, Hitler decided to go the legal way to seize power by winning elections – but still also by using propaganda and having his brutal followers of the Storm Troopers intimidate and violate opponents. It took until 1929 before the **NSDAP became influential** beyond Bavaria, due to the **stock exchange crash** in 1929 (**Black Friday**) which was followed by a long-lasting world-wide economical and social crisis. The government of the Weimar Republic could not improve the situation, the German people ever more turned away from democratic ideas, favored radicalism and called for a strong leader when, in 1930, **new elections** had become necessary.

From 1925 onwards Hitler aggressively used his rhetoric talent for **propaganda against all other political views** and also relied on the Storm Troopers. These ardent admirers of Hitler's used **brutal force** to spread horror among people who had a different political conviction. The Storm Troopers organized and performed **massive demonstrations** for propagandistic reasons and to gain more members for the NSDAP and to show that true community and comradeship was only possible within the party-organization.

Along with demonstrating power, the Storm Troopers and the NSDAP offered **leisure opportunities** for workers and their families and especially for boys to join summer camps – something that was happily welcomed by many of the poorer people, and, of course, made sure they would follow Hitler in the future. After **Hitler had come to power** in January 1933, these **leisure opportunities for youth** were turned into **paramilitary training camps** in order to prepare the young generation for the war, and all youth had to become a member of the “Hitler Youth” (“*Hitler-Jugend*” for boys) or the “Association of German Girls” (“*Bund Deutscher Mädel*” for girls).

Therefore Hitler **gained support** among many Germans by making massive use of defamation, propaganda, intimidation, brutal force and terror against people who had different political opinions. At the same time he won over a lot of indifferent, unhappy, dissatisfied people because they experienced long missed community and

thought that Hitler was a strong leader to guide them into a bright future and regained strength and influence.

When Hitler became chancellor, there were only two more National Socialist ministers in his cabinet. The others were members of conservative and nationalist parties who thought they were able to keep Hitler from setting into practice his radical politics. Therefore one of the first things Hitler did as chancellor, was to demand the **dissolution of the “Reichstag”** (parliament) and call for **new elections** on March 5, 1933. In order to win these elections, Hitler continued with his **aggressive propaganda**, assisted by the terror that his *Storm Troopers* spread among the population, for example by beating up people at meetings of other parties.

In **February 1933** Hitler declared the **German Communist Party** (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands, KPD*), **illegal** which meant that its leading figures along with thousands of its ordinary members were **persecuted and taken into so-called “protective detention”** (*Schutzhaft*). As early as 1925 there was a communist group called “*Roter Frontkämpferbund*” (**red front combat unit; RFB**) that initially fought the democratic ideas of the Weimar republic and wanted to establish a communist regime in Germany. This group was **dissolved by law in 1929**, but several underground successors formed immediately. As soon as the communist party had been forbidden, the **illegal RFB combat units took up their resistance** against the Nazi regime by recruiting youth, training them in paramilitary activities, but also by supporting poor and persecuted communists. When they were caught by the Nazis, they were **beaten and tortured**, the official explanation being that in “re-educating” them they had to be convinced to become supporters of the Nazi ideology.

ESTABLISHING DICTATORSHIP IN GERMANY (1933) ANNIHILATING POLITICAL PLURALISM

Right after Hitler had become chancellor on January 1933, he dissolved the newly elected parliament and held **new elections** in March 1933, the result being a rather disappointing 43.9% for the NSDAP. In the meantime, he managed to introduce a number of **new laws** which were necessary to get rid of the other political parties.

(1) As the German people were afraid of communism and saw themselves threatened by the Soviet Union, Hitler's slogan "Fight Marxism" was largely welcomed. In reality this meant that from February 1933 on **members of the communist party but also social democrats were terrorized**, bullied and humiliated – for the only reason that Hitler wanted the NSDAP to be the only party in Germany. Communists and social democrats were imprisoned and tortured in order to make them turn towards National Socialism. After the **communist party had been forbidden** and dissolved (February 1933), the members of the **Social Democratic Party** were the next to be **persecuted, imprisoned and tortured** (from March 1933 on).

In June 1933 the **German Social Democratic Party (SPD) was forbidden by law**. On the one hand, this allowed Hitler establish a one-party state (that is: dictatorship) and on the other hand, it meant that **social democrats were systematically persecuted**.

The **workers' trade unions** (which were the organizations of the working class people) were also **forbidden**, and their members persecuted and imprisoned (April 1933 onwards). Social democrats and trade unionists often cooperated in **small local resistance groups**, but often were betrayed and caught by the *Gestapo* (*Geheime Staatspolizei*, Secret State Police), imprisoned and from 1936 onward **deported to concentration camps** (for example in Dachau or Buchenwald).

(2) In February 1933 the **police was allowed the use of guns against all political opponents**, which meant that any person could

be shot just because of being a member of another party, participating in a meeting of the communist or social democratic party or because of saying a word against National Socialism. Thousands of political opponents or people who were denounced by others were executed in the streets. This law **dis-enabled all kinds of organized resistance** against the new regime.

(3) Hitler blamed the Jews for all financial misery and set out to “extinguish the Jewish race”. So his followers undertook the **first violent acts against Jewish members of parliament as well as against Jewish-owned shops**, as early as February 1933. A large proportion of the German Jews hoped (in vain as history proved) that persecution would stop once Hitler would have installed a new state of law and order. Only a minority of Jews left the country for good.

(4) On February 27, 1933, the building of the “*Reichstag*” **was set on fire**. The Nazis claimed that it had been a terrorist attack on National Socialism and the state, performed by a left-wing radicalized person, but the attack might as well have been undertaken by a group of Nazis themselves for propaganda reasons. On February 28, Hitler convinced the state president von Hindenburg to sign an “emergency decree” (*Notverordnung*) which set an **emergency rule** that actually lasted until the end of National Socialism and **allowed Hitler to rule without the consent of parliament**. This decree was called “*Reichstagsbrandverordnung*” and **suspended the basic civil rights** of freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and forming parties or clubs and individual freedom – just another step towards dis-enabling resistance.

(5) The emergency decree “legalized” the **imprisonment of all political opponents** and of members of the trade unions. By the end of April 1933 about **25.000 political opponents were imprisoned** and kept in so-called “protective detention” and the Nazis **began to build the first concentration camps**. Terror in the streets, spread by the Storm Troopers, and the fear of being denounced by neighbors muted the people so that there was almost **nobody left to even try to openly oppose Hitler’s politics**.

Being left without much resistance, Hitler took the next and **decisive step in establishing his one-party state** by introducing the so-called “**Act of Enablement**” (*Ermächtigungsgesetz*) on March 23, 1933. It meant that no other political party was allowed and the trade unions and workers’ associations were forbidden by law.

In April 1933, this was followed by the “Law for Re-establishment of the civil servant system” (*Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums*) which meant that **all civil servants who were thought not to be Nazis were expelled from their positions**. This included all Jews. The so-called “Aryan Paragraph” followed: every civil servant and later on everybody had to **prove that they were not Jewish or had Jewish ancestors**. This law was accompanied by **boycotts of Jewish-owned shops and industry** and by **violence against the Jewish population**.

Hitler’s steps towards radically destroying political pluralism and diversity of thought meant that under the label of “**Political Alignment**” the German people (mostly voluntarily) aligned under the “Leader-/*Fuehrer* Principle” which demanded **unconditional faith and submission under Hitler** – meaning no opposition, no diversity of thought, no personal freedom. One expression of this alignment and subdual was the **burning of books** written by so-called “un-German” authors in May 1933. Those who didn’t support Hitler tried to form underground resistance groups on a local or regional level, always endangered of being caught or denounced by their Nazi neighbors.

The peak of the “*Fuehrer principle*” was finally reached in August 1934, when, following state president Paul von Hindenburg’s death, the (re-established) **army had to take oath on the person of Hitler** (not on the German state any more) and Hitler had succeeded in **making his word, and only his, become law**. This meant that resistance in the military ranks and the police was made impossible – until it was too late to turn things.

ALIGNMENT AND “RACIAL PURITY” (1934-1941) PERSECUTION, DETENTION AND MURDER

Once **established as dictator and Fuehrer** of the Germans (**August 1934**), Hitler propagated that the Germans and only a few other peoples “with related blood” were “Aryans” and these were the best people and only true leaders of the world.

But the so-called Aryan race excluded a lot of people: all those who still were no members of the NSDAP, the Jews, Sinti and Roma, homosexuals, people who couldn't work or couldn't find a job, people suffering from diseases, and of course, the people of most other nations. Hitler said those people were “unworthy of living” and one had to get rid of all “elements” that were “impure”, sick or who didn't want to join the common efforts in establishing a new, true community of the people (*Volksgemeinschaft*) and Aryan race.

In **January 1934** the “**Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases**” (passed in 1933) became effective: The Nazis put into practice so-called “**Eugenics**” which propagated that **mentally disabled people and others who suffered from “hereditary diseases”** (even depression was considered hereditary!) were “unworthy of living” and should not be allowed to have children. All these people (more than 400,000 until 1945) were **sterilized against their will**.

Therefore, mainly **from 1935 onwards**, Hitler made his *Storm Troopers*, the police and other ardent followers persecute, imprison, torture, sentence to forced labour and finally **kill all those people who were thought not to support the new community of the people**.

1935-36 were the years when **pressure on and persecution of the German Jews was increased** to make the Jews leave the country. Those who stayed were **deprived of all their rights**: they were not to work, no shops served them, children were not longer allowed to attend schools together with “Aryan” children for example.

Especially **from 1937/38 on**, many **concentration camps** were built in order to imprison not only the German Jews but everybody who according to the Nazis didn't fit with their ideology. This meant that **in 1938** there were "**purges**" ("*Säuberungsaktionen*") to imprison all people who were **unemployed** and who had committed minor crimes (such as stealing), **homosexuals, disabled people and handicapped ex-WW I soldiers, prostitutes, Sinti and Roma and persons who the Nazis simply thought to behave in an "anti-social way"**.

The prisoners had to do **forced labour** partly in **underground labour camps to produce military equipment** for the war that Hitler had always wanted in order to subdue the other European nations. As soon as Czechia had been occupied (in 1938) and WW II had started (**September 1939**), huge **concentration camps were built in almost all European countries**.

In 1939 the next step was taken: **sick and disabled or "criminally insane" people** were systematically registered, forced into mental hospitals and – **beginning in January 1940** – **murdered**, mostly by poisoning them or simply letting them starve to death. When the so-called "**Operation T4**" became known in public, it was officially stopped but secretly **continued to 1945**. More than 200,000 were murdered in mental hospitals and institutions.

Despite the risks that resistance in Germany meant, there were some groups and organizations that ventured activities to oppose the Nazi regime, members of the dissolved communist and social democratic party and the trade unions but other groups as well.

Membership in the Hitler Youth (*Hitlerjugend*) and the **Girls' Association** (*Bund deutscher Mädel*) became **mandatory in 1936** for all children. But there were **young people who disobeyed**, not because they had any distinct political standing but because they **didn't like the paramilitary training camps** of the Hitler Youth. One group loved **American Jazz and Swing music** – something which the Nazis called "un-German" and "degenerated". These **groups of youth opposition were banned in 1939** and their members were imprisoned.

In 1942 and 1943, the famous group of “**White Rose**”, formed by students at Munich University, called for **overthrowing Hitler’s regime** when they learnt about the brutal warfare. They printed and spread flyers but were caught and executed.

In 1940 a number of civilians formed a group of opponents (called “*Kreisauer Kreis*”) that worked on **overthrowing the regime and planning a post-war German democratic state**. Apart from establishing a **pan-European network** among opponents to Hitler, this group closely worked together with a number of **leading military ranks** to venture the only organized attempt of getting rid of Hitler.

When it became ever more evident that Germany couldn’t win the war in **late 1943**/beginning of 1944 some **military ranks finally decided to act against Hitler**, even though this meant that they were constantly endangered of being discovered and executed for high treason. After many months of preparation, also including a lot of hesitation, on **July 20, 1944**, it was finally highly decorated Claus Schenk **Graf von Stauffenberg** (who had been an ardent follower of Hitler in the early years) who **smuggled a bomb** in a small suitcase into a building where Hitler met his officers to discuss on further warfare. The bomb exploded only minutes after von Stauffenberg had left the building, causing a number of dead and wounded men, but **Hitler survived**. Almost **all involved in planning and carrying out the assassination attempt were caught, sentenced to death and executed** within a few days.

Already in **June 1944**, the **Allied Forces had landed in Normandy** (France) to free Europe from the Nazis, slowly but successfully defeating the Nazi troops in the west. **Since 1942-43**, after the Germans had lost the battle of Stalingrad, the **Russian army ever gained more ground** and by **summer 1944** they, too, were **on the advance**. In **May 1945**, finally, Germany was defeated and **Hitler’s Third Reich ceased to exist**.

3

CZECHIA UNDER NATIONAL SOCIALISM

Czechia, beautiful country in the middle of Europe, has been one of those European countries that have largely been “forgotten” when addressing the National Socialist terror regime. This is due to the fact that, when WW II began, Czechoslovakia (the name of the state that was made up of two now independent states) had been annexed to the Third Reich – unlawfully but with the consent of Great Britain, France and the USA. The Czechoslovakian population and political leadership were not even asked, they simply had to accept the decision.

The fact that the Czech regions close to the German border were home to a number of people of German descent, the so-called *Sudeten* Germans, must not obscure the fact that the majority of the Czech people rejected both the Nazi ideology and the annexation which meant occupation. Therefore the occupied Czech people largely opted for resistance – be it passive or active.

Resistance against the Nazi rule was answered by increasing terror which in turn reinforced opposition and partisan activities among the population – setting into motion a vicious cycle that took hundred thousands of Czech people’s lives.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA – THE FIRST REPUBLIC (OCT 28, 1918 – SEP 30, 1938)

Establishment of Czechoslovakia

The end of World War I brought changes as to the make-up of states all over Europe. Most important for Czechia was the fact that the Austro-Hungarian Empire (that had been an ally of Germany in WW I) was dissolved. With the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Czech lands and Slovakia that had been parts of the Empire jointly proclaimed the establishment of independent **Czechoslovakia** on **October 28, 1918**.



As a part of the Paris Peace Conference after World War I, the foundation of the new state was agreed on in the **Treaty of Saint Ger-**

main on **September 10, 1919** and became internationally acknowledged on **July 16, 1920**. Prague became the capital of the country and the Prague Castle became the seat of the first president of Czechoslovakia, Tomáš Garrigue **Masaryk**. The time between WWI and WWII is now called "**the First Republic**". Czechoslovakia had a parliamentary democracy, concentrated 70% of the industry of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, and had an economy that was among the strongest in the world.

When the new country of Czechoslovakia was proclaimed, its leaders were still in exile (in Great Britain, the USA) where they were preparing the independence of Czechoslovakia. They helped to establish Czechoslovak Legion in Russia and also other military troops that

fought in the western front. They travelled a lot to get the support of the most important politicians (e.g. the US president Woodrow Wilson). **T.G. Masaryk** was chosen as *the president* and **Edvard Beneš** became the country's *foreign minister*. He took part in **the Paris Peace Conference** (lasting from **January 18, 1919 to January 21, 1920**) at which the new geo-political order of Europe was negotiated by representatives of 32 countries.

Problems with the borders

The first task at the **Paris Peace Conference** was to approve the historical frontiers separating Bohemia and Moravia from Germany and Austria. None of the Czechoslovak neighbors (Germany, Austria, Hungary, Poland) was satisfied with the new borders because these countries did not only lose territory but a well-working and productive economy. The only “friendly” border was the shortest one with Romania.

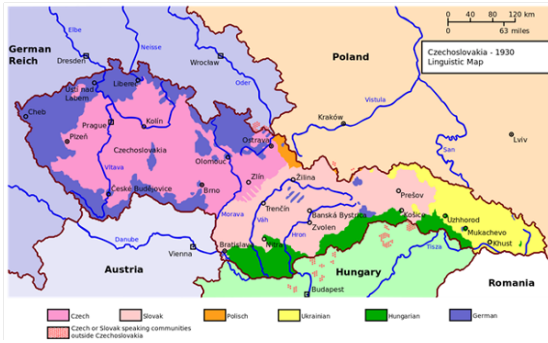
From the very beginning, the new democratic state had to deal with problems because of the many ethnic groups living in its territory. Especially the regions that had belonged to Germany and Austria before, were inhabited by people of German descend. The political spokesmen of the Germans in Bohemia and Moravia advocated cession of the area known as **the Sudetenland** to Germany or Austria. (The Sudetenland included parts of northern and western Bohemia and northern Moravia. The Germans were the most numerous minority in the new-born country (23%). Other than most other European countries, Czechoslovakia remained a well-working democracy and had a strong economy throughout the 1920s.

Preparation of the annexation

Hitler had never been in favor of the Czechoslovakian state, and openly advocated the annexation (or as he saw it: reintegration) of the *Sudetenland* in the German Reich. But the annexation of Sudetenland was in fact prepared by *Sudeten* Germans, who were not satisfied in Czechoslovakia and approved the German nationalist, anti-

Czech, anti-Semitic propaganda of **the Sudeten German Party (founded October 1, 1933)** led by **Konrad Henlein**. In the parliamentary elections of May **1935**, the party received almost two-thirds of the *Sudeten* German vote and sent the second largest bloc of representatives **to the Czechoslovak Parliament**. **Between 1935 and 1938**, the *Sudeten* Nazis increased their activities, which were basically aimed at uniting the Sudetenland with Germany and included hostile outbreaks and provocative incidents.

In March 1938 Henlein met Hitler in Berlin, where he was instructed to keep political tension in Czechoslovakia by creating obstacles but to strictly avoid any kind of agreement. Henlein's party not only succeeded in embarrassing the



Czechoslovak government but also convinced Great Britain and France that the situation in the Sudetenland was highly inflammatory and that the Czechoslovak leaders must be persuaded to take extreme action, even *ceding the region to Germany, to avoid a war*. In **summer 1938**, the British government sent to Czechoslovakia a mission led by **Lord Runciman** (a former cabinet minister). Its aim was to *mediate in a dispute* between the Government of Czechoslovakia and the *Sudeten* German Party. The British mediators were active in Czechoslovakia during the late summer, issuing their report shortly before the **Munich Conference in September 1938**. However, it did not help to solve the problem itself.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA – MUNICH AGREEMENT AND SECOND REPUBLIC (OCT 1, 1938 – MAR 14, 1939)

The way to the Munich Agreement

Over **summer 1938** the situation in Czechoslovakia became more and more flammable. After Hitler's successful **annexation of Austria** in **March 1938** Germany planned to "save" *3 million people of German origin who "were suffering" in Czechoslovakia*. However, most of the Germans in Czechoslovakia lived in the *Sudetenland* – border regions that were crucial for defending the country (there were border fortifications).

Hitler's generals were working on a plan called "**Case Green**" (the code name for the takeover of the Sudetenland and occupation of Czechoslovakia) **since June 1937**. The plan was changed several times and the Germans finally rejected the plan because it would have caused "a hostile world opinion which could lead to a critical situation." They were afraid that France and Great Britain would decide to defend Czechoslovakia.



However, neither France nor Britain felt prepared to defend Czechoslovakia, and both wanted to avoid a military confrontation with Germany at almost any cost. **France and Great Britain agreed** that *Prague should be urged to make territorial concessions to Germany* (splitting off the *Sudeten* German areas from Czechoslovakia). They believed that **it was the only way to save peace in Europe**. In **September 1938 Neville Chamberlain (the British Prime Minister)** went to **Berchtesgaden and Godesberg** to discuss the situation personally with the Führer. Hitler stiffened his demands that Czechoslovakia strictly rejected and **ordered a general mobilization on 23 September**. Having one of the world's best-equipped armies and strongly fortified borderline at that time, Czechoslovakia *was ready to fight but could not win alone*.

The Munich Agreement

In a last-minute effort to avoid war, Chamberlain immediately proposed **a four-power conference to settle the dispute**. Hitler agreed, and **on September 29 Hitler, Chamberlain** (the British Prime Minister), **Daladier** (the French Prime Minister), and Italian dictator **Benito Mussolini met in Munich**. The meeting started shortly before 1 pm. Hitler was furious and no one dared to invite the two Czech diplomats waiting in a Munich hotel and consult the agenda with them.

Nevertheless, **Mussolini introduced a written plan** that was accepted by all as **the Munich Agreement**. It was almost identical with the Godesberg proposal: the German army was to complete the occupation of the Sudetenland by October 10, 1938 and an international commission would decide the future of other disputed areas. *Czechoslovakia was informed by Britain and France that it could either resist Germany alone or submit to the prescribed annexations. The Czechoslovak government chose to submit and accept all German demands.*

Both Daladier and Chamberlain returned home relieved that the threat of war had passed. Chamberlain told the British public that he had achieved “peace with honour. I believe it is peace for our time.” His words were immediately criticized by Winston Churchill, who

declared, “You were given the choice between war and dishonour. You chose dishonour and you will have war.”

The second republic (Oct 1, 1938 – Mar 14, 1939)

On 1 October 1938 the **German troops entered** Czechoslovakia. However, the annexation of the Sudetenland, completed according to the Munich timetable, was not Czechoslovakia’s only territorial loss. Shortly after the Munich verdict, **Poland** sent troops to annex the Teschen region (**October 1938**) and **Hungary** got one-quarter of Slovak and Ruthenian territories (**November 1938**). By all these amputations *Czechoslovakia lost about one-third of its population, and the country was defenseless*. The economic impact of the loss of territory was also enormous. Just to give an example - the country lost almost all its coal reserves overnight.

The Czech president **Edvard Beneš** abdicated on **5 October 1938** and went into exile to London. A new president, **Emil Hácha**, was elected on **30 November 1938**. The political system of the country was hurt, some political parties (e.g. the Communists) were banned, censorship was introduced and the foreign policy was often pro-German, led by the idea to save at least the rest of the country.

As the country lost its German, Polish, and Hungarian minorities, the Czechs reluctantly agreed to change into a federalist country. The Slovaks pressed Prague for full **Slovak autonomy**, which was proclaimed on **October 6**. The country changed its name into **Czecho-Slovakia**.

A few months later, after confidential negotiations with Berlin, **the Slovak state declared its independence on 14 March 1939** and became a German satellite. Hitler forced the Czech president Hácha to surrender. On the following day, *15 March 1939, Bohemia and Moravia were occupied and proclaimed a protectorate of the German Third Reich*.

PROTECTORATE BOHEMIA AND MORAVIA (MAR 15, 1939 – 1945)

On the night from **14-15 March 1939**, **Nazi-German troops crossed the Bohemian border**. Under pressure from Berlin, Czechoslovak president Emil Hácha was forced to agree to the Nazi occupation of the Czech lands. On **16 March**, the **Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was declared by Adolf Hitler in Prague**. The Czech lands were subjected to German rule, and *Czechs were allowed only limited autonomy*. The Protectorate was headed by **the Reichsprotektor Konstantin von Neurath**.



Hácha remained president, but his cabinet had only very limited powers, meaning that each decision could be annihilated by the *Reichsprotektor*. The Nazi regime immediately took steps to subdue the Protectorate and put into practice the kind of “cleansing“ that had already taken place in Germany itself: all political opponents (especially social democrats and communists), emigrants that had fled from Nazi Germany because of their opposing political views and Jews were persecuted and arrested.

Hitler’s ultimate goal with the Czech territories (just as later with Greece) was to exploit the rich resources of the country and to first subdue the people to do forced labour for the Nazi war industry. Later he wanted to introduce what he called “Germanization“: make the

Czech territories completely German, offering new areas of settlement for “Arian Germans“ only (which meant that Hitler wanted all Czech people to leave the country or be killed).

On October 28, 1939 – the 20th anniversary of Czechoslovak independence – there were mass demonstrations and strikes against the annexation and the Nazi rule all over the Protectorate but especially in Prague. The revolt was crushed. A student, Jan Opletal, was wounded and finally died. His funeral on **November 17, 1939**, led to new upheavals during and after which 9 students were shot and 1,200 more students were arrested and interned in the concentration camp Sachsenhausen, and all Czech universities were closed.

For some two years the Czech protectorate kept the semblance of an autonomous body, but in **September 1941, Reinhard Heydrich**, *the head of German secret police*, replaced Neurath as Reichsprotektor and inaugurated a **reign of terror**. Heydrich was extremely violent trying to crush Czech resistance.

Under Heydrich's authority **Prime Minister Alois Eliáš** was arrested (and later **executed in June 1942**), the Czech government was reorganized, and all Czech cultural organizations were closed. *The Gestapo arrested and killed thousands of people*. The deportation of *Jews to concentration camps* was organized, and the fortress town of Terezín was made into a ghetto way-station for Jewish families.

In revenge, the assassination of Heydrich was prepared: Czech agents bombed and shot Heydrich on **27 May 1942** (he died on 4 June). After the assassination, martial law was proclaimed and **the period of terror** (called *heydrichiáda* in Czech) started: 10,000 Czech people were arrested and more than 1,300 killed. As “measures of atonement“, the Nazis destroyed the villages of **Lidice and Ležáky**, among others, shot almost all male inhabitants and deported women and children to concentration camps, on **June 10, 1942 and June 24, 1942**.

However, Hácha did not have the strength to resign and, trying to calm down the brutality of German rule, stayed on as a president. Martial law ultimately was lifted (**July 3, 1942**) only because the Germans needed Czech workers to maintain productivity in the war industry that the Germans had installed in the Protectorate.

During the Second World War, the well-trained Czech workforce and developed industry was forced to make a major contribution to the German war economy. Since the Protectorate was just out of the reach of Allied bombers, the Czech economy was able to work almost undisturbed until the end of the war.

On February 14, 1945, Prague was bombed, killing 700 civilians, and on **April 25**, American planes dropped 638 t of bombs on **Pilsen and especially the Skoda buildings**. **May 5, 1945, the Prague upheaval** succeeded in bringing down the Nazi protectorate before **Soviet troops freed Prague** and the Czech country from the Nazi rule on **May 9**. The state's existence came to an end with the surrender of Germany the same day.

4

FRANCE UNDER NATIONAL SOCIALISM

France and its history under National Socialism is probably better known than any other European country's fate. France and Germany had been fierce enemies ever since the 1870 German-French war which ended not only in the French defeat but the acclamation of the German Reich in Versailles and the coronation of the German Emperor - an act of utmost humiliation for France. As WW I then ended in the German surrender and destruction of the German Empire, the French imposed hard conditions of reparation on the newly founded German republic (the "Weimar Republic") - something which most Germans - and as a matter of fact, Hitler - thought humiliating.

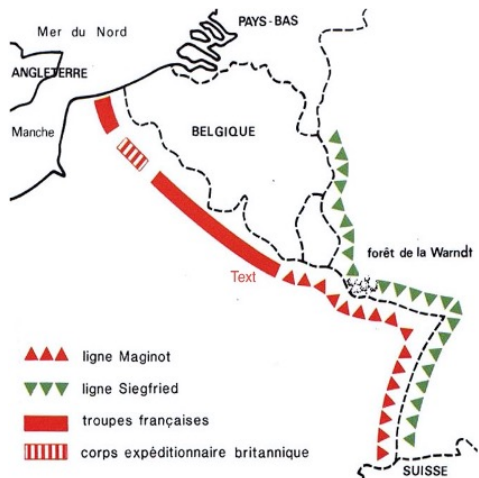
Once in power, Hitler didn't hesitate for long in massively violating the 1919 Versailles Peace Treaty when he "reintegrated" parts of the former German Reich, to mention but one aspect. As soon as Germany had started WW II with the invasion of Poland, France was prepared to fight the Nazi attack on their country - at least the French thought they were.

The French people's opposition and resistance against the Nazi occupants as well as against the French Vichy puppet regime has become famous, coining the expression *La Résistance* as an icon of ordinary people's courage to stand up against oppression and violation of human rights.

FRANCE IN WW II THE PHONEY WAR

In **1929**, still traumatized by the dreadful experiences of trench warfare, France began to build an eastern line of defense, the **Maginot Line**, named after the French Minister of War, André Maginot. It was a line of concrete fortifications, obstacles and weapon installations to stop an invasion by Germany, stretching from Nice in the south to Dunkirk in the north.

In the **1930ies** the Germans also built a defensive line in the west against France and its allies opposite the French Maginot Line known as **Siegfried Line** or **Westwall**, which stretched for more than 630 km from Kleve on the border with the Netherlands in the north along the western border down to the border with Switzerland in the south and featured more than 18,000 bunkers, tunnels and tank traps.



Then, on **September 1st 1939**, Hitler's troops **invaded Poland** so that its kin-states (protecting powers), **France** and the United Kingdom, **declared war on Germany** two days later.

Then French and German troops faced each other along the Maginot and Siegfried line, waiting for the great battle. But apart from only one military land operation on the western front, when in **September 1939 French troops invaded Germany's Saar district** but were **defeated** by Wehrmacht troops on **October 17th**, nothing happened. The Siegfried line soldiers faced the Maginot line soldiers and none of the armies even intended to launch an attack for eight months. So

the French called that calm period *drôle de guerre*, the British spoke of a *Bore War*, the Americans created the term *Phoney War* and for the Germans it was a *Sitzkrieg*.

But away from the quiet and inactivity at this front the opponents of war were very active:

- On **August 23rd, 1939** Hitler and Stalin signed the *Nichtangriffspakt* or *Hitler-Stalin Pakt* which enabled the German and Soviet invasion and division of Poland.
- On **November 30th, 1939** the Soviet Union made an assault on Finland in Karelia.
- On **April 10th, 1940** Germany started the **invasion of Denmark and Norway** to secure supplies of raw materials. Allied troops were landed but withdrawn in response to the German invasion of France.
- Minor dogfights between British and German fighter planes.
- The Royal Air Force (RAF) dropped propaganda leaflets on Germany.
- The first Canadian troops arrived in Britain.
- The Second Battle of the Atlantic was fought between British and German aircraft and battleships.

On **May 10th, 1940** German troops marched into Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxemburg, marking the end of the Phoney War and the **beginning of the Battle of France**.

FRANCE UNDER ATTACK THE BLITZKRIEG

The literal translation of *Blitzkrieg* is “lightning war” which means that the enemy is unexpectedly hit and paralyzed, the way a sudden flash of lightning hits the ground in some unexpected area or object.

Germany’s *Blitzkrieg* strategy was characterized by extensive bombing early on to destroy the enemy’s air capacity, railroads, communication lines and ammunition dumps, followed by a massive land invasion with enormous numbers of troops, tanks and artillery. After that infantry moved in, destroying any remaining resistance. The invasion of Poland was the test for Hitler’s *Blitzkrieg* strategy:

The French and British allied forces were prepared for a defensive war, relying on the strength of the Maginot line. Thus the allied command was completely surprised when at dawn on Friday, **May 10th, 1940** eighty **German divisions swept over Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxemburg** with paratroopers, taking over strategic points while the German Luftwaffe was bombing the Netherlands. The allied troops tried to join the Belgian army further north at the river Dyle (Plan D) to prevent the Germans from invading France from Belgium. However, **the Dutch surrendered on May 20th** and **Belgium capitulated on May 28th, 1940.**

But how could that happen? The Franco-English troops had been routed to Belgium for defense just as the Germans had expected. But almost at the same time, on **May 13th**, three armored German divisions under the command of General Guderian launched an **offensive in the Ardennes mountains**. The French had thought the Ardennes to be a natural, insurmountable barrier for heavy armored forces including tanks, since there were only narrow and unpaved bumpy forest tracks and therefore had provided for only weak defense in that area. That is why the Germans could advance almost undisturbed and operate a breakthrough at Sedan, France. Within a few days the front was broken, several French divisions destroyed. Now the German troops changed direction in **heading north towards the English**

Channel which they reached on **May 20th**. There they trapped several hundred thousand English and French soldiers on the beach at the French harbor of Dunkirk.

But in an incredibly courageous French and British effort, employing all available naval, rowing boats towed by fishing boats and private yachts, 340,000 soldiers could be evacuated to Britain.

Then all French lines of defense were broken with only a few French units left to oppose the Germans. **On June 14th, 1940 Paris was taken** by the Germans and on **June 19th German troops marched into Lyon and Cherbourg**. On **June 25th** the Germans, then already staying in Bordeaux and Valence, the German advance came to a halt with an **armistice agreement**.

FRANCE UNDER NAZI RULE ARMISTICE AND COLLABORATION

Beginning on **10 May 1940 France was invaded** by Nazi Germany. The Wehrmacht rapidly conquered France in bypassing the Maginot Line. The **French forces were in general retreat and by July 1940** it was apparent that the French had lost. The French prime minister resigned and Marshal Philippe Pétain, a hero of WW I, took over his office. He recognized the French defeat and asked for an armistice with Germany. **On 22 June 1940 the armistice was signed by the French and Germans** in a railway car in Compiègne Forest – in exactly that car in which the Germans had surrendered and signed their capitulation in 1918.

The armistice terms imposed on France were harsh. All occupation costs had to be borne by France. Nearly 2,000,000 Frenchmen were taken prisoners, some of which had to carry out forced labour for the Germans. France had to pay a heavy tribute in gold, food and supplies.

Three-fifth of France north and west of a line through Geneva and Tours were occupied to give the German Navy access to all French Channel and Atlantic ports.

The unoccupied zone, the »French State« or »Vichy France«, was governed by Marshal Philippe Pétain at Vichy and remained responsible for the civil administration as well as the French colonies. On **10 July 1940 Pétain was granted essentially dictatorial powers** by the National Assembly. On **24 October 1940**



Pétain and Hitler shook hands in Hitler's train and agreed on co-operation between the two states. Six days later Pétain made state collaboration official on the radio. Pétain established an authoritarian government that reversed liberal politics. His "National Revolution" had as its motto "Work, Family, Homeland" (*Travail, Famille, Patrie*), trying to restore a traditional society. The media were controlled and anti-Semitism and anti-Bolshevism were promoted.

On 24 October 1940 the first "Statute on Jews" was passed which excluded Jews from the administration, the military, entertainment, arts, teaching, law and medicine. The police oversaw the confiscation of telephones and radios from Jewish homes and enforced a curfew on Jews. In addition a "French Militia" was formed whose task was to track down resistance fighters, Jews, homosexuals, socialists, communists and so-called undesired elements.

In **July 1942**, under German orders, the **French police** organized the "Vel' d'Hiv Roundup" in Paris and **arrested 13,152 Jews** and 5,082 women and locked them up in the Vélodrome d'Hiver sports centre before transporting them to Drancy internment camp and finally shipping them by rail to Auschwitz to be sent to the gas chambers.

Other raids followed in August 1943 in which 7,000 Jews were arrested and from **22 to 24 January 1943** during a raid in Marseille **2,000 Marseillese people were sent in death trains to the extermination camps.**

The German Wehrmacht drafted young French men from annexed Alsace-Lorraine to fight on the Eastern Front in the Soviet Union. Those men called themselves "Malgré Nous" (against our will) because they were forced to join the Wehrmacht.

But there were also members of the "Legion of French Volunteers Against Bolshevism" and the "33rd Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS Charlemagne (1st French)" who were fighting with and for the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front.

FIGHTING THE NAZIS LA RÉSISTANCE

La Résistance – the French Resistance – was the collection of French movements that fought against the Nazi German occupation and the collaborationist Vichy régime. At the beginning those were small and mostly poorly armed groups. Slowly, networks formed which were involved in the escape of prisoners, Allied soldiers and airmen trapped behind enemy lines. They also published and disseminated underground newspapers and clandestine anti-Nazi and Vichy leaflets. Their members came from all economic levels and social strata of French society: workers, students, academics, artists, Roman Catholics, Jews, liberals, anarchists and emigrés such as Armenians, Georgians and Polish. The Communists joined the Résistance only at the start of the "Operation Barbarossa" when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. When on **16 February 1943** the "Service du Travail Obligatoire" organisation was created, which forced young men to work in German companies, many of them escaped to the countryside to avoid conscription into Vichy France's compulsory labour service and were called "maquisards".

Since in Hitler's eyes resistance fighters or partisans did not belong to an official army they were not subjected to the Geneva Convention and therefore could be treated as bandits and criminals which could be arrested, imprisoned or executed when being caught.

In May 1943 the majority of the Résistance movements were unified by Jean Moulin in the "Conseil National de Résistance" which was co-ordinated with the "Free French Forces" under the authority of French Generals Henri Giraud and Charles de Gaulle, both being in London exile at that time. Moulin, however, was betrayed to the Germans, arrested and tortured and died on his transport to Germany on **8 July 1943**.

The Résistance co-operated with the Allied Forces especially in providing reconnaissance and intelligence. In co-ordination with the Allies they destroyed railway lines and main roads to cut off German

supplies, interrupted phone lines, and provided information for the Allies on numbers, positions and movements of the Germans. Additionally all those actions were supported by strikes of the railway workers, the police and gendarmerie. After being called to arms in coded messages broadcasted by the BBC London, they **supported the Allied Forces when they landed on the beaches of Normandy on “D-Day”, 6 June 1944.**

But on their hasty retreat SS divisions committed further atrocious massacres of French civilians:

On **9 June 1944** soldiers of the *2nd Panzer SS division »Das Reich«* **hanged 99 residents of the city of Tulle** on the city balconies. The next day the same division **killed 642 people in Oradour-sur-Glane** rounding up all men in a barn and shooting them there and rounding up all women and children in the church and then setting it on fire so that all inside the building were burnt alive. On **25 August 1944 Paris was liberated** with the help of a French Armoured Division and earlier strikes by the Paris Métro, the gendarmerie and the police. On that very day, in a measure of retaliation, **124 of the 500 residents of the village of Maillé were executed** by a retreating SS division. Finally, with the landing of the 1st French Army in Provence **in August 1944** and backed by over 25,000 maquis, most of **southwestern, central and southeastern France was liberated.**

After the landings in Normandy and Provence, the different **groups of the Résistance were organized into operational units**, collectively known as *»French Forces of the Interior (FFI)«* and *»Francs-Tireurs and Partisans (FTP)«*. Estimated at 100,000 fighters in **June 1944** it reached about 400,000 by October that year.

In **September 1944** there were **still German forces in France** resisting the Allies' advance. In the **spring of 1945 the Résistance represented almost one third of the French troops.** The last areas still occupied by the Germans were mainly the western regions.

With the withdrawal of the German army the **Vichy Régime ceased to exist.** Marshal Pétain was sentenced to death but then pardoned, changing the sentence to life imprisonment in which he died at the age of 95.

On **23 August 1944** the then installed *Provisional Government of the French Republic* under the leadership of **General de Gaulle took residence in Paris**. He had to lead a country still at war for several months and was in charge of the »legal purge« of the administration as well as the civilian population in sentencing and even executing collaborators. Many maquis enlisted in the French Army.

On **29 April 1945 the German forces surrendered**. One day later Hitler committed suicide in his bunker in besieged Berlin. He was succeeded by Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz who had **signed the total and unconditional surrender in Europe on 7 and 8 May 1945** by General Alfred Jodl in Reims and Field Marshal Keitel in Berlin. — The bloody war was over.

5

GREECE UNDER NATIONAL SOCIALISM

Greece, beautiful and popular country for spending one's holidays and being famous for its hospitality, shares the same fate as Czechia when the National Socialist terror regime is addressed. Little if anything of the hardship the Greek population had to suffer under Nazi occupation.

Hitler who had adored Greek antiquity in his early days did not really include Greece in his war strategy first as his target was Russia. When Hitler's ally Mussolini attacked Albania and Greece against Hitler's will and the Italian troops were defeated by the Greek army, however, Hitler changed his mind. Postponing the war on Russia, Greece was not only subdued and occupied but plundered from all its resources, materials and finances. Its population was not just left to fight mass starvation and deportation for forced labor in Germany's concentration camps – additionally to the deportation of 40,000 Jews from Thessaloniki.

First, after the defeat of the Greek army, having left large parts of Greece under Italian control, things changed to the worse after the Italian surrender in 1943. The German troops committed mass murders of innocent people in so-called retaliation measures in order to fight the Greek partisans who didn't want anything but live in an independent, free country.

WW II AND GREECE

HOW GREEK INVOLVEMENT CAME ABOUT

As Hitler greatly loved and admired the arts of Greek Antiquity, he first considered the Greek people being of so-called “related blood” (that is as a sort of relatives to “Arians”) and did not want to involve Greece in his warfare of subduing the Slavic countries and peoples that he thought to be “subhuman beings” (Untermenschen). But his mind changed in 1940.

In the beginning, Hitler had not wanted to involve the southern European countries of Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece in a war because Russia had always been his main interest of warfare, and because Hitler needed the resources of the southern European countries.

When, in **June 1940, Stalin (the Russian dictator) annexed parts of Romania**, and when rest-Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria, more or less pushed by fears of being overrun by Bolshevist Russia, decided to join the “Axis Powers” (Germany, Italy, and Japan), the whole situation changed dramatically because of Italy.

Mussolini, the Italian dictator, himself had similar ideas as Hitler as to extend his power beyond Italy. Therefore **Italian troops occupied Albania in 1939** and, in August 1940, first wanted to start war on Yugoslavia, something which Hitler didn’t want. Disregarding Hitler’s wish to keep peace on the Balkans to avoid having a second front line in the south when starting war on Russia, **Italy attacked Greece on October 28, 1940**. As a reaction on this attack, British troops were stationed on the island of Crete. **On November 4, 1940, Mussolini’s troops were defeated by the Greek army**, and had to withdraw to Albania.

While the Greek government, having had traditionally good political and economic relations with Germany, tried to avoid war, saying that the British troops would not attack the Germans but only Italians, Britain wanted to reinforce their troops on the Aegean islands.

Shortly after **Bulgaria** had extended its territory and **joined the "Tripartite Pact" on March 1, 1941**, massive German troops were stationed in Bulgaria, to allow an easier warfare on Greece. **The Yugoslavian government**, whose position had been rather pro-Hitler but had not had a treaty with Nazi-Germany, officially **joined the Tripartite Pact/Axis powers on March 25, 1941**, disregarding internal fights for power in Yugoslavia.

On **April 6, 1941**, without having declared war large German troops **attacked both Yugoslavia and Greece**. Hungarian and Italian troops joined in shortly afterwards.

Yugoslavia as a whole was subdued and **occupied by April 17, 1941**, and the country was divided up between Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria and Germany, while in the end the Nazis kept the final say.

Other than the rather quick defeat of Yugoslavia, the Greek army, assisted by British troops, resisted longer. But in the end, because the Greek troops were not mobile enough, had nothing to resist the **heavy bombardment** by the invaders, and after a **surprise attack** from southern Yugoslavia, the city of **Thessaloniki fell on April 9, 1941**. 60.000 Greek soldiers had to surrender.

Moving very quickly southward, the German Wehrmacht and Italian troops **occupied the rest of the Greek mainland** and most of the islands **until April 30, 1941**. While most of the British soldiers that had assisted the Greek army saw a last minute evacuation to Crete and Egypt, 12.000 British and some 223.000 Greek soldiers were taken prisoners of war. But the Greek soldiers were set free again soon after.

In order to make sure that there would be no landing point left for the allied forces, mainly British troops, to attack Hitler's soldiers, the Nazi regime launched **"Operation Mercury" on May 20, 1941** to finally bring Crete under its control. Despite heavy German losses, the Nazis brought **Crete under their control**, and **by June 1, 1941**, the whole of Greece was occupied by Nazi Germany.

Due to this so-called "Balkans Expedition" Hitler had to postpone his war on the Soviet Union for several weeks which may have contributed to the fact that the hard Russian winter stopped the German troops from taking Moscow and advancing further into Russia – so

something that ultimately led to the change of war luck and helped the “Allies” (Russia, Great Britain, France, USA) to win territory and finally defeat Germany.

The consequences of the subdual of Yugoslavia and Greece were heavy and long partisan fights against the German aggressors, as well as the fact that the Nazis took advantage of their position and deported and killed almost 90% of the Greek Jews. Moreover, as Greek partisans did not give up fight, the German Wehrmacht recklessly killed thousands of Greek civilians in so-called “measures of atonement” (*Sühnemaßnahmen*) – which were nothing but cruel murders of people who wanted nothing else but live their lives in liberty and freedom. Numbers of victims, civilians and partisans, are most likely to be close to 80.000, set aside the prisoners of war that were brought to Germany for forced labour (*Zwangsarbeit*) and the more than 60.000 Jews deported to concentration camps and killed by the Nazis.

The occupation of Greece by the Germans ended in 1944, when most of the German troops had to withdraw due to the advancement of the Allied troops, but Crete and some Aegean islands remained occupied until May 1945.

NAZI OCCUPATION OF GREECE WHAT IT MEANT

Relations between Greece and Germany had been good in the **1920s** as economic cooperation resulted in political approaches and helped both countries. While big German firms (Siemens, AEG etc.) founded Greek dependencies, Greece exported agricultural goods and ore (such as chromium) to Germany. Traditional German high esteem for Greek culture and the people was reflected in many Greek people studying at Germany universities. One of them was Ioannis Metaxas, Greek Prime Minister in the 1920s, who was not only German-friendly but also liked National Socialist ideas. Hitler, on the other hand, admired Greek Antique arts and for political and economic reasons had initially wanted to keep Greece untouched by the war, relying on their allegiance.

The change came with the **first days of the war** as **Greece increasingly feared Italian invasion** and therefore asked both Germany and Britain for protection.

As Hitler was not willing to intervene with his Italian ally, Greek-German relations deteriorated, the more so as Hitler feared British presence in Greece that would hinder warfare on Russia. Then, when Italy finally tried to occupy Greece but was defeated, Hitler hardly had any other option than to intervene and try to settle affairs on



the Balkans and in Greece.

After having occupied the Greek mainland in May 1941 and invaded Crete in **June 1941, Hitler finally focused on the war against the Soviet Union.** As he did not want to leave strong troops in Greece and felt that he had successfully chased the British back to Egypt, **control of occupied Greece was largely given to Italy and Bulgaria,** while Hitler agreed to have a German-friendly, **collaborating Greek government and left only 75.000 soldiers stationed** in the strategically important areas of northern Greece, around Athens and on Crete.

With **Italy's defeat and surrender in 1943,** however, almost all **Greece came under full German control,** which meant 275.000 German soldiers, supported by 55.000 Bulgarians.

Despite the seemingly settled situation **in 1941/42** and as their **living conditions were miserable,** the Greek people's attitude over against the Germans had dramatically changed for different reasons:

- (1) Partly due to the battles, the **Greek economy had almost broken down,** causing a high rate of unemployment along with hyper-inflation.
- (2) Regardless of this, **Germany rigorously exploited all Greek resources,** be it technological and agricultural products or fuels and ore.
- (3) Exploitation of Greek raw materials demanded many workers, so that the **Germans urged the Greek to do "forced labour" (*Zwangsarbeit*)** – meaning hard work for extremely little payment or only a little food (not enough to sustain living). As the war went on, many Greek people were voluntarily and involuntarily deported to the Reich (mainly Bavaria and Austria) to do forced labour there.
- (4) **Greece was made to pay "occupation money" (*Besatzungsgeld*)** to support troops in battle as well as the occupants.
- (5) From the very beginning, German soldiers **recklessly plundered the Greek population,** stealing and forcing everything from them that was of worth, be it silver and gold or food.

(6) Thus left with almost nothing, the Greek population had to face the **hard winter of 1941/42** in which more than **250.000 people died from starvation and diseases**. The situation only changed slightly in spring and summer 1942 after Britain had loosened its sea blockade and then asked neutral Sweden to coordinate food supply, mainly from Canada.

Yet, Greece remained under the threat of starvation as exploitation wouldn't stop, while naturally the Greek population – apart from a few still pro-National Socialist groups – had turned against the German violators, and partisan fighters organised attacks on the cruel occupants, Italians and Germans alike. The two most important groups of resistance were the EAM/ELAS and the EDES which occasionally cooperated, assisted by secretly operating British soldiers, but generally tended to fight each other, thus unwillingly or voluntarily helping the occupants.

As the occupation went on and **German troops** in Greece were **more than tripled (in autumn 1943)**, each partisan action was answered with increasing brutality, not only against the **partisan groups** in the Greek mountains but also against the civilians:

- (1) By intimidating the population in the small villages, the Nazi soldiers tried to **cut off supplies for the partisans in the mountains**.
- (2) Following orders from Berlin, they **took civil hostages** who they shot in official places.
- (3) They conducted so-called **"atonement measures"** (*Sühnemaßnahmen*), unbelievably inhumane, utterly brutal actions, during which the men of the German Wehrmacht, as revenge for attacks by partisan groups, took away everything they could get hold of (animals, tools, clothes, furniture), burnt down whole villages, and killed the civilians.

Apart from these atrocities, the Nazis, in accordance with their efforts to extinguish the Jews, **deported more than 60.000 Greek Jews** to the concentration camps in Eastern Europe where most of them were murdered.

By the end of the occupation, the Germans had **destroyed hundreds of villages** and small towns and **killed some 30.000 people** conducting there well-planned and utmost inhumane atrocities, one of which took place in the town of Kalavryta, 24 surrounding villages and three cloisters.

After **partisans had taken hostage 78 German soldiers in October 1943** and negotiations for an exchange with imprisoned Greek partisans had been unsuccessful, the **partisans shot the Germans** (3 Germans escaped). On **December 5, German troops surrounded the town of Kalavryta**, searched the whole area for partisans, and as they couldn't find any suspects burnt a few houses, declaring their operation was finished and the population had nothing to fear. However, on **December 13, 1943**, following the order of General Karl von Le Suire, German soldiers **again surrounded the town**.

Women, children under 14, and elderly people were separated from the men. While the men were forced to gather on a little hill above the town, constantly threatened by armed soldiers, the women, children and old people – without knowing what happened to the men – were locked in the town school. All town houses, except for the school, were set on fire, and after the men had been urged to watch their houses burn down and the fire approaching the building in which their families were locked, the Germans shot all men. As the barbarian Germans left the town, the women, children and old managed a last minute escape from their trap, only to find their town in ashes, their husbands, fathers, brothers and sons killed and their own lives destroyed.

MASS MURDERS COMMITTED BY NAZIS THE KALAVRYTA MASSACRE

After the **Italian attack on Greece in 1941**, followed by the invasion by German troops and the surrender of the Greek army, Hitler Germany **first left control** of the southern parts of Greece **with the Italians**. Therefore Italian troops occupied the Peloponnese peninsula by May 1941, making the small town of **Kalavryta** in the mountains their **headquarters**.

The Italians confiscated several houses for the soldiers and turned the **school** building into their prison/**concentration camp** for the Greek partisans that were very active to regain freedom from occupation. Conditions for the imprisoned 500 Greek partisan fighters were very bad, they were beaten, tortured, suffered from diseases and famine under Italian brutality. Greek partisans kept on fighting the occupant, several times beating the occupants, but also suffering losses.

After the **Italian surrender** to the allied forces in **summer 1943**, it was no longer a part of the axis-powers, so **Nazi troops** disarmed the Italians on **September 9, 1943** and **took over control** of all Greece. From July to early December 1943 the Greek people had to withstand air raids as well as destruction of villages, as the Nazis thought that the centre of Greek resistance against the occupation was the town of Kalavryta and its surrounding villages and the mountains.

In order to wipe out resistance against the occupation and because they thought that British troops planned a landing on the south coast of the Peloponnese peninsula, the Nazis planned "**Operation Kalavryta**": a huge military operation by Wehrmacht troops from different occupied towns heading for Kalavryta.

Fighting the German troops at the town of Kerpini on October 16-18, 1943, the Greek partisans got hold of 83 German soldiers, 3 of them wounded, and imprisoned them in the school of Kalavryta. Negotiations for an exchange of the German soldiers with Greek partisans were without success but led to another German air raid on

Greek villages that resulted in heavy destruction and the death of 13 civilians.

The German plans for “**Operation Kalavryta**” were worked out right away and put into action after the Greek partisans had killed their 83 German prisoners in the mountains on December 7, 1943.

On **December 9, 1943**, at 9 am, Wehrmacht troops arrived in town and all Kalavrytan men had to **gather on the central place** of the town. In a speech the German commander told the people that the Wehrmacht only tried to get hold of the partisans, find and free the German prisoners, and chase the partisans away, and therefore the civilians were safe and should not be afraid.

Still pretending that they wouldn't do anything to the people, the occupants asked for food as well as for livestock (sheep, goats, pigs, cattle) to **supply the troops**, and searched several houses in town in **search of partisans**. As no partisan could be found, order was given to burn down their houses after having taken out everything of worth. The town **hotel “Helmos” was also burned** down as the Germans said they had found hand grenades there.

Although the German occupants stayed in town, the people of **Kalavryta remained calm** – hoping that nothing would happen to them if they didn't offend the Germans, even when on **Friday, December 10**, several important Kalavrytan **civilians were questioned**, people were not allowed to leave their houses after 4 pm, and German soldiers looted several houses and took everything that seemed of good use for them.

On **Saturday, December 11**, the local doctors had to conduct post-mortem examinations on three of the killed German prisoners (that had been found in a well close to Kalavryta), then the Germans got a funeral at Kalavryta cemetery. Although everything still seemed calm, the Nazis allowed more civilians from the surrounding villages into town but **let nobody leave** – meaning that the town of Kalavryta had become a sort of prison.

On **Sunday, December 12**, all live stock were gathered on a field, then killed and put on trucks that were sent to Patras. In the afternoon the German commander expressed his thanks for the food

supply and told the mayor that **the troops would leave the next day**.

Actually, some German troops left Kalavryta in the morning of December 13. But something that the people of Kalavryta didn't know was that already on Friday, December 10, order had been given to shoot all male Kalavrytans aged 13 to 80.

Instead of leaving Kalavryta in the morning of December 13, the occupants were divided into four groups each of which was given a different task in the horrors that were to come. The first group of armed German soldiers **forced all people in town to gather** in the town's central place and guarded them. The second group led the **male population to a hill**, threatened them with weapons and secured the surrounding area. The third group looted the houses and **set the town on fire**, while the fourth group made sure that the **women and children were kept captive** in the town school and could not escape.

In the **early morning of December 13**, the Germans rang the church bells to make the people gather in town. When the people arrived, frightened, packed with blankets and some food, the first group of heavily armed German soldiers **forced them all to enter the school building**, while another group observed the surrounding area for partisans.

Upon entering the building, all men and boys over 13 were forced into two classrooms (on the right) while the **younger children and their mothers** along with the old people were pushed into two rooms on the left side and **locked in there**. As the people were horrified, panicking in fear over what would happen, mothers tried to hold back their elder sons, while fathers – already suspecting the worst – told their younger boys to take care of the families.

As the two rooms crowded with horrified women and crying children were not big enough to imprison all of them, the men were forced outside again through the backdoors onto the school yard.

The remaining women and children were then also pushed into the building – guarded by Germans armed with pistols, machine guns and hand grenades. **Taking the families hostage** this way was done

to keep the men from putting up resistance, fighting or trying to escape.

The women and children, **crowded for hours inside the classrooms**, panicked as they didn't know what happened to their husbands, fathers and sons and feared that the German guards would shoot at any time. So they at least tried to **look out of the windows** to see what was going on. As they couldn't see what happened to the men, but heard trains whistling, they thought the men were taken away to some concentration camp. What they saw, however, were German **soldiers looting their homes**, taking everything of worth and value, and then **setting fire** to all the houses.

When the fire raged and destroyed the town under the terrible noise of bursting and collapsing houses, the soldiers guarding the school withdrew, leaving the locked-in people on their own. Realizing that the fire came ever closer to the school, with **smoke and heat creeping into the building**, the locked-in **people tried to escape** at any price. But as the doors opened to the inside and there were so many people in the building, some women **smashed the windows and threw out their children** to give them a chance to survive. Only after some time they **managed to open the doors and escape** just in time, pushing each other in panic to get out as the flames had already reached the building and thick, hot smoke filled the rooms.

The Germans, still in town to watch the scene, didn't do anything to help but laughed at the horrors and panic of the people.

When all the men had reached the hill, chosen by the occupants because of its position which made it virtually **impossible to escape unseen**, they realized a group of Germans positioned at **large machine guns** and observing the surrounding mountains for partisan activities.

The men – pushed together, some sitting, some standing – got ever more **nervous and fearful** as they asked themselves why they had been separated from their families, **what would happen to their families** and why they themselves had been forced up the hill and were **threatened with machine guns**. Then there was the noise of shots in downtown Kalavryta, quickly followed by thick clouds of smoke as the **shots had set fire to all the buildings**, except for the

school. Seeing this, the men quickly, yet silently agreed to **try to escape to rescue their families**. But before they could even fully react a green signal rocket was fired upon which the **Germans turned their machine guns towards the crowd of men**. When a second red signal rocket went up, the German soldiers **fired endless bursts to kill all the men** gathered on the hill.

Whoever could, tried to escape or hide among the dead bodies. But when the machine guns stopped, the **Germans kept on firing** at all the men who were still moving or breathing to fulfill the order of killing all Kalavrytan men. Only **13 of the more than 700 men survived** because they were able to hide underneath dead bodies and dared not to move for a long time even after the murderers had withdrawn.

While the Germans still were in town but no longer blocked the school doors, the women and children managed to **break out into the open**, only to see their town burning. Desperately trying to save their own and their children's lives, they **fled in all directions**, seeking shelter from the raging fire and the threat of being shot by the Germans. As some of the women and children **escaped to the fields or managed to hide** in the few houses that were not burning, the desperate overall outcry was: **“What happened to our men? Where are the men?”** Only a few women headed for the hill on which the Germans had committed the massacre.

Before retreating from the hill, the Germans had not only shot the Kalavrytan men with endless bursts of machine gun fire, but afterwards had also looked for and **killed those who had survived the machine gun shots**. Only **a few men survived** because they could hide somewhere. For a long time after the murderers had left, none of the wounded survivors dared to move, paralyzed, struck with fear, beside their minds.

Scenes beyond expression took place when first a few, then ever more women came up the hill to discover **heaps of the dead bodies** of their beloved ones while the sun, covered in the black smoke from the burning houses settled. Still, some women, after desperately having looked for survivors began to pull out the men's bodies from the heaps, and – finding them dead – slowly began **pulling and carrying**

them on their shoulders down to the cemetery, where they stayed, themselves more dead than alive, together with the few wounded surviving men for the night.

The next morning, ever more women and children who had fled to the fields returned to the burnt down town, found their way up the hill to experience the same horrible shock of finding their beloved fathers, brothers, husbands and sons murdered.

Without any of the town's doctors alive to help the wounded, without the town's priest to hold a ceremony, without any spades or other tools for digging the graves, the women and small children were left in **utter desperation, mourning, without hope** and almost without anything to keep their children and themselves alive. They **dug graves with their bare hands**, some up on the hill, most of them on the cemetery, and **stayed with the dead**.

Unable to think of anything, mourning the dead and left with nothing, the Kalavrytan women had to somehow **keep their surviving children alive**. Somehow they managed to turn to **organizing the days**: They collected blankets and other daily things that had withstood the fire, found and repaired houses and sheds that could still be used to give them shelter. And as people from neighboring villages brought food and tools, the **Kalavrytan women formed a committee** to organize life, distribute food and goods and thus **slowly began to rebuild their town**.

Part 2

Resistance

PART 2

RESISTANCE

AGAINST NATIONAL SOCIALISM

- BIOGRAPHIES -

6

RESISTANCE AGAINST NAZISM

Standing up for diversity and freedom against the racist and inhumane National Socialist ideology meant risking and often sacrificing one's life. From the very beginning - in Germany - Hitler and his followers aimed at one major goal - getting rid of people who didn't support their ideology or didn't fit with what they called racist purity. This meant that all opposing political views were eradicated with utmost harshness and people who didn't seem to come up to the Nazi ideal of a pure Aryan were persecuted, imprisoned, tortured (in order to turn them to National Socialists), killed and / or sent to concentration camps where death was only postponed until people were too weak to do the forced labor the Nazis needed them to do to keep the warfare going on.

Considering the course of history of the National Socialist regime spreading across Europe within only 3-4 years after Hitler's rise to power, it is quite obvious that the European peoples and countries did not simply obey and welcome National Socialism but stood up - or at least tried to - against their annexation (Czechoslovakia) and their being conquered in the course of a war that they had not wanted (France, Greece). Yet, standing up for freedom, diversity of opinion and one's own cultural identity meant fighting an extremely well organized regime that answered any opposition with utmost brutality. This in turn meant that people who resisted the regime had to form underground organizations, lead clandestine lives, often break up with families and friends, as one ne-

ver could be sure whether or not collaborators would betray the resistance fighters.

Turning to Germany, things were not completely different than in the countries subdued, annexed, occupied. On the one hand, most Germans had first welcomed Hitler and his rise to power for a number of different reasons. Due to National Socialist propaganda which was cunningly spread across the whole country from the very first moment of National Socialism, the majority had themselves quickly turned into more or less ardent followers.

Those Germans that withstood the “temptations” of the National Socialist goals of making the Aryans rule the world as “*Herrenmenschen*”, tried to fight the regime at least in the early days. However, Communists, Social Democrats and trade unionists that opposed the Nazi ideology with all the power that the unstable and weak democracy of the Weimar Republic allowed for, were swept away by Hitler’s turning all his powers against them. Within only three to four months (in 1933), Hitler had not only destroyed democracy and turned Germany into a dictatorship but also had all political opposition muted, political opponents imprisoned, murdered, exiled. Those who escaped persecution and who didn’t want to leave but fight on were forced to form underground groups.

Opposition and resistance in Czechia, France and Greece, as in all other European countries subdued by the Nazi regime, faced virtually the same fate: fighting against a giant that propagated its own views as the only right one, didn’t in the slightest hesitate when it came to killing opponents and innocent people and covering the continent with war and destruction. But still, there were quite a number of brave people, men, women and even children, who constantly risked their lives in order to stand up for their freedom, their human rights and for the very lives of their fellow citizens.

Giving a little insight to the lives of those who stood up for diversity and human rights, a number of biographies is presented in the same order as the historical chapters.

7

GERMAN RESISTANCE

Preconditions

Right after having come to power (January 30, 1933), Hitler took steps to **destroy all political opposition** as well as all **groups that might have resisted** to his plans.

On the other hand, neither the establishing of the NS dictatorship nor the NS war- and destruction policy created a widespread political resistance in Germany. The Nazis' insistence on the **values of the community**, with its **virtues of loyalty, obedience and a sense of duty** left **many Germans reluctant to resist**, despite the loss of freedom and the pressure they experienced. The **majority** of the population were **loyal or at least indifferent** towards the Nazi regime. The Nazis' system of coordination, with its **surveillance of the population and threats of arrest, torture or death kept people from openly resisting** which also meant that most Germans were extremely cautious about even making comments critical of the regime in public. Indeed, the system was so dangerous that even the slightest verbal criticism was regarded as a form of resistance leading to imprisonment, torture and eventually deportation or execution.

However, there was **resistance but it was risky and very often ineffective**. Opponents could only act **in secret** and once a member of a resistance group was revealed, the whole group was endangered.

About 7,000 resistance fighters operated in many small independent groups and at different levels:

- *Internal emigration* that covered all forms of **civil disobedience** such as the refusal to give the Hitler salute or listening to the BBC and telling anti-Hitler jokes;
- *Opposition activities* such as **refusing to join the Hitler Youth**, going on **strike and protesting** in public against the regime, **helping** Jews or informing people about the real situation in the concentration camps and on the battlefields of the war, etc.
- *Conscious political fight* against the regime such as attempting to assassinate Hitler or organizing a group to overthrow the Nazi regime.

German resistance groups

Social Democrats, Communists and trade unions

The first to oppose the Nazi movement and therefore to begin active resistance were the members of the *Social Democratic Party (SPD)*, the *Communist Party (KPD)* and the workers' trade unions. The SPD and the KPD were **banned in 1933** but their activists continued to oppose the Nazi regime. They undertook **extensive underground resistance** including **sabotage** of industrial machinery; **strikes**; **slow working** in armaments factories; the refusal to serve in the German army and to give the Hitler salute; and printing and spreading flyers.

The Christian churches

Both the Catholic and Protestant churches were not prepared to oppose the Nazi regime at first. **Protestants were divided** into two main groups: the *German Christians (Deutsche Christen)* who supported the Nazi ideology until 1935 (but then fell apart) and the **dissenting Confessing Church** (Bekennende Kirche, becoming more influential from 1936 onward). Especially members of the *Confessing Church* were

exiled and therefore couldn't do much any more. Hitler succeeded in silencing Catholics first, but quite a few **Catholic priests supported resistance** later on. In general, church representatives tried to fight the regime on a **more local and individual level**.

Conservative and civil resistance groups

Since 1940, a group of opponents met in Kreisau (Silesia). The *Kreisau Circle* established a resistance network of people from diverse backgrounds **based on Christian convictions**. They produced a **constitutional program for a post-Hitler Germany** and had numerous contacts with **other opposition groups in Germany and abroad**. Most of its members were **arrested and executed** after the failed assassination attempt on Hitler in 1944.

Military resistance against Hitler

Since 1934, all soldiers had to swear the **oath of allegiance to Hitler himself, which prevented measures of resistance**. Once it became clear that the war was lost, a group of military leaders **planned to assassinate Hitler**, overthrow the National Socialist regime, install a new military command and set up a new government that would negotiate for peace with the allies – which became known as the “Stauffenberg coup”. **On July 20, 1944, a bomb exploded during a conference at Hitler's headquarters**, killing several officers but Hitler survived. Stauffenberg and other plotters in the army were **arrested and executed** along with approximately 5,000 other opponents of the regime.

Youth protest

Most young people in Germany were loyal members of either the *Hitler Youth* or the *German Girls' League*. These organizations controlled every aspect of the German youth's life and demanded obedience

to Hitler and the Nazi regime. In March 1939, it became compulsory for all young people to join.

However, there were some **young people who strongly objected the rigid indoctrination** and discipline, instead preferring to **form nonconformist youth groups and gangs** that engaged in acts of protest and opposition. Working class and Communist youth groups **refused to participate in the official Nazi youth organizations** and therefore were persecuted and largely disbanded by 1939. The *Edelweiss Pirates* for example had **no distinctive political ideology**. They rejected the paramilitary character of Nazi youth organizations, the rigid control of the *Hitler Youth* over German teenagers and the general lack of freedom. The *Swing Youth* organized a **cultural form of resistance**. These largely middle-class young people admired American swing music and popular culture. They established **illegal jazz clubs and rejected membership in Nazi youth groups**, an attitude interpreted as a lack of patriotism. Persecution started in 1941.

Student protest: the *White Rose*

The *White Rose* was a **non-violent resistance group** made up by students. They were active at Munich University between 1942-1943, led by **Hans and Sophie Scholl** demanding an end to the war and resistance against National Socialists. They secretly **printed and distributed leaflets** calling upon the public **to remove Hitler from power**. They were discovered by the *Gestapo*, convicted of high treason, sentenced to death and executed.

OSKAR BRILL
a member of the communist party



Born on February 17, 1892, Oskar Brill became a metal worker and worked for the company Pfaff in Kaiserslautern that produced sewing machines. In 1927 he quit his job and operated a pub called “Hopfenbluete” until 1929 and then another one that he operated together with his wife until 1933.

Oskar Brill was a member of the **German communist party (KPD)** and a member of the **Kaiserslautern city council between 1925 and 1929**. On October 27, 1932 – before Hitler became chancellor – a branch of the

organization “*Roter Frontkämpferbund*” (*RFB*) was established in Oskar’s pub and he became the leading figure.

In its early days, the *RFB* was a paramilitary organization of communist ex-soldiers of WW I that wanted to fight for the communist ideas and were largely against the Weimar republic’s democratic ideas. Officially the *RFB* became illegal in 1929 but its member founded several successive organizations to stand in for the communist ideas and fight against the Nazi ideology. One of the more famous supporters of the communist party was Albert Einstein.

In the early years of the Nazi regime, the communists organized meetings in secret in order to make plans on how to fight the Nazi ideology. They tried to **attract young people and conduct paramilitary trainings**. They **secretly organized help (food etc.)** for other communists who were unemployed and poor. And the communists never shied away from **fighting against the Nazi Storm Troopers in street riots**.

As Hitler’s ideas were in absolute contradiction to communist ideas, it is no wonder that members of the communist party as well as its sub-

organizations became the first groups to be persecuted as soon as Hitler had come to power (from February 1933 on). It didn't matter whether or not the people had done anything to fight the Nazi regime – they were persecuted for the simple reason that they were communists.

Since the Nazis knew that Oskar Brill was a leading figure of communism in Kaiserslautern, his pub was closed in early February 1933. On **March 11, 1933, Oskar was imprisoned** for a few hours, released, imprisoned again one hour later and taken to the *Gestapo prison in Neustadt*. Oskar was lucky not to be beaten because some of the Nazi guards knew him. Instead, he witnessed that several of his comrades were beaten or tortured and some even committed suicide.

Between May 1, 1933, and September 1934 Oskar Brill was free but had to report at the police station twice a day because the Nazis wanted to keep control over Oskar's life. But in secret, Oskar **continued with speaking at secret meetings and helping the poorer families** – even though he himself was unemployed.

Then he was **imprisoned** again because two Nazi spies had blamed him, along with other communists, **for having planned an assassination attempt on policemen – which was not true**. Oskar Brill was sentenced to 4 years in prison, and afterwards he was kept in so-called “protective detention” (*Schutzhaft*) at the **concentration camp in Buchenwald**. Even though he was tortured and beaten, he survived. But he had suffered so many brutal attacks that he died on August 16, 1956.

LUDWIG GEHM
a social democrat and German partisan

Born on **March 23, 1905 in Kaiserslautern**, Ludwig Gehm grew up in a family of social democrats with close links to the local **workers' trade union**. After his father had called railroad workers to strike by the end of WW I, the family was expatriated from the Palatinate and went to Frankfurt.

In 1919, Ludwig began his apprenticeship and became a member of the social democratic party's youth organization. When, in the 1920s, the political situation **in post-WW I Germany** became increasingly radicalized and made left- and right-wing groups **fight street riots**, Ludwig Gehm decided for becoming a member of the **International Socialist Combat League** (*internationaler sozialistischer Kampfbund, ISK*).

Much earlier than other parties, this organization was well aware of the threat that the increasingly popular and politically successful NSADP meant to the unstable democracy. That was why the members of the combat league **introduced hard trainings** for its member as early as **1932**. Training included a **harsh discipline, absolute secrecy, hiding away flyers and other material, withstanding interrogations** and everything else that was needed for illegal, clandestine actions against the Nazis.

From the very first day of the Nazi regime, **Ludwig** and his comrades **organized actions of sabotage**, for example in **disturbing meetings** of the NSDAP or **painting anti-Nazi paroles** onto walls or on the road of the newly built freeway when it was about to be opened – **extremely risky operations**. Knowing that they couldn't overturn the Nazi regime, Ludwig's resistance group specialized in partisan activities disturbing the Nazis and showing the population that there still were people that disobeyed and stood up for freedom and democracy.

The resistance group also helped others who were endangered of being caught. Ludwig used several cover names to **hide his identity**, one of them being "the driver": He often **took resistance fighters**

to France on his motor bike, sometimes even driving all the way to Paris (about 500 kms). In order to make a living, Ludwig worked as a chef in a vegetarian restaurant in Frankfurt.

In **1936** the Nazis finally managed to get hold of Ludwig. He was **tortured and interrogated** 77 times but thanks to the absolute secrecy of the combat league, the Nazis could only prove him guilty of some minor acts of sabotage, and he didn't betray the other comrades. In the end, he was **sentenced to 2 years of prison for preparation of high treason**. Instead of being released, he was sentenced to 4 years of "protective detention" (*Schutzhaft*) in the concentration camp of Buchenwald in 1938, again surviving the constant torture.

As **in 1943** there was a lack of soldiers because so many had died but Hitler wouldn't want to accept that the war was lost, many prisoners from the concentration camps were recruited in so-called "probation units" (*Bewährungsbataillon*), Ludwig being one of them. After hard training his unit was sent to the **Ukraine in 1944** and then to **Greece**. Ludwig and 15 other soldiers **deserted from the German army** and **helped the Greek partisan army "ELAS"** fighting the Germans.

When **in 1945 the British freed Greece**, Ludwig Gehm was taken **prisoner of war** and taken to Egypt **until 1946**. He returned to Frankfurt in 1947. He dedicated much of the rest of his life to educational work at schools and universities to tell young people about the atrocities of the Nazis. He died in 2002, aged 97.



PHILIPP MEES

a member of the social democratic party



Born in Kaiserslautern on April 5, 1901, Philipp Mees was a skilled craftsman who learnt the professions of electrician, metal worker and machine engineering. In 1921 he became a member of the local Kaiserslautern **social democratic party** and held speeches at meetings. Additionally he was active in the **German workers' union organizations**.

In 1932 he began studies at the Frankfurt "academy of work" (*Akademie der Arbeit*) but was forced to quit after Hitler had come to power in 1933, only because he was a social democrat and active in the workers' union, something that accounted for his being unemployed until 1937. He finally succeeded in getting a job as a metal worker until **October 1938 when he was imprisoned**.

The reason for being imprisoned was that Philipp Mees and a number of other **social democrats** in Kaiserslautern had formed a **group of resistance fighters**. Their resistance meant that these people **printed and distributed flyers** against the Nazis, met (mainly in Philipp's flat) for **political discussions** and to prepare and organize the distribution of their flyers.

Another aspect was that the Kaiserslautern group **tried to connect with other social democratic resistance groups in the area**. In **spring 1935**, Philipp Mees and his young friend Jonathan Volk met with comrades from **Ludwigshafen and Mannheim to plan and organize activities** (printing anti-Nazi flyers etc.) and to **get into contact with emigrants in Paris**.

Connecting with exiled people in France meant **hope for international support and supplies with paper and (illegal) propaganda materials or even money to support members in financial need**.

Philipp Mees addressed the comrades in Paris in a letter asking for propaganda materials and describing the increasingly risky situation in Germany.

Hoping to make more contacts, **Philipp Mees traveled to Bale (Basel) in November 1935**. Talks about the international political situation, Hitler's openly propagated expansion politics, the increasingly bad situation of the Jews, and aims of the several diverging resistance groups were **disappointing and without results**.

Despite lacking support from exiled social democrats and other small resistance groups, Philipp Mees and his comrades continued their resistance by printing and distributing flyers and helping people in need until **October 1938**, when Philipp was **finally caught** by the Nazis and sentenced to 3 years and 4 months of detention in the prison of Ludwigsburg because of **"planned high treason"**.

However, he was not released but taken to the **concentration camp of Dachau in 1942**. After two years of constant torture, Philipp was **forced to join the army to fight in eastern Europe in November 1944** when the Nazi forces already were on retreat and lost battle after battle. On **May 1, 1945**, only a few days before the end of WW II, Philipp managed to **go over to the Russians** where he was taken prisoner of war. He managed to escape and return home in September 1945.

He continued to be an active social democrat, serving his city and region in several leading positions and received awards for his commitment in rebuilding and creating a democratic Germany.

JONATHAN VOLK

a member of the socialist workers' party

When Hitler came to power, Jonathan Volk (born 1913) is only **22 years old and a member of the socialist workers' party (SAP)** that closely worked together with the social democrats.

As Jonathan was a brilliant, charismatic speaker the local Kaiserslautern **Nazis asked him to join the party and teach the boys in the "Hitler youth" (Hitlerjugend/HJ)** even though his father was a Jew. Jonathan's answer was "I'd rather be killed than work for you!"

From the very beginning of the Nazi regime, Jonathan Volk was active in the **small resistance group of social democrats and like-minded people led by Philipp Mees.**

In 1935 he was involved in a resistance activity that took him on a **secret trip to France.** Because it was important for the small resistance groups to get and stay in contact with exiled persons who had fled from Nazi Germany because of their political views, **letters asking for help or anti-Nazi propaganda material had to be transported to and from France** – usually either on a bicycle or if available, on a motor bike.

Jonathan took over the **risky venture of smuggling such papers – hiding them in the frame of his bicycle and in a folder with a false bottom.** Somehow this action was **discovered and Jonathan was imprisoned in 1936** and in 1937, he was sentenced to 1 year and 2 months for "**preparation of high-treason**". As 8 months of detention in 1936 were subtracted, Jonathan was released after 6 months.

But still an ardent Nazi hater, he continued his resistance work. Together with Philipp Mees, the leading head of the resistance group, and some other fighters, Jonathan **again was caught and sentenced to 2 years and 9 months of detention in the detention camp Walchum-Ems.** There Jonathan had to do extremely **hard forced labour** in cultivating the peat bogs close to the river Ems. It is in this detention camp where the song "The peat bog soldiers" was born.

The camp was one of the worst and riskiest camps in Germany as the prisoners were tortured all the time while having to do the extremely dangerous work in the swamps.

Jonathan survived the tortures. For unknown reasons his father succeeded in getting him free in December 1940.

However, in **February 1943 Jonathan was forced to join the army and was sent to Greece.** Half a year later he was forced to join the “*Organisation Todt*” – a Nazi-led troop made up of forced labourers, ex-prisoners and prisoners of war that had to do the riskiest work one could think of. Only those were forced to join this troop who the Nazis considered worthless and whose death therefore was rather welcome.

Jonathan Volk survived, returned home to Kaiserslautern and dedicated the rest of his life to doing research on the millions of victims of the Nazi regime. He wanted to bring the Nazi atrocities to light because he was convinced that bringing to light and commemorating the victims includes pointing out that it all started with the demolition of democracy and the human rights.



OSWALD DAMIAN**a protestant Christian pastor**

Born in a small village in the south of the Palatinate in 1889, **Oswald Damian studied theology in Zurich** where he learnt about the ideas of religious socialism - **standing up for social equality, charity and rules of a Christian life** - that supported social democratic political views. When he finally became a pastor, he shared his views of religious socialism in his Sunday services and compared the original Christian convictions with socialism. He also established a group of supporters of the religious socialist Christian ideas and became its leading figure.

Oswald Damian was a **supporter of the peace movement and practiced a pacifist conviction**, always pointing out that true Christian life according to Jesus had to be peaceful. Being a pacifist, Oswald was in a dilemma: on the one hand, the Nazi ideology with all its racist ideas and brutal force attacking everybody who didn't support them, absolutely contradicted Oswald's conviction. On the other hand, Oswald's pacifism didn't allow him to really fight the Nazis. **The only thing he could do, was to oppose and resist the Nazi regime with words.**

In 1932 Oswald became president of the Palatinate religious-socialist association and **published a little book entitled "Religion is endangered"** in which he **attacked the Nazi ideology and accused all those who followed Hitler of racism.**

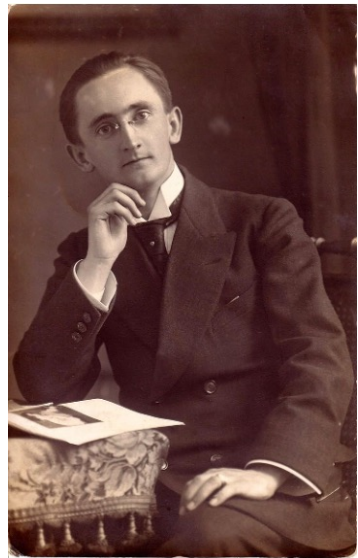
A number of **anti-Nazi newspaper articles** followed. This, of course, made the Nazis observe him and when Hitler had come to power, **Oswald Damian was immediately imprisoned** for his anti-Nazi agitation. After a few weeks as prisoner in the *Gestapo* **prison in Neustadt** – where all prisoners were beaten, forced to do nonsensical works and tortured, Oswald was released for a short time to conduct an important church service.

On July 16, 1933, he lost his job as a pastor and was sent to preliminary retirement – something rather unusual because pastors and

other people serving the church usually cannot be fired by politicians. Oswald's demission, however, was decreed by the church leadership and showed how much influence the NSDAP had already gained within the Christian churches. The church leadership obeyed and complied with the Nazi rules of getting rid of all persons who didn't support their ideology.

In 1934, however, Oswald Damian **again became pastor in the very small village** of Dörrenbach where he **couldn't do much** except for conducting Sunday services. He wasn't allowed to publish anything any more, meaning that the Nazis had taken all measures to mute Oswald and then simply ignore him.

Being a **broken man** because of the mistreatment and torture he had suffered, Oswald Damian tried to re-establish religious socialism in the post-war protestant church, but failed. His pacifist ideas made him stand up for the new **peace movement in the early 1970s** and start writing a novel on peace and disarmament during the cold-war period. His novel remained unfinished when he died in 1978, and **his resistance as one of the very few Christian pastors who opposed the Nazis was widely forgotten.**



ELISABETH GROß

a committed woman and mother



Elisabeth Geiberger, in July 1899, had 12 siblings and lived in Worms. In 1918 she married Heinrich Groß. The couple had two sons, born in 1919 respectively 1924. Her husband Heinrich was a member of the **German communist party (KPD)** and she was widely known for her **commitment in the “international workers’ help”** (*Internationale Arbeiterhilfe, IAH*), an organization that stood close to the communist party and **supported poor workers and their families**, especially with warm meals.

In 1932, Elisabeth was honored for her commitment at an international congress of the *IAH* in Moskow, Russia. After her return home, she gave a **speech about her trip to Moscow** and Leningrad and her experiences when visiting several Russian production sites at a meeting of the communist party with 400 people listening. This made her well-known far beyond the boundaries of Worms city. One of the people at the meeting, though, was a Nazi spy who secretly wrote down parts of Elisabeth’s speech and sent it to the regional NSDAP leadership.

Both Elisabeth and her husband **quit membership in the communist party** because of some quarrel in 1932. Elisabeth retired from her work at the *IAH* to become a **private person**. Between 1933 and 1939 she owned a fruit shop and then she and her husband opened up a car workshop, also working for the Nazis. Everything seemed calm and Elisabeth obviously didn’t have any trouble.

Things changed when both her sons and her husband were drafted and had to fight in WW II. Having a **pacifist conviction and generally not supporting Hitler** and the NSDAP, Elisabeth **made criti-**

cal remarks. On **July 29, 1943**, a friend of one of her sons visited her. Elisabeth was frustrated about the war and afraid of her sons and husband. This probably led her to be openly critical and say “there must be someone who kills Hitler. Isn’t there anybody who can get close enough to him?” Her son’s friend and his girl-friend **denounced Elisabeth to the local NSDAP.** Other **“proof” was collected** as well as the report on her speech in 1932 added. **On August 8, 1943, the Gestapo came to imprison Elisabeth.**

In **November 1943** she was taken to Berlin where she was kept in single detention and was tortured. In the course of a mental breakdown, she **tried to commit suicide in January 1944** but was rescued, only to be **sentenced to death in July 1944 for high treason** and undermining the military morale. **On August 25, 1944, she was beheaded** in Berlin – for the only reason that she was critical over against Hitler, the NSDAP and a war that was not to be won.

Elisabeth’s fate is an example of the Nazis’ fanaticism that they didn’t even shy from denouncing their friend’s mother.

In 1949, the person who had denounced Elisabeth Groß was accused of having helped with political persecution and of being guilty of Elisabeth’s death, and he was sentenced to 14 months in prison. But his attorney had the case revised, and in 1950, due to the lack of proof, the person was rehabilitated and free.

8

CZECH RESISTANCE

The birth of the Czech resistance

Resistance to the German occupation of Bohemia and Moravia began **immediately after the formation of the Protectorate on 15 March 1939**. German policy suppressed the acts of resistance and organizations of resistance as well. In the early days of the war, the Czech population participated in boycotts of public transport and large-scale demonstrations.

The Czechs demonstrated against the occupation **on 28 October 1939**, the 21st anniversary of Czechoslovak independence. **On 15 November 1939**, the death **of a medical student, Jan Opletal**, who had been wounded in the October violence, precipitated widespread student demonstrations. Politicians, students and teachers were arrested. **On 17 November, all universities and colleges in the protectorate were closed**, nine student leaders were executed, and 1,200 were sent to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Further arrests and executions of Czech students and professors took place later. 17 November was proclaimed the international day of students in 1941 in London – it is the only international day that has the origin in our country.

The Czech resistance network and its organizations

The Czech resistance could be divided into three basic groups: the democratic, the communist and the partisan group.

Democratic

The resistance network that existed during the early years operated under the leadership of Czechoslovak president **Edvard Beneš**, who coordinated resistance activity while in exile in London. The resistance groups formed under **the Central Leadership of Home Resistance** (*Ústřední vedení odboje domácího*, ÚVOD). It served as the principal secret intermediary between Beneš and the Protectorate.

The three major resistance groups that consolidated under ÚVOD were the Political Centre (*Politické ústředí*, PÚ), the Committee of the Petition "We Remain Faithful" (*Petiční výbor Věrní zůstaneme*, PVVZ) and the Nation's Defence (*Obrana národa*, ON).

In addition to serving as the means of communication between London and Prague, the ÚVOD was also responsible for the transmission of intelligence and military reports. It did so primarily through the use of a secret radio station, which could reach the Czech population. However, the ÚVOD was known to transmit inaccurate reports, whether false intelligence data or military updates. Sometimes this was intentional. Beneš often urged the ÚVOD to relay falsely optimistic reports of the military situation to improve morale or motivate more widespread resistance.

The most well known act of resistance organized from London was the **assassination of Reinhard Heydrich on 27 May 1942 (Operation Anthropoid)**. He was seriously injured and **died on 4 June 1942**. After the assassination, the Nazis proclaimed **martial law**, executed hundreds of Czechs without trial, and **destroyed the village of Lidice near Prague on 10 June, 1942**. Within a few weeks, the entire Czech underground resistance network was wiped out.

Communist

The groups mentioned above were all democratic in nature, as opposed to the fourth official resistance group: the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ).

Most of the members were former officers of the disbanded Czechoslovak Army. The ÚVOD's relationship with the KSČ was an important aspect of its daily functions. While the KSČ was not an official part of the ÚVOD and kept its organizational independence, it called for unity of action with all anti-Fascist groups. Leaders of the KSČ ingratiated themselves with the ÚVOD by helping to maintain Soviet-Czechoslovak relations. Beneš often used these KSČ leaders to arrange meetings in Moscow to expand the Soviet-Czechoslovak partnership. The KSČ's fate was also closely linked with the ÚVOD's. It too suffered annihilation after the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, unable to rebound until 1944.

Partisan warfare

Partisan groups began to form **in forested or mountainous areas**. During the spring of 1945, partisan forces in Bohemia and Moravia had grown to **120 groups**, with a combined strength of around **7,500 people**. Partisans **disrupted the railway and highway transportation by sabotaging tracks and bridges and attacking trains and stations**. Some railways could not be used at night or on some days, and trains were forced to travel at a slower speed. There were more than 300 partisan attacks on rail communications from summer 1944 to May 1945. Partisan groups had a diverse membership including former members of Czech resistance groups fleeing arrest, escaped war prisoners, and German deserters. Other partisans were Czechs who lived in rural areas and continued with their jobs during the day, joining the partisans for night raids.

The largest and most successful group was the **Jan Žižka partisan brigade**, based in the southern Moravia. It sabotaged railroads and bridges. Despite harsh countermeasures such as summary execution of suspected civilian supporters, the partisans continued to operate. Eventually, the Žižka brigade grew to over 1,500 people and was operating in large parts of Moravia upon liberation of the area in April 1945.

Resistance culminated in the so-called **Prague uprising of May 1945**; with Allied armies approaching, about 30,000 Czechs seized weapons. Four days of bloody street fighting followed before the Soviet Red Army entered the nearly liberated city.

JAN KUBIŠ

(24 June, 1913 – 18 June, 1942)

Jan Kubiš was born in Dolní Vilémovice in 1913. He was a boy scout and started his military career in 1935. During the Czechoslovak mobilization of **1938**, Kubiš served as a **deputy commander** of a platoon in Czechoslovak border fortifications. Following the Munich Agreement and demobilization, Kubiš was **discharged** from the army in **October 1938** and returned to his civilian life, working at a brick factory.



In **June 1939**, Kubiš fled Czechoslovakia and **joined a Czechoslovak unit in Poland**. Then he **fled to France during the early stage of WW II** to fight with the French and received the *Croix de guerre*. After the defeat of the French army, he fled again, this time to Great Britain, where he received training as a paratrooper.

During the allied (led by Britain) *Operation Anthropoid* Jan Kubiš, together with his best friend Jozef Gabčík and seven more soldiers, were **airlifted into Czechoslovakia** by the *Royal Air Force Halifax* on **28 December 1941**. In Prague, they contacted families and anti-Nazi organizations who helped them with preparing the assassination of *Reichsprotektor* Reinhard Heydrich.

On **27 May 1942**, Kubiš and Gabčík were waiting at the tram stop near one of the Prague crossroads that was well-suited for the attack because motorists had to slow down in a bend. **At 10:30 a.m. Heyd-**

rich's car appeared. Gabčík tried to shoot at Heydrich in his Mercedes-Benz open-top but his gun jammed. Heydrich ordered his driver to stop the car. As the car braked in front of him, **Kubiš threw a modified anti-tank grenade** concealed in a briefcase at the vehicle. The bomb severely wounded Heydrich when it detonated. Kubiš received a minor wound to his face from a shrapnel, but quickly recovered, jumped on his bicycle and rode away.

Heydrich was taken to hospital and the doctors immediately decided to operate. **Heydrich** was given several blood transfusions. Despite all the doctors' care, he **died of sepsis on 4 June, 1942.**

The dark period called "*heydrichiáda*" began. The human cost was enormous. **The villages of Lidice and Ležáky** - based on flawed intelligence reports linking them to the parachutists - **were razed** and their inhabitants shot or sent to concentration camps. Another 15,000 people met the same fate.

Kubiš and his group managed to hide for three weeks before they were **betrayed.** On **18 June, 1942,** they were discovered in the crypt of the church in Resslova Street in Prague. In an uneven **bloody battle lasting for six hours,** Kubiš was seriously wounded by a grenade and was found unconscious. He was immediately taken to hospital but **died** within twenty minutes. The other parachutists committed suicide to avoid capture after another four hours' fight with the SS.

In revenge, the Nazis murdered 24 of Jan Kubiš's family members and close relatives in the concentration camp Mauthausen: his father, both full and half-siblings, including their wives and husbands, cousins, aunts and uncles.

Heydrich's assassination was a subject for a few films, e.g. *Atentát* (1964) or *Anthropoid* (2016).

JAN SMUDEK – “The Elusive Jan“

(8 Oct, 1915 – 17 Nov, 1999)

Jan Smudek was born on 8 September, 1915 in Bělá nad Radbúzou. As he spent most of his youth in Domažlice, he knew the western



part of Bohemia very well, which proved advantageous later on. In **March 1939** he was a **college student** when the occupation of Czechoslovakia began.

On the evening of **15th March, 1939** the members of the boy scouts, Jan Smudek being one of them, met in an

apartment and **swore an oath to fight Nazism** until they were defeated or dead in front of the pictures of E. Beneš and T. G. Masaryk. **Jan Smudek served as a connection** between Prague and Domažlice for the resistance.

Jan managed to **acquire a gun** at a dance party, where a careless German officer left a belt with a holster with the Luger pistol in it. Jan planned a similar event with his friend, František Petr.

On **7 June 1939**, František and **Jan shot Wilhelm Kniest**, a German officer, who was returning to barracks after a night of drinking. The officer's death enraged the occupators. The (first) *Reichsprotektor* K. H. Frank himself went to the town of Kladno and proclaimed martial law. As a **consequence, 111 people ended up in concentration camps**. The true culprits, though, were not found.

The resistance was planning an attack at a train tunnel for which Jan was supposed to deliver a briefcase full of explosives. This led to a chain of events, after which he was given the nickname “the elusive Jan”: On **20 March, 1940** three **Gestapo officers came for Jan**

Smudek and questioned him about the briefcase he had brought from Prague. Smudek answered that the suitcase was in the attic where he was also hiding a gun. In the attic, **Smudek managed to wound one of the officers and ran away.** The *Gestapo* started the largest search operation since the occupation of the republic. Smudek **tried to cross the border via Prague,** but was caught by two guards on the night **22 March.** He shot both of them. After being caught again, he wounded another officer and fled once more. On **25 March he found shelter** with the legionary, Josef Sedláček, who helped him change his appearance by dyeing his hair and giving him glasses.

Shortly after Smudek's runaway from Domažlice, the Nazi repressions began. **150 citizens were arrested and transported to the concentration camp Flossenbürg.** Some of Smudek's friends were tortured and executed. The newspapers were full of bounties for catching Smudek or at least providing some information. This only helped spread the legend of the "Elusive Jan".

After having arrived in Prague, Jan **managed to flee to France,** where he joined the Czechoslovak foreign army, using the cover name Jan Doubek. After the invasion of France he ran away from the hostage hospital, eventually **traveling to Casablanca, then to Canada and finally ending up in Great Britain,** where he became a fighter pilot and married a British woman.

After WWII Jan returned home as a hero. In the early days of the communist regime Jan started planning his last runaway. **In 1947, Jan and his family fled to Germany and then to France.** Jan Smudek **returned** to Czechoslovakia after the Velvet Revolution **in 1989.** He died at the age of 84 on 17 November 1999.

It is said his life inspired the 1943 movie "Casablanca".

JOSEF FAHRNER

(9 Nov, 1910 - 1951)

Josef Fahrner, probably descending from a Czech-German family, was a Czech resistance fighter and officer, born on 9 November 1910 in Prague. He moved to Domažlice in **1935** to work as an **infantry lieutenant** in the new barracks. During the protectorate period, he was a district officer.

Together with Jan Havel, **Josef Fahrner organised the resistance group NIVA in southwestern Bohemia** that had members of several organizations (boy scouts, youth club, etc.). In **March 1939**, the twenty young men in the group **took an oath to fight against the German enemy**. Their mission was to **sabotage** the occupiers' actions and to focus on **boycotting** the German restrictions. They were responsible for **getting and hiding weapons and ammunition and spreading illegal leaflets**. Later in spring 1939 they began cooperating with an **illegal military organization**.

In **August 1939** the NIVA resistance group became a main organizer of the traditional Vavřinec fair, which actually was turned into a **big national manifestation against occupation** in the region.



In **1940** Josef Fahrner and 15 other members of his resistance group were **imprisoned** – accused of cooperation with the other resistance fighters, who had helped Jan Smudek to escape. Josef Fahrner spent **two years** in prison which slowed down the group's resistance activities. After his release, he took part in

resistance activities again: damaging tyres of German vehicles, scattering nails on the main roads or cutting telephone lines.

In 1943, Fahrner was appointed head of the NIVA resistance group giving the activities a better organization. By 1945 the activities were focused on all south-west Bohemia. At the end of WW II, Josef's group connected with the American army. Their main task was to deliver military reports on the positions of the German troops. This helped the Americans to bomb only military and strategic targets, not civilian ones.

On 5 May 1945, Josef Fahrner was appointed a military attaché for Domažlice by the American military command and two days later, he and Jan Havel created the *Border Guard Regiment* in western Bohemia. As NIVA had finished its mission it expired.

After the war, Josef belonged to the *Union of Liberated Political Prisoners* in Domažlice. He was one of the initiators of building a grave in a cemetery in Domažlice and a monument to the victims of Nazism and the Second World War in Chod Square in Domažlice. He was also a co-author of the book *Life for Truth*. In January 1951, he moved to Karlovy Vary.

MARIE PĚTROŠOVÁ**(1919 – April 17, 1942)**

Marie was born in 1919 and raised in the Czech-Silesian town Frýdek. After graduation from a housekeeping academy, she worked as a dressmaker. Due to her delicate appearance he was nicknamed “toothpick”.

Together with her father Emil Pětroš, a train conductor, she took part in the Czechoslovak resistance.

From **March to August 1939** she **was involved in illegally guiding civilians and soldiers across the**

Czechoslovak-Polish border, most often using the mountainous landscape in the Beskydy Mountains. Maria’s **whole family was involved**, her father and her aunt for example accommodated the people before crossing the border. In only one week, from **12 to 18 June 1939**, Maria managed to **help 30 soldiers escape**, until the *Gestapo* started to look for her. It took a while for them to find out her identity. On **18 August 1939**, she **was arrested by the Gestapo**. She was 19 at that time. During the investigation, she acted like a naive girl who liked walking in nature and didn’t know about any illegal activities. She **was released** after a short time.

Five months later she was arrested again. But this time she was pregnant. Despite numerous attempts during investigations and being tortured, she refused to denounce the other members of the resistance.



ce. The investigators described her as an arrogant and rude person. **As she was pregnant, it wasn't possible to send her to a concentration camp** but the *Gestapo* was extremely interested in her behavior and activities because they didn't believe her and only a lack of evidence made them release her again.

She **gave birth to her daughter Milena eleven days after she had been released**. She was very weak. **On 25 June 1940**, another seven weeks later, **she was arrested for the third time**. She was considered a very dangerous person that continued working in the resistance. It was urgent for the *Gestapo* to get rid of her very quickly. So, Marie was **deported to the concentration camp in Ravensbrück**. Her child, Milena, stayed and was raised by Maria's parents.

Her parents tried to help their daughter but their effort wasn't successful. **On 7 December 1940 Marie arrived at Ravensbrück** where she sewed military uniforms. She got weaker because of her poor health, hard work and bad conditions in the camp. She was thinking of her little daughter all the time - she wrote fairy-tales and drew pictures for her. She created a booklet as a birthday present for her daughter.

In 1942 she **became seriously ill** (meningitis, tuberculosis) and on **17 April 1942 she died**. Her family was informed about her death three weeks later.

JOSEF BRYKS**(18 March, 1916 – 11 August, 1957)**

Josef Bryks was a pilot who actively participated in the resistance from the very beginning in different ways. Nothing broke him down.



Originating from a family of peasants, he was born in Austria-Hungary in the small town of Lašťany in 1916. After graduation from a business academy he studied at the Military Academy and became a pilot.

After the occupation of Czechoslovakia, Josef first **helped organize the escapes of pilots** through Poland. In **January 1940** he tried to **escape himself to Hungary**. He was **imprisoned in Slovakia** – using a fictional identity until his first wife, who decided to collaborate, revealed his real name. However, **Josef Bryks managed to escape** through Hungary, Yugoslavia, Turkey, and Syria until he reached **France and then went to Great Britain**, where he became an **RAF fighter pilot**.

He proved to be an inventive man in captivity. He took advantage of the fact that the Germans did not find any documents with him, and thus managed to conceal his identity.

In Poland, he **helped distribute weapons and food during the Warsaw uprising**. Bryks also **took part in the so-called Great Escape** (which gave the American film its title). The great escape from

the camp in Sagan (present-day Poland) was devised in detail: On the night of **March 24-25, 1944**, all the prisoners shared the numbers according to which they were to cross a narrow tunnel they had dug using knives, spoons or tins. Bryks and his friend, another pilot, Otakar Černý, were to run quite at the end - they had high numbers. This paradoxically saved their lives, as they did not get out of the camp and subsequently did not become victims of the *Gestapo* that was waiting for the escapees at the end of the tunnel.

Bryks went down in history as he **was able to flee from captivity constantly**. And even though he was brutally beaten, he did not let himself be broken and continued fighting fascism.

After the war, Bryks received several awards and married Trudie - a girl he had met in England and with whom he had corresponded during his captivity. They moved to Olomouc, but their happiness did not last long. Like many other pilots, **Bryks ended up in a communist prison**. Trudie and her little daughter escaped back to England. **Josef died of heart attack on August 12, 1957**, in uranium mines in the Jáchymov region.

Trudie Bryks did not discover her husband's grave until 52 years after his death. She sought for people to find out about her husband's fate and went to the Czech Republic regularly. In 2006 Josef was judicially fully rehabilitated.

FRANTIŠEK PECHÁČEK**(15 Feb, 1896 – 3 Feb, 1944)**

František Pecháček was a *Sokol* trainer, author of publications on physical education, and a member of the resistance movement OSVO (*Obec sokolská v odboji*). He was a man fulfilling the *Sokol* ideals with his entire life and prepared to fight for the freedom of his country.

He was born on 15 February, 1896 in Záhornice, but spent almost all of his youth in Nová Paka, where he was an excellent gymnast at the local *Sokol* gym, and later a successful trainer of juniors and men.

After the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918, he joined the **army**, became a non-commissioned officer and managed a school for **physical fitness training in the army**. He became a member of the competition team of the *Czech Sokol Society* and **gained international awards**. When he left the army, he accepted the position of a permanent school trainer of Sokol in Tyrš's house, created mass compositions for team competitions, one of them **winning an international gymnastic competition in Paris in 1937**. One of his pieces is the song *Oath to the Republic*, performed by 30,000 practitioners on the 10th All-Sokol Rally in 1938.

After the occupation of the Czech lands, František completely fulfilled the final words of his *Oath to the Republic*, "We are standing strong, prepared to fight with new power for the better future of our beloved homeland."



Three months later, Czechoslovakia's future was decided in Munich, and within one year Czechoslovakia was occupied by the German army and World War II started. **Thousands of Sokol people were involved in the resistance.** František Pecháček became a **commander of the resistance organization Jindra.** As a part of his illegal activities, resistance fighters met in his apartment, including Jan Kubiš, a member of the *Operation Anthropoid airborne unit.* František **helped** hiding parachutists sent from Great Britain, and **preparing the assassination of Reichsprotektor Reinhard Heydrich** (27 May, 1942).

After Heydrich's assassination, **František, his wife Emilia and his brother's family were arrested.** They ended up as prisoners in Charles' Square in Prague. František Pecháček bravely faced torture and didn't say anything. After brutal interrogations, his wife was released and he was imprisoned in a small fortress in Terezín and then **sent to the concentration camp Mauthausen. His wife was killed in a gas chamber on 26 January, 1943.**

The exact circumstances of František's **execution**, however, are unknown. Some sources say he was shot by an execution squad. Another version says that he was torn apart by a pack of dogs. The last version says he was seriously wounded by camp commander George Bachmayer's mastiff and then shot after hospital treatment.

František's last words were: "Goodbye, brothers, I know I'm going to die, but I'm not afraid. A brave man dies once, only cowards die a hundred times. I will die calmly, because I know our victims were not in vain." He **died on 3 February, 1944.**

After more than 74 years his memory was honored with the memorial in his home town of Záhornice.

9

FRENCH RESISTANCE: LA RÉSISTANCE

La Résistance – the French Resistance – was the **collection of French movements that fought against the Nazi German occupation and the collaborationist Vichy régime**. At the beginning those were small and mostly poorly armed groups. Slowly, networks formed which were involved in the escape of prisoners, Allied soldiers and airmen trapped behind enemy lines. They also published and disseminated underground newspapers and clandestine anti-Nazi and Vichy leaflets. Their members came from all economic levels and social strata of French society: workers, students, academics, artists, Roman Catholics, Jews, liberals, anarchists and emigrés such as Armenians, Georgians and Polish. The Communists joined the Résistance only at the start of the »*Operation Barbarossa*« when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union.

When on **16 February 1943** the »**Service du Travail Obligatoire**« organization was created, which forced young men to work in **German companies**, many of them escaped to the countryside to avoid conscription into Vichy France's compulsory labour service and were called »maquisards«.

Since **in Hitler's eyes** resistance fighters or partisans did not belong to an official army they were not subjected to the Geneva Convention and therefore **could be treated as bandits and criminals which could be arrested, imprisoned or executed when being caught**.

In **May 1943** the majority of the Résistance movements were **unified** by Jean Moulin in the "*Conseil National de Résistance*" which was co-ordinated with the "*Free French Forces*" under the authority of French Generals Henri Giraud and Charles de Gaulle, both being in

London exile at that time. **Moulin**, however, was **betrayed to the Germans, arrested and tortured and died on his transport to Germany on 8 July 1943.**

The Résistance co-operated with the Allied Forces especially in **providing reconnaissance and intelligence.** In co-ordination with the Allies they destroyed railway lines and main roads to cut off German supplies, interrupted phone lines, and provided information for the Allies on numbers, positions and movements of the Germans. Additionally all those actions were **supported by strikes of the railway workers, the police and gendarmerie.** After being called to arms in coded messages broadcasted by the BBC London, they supported the **Allied Forces when they landed on the beaches of Normandy on “D-Day”, 6 June 1944.**

But on their hasty retreat **SS divisions committed further atrocious massacres of French civilians:**

On **9 June 1944** soldiers of the *2nd Panzer SS division “Das Reich”* **hanged 99 residents of the city of Tulle** on the city balconies.

The **next day** the same division **killed 642 people in Oradour-sur-Glane** rounding up all men in a barn and shooting them there and rounding up all women and children in the church and then setting it on fire so that all inside the building were burnt alive.

On **25 August 1944 Paris was liberated** with the help of a French Armoured Division and earlier strikes by the Paris Métro, the gendarmerie and the police. On that very day, in a measure of retaliation, **124 of the 500 residents of the village of Maillé were executed** by a retreating SS division.

Finally, with the landing of the 1st French Army in Provence in **August 1944** and backed by over 25,000 maquis, most of southwestern, central and southeastern **France was liberated.**

After the landings in Normandy and Provence, the different groups of the Résistance were organized into operational units, collectively known as “*French Forces of the Interior (FFI)*” and “*Franco-Tireurs and Partisans (FTP)*”.

Estimated at **100,000 fighters in June 1944** it reached about **400,000 by October** that year.

In **September 1944** there were still **German forces in France resisting the Allies' advance**. In the **spring of 1945** the **Résistance represented almost one third of the French troops**. The last areas still occupied by the Germans were mainly the western regions.

With the withdrawal of the German army the **Vichy Régime ceased to exist**. Marshal Pétain was sentenced to death but then pardoned, changing the sentence to life imprisonment in which he died at the age of 95.

On **23 August 1944** the then installed **Provisional Government of the French Republic under the leadership of General de Gaulle took residence in Paris**. He had to lead a country still at war for several months and was in charge of the “legal purge” of the administration as well as the civilian population in sentencing and even executing collaborators. Many maquis enlisted in the French Army.

On **29 April 1945** the **German forces surrendered**. One day later Hitler committed suicide in his bunker in besieged Berlin. He was succeeded by Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz who had signed the **total and unconditional surrender in Europe on 7 and 8 May 1945** by **General Alfred Jodl in Reims and Field Marshal Keitel in Berlin**. The bloody war was over.

DELPHIN DEBENEST**(1907 - 1997)**

Born in the French region (“département”) of Vienne in 1907, Delphin **Debenest worked as a judge** in the cities of Niort and Melle until **1940** and then became **deputy state attorney and member of the magistrate** at Poitiers.

Despite his public and safe position as a civil servant of the state in the field of jurisdiction, he decided to **join the resistance in 1941**. This step of actually leaving the realm of law and order meant that he **put at risk his position**, his family and, if caught by the Nazis, would have to face imprisonment, probably torture, deportation to a concentration camp, and being sentenced to death.

On the one hand, **he continued to work for a state which collaborated with the Nazi occupants**, imposing unjust and inhumane laws that negated the basic principles of ‘freedom, equality and the brotherhood of men’ that the French republic had stood for.

On the other hand, **he used his position as a judge and state attorney to help resistance fighters escape the suppression and persecution** by the French Vichy regime and the Nazi occupants. He therefore **joined several networks of the resistance fighters’ organization** of “l’Armée des ombres” (*army of shadows*). This meant that instead of continuing to do his job and getting into moral and abstract trouble, he decided to face the immediate and physical risks of partisan resistance.

In **July 1944**, when liberation of France was almost on its way, the Nazi occupants became **ever more reckless in chasing resistance fighters**. On **July 27, 1944**, they came to finally get **Delphin Debenest: he was arrested right in the high court building in Poitiers and deported to the German concentration camp Buchenwald in August 1944**.

He had to suffer the hardship and cruelty of so-called life in a concentration camp: on little pieces of paper he had stolen, he **put down a diary reporting the prisoners' work** of felling trees in deep snow; death all around; dehumanization, harassment and violence; endlessly lining up for a bit of soup; countless burials; longing for his wife and his two little children – the only thing that made him go on despite his despair. And **even in the concentration camp he continued some sort of resistance in founding and keeping up units for solidarity and help among the prisoners.**

During **April 1945**, the allied forces approached which was why the prisoners were **evacuated from Buchenwald and put into trains heading for another concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen** (close to Hamburg). When the train was bombed at the train station of Celle, Delphin **Debenest** and a friend **managed to escape**. Having spent two weeks hidden in the forest, the two men were **discovered by British soldiers and taken home to France.**

Having survived the concentration camp, Delphin Debenest was nominated **French general attorney at the international tribunal at Nuremberg in 1945** where he faced those persons who were the most responsible for the Nazi dictatorship.

Back in France, Delphin continued his work as a judge until his **retirement in 1977**. He died on July 2, 1997.



EDMOND PROUST

(1894 – 1956)

Edmond Proust was born in Chenay (a town in the region of Deux-Sèvres) in 1894 and **at the age of 20 became a soldier in the First World War**. He was **wounded in 1915** but returned to the trenches and was honoured for his bravery. The horrors of the First World War left deep impressions on him, making him a **strong defender of tolerance, pacifism and humanistic values**.



Working as a teacher from 1922 on, he again was **called up to the army upon the beginning of the Second World War (September 2, 1939)**. During the *Blitzkrieg*, fighting the German invasion of France, Edmond Proust was **taken prisoner of war in May/June 1940** but **released in August 1941** (because of being a veteran of WW I).

While being back in his teaching job, his wish to participate in the fight for liberation of his country grew stronger. Therefore, **in 1942, he created an autonomous group of resistance fighters**, made up of friends, that operated **independently of other groups**.

In 1943 he joined the “Organisation Civile et Militaire” (an organisation of resistance fighters carrying out secret missions to fight the Nazi occupants) and soon **became head of the local department (in August 1943)**.

In January 1944, when the “Organisation Civile et Militaire” **unified with the forces of interior resistance in the secret army** (“Armée secrète”), Edmond Proust **became the leading figure** of the region and contributed to giving the organization a military structure.

The allied forces (Britain, USA) and the French “shadow government” (made up of men that had fled to London and organized re-

sistance missions from there) planned for the time after WW II, they supported the creation of the “Forces Françaises de l’Intérieur” (the military organization of partisans that was turned into the official French army after WW II). **In August 1944, Edmond Proust was made regional head of the “Forces Françaises de l’Interieur”** by the allied forces.

Under Proust’s command the several resistance organizations he commanded had **a big share in preparing the allied troop landing in France – D-Day (starting June 6, 1944)**: They located, saved and hid material and military equipment that allied planes had dropped in containers. They risked their lives when attacking roads, ruining railroads, cutting off telephone lines in order to disturb German supplies and communication. They provided intelligence for the allied troops, and upon arrival of the liberation troops, they supplied the soldiers with whatever was necessary and available – risking their own lives every day.

The Germans, of course, knew about the paramilitary resistance organizations which meant that leading figures like Edmond Proust were most endangered to be caught and imprisoned or immediately shot for high treason. But **Proust**, managing to stay “under the German radar”, **was not caught and could instead give the resistance organization the military structure** needed for active and open fighting.

As the allied troops headed eastwards, liberating France and heading for the final destruction of the Nazi regime, Proust’s resistance fighters joined in and reinforced the troops from October 1944 to the end of the war.

DANIEL BOUCHET**(1894 - 1987)**

Born in 1894, Daniel Bouchet became a medical doctor in the region of Deux-Sèvres. In **June 1940**, in the middle of the *Blitzkrieg*, he **became mayor of the town Saint-Loup-sur Thouet** (until 1943, when he was imprisoned by the Nazis) and did everything he could to protect the citizens from the cruelty of the Nazi occupants.



In **January 1941**, doctor **Bouchet slapped a German petty officer in the face** (the reason is not known). **Bouchet was immediately imprisoned and sentenced to death but then pardoned and released.**

While continuing his work both as a doctor and as a mayor, he **joined the secret-service network “Confrérie Notre-Dame”** and later on the movement “*Organisation Civile et Militaire*” – both organizations were active in resistance against the Nazis. Bouchet, risking his life each and every day, **undertook lots of clandestine trips** to organize resistance against the occupants, **helped with secret service missions, recruited new members** for the resistance organization and helped in missions of saving and hiding material that the British allies dropped on parachutes.

On **August 9, 1943 Bouchet was caught by the Nazis, imprisoned (in the jail of Poitiers) and again sentenced to death on December 18, 1943.** But, maybe because of a good physical constitution, his sentence was **changed to life-long forced labour.** This meant that on **January 24, 1944 he was deported to the concentration camp Buchenwald** in Germany.

The concentration camp Buchenwald was one of only few concentration camps located in the middle of Germany and it was close to a number of big sites for the production of airplanes and military weapons. The Nazis sent prisoners from all over Europe to do forced labour under horrible living conditions because they “needed” workers to keep their military weapon production running.

During his detention at Buchenwald, Daniel Bouchet continued to help his fellow prisoners as much as he could.

Other than thousands of other forced laborers, **Bouchet survived** and returned to his home town when the war was over. He resumed his work as a doctor and **stayed politically active until 1973**. As a **co-founder of the “Conservatoire de la Résistance et de la Déportation”** (an organization dedicated to commemorate the Nazi atrocities committed in France and the resistance work of many French people), he **dedicated a lot of his time to teaching younger generations** the values of the resistance until his death in 1986.

GÉRARD PICHOT**(1921 - 2010)**

Born in the small village of Tourtenay (in the region of Deux-Sèvres), the young farmer **Gérard Pichot** joined the **French resistance movement “Organisation Civile et Militaire”** at the young age of 22.

Having been brought up as a republican with humanistic values, it was self-evident for him and **his whole family to join the resistance** against the Nazi occupation. Therefore, Gérard, along with his father Léonce Pichot, his father-in-law, his brother-in-law and a few other resistance fighters formed a **group of clandestine resistance fighters that undertook several paramilitary missions** against the occupants.

In **June 1943**, the group’s mission was to **find and save material in two containers on parachutes dropped from British planes**. The material was brought to the village and hidden away from the Nazis in secret cellars. But the **Nazis**, who knew of such clandestine missions, **investigated and caught most members of the group on August 9, 1943**. Gérard Pichot, who was not at his farm that day, **was caught 10 days later (August 19, 1943)**.

After some weeks in prison (in Poitiers), he was **deported to the concentration camp Buchenwald in Germany on January 1944**.

The concentration camp Buchenwald was close to several military production sites where the Nazis made forced labour workers produce airplanes, rockets and other military weapons mostly in underground production sites, one of these being called “Mittelbau Dora”.

On **November 10, 1944**, Gérard Pichot was transferred from concentration camp Buchenwald to the **“Dora” production site** where he first had to work in a unit transporting material to the under-

ground site. Later he was shifted to the depot which eased his life a bit.

When **in early April 1945, the concentration camp was liberated**, Gérard Pichot finally was free and **after a long dangerous trip, he returned to Paris on May 8, 1945** – the day when Nazi Germany surrendered and the war was over.



Gérard Pichot and other surviving resistance fighters founded the **“Conservatoire de la Résistance et de la Déportation”** (an organisation commemorating the Nazi occupation and the French resistance against it) **in 1986**. Gérard Pichot’s tireless efforts after the war were focussed on the young generations: he addressed students to teach them the values that the

resistance movement had fought for and **called young people to stay alert whenever human rights are endangered and to stand up for the values of humanity.**

ROBERT DOISNEAU**(1912 – 1994)**

Born in Gentilly (close to Paris) in 1912, Robert Doisneau became a professional engraver, and from 1931 on worked as a gifted photographer.

Having been **exempted from military service** upon the beginning of WW II, he had a job as an **industrial photographer** with Renault (cars) from 1934, but was **fired in 1939** as he had not kept deadlines several times.

The war events that led to the occupation of northern France including Paris in **June 1940** made

Robert **Doisneau flee from Paris and hide with friends near Bordeaux** in the west of France for several months. Yet, as the largest part of France was under German control and the so-called “free France” was ruled by the collaborationist Vichy government, **Doisneau decided to return to Paris – and become a man of resistance.**

He **did not join any of the bigger or smaller resistance groups** but worked in a more or less isolated way: Making use of his abilities and talents as an engraver and photographer, **he made fake IDs for persecuted people**, risking his own life to help others escape. At one incident, when time was too short to make a fake ID for a man called Serge Dobhowski, Robert **Doisneau didn’t even hesitate to give away his own real ID-card to Serge** – an action that would most certainly have cost his own life as well as Serge Dobhowski’s life if it had been discovered.



Having stayed **undiscovered in the underground until the liberation of France**, **Robert Doisneau and journalist Pierre Betz began as early as the start of 1945 with a photograph report series** on “*imprimeurs clandestins*” (*clandestine pressmen*) on those mostly unknown resistance fighters who had risked their lives in creating false papers and IDs.

After the war, Robert Doisneau became one of the most famous and most popular photographers of France. Up to today, many of his black-and-white photos of Paris are sold in souvenir shops.

GINETTE MARS *alias* CLAUDE VAILLANT
(1925 – 2013)

Ginette Mars was born and raised in Paris before her family moved to the town of Sainte-Néomaye (region Deux-Sèvres) in 1938.

Both her father, a police officer, and her mother were active in the resistance movement. At the young **age of only 17 and a half, Ginette returned to Paris to join a group of resistance fighters and partisans called “Michel”**. In order to hide her real identity she **called herself Claude Vaillant** from then on.

Ginette/Claude was a **very courageous young woman**, completing a large number of very dangerous missions: She **wrote, printed and distributed resistance leaflets**, and organized **women’s demonstrations against supply shortages**. After the Germans had introduced forced labour for all French men, she **organized fake ID cards and papers and helped hiding a number of men**. She



also organized fake identities for the families of people who had been executed or deported to concentration camps – a very dangerous mission because these families were observed by the Nazis. As a member of the organization “L’Assistance française” she **kept track of the executions, deportations, tortures and other atrocities** committed by the Nazis and the collaborating French.

In **June 1944**, while her father continued resistance in Paris (making use of his position as police officer), she and her mother **returned to their house in Sainte-Néomaye**. Until September she worked with the “Francs-Tireurs et Partisans” (irregular army and partisan organization that became a part of the regular army after WW II) as a **liaison officer and was responsible for guiding allied parachu-**

tists to hiding places. And she took part in **sabotage missions** of blowing up railway lines and German trucks to cut supply lines.

After the region had been liberated by the allies in early **September 1944**, Claude Vaillant / Ginette Mars continued her valuable work in the **French army as a secretary at the French army headquarters** but returned to her civil life in **June 1945**.

10

GREEK RESISTANCE

The Greek-Italian war and German invasion

With the rise of Hitler to power (1933), Yugoslavia, Greece, Romania, and Turkey would overcome their differences and conclude, in 1934, the Balkan Pact, a quadripartite defense agreement. However, thereafter Yugoslavia and Romania turned towards Germany and Italy while Greece was firmly oriented towards England. But when the Italians forcibly occupied Albania (1939), the Anglo-French reaction never came.

On the morning of 28 October 1940, Italy made known to the Greek government its intention to occupy parts of Greek territory. The Greek Prime Minister's response: "Well, we are at war", brought the Italian invaders into Greek territory. Italian troops struck Greek forces on the Greek-Albanian border, but the Italian plans failed. Mussolini's fascist regime had been humiliated in the eyes of his partner Hitler, who was opposed to an attack on Greece from the start. So, the Italians were waiting for German support to break the Greek resistance.

In April 1941, the Germans invaded Greece. Fierce fighting and German losses did not prevent the Germans from breaking through the Greek line of defense. The army capitulated, while the Greek government and the King fled to Egypt. The Germans occupied Athens on 27 April 1941.

Occupation and Resistance (1941-44)

Since April 1941 a triple occupation has been imposed on Greece; Bulgarians and Italians, with the help of the Germans, became their partners in the occupation of Greece. Resistance to the conqueror begins almost immediately.

Early examples of resistance were the stories of Konstantinos Koukidis and university students Glezos and Santas. Koukidis was a Greek soldier on flag guard duty on the Acropolis on April 27, 1941, the day the Germans invaded Athens. Once the first German soldiers climbed on the Acropolis and demanded of Koukidis to haul down the Greek flag and raise the Swastika instead, the soldier lowered the Greek flag, wrapped himself with it and jumped off the Acropolis cliff rather than raise the Nazi flag. On the second instance, it was on the night of May 30, 1941, when two young students, Manolis Glezos and Apostolos Santas, climbed the Sacred Rock of the Acropolis and without being noticed by the German guards approached the mast and lowered the swastika.

The Greek people are struggling to cope with the inhuman conditions of the occupation. The conquerors are seizing the wealth of the country. Hunger reaps the people. Tens of thousands of deaths. But these things do not break the morale of the people and so the resistance begins. Initially it was the product of spontaneous actions of individual citizens or small groups of citizens, but gradually it took on an organized form with the establishment of resistance organizations.

Urban resistance

Greek resistance was active in urban areas as well. Printers located in basements and abandoned warehouses printed tirelessly night and day pamphlets which urged the Greek people to take a stand and be patient 'for freedom was at hand'. On other occasions, public servants would deliberately prolong red tape and inhibit procedures, as in the example of railway servants being on strike to prevent trains full of forced labour workers to set off for German concentration camps.

On 28 February 1943, the funeral of the poet Kostis Palamas turned into a spontaneous demonstration of the people of Athens against the occupiers. On 5 March 1943, a general strike in the capital cancelled the conscription of Greek workers who were to be sent to Germany to work in the factories there. On 22 July of the same year, the Panathenaic demonstration protesting against the planned Bulgarian entry into Thessaloniki was drowned in blood by German tanks.

Armed resistance

The formation of resisting cells within the Greek territory started forming immediately after the German invasion.

In 1941 and 1942 the three most important resistance organizations were created: the National Liberation Front (EAM), the largest and one of the most massive in Europe; the National Democratic Greek Army (EDES); the National and Social Liberation (EKKA).

The National Liberation Front (EAM) was founded in 1941 and was affiliated with left-wing parties. It soon developed a military branch, the Greek National Liberation Army (ΕΛΑΣ), which launched a full-on guerrilla war against the occupant forces and their local collaborators, set mainly in the mountainous areas of rural Greece.

Already by mid-1943 the guerrilla groups had inflicted serious blows on the occupiers and had managed to liberate part of the mountainous hinterland, which was called Free Greece. The resistance world fought against the occupier, but also envisioned a better future for Greek society.

As time went by, the resistance organizations acquired a political character; conflicts between them were to be inevitable. However, there was no lack of cooperation; the blowing up of the bridge of Gorgopotamos (1942) was the culmination of the joint effort against the conqueror. The blowing up of the bridge delayed for several weeks the supply of the Germans fighting in Africa, raised the morale of the Greeks and glorified the armed struggle in the minds of the Allies.

German retaliation

The German attitude towards the Greeks became ruthless after the Italian capitulation (1943). The retaliation for every German killed

showed that the lives of the Greeks were valued less than the lives of the Germans. The occupying forces responded to resistance actions with reprisals, burning and destroying towns and villages and executing their inhabitants. Distomo, Anogia and Kalavryta are typical places of martyrdom.

The Massacre of Kalavryta or the Holocaust of Kalavryta refers to the near extermination of the male population and the total destruction of the town of Kalavryta on 13 December 1943. In early December 1943, the German Army's 117th Jäger Division began a mission named Operation Kalavryta, intending to encircle Greek Resistance guerrilla fighters in the mountainous area surrounding Kalavryta. During the operation, 78 German soldiers, who had been taken prisoner by the guerrillas in October, were executed by their captors. In response, the commander of the German division, General Karl Von Le Suire personally ordered the "severest measures" – the killing of the male population of Kalavryta on 10 December 1943. In total, 693 civilians were killed during the reprisals of Operation Kalavryta. 28 communities – towns, villages, monasteries, and settlements – were destroyed.

Another example, the city of Thessaloniki, was emptied of an active element, the Jewish element. 96% of the Jews of Thessaloniki, i.e. 46.091 people, ended up in the Auschwitz concentration camp, despite the large sums they had paid the Germans to maintain their freedom. Few of them, like other Greeks, would see Greece again after Auschwitz.

End of occupation

On 12 October 1944 the German forces withdrew from Athens and the occupation came to an end. On 18 October, the Prime Minister raises the Greek flag on the sacred rock of the Acropolis. When the Germans left Greece, they left behind destruction everywhere.

It was not only the dead - victims of the gas chambers, starvation, executions (from 1940 to 1944 over 520,000 Greeks lost their lives - 7% of the population - one of the highest in Europe) and also material destruction (forests, shipping, transport network).

The Greek people paid a high price for freedom.

LELA KARAGIANNI

(1898 - Sep 8, 1944)

Lela Karagianni was a national resistance hero that was executed by the Germans on September 8th 1944.

Lela Minopoulou, as was her maiden name, was born in 1898 in Limni Evoias. In 1916 she married pharmacist Nikolaos Karagiannis and together they had seven children.

Although her husband owned a pharmacy in the centre of Athens and a two-storey house where their family dwelled, Lela's middle-class comfort did not mean she was not concerned with the plight that hit her country once the **Italians and the Germans finally occupied Greece in 1941.**

On the contrary, **from the very onset of Axis occupation in Athens, she organized, funded and led an urban-based underground resistance network** that initially consisted of her own husband and seven children but eventually numbered more than 100 active resistance members.

Lela Karagianni **used her middle- and upper-class connections with Greek civil servants and officials** posted in various services and ministries of the Axis-related Greek government to **extract valuable intelligence and information** that she would later forward to her **British connections in North Africa**, mostly Egypt.

Moreover, she used **her own house as a safe house and hideout for resistance fighters** on the run from the Germans or British in-



telligence officers that would pass through Athens in secrecy on their way to the Allies Headquarters in North Africa.

In 1941 she was arrested for the first time by the Italians but was released due to lack of evidence. Her son George and daughters Ioanna and Electra were also arrested, but she continued with her underground operations. She managed to set them free and help them flee to Egypt.

However, she was **again arrested on July 11th 1944, this time by the Germans, along with five of her children. Her husband and two of her children had managed to escape.** They were all taken to prison and tortured. She **was beaten, burnt, left with no water and threatened that her children would be executed if she did not give up the other members of her resistance network.** She never succumbed and even stated that ‘threatening her with the life of her children is pointless since their lives belong to Greece and their blood would eventually drown out the Huns’.

Karagianni was finally **executed on September 8th 1944** by a firing squad along with 27 other Greek prisoners.

In the post-war times her contribution has been **acknowledged as that of a national hero**, her bronze bust is featured in the National Greek War Museum and a statue is erected next to her residence which can still be found in the centre of Athens next to the National Archaeological Museum and bears a plaque in her memory. Also, the Athens Academy has awarded her with the Virtue and Self-Sacrifice Award.

MAYOR LOUKAS CARRER and METROPOLITAN CHRYSOSTOMOS

When the Second World War broke out, there were about 275 Jews living on the Greek island of **Zakynthos** in the Ionian Sea. **Until 1943 the island was under Italian control and the Jews remained unharmed.** However, after Mussolini's fall, the Germans occupied the Italian territories and **on September 9, 1943 a German force landed on the island.**

The German commander **ordered all Jews to be assembled** so that they **could be deported to the mainland** and from there to the camps in Poland.



To prepare for the deportation, the **German officer summoned the Greek mayor, Loukas Carrer, and ordered him to prepare a list of all the Jews** on the island. The mayor went to the local church leader, **Metropolitan Chrysostomos** for assistance. Chrysostomos volunteered to **negotiate with the Germans** and told Carrer to burn the list of Jewish names. He then approached the German commander and implored him not to deport the Jews. The Jews were Greek citizens, he said. They had done no harm to their neighbors and did not deserve to be punished by depor-

tion. When the German would not listen and insisted on receiving the list of all local Jews, Chrysostomos took a piece of paper, **wrote the mayor's and his own name on it and handed it over.** **"Here is the list of Jews you required"**, he said.

The German authorities were resolved to continue with their plans. Realizing their attempt to stop the deportation had failed, the Metropolitan and the mayor **warned the Jews on the island**, told them to leave their homes and go into **hiding in the mountains**. Chrysostomos promised that the Greek islanders would provide them with food and shelter. Two thirds of the Jews followed the instructions and stayed in hiding until the island was liberated.

In August-September 1944 three small German boats came to deport the Jews. However the small German force was unable to round up all the Jews, and the community was left relatively unharmed.

On March 14, 1978, Yad Vashem recognized Loukas Georgios Carer and Metropolitan Dimitrios Chrysostomos as Righteous Among the Nations. Their courageous act is included in school curricula in Israel and is taught to Israeli students.



CAPTAIN NIKIFOROS / DIMITRIS DIMITRIOU (1929 - 2000)



Dimitris Dimitriou, born 1921, was a **Greek military officer** who served in World War II **against the Italian Forces** as a lieutenant of the Greek Cavalry Force and later in a Heavy Artillery battalion during the fight **against the German Army** in Northern Greece.

After the surrender of the Greek army, he was one of the first Military Academy-trained soldiers to **enter armed guerrilla resistance** as part of the National Liberation Army (ELAS), where he changed his name to Captain Nikiforos ('he who bears victory').

Nikiforos was well-known for his armed resistance against the Axis forces in occupied Greece and for his **involvement in the explosion of the Gorgopotamos Bridge**, known as *Operation Harling*.

Operation Harling, known as the Battle of Gorgopotamos in Greece, was a World War II **mission by the British Special Operations Executive (SOE)**, in cooperation **with the Greek Resistance** groups EDES and ELAS, which destroyed the heavily guarded Gorgopotamos viaduct in Central Greece **on 25 November 1942**. This was **one of the first major sabotage acts** in Axis-occupied Europe.

The force available for the operation numbered 150 men: the twelve-strong British team, which would form the demolition party, 86 ELAS men and 52 EDES men, who would provide cover and neutralize the garrison. Nikiforos was part of the ELAS Group that was commissioned to take out the north outpost garrison.

According to the plan, the attack was to take place at 11 p.m. on 25 November. The attack on the garrison outposts on the two ends of the bridge began as scheduled, but went on far longer than the time originally allotted. It was with the courageous military leadership of Nikiforos that the outposts were finally destroyed and the operation could proceed to become successful and a major setback to German supplies of Northern Africa Axis forces.

After the end of World War II, Nikiforos was imprisoned as a result of the Greek Civil War that followed directly after the Great War and was **released in 1952**.

He went on to become an active political voice and a prolific author. He died in 2000 recognized by both friends and foes for his contribution to the Greek Resistance.

MANOLIS GLEZOS and APOSTOLOS SANTAS

(Sep 9, 1922 - March 30, 2020 resp. Feb 22,1922 – April 30, 2011)

One of the most humiliating moments not only for Greece but for all humanity was when on **April 27, 1941 the swastika was hoisted on Acropolis Hill**, on the very cradle of democracy and Western Civilization. It was the day when the **German troops entered Athens to take control of the surrendered city**. The moment the Nazi flag flew in the sky of Attica marked the **beginning of three and a half years of pain, hunger and death**.

Yet, **two young men, barely 18, made a heroic move** which later proved to be the **beginning of the great Greek resistance** to the Nazis.

On 30 May 1941 Manolis Glezos and Apostolos Santas climbed on the Acropolis and tore down the swastika, which had been there since 27 April 1941, when the Nazi forces had entered Athens. It **inspired** not only the Greeks, but all subjected



people, **to resist the occupation**, and established them both as two international anti-Nazi heroes. **The Nazi regime responded by sentencing the perpetrators to death in absentia**, but they did not learn who they were until much later.

Manolis Glezos, born 9 September 1922 is a Greek left-wing politician and guerilla, best known for his participation in the World War II resistance. Born in Naxos, **Glezos moved to Athens in 1935** together with his family, where he finished high school. During his high school years in Athens he also worked as a pharmacy employee. He was admitted to the Higher School of Economic and Commercial Studies (known today as the Athens University of Economics and Business) in 1940. **In 1939**, still a high school student, Glezos **parti-**

participated in the creation of an anti-fascist youth group against the Italian occupation.

At the onset of World War II he asked to join the Greek army in the Albanian front against Italy, but was rejected because he was underage. Instead, he **worked as a volunteer for the Hellenic Ministry of Economics**. During the Axis occupation of Greece, he worked for the **Hellenic Red Cross** and the municipality of Athens.

Glezos was **arrested by the German occupation forces on 24 March 1942** and was subjected to **imprisonment and torture**. As a result of his treatment, he was affected by **tuberculosis**. He was again arrested on **21 April 1943 by the Italian occupation forces and spent three months in jail**.

After the war he had a really active political career that spanned decades which ended with him being elected as a member of the European Parliament in 2014, aged 92.

Apostolos Santas (22 February 1922 – 30 April 2011), commonly known as Lakis, was a Greek veteran of the Resistance against the Axis Occupation of Greece during World War II.

Apostolos Santas was born in 1922 in Patras. His family **moved to Athens in 1934**. He completed his secondary education in Athens and was accepted to the law school of the University of Athens, **completing his law studies after the liberation of the country from Nazi occupation in 1944**. In 1942, he **joined the fledgling National Liberation Front (EAM)**, and a year later the guerrilla force ELAS, with which he **participated in several battles** with the Axis troops throughout Central Greece.

After the Occupation, because of his leftist beliefs, he was **sent into internal exile to Ikaria in 1946** and then to the **Makronisos island in 1948**. He managed to **escape to Italy, from where he went to Canada where he was granted political asylum**. He lived in Canada until 1962, when he **returned to Greece**, where he spent the rest of his life. On 30 April 2011 he died in Athens, aged 89. Santas received numerous awards from various institutions in Greece and other Allied countries.

THE BAREFOOT BATTALION

The Barefoot Battalion refers to a **group of approximately 160 children who resisted the German rule in the city of Thessaloniki** during the Second World War and Nazi occupation in Greece.

The **German army took over the city of Thessaloniki** in Northern Greece, the second largest Greek city, on **April 8, 1941**. One of the first actions of the occupants was to **seize all government buildings to be used to house their administration services and detention premises**. In this light, **all the orphanages in the area were cleared**

of their children and suddenly **hundreds of children were found homeless** with no family, housing, clothes or food.



Therefore, **in an effort to survive, the orphans organized themselves** in a resistance group of their own, whose **main purpose was to steal food and supplies** from Germans and

their black market associates and which became known as the **Barefoot Battalion** due to its members' **lack of shoes and clothing**.

The Barefoot Battalion had a **strict hierarchy and organization** and missions were carefully planned and executed. Their main method of stealing supplies was for **one group to follow trucks and vehicles that carried food and another causing a distraction so as to slow them down**. Then, the first group of children would **climb onto the moving trucks and unload as many supplies as possible** before the vehicle would pick up speed again.

Supplies were not only shared among the orphans of the group but were also **shared with many Thessaloniki citizens** that would suffer from hunger and hardship. These young ‘Robin Hoods’ also **stole weapons to give to the guerrilla fighters** of the area and sometimes **hid resistance fighters on the run.**



Once their activities had become increasingly detrimental to the local occupation forces, **many orphans lost their lives** during their missions, since German soldiers had received orders to shoot on sight.

However, the Barefoot Battalion **continued its resistance activities until the end of Nazi occupation in Greece in 1944.**

PART 3

PROJECT WORK AND LESSONS

11

DEALING WITH NATIONAL SOCIALISM IN PROJECT WORK AND LESSONS

Almost a century after Hitler's rise to power and as the last few survivors who could tell the young generations of the Nazi terror are dying, the necessity to keep the memory of both the victims and of which atrocities the National Socialists committed is shifted to the responsibilities especially of teachers as we are the ones to give our younger generations orientation and plant the seeds into their hearts of a free, peaceful Europe thriving with friendship and diversity.

History curricula, of course, include the National Socialist era, usually by providing facts and numbers that remain abstract figures and often lead to people identifying National Socialism and the Second World War. The fact that Hitler had aimed at war from the very beginning must, however, not obscure that National Socialism was much more than a political movement. National Socialism was a complete worldview that included all aspects of life and therefore calls for being dealt with in all fields of education.

Setting out with commemoration work in school subjects other than history and in European project work is challenging as there are quite a number of pitfalls involved. The first and worst of these pitfalls is addressing the question of guilt. Especially German students often decline dealing with the Nazi era by saying they are not guilty. This is true, but dealing

with National Socialism is not about guilt, at least not about transferring guilt. It is about learning from the past in order to shape our presence and create a good, peaceful future. Pointing this out over and over again is of utmost importance when addressing National Socialism.

This final part of the reader is thought to be a little guideline for teachers and project coordinators to help address the topic with students.

The first chapter refers back to the historical and biographical texts presented in this reader. Along with the assignments that the international students teams dealt with during our project “Stand up, Europe“ there are some more ideas on how to work with in on the texts.

The second chapter addresses a number of basic ideas on how to deal with National Socialism in general.

The final chapter provides the list of sources we made use of to compose the texts and some further reading.

12

HOW TO MAKE USE OF THE TEXTS AND BIOGRAPHIES

The historical texts

The texts on the history of National Socialism provide the reader with an overview of the most important facts of the course of events in all the four countries involved in the project in order to help the students see a more comprehensive picture than just the course of events in their own country during the Nazi regime.

During the student exchanges work on the texts on each individual country was one of the two main aspects of commemoration work, the assignments being as follows.

Creating a time line

1-2 students from each country form a team. Teams should include a maximum of 6 students for good cooperation.

Students get together in their international teams and get one of the historical texts. E.g. if you start with Germany, each of the teams gets only one of the texts on Germany under National Socialism.

The students in each team decide themselves whether they split up the text and each student only works through one or two paragraphs or whether all students study the complete text. Allow 30-45 minutes for studying. Teachers should be around to help them with language or other problems in understanding.

Then each team talks about their specific text, informing each other about what they found out about the events. They put down the data and the events on stickers. Allow for another 15-20 minutes.

All teams get together to present their findings in a plenary session, explaining their findings and fixing the stickers to the timeline (which was prepared by the teachers and hung up at a wall).

In order to give the timeline a more attractive look, teachers may prepare a set of pictures (to be found on the internet) that match the events.

The timeline is supposed to not only stay visible during the whole exchange week for constant reference but also to be filled in with the data of the other exchanges. In the end, after 3-4 exchanges the timeline will be extremely full thus allowing for a good overview of the course of history all over Europe. In order to better differentiate between different countries, the stickers should have different colors for each country.

If there is enough time, some of the historical aspects may be visualized by documentaries (there are plenty to be found in the internet).

Focussing on individual historical events

The historical texts on Greece include the Kalavryta massacre as a set of texts on their own. As this massacre is a very complex story it deserves to be dealt with in a separate workshop (the arrangement of student teams being the same as above). Similar events to be dealt with separately can easily be found in all European countries.

When focussing on one of the numerous massacres and mass murders that the Nazis committed in all the countries that they had occupied, the details of those events may best be put together on a poster or a set of posters.

Students in their international teams again get a text, take notes on the decisive aspects and present these in a plenary session.

Documentary footage in some cases is available on the internet.

Video documentaries such as the film “The Balcony” (on the massacre in the northern Greek village of Lyngiadis, Greece) are both good for preparation of the students and for all aspects of project work, e.g. the creation of small timelines or posters to visualize the individual events. These individual events are best combined with work on biographies, relying on written or oral reports available on the internet.

The biographies

As a general preparation on working with biographies of individual resistance fighter or other people persecuted, imprisoned, tortured and/or murdered by the Nazis, the students should read a short introduction - as given in part 2 above - in their international teams. After discussing the relevant aspects and taking notes, the teams present their results in a plenary session. They may also make a poster and explain it to the others.

Working with biographies has proved to be of utmost importance when doing commemoration work because it is the individual lives of real people that really catches the students' attention and compassion. Historical data, even if put together in a complex timeline or posters, have an abstract character that usually does not grab students' deeper minds and hearts. But this is exactly what work with biographies does: catch people's attention, involve feelings, minds and hearts. And it is an individual's life and fate which in the end makes students realize which devastating results any antidemocratic, radical, racist regime has on individuals as well as on society.

However, when introducing biographies it is important to carefully observe students' reactions, especially the more sensitive young people. Therefore teachers should always be around, attentively observing and being there when consolation is needed due to the sometimes very cruel fates the Nazi victims had to face.

How to work with biographies

The students form teams, this times there should not be more than 4 students on one team.

Each team reads the biography assigned. Together, they think of a fictional story based on the biography. It may be a narration in the first person (the students slipping into the person's life), a dialogue, a diary entry, an interview, or even a short sketch that the team will perform. The team then prepare to present their story to the audience.

The outcomes of this way of working with biographies can be amazing regarding both the students' inventiveness and the depth of feelings expressed. The stories do not need to be long and elaborate and they may - or even should - draw on the information provided in the biographical notes provided.

The stories below give a little insight to what the student teams on the "Stand up" project created.

Examples created by students

Story on MARIE PĚTROŠOVÁ (CZ): A letter to my daughter

Dear Milena,

I am writing this letter to your future self because I can't be with you to see you grow up.

How are you doing? Do your grandparents take good care of you? I would love to know how your life will develop while I can't be there. Along with my letter I send some pictures for you and some very nice fairy-tales. Hope you enjoy them as much as I do.

I am currently living far away from home. Bad people arrested me for doing good things and now I need to suffer for doing what I did. But it will be alright, I promise.

The story of my life is pretty adventurous. I helped other people escape from our country to Poland. It was a very good feeling - because I was doing something good. They arrested me for this "crime" three times.

If you get into trouble, don't forget that you can always play a little silly woman, it can help you a lot. They have done horrible things to me, just to prove me guilty of that little "crime" of mine.

Right now I am a bit sick from this place, mentally and physically, too, but I keep thinking of you - this helps a lot.

I wish the best of luck to you. May your life be filled with love and joy. Always remember to be truthful and kind. Especially to yourself. And don't forget other people who are in need.

With love

Marie, your mother

Sketch on the BAREFOOT BATALLION (GR): Fooling the Germans to get food - initially performed by a student team

A German truck has stopped in front of a large warehouse full of food supplies for the Nazi soldiers, very early in the morning. Only a few people are on the street, walking by without taking notice of the truck. Only two German soldiers, fully armed, stay outside to secure the truck while a few others go inside to get the food in big boxes.

A group of children, all in rags and without shoes, approach the scene. They speak Greek and point at the Germans, laughing and shouting words at them that they don't understand.

The Germans get nervous because they know that children try to steal food. As the children come closer to the truck, the two soldiers shout at them: "Halt! Stop! Leave or we will fire at you!" They are preparing their guns to defend the truck ...

Meanwhile three other German soldiers bring boxes with bread and fruit to the truck. They are observed by a second group of children who hide behind a corner. One of the Germans asks the others something but they only shout back "Everything okay! See that you get the stuff as quickly as possible!" So the three lift the boxes into the truck and return to the warehouse.

While the other children in front of the truck distract the guarding soldiers, two of the other group quickly run to and jump up into the truck. The others form a line, knowing that they have to be quick and able to run as fast as they can if someone sees them or the other soldiers come back.

The two in the truck grab whatever they can get and throw it out of the truck. The children in line fetch the food and pass it on to the others ...

Suddenly there are gun shots ... fortunately the soldiers first fire into the air. The children in front of the truck run away and one of the soldiers chases them to the next corner.

Alarmed by the shooting, two other soldiers come out of the warehouse, only to see that one little boy runs away with an orange in his hand. All the others already disappeared ... leaving the food boxes half empty.

Story on Edmond Proust (FR): A letter to his family

June 5, 1944

Dear family,

For the past few days we have been busy making preparations for D-Day which is supposed to start tomorrow. I am pretty agitated and I hope everything will work properly and

as we have planned it. But I am also afraid of the consequences in case the allied forces will fail.

We started by saving and hiding materials for the allied forces, mainly weapons. We have stored food and water for the soldiers who are going to land tomorrow. Last night we got the last delivery and were almost caught by the Nazis. It was pretty close and we almost had to leave behind the supplies, but we managed to save everything while running straight into the woods to our camp. Thank God we escaped! I don't even want to imagine what could have gone wrong if they had caught us.

I haven't slept a wink, I was anxious about today's resistance action. We were supposed to plant explosives on three bridges just south of our base camp, but there were guards on one of the bridges, so we only succeeded in preparing two bombs. I hope the explosions will slow down the Nazis anyway. The explosion is supposed to take place the moment the invasion starts. At the same time, we'll tear down the telephone poles that lead to the German headquarters. If everything goes according to plan, this will gain the Allies a lot of time.

I also hope that the Information we gathered during the past few weeks will prove helpful as well. It was pretty hard to get any information at all because we had to hide in the forest and unfortunately the Nazis had a camp nearby. So we had to be extremely careful. We were spying them with binoculars and a friend of mine was writing down what I was telling him of the things that I could bear and understand. It was pretty scary to be that close the enemy but I think it was worth it. The information we had gathered went immediately to the headquarters in England, thanks to a courier pigeon. I hope they got the news, there's so much depending on this little pigeon ...

Wish us luck for the hours and days to come!

I hope to see you soon,

au revoir et bisous

Edmond

13

DIDACTICS GUIDELINE ON NATIONAL SOCIALISM

Although most of the aspects of commemoration work are options to choose from when dealing with National Socialism, depending on which school subject you teach or whether you prepare a project or an international cooperative project, the first aspect mentioned should be mandatory in order to put yourself and your students on the right track.

When dealing with the Nazi regime it is important to be aware of students' reactions and try to counterbalance sensitivity or aggression. In general, observing, listening, answering and discussing all issues should accompany reading and work in student teams.

1 Commemoration work - why, what for, how?

General orientation to start from

Commemoration means learning about the facts and (global) connections in politics, societies and economies and grappling with injustice, terror, violation of human rights, discrimination.

Commemoration is not about condemning or glorifying the past nor is it about transferring guilt. It is about understanding that the past comes along with responsibility for us all in shaping our lives.

This can best be done by not only presenting facts, figures and data but by learning about (and if still possible from) real persons. As the

chances to listen to and discuss with survivors of the Nazi terror are tending towards zero, try to find witnesses of the second generation or make use of printed biographies.

Apart from history lessons there are many other subjects for doing commemoration work: the languages, ethics or religious instruction or arts.

Your students should be on secondary education (aged 10+), but if done sensitively and leaving the most atrocious aspects aside, a younger age may be possible as well.

Commemoration is a very good theme when it comes to international / European projects. International project work requires more focus on the aspects of what commemoration is about. As soon as students have realized that the project is about common responsibility, not about guilt, the focus shifts to their own cooperation and friendship.

When doing projects on an international basis see that the students always work in international teams.

2 The Nazi worldview

Realizing that National Socialism and the Second World War are not identical but that National Socialism was a complete worldview means that there are a number of topics beyond the historical and political facts to be considered.

One of these topics is the Nazi **racial ideology** of Aryans, racial purity, Herrenmensch etc. or what it meant that the Nazis quickly succeeded with their concept of cooptation (*Gleichschaltung*) in Germany and what this meant to society as a whole.

Another extremely important issue that derives from the racial - and fascist - views is the **systematic persecution, detention, forced labor and extinction** of groups of people who didn't fit in the Nazi ideology.

Of course, the most widely known group of people that were persecuted and murdered are the **European Jews**. The holocaust of milli-

ons of Jews deserves to be dealt on its own in more than just a few lessons or as one topic among others during a project.

But there were a number of **other groups** that the Nazis persecuted, imprisoned, tortured and in many cases murdered. Especially in Germany - largely disregarded - these were homosexuals, people with some physical or mental disorders (many children among them), so-called antisocial people, unemployed ones, prostitutes, Jehovahs witnesses, Sinti and Roma, and finally all those that held different political views.

The populations of other European countries were not only persecuted for their opposing political views (which included non-partisan or resistance people). If the Nazi worldview categorized peoples as non-Aryan but as so-called “subhumans” they were either murdered or first made to do forced labor to keep Hitler’s production of guns etc. for the war running.

Another topic of its own is the systematic persecution, detention and exploitation of people in general. Here, the system of **concentration camps**, spread all over Europe is to be addressed in depth. The first so-called wild concentration camps were established as early as mid 1933 all over Germany in order to break the opposing political views of e.g. communists or social democrats. The Nazis themselves called these camps work camps and made the population believe that they were only to make “antisocial elements” work and convince them of the positive aspects of the Nazi “community of people” (Volksgemeinschaft). The fact that torture was daily routine was, of course, denied.

The concentration camp at Dachau, Germany, erected in 1935, became the model for all other concentration camps built all over Europe. Some of the concentration camps, e.g. at Auschwitz, however, were much more than concentration camps. Their purpose was to carry out the systematic, extremely well-organized mass murders.

All these topics deserve **in-depth discussions**, most likely to be **addressed in projects**. Although it is difficult to separate the aspects mentioned, try to reduce the number of issues as well as the amount of reading texts to work with. In-depth treatment of the topics demands **students of higher ages (15+)**. But younger students will

also be able to work on a lot of the issues mentioned on a more general scale.

3 Nazi expansion policy and rule over Germany

The **course of events during WW II** evidently is the theme most often dealt with. But unfortunately only a few major aspects usually are talked about: the invasion of Poland as the starting point, the Blitzkrieg on France and the war on Russia.

Yet, it is worth taking a **closer look at a number of other events** during and - perhaps even more so - **before the war** such as Hitler's assisting Franco in the Spanish Civil War; the annexations of Austria and Czechoslovakia; Italy's involvement and policy as one of Nazi Germany's allies; Hitler's and Stalin's treaty on Poland which was the precondition of a successful invasion by Hitler's troops.

Even though the European aspects of Nazi policy are of utmost importance, **Hitler's rule over Germany** should not be forgotten or pushed to the background. A large part of what Hitler imposed on Germany **from 1933 onwards** was preparation for the war, lining up the German population behind him or rather subduing them under his will, securing the people's support and making the fit for fighting.

4 Nazi propaganda and socio-economic crises

All this was done by an extremely well-organized **propaganda machinery** - a topic that both pops up when talking about any other of the topics mentioned as well as it may be dealt with separately. The fact that the Germans were so easily tempted and convinced of the need of a strong leading figure in the 1920s, thus falling prey to Hitler's cunning propaganda, however, reveals a number of socio-economic crises that Germany, among all other European countries and beyond, had to face after WW I.

Dealing with those **socio-economic aspects of a world in crisis** allows for comparisons of different countries in order to show that political crises always affect economies, societies as well as individuals (a good example being the stock exchange crash in 1928).

This, of course, is not to result in any form of excuse for Hitler's rise that the Germans largely supported in the late 1920s and early 1930s but to make students **realize the overall picture of global interconnections**.

5 Other European countries under the Nazi regime

It is quite obvious that when doing project work on an international / European basis, the **project partners' home countries** necessarily need to be addressed. As this reader presents three other countries apart from Germany there is not much more to be said.

It is, however, worth while mentioning that there are numerous aspects to be chosen from, as the examples given above show. Most importantly, **the topic(s) chosen should not overload the project**. Instead of trying to provide the students with a general and therefore rather superficial overview it is wiser to choose only one aspect in order to be able to **allow for an in-depth approach**.

6 Bridging past and present

Probably the most important issue when dealing with National Socialism, no matter whether in lessons or a project, is to **always provide a bridge from the past to the present**.

For one part, building a bridge allows for answering the question of guilt in an appropriate way: **Guilt lies with the past generations** that supported, enabled and helped the Nazi terror to be spread across Europe. Even though present and future generations are not to be blamed guilty of what their forefathers and -mothers did, it is exactly this aspect that necessarily entails the second bridgehead: **Contemporary as well as future generations** have to become aware and embrace their social and individual **responsibility**. It is the ongoing responsibility of doing everything possible to prevent any such terror regime ever coming to power again.

This is why the **counterbalance** in (European) projects should always reflect on the **European values, the European Union, inter-**

national friendship and the like in appropriate way and spending a good share of time on discussions as well as games and spare time for the students.

Another bridge between the past and present/future times addresses the way we deal with the National Socialist regime today.

On the one hand, this completes the loop of commemoration work by answering the question of why to focus on commemoration at all: Commemorating the past is important in order to be able to learn from it, prevent any kind of dictatorship and terror regime, and to positively build upon a peaceful future for everybody.

On the other hand, there are quite a few shortcomings of politics but societies and individuals as well to be addressed. This aspect certainly involved Germans much more than any other people in Europe as there are a lot of issues that have been left to oblivion - often deliberately.

Knowing, or rather getting to learn, about what the National Socialists did to everybody who did not comply and support their views is a decisive step.

Taking a step further, thus building bridges, involves talking about the current relationships among the European countries and revealing what urgently has to be settled of the better, not only with respect to just demands for reparation (e.g. for Greece) but also regarding the way the smaller European countries (such as the Czech Republic) and the bigger and more potential countries (like Germany and France) interact on a political basis.

In the end, there are a multitude of topics to be dealt with when starting out with commemoration work on a European basis, the above examples of what may be dealt with only giving a superficial insight.

Yet, no matter, how small you feel your project to be, it is worth every effort (and there is a lot of effort and joint powers needed to prepare and carry out such a project). The most rewarding outcome of such a project is that the young Europeans who take the challenge of working on any aspect of the Nazi regime first meet as strangers and say good bye as friends.

14

SOURCES AND LINKS

1 Sources used for the history sections

As the texts on the course of events during the National Socialist regime were composed by the coordinating teachers on the project, the sources drawn upon mostly were written in our respective mother tongues - Czech, French, German and Greek - and then written in English or translated.

All the texts presented in this reader were never conceived of as meeting any kind of scientific character but were written with our students in mind. This is the reason why there are no quotations and references in the texts as these would have distracted or even puzzled the students, diminishing their focus on the course of events that was the project's goal.

The sources listed below therefore are but a very small choice from what is available on the internet and of course, much more an inestimable amount of books.

Germany

History:

Geschichte und Geschehen bilingual. 20th Century. Klett, Stuttgart 2008

National Socialism. 1933-1945. Verlag Cornelsen, Berlin 2011

Exploring History. The Third Reich. Westermann, Braunschweig 2014

<https://www.dhm.de/lemo>

<https://www.bpb.de>

<https://www.bundesarchiv.de/DE/Navigation/Finden/Epochen/Deutsches-Reich-Nationalsozialismus/deutsches-reich-nationalsozialismus.html>

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Nazism>

https://www.bundestag.de/parlament/geschichte/parlamentarismus/drittes_reich

Resistance:

<https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/home/> (English version)

https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Widerstand_gegen_den_Nationalsozialismus

<https://www.pirmasens.de/leben-in-ps/kultur/gedenkprojekt/dezentrale-gedenkorte/hauptstrasse-58/>

Czechia

History:

<https://www.dw.com/de/hitlers-krieg-in-der-tschechoslowakei/a-17492609>

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2 Sources used for the biographies

Other than with the historical aspects of Europe under National Socialism there is hardly any literature in any other than the respective native languages when it comes to learning about individual persons. The biographies in this reader therefore largely seem to be the first, rather small, attempt of presenting biographical notes on individual fates to an audience hitherto unconscious of these persons.

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Edmond Proust:

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Gérard Pichot:

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Delphin Debenest:

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http://umap.openstreetmap.fr/de/map/jugenderinnert_151980#6/45.283/15.403

<https://www.facebook.com/FlowersFadeEarly> (film documentation)

<https://www.dmko.gr/> (Municipal Museum of Kalavrytan Holocaust)

15

ON THE PROJECT

The Erasmus+ funded European project “The courage to stand up for diversity in Europe - then and now” was initially designed by 8 teachers and an external expert from 4 European countries: *Berufsbildende Schule 1 Technik Kaiserslautern*, Germany (coordinating school); *1st Epaggelmatiko Lykio Lechainon*, Greece; *Gymnasium Stribro*, Czech Republic; *ASS Enseignement catholique de Bressuire*, France.

Due to the pandemic that swept over Europe only shortly after our first exchange week in Greece, our French partners unfortunately dropped out. The three remaining schools, teachers and students alike, were determined and finally succeeded in carrying on together. The difficulties we had to manage involved numerous changes in planning our exchanges and two weeks of so-called virtual mobilities, meaning that the project groups could only get together and work online. Luckily, the final exchange in Germany could be done in person – during the closing week of summer holidays.

The fact that the students were willing and even keen on getting together for work on this difficult and demanding topic, overcame their disappointment when real exchanges were not possible, come together for virtual meetings and finally sacrificed a week of their holidays is a wonderful proof of the living European spirit.

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Despite all the difficulties we had to face and all the hurdles we took together, “Stand up, Europe!” was a great project!

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The project coordinators and authors of the texts

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Europe in March 2022