Modern European History

Unit 9 – WWII

Schindler During WWII

*I knew the people who worked for me. When you know people, you have to behave towards them like human beings.* ~ Oskar Schindler

**SCHINDLER DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR**

When the Nazis seized power in Germany, unlike the Communists in Russia, they did not completely abolish private enterprise. Hitler, who viewed life in terms of a pseudo-Darwinist "struggle of survival," believed that the "captains of industry" were at the top of their professions because they had demonstrated the greatest ability and ruthlessness. As a result, the Nazis not only preserved elements of the private sector but used those elements to the advantage of the Nazi state.

**PRIVATE BUSINESSMAN**

During the Second World War, private businessmen like Oskar Schindler operated factories in Nazi-occupied Poland, exploiting both Polish labor and Jewish slave labor for the benefit of both the German war machine and (not coincidentally) the factory owners.

Arriving in Krakow during the first week of the Second World War, Schindler quickly won the friendship of key officers in both the SS (Nazi elite) and the Wehrmacht (German army). He won their friendship by his unusually personable manner and by his seemingly inexhaustible supply of desired goods: cognac, cigars, coffee, and women. Most of these items Schindler obtained from the thriving black market in Krakow.

True to his roots in the old Habsburg Empire, Schindler knew how to make a bribe seem like an act of friendship. His friends in high places would assure Schindler a steady flow of army contracts. Now Schindler had to locate a factory to produce the desired goods.

For this he turned to the Jews.

**THE POLISH JEWS**

When the Second World War began in 1939, three and a half million Jews lived in Poland, fully ten percent of the population. Krakow was home to 56,000 Jews, a size equal to that of the entire Jewish population of Italy. The majority of the Polish Jews were utterly impoverished, as were the Poles. But the relatively few wealthy Jews, and the omnipresent Jewish store on the corner, gave rise to the generalization that the Jews were "rich." At the same time, however, the Jews were identified with communism, although most of the Polish Jews were Orthodox and far removed from the atheist world of communism.

Under the fairly benevolent rule of the Austrians before the First World War, Krakow had developed a reputation as a "liberal" city. The Jews were allowed to pursue their lives with more freedom than in the Russian and Prussian (German) controlled regions of Poland. The Krakow Jews were mostly middle class and had lived in Krakow since the early 14th century. They began speaking Polish (as opposed to Yiddish or Hebrew) in the early 19th century. In 1867, Emperor Franz Josef ascended the throne in Vienna, and the Jews were permitted to live outside the ghetto for the first time. The local Polish and German middle classes bitterly protested this relative freedom given to their economic competitors.

The Jews of Krakow lived mostly in Kasmierz, a suburb of the city named for 'Kasmierz the Great,' the 14th century Polish king who had invited German Jews to Poland at the time of great pogroms (or outbursts of anti-Jewish violence) in the German lands. Kasmierz built the Krakow suburb for which he was named, and, more significantly, he issued a charter which protected Jewish "liberties." In sharp contrast to the abattoir it became, Poland was originally a haven for Jews.

In November 1939, one month into the brutal occupation that would last five years, the Nazis issued a decree demanding that all Jews over the age of nine wear a blue and white armband emblazoned with the Star of David. Thus, the first step in the destruction of the Jews had been taken.

**ARYANIZATION**

In Poland, the Nazis quickly expropriated Jewish businesses. Through a process termed "Aryanization," Jewish property was sold to "Aryans" (i.e., Germans) for a considerably reduced price. The Jews, of course, had no right to protest this virtual confiscation.

In this manner, Schindler located a formerly Jewish-owned factory on the outskirts of Krakow, which, after retooling, would produce enamel pots and pans and, later, in 1941, munitions. Through the good graces of his high-ranking friends and with the usual bribes, Schindler won lucrative contracts to supply his kitchenware to the German army.

The name of Schindler's factory was Deutsche Email Fabrik, or Emalia. The building still stands and is occupied by another factory. Since the film, it has become a tourist mecca, to the bewilderment of local Poles who see it as just another soot covered building in a soot covered city.

**ITZHAK STERN**

Having found a Jewish factory, Schindler next located the capital necessary to purchase it and to get operations underway. His key contact was a Jewish accountant, Itzhak Stern (played by Ben Kingsley in the film).

According to Stern's postwar recollection, he immediately recognized that Schindler was that rare item in Nazi-occupied Poland: The "good" German. When Schindler commented that it must be hard to be a priest during times like these, when life did not have "the value of a pack of cigarettes," Stern seized the moment to recite the Talmudic verse: "He who saves one life, it is as if he has saved the entire world." Schindler replied, "Of course, of course."

Keneally writes, "Itzhak, rightly or wrongly, always believed that it was at that moment that he had dropped the right seed in the furrow."

The influence of Itzhak Stern is of decisive importance in understanding Schindler's evolution from war-profiteer to rescuer of Jews. When Stern was buried in 1969, Schindler stood at the graveside, crying like a child.

Stern was the first person to inform Schindler that Jewish slave labor cost less than Polish labor. Schindler, with an eye towards a profit, recognized the advantage of Jewish labor. Thus began his relationship with the Jews. He would be Herr Direktor, they would be his employees. He would always have a kind word for them. In the end, he would save many of them from annihilation.

The first indication that Schindler was of a different breed came on December 3, 1939. He whispered less than ambiguous words into Stern's ear: "Tomorrow, it's going to start. Jozefa and Izaaka Streets are going to know all about it." Talk like this was highly dangerous. Coming from a German, it was bewildering.

Jozefa and Izaaka Streets were located in Kazimierz, the Jewish quarter. Here, the SS staged a terror-filled Aktion or "strike" the next day, beating, humiliating, robbing, and killing Jews in a seemingly haphazard manner.

Schindler had taken a first step, however tenuous, towards rescue.

**WAR-PROFITEER**

To get the ball rolling, Stern introduced Schindler to a group of wealthy Krakow Jews. These Jews had managed to retain their wealth despite the Nazis' best efforts to seize it. With few options, these Jews invested their capital in Schindler's factory, but with the provision that they would work in the factory and, apparently, be spared the uncertain future (which, in the film, Schindler bluntly and indeed cruelly cites in order to strengthen his bargaining position).

Schindler, who arrived in Krakow with little more than his natural panache and the swastika on his lapel, had acquired a Jewish factory, Jewish capital, Jewish labor, and Jewish expertise, all with very little if any personal investment.

"You have done well here," Emilie tells her husband (in the film) when she arrives in Krakow for a short visit. "Always before there was something missing," he says, explaining his lack of financial success prior to September 1, 1939. "Luck?" she asks naively. "No," he replies. "War."

Schindler was the quintessential war-profiteer. Initially, he was able to overlook the dehumanized condition of the Jews under Nazi rule. He was interested in profit, and he was not above exploiting the Jews to this end.

Spielberg's film focuses on Schindler's evolving relationship with the Jews. A central theme emerges: In the pursuit of profit, Schindler becomes dependent on the Jews for their expertise--particularly, it seems, on Itzhak Stern--and as he becomes dependent upon the Jews, Schindler begins to know them as human beings. They appear to be quite different from the Nazi propaganda's depiction of Jews as "vermin" and as "rats." Schindler has a financial investment in his Jewish workers, but at the same time he develops an investment in them as human beings.

Twenty years after the war, with the benefit of hindsight, Schindler explained his rescue of Jews this way: "I knew the people who worked for me. When you know people, you have to behave towards them like human beings."

On another occasion, Schindler described his behavior differently: "There was no choice. If you saw a dog going to be crushed under a car, wouldn't you help him?"

**THE KRAKOW GHETTO**

On March 3, 1941, the Nazis established a Jewish ghetto--an area into which Jews were segregated--in Podgorze, a suburb of Krakow across the Vistula River. A wall was constructed to enclose the ghetto, and the Jews watched ominously as the wall was shaped in the form of Jewish grave stones. The ghetto comprised three hundred and twenty apartment buildings into which a Jewish population of about seventeen thousand was crammed. The rest of the Jews in Krakow had already been expelled to the neighboring countryside. The overcrowding in the ghetto was severe, as families were forced to live together in cramped apartments. This contributed significantly to Jewish demoralization, a key German tactic.

Fearing for the safety of the Jews, Stern implored Schindler to hire more Jewish workers. Schindler agreed.

When the Jewish workers arrived at his factory, Schindler told them, much to their astonishment: "You'll be safe working here. If you work here, then you'll live through the war."

One of the remarkable witnesses to the horror of the Krakow ghetto was a Polish Catholic, Tadeusz Pankiewicz (pronounced Ta-de-ush Pan-ke-ie-vitsch). Pankiewicz managed to keep his pharmacy operating in the Krakow ghetto presumably because the Germans feared the outbreak of typhus and believed that a modicum of medicines administered to the ghetto inhabitants would keep the disease at a distance. Ironically, the German fear of disease was one of the few weapons available to the Jews.

Pankiewicz wrote of Schindler's factory, "The Jews there were treated humanely."

**THE JUDENRAT AND THE GHETTO POLICE**

One of the first directives the Nazis issued was for the establishment of a Judenrat, or a Jewish Council. This was the device the Nazis utilized for governing the ghetto. When the Nazis issued a decree, the Judenrat implemented it. The Nazis established a Judenrat in all the Jewish localities in Poland, and its role during the German occupation is controversial in the extreme. Some view it as a traitorous extension of the Nazi machinery of death, while others believe the Judenrat did its best to alleviate Jewish suffering in an impossible situation.

In Krakow, the Judenrat, initially comprising twenty-four eminent members of the prewar Jewish leadership, was located in the main police station under the supervision of the Gestapo.

The director of the Judenrat in Krakow was Dr. Arthur Rosenzweig, a lawyer with an impeccable reputation. At the time of the first deportation of Krakow Jews in June 1942, Rosenzweig refused to do the Nazis' bidding, and as a result he and his family were placed on the transport to the Belzec death camp. The Germans subsequently found a compliant Judenrat director, David Gutter.

The Germans also created a ghetto police force, the so-called "OD" or "Ordnungsdienst," meaning "the service for keeping order." The commander of the ghetto police was Symcha Spira, a classic psychopath whom the Germans dressed up in an immaculate uniform festooned with all sorts of ridiculous insignia. Spira carried out the Nazi orders blindly and with ruthless zeal.

As portrayed in the film, the Jewish police were distinguished by their coats buttoned to the neck and by their truncheons which they swung ruthlessly. In the futile effort to save their own lives and the lives of their families, the Jewish police assisted the Nazis in rounding up Ghetto Jews for deportation. Not all of the Jewish police were scoundrels. When the Krakow ghetto was "liquidated" in March 1943, two policemen defied German orders and helped Jewish mothers smuggle their children into the Plaszow camp.

The Judenrat members and Jewish police were ultimately murdered by the Nazis, who wanted no witnesses. The Judenrat and the "OD" had earned the privilege of being the last to die.

**THE CHILD IN RED**

In June 1942, Schindler inadvertently witnessed an Aktion in the Krakow ghetto. The Aktionen were Nazi "strikes" on the ghetto to round up Jews for deportation to the death camps. They were meticulously planned and usually the Nazis were assisted by their foreign collaborators (Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian) and by local collaborators (Polish "blue" police and Jewish ghetto police).

At the time, Schindler and his mistress were out for a pleasant horseback ride on a hilltop when the macabre Aktion opened directly below them. Astonished by the Nazi ferocity, Schindler's eye was drawn to a little girl clad in red who, alone, stood out from the mass of Jews being herded to the trains and to their death.

In Spielberg's otherwise black and white film, this child's coat appears in red, making her stand out all the more. The important question is: Why?

Many years later, with a certitude perhaps bolstered by distance, Schindler looked back on this Aktion and said, "Beyond this day, no thinking person could fail to see what would happen. I was now resolved to do everything in my power to defeat the system."

**"ESSENTIAL WORKERS"**

The Jews who were deemed "essential workers" for the German war effort, including the Jews who worked for Schindler, were temporarily spared deportation.

In the early years of the Second World War, the Germans waged a fierce debate among themselves regarding the fate of the "essential worker"-Jews. Hitler and the hard-core Nazis wanted to destroy all of the Jews, but the less ideological Nazis, with many German businessmen as their allies, argued that it was impractical to murder a people whose labor was absolutely essential to the war effort (and to their own profits).

Ironically, there were some SS officers who also chimed in on behalf of the "essential-workers." If all of the Jews were destroyed and the camps liquidated, the SS rightly feared they would have nothing to do in occupied-Poland and would be sent to fight on the Russian Front. Much to the relief of the German industrialists, the SS, and, not least, the Jews, Hitler begrudgingly agreed to spare the Jewish "essential workers," but only for the time being. As SS leader Heinrich Himmler noted in September 1942, "One day even these Jews must disappear, in accordance with the Fuehrer's wish."

On March 13, 1943, at the time of the final "liquidation" of the Krakow ghetto, the Jewish "essential workers" in Krakow were sent to the labor camp at Plaszow. It was constructed just outside of Krakow on the grounds of two uprooted Jewish cemeteries. Jewish tombstones were used as pavement slabs by the Germans.

**"RESETTLEMENT"**

On June 2, 1942, the first deportation, or "resettlement," from the Krakow ghetto began. The Germans planted the rumor that the ghetto was too crowded and the Jews not fit for labor had to be removed. It seemed a plausible explanation. The ghetto was overcrowded.

Tadeusz Pankiewicz, the Polish pharmacist in the Krakow ghetto, witnessed the June 1942 deportations. In his book, The Krakow Ghetto Pharmacy, he wrote, "The nightmare began. Like apparitions in a horror novel, they [the Jews] moved with faltering steps, carrying all their possessions on their weary backs, as heavy as the tragic burden of the fate they were facing."

The deportation lasted three days, until the morning of June 4, 1942. The heat was unbearable. "Fire seemed to fall from the skies," Pankiewicz wrote. And the Germans were brutal beyond their usual standards. "Apparently blood exacerbated their bestial and sadistic instincts."

During the first deportation from Krakow, seven thousand Jews were sent by train to the Belzec death camp in eastern Poland. In this early stage of the destruction process, the Jews had no idea what awaited them.

On October 28, 1942, the Nazis struck the Krakow ghetto a second time. Pankiewicz writes, "It was a beautiful, almost spring-like day, the cloudless sky reminded one of the time of the June deportations." The Nazis informed the ghetto that only "essential workers" would be spared deportation. The Jews desperately tried to secure for themselves a "blue card" denoting status as an "essential worker." It held the illusion of survival. Not infrequently, the Jew clasping a "blue card" was also sent to the trains. The Germans operated in a brutal fashion that was both methodical and whimsical.

Like the June deportations, the Nazis removed seven thousand Jews from the ghetto. Pankiewicz wrote, "Everything was done to remove valuable objects, destroy and burn them, so that they would not fall into German hands." Six hundred Jews were shot on the spot. "The Spartan like silence of the victims drove them (the Germans) crazy." The Jews rounded up in the second deportation were also sent to the Belzec death camp.

**THE DEATH CAMPS**

In the early stages of the destruction process, the Jews did not know that death awaited them. Shrewdly, the Nazis explained that the Jews were being "resettled" further to the east. There were rumors of work camps in Ukraine. This was a deliberate effort by the Germans to hide their murderous intent. German and Polish railroad employees partook of the charade, explaining to apprehensive Jews that comfortable facilities awaited them at the end of the line. "Only the young will have to work," the rumors said.

Today, fifty years later, it is relatively easy to conjure up images of the death camps. We have the Nazi example before us. In 1942, however, who could imagine that "the nation of philosophers and poets" was capable of building an assembly line of death?

News of the death camps reached Krakow in November 1942, after the two waves of deportations were complete. A female relative wrote a letter to a Jewish doctor in Krakow who was "passing" as a Polish Christian outside the ghetto on the so-called Aryan side. She was living in Lvov, the present-day capital of Ukraine. Her train trip to Lvov had taken her by the Belzec death camp, which was located on a main railroad line. This letter was the first confirmation of what hitherto had only been rumored: The Jews were being physically destroyed.

In a 1994 interview, Emilie Schindler said, "At first we knew nothing about the Jews. Eventually everyone in Krakow knew that they were killing Jews. My God, how could we not know?"

Still, the general belief in the ghetto affirmed the possibility of survival: "Whoever endures will live." Miriam Peleg-Marianska, a young Jewish woman "passing" as a Christian in Krakow, has written that "hopeful rumors" were "shared by the Jews like bread by the starving."

**MARCH 13, 1943**

The final "liquidation" of the Krakow ghetto occurred on March 13, 1943. It was conducted with characteristic Nazi brutality. "The German proclivity for viciousness," Panankiewicz wrote, "was limitless." The last of the Krakow Jews were either deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau or, if deemed "essential workers," they were sent to the Plaszow labor camp outside of Krakow.

The Germans tried to prevent Jewish parents from smuggling their children to Plaszow, but nonetheless three hundred children reached the camp.

Even in this late hour, many of the Jews still "deluded themselves," according to Pankiewicz, "that they might live, that the papers would be needed, reactions similar to the death twitches and convulsive quivering of a hanged man."

The Schindlerjuden who were living in a sub-camp at Schindler's enamel factory were allowed to remain there . . . for the time-being. Schindler had doubtless resorted to the usual means of bribery to prevent the "liquidation" of his camp.

Many German industrialists using Jewish slave labor in Krakow went to great lengths to have these workers excluded from deportation. Panankiewicz writes, "Occasionally there were cases of sincere sympathy and willingness to help individual Jews, as I could judge from the stories of those directly concerned. Usually, each of the Germans acted in his own interests because the loss of workers and first class specialists could cause the liquidation of the shop, resulting in consignment of the manager to the front. Each was interested, therefore, in protecting his Jews from deportation."

At this stage of the destruction process, where did Schindler stand? Was he interested in saving "his" Jews for humanitarian reasons? Or was he interested in saving them for reasons of profit? Or both?

**JEWISH RESISTANCE**

In the autumn of 1942, the Jewish Fighting Organization, known by its acronym ZOB, emerged. It had secret cells in several Polish cities, including Krakow. The Jewish resistance in Krakow comprised members of the prewar Zionist youth movement Akiba. Its leaders were Adolf Liebeskind, Simon Draenger and his wife Gusta Dawidsohn, Maniek Eisenstein, and Abraham Leibowicz.

Abika purchased a handful of weapons on the black market. They also received weapons from the small Polish communist resistance movement known as the People's Guard. The major Polish resistance movement, the Home Army, or "AK," was largely unfriendly to Jews and, in any event, was weak in the Krakow region.

The first action of the Jewish fighters in Krakow occurred in August 1942 when they derailed a military train between Krakow and Bochnia. Lacking explosives, the Jews simply unscrewed the rails. In September, the Jewish fighters killed a number of lone German soldiers on the streets of Krakow and added to Akiba's fledgling stockpile of weapons. They also assassinated the German director of the Price Control and Price Administration Board in Nazi-occupied Poland. His death caused quite a stir in the Krakow region, although the Germans said he died in a car accident.

The Jewish resistance in Krakow also published two clandestine newspapers, one of which was the "Hekhalutz Halokhem" ("The Fighting Pioneer"). One issue exhorted the Jews to flee from the ghettoes because "each flight from the executioner's hands is today a fighting action. We must make it difficult for him to carry out his work of extermination. Do not lay your own head on the block."

In October 1942, Akiba members dug a tunnel into a German garage and set fire to several military vehicles. On November 2, 1942, the Jewish fighters attempted to assassinate Marcel Gruner, a Jewish informer working for the Gestapo. The attempt failed, but a second attempt did not.

On December 22, 1942, in one of the first and most spectacular guerrilla actions in Poland during the war, Jewish fighters bombed the coffee house Cyganerja and two other cafes which were frequented by German officers. At the Cyganerja, eleven Germans were killed and thirteen others seriously wounded. The Jews also attacked an officers' mess, but apparently the bomb did not explode, and, according to the German account, the Jews "tried to achieve their aims by using firearms."

Hitler was enraged by the Jewish actions in the capital of the General-Gouvernment, and he ordered the high-ranking Gestapo agent, Heinrich Mueller, to Krakow. The Nazi manhunt for the resistance fighters was merciless, and virtually the entire ZOB organization in Krakow was wiped out. As a result of betrayal by two ZOB members, Leibowicz, dressed in the uniform of a German officer, was captured. The Gestapo pounced on Judah Tenenbaum, but the Jewish fighter snatched a German's pistol and killed him before being felled by machine-gun fire. The Abika leader Liebeskind was surrounded by German police. He killed two Germans and wounded two others before being shot himself. The other Jews who were captured later escaped from a truck driving them to the site of their execution at Plaszow. Eventually, they were hunted down and slaughtered.

"We are fighting for three lines in the history books," Liebeskind said a few weeks before his death. His wife, Rivka, escaped from Krakow with several other Jewish fighters, hoping, as she later said, "to set up hideouts, to work in forests, and to enable Jews to hide --because they still hoped that the war would end." The aim, she said, "was to save at least someone to relate our story."

For eight months in 1942-'43, the Jewish resistance waged urban guerrilla warfare against the Germans in the very heart of the Nazi-occupied Poland.

**ZEGOTA**

In December 1942, the Council for Aid to the Jews, known clandestinely as Zegota, was established in Warsaw. This small, highly unique Polish organization was dedicated to saving the remnant of Polish Jewry. With a handful of courageous and indefatigable workers, Zegota provided funds to Jews in hiding, produced false documents, smuggled food and other goods into the Nazi camps, and rescued an estimated 2,500 Jewish children by hiding them in Catholic orphanages and convents.

Zegota was founded by Zofia Kossack, a prewar novelist and a member of the wartime Catholic organization, "Front for the Rebirth of Poland." In September 1942, Kossack issued an illegal leaflet which decried both the annihilation of the Jews and the silence of the Poles, and which, at the same time, demonstrated that even those who acted to rescue Jews were not without the anti-Semitic sentiments deeply imbedded in the cultural milieu. Kossack wrote:

Our feeling toward the Jews has not changed. We continue to deem them political, economic, and ideological enemies of Poland . . . But we protest from the bottom of our hearts filled with pity, indignation, and horror. This protest is demanded of us by God, who does not allow us to kill. It is demanded by our Christian conscience . . . Who does not support the protest with us, is not a Catholic.

Kossack, who employed her children in Zegota's rescue efforts, was suspected of resistance activities by the Germans and sent to Auschwitz. They did not suspect that her activities included the rescue of Jews, or she would have been executed forthwith. In the end, Kossack was ransomed out of Auschwitz by her friends, whereupon she resumed her efforts on behalf of the relatively few Jews left alive in Poland.

In April 1943, Zegota opened a secret office in Krakow. It was directed by Stanislaw Dobrowolski, a member of the Socialist Party. He helped find sanctuary for Jewish children and was also instrumental in smuggling food and clothing into the Plaszow camp. Later, he helped direct the smuggling of goods into Schindler's factory at Brunnlitz, Czechoslovakia.

Dobrowolski's opinion of Schindler was scathing. He described the businessman as "a benefactor out of fear," one of the many war-profiteers in Krakow "who had for long years employed for a token fee the slave labor supplied by the camp commandant and, toward the end of the war, when at last they took alarm, let themselves be terrorized to the point of acting as intermediaries in smuggling whole cart-loads of bread and clogs, purchased by Zegota," into the Plaszow camp.

**AMON GOETH**

The SS officer Amon Goeth (pronounced Gert) commanded the Plaszow labor camp. He had orchestrated the final "liquidation" of the Krakow ghetto as well as the ghettoes in several provincial towns, including nearby Tarnow. Goeth had additional experience at three death camps in eastern Poland, Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka.

Born in Vienna, Austria, in 1908, Goeth came from a family well-established in the printing industry, and he hailed from that nation which supplied an inordinately large number of Nazi criminals to the destruction process. The long list includes Adolf Eichmann, the SS officer who organized the deportation of Jews from all of Europe to the death camps in Poland (and who was executed by the Israelis in 1962 after being captured and smuggled out of Argentina).

"I knew Goeth," said Anna Duklauer Perl, a Jewish survivor. "One day he hung a friend of mine just because he had once been rich. He was the devil."

Pankiewicz observed Goeth at work in the Krakow ghetto: "Tall, handsome, heavy set with thin legs, head in proportion, and eyes of blue, he was about forty years old. He was dressed in a black leather coat, held a riding crop in one hand and a short automatic rifle in the other; close to him were two huge dogs."

"When you saw Goeth, you saw death," said Poldek Pfefferberg, one of the Schindlerjuden.

**THE BUREAUCRATS**

As a Nazi, Goeth was both typical yet unusual. Sadists abounded in Nazi-occupied Poland, but they could not have done their work without the countless and faceless "desk-bound murderers" who enjoyed the warmth of an office in Berlin (and elsewhere), had emotionally stable family lives, and never set foot into a concentration camp.

The bureaucrats, comprising every branch of the German civil service, arranged for the expropriation of Jewish property. They scheduled the trains taking the Jews to the death camps, as though they were a trainload of vacationing Germans bound for Italy or the Greek islands. They arranged for the delivery of the Jewish property to bombed-out German civilians, including bloodstained clothing. They took orders. They issued decrees.

Organized murder on so vast a scale as implemented by the Nazis required teamwork. The bureaucrats were team players, as integral to the murder of Jews as Goeth himself. The majority of the government bureaucrats in Nazi Germany had been at their jobs long before the Nazis seized power in 1933. Indeed, relatively few were members of the Nazi Party.

The impassive bureaucrats share responsibility for the Holocaust. For the victims, there was no difference between Goeth and his administrative accomplices.

The sadist murders with his hands, the bureaucrat with his pen.

**THE GOETH-SCHINDLER RELATIONSHIP**

Initially, the Schindlerjuden were allowed to live in a sub-camp at Schindler's factory. In August 1944 they were forced to move to the Plaszow labor camp. According to Keneally, Schindler befriended Goeth for the purpose of protecting his workers and keeping his profits rolling in. After all, the murder of the Jews meant the end of his thriving business. The exact nature of the Schindler-Goeth relationship is unknown, but it is not implausible that Schindler and Goeth were friends. Schindler enjoyed friendly relations with the top SS and Gestapo people in Krakow. He spent virtually all of his time in the company of murderers.

After the war, when Schindler was visiting some of the Schindlerjuden in Israel, a journalist asked, "How do you explain the fact that you knew all the senior SS men in the Krakow region and had regular dealings with them?" Schindler answered evasively with characteristic wit : "At that stage in history, it was rather difficult to discuss the fate of Jews with the chief rabbi of Jerusalem."

A great many of the Nazis were susceptible to bribery, Goeth among them. Feathering his nest, Schindler plied Goeth with money and the usual variety of black market goods. The SS arrested Goeth in September 1944, charging him with theft of Jewish property (which 'belonged to' the Reich and should have been forwarded to Berlin). After the war, on September 13, 1945, Goeth was hung by Polish authorities at the site of the former camp at Plaszow. He died unrepentant.

In a 1994 interview, Helen Rosenzweig, a Jewish woman whom Goeth chose as one of his personal servants, remembered Schindler as a frequent guest at Goeth's villa overlooking Plaszow. "He was a jolly, kind man and he liked to drink. Many times he would come into the kitchen and with a smile on his face he would pat my hair and say, 'Don't worry. I will take care of you. You will be free. You will get rid of this hell.' He called me 'kindchen,' which in German means 'little child.' I couldn't make him out."

**"JUDENFREI"**

In July 1943, the Nazis declared the region of Selisia in southern Poland to be "Judenfrei" or "Free of Jews." In fact, a remanent of Polish Jewry survived in a handful of labor camps, Plaszow among them.

As the Soviet armies advanced from the east towards Poland, Hitler ordered the extermination of the hitherto protected "essential worker." In effect, Hitler decided that it was more important for the Jews to be destroyed than it was for the essential war factories to continue operating. The war against the Jews took precedent over that against the Allies.

In the summer of 1944, trains deporting the Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz received right-of-way over war transports to the Russian front. Indeed, Auschwitz's most lethal period was during the last months of the war when the German army was retreating on all fronts and Allied bombs were daily falling on the Reich.

Once the tide had changed, the Nazis tried to destroy the evidence of their killing. At death camps like Belzec, Treblinka, and Sobibor, the Nazis ordered commandos of Jewish slaves to unearth the thousands upon thousands of bodies that been buried. The bodies were burned in huge bonfires (as depicted in the film). Pine forests were planted where the gas chambers had stood, and a Ukrainian guard was stationed in the vicinity to prevent local Poles and Ukrainians from uprooting the remains in search of the fabled "Jewish gold."

In the effort to destroy the evidence of their work, the Nazis were the first Holocaust-deniers. In an October 1943 speech, the SS leader Heinrich Himmler acknowledged that the German people themselves would not understand the murder of millions of Jews.

**THE "LIST"**

On September 4, 1944, as the Eastern Front crumbled and the Soviet Red Army approached Krakow, the Nazis closed the Jewish camp at Schindler's factory. The Schindlerjuden were sent to Plaszow. On October 15, 1944, Plaszow itself was "liquidated." It was at this point that Schindler established his "list." Hitherto, Schindler's actions on behalf of Jews had been subtle and the result of self-interest. In the autumn of 1944, that changed.

Determined to save his Jewish workers from extermination, Schindler bribed Goeth to send the Schindlerjuden to a new factory that Schindler planned to establish at Brunnlitz in Czechoslovakia, near his hometown of Zwittau. The site was directly over the Sudeten mountains from Auschwitz-Birkenau.

To strengthen his argument, Schindler insisted that his Schindlerjuden were needed to build the "secret weapons" that Hitler had promised would win the war. It was a clever argument; many Germans held out the hope that the Fuehrer would produce yet another miracle.

Schindler's "list" comprised the names of the Jewish workers who were ostensibly needed to operate Schindler's "war essential" factory. It was, in essence, a list of those who would live and, by exclusion, those who would not. The Nazis reduced life to a brutal equation: I want to live; hence, you must die.

**AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU**

The Schindlerjuden were transported by train from Krakow to the new factory in Czechoslovakia, but three hundred Jewish women were mistakenly routed to the death camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The rescue of these Jewish women has never been satisfactorily explained. After the war, in 1949, Schindler and Stern told a journalist that the women had been sent to Gross-Rosen, a concentration camp in eastern Germany. In his book, Keneally acknowledges that the entire affair is clouded with uncertainty.

To effect the rescue, Schindler had resorted to bribery. It is not unreasonable to suspect that Schindler dealt with Nazi officials who, recognizing that the war was coming to an end, were determined to fatten their wallets prior to escaping to South America. The Nazi criminals who were so efficient at killing an unarmed people were also remarkably efficient in making good their post-war escape, an escape financed by the wealth of those they had murdered.

In any event, Schindler did rescue these women from a Nazi camp, a fact to which many of the women have testified. That "was something nobody else did," said Johnathan Dresner, a Tel Aviv dentist, whose mother was among the rescued.

**BRUNNLITZ**

The Jews who arrived at Schindler's new factory at Brunnlitz numbered over a thousand. Schindler also rescued an estimated 85 Jews who had been sent from Auschwitz-Birkenau to a nearby Nazi labor camp at Golleschau. The Jews were put to work at the factory producing munitions, but it is said that Schindler sabotaged the production line so that little of any value ever left the factory.

The main problem at Brunnlitz was food. The neighboring German community was not in the least bit interested in a Jewish labor camp in the vicinity and were loath to share what little food was available with the despised Jews.

It is in Brunnlitz that the role of Emilie Schindler became paramount. "It was so little that they [the Nazis] gave the people to eat," Emilie Schindler said in a 1993 interview. "To everyone, not just the Jews. No matter who they were. For everyone it was very little." Emilie recalled that within ten days the Jews had consumed their monthly allotment of food. For the next twenty days, they had nothing to eat but "air."

Emilie Schindler worked indefatigably to secure food for the Brunnlitz camp. Emilie insists that there was much more to Oskar Schindler than the altruist depicted in the book and movie. She says that Oskar Schindler, who abandoned her after the war, procured no food for the camp. "I don't recognize it when he lies. You know, when he says that he brought the food? No, nothing did he bring! All the food, I brought! . . . All the food that the Jews ate, that the Germans ate, that the SS ate, I brought. Not him. He brought nothing."

**MAY 8, 1945**

On May 8, 1945, the war in Europe ended. Schindler gathered his Jews before him. One of them, Murray Pantirer, recalled the words of Herr Direktor: "He said, 'Mein kinder (my children), you are saved. Germany has lost the war."

A day later, the 1,200 Schindlerjuden were liberated by a lone Russian officer on horseback, the vanguard of the Soviet Red Army. The officer, who was Jewish, said, "I don't know where you ought to go. Don't go east --that much I can tell you. But don't go west either. They don't like us anywhere."

Two thirds of European Jewry had been exterminated, and the few words spoken by a Russian officer summarized the Jewish lesson of the Second World War. Upon those words the nation of Israel was founded.

Before he and Emilie fled west in the direction of American forces (dressed in prison garb, under the "protection" of eight Schindlerjuden, and with a letter in Hebrew testifying to his lifesaving actions), Schindler received a gift from his grateful Jews: A ring made from gold fillings extracted from one of the grateful Jews. The ring was inscribed with the Talmudic verse: "He who saves one life, it is as if he saved the entire world."

The fate of the gold ring symbolized Schindler's frailties and contradictions that rendered his heroism even more perplexing. Several years after the war, a Schindlerjuden asked him what he had done with the gold ring? "Schnapps," Schindler replied, referring to the liquor which he had gotten in exchange for the gold ring.