

# Studying the Holocaust

## RESISTANCE, RESCUE AND SURVIVAL

## 11 & 12. Resistance

*To Resist was ...*

*to smuggle a loaf of bread,  
to teach in secret,  
to cry out warning and shatter illusions,  
to rescue a Torah Scroll,  
to forge documents,  
to smuggle people across borders,  
to chronicle events and conceal the records  
[diaries, documents]  
to hold out a helping hand to the needy,  
to contact those under siege and smuggle  
weapons,  
to fight with weapons in the streets,  
mountains and forests,  
to rebel in the death and concentration  
camps,  
to rise up in the ghettos in revolt.*

—The Ghetto Fighters' House

### Excerpts from Local Stories of Resistance

*... Jews were not sitting on their hands:  
some of us fought dearly and spilled our  
blood and laid down our lives ... [Every]  
second week, we used to tear up telephone  
lines, we used to tear up the railroad track,  
the track itself ... "*

—Ed. K., survivor from Pruzhani, Poland,  
partisan/resistance fighter,  
currently living in Bellevue

*I was beaten quite often because I  
[stuck] up for the sick ones. Sometimes a  
Czechoslovakian woman would tell me in  
the factory that she hid an apple, or a piece  
of cake or a slice of bread for me to take it  
home. If I [could], I smuggled it through to  
save the people in the sick room. An apple I  
cut up, oh boy, how many pieces I made out  
of it, and I fed them so they can live an  
hour more.*

—Fanny W., survivor from Poland,  
currently living in Seattle

# Studying the Holocaust

## RESISTANCE, RESCUE AND SURVIVAL



Thomas Blatt's bowl from Sobibor death camp, on display at the Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center

Thomas "Toivi" Blatt born in Izbica in the Lublin district of Poland was rounded up and taken by the Nazis and their collaborators to Sobibor. Soon after arrival, he was separated from his family. He would not see them again. After asking a friend, "What's this place like?" his friend answered, "It is a death factory."

However, even in such a place, the Nazis needed workers. Thomas caught the attention of the SS man in charge, and he became one of 600 Jews selected to be on Sobibor's workforce.

*"We knew our fate. We knew that we were in an extermination camp and death was our destiny. We knew that even a sudden end to the war might spare the inmates of the "normal" concentration camps, but never us. Only desperate actions could shorten our suffering and maybe afford us a chance of escape. And the will to resist had grown and ripened. We had no dreams of liberation; we hoped merely to destroy the camp and to die from bullets rather than from gas. We would not make it easy for the Germans."*

— Thomas Blatt.  
*"From the Ashes of Sobibor," p. 139*

On October 14, 1943, the prisoners commenced not just an escape, but a revolt. Already 250,000 Jewish people had been murdered at Sobibor. The revolt had been carefully planned for months: key Nazi officers in the camp were going to be killed, one by one. Only later in the day would the Nazis notice them missing. They would sound the alarm, and the news of a revolt would spread like wildfire among the prisoners. The prisoners could overtake the remaining guards and escape. The revolt was successful.

*"The mass of prisoners, coming from most of the nations of Europe and speaking diverse languages, now understood. From the assembled Jews, all of a sudden, a single strange, and impatient voice was heard. 'FORWARD! HURRAH! HURRAH!' It was quickly picked up, and, in a flash, the entire camp answered the call to defiance. Most of the Jews spontaneously divided themselves into two groups. A smaller group stormed the fences in Lager I, frantically cutting the barbed wires with axes and shovels, without concern for the ditch full of water and the mines. Some threw planks of wood to detonate the mines. The second, larger group, armed with an assortment of weapons, pushed its way forward toward the exit of Lager I to reach the main gate."*

— Thomas Blatt.  
*"From the Ashes of Sobibor," p. 151*

Many escaped and the camp was soon shut down. Thomas Blatt explains that the revolt "made my improbable survival possible." Just 53 of the 300 who participated in the revolt lived to witness the liberation by the Soviet army in 1944. Thomas Blatt, age 17, was one of them.

Before the revolt took place, Thomas buried this bowl in the sand of his barracks with valuables placed inside. Late in 1944, he recovered this bowl — his own eating bowl. Why? "For all those left behind."

Blatt, Thomas Toivi. *"From the Ashes of Sobibor: A Story of Survival."* Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1997.

# Studying the Holocaust

## RESISTANCE, RESCUE AND SURVIVAL

### Other Documented Instances of Resistance\*\*

- The largest armed uprising [during the Holocaust] was the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (April – May 1943), sparked by rumors that the Nazis would deport the remaining ghetto inhabitants to the Treblinka death camp in Poland. As German forces entered the ghetto, members of the Jewish Fighting Organization (Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa; ZOB) pelted German tanks with hand grenades. It took the Nazis 27 days to destroy the ghetto and snuff out the last resistance.
- Uprisings took place in Vilna and Bialystok and in a number of other ghettos ...
- A number of fighters resisted by escaping from the ghettos into the forests, and joining the partisans. Some Jewish council (Judenrat) chairmen resisted by noncompliance, and refused to hand over Jews for deportation.
- Many Jewish authorities in Palestine sent clandestine parachutists into Hungary and Slovakia to aid Jews ...
- Jews fought as part of the national resistance movements in Belgium, France, Italy, Poland, and other countries in eastern Europe ...
- Jews in the ghettos and camps also responded to Nazi oppression with forms of spiritual resistance. The creation of Jewish cultural institutions, the continuance of religious observance, and the will to remember and tell the story of the Jews (through, for example, the Oneg Shabbat archive in Warsaw) were conscious attempts to preserve the history and communal life of the Jewish people despite Nazi efforts to eradicate the Jews from human memory ...
- Between 1933 and 1945, a variety of groups offered resistance to the Nazis. Among the earliest opponents of Nazism in Germany were communists, Socialists, and trade union leaders ...

- On August 1, 1944, the Polish Home Army launched an uprising in Warsaw against the German army. After 63 days of bitter fighting, the Germans defeated the Poles. It was a staggering loss. Nearly 200,000 Poles, most of them civilians, lost their lives. This became known as the Warsaw Uprising.
- Members of other victimized groups resisted the Nazis. In May 1944, SS men ordered Roma (Gypsies) to leave their barracks at the Auschwitz Gypsy family camp (presumably to be sent to the gas chambers). Armed with knives and axes, the Roma refused to leave. The SS men retreated ...
- Other forms of non-violent resistance included sheltering Jews, listening to forbidden Allied radio broadcasts, and producing clandestine anti-Nazi newspapers ...

*\*\*Information from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum ([ushmm.org](http://ushmm.org))*

### Study Questions

Below are some questions that Holocaust educators have suggested to pose to students to help them to better understand resistance during the Holocaust.

- Define resistance. How does a person's efforts to resist the Nazis show resistance?
- Who were the people who resisted and what characteristics did they exemplify?
- What were the obstacles to resistance? In light of the obstacles, how did people resist?
- What "costs" were involved when people resisted?
- How does someone develop the moral courage to resist?
- Many major uprisings and armed resistance movements ended tragically for the resisters.

# Studying the Holocaust

## RESISTANCE, RESCUE AND SURVIVAL

Knowing this, was this type of resistance “successful”?

- How would you measure whether or not resistance was successful during the Holocaust?

### Suggested Web Sites

- Visit the article at the **Jewish Virtual Library**: [jewishvirtuallibrary.org](http://jewishvirtuallibrary.org).  
  
Click on “Library”; click on “Resistance”  
You will be presented with a list of resisters and stories of resistance, including the White Rose and many others.
- **Resistance During the Holocaust** — a booklet (printable version available)  
[ushmm.org/education/foreducators/resource/resistance.pdf](http://ushmm.org/education/foreducators/resource/resistance.pdf)

### Jewish Resistance

- **Yad Vashem**  
(Click on “Education” at the top. Click “Holocaust Resource Center” and then select “Jewish Resistance” in the column on the left.)  
  
Includes articles, information, stories from resistance in the ghettos, resistance in the camps and partisans.
- **Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation** —  
Study guides online: [jewishpartisans.org](http://jewishpartisans.org)

### Non-Jewish Resistance

- **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**: [ushmm.org](http://ushmm.org)  
(Click on “History”; click on “Encyclopedia”; select “Non-Jewish Resistance”)  
  
Includes article, online exhibit, video footage, and links to stories

- **White Rose Student Group**:  
[jlrweb.com/whiterose/](http://jlrweb.com/whiterose/)

The White Rose was a small group of university students in Nazi Germany who printed and distributed anti-Hitler leaflets. They were not a club or a society ...

- **Warsaw Uprising 1944**: [warsawuprising.com](http://warsawuprising.com)

... a heroic and tragic 63-day struggle to liberate World War II Warsaw from Nazi/German occupation.

### Armed Resistance

- **Map of Jewish armed resistance**:  
[ushmm.org/outreach/pol75480.htm](http://ushmm.org/outreach/pol75480.htm)
- **Revolts at Killing Centers**:  
[ushmm.org/outreach/kcrechr.htm](http://ushmm.org/outreach/kcrechr.htm)
- **Warsaw Ghetto Uprising exhibit**:  
[ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/focus/uprising](http://ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/focus/uprising)