

**The Nazis, the Vatican,**  
**and the**  
**Jews of Rome**



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Printed in the United States of America.

Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the Library of Congress.

978-1-61249-787-7 (paperback)

978-1-61249-786-0 (hardback)

978-1-61249-788-4 (epub)

978-1-61249-789-1 (epdf)

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*Those who believe absurdities commit atrocities.*

VOLTAIRE

*When they burn books, they will ultimately burn people.*

HEINRICH HEINE



# Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xv</i>
1. Chief	1
2. Germany's Fanatic Determination to Fight	15
3. I'll Go Right into the Vatican	20
4. I Wanted to Make an Air Drop in Rome	25
5. The Worst Horrors of the Nazi Regime	32
6. Do Not Worry	37
7. Like a City of the Dead	45
8. The Reincarnation of the Dying Corpse	56
9. I Have a Special Mission for You	60
10. A Final Solution to the Jewish Question	69
11. We Must Disperse the People	74
12. The Byzantine Christ	78
13. If You Pay, No Harm Will Come to You	85
14. We Had the Moral Right	98
15. Keep Out of All Questions Concerning Jews	102
16. Like Autumn Leaves Lay Waiting	108
17. Los! Raus! Schnell!	112
18. It Is Simply Impossible to Refuse	125
19. Let's Go Make a Few Phone Calls	130
20. Train X70469	139
21. Numbers 1581–158639	148

22. These Jews Will Never Return to Their Homes	156
23. He Is No Longer Our Rabbi	167
24. A Connection to the Pope	171
25. We Have Contended with Diabolical Forces	179
26. I Was Only an Executor of Orders	183
Epilogue: I Must Go Back and Tell	191
<i>Notes</i>	197
<i>Bibliography</i>	243
<i>Index</i>	255
<i>About the Author</i>	265



# Preface

THE VISION OF A MASTER RACE WAS THE WORLDVIEW OF ADOLF HITLER'S Germany that called for the racial reordering of Europe. The Nazis clung to the delusion of ethnic and racial purity with absolute rectitude. Walter Reich contends that "if the racial reordering of Europe was the heart of the Nazi animating vision, the Holocaust was that heart's left ventricle."<sup>1</sup> When the Nazis assumed power in Germany, the Jewish population in Europe was over nine million. Ninety percent of the Jews lived in countries that Germany would occupy. Once they were occupied they would face the implementation of the annihilationist policies of the Nazis. Soon after Hitler was made chancellor of Germany he embarked on the persecution of his racial enemies, gaining momentum throughout the decade.

The final solution didn't rest on a single decision at one particular moment in time. Nazi policy did not proceed in a linear fashion but instead unfolded incrementally along a twisted road, developing in stages. The Holocaust took place in the midst of a global war that killed upwards of fifty million to sixty million people. During the war, reports of the atrocities were viewed in a larger context and not linked to the special fate of the Jews. Their persecution was placed within the context of other victims.

Hitler declared his goal in a speech to the Nazi faithful on January 30, 1939, circulated worldwide. "If international finance Jewry, in Europe and abroad once again succeeds in plunging various peoples into a world war, the result will not be the Bolshevization of the earth and triumph of world Jewry, but the destruction of the Jewish race in Europe."<sup>2</sup> On September 1, 1939, Wehrmacht troops blitzed their way into Poland. In April 1940 Auschwitz I was created, followed by Auschwitz II-Birkenau, on July 31, 1941. Hermann Göring, commissioner for the final solution of the European Jewish Question, in a directive drafted by Adolf Eichmann, ordered Reinhard Heydrich "to bring about a total solution to the Jewish problem in the German sphere of influence." The farther Hitler's army ranged, the SS followed them. The Einsatzgruppen, mobile killing squads, were present in all the eastern campaigns. In June 1941, a decisive point was reached with the invasion of the Soviet Union and the mass murder of the nation's Jews. One and a half million Jews were targeted and murdered. The Nazis followed their military victories and even their defeats by intensifying their attempt to eliminate the Jewish "race" from the face of the earth, to be accomplished by mass murder.<sup>3</sup>

On January 20, 1942, Heydrich chaired a conference at Berlin-Wannsee to coordinate the various offices involved in the Jewish question and to implement the final

solution. Originally the conference was to be held in December 1941, but it was delayed because of US entrance into the war. Among the attendees were Adolf Eichmann and Heinrich Muller of the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA). Eichmann recorded the official minutes of the meeting. The Wannsee Conference was to give an official stamp of approval to a prior policy. Jews were already being killed on a grand scale at Chemo and in the conquered territories. Heydrich displayed a chart that showed the numbers and locations of the Jewish communities that were to be evacuated and liquidated. He asserted that the figures cited were low estimates, since they were based on religion, not on the racial definitions of Jews. The number for Italian Jews, fifty-eight thousand, was inflated. The largest concentrations of Jews were in Rome, Milan, and Turin. The conference lasted for one hour, and none present raised any objections. The normality of insanity had been on full display. Copies of the minutes were circulated to the ministries and the SS offices. The implementation of the final solution varied in different countries depending on local circumstances. Such was the case in Italy. The Holocaust in Italy did not happen by accident or chance but instead happened by design.<sup>4</sup>

On March 2, 1939, Pius XII ascended to the throne of St. Peter. He was a trained diplomat with expertise on Germany's history and politics. Five months later Germany and the Soviet Union signed a nonaggression pact with an agreement to divide Poland between them. On September 1, 1939, Wehrmacht troops invaded Poland. Two days later, Britain and France declared war on Germany. Two weeks later, Soviet forces invaded Poland from the east. Polish resistance collapsed, and German forces took control of western Poland.

Elements in the German military and members of the Abwehr, the Reich military secret and counterintelligence service, planned a coup to remove Hitler, end the war, restore democracy, and withdraw German forces from Poland. They had to determine what the British and French wanted and would do. A secret exchange of proposals was necessary, but they needed a credible and respected intermediary. Pius XII was internationally respected, discreet, and skilled among diplomats. The overture to the pope's representatives took place in the first week of October 1939. The pope was briefed of the plot and the parties involved. In less than twenty-four hours he agreed to act as intermediary. He did not meet personally with the plotters, thereby protecting plausible deniability. Some of his advisers believed that he might have gone too far out on a limb. The risks if the Nazis found that he was involved in the plot to remove him were immeasurable. The pope had compromised the Vatican's traditional neutrality and his personal position and the papacy as well. A realist, he assessed the meaning of power. He did not have time for any plan that lacked the assurance of power to alter or prevent an outcome. He also calculated the limitation of moral appeals to confront the dark forces of Hitler and Joseph Stalin. The pope's decision to work with the German resistance is a measure of his strategic thinking. On the same day that he consented to

partner with the plotters he signed his first encyclical, "Summi Pontificatus," a powerful condemnation of anti-Semitic violence. The Nazis declared that the pope had abandoned any pretense of neutrality.

In 1940 a series of meetings and exchanges between papal emissaries and those of the resistance and the British took place. For their part, the British made it clear that negotiations could take place after Hitler was removed and not beforehand. By the end of March, Hitler was still in power. Several of the plotters lost their nerve and their will for a coup. For his part, the pope had gone far to help the conspirators. He went to the outer limits of what was possible. Pius had gambled and lost.

After the collapse of these efforts the conspirators wanted to forestall an offensive against France, the Low Countries, and Scandinavia. They leaked information to the pope hoping that he would warn them. The pope secretly warned France, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and neutral Switzerland. His warning was largely ignored and considered unreliable. When the invasion materialized, Pius sent messages of sympathy to the three Lowland sovereigns.

The pope followed a pattern of operating in secret by directing specific prelates with their assignments. In 1940 he directed Monsignor Giovanni Ferrofino to go to Madrid and Lisbon to transfer Jews from Spain and Portugal to central America. Ferrofino met with Portuguese officials and conveyed the Vatican's request for 1,600 visas per year for the Jews who had fled to Portugal. Between 1940 and 1941, there were two transatlantic crossings a year bound for Central America. Ferrofino accompanied the first boatload of eight hundred Jews to the Dominican Republic.

After Hitler ordered the Wehrmacht into the Soviet Union, the Stalinist regime became an ally of the democratic West. Unlike myth, history is not tidy, and the events that became known as the Holocaust are too complex to be dealt with superficially or simplistically. The record of the Soviet Union was at odds with the goals of the Allies reflected in Franklin Roosevelt's Four Freedoms declaration. In 1942, the Allies issued a belated human rights declaration that in general terms condemned the treatment of Jews and promised retribution while ignoring the record of their Soviet ally. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill maintained that the only way to halt the ongoing Holocaust was to win the war with overwhelming force. The end of the Third Reich lay in the future; meanwhile, millions had perished. The Allies wanted the Vatican to sign onto the declaration. The Vatican wanted to include the Soviet Union for the atrocities it had committed and also made it clear that by becoming a signatory, it would openly violate its status as a neutral. Shortly after the declaration was announced, Pius XII delivered his Christmas address in which he denounced both the Nazis and the Soviets for the persecution of thousands because of their nationality or race who were marked for extinction. The Allied declaration and the Christmas message were directly linked acts of denunciation.

Central to this study is the perilous period between 1943 and 1944 during which the Jews of Rome were arrested and deported. It is imperative to determine what courses of actions most likely would have spared Italian Jews from the gas chambers. The events and the principal actors during this period in Italy must be carefully examined in the historical context of their time to avoid normative or counterfactual assertions and what might have been. The context before and after 1943 is essential for understanding the actual constraints and concessions that were made. The roundup and deportation of the Jews of Rome took place on October 16, 1943. Realistically, there were no options to alter the decision set by Berlin when we consider the world of occupied Rome. Moral condemnations at the time would not have worked, nor would open direct confrontation by the Italians, the Jewish leadership, or for that matter the Vatican. The overwhelming force of the Wehrmacht, the Gestapo, and the SS in Rome precluded direct confrontation. Secrecy and clandestine action networks had the best chance of success. Within that framework, survival depended on several factors. It was essential to assess the danger and to act quickly and secretly.

On July 10, 1943, American and British forces landed in Sicily. They failed to cut off German forces from retreating to the mainland. The parameters of a long and costly campaign would follow and accelerated events in Rome. Benito Mussolini paved the way for the Holocaust in Italy. He had put in place the building blocks for the radical persecution of the Jews.

On July 25, Mussolini was replaced by Marshal Pietro Badoglio. During the forty-five days of Mussolini's regime he failed to stem the tide of German troops into northern Italy. The period between Mussolini's ouster and the announcement of the Armistice of Cassibile on September 8, 1943, between the Allies and the Italians was crucial to the fate of Italian Jews. On September 10, Allied forces came ashore at Salerno. American military commanders were overly cautious and allowed opportunities to seize Rome to slip away. Rome was within their grasp. The Italian leadership was culpable as well. That failure allowed the Nazis to take control of Rome and turn on the Jews. Both Hitler and Himmler focused on the Jews of Rome and shared an obsessive conviction that they must rid the world of them. Most Italian Jews were slow to grasp the tragic prospect that suddenly had opened up before them. They were unaware that the RSHA circulated a directive that even Jews who held Italian citizenship and were abroad would not be exempted from deportation.

On September 8, 1943, Nathan Cassuto, the chief rabbi of Florence, warned his congregation and community leaders to disperse and hide. He went from house to house urging them to flee to the countryside or convents and use false names. Few Jews were found in their homes. When the Germans entered Ancona, Don Bernadino, a Catholic priest, warned Elio Toaff, chief rabbi, that the Germans would come for the Jews. Toaff and Giorgio Terni, president of the Jewish Community of Ancona, immediately shut

down all offices. The rabbi closed the temple and told the congregants that they must immediately go into hiding. Jewish lives were saved by this bold action. Though the situation in Rome was complex, Cassuto and Toaff's actions would serve as a model for their counterparts in Rome. Ugo Foa, president of the Jewish Community of Rome (Comunità Ebraica di Roma, CER), and Dante Almansi, president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (Unione delle comunità ebraiche italiane, UCEI) in Rome, were slow to respond despite warning signs before their very eyes. They were confident that the Germans were behaving properly rejected the warnings of others. In particular, the Jewish leaders concluded the chief rabbi's advice was without merit.

Within Rome's Jewish community a triple cleavage of social class and religious observance split the city's Jewish population into contrasting mentalities. Key members of the leadership were confident that their contacts with fascist officials would provide them with protection and benefits. In addition, the fascist anti-Zionist and pro-Zionist Jews were vocal within the community. Finally, there were personality clashes exacerbated by a desire to protect their institutional turf. These factors stood in the way of discerning the signs that the Jews were in mortal danger. Survival depended on the leadership to adopt a unified response to a course of action that would allow the maximum number of the community to evade capture. The chief rabbi of Rome and other leaders advised Foa to close the community offices and advise the Jews to go into hiding.

On September 10, 1943, Wehrmacht troops entered Rome, immediately proclaimed restrictions on the Italians, and asserted the penalties that would result in death. In particular, anyone hiding a Jew would be executed. With German control of the city, the opportunities for rescue were circumscribed. Two days later Jews were being arrested and deported in northern Italy, including Milan and Turin. The Germans seized Mussolini's internment camps. In addition, German troops in full battle dress were posted at Vatican City. The enemy were not just at the gates; they had breached them. The Vatican's options were limited. It couldn't confront the Germans with its Swiss Guards, nor could it call on Allied air strikes on Rome. The Vatican could and did operate secretly. Given the circumstances, the pope selected individuals to perform secret assignments. A secret network in Rome that was created to help Jews evade capture by the Germans provided travel money, false identity papers, passports, and letters of recommendation for foreign visas.

Herbert Kappler, Gestapo chief of Rome, received two deportation orders in September 1943. Contrary to his account, he proposed Jewish gold for Jewish lives in order to forestall the deportation. His explanation has numerous inconsistencies, and his narrative was fashioned prior to his trial in 1945. The extortion of gold from the Jews purposely lulled them into a false sense of security. Kappler had no intention of violating two direct orders. Even after the sacking of the communities' libraries, Kappler conducted a raid on the CER's offices and seized the membership lists necessary for the

execution of his orders. The lists should and could have been safeguarded. They were eventually cross-referenced with the official census. Together they provided a virtual road map to every Jew in Rome.

On October 16, 1943, Black Saturday (*Sabato Nero*), the Germans executed their plan and methodically proceeded to arrest 1,259 Jews regardless of age, sex, or the condition of their health. This was to be a two-day operation. Prior to and during the roundup Pius XII ordered convents, churches, monasteries, and extraterritorial properties to shelter Jews. Jews also found refuge in hospitals and the homes of everyday Romans.

When word of the roundup reached the pope, he quickly decided to move on multiple fronts. He directed Cardinal Luigi Maglione, Vatican secretary of state, to immediately summon Ernst von Weizsäcker, German ambassador to the Holy See, and register an immediate protest and express the pontiff's deep distress because of what was taking place. When they met Maglione made it clear that if the operation against the Jews was not ended, a public condemnation would be made. While the Maglione-Weizsäcker meeting was still in progress the pope summoned Carlo Pacelli, his nephew, directing him to go to Bishop Alois Hudal. Hudal was to write a letter of protest to General Rainer Stahel, the commandant of Rome, and demand a termination of the arrests. The choice of Hudal for this assignment was a strategic one.

Father Pankratus Pfeiffer, Pius's trusted emissary, personally delivered the letter to Stahel. Pfeiffer emphasized that the pontiff wanted him to halt the roundup. The pressure on Stahel intensified. He made a direct call to Himmler urging him to terminate the roundup due to the special character of Rome and the prospect of a revolt by the Romans. Stahel invented a military rationale justifying the halt to the roundup. Himmler was ignorant of military matters, and the order to terminate the roundup arrived close to 2 p.m.

An open public protest by the pope would have exposed the Jews sheltered in convents and churches. In addition, it would have triggered a resumption of the roundup. It also would have exposed the Vatican to a direct invasion, an obsession of Hitler's.

History is a persistent dialogue between the present and the past. Interpretations are subject to change as new evidence emerges, raising questions and challenging previous assumptions. The imperative to understand what happened and why drives this account. How should all generations respond to the unvarnished evil that animated the Nazis implementation of the final solution? Elie Wiesel came to grips with this question in *Night*: "When we speak of this era of evil and darkness, so close yet so distant, 'responsibility' is the key word."<sup>5</sup> The silent are as voluble as those who speak. What is documented is as telling as what is left out. To fathom the unfathomable is responsibility and memory. The imperative to remember and yet the inadequacy of memory drives the story of the Jews of Rome during this fateful period.

# Acknowledgments

THIS BOOK IS AN OUTGROWTH OF TWO PREVIOUS PUBLICATIONS, *FOR LOVE AND Country: The Italian Resistance* and *Pius XII: The Holocaust and the Revisionists*. The research of one led inexorably to the next. I have repeatedly returned to Rome to conduct my research. While a scholar-in-residence at the American Academy in Rome, I was able to devote all my energies to my projects. In 2009 at Loyola University of Chicago's John Felice Center in Rome, I taught courses associated with my ongoing research.

A work of this magnitude is not a singular undertaking and is dependent on the assistance of many. I'm greatly indebted to William Doyno, a talented historian, author, and researcher. His work has appeared in many prestigious journals. Bill compiled "An Annotated Bibliography of Works on Pius XII, Second World, and the Holocaust" that appeared in Joseph Bottum and David Dalin's *The Pius War*. This bibliography is an invaluable source for historians, researchers, and authors. Bill critiqued two key chapters of my book that dealt directly with the October 1943 roundup of the Jews. He always keeps me abreast of the latest published resources. I'm forever in his debt.

Gary Krupp, president of the Pave the Way Foundation, has been of enormous help in my research, especially referrals to individual historians and researchers. I merely mention his name, and they respond generously. Gary provided a service to all researchers by posting numerous original sources related to Pius XII, World War II, and the Holocaust on the Pave the Way Foundation website. He also edited *Pius XII and World War II: The Documented Truth*.

Deacon Dominiek Oversteyns read and evaluated two chapters that deal with papal rescue of Jews and made numerous suggestions for improvement. He shared his latest research. I'm grateful that Deacon Oversteyns kept prodding me in the pursuit of accuracy. Father Livio Poloniato also read one chapter and made useful additions and corrections. Professor Ronald Rychlak has provided the foundation for all scholars in his published volumes, including *Hitler, The War and the Pope* and *Righteous Gentiles*. I also benefited from the outstanding research of Professor Luigi Matteo Napolitano and Dr. Johan Ickx, Vatican archivist.

Twenty-five years ago I met the artist Georges de Canino in Rome. We became fast friends. He has firsthand and thorough knowledge of the history of Roman Jews, particularly during World War II. He has not hesitated to refer me to individuals who might be of assistance. I'm grateful for his help. Whenever we meet Georges will have a file in hand and point to its contents and say, "You must write on this and publish it

in America.” My usual response with a chuckle is “Georges, I am not going to live long enough to do all you want me to do.”

I miss the humor and friendship of Professor Lamberto Mercuri. He provided his firsthand experience with the American army during World War II. I valued the friendship of Professor Maria Palladino. We taught at the same time at Loyola University’s Rome Center. Maria didn’t hesitate to send me new books or make me aware of sources published in Italy. I am grateful for her constant support, and I valued her insights. She was a dear friend and a wonderful teacher.

I’m extremely grateful to Justin Race, director of Purdue University Press, who provided encouragement and guidance toward the finish line along with Katherine Purple and Andrea Gapsch, and especially to Yvonne Ramsey, copy editor. My heartfelt thanks. Special thanks are extended to Ashley Young, for formatting the manuscript, and Laura Gallo, who patiently provided technical assistance. I gratefully acknowledge my gratitude to the many historians, archivists, and librarians who helped or pointed me in the right direction. I have profited from having many colleagues who have been generous in their support. My students during the course of my career have been a source of inspiration, always challenging me to think anew.

I have had the good fortune to have had Dr. Leonard Covello as my mentor. Professor Philip Cohen, Montclair State University, was an important role model. Professor I. William Zartman provided generous guidance and understanding during my graduate days at New York University. I will always remember Professor Arnold Zurcher’s kindness and support, which were vital to my success at New York University.

I thank my children Laura, Daniela, and Andrew, who encourage their father to keep at it. Without my wife Grace, this book would not have seen the light of day. Her patience and love are without limit. Grace has sustained me during difficult periods and continues to be my safeguard against sham and compromise. She is my North Star, my moral compass. Finally, my grandchildren keep their nonno on an even keel. They each have a special place in my heart. I alone bear full responsibility for whatever shortcomings remain in this study.



# I

## Chief

ON NOVEMBER 25, 1938, PIUS XI SUFFERED A SECOND HEART ATTACK, AND his health rapidly declined. He died on February 10, 1939. At the papal funeral mass seated in separate sections were Israel Zolli, the chief rabbi of Rome; Ugo Foa, president of the Jewish Community of Rome (Comunità Ebraica di Roma, CER); Herbert Kappler, the German police attaché; and Benito Mussolini. The intersections of time and place brought them to St. Peter's, and their trajectories subsequently would become intertwined. They would collide with one another four years later.

The deceased Pius XI had prepared his secretary of state, Eugenio Pacelli, to be his successor. A “rare combination of intelligence, skill and dedication,”<sup>1</sup> Pacelli earned two doctorates, one in theology and the other in canon law.<sup>2</sup> His family had served the Holy See since 1819, and after ordination to the priesthood in 1899, Pacelli was assigned to the Chiesa Nuovo near his family's home.<sup>3</sup>

Pacelli's career was a steady ascent from the Vatican's nuncio to Munich and later in Berlin in the 1920s to undersecretary of state, bishop, and cardinal secretary of state. His tenure as secretary of state “enhanced his reputation as a veritable prince of diplomats—a model of what was discreet, trustworthy, and diplomatically surefooted.”<sup>4</sup> Tenacious and mentally agile, Pacelli was described as warm and welcoming, “a brilliant conversationalist . . . far from the cold aloof caricature painted by his opponents.”<sup>5</sup>

On March 1, 1939, the Sacred College of Cardinals met in Rome to elect a new pope. Pacelli was considered the front-runner, and many observers thought he would be elected on the first ballot. The Reich applied not-so-subtle pressure on German cardinals to not vote for Pacelli. The Nazi security service determined that Pacelli was opposed to the National Socialist regime. The Nazi press began an immediate propaganda campaign. In a preemptive attack the newspaper *Das Reich* wrote, “Pius XI was a half-Jew, for his mother was a Dutch Jewess; but Cardinal Pacelli is a full Jew.” More to the point, another German newspaper admitted that “Cardinal Pacelli is not favorably accepted in Germany, since he has always been hostile to National Socialism.” While

Pacelli was nuncio and then secretary of state, forty of his forty-four public speeches had attacked National Socialism. Before the conclave assembled, the *New York Times* reported that “the Jewish issue in Italy is growing more intense and is one of the gravest of the many serious problems being considered by the Cardinals who will enter the conclave . . . to elect a new Pope. . . . That the [Italian government’s] feeling against the church since the stand that Pope Pius XI took on the anti-Jewish policies of Germany and Italy is much stronger in Rome seems certain.”<sup>6</sup>

On March 2, 1939, a puff of white smoke lifted into the Roman sky, a confirmation that the Sacred College of Cardinals had reached a decision. In less than twenty-four hours they selected Pacelli to the throne of St. Peter on his sixty-third birthday. Cardinal Pacelli took Pius XII as his pontifical name and became the first Roman-born pontiff in centuries. Germany had the distinction of being the only country not to send a representative to the new pope’s coronation. Mussolini did not attend the coronation and sent Galeazzo Ciano, his foreign minister, who shocked everyone as he entered the nave of St. Peter’s flashing the fascist salute.

Pius XII was a trained diplomat and an expert on German affairs.<sup>7</sup> It was clear that the conclave wanted a pope with a thorough knowledge of the politics of Germany. President Roosevelt sent a congratulatory message. In 1936 Pacelli and Roosevelt met at Hyde Park in 1936 and likely discussed the deteriorating international scene. While he was in the United States, Pacelli also met with two representatives of the American Jewish Committee and reaffirmed Pope Benedict’s condemnation of anti-Semitism.<sup>8</sup> “Diplomats and journalists from Western democracies especially welcomed Pacelli as an ally in the gathering threat to peace and stability.”<sup>9</sup> Pacelli was praised for his relations with the American Jewish community notably for his support of the Zionist cause. The Vatican also received messages of approval from the Anglo-Jewish Community, the Synagogue Council of America, the Canadian Jewish Congress, and the Polish Rabbinical Council.<sup>10</sup> Samuel Goldstein, the American grandmaster of the Fraternal Order of Abraham, endorsed the selection of the new pope. “Everybody knows the liberal tendencies of Cardinal Pacelli, and every Jew in this country should honor him, for we all know that the new Pope thinks along the lines of human rights. The Church is to be congratulated in selecting Cardinal Pacelli for its leader.” The Australian Associated Press reported that “political observers in Rome consider the election a setback to Mussolini because Cardinal Pacelli is a strong anti-Fascist.” Ugo Foa sent a congratulatory letter after his election as president of the CER.<sup>11</sup>

The Nazis and the Italian fascists were less than enthusiastic with the selection of Pius XII, who was perceived a hostile enemy. Albert Hartl, a defrocked priest and a member of the Nazi secret service, was ordered to prepare a dossier on the new pope. Hartl assigned SS spies in Rome to keep tabs on the maneuvers of the Vatican leadership.

The new pope immediately made it clear to all in the Secretariat that he reserved all German questions and problems to himself. Shortly after his election Pius met with the German cardinals, who attended the conclave and immediately began asserting his imprint on the assemblage.<sup>12</sup> The pope wanted his cardinals to report on the status of the church in Nazi Germany. His immediate goal was to prevent another disastrous war from engulfing Europe. Pius issued a call for a peace conference to avoid war. This was a formidable objective to accomplish and a steep hill to climb. The new pontiff sought the counsel of his nephew Carlo Pacelli, who served as the Vatican's chief legal counsel, and his good friend Enrico Galeazzi. Both men routinely met with the pope each morning.

The new pope lived, worked, and maneuvered the Vatican amid the shifting sands of the international arena. Pius XII thus confronted the stark reality of two dominant totalitarian ideologies, fascism and communism. Each posed serious dangers to international stability and to human rights. Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin were tyrants who threatened the survival of Western democracy and capitalism as well as the Catholic Church, which from 1914 to well after World War II had to contend "with two world wars, genocide, [and] economic depression"; they are "ideologies bent on achieving total control over the societies they governed." The pope needed to navigate this ideological minefield but also confront these dangerous threats. He realized the limitations of moral appeals to confront and alter the dark forces of Hitler and Stalin.<sup>13</sup>

Hitler's triumphant success at Munich on September 30, 1938, emboldened him and the regime to become even more violent. His support among the German public at large and many of the skeptics in the military was enhanced. His generals were weakened and divided. Hitler issued his first general directive for the invasion of Poland.

The international community was shocked with the news that Germany and the Soviet Union had sealed a nonaggression pact on August 24, 1939. Germany was relieved of the burden of fighting a war on two fronts. The pact was a green light for Hitler to go ahead with the invasion of Poland.

As war beckoned, Roosevelt communicated with the new pontiff through the apostolic delegate in Washington. The president requested the pope's support for a peace conference. Cardinal Luigi Maglione responded to the president explaining the Holy See's inability to intervene directly with Germany. The operative word was "directly." What the pope pursued indirectly and secretly was another matter altogether.<sup>14</sup> According to Ian Kershaw, "Within the last days of peace, the conservative opponents of Hitler were uncoordinated, unclear about what was happening, and uncertain how to act themselves."<sup>15</sup> Days before the invasion of Poland, Hitler ordered his top military commanders to Berchtesgaden, his mountain retreat. Hitler stunned the assembled generals in describing how he planned to lay waste to Poland. He assured his audience that he would liquidate the Polish clergy. The generals were appalled by Hitler's

angry tirade, but they lacked the courage to challenge Hitler and remained silent.<sup>16</sup> The generals were uneasy with Hitler's assurance that the war could be localized. Absent in Hitler's decision making was clarity, rationality, and even consistency.

The decision to invade Poland and the plans to widen the war in the West reinvigorated the German resistance. Elements within the military establishment in Germany both loathed and feared the Nazis, the SS in particular. Ludwig Beck and other officers were convinced that Hitler was dangerous and would bring Germany into a disastrous war. Beck was the catalyst and key player in the resistance along with Wilhelm Canaris, chief of the Abwehr, the Reich military secret and counterintelligence service. Another key figure at this stage was Hans Oster, Canaris's chief of staff and head of the Central Division of the Abwehr.

Case White, the invasion of Poland, was activated on September 1, 1939, as German forces blitzed their way into Poland. Unable to prevent the outbreak of war, Pius sought to contain it before all Europe was drawn in.<sup>17</sup> Two days after Poland was attacked, Britain and France formally announced their declarations of war against Germany. On September 17, the Soviet army invaded Poland from the east. By the end of the month, Poland was divided between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.

The outbreak of war presented immediate humanitarian problems. The pope responded by creating the Pontifical Relief Commission whose task was "to provide war refugees with food, clothing and shelter." He reinvigorated the Vatican Information Bureau with the purpose of reuniting people separated by the war and providing information to anxious family members. Vatican Radio was turned loose and broadcast messages searching for missing persons as well as denunciations of Nazi atrocities.<sup>18</sup>

The savagery of the Nazi invasion intensified the efforts of Canaris and others in the resistance to depose the *führer*. Disparate elements within the regime were beginning to coalesce around the belief that a coup d'état was essential to save Germany from disaster. The other option was assassination.<sup>19</sup> The Wehrmacht overwhelmed Polish resistance, and the Polish campaign ended on October 8. Germany then took control of western Poland. The West had offered no direct military assistance. The German army emerged from the Polish campaign as the key to stopping Hitler and effectuating a successful coup.

The Central Division of the Abwehr led by Canaris became the center of the anti-Hitler conspirators. The Abwehr was in a position to provide false identity papers, documents, and a cover by disguising their activities as intelligence operations.

The Canaris-Beck-Oster resistance group planned a coup to remove Hitler, end the war, restore democracy in Germany, and withdraw German forces from Poland and Czechoslovakia. After a coup d'état, Hitler would be removed, assassinated, and General Beck would form a provisional government. They also sought to get the British and French to put aside any plans for an offensive and widen the war. They believed

that such an act would only unify the Wehrmacht behind the führer. Moreover, “they needed assurances that the British and French would agree to end the war and recognize a new German government and refrain from taking advantage of Germany’s vulnerability during the transition period.” If the British agreed, the French were sure to follow, and with that assurance in hand the conspirators would make a move to remove Hitler. The anti-Hitler resistance needed to determine the terms that the Western powers were prepared “to grant to a post Hitler government.”<sup>20</sup>

The conspirators needed a credible intermediary to convey their proposals to the British and prove their sincerity. Canaris and Oster decided on a plan to approach Pius XII. Internationally respected, discreet, and knowledgeable, he would be indispensable to the success of the plotters. Pius knew Beck, Canaris, and Oster from his days in Germany as nuncio and as cardinal secretary of state. Hans von Dohnanyi and his brother-in-law Dietrich Bonhoeffer, an evangelical pastor, were opponents of the regime. Dohnanyi recruited Bonhoeffer into the Abwehr as a liaison officer and into the circle of plotters. Dohnanyi was at the center of the conspirators’ plans and well positioned within the Abwehr. Oster, Dohnanyi, and Bonhoeffer were appalled by the persecution of Jews. Oster was informed about the murder of Jews in Poland and, along with Dohnanyi, worked secretly to rescue German Jews. Canaris knew what they were doing and personally intervened to rescue five hundred Dutch Jews.<sup>21</sup>

The pope knew Josef Müller, a Bavarian lawyer with many Vatican contacts who was selected to act as the courier and coordinator for the conspirators’ proposals. Müller was to approach his contacts within the Vatican and determine if the pope would support the plot and serve as intermediary between the anti-Hitler conspirators and the English and French. Müller had made many trips to Rome supplying useful intelligence. Canaris arranged for him to travel back and forth from Berlin and Rome as an Abwehr agent. Canaris trusted the pope’s judgment. He thought that Pius was the “best informed diplomat in Berlin” and found a kindred spirit with someone who shared an intense aversion to Hitler. The credibility of the conspirators was greatly enhanced with the intelligent and principled Ludwig Beck as their leader. The plotters would be taken seriously if Pius joined them by transmitting their proposals to the British.<sup>22</sup>

Müller arrived in Rome the first week of October 1939 and began meetings between Berlin and the Vatican. Hitler’s speech to the Reichstag, which coincided with Müller’s arrival in Rome, presented a “peace plan” completely on Hitler’s terms. The Allies rejected it out of hand. Hitler reacted by putting in motion a directive to invade the West.

Müller never met with Pius but did deal with either Father Robert Leiber, Pius’s trusted and principal aide, or Monsignor Ludwig Kass. Both were discreet as papal confessors. Müller’s first meeting was with Monsignor Kass, the former chief of the German Center Party who was serving as the administrator of St. Peter’s. Müller and Leiber were friends who felt completely comfortable working with one another. During

their first meeting Müller revealed the German generals, and the Abwehr planned a military coup. He outlined the conspirators' aims, and they wanted the pope to act as an intermediary with the West. After his meeting with Müller, Leiber agreed to bring the plotters' proposals to the pope. The pope listened carefully as Leiber briefed him on the plot and told Leiber that he would reflect on the overture that night.<sup>23</sup>

The next morning, Pius quickly agreed to act as the intermediary. Müller received the good news on October 17, 1939. The pontiff made it clear that he would assume "control of the channel between London and Berlin." Code names for the key participants were devised: Pius XII, Chief; Müller, Herr X; Leiber, Gregor; and D'Arcy Osborne, Mount. Leiber was shocked at how quickly the pope had acted. Privately, he thought that the pontiff might have gone too far out on a limb. He realized, as did the pope, that the risks were immeasurable if the Nazis discovered the plot to remove Hitler. Moreover, if Mussolini learned of the pope's involvement he could claim that it violated the terms of the Lateran Pact and provide grounds for "intervention in the affairs of the Vatican State." The Pope took part in a risky operation. "By collaborating in conversations, which had as their purpose the subversion of a foreign government and by passing that government's military secrets to its opponent, Pius XII seriously compromised the traditional neutrality of the Vatican and jeopardized his personal position as well as that of the papacy."<sup>24</sup>

Leiber informed Müller that the pope would act as intermediary and would do so because "not as Head of the Vatican State, but as a Pope his conscience not only allows but obliged him to offer his life and the Church for peace." Pius made it clear that he would assume "control of the channel between London and Berlin." The pope decided that the German resistance had to be heard in Britain, and he would play his part and "serve as secret agent for the resistance."<sup>25</sup> Pius's goal was a quick end to hostilities and the restoration of Polish sovereignty and territorial integrity. Harold Deutsch notes that "Pius the realist, whom a long life of varied experience had made rather skeptical, had a highly developed sense for the meaning of power. He had little time for plans, no matter how well intentioned, which were lacking in assurance of execution."<sup>26</sup> Pius was a pragmatic realist whose agile mind quickly assessed the vital need to act quickly or the moment might pass. His quick agreement to serve as an intermediary was a remarkable act.

Pius's participation was conditioned first on Britain and France agreeing to refrain from involvement in Germany's internal affairs. He made it clear that he wanted "personal control of the channel between London and Berlin" so he would be personally involved and not the Holy See. The pope kept key advisers such as Secretary of State Cardinal Luigi Maglione and his undersecretaries Monsignors Tardini and Montini in the dark regarding his involvement with the German conspirators.<sup>27</sup>

On the same day Pius that gave his consent to partner with the plotters he signed his first encyclical, and three days later on October 20 "Summi Pontificatus" was formally

proclaimed. The encyclical condemned Nazi anti-Semitic violence and was a powerful condemnation of totalitarianism and racism. It asserted that in the Catholic Church “there is neither Gentile or Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free. But Christ is all and in all.” The pope urged resistance to attacks on Judaism and instructed Catholics by saying “Non licet; it is not allowed.” He addressed the Nazis directly as “an ever-increasing host of Christ’s enemies who deny or in practice neglect the vivifying truths and the values inherent in the belief in God and in Christ.” The pope expressed his pain for “the peoples who have been swept tragically into the vortex of war are perhaps only at the beginning of sorrows, but already, in thousands of families, desolation, misery, and death hold sway. The blood of countless human beings, noncombatants among them, has been shed and cries out to heaven especially the blood of Poland, a nation very dear to us.” Ronald Rychlak argues that “the equating of Gentiles and Jews was a clear rejection of Hitler’s fundamental ideology and with the Nazis having overrun Poland, there was no room for interpretation.” Robert Ventresca added that the encyclical was a “moral indictment of radically secular states and the unity of human society” that emerged from “our common origin and by the equality of the rational nature in all men, to whatever people they belong.” The pope’s condemnation of the Reich was also notable for condemning the Soviet Union after it had joined Hitler in attacking and dismembering Poland.<sup>28</sup>

The international press enthusiastically greeted the encyclical. The *New York Times* reported in a front-page article that “it is Germany that stands condemned above any country or any movement in this encyclical—the Germany of Hitler and National Socialism.” At the end of October, Anne O’Hare McCormick, a *New York Times* reporter, wrote that “the dictatorship is not simply a form of government[;] it is a form of life, a usurpation of every human and divine right.”<sup>29</sup> The Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported that many observers had not expected “so outspoken a document” and that “the unqualified condemnation which Pope Pius XII heaped on totalitarianism, racist and materialistic theories of government in his encyclical . . . caused a profound stir. . . . Although it had been expected that the Pope would attack ideologies hostile to the Catholic Church, few observers had expected so outspoken a document.” The *American Israelite* praised the pope for “stressing the inviolability of the human person as a sacred being.” Papal critic Susan Zuccotti, anxious to criticize the pope, falsely claimed that the “encyclical never mentioned Jews.” She failed to read it carefully with an open mind or to consider the reaction of the Nazis.<sup>30</sup>

The reaction of the Nazis was swift. Josef Goebbels recorded in his diary that the encyclical “was very aggressive towards us, though covertly.” Reinhard Heydrich wrote to Hans Lammers, head of the Reich Chancellery, to say in part that “the encyclical is directed exclusively against Germany, both in ideology and in regard to the German-Polish dispute. How dangerous it is as regards our foreign relations as well as

our domestic affairs is beyond discussion. . . . God, he says, regards all peoples and races as worthy of the same consideration. Here he clearly speaking on behalf of the Jews.” Heydrich proceeded to state that “this declaration of the Pope makes an unequivocal accusation against Germany. . . . Here he is virtually accusing the German people of injustice towards the Jews and makes himself the mouthpiece of the Jewish war criminals.” The Nazis declared that the pope had abandoned any pretense at neutrality. The morale of the conspirators was bolstered by the encyclical.<sup>31</sup>

In his trips to Rome, Müller gave Leiber and Kaas reports describing the atrocities committed by the Nazis in Poland, including their persecution of the Polish Catholic Church. The Abwehr plotters urged the pope to refrain from a public protest. According to Müller, “this would have made the German Catholics even more suspected than they were and would have greatly restricted their freedom of action in their work of resistance.” Meanwhile, Leiber had already informed Francis D’Arcy Osborne, British ambassador to the Holy See, that the pope had agreed to work with the German conspirators.<sup>32</sup>

Müller resumed deliberations with the papal representatives, which extended well into November and the new year. Oster and the others worked to widen the resistance by meeting with officers in the Wehrmacht who opposed the widening of the war that Hitler was certain to initiate.

A flurry of meetings took place between Müller, Leiber, and Kass and between Pius and Osborne. Osborne informed his government and responded to the messages from Müller that were sent to Leiber and on to the pope. Pius did not meet personally with Müller, covering his tracks and protecting plausible deniability. The pope dealt directly with Osborne. Müller made it clear that the pope should only contact the British. Mark Riebling wrote that “to avoid suspicion that they played the Allies against each other, the plotters should not negotiate with more than one government at a time.”<sup>33</sup>

The plotters were given an additional boost by the pope’s 1939 Christmas message. In it Pius articulated the conditions for a just and honorable peace in a five-point plan. In particular, he singled out the protection of racial minorities, the rights of small nations, economic cooperation, disarmament, and the role of religion as the only true guarantee of a “just and lasting peace.” He again condemned Nazis crimes committed against the Polish people.<sup>34</sup>

In early 1940, the pope transmitted two messages through Osborne to his superiors. Pius asked the British “if the Generals succeeded in removing Hitler would the British government be disposed to conclude an honorable peace treaty?” Müller returned to Berlin with a document outlining a peace plan conditioned on the removal of Hitler first. The document written by Leiber was dictated by Pius.<sup>35</sup> “There was no question of negotiations in the usual sense. Rather[,] it was an exchange of inquiries and replies which might provide ‘a basis of negotiations.’”<sup>36</sup>



Throughout the early months of 1940 a series of exchanges between the parties took place. From the British perspective, the conspirators' plan involved the British remaining on the sidelines during the coup and then coming to terms with a new government with which they could negotiate. What would be the acceptable terms? And what kind of government would follow a successful coup? Were the Germans to be trusted? In turn, the conspirators needed assurance that the British could be trusted. These were questions that needed answering.

The German resistance was buoyed by Vatican Radio's broadcasts in January 1940 denouncing Nazis atrocities committed in occupied Poland. The broadcasts declared that the atrocities "affronted the moral conscience of mankind." The Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported that Vatican Radio "broadcast an outspoken denunciation of German atrocities in Nazi Poland. . . . The broadcast cited the 'unimpeachable testimony of eyewitnesses to the horror.'" <sup>37</sup> The broadcasts also reported the violence in Soviet-occupied Poland and that "a system of interior deportations and zonings is being organized." The pope ordered Vatican Radio to broadcast exiled Polish cardinal August Hlond's reports. On January 20, 1940, an American Jesuit on Vatican Radio became the first announcer in the world to report the imprisonment of tens of thousands of "Jews and Poles [who] are being herded into separate ghettos, hermetically sealed. . . . It adds up to a fearful total and tremendous responsibility, one more grievous affront to the moral conscience of mankind." Vatican Radio condemned Nazi atrocities against Jews and Catholics in occupied Poland. The Vatican under the pope had taken a direct public stand. The Jewish Telegraphic Agency circulated the content of the Vatican's broadcast three days later with the headline "Nazi Atrocities in Poland Held Affront to Mankind in Vatican Broadcast." Church authorities sent reports of the Soviets' brutal occupation in occupied Poland and their persecution of the clergy.

By the end of February 1940, the British agreed to an exchange of views with the conspirators but wanted specific details. The conspirators feared being exposed if the Allies imposed harsh peace terms. During the following days, both parties outlined their positions through the pope and his representatives. Pius received the final British terms in early March.

In a meeting on March 10, the pope confronted Joachim von Ribbentrop. Ribbentrop expounded on the inevitability of a German victory and the "futility of a papal alignment with the enemies of the Fuhrer." Pius listened and then calmly opened a file. In perfect German, he enumerated the atrocities the Nazis had committed. Pius cited "the precise date, place and time of each crime." Pius and Cardinal Maglione demanded the termination of the atrocities. The *New York Times* reported that the pope "came to the defense of the Jews in Germany and Poland." <sup>38</sup> The Vatican was appalled by the persecution of the Catholic Church. In the diocese of Poznan alone, of the 828 priests,

450 were sent to concentration camps, 74 were executed, and the rest fled Poland. In all of Poland the Germans killed 4 bishops, 1,996 priests, 113 clerics, and 238 nuns.<sup>39</sup>

By mid-March, the British responded with their final terms that included not only the removal of Hitler but also the complete elimination of National Socialism. The conspirators compiled a twenty-page X-Report. Among the key points were the removal of Hitler and that no war in the West was to be undertaken. It seems that the British remained skeptical of the true motives of the conspirators. Some circles within the British government believed that these overtures were somehow a trap. The British made it clear that negotiations could take place after Hitler was removed and not beforehand. Even if that were achieved, the Germans would still have their military intact. The British awaited the removal of Hitler. By the end of March, Hitler was still in power.

At this point several of the plotters lost their nerve, and some reasoned that contact with the British constituted high treason. How could they argue with the military successes of the *führer*? Officers in the Wehrmacht had derisively dismissed Hitler as “the corporal.” Mark Riebling described Josef Müller’s reaction to this development: “A dejected Müller returned to Rome. The generals, he said, lacked the will for a coup. ‘All was ready,’ he told Father Leiber. ‘The other day I sat at my desk at five o’clock and waited for a call. But none came. By May 1940 it became clear that the plan of the conspirators had fallen apart, as they failed to unite Germany’s internal and external enemies. Mark Riebling asserted that “the pope, as one reader of the (X-Report), had ‘gone astonishingly far’ to help the conspirators. Pius had coaxed London to meet the plotters more than halfway, and covered the British terms with the mantle of his authority. He had brought the plans to the edge of action.”<sup>40</sup> The pope was disillusioned with the failure to bring an immediate end to the war and the removal of Hitler. Pius had gone out on a limb and had gambled and lost.

Leiber concluded that “Pius XII in his efforts for peace went to the outer limits of what was possible for a Pope.” Papal critics of Pius XII including Robert Katz, Susan Zuccotti, and Michael Phayer are completely silent, ignoring the pontiff’s high-risk involvement with the anti-Hitler conspiracy that historian Owen Chadwick characterized as “the most risky and heroic act in the history of the papacy.”<sup>41</sup>

In desperation, the conspirators attempted to forestall the offensive against France, the Low Countries, and Scandinavia. They leaked information to the pope with the hope that he would warn them. The Abwehr provided the secret time and date of the attacks. Hermann Göring’s Research Office intercepted a telegram from the Belgian ambassador to the Holy See. The telegram indicated that a German had arrived in Rome and delivered to the pope the attack date on neutral Belgium. Though his name was not mentioned in the communication, Josef Müller was the German in question; he turned the attack date over to Leiber.<sup>42</sup>

Pius secretly warned France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and neutral Switzerland of the impending attack. He alluded to such an attack in a public statement as well. Hitler had changed the dates for the attack from January to May. The Vatican's information proved accurate even though it was largely ignored and considered unreliable by the governments that had been warned.<sup>43</sup>

While the invasion was in progress, Pius took a "more direct step of addressing messages of sympathy to the three Lowland sovereigns. He wrote them personally on his little typewriter and corrected them in his own hand." His messages included a frank condemnation of the Nazi invasion, and he ordered them published on the front page of *L'Osservatore Romano* on May 12, 1940. Hitler and Mussolini were enraged when they read them. Dino Alfieri, Mussolini's envoy to the Holy See, was in the process of moving to a new assignment in Berlin. In an audience with the pope, Alfieri told him that Mussolini found the telegrams "a cause of lively displeasure" and indicated that they were "a gesture against his policy." Alfieri then made a not so subtle threat that the tension caused by the pope "did not even exclude something serious happening." The pope calmly replied that he was not fearful of being sent "to a concentration camp or falling into hostile hands." As Harold Deutsch noted, "Had the Nazis learned of the Pope's direct role with the conspirators, the risks to him and the Church were 'incalculable.'" Robert Leiber felt that the pope had gone too far and threatened his personal position and the neutrality of the Holy See. Leiber added that the Nazis would "have chopped the Pope into little pieces" if they knew of his collaboration with the conspirators.<sup>44</sup>

The path to the conspirators and the pope was being exposed. Göring's Research Office had intercepted and decoded additional messages that implicated the conspirators and the pope. The pope destroyed his personal papers in order to hide his involvement. Müller urged the conspirators to destroy any and all documents that would link the Catholic Church with the resistance. Beck, for his own reasons, declined to follow suit, but Müller objected, fearing that if any documents were discovered all parties would be in danger.

Hitler's prestige soared among the Germans at home and won over some generals as his string of victories mounted. According to Mark Riebling, these successes "demoralized both his foreign and his internal enemies. The plotters saved their honor but lost their moment." Harold Deutsch underscored an essential problem, adding that "with the country at war, high treason, which a substantial number of military leaders had been prepared to contemplate in peacetime, had moved precariously close to identification with national treason."<sup>45</sup> For the time being, though, the pope's direct involvement in the efforts to remove Hitler remained hidden.

Pius XII resumed his initiative to bring about a negotiated end to the war. In his 1940 Christmas message, he presented with "greater definiteness" a five-point plan for peace that he first enunciated the year before. The *New York Times* editorialized that

“the voice of Pius XII is a lonely voice in the silence and darkness enveloping the continent this Christmas.” His program for peace agreed fundamentally with the Roosevelt-Churchill eight-point declaration but went “farther than the Atlantic Charter.” The *New York Times* went on to state that “in a call for a ‘real new order’ based on liberty, justice and love . . . the Pope put himself squarely against Hitlerism . . . and he left no doubt that the Nazi aims are also irreconcilable with his own conception of a Christian peace.”<sup>46</sup>

Pius continued to use selected agents to inform the Allies about Germany’s military plans, including the planned invasion of the Soviet Union. The pope maintained an active link with anti-Hitler elements in Germany.<sup>47</sup>

The conspirators in the Abwehr came under scrutiny. After 1940, rumors circulated in Nazi leadership linking the pope to the anti-Hitler conspirators. Reinhard Heydrich saw to it that Müller and other suspected conspirators were closely monitored. Heydrich directed Walter Schellenberg to open a dossier on the Vatican. “The case file carried the code name *Schwarze Kapelle*, or Black network, after the color of priestly cassocks. Since *Kapelle* also meant ‘chapel,’ that double meaning became an SS metaphor for treason tracing to the Vatican.” By 1943 pieces of the conspiracy linked to the Vatican would fall into place.<sup>48</sup>

The pope continued to work in secret. Though the Nazis didn’t know the specifics, they suspected for some time that the pope was not only sympathetic to the plight of the Jews but was also actively assisting them. The Vatican received thousands of appeals for their rescue as Jews sought to escape the oncoming Nazi juggernaut. They fled from Germany, Austria, France, Yugoslavia, and other countries seeking refuge in Spain and Portugal, hoping to travel to safe havens elsewhere. Time was running out.

The limited initiatives of some nations with the goal of resettlement in Central America provided an opening for the Vatican. In 1940 Pius met with Monsignor Giovanni Ferrofino, from the nunciature in Santo Domingo and Haiti. During their meeting, Pius expressed his frustration with the failure of Western powers to rescue Jewish refugees who were seeking asylum. He also conveyed his impatience with the Spanish and Portuguese governments, which he felt had to act quickly to save the Jews in their countries. At one point in the conversations, his frustration boiled over when the United States didn’t help “to save this vibrant community.”<sup>49</sup> During the years when it was possible for Jews to leave Germany, the United States and European nations failed in their hour of need.<sup>50</sup> The pope ordered Ferrofino to go to Madrid and Lisbon to facilitate the transfer of Jews from Spain and Portugal. The pope added, “See for yourself. How can the Spaniards not understand, how can the Portuguese not understand that we must save as many people as possible.” Ferrofino was then based in Lisbon.

General Francisco Franco cooperated with Ferrofino. Franco refused Hitler’s request to deport Jews and Muslims, considering them important to the history and

culture of Spain. He passed an edict that any Jew with even the tiniest bit of Spanish heritage could safely come to Spain. Franco agreed that Jews could travel to Spain and onward to other countries as well. Ferrofino worked with the apostolic nuncios in both Madrid and Lisbon, who had received written orders from the Vatican. There were ten thousand to twelve thousand Jews seeking to flee to Portugal. Ferrofino met with the president of Portugal and conveyed the Vatican's request for at least 1,600 visas per year for the beleaguered Jews.

In 1940 Ferrofino boarded the *Serpa Pinto*, a pre-World War I Portuguese vessel, and accompanied the first boatload of eight hundred Jews. Between 1940 and 1941, there were two transatlantic crossings a year. The Jews were destined for the Dominican Republic or Cuba and then the United States, Canada, or Mexico. Bruno Luzzatto and his wife and two children fled their home in the Veneto after Mussolini enacted the racial laws. They crossed into Switzerland and then made their way to Paris, Marseille, and Lisbon. They were able to obtain American visas. In late March 1941 they boarded the *Serpa Pinto*, bound for the United States. The voyages grew increasingly hazardous, coming to a halt after 1941.

In 1941, Hugo Adler entered Rome and was given refuge in the Vatican. He met with the pope, who arranged for him to be supplied with false identity papers and a visa. Adler traveled through France and Spain and safely into the Dominican Republic. In 1942 with the Vatican's direct intervention, Jews entered Spain and Portugal, where they obtained exit visas for to destinations in Central America.

Whenever Mauro Silvani, the papal nuncio, met with Raphael Trujillo, the Dominican Republic's dictator, or Fulgencio Batista, his Cuban counterpart, they wanted complete assurances that Silvani's participation in the rescue effort was requested at the express direction of the pope. The nuncio invariably affirmed that his mission was ordered directly by Pius. Ferrofino and Silvani received frequent telegrams in a variety of languages but not in Italian, and the messages were double encrypted to avoid detection. The telegrams ordered the nuncio to obtain entrance visas for Jewish passengers. Ferrofino decoded the telegrams for the nuncio. The Ferrofino network was consistent with and overlapped the efforts of the United States to rescue Jews destined for the Dominican Republic and Cuba. In 1940 the United Jewish Appeal for Refugees in 1940 contributed \$125,000 to the Vatican's work in helping Jews to escape.<sup>51</sup>

By 1941, the Vatican had become the first state to issue "protective passports" through its nuncios to endangered Jews. The practice was copied by Sweden and other neutral nations. Papal protective passports were effective in saving thousands.<sup>52</sup>

In addition, Pius XII continued with the emigration project to Brazil initiated by his predecessor. Cardinal Lemo, the Vatican's nuncio to Brazil, obtained President Getúlio Dornelles Vargas's cooperation to grant entry visas for the victims of racial persecution. Between 1939 and 1941 nearly three thousand Jews, "non-Aryans," gained entry to Brazil.<sup>53</sup>

The *Jewish Chronicle* reported that Goebbels had angrily denounced the pope for his pro-Jewish interference. “The Vatican during the past two months have enabled 300 Jews to leave Nazi occupied countries, including the ghettos of Poland, and go to Spain and Portugal. The Vatican appears to have obtained Spanish and Portuguese visas for these Jews.”<sup>54</sup> Reich intelligence constantly monitored the Vatican’s rescue efforts.

The pope subsequently ran a secret network in Rome led by Father Giancarlo Centioni. Centioni joined the St. Raphael Society, helping Italian and foreign Jews evade capture from the Germans. Centioni lived in the General House of the Pallottine Fathers along with a number of German priests who were helping Jews. Centioni had the advantage of personal contacts and inside information, since he served as military chaplain to the fascists. Father Anton Weber and Cardinal Maglione were the direct links to Centioni and the St. Raphael Society. Pius arranged to transfer travel money, passports, false identity papers, and letters of recommendation for foreign visas. Arturo Gioia was one of two couriers who then delivered the secret items to individual Jews. A number of Jews in Rome made their way to Portugal. The Ferrofino and Centioni networks violated the Vatican’s status as a neutral under international law.<sup>55</sup>

## Germany's Fanatic Determination to Fight

**I**N 1940 BENITO MUSSOLINI (THE DUCE) WROTE TO ADOLF HITLER EXPRESSING his displeasure with the nonaggression pact. Mussolini remained neutral while Hitler attacked the West. On March 19, 1940, Joachim von Ribbentrop arrived in Rome and presented the Duce with Hitler's response urging him that "now is the time to share in the fight so that you can share in the spoils."<sup>1</sup>

The success of the German blitzkrieg throughout the northern tier of Europe and France convinced Mussolini and the French king Victor Emmanuel III that Hitler had already won the war. Hitler's northern offensive reinforced Mussolini's belief that somehow a war would solve many of his nation's problems. On June 10, 1940, the Duce announced his declaration of war on France and Great Britain. In a telegram to Hitler, Victor Emmanuel wrote, "I am certain that the glorious armies of Italy and Germany will bring victory."<sup>2</sup> Mussolini's failure to relate means and ends to his foreign policy proved disastrous for Italy and ultimately produced the downfall of the regime. There was a wide divergence between Italy's resources and the Duce's ambitions. Mussolini believed that by declaring war he could gain maximum advantage with a minimum investment of the nation's resources. He took a calculated risk and brought his nation into a war for which it was militarily, economically, and, psychologically unprepared. A parallel strategy with Germany was essential. Absent was a combined command or an agreement on essential plans and military objectives. Most of his generals knew that catastrophe loomed for the nation. The war got off to a good start except for the subsequent chaos.

All went wrong for Italy as defeat and disaster followed one another in Greece, Albania, Yugoslavia, and North Africa. In April 1941 Italian troops abandoned Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital. Two months later Mussolini received a communication from Hitler stating that he was going to break the treaty with Russia and launch an attack. Mussolini, though surprised, didn't seem to understand the grave implications involved in opening a second front in the east. In July 1941, though Mussolini was not asked to do so, he sent an initial force into the Russian eastern front, adding an additional 250,000 men with only one month of supplies.

At home, the military disaster in the field triggered high employment and open demonstrations among urban and rural workers. Northern Italy had already been subjected to aerial bombardments that had a devastating impact on the nation's economy.<sup>3</sup> There were significant shortages of food and fuel, and a rationing program was introduced. As disaster loomed, Mussolini's stomach pains and insomnia intensified as well did his loss of reality. In October 1942, the bespectacled SS reichsführer Heinrich Himmler along with SS Karl Wolff came to Rome and briefed Mussolini on the military situation and Germany's Jewish policy. The Duce "had not yet turned over any Italian Jews to the Germans."<sup>4</sup> One month after Himmler and Mussolini met, British and American forces landed in North Africa, bringing the war closer to the Italian mainland.

In January 1943, Hitler ignored General Friedrich von Paulus's appeals from Stalingrad to surrender. He ordered von Paulus to fight to the last man. Hermann Göring had assured Hitler the embattled troops could be supplied by air. That assurance ended in failure. One month later, the Wehrmacht surrendered. Many within the Wehrmacht were critical of Hitler, certain that he was responsible for the Stalingrad catastrophe. Germany's defeat at Stalingrad and the closing of the ring around the Axis in North Africa marked the turning of the tide of the war in Europe. Mussolini and Victor Emmanuel wagered on German power, not Italian power, and they were losing. In a public declaration, the Allies had disclosed their intention to demand the unconditional surrender of the Axis. The Vatican was dismayed by the policy, believing it would provide the Nazis with a propaganda advantage, rally popular support behind the regime, and weaken the German resistance movement.<sup>5</sup>

At the end of January Libya was lost, and Italian troops retreated to Tunis. Mussolini blamed the Italian people for their lack of resolve and disloyalty. He proceeded to blame the Vatican, which he felt was the center of all opposition to fascism. In addition he blamed the Jews, expressing "his approval of the Germans for shooting Jewish women and children." Mussolini reassured the führer that "as a race, the Jews were a disease to be cured by fire and the sword." Though Germany's military fortunes were reversed, this didn't stop its program against the Jews and probably stimulated it to go further and faster.<sup>6</sup>

Italians had already determined that the war was lost. Popular unrest intensified as repeated strikes spread from Turin to Milan. Tunis in North Africa fell to the Allies, and the invasion of Sicily was next. Until July 1943, the war for the Italians had been fought at a distance but would arrive on the mainland with a vengeance. American and British forces landed in Sicily on the morning of July 10, 1943, while Mussolini reviewed an elite Italian division, his so-called praetorian guard.<sup>7</sup>

A clear plan for the conquest of Sicily was absent, which in turn led to no agreement among the three ground commanders. They had renounced any attempt to work with the Italian high command.<sup>8</sup> Had Allied and Italian military forces worked together,



German forces in Sicily could have been confined to the island. As the campaign unfolded, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring was relieved that the Allies had failed to land in Calabria behind his forces. This would have blocked any attempts to escape across the Strait of Messina. This was a major lapse in Allied planning and one that would have dire consequences.<sup>9</sup> Though Sicily fell in thirty-eight days, a German force of sixty thousand men had fought an Allied force of almost five hundred thousand. Albert Kesselring, supreme commander of the Wehrmacht in Italy, was certain he could defend Italy, thereby setting "the parameters for the long, bloody campaign to follow." He convinced Hitler that the entire area south of Rome should be defended.<sup>10</sup>

General Dwight Eisenhower rendered a critical assessment of the selection of Sicily as the initial objective of the Allies. In his opinion, if the purpose was to clear the Mediterranean for Allied shipping, "then Sicily was a valid objective." But if the actual purpose was the invasion of Italy to "defeat the country completely," then the invasion of Sardinia or Corsica was the best strategy. German intelligence prior to July was uncertain if Sicily, Sardinia or Corsica was the Allied objective.<sup>11</sup>

As events accelerated within in Italy, Italian officials were meeting secretly with the Americans to withdraw from the conflict. Most of the Italian military staff had concluded that they had to extricate their country from certain defeat and sign an armistice. On the morning of July 14, 1943, the King Victor Emmanuel decided to replace Mussolini with Marshal Pietro Badoglio. Victor Emmanuel met with Badoglio and told him that a new government had to be installed. The king told Badoglio that he would give him a precise date when Mussolini would be removed. By mid-July there were two conspiracies against Mussolini: one by the king and the generals and the other the moderates on the Grand Council led by Dino Grandi and Giuseppe Bottai. Cardinal Ceslo Constantini recorded in his diary that "Italy is on the edge of the abyss."<sup>12</sup>

On July 19, Hitler summoned Mussolini to a meeting at the Villa Gaggia near Feltre in the Veneto. Early in the morning, Allied planes had dropped leaflets warning that Rome was going to be bombed. The meeting between the two dictators began promptly at 11 a.m. As usual, Hitler dominated the meeting while Mussolini fell silent. Hitler showed no mercy and said that "the crisis could be overridden if Italy emulated Germany's fanatic determination to fight."<sup>13</sup>

While the meeting was in progress, Mussolini was informed that Rome had been under aerial attack. Over six hundred American bombers in a three-hour attack dropped nearly one thousand tons of bombs on a number of targets, including Rome's Tiburtina and Termini railway yards as well as nearby airfields.<sup>14</sup> The bombing severely damaged San Lorenzo, a poor workers' district. The ancient Basilica of San Lorenzo sustained extensive damage. "The raid had destroyed the equivalent of two hundred miles of railway track." When the attack ended fourteen hundred or more Romans had been killed, and another six thousand were seriously wounded.<sup>15</sup> The survivors in San Lorenzo

were stunned and disoriented in the aftermath of the bombing.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, during the break at the Feltre meeting, General Vittorio Ambrosio pressed the Duce to take this opportunity to separate from the Germans, but he refused. When the meeting resumed, Hitler continued with his verbal assault, humiliating Mussolini even further. The Duce was greatly concerned about his absence from the city during the bombing.<sup>17</sup>

When the bombing ended, news circulated that the pope was coming to the Basilica of San Lorenzo. Pius XII, without escort and accompanied by Monsignor Giovanni Battista Montini, arrived in a small car. When people spotted the pope, they “ran to the basilica, in front of which the people encircled him, speaking more with their eyes and tears than with words.” Dan Kurzman described the scene: “The Pope . . . plodded through the smoking rubble of charred houses where more than five hundred victims were strewn, while survivors struggled to touch his white cassock. Then a laborer spread his jacket on the cobblestones and the Pope knelt to pray.”<sup>18</sup>

Pius XII was visibly moved as the people gathered near to hear him and receive his blessing. The pope blessed those around him, the wounded and the dead. He remained in the district, interacting with residents and giving them comfort. Before he left, he cradled a dead infant in his arms. On the evening of July 20, Hitler was given an intelligence report indicating that a coup was planned to oust the Duce and replace him with Badoglio.<sup>19</sup>

Dino Grandi, president of the Chamber of Federations and Corporations, wrote the king: “Our fatherland is on the threshold of defeat and dishonor.” Grandi went to the king and presented his case for Italy’s separation from Germany and Mussolini’s removal from the government.<sup>20</sup> Those who opposed the continued alliance with the Germans planned to use the moribund Grand Council to remove Mussolini and restore the political initiative to Victor Emmanuel. The army and the king backed Grandi and the conspirators. Grandi planned to introduce a no-confidence resolution. He sent a copy of the resolution to the seventy-four-year-old king giving him the constitutional pretext to act.

As far as the Vatican was concerned, Robert Ventresca argued, “the Allies knew, of course, that Pope Pius XII and the Vatican had long opposed Italy’s involvement in the war and worked constantly for years to keep Mussolini from falling into Hitler’s arms, all to no avail.” The goal in 1943 was to approach the pope and plan for a post-Mussolini government. The Vatican gave no indication that it was directly involving itself in Italian internal affairs and thereby violating its official neutrality. What it was doing secretly is another matter. Nonetheless, Pius XII had “authorized papal diplomats to make entreaties with King Victor Emmanuel III in June 1943, to discuss options for getting Italy out of the war and sparing Rome the horrors of aerial bombardment or direct occupation.” The pope made certain they he was fully informed of the Grand Council’s proceeding.<sup>21</sup>

Mussolini convened the Grand Council on July 24 in the Palazzo Venezia. A contentious all-night meeting ensued. Mussolini spoke for nearly two hours. He pleaded with, cajoled, and threatened the members of the council. Grandi led the attack, saying “you have imposed a dictatorship on Italy. You have destroyed the spirit of our Armed Forces. Mussolini attempted to deflect all criticism and the charges leveled against him. He failed to effectively defend his alliance with Germany and his conduct of the war.”<sup>22</sup> Dino Grandi introduced a resolution asking the king to take command of the Italian armed forces and restore a constitutional democracy. The resolution passed with a vote of nineteen to seven with one abstention. Galeazzo Ciano, Mussolini’s son-in-law, voted with the majority.<sup>23</sup> Charges, countercharges, and recriminations were exchanged. The meeting lasted for ten hours and ended in the early hours of July 25. The Grand Council had no power of its own to enforce the resolution, but the military backed the king.

Armed with the constitutional pretext to act, the king summoned Mussolini to the Villa Savoia. Mussolini, dressed in a blue suit and looking tired and gaunt, went to the king’s residence. A military ambulance was waiting hidden and unseen by Mussolini’s entourage of fascist police and functionaries, who waited outside. The king lost no time and got right to the point: “My dear Duce it’s all over. Italy has gone to pieces. Army morale has reached bottom and the soldiers don’t want to fight any longer. The vote of the Grand Council is tremendous. Surely, you have no illusions as to how Italians feel about you at this moment. . . . At this moment, you are the most hated man in Italy.” The king forced Mussolini’s resignation. It was over in twenty-minutes. The king assured the Duce of his personal safety and shook his hand. Dumbfounded, Mussolini was immediately arrested by fifty carabinieri who were hiding in the king’s gardens. The Duce was put in an ambulance and driven off ignominiously to confinement in a military police barracks. Mussolini’s bodyguards and the fascist militia didn’t act to help him. At 10:45 p.m., rumors that had circulated all day were confirmed in a radio broadcast. When the Italians learned that the Duce had been overthrown, there were “explosions of collective joy.” In jubilation, Italians poured onto the streets of Rome. People jammed the Piazza Venezia, and tricolor flags were prominently displayed. In many cities, “busts and statues of the Duce were smashed or dragged clanging through the streets.”<sup>24</sup> Hitler was outraged when the news reached him. His own prestige was on the line, and it had taken a severe blow.<sup>25</sup>

## I'll Go Right into the Vatican

**A**S POLICE ATTACHÉ IN ROME, MAJOR HERBERT KAPPLER, WAS MONITORING the events in Rome. He rigged a short-wave radio in his office, allowing him to be in constant contact with Heinrich Himmler and Ernst Kaltenbrunner, chief of the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA). His reports detailed the confusing events unfolding in Rome. Of particular interest were the maneuvers of Pietro Badoglio's government, the status of the Italian military forces, and the possible involvement of the Vatican with Benito Mussolini's removal. The Nazis were none too happy with Pius XII's latest encyclical of June 1943, "Mystici Corporis Christi" (The Mystical Body of Christ). The encyclical criticized their racist policies and asserted that the Catholic Church embraced all peoples "whatever their nationality and race." The pope's target was unmistakable. The 14,500-word-long encyclical was an unequivocal condemnation of the Reich's euthanasia program and reinforced the pope's condemnation of December 2, 1940.<sup>1</sup>

Kappler, officially was liaison officer to Mussolini's government, and security adviser to the Fascist police. "Technically a police attaché within the German embassy in Rome, . . . Kappler was placed with German diplomats as cover."<sup>2</sup> In reality, his responsibility was to the Gestapo and the foreign intelligence departments of the RSHA. He reported to them, not the Reich Foreign Ministry. The Nazis were thrown into a state of confusion when they learned of Mussolini's ouster and subsequent arrest. Hitler summoned his top lieutenants to Wolfsschanze (Wolf's Lair), his military headquarters in East Prussia, "for the intense, almost unceasing series of meetings that occurred in the days after Mussolini's fall."<sup>3</sup> Before his lieutenants arrived, Hitler made two decisions. Though Badoglio proclaimed his loyalty to the Axis, Hitler believed that he would make a deal with the Allies and decided to ready German troops in a position to take control of Italy. He ordered German troops from southern France and southern Germany to control the Alpine passes, essential to the supply of German divisions already in Italy. The day after Mussolini's ouster the first German troop trains came through the Brenner Pass, a strategic entry point that Badoglio should have secured as soon as he was installed as prime minister.

The führer and Himmler were obsessed with rescuing the Duce and restoring him to power. Hitler dismissed any suggestion that they wait before taking any action. Four plans were improvised, each with secret code names. The first was Eiche (Oak), a plan to find and rescue Mussolini, and the second was Operation Black (Schwartz), the military occupation of Italy. Under consideration was an airborne assault on Rome. The third plan was Operation Axis (Achse), the capture and destruction of the Italian fleet, designed to prevent the Allies from taking control of this valuable asset.<sup>4</sup> The fourth plan, Operation Student, involved the armed takeover of Rome, the restoration of the fascist regime, and the arrest of Badoglio, King Victor Emmanuel, and officers of the Italian armed forces, who were to be flown to Germany. "The practical question was one of timing. Hitler, Göring, and Goebbels wanted to act at once."<sup>5</sup> Oak and Student were tied to one another. The latter involved the elite Second Parachute Division of twenty thousand men under the command Luftwaffe general Kurt Student. Ernst Kaltenbrunner proposed the establishment of a special commando unit to rescue Mussolini under the command of Otto Skorzeny, a longtime friend. Himmler thought that Skorzeny didn't have the necessary experience for this assignment, but Kaltenbrunner prevailed. After meeting Skorzeny, Hitler was convinced that he was the right man for the rescue operation. The führer instructed Skorzeny to keep his mission secret from Marshal Kesselring, and the Reich's diplomats in Rome.

During the proceedings, Hitler's voice filled with rage. Alan Bullock recorded his comments: "Undoubtedly, in their treachery, they will proclaim they will remain loyal to us; but this is treachery. Of course they won't remain loyal. . . . [A]lthough that so-and-so Marshal Badoglio declared immediately that the war would be continued, that won't make any difference. They have to say that. But we'll play the same game, while preparing everything to take over the whole area with one stroke, and capture the riff-raff."<sup>6</sup>

Operation Student included those considered false fascists who voted against Mussolini at the Grand Council's meeting. Approximately fifty of them would be arrested in a number of commando raids and flown to Germany, where they would be executed. Joseph Goebbels wrote in his diary that "the Führer intends to deliver a great coup. In this manner: A parachute division now stationed in Southern France is to land all around Rome. This division is to occupy Rome, arrest the King, Badoglio, and his henchmen, and fly then to Germany. Once we have the King, Badoglio, and all the men behind the scenes in our hands, the whole situation will naturally be changed completely."<sup>7</sup>

As a corollary to Operation Student, Hitler threatened to seize the Vatican as well. Behind the treachery of the king and Badoglio, Hitler believed, was the "invisible hand of the Vatican." Hitler and the Nazi elite were convinced that given Pius XII's track record of opposition to the regime, he was behind all anti-Nazi activity.<sup>8</sup>

Walther Hewel, Ribbentrop's liaison officer at Hitler's headquarters, saw the führer on a daily basis. At the meeting with the führer and his lieutenants, Hewel asked, "What

about the Vatican? Shouldn't we say that the Vatican exits are to be blocked?" In response, the führer thundered: "That doesn't matter now. I'll go right into the Vatican right now. Do you think the Vatican bothers me? Do you think the Vatican embarrasses me? We'll grab it at once. First of all, the whole diplomatic corps is in there, I couldn't care less. That bunch is in there, we'll drag them out, the whole swinish bunch (pack) of them. . . . What of it? We can apologize afterwards, that's nothing to worry about. . . . We will find the evidence of this treachery right in the Vatican." Hewel replied in agreement, "We will find documents in there." Hitler was pleased with Hewel's concurrence and said, "There, yes, we'll find documents. The treason will come to light."<sup>9</sup>

Erwin Rommel expressed his opposition to "the high-risk panicky response." Goebbels agreed with Hitler's assessment of the Vatican's role in Mussolini's removal but not Hitler's goal of invading the Vatican. He wrote in his diary that "Ribbentrop and I opposed the plan most emphatically. . . . I would regard such a measure as exceptionally unfortunate because of the effect our measures would have on the whole of world opinion."<sup>10</sup>

Though Hitler was convinced that the pope was directly involved in the removal of Mussolini from power, Pius discreetly kept himself at a safe distance from the intrigue of the conspirators. The Vatican had actually been caught off guard when they learned that Mussolini was removed. The pontiff determined that if the Vatican joined in and, David Alvarez argues there was "a conspiracy against the Duce and that conspiracy failed, the Papacy would be dangerously exposed." Hitler, at this juncture, probably decided to place the assault on the Vatican on hold for the moment. He would come back to this plan in September when Rome was occupied and under control of the Wehrmacht. Mark Riebling takes a different view and presents persuasive documentation that the pope played a direct but secret role in Mussolini's ouster.<sup>11</sup>

The führer and Himmler "attached great importance to securing Mussolini in person to lead a restored Fascist government."<sup>12</sup> Goebbels, Generals Rommel and Alfred Jodl, and Admiral Donitz thought that Hitler was overly optimistic about the restoration of the fascist regime. Rommel, who served as commander in chief in Italy, felt that precipitate action would force Badoglio into the Allied orbit. Rommel as well as the other military leaders present were highly skeptical about the viability of a restored fascist regime.

Himmler ordered Walter Schellenberg, chief of the Sicherheitsdienst (Security Service, SD) Foreign Intelligence, to contact Kappler immediately. Kappler was to make the search and rescue of Mussolini his top priority.

On the evening of July 27, 1943, two days after Mussolini had been deposed, Waffen SS colonel Eugen Dollmann and Herbert Kappler met the scar-faced six-foot-four Lieutenant Colonel Otto Skorzeny at Albert Kesselring's headquarters in Frascati. The burly thirty-five-year-old Skorzeny extended a giant paw in greeting the two of

them. Both Kappler and Dollmann inspected Skorzeny, whose bore deep facial scars from fourteen duels he fought as a student in Vienna. "The stocky thirty-five-year-old, clad in a fur-lined flying jacket[,] was an imposing figure."<sup>13</sup> Skorzeny arrived in Rome with a contingent of Waffen SS troops. He had just come from the meeting at Wolf's Lair. Himmler ordered Skorzeny to utilize Kappler and Dollmann for Operation Oak. Skorzeny explained that his mission was to find and rescue Mussolini. In addition, he was to implement Operation Student as well. Skorzeny was to conduct a massive coup to prevent Italy's defection from Germany and to arrest Badoglio, the king and the royal family, the cabinet, military officers, and those fascists who were complicit in Mussolini's ouster including Dino Grandi. After dinner, Skorzeny proceeded to tell the two men that Hitler ordered him to "keep his mission secret even from the German Military Command and the Embassy in Rome."<sup>14</sup>

At first, Dollmann was skeptical about the planned coup. He abandoned his misgivings when he learned that Himmler endorsed Operation Student. Dollmann subsequently showed Skorzeny the location of various ministries and royal palaces on a street map, pointing out the carelessly guarded entrances.<sup>15</sup> Skorzeny "dressed half in uniform, half in civilian clothes, with members of the Skorzeny task force had kept driving past key-points in the city, in German army vehicles or on motorcycles. In particular, they had cruised round the Villa Savoia with special frequency."<sup>16</sup> As a consequence of these not so secret forays, Italian officials and the royal household were alerted to the impending danger. Badoglio's police went ahead and arrested key fascists whom they believed would have participated in or cooperated with any action the Germans had planned. Kappler was contemptuous of Skorzeny's careless reconnaissance forays into Rome. He resented Skorzeny's intrusion onto his turf. Nonetheless, Kappler had been ordered to cooperate with the headstrong Skorzeny. Though Kappler and Dollmann had a natural dislike for one another, they agreed that rescuing the Duce and resuscitating the fascist cause by force was a bad idea.

On July 27, Kappler radioed Berlin with his desire to meet with Reichsführer Himmler. Kappler intended to convey his assessment of the feasibility of both Oak and Student. Kappler was quickly informed that his request had been granted. In the afternoon he went to Fredrich von Plehwe's office, which was close to his own in the German embassy. The thirty-one-year-old von Plehwe was the staff officer and assistant to General Enno von Rintelen, military attaché at the embassy. Kappler explained to the staff officer that he came to obtain von Rintelen's backing before he flew to see Himmler. Kappler told Plehwe that he had received an order from Himmler. Kappler was to make necessary preparations for the restoration of the fascist regime. He said that he thought it a bad idea. Plehwe told Kappler that both Rintelen and he believed that the fascist regime could not be brought back to life. As the meeting came to a close, Kappler made it clear that if he failed to convince Himmler he would faithfully carry

out all orders. Kappler promised after his meeting with Himmler that he would provide Plehwe with a report.<sup>17</sup>

Kappler flew to his meeting with Himmler. Himmler immediately rejected Kappler's arguments and for that matter those from any others who may have entertained similar views. He reiterated the purpose of the two operations and that the decision was final. Kappler left and assured the reichsführer of his unquestioning obedience. Four days later, Kappler was true to his word. He went to Plehwe's office and reported that his arguments fell on unconvinced ears.

As it developed, Operation Student was abandoned for good reason. There would have been a bloodbath in Rome with costly street fighting with Italian troops and the carabinieri who were loyal to the king. Kappler also fell into line and proceeded to give Skorzeny whatever help he could and assured him of his complete cooperation.<sup>18</sup> But a major problem remained. They had to locate Mussolini. Was he still in Rome or taken elsewhere?



## I Wanted to Make an Air Drop in Rome

ON JULY 25, 1943, ITALIANS LEARNED THAT KING VICTOR EMMANUEL HAD dismissed and arrested Benito Mussolini. What Italians did not hear was Prime Minister Pietro Badoglio's proclamation that Italy would continue to fight and "remains loyal to her pledged word." A nation's euphoria evaporated with the reality that the war was not at an end.<sup>1</sup>

Neither the king nor Badoglio had plans for using Mussolini's arrest as a step forward to peace and support of the Allies. Badoglio sought to avoid an unconditional surrender to the Allies. A royal-military dictatorship replaced the fascist regime. Roy Palmer Domenico asserted that "Badoglio's forty-five days maintained[,] rather than dismantled, most of Mussolini's terror state. The secret and brutal OVRA police was not disbanded."<sup>2</sup> The Jewish community petitioned Badoglio to annul the race laws. Pietro Badoglio promised that he would, but he never followed through with his pledge. The National Fascist Party (Partito Nazionale Fascista) was disbanded, while political prisoners remained incarcerated. The military in effect had assumed full command of the country and imposed a strict curfew. "In fact, for Jews and non-Jews alike," Susan Zuccotti argues, "Badoglio's forty-five days constituted a period of unwarranted hope that blinded them to a fearful reality."<sup>3</sup> Badoglio's lockdown of civil society and especially the total censorship of the news meant that Italians knew little of the deportations taking place elsewhere in Europe.<sup>4</sup>

Badoglio's brief reign was filled with "intrigue, anxiety, sudden hopes and equally sudden disappointments but, above all, of great uncertainty."<sup>5</sup> Italy was caught between the advances of the Allies and its alliance with Germany; survival and opportunism guided Badoglio's regime in a double game of deception. In July 1943, Adolf Hitler decided to send all available German manpower into central and northern Italy in the belief that this might convince Badoglio not to quit his German ally.

In early August, Italian officials were reassuring the Germans that the new regime would stand by its commitments while at the same time secretly negotiating a surrender with the Allies. Italian negotiators stressed that speed was of the essence, since German

troops were pouring into the country. General Dwight Eisenhower had already set September 9 and Salerno as the location for the invasion of the mainland. A quick surrender was necessary so that the Allied forces would not have to contend with the combined forces of the Germans and Italians. After the successful invasion of Sicily and on the eve of Salerno landing, Allied airpower controlled Italian skies.

General Giuseppe Castellano, Italy's lead negotiator, wanted to know when and where the Allies were planning to land on the mainland.<sup>6</sup> The Allies indicated that as soon as the armistice was announced they would make an airborne assault on Rome coordinated with seaborne landing. Castellano asked, "Are you able to occupy Rome and protect us from the Germans?" The Italians urged that invading forces should land north of Rome.<sup>7</sup> A landing at Civitavecchia just thirty-seven miles northwest of Rome would have compelled German forces to withdraw from the city. The Italians were shocked to learn that only three divisions had been committed to the Allied landing, whose location was not disclosed to the Italians. Meanwhile, German units in Italy were ordered to disarm all Italian forces as Wehrmacht and SS units continued to stream into the country. Hitler had used the months it took Badoglio and his government to reach an agreement with the Allies to bolster and prepare his forces.

Castellano knew that his government wasn't in a position to determine the terms of their surrender, which were hammered out during August and September. When the terms of the surrender were finalized, it was agreed that Italian forces would seize Rome's airfields. In addition, Allied paratroopers would drop into Rome, while Italian ground forces would engage the Germans. On September 3, the Italians ran out of options and signed in secret the armistice with the Allies.

Badoglio failed to issue any orders to halt German troops from pouring into northern Italy through the Brenner Pass. The Germans also disbanded the Italian Fourth Army on the French frontier. In a matter of days the Alpine passes were in German hands, and Erwin Rommel's army took control of Trieste and the lines of communication through Venezia-Giulia and Slovenia. They cut off thirty-two Italian divisions to the south.

On September 6, the Italian high command learned that the main attack would not be near Rome at Anzio but instead would farther south at Salerno, leaving the Italians to defend the capital themselves with the help of only one Allied division.<sup>8</sup>

The following day, General Maxwell Taylor and Colonel William Gardiner secretly entered Rome and met with General Giacomo Carboni, who led the Italian troops defending Rome. Carboni told the Allied commanders that since the landing was to be at Salerno to the south and was one-fifth the size they had anticipated, "it was impossible for the Italian troops to hold the airfields, protect Rome, and give logistical support to the airborne division."<sup>9</sup> He urged Taylor to delay the airborne drop by a few days until the troops were ashore but not to cancel it. The Americans were predisposed to abort

the airborne drop.<sup>10</sup> Prime Minister Badoglio decided to cancel his participation in the airborne assault on Rome, code-named Giant II. The Italians missed the chance at this crucial moment to have left the war, fight with the Allies, and save Rome.<sup>11</sup> Taylor also concluded that Giant II had to be cancelled; he and Major General Matthew Ridgeway, commander of the 101st Airborne, felt under the current circumstances that the operation would have been disastrous. General Bidell Smith disagreed with both Taylor and Ridgeway and felt that the decision was premature. Word of the cancellation reached the planes as they were about to take off on their mission.<sup>12</sup> General Eisenhower felt that the American commanders were overly cautious and lost a great opportunity. "An air landing on Rome and sea landing nearby, instead of Salerno, would have automatically caused us to evacuate all of the southern half of Italy," Albert Kesselring asserted later.<sup>13</sup> General Siegfried Westphal, Kesselring's chief of staff, also believed the Allied strategy to have been flawed and that Rome was vulnerable.<sup>14</sup>

After the war, it was learned that the Germans did not have the twelve thousand troops as previously thought ready to take over the airfields from the Italians.<sup>15</sup> There were only a few anti-aircraft units near Rome and a panzer division about sixty-three miles to the north. General George C. Marshall cabled Eisenhower and expressed his "disappointment with the inability to seize Rome and the landings on the Italian toe," which struck him as unduly conservative. Eisenhower argued, "I wanted to make an air drop in Rome . . . and we were ready to execute the plan." Robert Murray, who helped plan Giant II, concluded that "the airborne commanders had set their minds against the operation from the start for standard military reasons and because nobody trusted the Italians."<sup>16</sup>

On September 8, Radio Algiers carried Eisenhower's announcement: "The Italian government has surrendered its armed forces unconditionally."<sup>17</sup> The Italian War Office had prepared a directive that ordered all Italian armed forces to engage the Germans once the armistice was announced. Badoglio failed to issue the directive, leaving Italian personnel without leadership or instructions. Each command was on its own and would feel the full weight of Nazi anger. Italian radio confirmed the surrender. Italians, especially in Rome, were stunned and confused by the news of Italy's capitulation. Kesselring was now more than ever intent on settling scores with the Italians.

On the morning of September 9, American forces under General Mark Clark landed at Salerno, thirty miles south of Naples. Instead of the three to five months needed to plan a major amphibious expedition, Clark had been given only forty-five days. He had also counted on four assault divisions but received only three. Force size was based on shipping capacity rather than battlefield requirements. The Salerno operation proved to be of no help in the defense of Rome.<sup>18</sup>

To Kesselring's relief, "the Allies landed much farther south than he had dared to hope, not in the neighborhood of Rome as he had feared. . . . Hitler and his military

advisors had already written off the south of Italy, and the German defense plans were based on positions well to the north of Rome.” Sir B. H. Liddell Hart criticized the choice of Salerno because “it conformed all too closely to the opponent’s expectation from the experience of their cautious habit.” Kesselring felt that the Allies gave up a strategic initiative by their insistence on tactical security against air attack, a decision characterized by Liddell Hart as “over-insurance.” Allied planners had not exploited their command of the sea and their air superiority. A successful landing could have been made closer to Rome. Kesselring saw clearly that there was neither a unified Italian command nor a precise set of orders to defend Rome. “The fact that the Allies missed a chance of an airborne landing had eased the tension,” he wrote. “Left to themselves the Italian divisions although outnumbering us by three to one, we were in no actual danger.”<sup>19</sup> When Mussolini was removed from power, the Germans had seven divisions in Italy. After announcement of Italy’s surrender, the number rose to twenty-four.

On September 8, the day Eisenhower announced the armistice, nearly 131 American B-17s bombed the town of Frascati hoping to hit Kesselring’s headquarters, situated between Frascati and Grottaferrata. The raid failed. “An estimated two thousand civilians and dozens of German staff officers died as well as two thousand civilians. Temporarily dispossessed of both his headquarters and his smile, Kesselring crawled from the rubble.”<sup>20</sup> Had the Americans successfully destroyed the German signal center at nearby Mount Cavo, Kesselring would have been forced to retreat to the north.

Badoglio’s government was caught between the hammer and the anvil, between Allied and German forces to the south and the Wehrmacht to the north of Rome. General Mario Roatta, the army chief of staff, suggested that it was “useful not to expose the king and the Government to the risk of capture.” He also told a group with Badoglio present that “if the Germans get their hands on us they will shoot us all. And why should we let them shoot us.”<sup>21</sup> Badoglio and the king decided to flee Rome.

At 5 a.m. on September 9 the royal family, Badoglio, Roatta, and key military leaders—a total of twenty-two men and women—shamelessly fled Rome and headed toward Pescara, 170 miles across the country on the Adriatic Sea, in an effort to save their own skins. From Pescara, they went south to Brindisi hoping to reconstitute the government and preserve the continuity of the nation. “In his flight, Badoglio could easily have gone to the Gran Sasso and taken Mussolini to southern Italy with him as a prisoner, but he chose to ignore a clause in the Italian surrender agreement that called for Mussolini to be handed over to the Allies.”<sup>22</sup>

Before fleeing Rome, Badoglio failed to leave instructions to the armed forces. Who was to take command? Who was to take charge of the defense of the country? These questions were never officially answered. Even many of his ministers did not know that the king and Badoglio were leaving Rome.<sup>23</sup>

Confusion was widespread, and each command was left on its own. Italian forces were quickly overwhelmed. Kesselring later admitted, “left to themselves the Italian

divisions, although outnumbering us by three to one, we were no actual danger.”<sup>24</sup> The Germans had obtained the code used in giving the orders to Italian officers not to fight.

Kesselring issued the Italians an ultimatum to surrender or Rome would be destroyed. Field Marshal Caviglia, having assumed command of the city, had no options left. He agreed on September 10 to surrender all troops around Rome, while Kesselring agreed to respect Rome as an open city. With German troops poised to enter Rome, remnants of Italian troops and ten thousand civilians armed only with rifles rushed to Porta San Paolo to defend the city. Monsignor Carroll-Abbing reported that a few bands of Italian soldiers and civilians erected “barricades in the streets between the Basilica of St. Paul and the gate of the city. Groups of young boys were taking part in the fighting. . . . In the Piazza dei Cinquecento, opposite the railway station, civilian snipers crouching behind overturned carts were trying to dislodge the Germans.”<sup>25</sup> There was neither organization nor a leader for the resistance. Rome fell to the Germans on September 10, 1943. The next day Kesselring declared all Italian territory to be a theater of war under direct German military control.

Italian troops had few options. They could continue to engage the Germans, fight with the Germans against the Allies, join the partisan against the Germans, or wait to be disarmed and risk being shipped off to a labor camp or a concentration camp. Many chose to hide by taking off their uniforms and slipping into anonymity. While Badoglio, the king, and Roatta had saved themselves, the Germans had captured thirty generals and many Italian officials. Thousands of Italian soldiers were captured and shipped on sealed cattle cars to concentration or labor camps.<sup>26</sup>

Maria Teresa Regard had joined in the defense of Rome at Porta San Paolo. During the fighting she went to Levi de Leon, a Roman Jew and a good friend who had remained with his family in their apartment when he heard the Germans were about to enter Rome. Regard pleaded him to go into hiding. She also warned her other Jewish friends to do likewise. They didn’t heed her warning. De Leon along with his wife and sixteen-year-old son were subsequently rounded up and sent to Auschwitz. Regard later joined Gruppi di Azione Patriottica (Patriotic Action Groups), one of the major partisan groups in Rome. Meanwhile, some Jews—unlike de Leon—began to seek safety throughout Rome in private homes, convents, churches, and monasteries.<sup>27</sup>

Rome had been within the grasp of the Allies, whose failure to take the city had more than military consequences. A landing north of Rome coordinated with a paratroop attack on Rome would have forced the Germans to retreat. The Allies’ earlier failure to contain Kesselring in Sicily by not cutting off his escape route had led to a protracted war. The airborne operation was aborted by overly cautious American commanders and indecisive Italians. Badoglio failed to prevent German troops from pouring through the Brenner Pass. For both Allied and Italian forces, a combination of military and political miscalculations—even negligence—allowed the Germans to seize Rome. Once the Germans overran the city, the Jews were in mortal danger and facing

a deadly occupation. The overly cautious strategy of the Allies made it possible for the Germans and fascists to turn on the Jews of Rome and carry out their diabolical plans.

With the collapse of the fascist regime in 1943, Hitler and Himmler turned their racial hatred toward the Jews of Rome. Both men shared the obsessive conviction that they must rid the world of the Roman Jews, “the only living descendants of the ancient Roman people.”<sup>28</sup> Himmler drove the final solution to Rome and beyond to other Italian cities. How were the Jews going to escape the oncoming juggernaut of Nazi depravity that was to be unleashed with greater ferocity? Most Italians were slow to grasp the tragic prospect that suddenly had opened up before them in September 1943. The RSHA circulated a directive that even Jews who held Italian citizenship and were abroad would not be exempt from deportation.<sup>29</sup> Rome’s Jews were unaware that the Nazis were collecting lists of community members in other Italian cities. For Italian Jews this was a period of uncertainty, hesitation, and indecision as they adopted a wait-and-see posture. Soon after the armistice was declared, Nazi police in Bolzano ordered that “pure Jews” were to be taken into custody; twenty-five were deported. Two days after Rome fell, thirty-five Jews were arrested in Merano, Bolzano, and nearby localities and sent to Auschwitz. German army units, along with the fascist militia, arrested four hundred foreign Jews in Cuneo and proceeded on to Novara. In Ferrara, out of a population of eight hundred Jews, two hundred were immediately arrested including Silvio Magrini, president of the Jewish Community of Ferrara. They were first sent to Fossoli and then to Nazi death camps; only five survived.

Within one month after the occupation commenced, roundups and deportation took place in Trieste, Milan, Turin, Florence, Genoa, and smaller cities. The day before the Germans entered Rome, the first large-scale roundup took place in Trieste. After the Italian Social Republic (*Repubblica Sociale Italiana*, RSI) was formed as a puppet state under Mussolini’s leadership on September 23, fascist militiamen, Italian SS police units, and the *Brigate Nere* (the Blackshirts) cooperated with the Nazis and often took the lead in rounding up Jews in central and northern Italy. The fascists made 50 percent of the arrests. The RSI instituted a series of anti-Jewish measures including the confiscation of properties, the dissolution of all the Jewish community organizations, and the arrest of “all Jews of whatever nationality and their internment.”<sup>30</sup> Most Italians viewed the fascist units with a combination of fear and utter contempt.<sup>31</sup> RSI officials were directly involved in locating Jews and aided their subsequent deportation. Approximately half of the arrests of Jews were carried out by Italians.<sup>32</sup> The fascist government had already put in place two hundred civilian internment camps. The internment camps in the north accelerated the deportations to the extermination camps. Fascist Italy was “both progenitor of and collaborator in genocide.”<sup>33</sup>

Ettore Ovazza had been a vocal and enthusiastic supporter of the fascist regime. It enabled him to become a prominent leader in the Jewish community “at the expense

of those who were reluctant to disassociate themselves from Zionism.” Ovazza knew that Jews were persecuted in Germany, but he was blinded by the false assumption that a total devotion to fascism would insulate Italian Jews from a similar fate. The SS did not agree. They killed Ovazza’s son as he attempted to cross into Switzerland. Ettore Ovazza fled Turin with the remainder of his family. They were arrested as they hid in an elementary school and executed. Their bodies were dismembered and then burned in the school’s furnace.<sup>34</sup> Would the news of the ongoing atrocities reach Rome and convince the Jewish leadership that they must act?

## The Worst Horrors of the Nazi Regime

**E**RNST VON WEIZSÄCKER WAS BORN IN STUTTGART. HIS FATHER WAS MINISTER president of Württemberg, and his grandfather was a prominent historian. Weizsäcker's career began first in the navy; he then entered the diplomatic service in 1920, first as a counselor in Basel. He became chargé d'affaires in Switzerland and then assumed other diplomatic posts in Europe. During the early days of the Reich, he was appointed to head the Political Department of the Foreign Ministry. The handsome, blue-eyed Weizsäcker proved to be an excellent administrator. Though not a party member, he was appointed state secretary, a position comparable to assistant secretary of state in the US State Department. Weizsäcker had been state secretary in the Reich Foreign Ministry until the summer of 1943. On several occasions he formally requested a transfer out of Berlin without success. An ardent nationalist, Weizsäcker was quiet and cautious. He found the atmosphere in the Foreign Ministry unbearable, as it was filled with intrigues and plots. Moreover, he often gave voice to his moderation, only to be rebuffed.<sup>1</sup>

Weizsäcker could no longer stand his superior, the obnoxious, overbearing, fundamentally ignorant, vain, Joachim von Ribbentrop, who insisted on the use of "von" Ribbentrop even though he was not raised in an aristocratic noble family. Ribbentrop, along with several others who held high positions in the Reich, were unfit to hold positions of responsibility. The foreign minister was a faithful mannequin unconditionally subservient to Hitler. Intimidation was Ribbentrop's modus operandi in his dealings with both foreign leaders and the personnel in the Foreign Ministry. Though fluent in French and English, he insisted on an interpreter when dealing with diplomats from France, Britain, and the United States. Sumner Wells, US undersecretary of state, characterized his diplomatic style as "a mix of bullying bluster and icy coldness coupled with lengthy monologues praising Hitler." Ribbentrop was unconditionally subservient to the führer.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Ribbentrop was notoriously disorganized, a connoisseur of chaos who sent his personal staff on pointless errands. Foreign leaders quickly discerned that he knew little of foreign affairs and nothing of foreign policy.



He was thunderously incompetent but controlled “most of the flow of foreign political information to the dictator.” Weizsäcker, in his memoirs, admitted, “I honestly hated him. . . . [I]f one were to visit any mental home one would find a number of people of the same type as Ribbentrop.”<sup>3</sup> He was appalled by Ribbentrop’s inability to submit to the rules of conversation. Weizsäcker’s dilemma was insurmountable. He hated both Ribbentrop and Hitler but felt duty bound to the career men in the foreign ministry whom he felt were competent and honorable men. Weizsäcker felt that the diplomatic service would play a vital role in postwar Germany and held the staff together.

As early as 1940, Weizsäcker saw an opportunity to distance himself from the regime and Ribbentrop. Weizsäcker requested the appointment as ambassador to the Holy See, since Diego von Bergen was seriously ill. Bergen did not support the policies of the Reich and sought to disassociate himself from its excesses. Weizsäcker’s request was not acted upon. Three years later, Weizsäcker again requested the appointment to the post in Rome, this time with Bergen’s support. Ribbentrop accommodated him since he wanted “a more servile and less hostile state secretary, [and] moreover he suspected Weizsäcker’s loyalty to the Foreign Minister.”<sup>4</sup> There were deeper reasons for Weizsäcker’s desire to leave Berlin.

Weizsäcker was fundamentally a conservative as well as a moderate nationalist. He favored an authoritarian regime but not the Nazis led by the fanatical Hitler. Though Weizsäcker supported some of the achievements of the regime, he was appalled by the dangerous course of its foreign policy. He was certain that road would lead to an unwinnable war and the eventual destruction of Germany. Weizsäcker opposed Hitler on key issues and was counted among the members of the resistance centered in Canaris’s *Abwehr*. In 1942, Weizsäcker warned Ulrich von Hassell, a fellow diplomat, that he was being investigated for his involvement with the German resistance. Hassell was sickened by the “vile persecution of the Jews.” He shared Weizsäcker’s disdain for Ribbentrop and Hitler.

Before the war, Weizsäcker encouraged the British to take a strong stand against Hitler while officially urging the *führer* to moderate his demands. Weizsäcker covertly informed the British of a potential Nazi-Soviet pact, borne out by subsequent events. He was “against the war but eager to stave off defeat” once it started, “hostile to Hitler but not one of those who plotted against his person.”<sup>5</sup> When Weizsäcker lost his son early in the war, he was convinced that Hitler had to be removed from power. Hitler’s invasion of Poland and his attack on the West propelled him to join the anti-Hitler conspirators. Weizsäcker had opposed Hitler’s absorption of the Sudetenland and thought that the decision to invade Poland would surely bring a war with the West. He supported the anti-Hitler conspirators, especially their overtures in 1940 to enlist Pius XII in their plot against Hitler. Weizsäcker had pinned his hopes for some time on effectuating an end to the war. He believed that the pope was the principal instrument for

accomplishing that objective. Weizsäcker was fully aware of the pope's peace initiatives and his involvement with the German resistance. It was apparent to Weizsäcker that Hitler was intent on a course that would provoke a disastrous war for Germany and Europe. "When war came he persuaded himself that he served his country first and Hitler after or not at all." The handsome, taciturn, white-haired Weizsäcker was a realist, but his attempt to serve as a moderating influence on Nazi policies came to a dead end. He opposed the invasion of Russia, and his effort to change the Reich's course on the Jewish question failed.

Despite Weizsäcker's anti-Hitler views, it became impossible to distance himself completely without becoming part of the evil. As state secretary he signed documents or initialed deportation orders. His complicity in the persecution of the Jews would haunt him for the rest of his life.

Weizsäcker reasoned that if he resisted signing such measures, he would have been removed from his post. By remaining at his position, he could attempt to take some action to save some Jews or soften their application. Among the decisive factors for his desire to leave his post in Berlin for Rome was that "his name was being tarnished by association with the worst horrors of the Nazi regime."<sup>6</sup>

Weizsäcker welcomed the opportunity to leave "the frenetic atmosphere in Berlin, redolent of personal intrigues and competency conflicts, ominous with the possibility of arrest by the Gestapo." In addition, there was always the fear that his connection with the German resistance would be exposed. He calculated that as ambassador of the Holy See "he might pursue 'possibilities of peace,' but the appointment of a new ambassador "at this juncture was . . . quite impossible."<sup>7</sup>

Weizsäcker's appointment was not considered plum, especially since Italy in 1943 was nearing total defeat. Whether he realized it or not, Weizsäcker would be facing many insurmountable challenges.

Weizsäcker assumed his post in June 1943 as the confusing political situation and events unraveled with increasing rapidity. He decided that he would make every effort to avoid an open break between the Reich and the Holy See. "During the summer of 1943, he performed the normal diplomatic functions of reporter and representative."<sup>8</sup>

In July, Ambassador Weizsäcker reported to the Foreign Office that the pope "could see no sign of peace negotiations. One month later the Vatican had spelled out aims that must have been wholly consonant with Weizsäcker's desire for a peace that would preserve Germany from ruin."<sup>9</sup> Soon after Mussolini was removed from power, Weizsäcker was certain that Badoglio would withdraw from the war and abandon Italy's alliance with the Reich.

Once Rome fell to the Germans, Weizsäcker would have to steer between competing military and diplomatic authorities and maneuver carefully with his superiors in Berlin. This complicated his mission in Rome. Rudolf Rahn, the German ambassador

to Italy, and his staff left Rome and maintained an official liaison with the resurrected fascist regime, leaving behind a skeleton staff. Though constrained by his responsibility to the foreign ministry, "Weizsäcker did have considerable independence in Rome and worked easily with the Vatican for a number of considerable objectives."<sup>10</sup>

The day after the occupation of Rome began, Albrecht von Kessel, the new first secretary to the Holy See, tipped off the Vatican that the Germans intended to place the pope "under their protection," Kessel said. "Hitler blamed Pius for the fall of Italy, because the Pope had talked by phone with Roosevelt."<sup>11</sup>

During the first week of the occupation of Rome, Weizsäcker met with Albrecht von Kessel, who became his most trusted aide in the Villa Napoleon, the German embassy to the Holy See. Von Kessel, known as "Teddy" to his colleagues, had not joined the Nazi Party since he was staunchly opposed to Hitler and the regime. Von Kessel did not hide his disdain for the führer. Both men were certain that the persecution of the Jews was imminent and that "the worst was to be expected." According to von Kessel, a meeting was "held to discuss what we could do to help the Jews."<sup>12</sup>

They decided to attempt to warn the Jews indirectly and avoid detection. Kessel's friend, Alfred Fahrner, was the Swiss secretary-general of the Institute of International Law in Rome attached to the League of Nations. Kessel met with Fahrner and urged him to inform any Jewish leader to warn all Jews that they should immediately leave their homes and go into hiding. Fahrner agreed to this course of action. After the meeting with Fahrner, Kessel was convinced he had done his duty.<sup>13</sup>

Within two days, the two men met once again. Fahrner told Kessel that he passed on the warning to his Jewish contacts. Unfortunately, they believed that the Germans were behaving correctly and so weren't worried. Kessel was dumbfounded when Fahrner said that he agreed with this assessment.<sup>14</sup> "The Swiss and the Jews had failed to understand that it was order not chaos that the SS needed to carry out its work." Deportation was certain to follow after order was established. Kessel was stunned by the failure of his friend and his Jewish contacts to comprehend the danger.<sup>15</sup> Kessel went ahead and warned a Jewish friend, who took his warning seriously enough and left Rome. Some Jews as the days passed sought refuge in Vatican properties or trekked south to Allied lines. Many were either complacent or paralyzed by indecision.

In the following months, von Kessel and Paul Franken, an Abwehr agent, would become a vital link between the anti-Hitler conspirators in Germany. Von Kessel and Franken served as secret agents to the Vatican and met with either Father Robert Leiber or Ludwig Kass. In particular, von Kessel and Franken forged a vital connection to Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg, who would figure prominently in an assassination plot to kill Hitler that materialized one year later.<sup>16</sup>

Weizsäcker went ahead and appealed to Ribbentrop to take action in regard to the atrocities committed against the Jews. Weizsäcker considered the persecution of Jews

morally indefensible. He concluded that he couldn't bring an end to Hitler's policies and could only limit their impact.<sup>17</sup> On several occasions Weizsäcker turned away individuals who offered to reveal the hiding places of Jews.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, Pius XII instructed Cardinal Maglione to meet Weizsäcker "with an appeal in general terms . . . on behalf of the civilian population of every race, and especially for the weakest, women, the elderly, children, the lower classes."<sup>19</sup>

## Do Not Worry

PRIOR TO THE GERMAN OCCUPATION, MOST ITALIANS WERE UNAWARE OF the deportations taking place in Europe. Any news they received was strictly censored, and the news from non-Italian sources was regarded as Allied propaganda. Italian Jews didn't comprehend that they were to be targeted for persecution and deportation. In their minds, certainty was to be questioned. One person who recognized the danger was Israel Zolli, the chief rabbi of Rome. The Germans followed a pattern in which the chief rabbi of a city and other Jewish leaders were the first to be apprehended and then deported. Zolli and leaders of the Roman Jewish community were to be immediate targets once Rome was occupied.

Zolli was born Israel Zoller on September 17, 1881, in Brody, "a predominantly Jewish city" in Polish Galicia (now Ukraine). As part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Brody was also populated by Poles, Greeks, and Armenians. Zoller's mother belonged to a family with a rabbinical tradition of more than four centuries, and they wished that Israel would become a rabbi. At the age of twenty-four he studied at the University of Vienna and then went on to the University of Florence, where he completed his doctorate in philology. At the same time, he also pursued his rabbinical studies with Hirsch Perez Chajes at the Italian Rabbinical College in Florence. Zoller became a professor of Hebrew and Semitic languages at the University of Padova, "where he enjoyed an enthusiastic following and lectured widely to non-Jewish audiences."<sup>1</sup>

Zoller was named vice rabbi of Trieste in 1912, reuniting with Hirsch Perez Chajes who had been appointed chief rabbi. After World War I Trieste was united with Italy in 1920, and Zoller was named chief rabbi. He was granted Italian citizenship, and his surname was Italianized to Zolli. Zolli acquired a reputation as a leading intellectual in Europe.

The Jews in Trieste were split between the Zionists and those who desired to collaborate with the fascists. This pattern existed throughout Italy. Zolli worked to heal the breach by helping the Zionist faction to obtain passports and money. He also helped those who collaborated with the fascists by finding them work. Zolli, like his fellow

rabbis, was also confronted by the difficulty of accommodating their Orthodox and Reform congregants.

Zolli was fluent in German and had mastered Italian. When the Nazis came to power, he acquired reports describing the conditions Jews faced in Germany. As chief rabbi he was in a position to talk with hundreds of refugees from many countries in Europe, many of whom passed through Trieste. Zolli met with Professor Armand Kaminka of Vienna and Professor Torczyer and inquired about conditions in Austria and Germany. Given his position as chief rabbi, he said, "I had the opportunity of reading all kinds of documents that placed before my eyes the whole reality of the terrifying situation."<sup>2</sup> Zolli spoke with many refugees who provided him with crucial insight into Nazi persecutions. As a result, Zolli was more knowledgeable and fearful of Nazi intentions than many of his Italian colleagues. In the early 1930s, he preached in the Trieste synagogue against Nazi racial policies. Zolli made every effort to save the German Jews who fled from the Reich. He assisted a large number of them to flee aboard two Trieste ships owned by Lloyds of London.

In 1935 in an effort to remain at his teaching post at the University of Padova, Zolli signed the required loyalty oath even though he was not a fascist sympathizer. Twelve hundred professors in Italy also signed the oath; only twelve refused to comply, three of whom were Jews.<sup>3</sup> Zolli openly preached against the passage of the Nuremberg laws.

With the passage of the anti-Semitic laws, Zolli was forced to leave his teaching post. In 1937 he and other rabbis signed a declaration defying a fascist order for Jews to sever their ties to world Jewry. Some in the community and those who were still fascists were appalled by this act of defiance, and the community was split over this issue.<sup>4</sup>

Zolli protested in a letter to Benito Mussolini when the synagogue in Trieste was vandalized in 1938. By 1938 Zolli became an avowed antifascist. One of his congregants had asked him what he thought would happen to all the Jews in Europe. Zolli responded that they were in grave danger and that he would remain at this post and not flee Trieste.

According to the fascist anti-Semitic laws, foreign-born Jews who became citizens after 1919 were stripped of their citizenship. "In Zolli's case, the Prefect of Trieste stripped him of his Italian citizenship by decree in May 1939. The state had rejected him as Chief Rabbi because he technically was a Polish national." While still posted in Trieste, he passed on information regarding Adolf Hitler's persecution of the Jews to Angelo Sacerdoti, the chief rabbi of Rome. This was a naive attempt to enlist Sacerdoti in an attempt to persuade Mussolini to exert his influence on the Nazi regime to alter its anti-Jewish policies.

In 1940, the fifty-nine-year-old Zolli was offered the prestigious but vacant post of chief rabbi of Rome and rector of the Rabbinical College. Zolli was enigmatic, an internationally known scholar who was cerebral and seemed remote. "He had arrived in

Rome,” Gordon Thomas writes, “with his second wife Emma, and his daughters Dora and Miriam. His first wife had died after giving birth to Dora.” In the 1930s Jews from the north moved to the capital. H. Stuart Hughes asserted that “many of them never, or only fleetingly, enrolled as full-fledged members of Rome’s Jewish community; they never became Roman Jews in the same sense as those whose ancestors had lived on the banks of the Tiber from time immemorial. In sum, a triple cleavage—of social class, of religious observance, and of date of arrival—split the city’s Jewish population into sharply contrasting mentalities.”<sup>5</sup>

Before Zolli had arrived at his post, a split had erupted between David Prato, the outgoing chief rabbi, and the CER’s governing council. Prato felt that the council was encouraging assimilation under the influence of fascist ideology. The rupture occurred over the very definition of who was to be considered Jewish. Prato insisted that children born from an intermarried couple were not Jewish. The CER’s governing council argued otherwise that they were entitled to be raised in the Jewish faith. Prato ultimately resigned his position. Zolli assumed his post amid this ongoing division that was not resolved by the departure of Prato.

The vast majority of Roman Jews who still lived in the former ghetto were poor, proud, and not well educated in an area that was for all intents and purposes a slum. Life was harsh as they tried to eke out a living. An insular mentality and their distinct Roman Jewish identity led them to be suspicious of the outsider.<sup>6</sup>

Zolli was confronted by another preexisting division within the Jewish community among those who were still partisans of Mussolini. Though the racial laws impacted all Jews, one segment of the community maintained their allegiance to the regime. They hoped that whatever contacts they had in the regime would provide them with protection and benefits. The other faction who were in the minority included those who clearly opposed the fascist regime. The fascist anti-Zionist and pro-Zionist Jews were vocal within the community. Distinct class difference existed between the Jewish leadership and the majority of the poorer Jews.

Added to this mix of emotions was the fact that Zolli was regarded as an outsider, particularly within the established leadership including Ugo Foa and Dane Almansi. The ghetto Jews thought of themselves as more Roman than the Romans. Zolli wasn’t a Roman Jew; he was a Polish Jew who became a naturalized Italian.<sup>7</sup> The rabbi would have a difficult and perhaps insurmountable task of uniting the divisions within the community at large and the leadership in particular. These divisions would play out in Zolli’s relationship with and his place within the community’s leadership. Zolli was in an uneasy position of having to deal on one hand with Foa, president of the Jewish Community of Rome (Comunità Ebraica di Roma, CER), and on the other hand with Almansi, president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (Unione delle comunità ebraiche italiane, UCEI). “Foa and Almansi had well-defined and extensive powers

with regard to native Jews.”<sup>8</sup> The structure of leadership in the Roman community included Foa and a board of fifteen elected councilors. Both the president and the board members were mostly elected from the “prominente,” the most well off. “In practice this meant assuring the perpetuity of the apparatus.”<sup>9</sup>

According to a 1930 law, the chief rabbi could not speak on nonreligious matters. Only the president and the council could do so, and they were determined to protect their turf. Foa urged Zolli to become acquainted with the inhabitants of the ghetto. In addition to his rabbinate duties, Zolli taught in the ghetto school.

The fifty-six-year-old Foa was born in Florence and had lived in Leghorn. He followed the pattern of other Jews who fought in World War I. Foa was commissioned a captain and decorated for his bravery. When the war ended, he began his legal studies and joined the National Fascist Party to advance his career. Once Mussolini assumed power, Foa’s abilities and his family name resulted in a rapid ascent. The Foas were a distinguished and influential family. Two years before the passage of 1938 the racial laws, Ugo Foa was appointed a magistrate by the Ministry of Justice and moved his family to Rome from Tuscany. Foa was a scholar and possessed “a brilliant legal mind.” As magistrate, he administered fascist justice not realizing “that one day this justice would be fused with a Nazi attempt to obliterate his community.”<sup>10</sup>

Foa brought with him an impressive pedigree enhanced by his presidency of a veterans organization and various honorary titles. He hobnobbed among the prominente and continued to rely on these influential contacts once the racial laws were imposed, forcing him from his position as magistrate. Foa went into private practice, and his extensive contacts enabled him to earn a comfortable living and reside in an expensive apartment in the fashionable Parioli district of Rome even after the implementation of the racial laws, while some of his friends left Italy for safer destinations. The prominent members of the Jewish community made Foa president of the CER. The council (*giunta*) had only one member from the ghetto, while the rest were prominent Jews. The class differences within the council were a reflection of those within the community at large. Many among the prominent were financially well off, living outside of the cramped ghetto. The tall silver-haired Foa brought an impressive bearing to his new position. He worked diligently to bend, if not ameliorate, the impact of the racial laws on the Jews.

Another part of the structural organization of the Jewish leadership was UCEI president Dante Almansi. “The barrel-chested forty-year-old came from modest origins in Trastevere.”<sup>11</sup> He held positions within the police system, serving in the offices of the vice chief of police, and as prefect of a number Italy’s provinces. He became deputy chief of the Roman police force.

In his position with the state police, Almansi may have helped to cover up the murder of Giacomo Matteotti, Mussolini’s outspoken and fearless opponent. Matteotti’s



murder nearly brought down Mussolini's government just two short years after assuming power. Mussolini rewarded Almansì with a regional prefecture (governor). Also, as a result of the Matteotti affair, Almansì formed two influential contacts; Achile Starace, secretary of the National Fascist Party secretary, and Guido Buffarini-Guidi, head of the Interior Ministry. Almansì was highly respected and became one of the most influential Jews in Italy.

After the racial laws were implemented, Almansì was removed from his government position. In 1939 he became president of the UCEI. He worked to soften the impact of the racial laws on Italian Jews. Almansì was unable to comprehend the inherent danger of Mussolini's alliance with Hitler and that the Duce was clearly aping the Nuremberg laws. Even when others were confronted with the danger of the fascist-Nazi alliance, Almansì felt that he could rely on his contacts within the regime. Dan Karman states that prior to the passage of the racial laws, "Foa, Almansì, and most other Jews occupying high places had no intention of voluntarily rejecting their source of bread and butter; nor would they give up hope in a system they had so loyally served, one they had simply accepted as a way of life, whatever its merits or defects."<sup>12</sup>

Zola often wondered aloud how Foa and Almansì could have attained their positions within the fascist regime without compromising themselves. The rabbi was not afraid to air this view to whomever might be willing to listen, and those opinions got back to Foa and Almansì. This only added to the split within the Jewish leadership that was to become more pronounced at this critical juncture.

Outside of the formal structure of the community was the Delegation for the Assistance of Jewish Emigrants (Delegazione Assistenza Emigranti Ebre, DELASEM). Originally DELASEM was based in Genoa, but the leaders had to go into hiding. They transferred their funds to Don Francesco Repetto, a catholic priest who carried on with DELASEM's task of helping refugees. The Rome-based branch of DELASEM had Renzo Levi, a wealthy industrialist, as its president, largely an honorary position. The short, stocky Levi was also a member of the community's council. He was forceful and persuasive in his presentations. Levi and Almansì maintained separate offices on the left bank of the Tiber, a brief walk to the Tempio Maggiore and the ghetto.

Settimio Sorani was the chief executive officer of DELASEM. Levi and Sorani were native-born Romans. DELASEM received funds from a number of Jewish agencies in the United States and other countries as well. The Vatican played a direct role in the work of DELASEM. As early as 1940, Settimio proposed to the leadership a number of measures that could be taken should the Germans occupy Italy.

As a result of a number of their influential contacts, Levi and Sorani were informed about the developing Holocaust. Levi in 1943 also learned of the roundup of the Jews in northern Italy, and their deportation only confirmed his fears. Levi and Sorani presented Almansì with the information they had gathered but couldn't convince the

president. Almansi's only response was "true or not these things can't happen in Italy."<sup>13</sup> Two days before the occupation of Rome, Levi and Sorani along with their families, armed with non-Jewish identities, went into hiding. While in hiding, they continued to warn the community and urged Foa and Almansi to follow their example. Levi and Sorani also hid or destroyed DELASEM's files and documents. Secretly they advised foreign Jews to cross into Allied territory where they would be safe. Levi and Sorani's attempts to warn community leaders coincided with those of Rabbi Zolli.

Levi and Sorani urged Foa to warn the community of the danger that the impending occupation of the city posed to the Jews. In addition, Levi and Sorani gave to the community president the information they had acquired from reliable sources that clearly pointed to the impending disaster that awaited the Jews. Foa felt that the information was unreliable, an exaggeration. For the next two months, Sorani and Levi repeated their warnings to both Foa and Almansi. Levi, who was never shy about expressing himself to the CER's council, surely repeated his warnings during their deliberations. Settimio's sister Rosina was Foa's secretary. No doubt, her brother shared his information with her as well. She reinforced and shared her brother's views with Foa. On a number of occasions the BBC reported that Jews were being killed and gassed. Foa remained unmoved. The leaders and the community at large refused to believe that these reports were accurate.

In March 1943 Rabbi Zolli met with Foa and had in hand numerous letters whose authors throughout Europe had since been killed by the Nazis. Zolli proceeded to tell him of the fate of the Jewish communities in Europe. He believed that the Jews of Rome were not safe. An acute sense of realism gripped the rabbi. He was determined to act to save the Jews, convinced that they were in grave danger. The rabbi's fears were confirmed by a well-placed informant who told him that the Nazis were intent on persecuting the Jews of the eternal city. On September 9, 1943, the rabbi delivered a speech in the Tempio Maggiore. He spoke about the seriousness of the situation for all Romans, particularly the Jews, but had little impact on his audience. Zolli decided first to appeal to Almansi and then proceed to Foa. Almansi and Foa "were different personalities. Almansi never had quite lost his streetwise stare that suggests he often did not believe what he had heard. Foa had the self-control of a judge."<sup>14</sup>

On the evening the Germans were poised to enter Rome, Rabbi Zolli called Almansi from the ushers' office at the temple. He told Almansi in no uncertain terms that the Germans would be in Rome the following day. Zolli implored him, "Let us meet with the President of the Community of Rome. Do invite him to be in your office tomorrow at seven. I shall tell you what I think must be done to protect the Israelite population. If you follow me, I will take upon myself the greater part of the responsibility. . . . If only you agree and act at once." Zolli remembered Almansi's response. "Ha, ha, ha! He laughed so loud that it was heard by Mrs. Gemma, an usher in the temple, who was

holding a candle near me. It was the only light we could use, as electric lights were forbidden.”<sup>15</sup> Almansi continued in a tone of shocked naivete. “How can a mind as clear as yours think of interrupting the regular functioning of offices and the regular conduct of Hebrew life? As recently as yesterday, I went to the Minister and received quite reassuring information. Do not worry.” “But you see . . .,” Zolli gasped at Almansi’s cavalier assessment of Jewish security. With a whiff of condescension Almansi replied, “No, I repeat that you can keep quite calm. And, moreover, you must communicate absolute confidence to the people. Don’t worry, and have a good night.” Zolli was incredulous at Almansi’s response. He hung up and turned to an usher in the temple who was in earshot of the conversation and said, “Remember, in Rome there will be a bath of blood. Who knows how many Jews will pay with their life.” Zolli was determined not to give up in his effort to warn and protect the community.<sup>16</sup>

The next day when the Germans marched into Rome, Zolli waited in desperation for Foa to contact him one way or another. But the CER president did not think it important enough to call the rabbi. Zolli went to the temple only to find the offices deserted. In an atmosphere fraught with confusion and danger, he went to the regional commissioner of the police. The commissioner told him that he was listening to a broadcast from London Radio. He said that the report asserted that after the Nazis entered Prague, they killed the chief rabbi. The commissioner advised Zolli to leave his house and go into hiding until it was safe to return. Zolli’s fears were confirmed after the liberation of Rome, when it was learned that the chief rabbis of Modena, Bologna, Orvieto, Florence, and Genoa had all been deported and killed in concentration camps.

Rabbi Zolli was faced with a torturous dilemma. How was he to convince Almansi and Foa that there was a real and present danger to the Jewish community? Zolli, an opponent of complacency, was determined to continue his efforts to warn and protect the community.

Elsewhere there were examples of a different response than that of the Roman leadership. The day before Zolli phoned Almansi, the chief rabbi of Florence, Nathan Cassuto, had warned his congregation and the community leaders to disperse and hide. He went from house to house urging them to flee to the countryside or to convents using false names. They accepted his appeal, and few Jews were found in their homes.

The Germans entered Ancona in September on the eve of the Yom Kippur fast. An attempt to round up the Jews of Ancona failed, since Don Bernadino, a Catholic priest, warned Elio Toaff, the chief rabbi. Giorgio Terni, president of the Jewish Community of Ancona, and Toaff shut down all offices. Toaff closed the temple amid the protests of many in the congregation. He warned the congregation not to attend Yom Kippur services and that they must immediately go into hiding. Terni and Toaff arranged that many of the Jews would be given refuge in the countryside with peasants of the Marches. The peasants took them in without any objection but realized they were risking their

lives. When the Germans raided Jewish homes, they were gone, and none were captured or deported.<sup>17</sup> Though the problem in Rome was more complex, Toaff and the leaders in other cities served as models for survival. Recognizing the danger, acting immediately, securing the community membership lists, and taking direct immediate action were the essential ingredients.

Most Romans could not ignore the fact that German troops were posted around the entrances to Vatican City, replacing the carabinieri. Romans should have realized that even the Vatican was at risk. The official explanation was that the troops were there to protect the Vatican from “irresponsible elements.” Protection from whom? Which irresponsible elements? Pius XII, though alarmed, was not fooled or intimidated by their presence. Jews who had been sheltered within the Vatican and extraterritorial properties were secretly transferred into convents once German forces occupied Rome.<sup>18</sup>

## Like a City of the Dead

ON SEPTEMBER 10, 1943, THE GERMANS MARCHED PAST THE ARCH OF Constantine and down Via del Imperio. Rome was a city in turmoil and came to a nearly total standstill. Few people were seen on the streets, as most stayed indoors for their own safety. Thousands peered from darkened windows. The streets were littered with shells, puddles of blood, and grenade shrapnel. Artillery equipment, a burned-out armored car, and abandoned cars were visible. Broken glass and rubbish were on many of its streets. Snipers shot at German soldiers, who retaliated with machine-gun fire. Wehrmacht troops spread through the city like a spider weaving its web.

Mary Saint Luke, mother superior of the Holy Child, resided on the Via Veneto. Born Jesse Lynch in Brooklyn, she spoke Italian, German, French, and English. Her facility with four languages made her ideally suited for the Vatican Information Bureau. She adopted Jane Scrivener as her pen name for her diary. On September 11, 1943, she recorded in her diary that Rome “was like a city of the dead. No shops open. No policemen about anywhere. No one going to work. No buses. No trams. . . . [A]nd pathetic pools of blood lay on the pavement, blackening in the hot sunlight. The city was left to its own devices.”<sup>1</sup> Field Marshal Albert Kesselring immediately asserted his authority:

The Italian territory under my command is declared to be a war territory. It is subject throughout to German martial law. Any crime committed in this territory against German armed forces will be punished according to German martial law. . . . Those organizing strikes or sabotage, as well as snipers, will be executed immediately. . . . Until further notice private correspondence is suspended. All telephone conversations must be as brief as possible, and they will be strictly monitored. Italian civil authorities and organizations are responsible to me for the maintenance of public order. They will prevent all acts of sabotage and of passive resistance to German measures.<sup>2</sup>

Kesselring’s declaration that Rome was to be an open city was pure fiction. The city contained troops of the Afrika Korps as well as two thousand to three thousand

SS, Gestapo, and Wehrmacht soldiers. Key officers were housed in the Hotel Flora, and the Excelsior on the Via Veneto became their headquarters. Throughout the occupation, troops, armored vehicles, and tanks traversed the city's streets, moving to and from the front and using Rome's open-city status as a protective umbrella. Nazi flags with a huge black swastika against a red and black background flew throughout Rome. Jane Scrivener vividly described the scene at the Vatican. "By midday St. Peter's was shut. . . . The same for Vatican City: Porta Santa Anna was hermetically closed. . . . Palatine Guards reinforced the Swiss, who are not very numerous."<sup>3</sup>

By early evening, Rome was ominously quiet. The city became sullen and somewhat cold. People were stunned; they whispered in hush tones wondering what would come next. On the evening of September 10, Adolf Hitler spoke from his headquarters in East Prussia. His recorded remarks were transmitted from Berlin and heard on Radio Rome. Hitler had not uttered a word in public since Benito Mussolini was deposed. Joseph Goebbels urged him to make a public statement. For the first time Hitler's speech was relayed without the customary Goebbels introduction, "the 'Sieg Heils,' the cheers, the applause of a Nazi audience. . . . His speech, delivered hurriedly, was over in fifteen minutes. Hitler lavished praise on Mussolini as 'the greatest son of Italian soil.'"<sup>4</sup> The *führer* promised that Italy would pay for deposing "her greatest son" (Mussolini) and her great betrayal. He declared that the measures to be imposed on them were to going to be "very hard."

The Wehrmacht, headed by Generals Kesselring and Erwin Rommel, governed Italy. Kesselring picked General Rainer Stahel to be the military commandant of Rome. During World War I, Stahel rose in the ranks of the Luftwaffe from colonel to major general. He served in southern Russia and was awarded the Iron Cross.<sup>5</sup> Stahel didn't control all of the police forces of the city, some of whom were under the authority of SS Herbert Kappler. Kappler, in turn, was under the authority of General Karl Wolff, commander of the SS in Italy.

On the second day of the occupation "German troops were everywhere. Tanks, armored cars and machine guns were practically at every corner."<sup>6</sup> The rhythmic clumps of nailed boots were to become a familiar sound, producing fear and resentment simultaneously. "A general climate of fear paralyzed the city." Romans were constantly being stopped on the street. Paolo Monelli described the scene:

It was forbidden to ride a bicycle, forbidden to walk along certain sidewalks, forbidden to cross certain streets, forbidden to stock up on food, forbidden to telegraph or telephone outside Rome, forbidden to enter or leave the city, forbidden to spend the night at a friend's house. It was dangerous to carry a package under your arm, to walk with a rapid gait, to have a beard grown too recently or to wear dark glasses. It was a mortal danger to hide a fugitive . . . or to listen to the [Allied] radio broadcasts from Bari or Palermo.<sup>7</sup>

During the first weeks of the occupation, it was a common sight to see German soldiers stopping civilians and demanding that they turn over their jewelry and money. The Germans went on a rampage, plundering the wealth of Rome, looting houses, and openly and shamelessly robbing the Italians at gunpoint.<sup>8</sup> Soldiers looted stores. “Other Germans broke into the apartment of the pope’s sister, killed her lodger who opened the door, then ate and drank their fill before looting and going away.”<sup>9</sup>

Edicts and proclamations imposing restrictions written in German and Italian became a daily occurrence. General Stahel gave the Romans twenty-four hours to turn in any weapons they had in their possession. Anyone found with a weapon either on their person or in their home would be shot. Few Romans complied with this demand. Additional punishable activities included the following:

Harboring or helping escaped prisoners of war: death.

Making contact with escaped prisoners of war: hard labor for life.

printing, publishing, or circulating news derogatory to the prestige of the Axis:  
life imprisonment.

Owning a wireless transmitter: death.

Looting in evacuated areas: death.

Desertion of work or sabotage: death.

Not fulfilling labor obligations: death.

Taking photographs outdoors: hard labor for life.

It was also clear that anyone hiding Jews would be shot. Anyone found printing or distributing anti-German newspapers or circulars was to be shot. The clandestine distribution of leaflets and newspapers became widespread, further infuriating the authorities. This led to still another edict stating that even the act of reading or picking up such material, some of which was dropped by air by the Allies, was subject to severe penalties. Young and old ignored this restriction. At night, in violation of the curfews, many proclamations that had been posted around the city were torn down.

Initially the curfew imposed on all Romans extended from 7 p.m. to 6 a.m. The curfew was subsequently changed, becoming more restrictive. All Romans were required to complete a census report, and further penalties were imposed for noncompliance. The ostensible purpose of the census was to identify male citizens who could be used for forced labor. Less than 2 percent of the entire male population responded.

All Italian males were ordered to report to work, which actually meant forced labor in Italy or elsewhere. Since few males responded to any of these demands, they went into hiding, not to be seen on the streets. The roundup of Italian males became a constant feature of life in Rome. Jane Scrivener described one roundup when the Germans cordoned off streets in the Prati quarter with machine guns and “rounded up all the men found inside the enclosure. They were put on lorries and taken away.”<sup>10</sup>

It became a common occurrence to hear the cry “I Tedeschi! I Tedeschi! Rastrellamenti!” (“Germans! Germans! Roundups!”). The Germans cordoned off streets, taking all in the enclosed area. If the residents were unable to produce German-authorized working papers, they were packed by the hundred onto trucks and shipped to Germany or to surrounding areas of Rome as slave labor. “They would mend roads and bridges for the Germans, build fortifications, and lay railroad tracks.”<sup>11</sup> Few young Italians risked appearing on the streets. One Roman described the roundup: “It is a common practice for them to raid a restaurant, theater, cafe or even a church and drag off twenty, thirty or forty-year-old men at random to slave-labor battalions. Or various sections of the city would suddenly be surrounded by a dragnet of Wehrmacht or SS soldiers.”<sup>12</sup>

In addition, boys from ages 18 to 22 were called up for military service. As a result, Italian males and former soldiers went into hiding and remained off the city’s streets. After the armistice was declared, five hundred thousand to six hundred thousand Italian soldiers and twenty-five thousand officers were captured and then deported to Germany and placed in camps.<sup>13</sup>

German authorities imposed a ban on the use of bicycles at any time, and violators were told that they would be shot. This was clearly aimed at the partisans, who often used bicycles to deliver an attack and flee. Field Marshal Kesselring followed with his own set of edicts, declaring that anyone who possessed weapons or explosives, committed acts of violence against the Wehrmacht, or harbored enemy forces would be executed. These restrictions were clearly aimed at the partisans, who were becoming increasingly active and bold.<sup>14</sup>

Open resistance to the restrictive edicts often followed their promulgation. Once the fascist regime was restored, the partisans began a campaign against them. Within in the ranks of various partisan bands, the issue arose as to whether the armed campaign should be directed against not only the fascists but also the Germans. Would such actions bring reprisals? Some within the resistance argued forcefully that Italy was under occupation by a foreign power. Such actions, they argued, were legitimate acts of war against their oppressors; thus, from a moral and legal point of view, direct attacks against the Germans were justifiable. Romans felt that the fascists had disgraced the national honor and that directing their attacks against the Germans was the only way the nation could be redeemed.<sup>15</sup>

As the occupation took hold, conditions worsened. The sound of German boots was heard everywhere. The German went about lodging themselves in Rome’s hotels, certain of their comfort. Shop owners boarded up or bricked their windows and doors. There was little in the shops anyway even if someone had a ration card. Prices soared, and food was scarce. Bread and foodstuffs were rare commodities. Salt and matches were not to be found. Matches were needed for those who cooked in gas ovens. Medicine and medical supplies were just about nonexistent. Items were available on the



black market at exorbitant prices. A kilo of pasta on the black market cost eight hundred lire, eggs cost thirty to forty cents apiece, and a quart of milk cost a dollar or more.<sup>16</sup>

Gasoline for cars and buses was nonexistent. The black market continued despite German prohibitions. Basic necessities were costly and hard to find. Buses and trams deteriorated because spare parts and tires were unavailable. The only traffic moving through the streets was German cars.

Roadblocks were a common sight. Motorists and cyclists were stopped so their vehicles could be confiscated. Kesselring ordered the commandeering of all vehicles including buses, taxis, trucks, and private cars. This only added to the scarcity of food, since there would be no way to get the necessary provisions from outlying sources. Shops were systematically looted as were homes, where typewriters, radios, and even sewing machines were taken. Warehouses that had anything left were "emptied systematically."<sup>17</sup> Milk, vegetables, and bread were luxuries. The Germans commandeered whatever was available as they went about searching shops and homes and any place they thought food was being stored. It was not uncommon for the Germans to go to a restaurant and eat and drink without limit. When presented with the bill, they would tear it up and leave.

Anyone living near the Villa Wolkonsky, the German embassy and ambassador's residence, was prohibited from passing close to it. Numerous sentinels were posted around the embassy for protection. This was a clear indication of the growing incidents of defiance and outright resistance that had rattled the Germans. Sentinels were posted at night with orders to fire on anyone approaching the embassy. This led to one comical incident. A sentinel who was clearly drunk thought he saw suspicious figures moving about on the rooftop of one nearby building. He fired repeatedly, drawing a nearby platoon that identified the suspicious men on the roof as the "stone figures of Saints which surmount the façade of St. John Lateran."<sup>18</sup>

The Romans who endured such hardship and near starvation would not laugh at the above incident. As far as they were concerned, the partisan attacks on the Germans for starving them to death and treating them with such contempt were justifiable. They remained steadfastly impervious to carrots and sticks. Jane Scrivener wrote that "the Italians simply loathe the Germans, but the latter do not seem to have grasped the fact . . . on account of the Germans cutting down the Roman food supply while they themselves are living on fat the of the land."<sup>19</sup>

A daily reminder of the German presence was the sight of sleek black Mercedes-Benzes with two miniature Nazi flags fluttering from prongs on the fenders; the flags also appeared on Wehrmacht trucks. The officers in their staff cars, smug in their superiority, were reinforced as they rode throughout Rome. The sounds of jackbooted soldiers in their green-gray uniforms and the sight of Nazi armbands were constant reminders of their threatening presence.<sup>20</sup>

When the Germans seized control of Rome, Vatican officials in particular were confronted with a frightening reality: the enemy was not at the gates; it had breached them. That reality posed serious security issues for the Vatican, which had to consider carefully what path to take given the limitations on its actual power. On one hand, it couldn't openly abandon its official neutrality, nor could it realistically confront the Germans with force. Though officially neutral, what the Vatican did secretly and unofficially was entirely another matter.<sup>21</sup>

In August 1943, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris met in secret in Venice with Cesare Amé, chief of military intelligence of the Italian military high command. Canaris warned Amé that Hitler intended to kidnap the pope and the king. Amé's contacts in Rome passed this on to the Vatican. "Since its rise to power the Nazi regime considered the Catholic Church, in general, and the Vatican in particular, an obstacle to its totalitarian, imperialistic, and racist aspirations."<sup>22</sup> In early August reliable sources informed the Vatican that it could be invaded at any moment.<sup>23</sup> Before Mussolini's ouster, Joachim von Ribbentrop urged Galeazzo Ciano, his Italian counterpart, to move on the Vatican and remove the pope. Ciano recorded in his diary that "the Pope is even ready to be deported to a concentration camp but will do nothing against his conscience."<sup>24</sup> Ribbentrop ordered Diego von Bergen, German ambassador to the Holy See, to threaten Pius with physical retaliation. At first the pope didn't react to the direct threat but then he calmly said that "he didn't care what happened to him." Von Bergen reported to Ribbentrop that the Pope "is no more sensible to threats than we are."

On August 23, 1943, Francis D'Arcy Osborne and Harold Tittmann warned Monsignor Giovanni Battista Montini that the military services of Great Britain and the United States received reports of an advanced plan to abduct the pope. On September 10, 1943, Cardinal Maglione met with the Brazilian ambassador, dean of the diplomatic corps. Maglione told him that the situation was serious and that he should warn his colleagues to take steps to protect their archives from an invasion of the Vatican. Maglione went on to tell them that such an action "was not to be excluded."<sup>25</sup> Hitler in a rage could give the order and overrule anyone who thought otherwise. By the end of the first week of the occupation, Allied diplomats began to destroy "all documents that might be of use to the enemy." The diplomats assigned to the Holy See decided that they would follow the pope if he were taken by force to Germany. Behind the scenes Walter Schellenberg, SD chief, substantiated the mounting evidence. "Under the influence of Goebbels, a point had been reached in the autumn of 1943 when Hitler was seriously considering the deportation of the Pope." Nicolaus Kunkel, a staff officer in General Stahel's command, stated that "for the duration of my time in Rome, a good nine months, all of us officials were convinced that any day the order would arrive: Occupy the Vatican. . . . Hitler's volatile personality made it realistic."<sup>26</sup>

Four days before the occupation, Pius XII met secretly with all the cardinals living in Rome. He discussed the possibility that when the Germans occupied the city they

might attempt to invade the Vatican, kidnap the pope, take him north, and most likely kill him. If he resisted, there was the distinct possibility that he would be shot “while trying to escape.”<sup>27</sup> Pius XII prepared a letter of resignation that in essence declared that “they can arrest Cardinal Pacelli, not the Pope.”<sup>28</sup> Additional contingency plans were implemented. In anticipation of a sudden evacuation, key staff officials in the Secretariat were also ordered to keep a suitcase packed at all times and to be ready to leave for a neutral country. Vatican authorities arranged to have important documents hidden in obscure and hard-to-find places in “the thousand-room pontifical palace” and the secret recesses of the archives. Arrangements were also made to protect the Vatican library and museum.<sup>29</sup> The pope’s personal and confidential documents were hidden under the marble floors of the papal apartments and the papal palace. “The brick and stone walls surrounding Vatican City were heightened by the addition of steel railings along their tops.”<sup>30</sup>

The principal responsibility for protecting the “Holy Father and the Apostolic Palace fell to the Swiss Guard and the Pontifical gendarmeria.”<sup>31</sup> It was apparent that if there was a direct assault they were too few in number, and they were inadequately equipped to stop such an incursion. The pope sent a written order to the commandant of the Swiss Guards that if the Germans breeched Vatican City itself, they were to offer no resistance. Pius XII sought to avoid a repeat of the bloodshed during the sack of Rome in 1527, when 147 Swiss Guards perished as Pope Clement VII attempted to escape from his enemies.<sup>32</sup>

On the morning of September 10, German paratroopers advanced on the Vatican. Behind them lurked SS men in a limousine, “their jackboots gleaming, and the skull-and-crossbones insignia leering hideously from their lapels.”<sup>33</sup> The black-booted paratroopers armed with antitank and submachine guns, in full battle dress, took up positions on the Rome side of the white line separating it from Vatican City. The white line was the only physical limitation to a direct invasion of the Vatican. The Germans erected a tripod on which a telescope was placed to observe and monitor “all comings and goings at Vatican City.” They were to hold these positions around the clock each day. The Vatican’s lifeline could be severed at any moment.<sup>34</sup> The pontifical postal facilities were cut off but not the Vatican’s broadcasting station. An SS report stated that it had brought to an end the Vatican’s espionage center. The report also maintained that the Vatican was now under “the protection of Adolf Hitler’s own lifeguards.” Albrecht von Kessel secretly reported that the pope would be placed under the Reich’s “protection.” The official explanation for German troop presence at the edge of Vatican City came the day after Rome was occupied. The Vatican was not disabused. Protection? From whom? Was this intended to intimidate and threaten the pope? Was this the prelude to a direct move on the Vatican? Vatican authorities were not duped into believing they were safe, nor did the troop presence curtail their clandestine activities. The pope made it abundantly clear to Ambassador Ernst von Weizsäcker that he would remain

in Rome in all circumstances. Pope Pius XII never left Vatican City as he had done in July and August to comfort the bombed victims in the San Lorenzo district of Rome. In addition, he didn't leave the Vatican to go to Castel Gandolfo, the papal palace.

German forces in Rome grew in number, posing a clear and present danger. Vatican City is "smaller than most golf courses and college campuses," only 110 acres "not counting several basilicas and buildings in Rome and Castel Gandolfo."<sup>35</sup> Within Vatican City there were Vatican citizens who eventually grew from a few hundred to four thousand, including about four hundred or more Jews seeking safety. Those who lived within Vatican City traveled with Vatican passports.

The papal enclave was protected by the "Pope's Soldiers," which included the Swiss Guards, pontifical gendarmeria, Palatine Guards, and the Noble Guards. "The Palatine and Noble guards were placed at several extraterritorial properties; however, there were so many of them that it was impossible for them to be placed at each one." The Palatine Guards were especially vulnerable to "provocation, misunderstanding, and accident, violence." The Palatine Guards "were the only ones of the pope's units to come under direct fire during the war."<sup>36</sup>

There was always the lingering threat that Vatican City could be cut off entirely either by the fascists or German authorities. Nothing could enter or leave without their approval. Vatican City "was totally dependent on Italy for gas and electricity. Every lump of coal, every liter of gasoline, every cut of meat or kilo of pasta, every aspirin and dose of aspirin, every piece of paper, every bolt and nail consumed inside the city came from outside the pope's walls."<sup>37</sup>

While the Lateran Treaty of 1929 recognized the sovereign independence of Vatican City and affirmed the political neutrality of the papacy, it bound only the Italians, not the Germans. The fascists had violated the treaty on many occasions, and the threat that this would continue intensified with the establishment of the puppet government, the RSI. "Few in the papal enclave expected the treaty to be a reliable talisman against an unscrupulous regime that repeatedly demonstrated its contempt for international treaties and disregard for the rights of neutrals."<sup>38</sup>

On September 12 Ambassador Weizsäcker was authorized to inform the Vatican "that the sovereignty and inviolability of the territories and properties of the Vatican would be respected."<sup>39</sup> Goebbels recorded in his diary that "the Vatican has inquired of our Ambassador [Weizsäcker] whether its rights would be safeguarded in the event of our occupying Rome. The Führer has sent an affirmative reply."<sup>40</sup> Hitler had passed the authorization on to Ribbentrop, who codified it and sent it to Weizsäcker.

With the authorization as cover, the führer had other plans in mind for the Vatican. He blundered, though, since the Vatican properties would serve as a refuge for Jews, Italian soldiers, partisans, and others who fled from the Nazi terror. The Germans learned in short order that churches, monasteries, convents, and other properties were

hiding Jews. It was easier to target the extraterritorial properties than undertaking incursions directly on Vatican City. Meanwhile the Vatican went on secretly issuing visas and forging identity documents for people at risk.

The Vatican immediately posted placards written in Italian and German on all buildings covered by the authorization. The placard in bold type declared "Property of the Holy See." In addition, it read "This building serves religious objectives and is a dependency of Vatican City. All searches and requisitions are prohibited." A lone Palatine Guard was posted at some of the properties to reinforce this right.<sup>41</sup> To placate his superiors, Weizsäcker telegrammed Ribbentrop on September 19. "The German occupation of Rome does not diminish the sovereignty of the Vatican. The Vatican transmitter has not been occupied by us because it stands inside Vatican City, the Pope is not hampered in his apostolic duties by German action. He is not our prisoner. . . . Traffic between Vatican City and the numerous extraterritorial Vatican enclaves within Rome, as well as the office of the Curia in the City, had been ensured."<sup>42</sup>

Ribbentrop wired Weizsäcker that "the Reich government will respect the sovereignty and integrity of the Vatican State to the full." Revisionist historian Susan Zucotti argues that the Vatican should not have placed protection placards on all its buildings; they should have been placed on only those churches, convents and church institutions that hid Jews and refugees. That would have been a clear signal to the Nazis that those properties contained Jews and would facilitate their search for them.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the authorization, what could the Vatican do if its rights were violated and a move was made directly against it? Rome became an armed camp, and the Wehrmacht could be called upon at a moment's notice. Robert Royal described the situation. "Wehrmacht armored cars prowled the streets of the Borgo just outside the Vatican walls, and the bridges leading to the papal enclave were mined. For that matter, the bridges and other key installations in Rome were mined in anticipation of a rapid withdrawal."<sup>44</sup> According to David Alvarez, Swiss Guards were armed with "a loaded 98 Mauser rifle, a bayonet," and ninety rounds of ammunition. All officers and noncoms carried semi-automatic pistols. Each guard post was given ammunition boxes and gas masks. "Their equipment was completely out of date, and the Pope's 'army' was hopelessly outnumbered. The Swiss guards exchanged their picturesque attire of yellow slashed with blue and red for war-service uniforms."<sup>45</sup>

The Vatican was unprepared to confront the challenges of World War II, the stresses, strains, and intense demands made upon it. The Secretariat of State and most nunciatures were understaffed, and they were not adept in their methods of gathering intelligence. At the onset of the war the Secretariat of State, "the wartime nerve center," employed only thirty-one individuals, including archivists.

Though the diplomatic service was small, the quality of its personnel was good. Most were well-trained career diplomats; however, "the information reaching the Secretariat

from its diplomatic outposts was far from comprehensive.”<sup>46</sup> The British and French ambassadors were shocked that the Vatican was not well informed. “The British envoy noted that for news of the war, the Pope relied primarily on the BBC.”<sup>47</sup>

The Germans had overestimated the intelligence capabilities of the Vatican and continued to cling to the myth that it was a vast and reliable information center.<sup>48</sup> Most foreign governments persisted in the belief that the Vatican had an effective intelligence network. In fact, they assumed “that the information networks reached into the most distant corners of the globe and no world leader was as well-informed about world events as the Holy Father.”<sup>49</sup> As a result of this estimate, the intelligence organizations of most foreign governments targeted the Vatican. In response, “the Vatican police created a plain-clothes Special Section for counterespionage.”<sup>50</sup> The Germans in particular clung to a false belief “that Roman Catholicism was nothing more than a cover organization for the private intelligence service of the Pope.”<sup>51</sup>

Fascist intelligence services conducted operations to gather information, recruiting and placing informants within the Vatican. “Censors and eavesdroppers monitored mail, telegrams and phone calls to and from Vatican City.” Every communication “passed through Italian postal and telegraph channels.”<sup>52</sup> Italy was not alone in spying on the Vatican. A number of countries—including the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, France and certainly Germany—employed intelligence operations to monitor the Vatican.

In an effort to undermine the Vatican, the Germans were particularly active in attempting to penetrate it. The Nazis concluded that in order to neutralize or, better, destroy the Catholic Church, it was crucial to know what was going on within the Vatican.

Herman Göring created the so-called Research Office that monitored Vatican phone calls and all written communications. The Research Office was a cryptanalytic agency using the Reich Air Ministry as cover and reported to Göring. The most important intercepts made their way to the upper circles of the Nazi hierarchy, most importantly to Hitler.<sup>53</sup> All of the Reich’s agencies—the SD, Abwehr, the Foreign Ministry, and the Air Ministry—had their own radio interception and decrypting services to tune into Vatican Radio and its telegraphic services.

The Vatican was aware of most of these efforts if not the specifics. Fascists had been opening its diplomatic pouches. In response, the Vatican obtained an agreement with the Swiss to allow its couriers to carry papal diplomatic mail.<sup>54</sup> German cryptanalysts were able to crack some of the Vatican’s codes. The Vatican was aware of these operations and that its cryptosystems had been “compromised on a major scale by German and Italian intelligence.” Himmler’s agents were able to secure one papal code. Papal authorities took action and changed to stronger ciphers and had messages encrypted. The Vatican’s staff was warned to be careful about what they said on the phone or what they wrote.<sup>55</sup> Pius frequently entrusted single individuals with specific and secret

assignments. Göring's interception service deciphered all telegrams sent to the German bishops, especially those sent to Monsignor Cesare Orsenigo, nuncio in Berlin.

The Germans from 1940 to 1945 established a listening station in the Wannsee suburb of Berlin monitoring Vatican Radio around the clock. Vatican radio transmissions reached Europe, the Middle East, North America, Africa, and South Asia. In 1943, the Vatican was making frequent use of Vatican Radio to transmit its messages "with government or private receivers in various countries." It also communicated with priest rescuers.<sup>56</sup>

With the war raging throughout Europe, the Vatican faced major obstacles to communicate with its personnel. Communication even with couriers and secure diplomatic pouches, transportation networks, roads, airports, railway yards, bridges were destroyed. The Vatican often received faulty or "untimely intelligence" and even had unreliable or limited information about what was going on even in southern Italy after Allies landed in Sicily.<sup>57</sup> The inaccuracy and unreliability of its intelligence was evident time and time again. "Usually the Papacy was often no better informed about wartime affairs than any other government; often it was woefully uninformed."<sup>58</sup> The Vatican relied mainly on its nuncios and delegates and secondarily on foreign diplomats concerning the war.

Though the Vatican had been given assurances that its sovereignty would be honored, there were signs to the contrary. On one occasion, German soldiers crossed the dividing line and placed themselves directly at the bronze doors of St. Peter's. They asserted their right to check and approve the papers of everyone entering the papal palace. The soldiers were on Vatican sovereign territory, a clear and overt violation. The Swiss Guards ordered them away, and a tense confrontation developed. The Germans retreated to their side of the dividing line.

On another occasion a detachment of Palatine Guards at the Palazzo San Callisto, a papal building, successfully repelled fascist thugs who entered Vatican property.<sup>59</sup> These were ominous signs, and if they persisted the future did not bode well for the Vatican, as more serious incursions seemed inevitable.

Since the summer of 1943, Rome had been subject to air attacks. Several bombs fell on Vatican property. In another attack bombs fell on Vatican City itself, destroying several buildings and killing a worker and a priest. These attacks were evidence that the pontiff was not immune from the bombings.<sup>60</sup> As a precaution, several bomb shelters were constructed in Vatican City, and a blackout was instituted. A special shelter was constructed for Pius "in the medieval tower of Nicholas II, but he steadfastly refused to use it, deciding to stay in the papal apartments during the air attacks."<sup>61</sup>

## The Reincarnation of the Dying Corpse

THE SECOND DAY OF THE OCCUPATION WAS CROWDED WITH A SERIES OF momentous developments. The night before, Adolf Hitler had boasted that he had the entire Italian army in his hands and that Italy would pay dearly for the betrayal of its Axis partner.

Ever since Operation Oak was devised and put into operation, it was incumbent on those involved to locate Benito Mussolini. There were disagreements among the Nazis regarding the Duce's true location. Pressure was put on all parties to locate and rescue him.<sup>1</sup>

Immediately after his arrest, Mussolini was taken first to the island of Ponza, next to La Maddalena and then to the Hotel Campo Imperatore, high atop the Gran Sasso amid the Abruzzi mountains. Both Operation Student and Operation Oak involved group planning and execution, though Otto Skorzeny would garner full credit afterward. Heinrich Himmler advised Skorzeny to enlist Herbert Kappler and Eugen Dollmann for his intelligence-gathering efforts. This was an odd pairing, as their mutual animosity was palpable. Kappler was jealous of the good-looking, suave, and better-educated Dollmann.

Though Dollmann was attached to the German embassy, he wasn't answerable to Kappler but instead to Himmler. Colonel (Obersturmbanführer) Dollmann served as liaison officer between General Karl Wolff and Field Marshal Albert Kesselring and between the latter and the Vatican. In addition, Dollmann served as Himmler's and Wolff's liaison with the royal Italian government and later the RSI. In reality Dollmann was Himmler's man in Rome, and Dollmann's spying added to Kappler's unease. Dollmann had an appetite for intrigue, filing a steady stream of reports to Himmler. The slim Bavarian was fluent in Italian, which made him a valued interpreter at key meetings involving Mussolini, the führer, Karl Wolff, and those authorities who didn't speak Italian. Hitler liked Dollmann and enjoyed his conversation and also was pleased that Dollmann was Eva Braun's confidant. Dollmann's US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) file described him as "very temperamental with a vivid personality and a great



sense of humor, but egotistic.” Dollmann’s flamboyance was displayed as he rode around Rome in a Mercedes with Kuno, his wolfhound, at his side. Dollmann was a consummate actor. He had concerned himself with the “Jewish question” in Italy. Before Mussolini was deposed, the fascist government was not moving quickly enough to address the “Jewish problem” in Italy. Dollmann had urged SS Major Cartheo Zeitschel to send a report to the SD and bring the matter to Himmler’s attention.<sup>2</sup> Kappler put aside his animosity for the time being and obediently went to work.

Kappler radioed Berlin continuously throughout the summer and into September. His intelligence reports were often accurate. Kappler assured Berlin that he was doing everything possible to locate Mussolini’s whereabouts. In mid-August, Kappler intercepted a letter from Countess Edda Ciano to her father, who had by then been moved to La Maddalena. The letter confirmed that the Duce had been there but was on the move. Kappler intercepted messages between the Italian Ministry of the Interior in Rome and the police inspector in Cueli, who was in charge of security arrangements at the Gran Sasso skiing resort. Kappler had police sources near the Gran Sasso, who confirmed that Mussolini was being confined at the resort. Kappler sent an investigating team to determine if Mussolini was in fact being held at the Hotel Imperatore. Kappler confirmed the accuracy of this report and cabled Berlin. That information made its way to Skorzeny.<sup>3</sup>

German armored cars, ten tanks, and forty truck jam-packed with German troops arrived at the base of the funicular station to the Gran Sasso. On the afternoon of September 12 “after carrying out reconnaissance of the area, an SS commando unit of paratroopers led by Otto Skorzeny . . . flew silently over the peak on gliders,” Skorzeny’s glider touched down safely.<sup>4</sup> At 2:15 p.m. the commando unit of about one hundred men was positioned at the Camp Imperatore mountaintop and within minutes overwhelmed the complex. Skorzeny entered the hotel, waved his pistol, and ran up the stairs, followed by several of his men. His dueling scars glowed red with excitement when he burst into Mussolini’s room and declared, “Duce, the Führer sent me to free you.” Mussolini replied, “I knew my friend Adolf Hitler would not have abandoned me.” A small landing strip was quickly prepared, and a small Fieseler-Storch aircraft landed. “Mussolini was bundled up” and flown to Hitler’s headquarters in East Rastenberg. The news of his rescue was announced that evening.<sup>5</sup>

Ernst Kaltenbrunner arranged it that he would personally present Mussolini to the führer. Hitler was shocked when he first saw Mussolini’s deteriorated physical condition; he had changed beyond recognition. Mussolini’s confinement had affected his health. “His face was emaciated, his frame shrunken, and his will to rule almost gone.”<sup>6</sup>

Hitler promised to restore Mussolini to power albeit in a satellite republic and wanted the new state to be called the Italian Fascist Republic. Mussolini resisted and, with the concurrence of his cabinet, decided on the Italian Social Republic (RSI), in

essence a cosmetic change at best. The formal proclamation of the RSI, the reincarnation of the “dying corpse,” was made four days following Mussolini’s rescue. “Hitler’s conviction that Fascism could be revived in Italy proved as insubstantial as his belief in Mussolini as a brother Superman.”<sup>7</sup> The restored fascist government was commonly but derisively known as the Republic of Salò. Susan Zuccotti underscored Mussolini’s subservience. “Denied even a capital, most of the republic’s offices were scattered throughout the province of Verona, an area conveniently located, for German purposes, on the direct rail line to the Brenner Pass.”<sup>8</sup> Mussolini was placed in the Villa Feltrinelli in Gargnano on Lake Garda that served as his residence and office. Surrounded by Wehrmacht soldiers, Hitler made certain that Mussolini wouldn’t govern in reality. Rudolf Rahn was transferred from his assignment in Rome to Fasano to serve as the German ambassador to the RSI. He subsequently approved or rejected all of Mussolini’s decisions. The RSI “degenerated into a morass of violence, corruption, and terror.” Mussolini invoked the Lateran Treaty for the continued recognition of the RSI. The pope refused recognition. “The Vatican replied that the Concordat had been made, not with the Fascist government, but with the Italian State; and that State under its legitimate head, Victor Emmanuel III, which was now at Bari.”<sup>9</sup>

While he had been in confinement, Mussolini had even attempted suicide. He and his party were finished, “and no amount of galvanizing would raise the Fascist corpse to life.” Alan Bullock concluded that “under Hitler’s urging—and scarcely veiled threats—he agreed to play the part for which he had been cast. . . . The RSI was neither independent nor had the authority to truly govern; it was despised by the Germans and hated by the Italians. Mussolini had been degraded into a servile puppet who even despised himself.” He was rendered impotent. His servile position didn’t prevent him from drafting the manifesto for the Fascist Party Congress held in Verona. The seventh article stated, “Those belonging to the Jewish race are foreigners. During the war they belong to an enemy nationality.” The foundation for the further persecution of the Jews in northern Italy had been established by the RSI. Thirty-four thousand Italian Jews were exposed to further persecution by the RSI and the Germans.<sup>10</sup>

Many people stood in line to take credit for finding Mussolini. Skorzeny was awarded the army’s most prestigious medal, the Knight’s Cross of the Iron Cross, for leading the rescue operation and became a folk hero. Kaltenbrunner was also available to take more than a few bows. For his part, Kappler took credit and praise for tracking Mussolini’s movements. It was quite a feather in his cap. Indeed Kappler’s intelligence work was decisive in locating the Duce. Dollmann also made sure he was available to take the necessary bows for the successful outcome of Operation Oak. His egotism on full display rankled Kappler. Of course, Skorzeny ultimately took full credit, much to dismay of other German officers who were key to the success of the operation.

Throughout the German occupation, Kappler was in constant radio communication with Himmler and Kaltenbrunner. Kappler used this method almost exclusively, since it gave him greater independence from “Italian and local German officials.” Though he sent some mail by courier and made some phone calls, he relied on radio communication. From the early days of the occupation until late October, “Kappler and various RSHA and SS authorities in Germany exchanged radio messages each day.”<sup>11</sup>

## I Have a Special Mission for You

**K**ARL WOLFF BECAME A BUSINESSMAN AFTER WORLD WAR I AND JOINED the Nazi Party. He hitched onto Adolf Hitler's rising star. With guile and cunning, Wolff rose rapidly in the party. Once the Nazis attained power, he ascended to the highest ranks of the SS. He became a general in the Waffen SS and chief of Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler's personal staff. Wolff's rank was equivalent to a general in the Wehrmacht. His importance was underscored by the placement of his office next to Reichsführer Himmler's. Wolff served as a liaison between Himmler and the führer on one hand and Himmler and Ribbentrop on the other. SS-Obergruppenführer (General) Karl Wolff was second to Himmler in the SS hierarchy, though Ernst Kaltenbrunner, as head of the RSHA and Reinhard Heydrich before him were on an equal level. Wolff lauded Himmler and wrote with gratitude, for "all that I am" was owed to Himmler. "To be able to serve him loyally and selflessly is not only an obvious duty but gives me the greatest pleasure and the sense of being honored," Wolff wrote. One year later he reflected on his first meeting with Himmler. "His clear eyes looked into our very souls. From that moment onward he succeeded in establishing the personal link that bound us to his strong personality."<sup>1</sup> Himmler affectionately called him "Wolfchen" (Wolffie).

Wolff appeared to be a "dapper banker" to those who met him for the first time. To some of his peers he was an unrepentant show-off. "Like Heydrich he conformed closely to the Aryan ideal, six feet tall, blond hair, blue eyes with a high enough forehead to give his face the required length."<sup>2</sup> Wolff was intelligent, self-serving, devious, manipulative, and dangerous. He was adept at survival and conspiracy. Despite the occupation of Italy, a short-term solution at best, the Nazis were facing defeat. Hitler lacked the manpower and resources to contain his enemies. Wolff understood this reality. He was a master of self-preservation and took precautions against potential enemies. He wore a ring on which the flat surface bore the SS emblem and underneath was etched LAH (Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler), Hitler's personal guard. The ring had a hollow receptacle to carry a lethal pill so Wolff could be prepared for all contingencies. Walter Schellenberg and other Nazis took similar precautions.<sup>3</sup>

Despite his denials, Wolff was aware of the atrocities that were committed and the adoption of the final solution. He was complicit in its implementation. In 1941, he accompanied Himmler to the Soviet Union and witnessed the murder of Jews. Himmler continually pressed for increased transport capacity. Wolff responded and telephoned the state secretary in the Reich Transport Ministry and “assured him . . . there would be every day a train with 5,000 Jews from Warsaw to Treblinka, as well as a train from Przemysl (Lublin district) to Bełżec weekly.”<sup>4</sup> Wolff followed with a letter to the state secretary on behalf of Himmler in which he wrote, “It is with special pleasure that I take note of your information that, beginning already 14 days ago, daily trains each with 5,000 members of the chosen people are departing to Treblinka, so that we in that way are able to expedite the flow of that segment of the populace at an accelerated pace.”<sup>5</sup> At war’s end, Wolff refused to take any responsibility for the transport of three hundred thousand Jews to their deaths.

On March 1, 1941, Wolff joined Himmler and toured Auschwitz.<sup>6</sup> Wolff was present when Himmler issued new orders to Rudolf Höss, the camp commandant. Himmler wanted to expand the camp to a capacity of thirty thousand prisoners. Himmler returned to Auschwitz in 1942 and used the opportunity to witness a demonstration of how people were murdered in a gas chamber.<sup>7</sup> He surely read Himmler’s report on what the reichsführer had seen. The reports of the mass executions of Jews in Russia and other occupied countries were sent to Himmler as early as 1941. All of the reports went through the approving hands of Wolff.<sup>8</sup> Wolff toured Poland with Himmler in 1942 and witnessed the execution of Jews. He couldn’t legitimately claim ignorance of the final solution. Wolff could not have held his high position, personal adjutant to Himmler, without being personally involved. After the war, Wolff would claim that the charges against him were lies made up by international Jews.

Wolff, at forty-three years of age, was appointed highest SS and police leader for Italy in 1943. Among his duties as head of the SS in Italy, he oversaw contacts between Italian authorities and the German SS and police. In addition, he supervised Jewish affairs in Italy. Wolff, writing to his wife, said that he was overjoyed with his first independent command in Italy. He expressed his “indescribable happiness” and “the trust of the Führer and Reichsführer.”<sup>9</sup> At this point, the RSHA was focused on the deportation of the Jews in German-controlled Italy.

On September 12, the same day that Mussolini was rescued, Wolff was at the Wolf’s Lair, Hitler’s East Prussian headquarters in Rastenberg. Hitler had lived there the greater part of the years between June 1941 and November 1944 in the gloomy surroundings removed from the nation he ruled. General Alfred Jodl described Wolf’s Lair as “a mixture of cloister and concentration camp.” According to Alan Bullock, the “The Führer’s headquarters situated in a northern forest consisted of a number of wooden chalets. But under the threat of air-raids Hitler soon moved to one of the massive concrete bunkers embedded in the ground.” Each day at noon, the führer convened

a conference to receive a “series of reports on the military situation, in which decisions were taken solely by the Führer.”<sup>10</sup> Hitler lived in a world of his own and would not read a report that in any way ran counter to the preconceived picture he had formed in his own mind. As the days slipped by, he increasingly became unmoored from reality.

Wolff received a phone call from Himmler, who informed him that Hitler wanted to see him immediately and had a secret mission for him. Himmler didn’t tell Wolff that it was he who recommended him for the assignment. Hitler’s trust in Wolff was enhanced by his anti-Semitic résumé. When he entered Hitler’s quarters, he was greeted abruptly. Only the two of them were present. Hitler at first vented his anger at the pope and the Italian king, then briefly discussed Wolff’s new position. The führer lost no time and confronted Wolff with an order.

“I have a special mission for you, Wolff. It will be your duty not to discuss it with anyone without my permission to do so, with the exception of the Reichsführer (Himmler) who knows about it. Do you understand?” Wolff replied, “Understood, my Führer.” Then Hitler glared at Wolff, “his notorious pale-blue grey eyes alive with diabolical energy.” He barely concealed his bitterness. “I want you and your troops, while there is still a strong reaction in Germany to the Badoglio treachery, to occupy as soon as possible the Vatican and Vatican City, secure the archives and art treasures, which have a unique value, and take the Pope with the Curia, to the north. I do not want them to fall into the hands of the Allies or to be under their pressure and influence. The Vatican is already a nest of spies and a center of anti-Nationalist Socialist propaganda.”<sup>11</sup>

Hitler’s direct order came over Wolff like a chill gust of arctic wind. He continued, “I shall arrange for the pope to be brought either to Germany or to neutral Liechtenstein, depending on political or military developments. When is the soonest you think you’ll be able to fulfill this mission?”<sup>12</sup>

Wolff gasped for air and tried to take in not only the audacity but also the lunacy of the planned abduction. Wolff told Hitler that it was a complicated mission, and he couldn’t give a precise schedule. It necessitated the transfer of specialized SS and police units to Italy, some even from the southern Tyrol. Wolff would need translators with expertise in Latin, Greek, and Italian. He offered a time frame of four to six weeks for the implementation of the operation.

Hitler was not satisfied and answered, “That is too long for me, rush the most important preparations and report developments to me approximately every two weeks.” The führer admonished Wolff before he left. “Because of its worldwide implications, I am personally conveying to you and you alone. I make it your duty to speak to no one about this matter without my concurrence. Himmler, whom I have just initiated, is the one exception.”<sup>13</sup> Wolff saluted and clicked his heels. “Of course, my Führer.” He agreed but had already calculated the ramifications of a papal abduction. A move against the pope would turn the Italians and the entire Catholic world, nay the free world, against Germany. Perhaps he could stall while appearing to comply with the directive.

Despite his inner doubts, Wolff went ahead with the abduction plan based on Himmler's guidelines. Wolff ordered SS general Wilhelm Harster to recruit approximately two thousand handpicked men. They would descend on Rome and control all exits to and from Vatican City. Most of the forces would come from the southern Tyrol. A number of them had to be capable of reading Latin, Greek, French, and Italian. They were "to seal off all exits from the Vatican, then occupy the Vatican radio station." A specialized unit would collect and pack for export documents, art treasures, and money. They were to proceed and arrest the pope and the Curia and take them out of Rome as per the set guidelines. The papal column would speed via Bolzano and Munich into Liechtenstein unless another destination was chosen. In addition, they were assigned to take over the Vatican's radio station to prevent it from reporting the ongoing operation. Additional units were to search for political refugees and Jews who may be hidden in the Vatican. Speed was essential so that the Allies and anyone else would not be in a position to render any aid.<sup>14</sup>

It was no accident that Wolff's meeting with the führer coincided with the assurances given to the Vatican that its sovereignty would be respected, a calculated move on Hitler's part. This was merely a cover to allay the Vatican's suspicions. This assurance would become a moot point once the invasion of the Vatican was implemented. It didn't take long for other Nazis to learn of the abduction plot. Walter Schellenberg, SD chief, wrote that "under the influence of Goebbels, a point had been reached in 1943 when Hitler was seriously considering the deportation of the Pope. . . . In extensive reports I tried to point out the immense disadvantages that would result from such an action and how it would discredit Germany in the eyes of the entire world."<sup>15</sup>

There were historical precedents for a papal abduction. Napoleon had removed Pius VI, who subsequently died while in captivity, and followed with the abduction of Pius VII in 1809. Hitler was not concerned with historical precedent. As soon as the Nazis assumed power it was their intention to destroy the Christian churches in Germany. John Conway wrote that "the Nazi's antagonism towards the Churches arose from their intolerance of any compromise with a system of belief that spanned the centuries and embraced all men under the doctrine of equality before God. . . . The Nazi radicals were motivated not only by a desire of total control, but an ideological fanaticism that believed it possible to create an ersatz religion of blood soil."<sup>16</sup> To that end, they regarded the pope as a spiritual competitor who stood in the way of creating a secular substitute for Christianity.<sup>17</sup> Hitler expressed his hatred of all Christian churches and the Catholic Church in particular in private dinner conversations.

Hitler and the Nazi elite were intent on settling old scores sooner rather than later. As nuncio, secretary of state, and now pope, Pius XII had crossed swords with the regime on numerous occasions. The Italians monitored his every utterance. The Nazis concluded that he was their sworn enemy, a formidable foe.<sup>18</sup> Unlike many of the German politicians, Cardinal Pacelli never trusted Hitler or believed he would be

capable of moderation.<sup>19</sup> Since the start of the war, Pius XII had continually called for its termination and a negotiated peace. This only added to Hitler's distrust and outright hatred for the pontiff. The führer concluded correctly that though the pope asserted the Vatican's neutrality, he was in reality pro-Allied, not to be trusted. In the fall of 1942 Goebbels condemned Pius XII as "pro-Jewish."

Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill determined that the threat of post-war retribution was the only diversion they would consider. Total military victory was widely seen by both men as the fastest route to rescue. On December 9, 1942, Rabbi Stephen Wise led a delegation and met with President Roosevelt. They presented two memoranda totaling twenty pages. The first was a summary of events on the Nazi blueprint for extermination, and the second was a list of recommendations. The president told Wise, "We cannot treat these matters in normal ways. We are dealing with an insane man — Hitler, and the group that surrounds him represent an example of a national psychopathic case."<sup>20</sup> The meeting lasted thirty minutes, and the president agreed to issue a war crimes warning. On December 17, 1942, the three main Allied governments and eight governments of occupied countries issued the Allied Declaration, specifically a declaration on atrocities. Its central paragraph referenced not only Britain and the United States but also the nine governments in exile. The declaration estimated the victims of the mass executions to be "in many hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women, and children." It proceeded to state that it was the Nazi government's "intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe" and condemned "this bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination." It went on to assert that "practical measures" would be taken to ensure that "those responsible for the crimes would be brought to retribution." The declaration didn't mention the names of specific Germans who would face retribution.<sup>21</sup>

The day after the Allied Declaration was promulgated, the *New York Times* editorialized that "the most it can do is to denounce the perpetrators and promise individual and separate retribution. But at least this we know, that there can be no compromise with this evil force." It also carried a front-page article that in part said, "The Allies now recognized and condemned Nazi policy, and they threatened to punish war criminals, but publicity alone could save few Jewish lives. They offered no hint of a rescue strategy." Though it would take total victory to end the ongoing genocide, it was indeed possible to rescue those who could still be saved.<sup>22</sup>

The United States and Britain wanted the Vatican to sign onto the Allied Declaration. For its part, the Vatican wanted the Allies to include a condemnation of the Soviet Union for the atrocities it had committed. For "practical" political reasons, the declaration didn't include the Soviet Union.<sup>23</sup> The Vatican also explained that becoming a signatory would openly violate its status as a neutral. In addition, the Vatican was a tiny state that could be cut off by the fascist government, whereas the United States



was four thousand miles away and protected by two oceans in relative security. As a result, the Vatican did not become a signatory to the declaration. Myron Taylor reported to President Roosevelt, "You will recall that as early as 1940, His Holiness the Pope condemned in no uncertain words the policies of the Axis and the conduct of the armies toward the peoples of religious and political character."

Eight days after the declaration was announced, Pius XII delivered his Christmas message in which he said that the world was "plunged into the gloom of tragic error" and that "the Church would be untrue to herself . . . if she were deaf to the cries of suffering children which reach her ears from every class of the human society and to devote themselves to the services of the human person." The pope denounced the Nazis, the Soviet Union, and, in particular, the persecution of "hundreds of thousands who, who without any fault of their own, sometimes only by reason of their nationality or race, are marked for death or progressive extinction." The pope employed the Latin word "stripe," which meant race but had been used throughout Europe for centuries as an explicit reference to Jews. While condemning totalitarian governments, he acknowledged the responsibility of the church and urged Catholics to provide shelter for those in need. The papal message was circulated throughout the world.

On Christmas day, the *New York Times* in its editorial praised the pope for his moral leadership. "This Christmas more than ever he is a lonely voice crying out in the silence and darkness of a continent. . . . The Pope put himself squarely against Hitlerism when he assails the violent occupation of territory, the exile and persecution of human beings for no reason other than race or political opinion." Martin Gilbert, the preeminent Holocaust scholar, said, "The Allied Declaration and Pius XII's Christmas message were directly and inextricably linked acts of denunciation." Gilbert added that the Christmas message condemning the extermination of people based on "race or descent" was of paramount importance because "it put the Pope squarely and publicly against the Holocaust." Anyone who listened to Vatican Radio or British news reports of the Christmas message or circulated it were either sent to a concentration camp or executed. Francois de Beaulieu, a sergeant and a radio operator, left Wehrmacht headquarters with a translation of the Christmas message and secretly circulated it. He was arrested and spared the death penalty but was imprisoned.<sup>24</sup>

While condemning totalitarian governments of Italy, Germany, Spain, and the Soviet Union, Pius acknowledged the responsibility of the church and urged Catholics to provide shelter to those in need.<sup>25</sup> The *Times* of London underscored the pope's condemnation of "the persecution of the Jewish race."<sup>26</sup> *L'Osservatore Romano* emphasized the importance of the Papal Christmas message with a steady stream of articles that further explained and interpreted it. The Nazi press obediently and violently reacted to the pope's reference to the persecution of Jews. They employed the exact words contained in an RSHA report and included the *Berliner Morgenpost*, *Das Reich*, *Der*

*Stürmer*, *Völkischer Beobachter*, *Der Andriff*, and *Der Judenkenner*, among other newspapers and journals.<sup>27</sup>

*L'Osservatore Romano* followed the Christmas message with an article explicitly condemning the murder and extermination of Jews in Europe. The Nazi reaction was reported in the *Palestine Post*. The *Völkischer Beobachter*, a Nazi organ, railed against the pope. "In Vatican City, enemies of Italy and Germany and Jewish gangs are working against the Axis. The Vatican's attitude is by no means one of neutrality but rather of overt hostility to which a stop must be put."<sup>28</sup> Robert Farinacci, a rabid anti-Semite and editor of the official fascist newspaper, sprang to the attack. "The Church's obstruction of the practical solution to the Jewish problem constitutes a crime against the New Europe." Goebbels's diary reflected his rage. "The Pope has made a Christmas speech. Full of bitter, covert attacks against us, and against the Reich and National Socialism. All the forces of internationalism are against us. We must break them."<sup>29</sup> He added that the pope was clearly "pro Jewish." The pope followed the Christmas message with an address to the College of Cardinals. He reiterated his condemnation of the murder of people based on their "stripe" (descent, race), an unmistakable condemnation of Hitler's final solution. Papal critic Michael Phayer criticized the Christmas address for not mentioning Jews when in fact it had, and Robert Katz as well as Susan Zuccotti characterized it as so vague that few would understand it. Both were intent on making a point and failed to thoroughly consult the 1942 context, the international press, and Nazi reaction as well as current documentation. Though the Allied Declaration promised retribution, it had no material effect on the Nazis. They followed their military victories and even their defeats by intensifying the completion of the final solution.<sup>30</sup>

The Christmas message was one of a long list of offenses that enraged the Nazis and compelled Hitler to occupy the Vatican and abduct the pope. Vatican officials had been warned by D'Arcy Osborne and Harold Tittmann, who reported that Allied special forces would intervene to block the plan. Monsignor Giovanni Battista Montini and Bartolommeo Nogara, director of Vatican museums, decided they would hide the pope for three days in the Tower of the Winds above the Vatican Library and the Secret Archive until the special rescue team of the Allies arrived. A separate plan was devised by Count Enrico Galeazzi and two collaborators, who would arrange to drive the pontiff north of Naples and transport him by ship to Spain, where he would remain under the protection of General Francisco Franco.<sup>31</sup>

The threat of a papal abduction was taken seriously enough. Swiss Guards armed with rifles were posted around the clock outside the papal apartments. Pius XII made it clear that he didn't intend to leave Rome despite Nazi attempts to lure him to meet with the führer. The pope declared, "Rumors of Nazi intentions are not flights of fancy, but must be taken seriously. However, I will never leave Rome or the Vatican unless I am chained and taken by force." Though the threat of an invasion of the Vatican was

taken seriously, it didn't dissuade the pope from acting secretly with rescue efforts or cut his contacts with the anti-Hitler elements in Germany.

Ernst von Weizsäcker learned of Wolff's meeting with Hitler. On October 9 in a papal audience, Pius confronted the ambassador with his knowledge of the plot. "The perfect calm that was mirrored in the pope's bright, bespectacled eyes seemed not the least disturbed as he brought up the kidnap plot." The ambassador was forced to admit that such a plot truly existed.<sup>32</sup> The pope refused to be constrained by the confirmation of Hitler's plot.

Weizsäcker cabled Ribbentrop and criticized the plot, characterizing it as a senseless idea. General Rainer Stahel was also aware of the plot, since he and Weizsäcker were in frequent communication. Both Stahel and Weizsäcker shared Wolff's belief that the papal abduction would be a complete disaster. Despite Hitler's order to keep the plot secret, Wolff disclosed it to Rudolf Rahn. Rahn was troubled with the news, As it reinforced his concerns that he had been working for a "genocidal government" and the "maniacal Führer." Though he followed orders, he doubted whether the war could be won. Eugen Dollmann also was fully aware of the kidnap plot.<sup>33</sup>

Four days after Weizsäcker's audience with the pope, the *New York Times* reported that Ambassador Weizsäcker had advised the pope to go to neutral Liechtenstein for his own protection from the dangers of war. The report made no mention of a plot to abduct the pope. Weizsäcker never counseled the pope to leave Rome, nor would the pontiff ever agree to do so.<sup>34</sup>

Wolff, Ribbentrop, and Rahn worked to calm things down.

Rahn said, "We agreed that carrying out such a plan would have had tremendous consequences and that it had to be blocked." He made several trips to Berlin in order to persuade other officials to intervene while publicly characterizing public mention of the plot as merely foolish rumors. Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel was worried about the repercussions of the plan. Goebbels recorded in his diary that "I regard such a measure as exceptionally unfortunate because of the effect our measures would have on the whole of world opinion." Albrecht von Kessel reflected, "Between September 1943 and June 1944, he (Hitler) considered kidnapping the Pope and taking him to Germany. We had definite information that had the Pope resisted, he would have been shot while trying to escape." Kessel reported that Weizsäcker worked to calm things down and further testified that "like a trapped beast, Hitler would have reacted to any provocation with extreme violence. Hitler, kept at bay by the Allies, and their Unconditional Surrender demand, was like a beast of prey pursued by hunters, capable of any hysterical excess or crime."<sup>35</sup>

In November 1943, Wolff met with the führer and reported on his preparations, choosing to employ arguments that would have a maximum effect on him. Wolff reasoned that the operation should be halted since it would have untold ramifications if

it were implemented. He argued that there were serious political and military reasons for its cancellation and cautioned that the abduction of Pius XII would trigger massive popular insurrections in Italy and Europe, causing major security issues. In addition, it would hurt the military effort not just in Italy but also throughout Europe. Kesselring's troops would be diverted from their military mission in order to contain an uprising of the Italian population. The abduction would also stiffen the active and growing resistance movement in Rome and the rest of Italy. The resultant turmoil would interfere with military operations. Wolff fully believed in this rationale, but he was also preparing for his own survival because the war, for all intents and purposes, was lost. Since he was complicit in the final solution, he would be brought to trial as the United Nations Declaration had promised. His opposition to the abduction of the pope might be a factor in his favor.

Hitler was convinced to delay the execution of his directive, but the abduction of the pope was still in play. Germany's military situation in Europe was such that it forced Hitler and his staff to address other pressing priorities.<sup>36</sup> The führer and Himmler fixed their attention on the Jews of Rome. Robert Katz and Susan Zuccotti totally ignore any discussion of the papal abduction plot.

## A Final Solution to the Jewish Question

WHEN ANYONE FIRST ENCOUNTERED HERBERT KAPPLER, HE DIDN'T seem particularly dangerous. He had a bony face and penetrating eyes. His puppet-like movements seemed awkward to some observers. He could be unassuming and then turn abruptly violent. The dueling scar across his face reddened when he became angry or upset. Kappler spoke in a monotone, a tone of calmness that seemed to be maintained with great difficulty. This was the view from the outside, but who was the man behind the mask?

Kappler was born in Stuttgart, the son of a chauffeur. An electrician by training, he joined the Nazi Party when he reached his twenty-third birthday. Kappler went from the SA to the Security Police of the SS and displayed a gift for secret police work. A failed attempt to kill Adolf Hitler in 1939 led to Kappler's assignment to the team interrogating Georg Elser. Kappler's principle job was to break down Elser's silence. Elser was beaten into submission and confessed. Kappler also played a key role in examining a plot to topple Hitler involving the British Secret Service and was fast-tracked for important assignments, since his reputation as a hardworking loyal Nazi was firmly established. His rapid rise was due to his friendship with Reinhard Heydrich and Heinrich Himmler, his mentor. Kappler was a "fanatical Nazi who proudly wore a steel ring decorated with the Death's Head and swastika inscribed, 'To Herbert from Himmler.'" Those who received a similar ring were instructed to wear it on their left hand. They also received a letter from Himmler explaining that it was a "sign of our loyalty to the Führer, of our unchanging obedience towards our superiors." Kappler was a rabid anti-Semite, a fact that endeared him to his superiors, particularly Himmler.<sup>1</sup>

Kappler's fluency in Italian and his background in espionage and security set him on an upward career path. As he approached his thirty-sixth birthday, he was accumulating quite a résumé of successes, not the least of which was locating Benito Mussolini. Major Kappler married Leonore Janns in 1934. She had been a typist in the Nazi Party's office in Stuttgart. Their marriage was one of icy lovelessness. Kappler's ascent in the SS would have been stymied if he remained childless. The Kapplers adopted Wolfgang,

“bastards of the Lebensborn — children of Himmler’s sexually degenerate scheme of finding and mating ‘perfect’ German men with German women of equal perfection.”<sup>2</sup> Kappler despised his wife and sought to divorce her. His mistress, Helene Brouwer, a Dutch woman, had been trained in espionage at the SD school in the Netherlands. She arrived in Rome with Kappler ostensibly to serve as his personal assistant.

Kappler was not well liked by his peers and had few friends. Ambassador Rahn once called him “a cruel policeman,” and Albrecht von Kessel characterized him “a ferocious beast.” General Siegfried Westphal added, “I never wanted to have anything to do with him” and kept his distance.<sup>3</sup> Kappler’s love of Etruscan vases, roses, photography, and dogs were in stark contrast to his cold, calculating, and ruthless inner self. Kappler completely believed in the mission of the Third Reich. He viewed his job as the protection of the regime’s security, and to that end he was prepared to carry out the orders of his superiors to the “last comma unquestioningly.”<sup>4</sup> Kappler didn’t merely “collaborate with evil; he was part of the machinery.” He was not a man to be trifled with. He even arrested Princess Mafalda, King Victor Emmanuel III’s daughter. Kappler called her to come to his office on the pretext that her husband was calling from Germany. When she arrived, she was taken into custody and sent to Buchenwald, where she died.<sup>5</sup>

Kappler was unaware that on the same day that Mussolini was rescued, Hitler had directed Karl Wolff to implement a plan to abduct the pope. If implemented, it would surely pose serious security issues for Wolff.

After the war, Kappler claimed at his trial that on the evening of September 12—when Wolff met with the führer—he was in his temporary office at the German embassy. He claimed that he received a phone call from Himmler’s headquarters in East Prussia. Kappler expected that he would be congratulated for his role in the Duce’s rescue and even receive a promotion. According to Kappler, he wasn’t disappointed, feigning surprise. According to his version of events, the nameless officer at the other end informed Kappler that indeed he had been promoted to lieutenant colonel (Obersturmbannführer) and head of the Gestapo in Rome. The importance of an individual in the SS was not by rank but rather by assignment. At the same time, he was going to be awarded the Iron Cross. According to Kappler, the officer conveyed Himmler’s personal congratulations and a verbal deportation order.<sup>6</sup> He wanted Kappler to proceed with preparations for the roundup and deportation of Rome’s Jews. Kappler was also told that the operation would take place soon and that further instructions would follow. In essence, it was a get-ready order.

There are a number of inconsistencies and inaccuracies in Kappler’s account. At his postwar trial, only a few years had elapsed since the alleged phone call. Kappler had a prodigious memory, but he claimed that he could not recall who had called him and on what authority that person had to convey a get-ready deportation order. Four such important matters—the rescue of Mussolini, Kappler’s promotion, the Iron Cross award,

and a deportation order — were tied together, occurring on the same day, yet his memory had conveniently failed him. These events would have been etched in his memory with a dizzying effect on his self-esteem. How could they not? Why would he have received a phone call when he and his SS superiors were in daily radio contact during this period? Actually, the deportation order came after September 12.<sup>7</sup>

Kappler was clever, a master at deception and politically astute. The reason for his deception was that placing the phone call early in the occupation would buttress his assertion that he attempted to abort the deportation of the Jews. If accepted, this account would save him from facing considerably more serious charges at his postwar trial. Placing the deportation order on September 12 implicated someone else, Karl Wolff. At the end of the war, Kappler was on trial not for the deportation of the Jews but instead for his role in the Ardeatine massacre. In addition, he exceeded orders by requiring the Jews to deliver their gold to avoid deportation.

During the period leading up to September 12, Himmler was completely consumed with the rescue of Mussolini and had ordered all available SS and police forces to be employed in this operation. “All other activities were to be deferred.” Himmler’s phone logs do not reveal a phone call to Kappler on September 12.<sup>8</sup> There are additional reasons to doubt Kappler’s version of events. On September 12, the Germans did not have full control of Rome. Kappler was not in a position to implement or even fully prepare for the deportation. That would come later after he had additional personnel at his disposal. Kappler was focused on other actions for which he had the capacity to implement successfully.

On September 15, SS general Karl Wolff met with Himmler twice, and they must have discussed the führer’s kidnap order and the “imminent roundup of Jews in Rome.” It was at this meeting that Wolff recommended Kappler’s promotion. It was not Himmler but rather Wolff who brought the good news of his promotion to Kappler upon his arrival in Rome on September 18. The RSHA didn’t even know of Kappler’s promotion until February 1944. Himmler had the paperwork for the promotion backdated to September 12 so it would “coincide with the day of Mussolini’s rescue.”<sup>9</sup> On September 18 Wolff, while in Rome, handed out the Cross of Merit decorations to at least two German officials.<sup>10</sup> It’s likely that Wolff told Kappler about Hitler’s directive to kidnap the pope or hinted at it even though he was sworn to secrecy. Kappler heard rumors to that effect, since any move on the Vatican would have involved him and his command. It also would have compromised the inevitable deportation of Rome’s Jews. If the abduction plot were activated in September or even October, it would work at cross-purposes with the deportation plans of Himmler and Adolf Eichmann. Having met with Himmler, Wolff likely transmitted the get-ready deportation order verbally himself or at the very least reinforced it when he met Kappler. Thus, both men are more fully implicated in the deportation of the Roman Jews. At his postwar trial, Kappler

was not certain what Wolff would testify to if he were brought to trial and decided to cover his tracks by presenting his own time line to protect himself.

Himmler met with Ernst Kaltenbrunner, head of the RSHA, the day after his meeting with Wolff to discuss the “Jewish question” and reached the decision to proceed with the deportations. Kaltenbrunner was a man not to be crossed. Kaltenbrunner was dedicated to the implementation of the final solution. On a personal level, he was a “physical giant of a man,” also “paranoiac, a killer, and an alcoholic.”<sup>11</sup>

Between September 18 and 19, Himmler’s office radioed by a marconigram a precise get-ready order directly to Kappler: “The recent Italian events impose a final solution to the Jewish question in the territories recently occupied by the armed forces of the Reich. The Reichsführer (Himmler) therefore requests Obersturmbann Führer Kappler to actuate without delay all necessary preliminary measures (against the Jews) in order to assure the precipitous and secrecy of the operations to be carried out in the territory of the city of Rome. Immediate further orders will follow.”<sup>12</sup>

Wolff knew that the deportation of the Jews was imminent. He did one thing that would assist the success of the impending roundup: immediately ordered the transfer of one hundred policemen from a German police battalion in northern Italy to Rome, giving Kappler the nucleus of a force of his own. Wolff also used Waffen-SS units to reorganize the fascist militia. All of these forces would be important during the next month. Kappler recognized that he could not depend on the Italian police to cooperate with the Judenaktion (meaning “Jewish action,” referring to the roundup of Jews). In fact, the “general unreliability of Italian police in Rome forced Kappler to take some Roman police officials into custody.”<sup>13</sup> Since he knew about the order at this point in time and received a confirmation, he wouldn’t or couldn’t delay or obstruct a direct order. Kappler worried if he could successfully pull off the deportation with so few men. Wolff in part solved this problem. The deportation would be supplemented the next month with the arrival of Theodor Dannecker, Eichmann’s deportation expert.

At their meeting in July, Kappler pledged to Himmler his unquestioning obedience. Though there is no written record of their conversations; it is likely that the deportation of Rome’s Jews arose at their meeting. At minimum, Kappler knew Himmler’s thinking on the subject. Clearly, the deportation order was coming from the highest authorities (Hitler) and those in the RSHA whose moral callousness was plainly evident. Kappler would even claim no prior knowledge of the deportation of Jews in Europe or having ever heard of Eichmann’s plan. Any pretense on Kappler’s part that he didn’t know that Jews were being deported elsewhere was dispelled by the receipt of this order and the others that followed. He had been in constant contact with Himmler and Kaltenbrunner, and that they never mentioned the fate of the Jews to Kappler defies all credibility.<sup>14</sup>



Kappler soon went to work and obtained from the Questura the list of the estimated number of Jews in Rome, including their names and addresses. As he reviewed the data, problems emerged. The total number of Jews in Rome was hopelessly inaccurate. Many of those listed who lived in the ghetto had the same or similar names. Kappler was under pressure to sort this out.

## We Must Disperse the People

ON MONDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 13, RABBI ISRAEL ZOLLI WENT DIRECTLY to CER president Ugo Foa's office. Zolli was hopeful that he could convince Foa and have him on his side. That would go a long way toward bringing Dante Almansì on board to act on his proposals. Some Jews in small groups were milling around in front of the temple. Zolli asked them, "Why are you here? Go away and hide as far as you can."<sup>1</sup>

Foa's office was on the second floor of the synagogue overlooking the ghetto. Few employees were present, as most of the others stayed, home uneasy and worried. It would appear that this made little impression on President Foa. He seemed puzzled as to why the rabbi would want to see him. It was apparent that the Nazi control of the city would necessitate immediate steps to protect the community. Foa had consulted his fascist contacts. They assured him that the Germans would behave properly and were not interested in the Jews, since they constituted such a small portion of the entire population of the Eternal City. Foa knew that the concentration camps existed, perhaps even the gas chambers. Some of his closest associates, even some on the CER council, were uneasy with their precarious situation. Foa rejected advice to go into hiding and tell the community to follow his example.

After keeping Zolli waiting, Foa finally relented and summoned the rabbi into his office. They exchanged greetings, and Zolli immediately got to the point. "Listen, Mr. President, give orders that the temple and all the oratories be closed. Send all the employees home and close the offices. . . . Let the lawyer Piperno draw one million lire, or even two, from the bank and give all employees three months 'advanced pay.'" Zolli calculated that this would demonstrate to those who were complacent that this was an urgent and serious matter. "The rabbi urged [that] Jewish funerals be conducted by the civil authorities and that despite the approach of the autumn season of high holidays, Jews must not assemble in large groups, and the religious ceremonies must not be held."<sup>2</sup>

Zolli reasoned, "The prayers can be said at home. Let everyone pray where he is: after all, God is everywhere." Foa absorbed all that the rabbi had been saying but gave no

indication that he agreed. Zolli continued by pointing out that there were thousands of Roman Jews and Jewish refugees from other cities who were in danger. He warned that it would be tempting as well as easy for the Germans to “surround the temple and oratories precisely when they were filled with people.” Zolli said that the purpose of his proposals was to demonstrate how critical the situation was at the moment while so many in the community seemed to be unaware of the danger they faced.<sup>3</sup>

Zolli urged Foa to establish a committee of three to handle the allocation and distribution of the CER's funds to help pay for the “dispersal of the poorest Jew from their homes and the city.” Once the initial families went into hiding, this would convince others to follow their example. Zolli was certain that this was the way to save the Jews by “organizing an underground exodus” to “homes of non-Jews, Catholic monasteries and convents, or in villages across the countryside.”<sup>4</sup>

When Zolli ended his impassioned presentation, Foa summoned his executive secretary and asked for a member of his staff. “Miss S. P. in the office? When told that she was afraid of being at the Temple, Foa ordered the secretary to fire the staff member.”<sup>5</sup>

Foa confronted Zolli. Instead of addressing the merits of Zolli's advice, Foa made it clear that the chief rabbi could not speak on nonreligious affairs. Foa asserted that this was the prerogative of the president and council. Foa, trapped by his own hubris, went on to admonish Zolli. With complacent certitude the president said, “You should be giving courage instead of spreading discouragement. I have received assurances.”<sup>6</sup> Foa was impervious to Zolli's logic, defiantly asserting his authority. He declared that the Tempio Maggiore would stay open, as would the oratories. Foa rejected not only Zolli's plan but also similar appeals from Renzo Levi, Settimio Sorani, and community leaders. Foa was convinced that these things could not happen to the Jews in Italy. He reasoned that his contacts in high places would serve as protection. Besides, the Jews had behaved perfectly and provided no grounds for their persecution.

Oblivious to the dangers, Foa had stunned the rabbi. Zolli left the temple determined as ever to return and attempt to persuade him to reverse course. Two Gestapo agents followed the rabbi after he left Foa's office. He was able to lose them in the maze of the tiny streets of the ghetto.

Meanwhile, Amadeo Fatucci encountered Foa on a nearby street. Fatucci clearly was worried about the menacing presence of German soldiers throughout Rome and asked him, “Need we fear?” Foa responded, “The authorities have no interest against the people, and the people must be tranquil. When people are tranquil, the authorities do not intervene.”<sup>7</sup>

Unable to convince Foa, the rabbi decided to meet with Almansi and try once again to persuade him. Zolli went to Almansi's office on the Lungotevere Sanzio two days after his meeting with Foa. Almansi was the most influential leader of Italian Jewry and was highly respected. Zolli repeated his plan to save the Jews and went even further.

He proposed that all of Italian Jewry should be disbanded, albeit on a temporary basis. Almansì listened graciously and said, "I guarantee safety for you and your wife also."<sup>8</sup> Zolli wasn't just interested saving himself; he wanted to save all of the Roman Jews. He had hoped that Foa would be present at this meeting. Zolli thanked Almansì and said, "We must disperse the people." Almansì held Zolli's incredulous stare for a moment and said, "I do not share your fears in the least." Zolli then offered, "But pardon me, Your Excellency; even granting that my preoccupations are groundless, and they are not, what do you lose by listening to me? Invite the other President."

Before leaving, Zolli proposed that all three leaders meet at least to discuss his plans. "If you both wish to come," Almansì responded, "let me know, and I will await you with pleasure."<sup>9</sup> Almansì had a major blind spot that went back to the late 1930s. He could not believe that Benito Mussolini's alliance with Germany posed any threat to Italian Jews.

The rabbi was on a desperate mission and went back to Foa's office four days later in hopes of having all three meet. Foa once again invoked his authority and reminded Zolli that any measure could only be taken by him and the CER council. This did not include Almansì or the chief rabbi. Zolli then pleaded with Foa to destroy the community's list of Roman Jews. Two lists existed, one for contributors and the other a more precise list on index cards complete with names, addresses, apartment numbers, and birth dates of every Jew in Rome. Foa's only answer to his last suggestion was that he might have to remove King Victor Emmanuel's portrait once Mussolini reclaimed his position as head of state.

Foa and Almansì assured Zolli during their meetings that their contacts in the Italian government had given them guarantees that the Jews would not be harmed. Carmine Senise, chief of Rome's police, assured Almansì that there was no need to worry about the intentions of the Germans. Foa and Almansì pointed to the good behavior of the Germans in Rome who hadn't harmed a single Jew. Whether true or not it was verisimilitude, and the distance it held from reality was constant at least for the moment. Zolli was convinced that the behavior of the Germans was only a prelude to persecution.

The rabbi left Almansì and attended a meeting at the hospital on Tiber Island. Zolli was told that he was in danger, that he "was too daring" and should go into hiding. He had failed to persuade Foa and Almansì and followed his instinct as well as the advice of others. Zolli left his ghetto apartment with his family and found refuge in the home of the Pierantoni family, who were Catholic. Zolli didn't officiate at the Sabbath worship that evening. Some community leaders had taken advantage of their financial position and gone into hiding. Foa and Almansì in particular as well as other leaders in the community who rejected Zolli's plan were disconnected from reality.

These were ominous signs compounded by the broadcast proclaiming the creation of the RSI for German-occupied Italy. The pope did not recognize the RSI, an obvious

rebuke of Mussolini and Adolf Hitler. In the past Mussolini had been able to resist the deportation of Jews, but on the very day of the announcement of the RSI, two dozen Jews elsewhere in Italy were shipped to Auschwitz. An additional seven thousand were deported to Auschwitz in the following months. This led Denis Mack Smith to a critical conclusion: "Mussolini's racialist prejudices were hardly modified very much by the horrors of nazi persecution. . . . [T]he man he chose to take charge of administering the racial laws was Giovanni Preziosi, . . . who was the most genuinely anti-Semitic fanatic in Italy."<sup>10</sup> Preziosi, who had friends in high places, was installed as inspector general for race. He sent a memorandum to Mussolini that called for the elimination of all Jews, including "Half Breeds, spouses of Jews, and all who have a drop of Jewish blood, even converts."<sup>11</sup>

In a letter to Hitler, Mussolini "implied his support for his new anti-Jewish policy." He had received a report from the Italian ambassador to Germany with explicit information regarding the extermination program. In response Mussolini wrote to Hitler that "steel and fire will cure (the) ills that the demoplutocracies and Judaism have inflicted on the human species."<sup>12</sup> The Duce agreed with Preziosi and Hitler that all Jews should be expelled from Europe and "repeated his strange instruction that Italians must become a pure race, free from contamination and cross-breeding." The interior minister of the RSI issued Police Order No. 5 in November, "which decreed that all Jews within the territory of Salo, whatever their nationality, be arrested and confined in internment camps awaiting deportation to the Lager."<sup>13</sup>

## The Byzantine Christ

ELEVEN DAYS AFTER THE GERMANS OCCUPIED ROME, LIEUTENANT COLONEL Herbert Kappler, SS major Karl Hass, and other detachments surrounded the headquarters of the Banca d'Italia on Via Nazionale. The Germans loaded over 119 metric tons of Italian gold reserves onto trucks and transported it northward to Milan. The gold was stored in a regional branch of the national bank under German supervision. Actually, the gold “came under German control, [as] the men of the Amt Rosenberg, the organization most involved in the looting of cultural treasures in the occupied countries[,] had also arrived.”<sup>1</sup> It’s unclear who gave the order. Did it come down from Heinrich Himmler to Eugen Dollmann, then on to Kappler? Perhaps it came from Reichsbank president Walther Funk. Kappler added to his reputation by conducting this operation with impressive efficiency. Gold and the Jews remained on his mind.

Kappler’s position was clarified shortly after the gold was transferred from Rome.<sup>2</sup> In Rome the lines of authority were often overlapped, and this inevitably led to confusion and conflict. This was especially the case when you factor in the prevalence of rivalries, fueled by jealousy or outright hatred among the Germans in Rome. The competition among key Nazi leaders was especially fierce in their quest for control of the RSHA. Kappler appeared to be under General Rainer Stahel’s authority and ultimately to Albert Kesselring. On security matters, the SS were their own authority. Karl Wolff ordered General Wilhelm Harster, Gestapo chief of Italy, to transfer Kappler into his command. The transfer clarified the respective lines of command and Kappler’s responsibilities. Harster’s command was the most important branch of the German police.

Also, in the second week of the occupation Adolf Eichmann, chief of Jewish Affairs Section IV in the RSHA, revoked any exemption of Jews with Italian citizenship who found themselves in countries under German control. In July 1943 Eichmann wrote to Eberhard von Thadden, the Foreign Ministry’s “expert” on the Jewish question. Eichmann stated that though some Italian Jews might be holding foreign passports, they could be sympathetic to Badoglio’s regime. It would be difficult to ascertain who they were; therefore, all such Jews were subject to deportation.<sup>3</sup>

Herbert Muller, head of Office 4 and the entire Gestapo apparatus, followed with a directive to all officials in the controlled territories in Europe “that Jews who held citizenship had ‘immediately’ become liable for ‘transfer, to the East, in other words, deportation.’”<sup>4</sup> All officials within Italy including Kappler, Wolff, and Rahn received this specific directive.

On September 24, Himmler and Eichmann met to discuss the deportation of the Roman Jews. Since Reinhard Heydrich’s death, Eichmann attached himself closely to Himmler, giving him additional clout within the Nazi hierarchy and his competitors. Heydrich had been one of Eichmann’s most important supporters. Eichmann didn’t trust Kaltenbrunner, Heydrich’s successor, even though the RSHA chief had recruited him into the SS. Eichmann invariably invoked the reichsführer’s name at all meetings and discussions.

Eichmann went about his work on implementing the final solution, a desk murderer with the detachment of an efficient career bureaucrat. He prided himself on being a “regular guy” and a family man but fixated on his job of eliminating Jews from the face of the earth.<sup>5</sup> Eichmann shared Himmler’s fanatical hatred of the Jews. Eichmann and Himmler weren’t an anomaly. They were among the countless other Nazis who followed orders without question and the myopic millions who provided the popular underpinning of the regime.

From the perspective of the Nazi elite, “military setbacks were no reason to change course on the final solution but, rather, a reason to continue with it.”<sup>6</sup> Himmler was fanatically devoted to the führer implementing his directives.<sup>7</sup> Adolf Hitler had gone on record that Jews were “the evil gnawing our vitals. . . . [T]he time will come when I’ll settle accounts with them.” That time had arrived with a vengeance.<sup>8</sup> Like the führer, Himmler, Eichmann, Heydrich, and a vast number of Nazis had in common “qualities that show all too clearly the desire to take revenge on human life.”<sup>9</sup> Eichmann fulfilled every order he received. Eichmann declared that his justification rested on his oath of allegiance.<sup>10</sup> He came fully prepared to all his meetings with charts and reports from his field operatives. Eichmann maintained pressure on all his subordinates and “kept a grip on field operations by incessant traveling.” His field operatives, or so-called advisers, came directly from his office and called themselves “Eichmann’s special commandos.”<sup>11</sup> Eichmann took precautions during his travels; he “surrounded himself with bulletproof glass, traveled with a mobile arsenal in the trunk of his car, and began ensuring that no one took his photograph.”<sup>12</sup> With the Germans in control of Rome, Eichmann approached Himmler and asked that his IV-4 section take the lead in the deportation of the Roman Jews to Auschwitz.<sup>13</sup>

Eichmann was thoroughly prepared when he met with Himmler. The meeting resulted in Himmler’s second direct written deportation order meant for Kappler’s eyes only. On September 24 the order was transmitted from his office in Berlin and arrived

at the German embassy in Rome the next day. “Drawn up on special paper bordered with a black stripe, the message bore the designation *Geheime Reichssache*,” the highest secret classification mainly used for communications between chiefs of different departments. The order was addressed to SS Obersturmbannführer Kappler.<sup>14</sup>

It is known that his nucleus of Jews has actively collaborated with the Badoglio movement and therefore its speedy removal will represent, among other things[,] necessary security measure guaranteeing the indispensable tranquility of the immediate rear of the southern front. All Jews, regardless of nationality, age, sex, and personal conditions[,] must be transferred to the north for liquidation. . . . The success of this undertaking is to be assured by a surprise action[,] and for this reason it is absolutely necessary to suspend the application of any anti-Jewish measures of an individual nature in order not to arouse any suspicions among the population of an imminent “Judenaktion.”<sup>15</sup>

While the order was being decoded in Rome, “Ernst Kaltenbrunner, head of the security services, that included the Gestapo, circulated a list of countries from which Jews could now be deported, Italy was first on the list.” That list was at the center of the agenda when Himmler and Eichmann met. Kaltenbrunner personally endorsed the deportation of Roman Jews.<sup>16</sup>

After Himmler’s top-secret order was decoded, it was brought into General Rainer Stahel’s office. Though the order was addressed to Kappler, Stahel was visibly upset especially when his eyes fixed on the word “liquidation.” Stahel immediately went to see Eitel Friedrich Moellhausen, who was temporarily in charge of the German embassy. Ambassador Rudolf Rahn had been injured in an automobile accident. Moellhausen, with the rank of consul, possessed the full powers of a chief of a diplomatic mission. At thirty years of age, he was the youngest chief of a diplomatic mission in Europe. His present position was contractual, since he was a noncareer officer in the Foreign Service.

Friends and colleagues dubbed the tall and lean olive-skinned Moellhausen “the Byzantine Christ” because of his facial and physical appearance.<sup>17</sup> Moellhausen’s mother was French, and his father was part German. Moellhausen was fluent in French, Greek, and Italian. His fluency in these languages had landed him a position in the propaganda section of the German foreign office. Though a German citizen, he spent little time living in Germany and had repeatedly refused to join the Nazi Party. His career path seemed to be limited.

Moellhausen didn’t internalize or accept the racist ideology of the Nazis. He was aware that the Jews were being deported to concentration camps. Though he wasn’t particularly disposed to helping Jews, he was open to helping anyone in need, including Jews.<sup>18</sup> Moellhausen’s friend, an Italian girl, was hiding a Jewish family in her home.



“For the remainder of the occupation he would bring extra ration books when he visited her in order that the fugitive family be well provided.”

While posted in Paris, Moellhausen met Rahn, who was on a fast track for advancement in the foreign ministry. Moellhausen became his aide and went with Rahn on his next assignment. Rahn was assigned to North Africa and intervened to prevent the deportation of Tunisian Jews. He persuaded Kesselring to use the Jews for forced labor and argued that there were no means to transport them.<sup>19</sup>

Stahel went to Moellhausen’s office with the decoded message. He wasted little time and said to Moellhausen, “I don’t want anything to do with this Schweinerei (swinish) matter.” Stahel knew that a plan to abduct the pope existed. He would have a popular uprising on his hands if it was effectuated, and now came this odious directive. As Moellhausen read the order, his eyes also fixed on the use of the term “liquidate” in connection with the persecution of the Jews. From that moment, he realized that he couldn’t claim ignorance. He turned to Stahel and said, “All right then, you should have no difficulty sabotaging the plan.” Stahel replied that he would disassociate himself from the order but could do nothing to abort it. He proceeded to tell Moellhausen that the order was sent for Kappler’s eyes only. Stahel advised the consul that if the Gestapo chief didn’t share it with the two of them, they should pretend ignorance. Stahel took the next step, suggesting that perhaps Moellhausen could take action through the foreign office. “Moellhausen replied, ‘How? I’m only a second-grade diplomat. The Jewish Question is a matter only for the SS.’” He then offered to reflect on the order overnight and try to come up with something.<sup>20</sup>

The deportation order was placed on Kappler’s desk without any indication that it had indeed been intercepted and read by others. When Kappler arrived at his office, he read the top-secret document and learned quickly enough that he wasn’t the only one who had read it.

The day before the order was received and decoded, Kappler reported to Berlin that the Vatican had sold Spanish, Argentinean, Mexican, and Portuguese visas to Jews attempting to escape from Rome by train with Spanish diplomats. The Vatican wasn’t selling the visas, and this specific report was inaccurate. Kappler was on to something. The Vatican was secretly providing false identity documents, visas, and means to escape to Portugal and Spain. Kappler also reported to Berlin that an Egyptian businessman from Alexandria was circulating an order to smuggle Jews from Italy into Switzerland. He sent these reports in an attempt to involve his superiors in closing down these activities.<sup>21</sup> As Kappler read the deportation order, he remembered the report sent the previous day. He believed that the activities in that report were true and that they could undermine the effectiveness of the forthcoming roundup. His reports to Berlin and his determination to find out who had distributed or purchased the visas left no doubt in his mind that he would proceed with the implementation of the reichsführer’s order.

Kappler's reports to Berlin, though, were consistent with the existence of the Vatican's rescue networks and its role in facilitating the acquisition of visas.<sup>22</sup>

Moellhausen followed Stahel's advice and decided to do what he could to abort the order. Allied armies were closing in, and Hitler and his lieutenants increased their fanatical pursuit of the final solution. How could anyone believe, much less entertain the belief, that alternatives to Hitler's master plan would be accepted? Certainly not Kappler.

On Sunday morning, September 26, Moellhausen decided to meet with Kappler. Moellhausen understood that his intervention was not exactly risk free. He had concluded that the deportation of the Jews was morally and politically indefensible. Moellhausen suggested that the two of them could propose to Field Marshal Kesselring an alternative to deportation. They could propose that Jews be used for local labor service. A precedent existed for this approach, since Ambassador Rahn had used this same tactic while serving in Tunisia and was able to remove the Jews from the Gestapo's authority. Rahn had asked Kesselring's intervention. The field marshal ordered that the Jews should be used for "the construction of fortifications," thereby saving them.<sup>23</sup> Was Moellhausen naive enough to think he could get Kappler, much less Kesselring, to countermand a direct order?

Moellhausen put Kappler in an awkward position. Kappler was furious that Stahel and Moellhausen had read the top-secret order. When he calmed down, Kappler said that he could do nothing since this was a direct order. He couldn't ignore it or claim that he hadn't received it. The quick-witted Kappler had already developed a stratagem of deception and intended to set it in motion. He kept this to himself.

Moellhausen told Kappler that although he received orders from Berlin, the Gestapo chief also received orders from Kesselring; it followed that Kappler obey the latter. Kappler had been put under the direct command of Harster and above him General Wolff and the RSHA. Moellhausen was ignorant of this fact and the chain of command. Kappler didn't educate him on the matter and played along with him. Moellhausen proposed that they should go to Kesselring.

Why would Kappler really believe that Kesselring would want to do battle with Himmler and ultimately with the führer himself? Kesselring had a war to direct and fight. Was the ambitious Kappler really willing to put himself and his entire career on the line? Did Kappler, the cold-eyed realist, submit to compete naivete? What he decided to do was give the appearance of going along with Moellhausen's quixotic scheme and perhaps even with Stahel. The success of the deportation of the Jews was inextricably tied to Kappler's own career that was on the ascent and to his adherence to the tenets of the final solution.

Both men were driven to Kesselring's Monte Soratte headquarters. Kappler never revealed that prior to the latest order he had received a verbal order and a written get-ready order as well. Kesselring was totally loyal to Hitler and Nazism. When Moellhausen presented his plan to Kesselring, the Gestapo chief added that the success of

the deportation would necessitate at least one motorized battalion from his command. Moellhausen reminded Kesselring that he had already approved a similar plan and that a Tunisian solution to Rome's Jews was possible. Kesselring had much on his mind and declined to provide the troops to assist in the roundup, since he had to deal with an impending Allied landing at Ostia and the need to defend Rome. "I cannot give my approval. . . . I need all available forces." Kesselring didn't want to involve himself with the "Jewish problem" and the regime's genocidal programs. Moreover, it was not necessary for him to duplicate the Tunisian model for Rome's Jews at this time.<sup>24</sup> He was already impounding Italian males for forced labor. Kesselring suggested that the Jews could be used to build fortifications around Rome but implied that this was only if they got approval from another source.

The field marshal wore a mask of detachment. He made it clear that the initiative for the proposal would have to come from either Moellhausen or Kappler. Moellhausen realized that he would have to persuade the foreign office, namely Joachim von Ribbentrop. Kappler had already concluded that this wasn't feasible and that it wouldn't produce any results. Moellhausen would have to go it alone. Kesselring had given a tepid, unenthusiastic response, which Moellhausen interpreted as his acquiescence.<sup>25</sup>

The two men returned to Rome, but before they separated Kappler felt compelled to reassure that Moellhausen that he had no desire to persecute Jews. Kappler, an avowed anti-Semite, had accepted and believed the racist doctrines of Nazis. It followed, then, that the Jews of Rome were their enemy. He told the puzzled Moellhausen, "For my part the Jews can just as well remain where they are." What did this mean? Kappler gave the appearance of cooperating with Moellhausen's scheme and accurately read Kesselring's reluctance to get involved. Kappler thought he could convince the consul and Stahel that there was no alternative but to obey the order. Perhaps he was attempting to convince himself.

Moellhausen retreated to his office, as did Kappler, who decided to pursue his own course of action. Kappler must have wondered how Moellhausen or anyone else could believe, much less entertain the belief, that alternatives to the final solution would be accepted or that he should obey Kesselring over the reichsführer.

Kappler had developed a calculated strategy of deception that would give the appearance of circumventing the deportation order while actually carrying it out. How could he disarm the Jews and prevent them from sounding the alarm? The deportation order indicated that he should "not arouse any suspicion" of an imminent roundup, and the element of surprise was essential. How could he prevent the Jews from escaping the roundup? Kappler decided that he would go his own way and that Moellhausen would have to take the initiative on his own. There was little chance that he would succeed. His direct intervention was a major risk, but the deportation order rattled Moellhausen. Prior to this point, he had no direct knowledge of the final solution. His knowledge of the final solution was thrust upon him by virtue of the decoded message.

The determined Gestapo chief returned to his office and lost no time. He contacted Rome's police headquarters, telling them that he wanted to arrange a meeting with the leaders of the Jewish community in his embassy office that evening at 6 o'clock. The offices of Kappler, Stahel, Moellhausen, and von Plehwe were all housed in the Villa Wolkonsky. The *Questura* turned Kappler's request over to Commissar Gennaro Cappa, chief of the Office of Demography and Race. Cappa went to Ugo Foa and Dante Almansi to inform them of the requested meeting and emphasized that they were to be there precisely at the appointed time.

There were competitors and dangerous people, and Kappler had to choose his allies carefully while being aware of potential spies who might rat him out, including Colonel Eugen Dollmann. Dollmann ingratiated himself to Wolff and became the general's favorite. Fundamentally, Dollmann was Himmler's personal representative in Rome, his eyes and ears. Kappler could never be sure that Colonel Dollmann wasn't spying on him and as such posed a perceived or actual threat to him. Dollmann was devious and conspiratorial.

Aside from Dollmann, there were other spies or unreliable "fascist allies" in Rome who at any moment could turn on the Gestapo chief. There were human Dobermans who for five thousand lire were willing to turn over partisans, Jews, and escaped prisoners of war. Why not Kappler for more lire or deutschmarks? Rome was "a city of spies, double agents, informers, torturers, escaped war prisoners, hunted Jews, and hungry people."<sup>26</sup> As September neared an end, there was a rumor in limited diplomatic and military circles that a special SS unit would be sent to Rome and that the Jews were in grave danger. Secrecy and stealth were vital to the roundup's ultimate success.

Kappler, who knew that Himmler and Hitler were determined to exterminate all Jews, was someone who slavishly followed orders and was recently promoted. He would not risk his career by going along with Moellhausen's naive scheme by appealing to a higher authority. Kappler played a double game by appearing to be an ally of Moellhausen on one hand and, on the other, proceeding with the groundwork for the implementation of the roundup, cleverly covering his tracks.

Kappler calculated that if the Jews were to learn what was in store for them, they would surely "seek sanctuary in the hundreds of churches, monasteries, and convents throughout the city" and in the Vatican itself.<sup>27</sup> The Germans had concluded that Vatican City was a refuge for politicians, Jews, and soldiers.<sup>28</sup> Far too many Jews followed the example of the community leadership, who expressed confidence and gave assurances that all would be well. They continued their daily routine of going to work, opening shops, and trying to eke out a living. Kappler's plan was to take away a means of escape and lull them into a false sense of security while he proceeded with preparations for the roundup.

## If You Pay, No Harm Will Come to You

ON SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 1943, UGO FOA AND DANTE ALMANSI ARRIVED at the Villa Wolkonsky at 6 p.m. and were ushered immediately into Herbert Kappler's office. While a police attaché, Kappler would come to the embassy dressed in civilian clothes. This evening he was dressed in his black SS uniform, the red and black swastika armband and the twin lightning bolts visible on his collar. This was designed to intimidate and make it clear that they were dealing with the dreaded SS.

At first, Kappler spoke in a monotone voice; his demeanor was both courteous and friendly. He said that he was sorry for any inconvenience and talked in general about a number of things. The slim black-booted Kappler, temporarily quiescent, could turn dangerous in an instant. He fixed his distinctive ice-cold penetrating gaze on the two presidents. The thin dueling scar on his cheek reddened with his rising anger. He said to Foa and Almansi, "You and your co-religionists are Italian nationals, but that is of minor importance to me. We Germans consider you only as Jews and therefore our enemy. Rather, to be more precise, we consider you a distinct group, but not completely apart from the worst enemies we are fighting. And we will treat you as such."<sup>1</sup> Kappler went on to rail against the international Jewish conspiracy whose "weapons were money and gold." Jews, he said, were a persistent race who shifted with the wind according to who had power, thereby enabling them to survive for two thousand years. The subtext of his rant was that the Jews in Italy had to be disarmed of their weapons first and then liquidated.<sup>2</sup>

A glacial frost penetrated the room. Foa and Almansi gasped for air and finally came to understand the peril the Jews faced. Perhaps even their stubborn refusal to accept the warnings of Rabbi Israel Zolli, among others, may have flashed across their minds. Foa and Almansi held Kappler's stare for a minute trying to comprehend the full meaning of his outburst. "It is not lives or the lives of your children that we will take—if you fulfill our demands," Kappler continued. "It is your gold we want, in order to buy new arms for our country. Within thirty-six hours you must pay fifty kilograms of gold. If you pay, no harm will come to you."<sup>3</sup>

The Gestapo chief threatened a general and complete roundup and deportation of all Jews in Rome if his demands were not met. The two leaders looked at the floor for a moment and then made eye contact with the Kappler. Foa and Almansi, still in shock, said later that they heard Kappler say "If you do not (pay), two hundred of your Jews will be arrested and deported to Germany, where they will be sent to the Russian frontier or otherwise rendered harmless."<sup>4</sup> Kappler later insisted that he said that all the Jews would be rendered harmless and that he threatened a total roundup and deportation. The two men fixed their attention to every word including "rendered harmless."

The leaders asked whether, if they were unable to meet the terms of Kappler's demands, only Jews who were formally part of the community be taken or even converts to Catholicism and the offspring of mixed marriages. Kappler's steel-gray eyes widened, and his response came quickly. He snapped that he considered anyone with a drop of Jewish blood in his veins, whether "inscribed or not, baptized or mixed[,] as an enemy of the Reich." He continued, "I don't make any distinction between a Jew and a Jew, inscribed or not."<sup>5</sup>

Almansi's glance met Kappler's eyes and asked if the Italian lire could be accepted as payment as well. Kappler responded quickly with a firm no. Only Jewish gold would be acceptable. The two men faced the grim reality that they had no alternative but compliance; any opposition was useless. They confined themselves to the time frame for turning over the gold. They told Kappler that this was an extremely large amount to raise in thirty-six hours.

Kappler turned from a threatening tone to a more reasonable one and said that he would extend the delivery date to forty hours, with the deadline to expire at noon on Tuesday, September 28. He offered to have trucks available to help collect the gold, but Foa and Almansi declined. Kappler ended with a parting salvo. "Keep in mind I have carried out several operations of this kind, and I have always brought them to a successful conclusion. I have only failed only once, but that time several hundred of your brothers paid with their lives."<sup>6</sup>

Foa and Almansi left Kappler's office realizing that any objections or attempts at further conditions were futile. They were frightened and shocked. Kappler saw the impact that his threat had on their frightened faces. He successfully gauged his thrust at their vulnerabilities. Foa and Almansi were convinced that if they met Kappler's ransom, the Jews would be safe and the fears of the community allayed. Both men deluded themselves into believing they were entering a contractual agreement. Gold for lives produced a false sense of security. Kappler had effectively gotten inside their heads.

Foa and Almansi's first instinct was to contact fascist officials in the vain hope they could intervene or persuade others to do so. To that end, they contacted Commissar Gennaro Cappa in the race office and Commendatore Enzo Rosselli, regent of the *Questura*, and relayed the details of the extortion ultimatum. Both men indicated that

they would attempt to do something on their behalf. Though they were sympathetic, it soon became evident that nothing had come of their intervention. Foa realized that “evidently our Authorities could do nothing against the Teutonic power.”<sup>7</sup> Once again, both men had put too much faith in their fascist contacts.

With the clock ticking, Foa decided to call an emergency meeting of the CER for Monday morning. They had to organize the collection of the gold and disseminate the necessary information to the larger community. Though some of the wealthiest Jews were hiding within the city or had fled elsewhere, the vast majority of Jews were poor and openly exposed. This cast doubt as to whether they would be able to meet Kappler’s demand for gold with a deadline looming. Could they trust Kappler to keep his word? If they couldn’t meet his demand, how would the two hundred Jews be selected and by whom? Would the Germans stop at two hundred, or would all Jews be apprehended? What real option did they have? The Jews in Rome were hardly prepared for flight or exodus on such short notice.<sup>8</sup>

Kappler had devised this plan after receiving a second deportation order that was comprehensive, not limited to a specific number. He could not have possibly believed that 50 kilograms of gold would satiate Adolf Hitler, Heinrich Himmler, and the Nazi elite’s bloodlust for Jewish lives. He was not that naive or shortsighted. What if he failed to carry off his end of the deportations? What if the Jews somehow escaped the net? Could he carry his end of the deportation operation, or would he fall flat on his face? Gold in the hands of any person, much less poor Jews, could be the currency for survival. Without it, the chances of escape were limited. The extortion of the gold would make the victims themselves defray the cost of their imminent rail journey to Auschwitz. The promise of gold for lives was a cunning scheme, and it worked to perfection.<sup>9</sup> Even if the arrest were limited to two hundred Jews, would approximately 110 pounds of gold save them? Fifty kilograms was worth \$56,000 on the international market, about \$5.25 for each Jew. Were those in Berlin and East Prussia just thinking in terms of only two hundred human beings when the final solution encompassed millions of Jewish men, women, children, the aged, and the infirmed?<sup>10</sup>

While Reinhard Heydrich was alive, Kappler was exposed to his obsession with the Jews. Though Kappler had not met Heydrich’s successor, Ernst Kaltenbrunner, chief of the RSHA, he was aware of the policies and the thinking that permeated the RSHA. Kappler knew Himmler and some of the men behind the final solution. His steel ring was a constant reminder of the reichsführer.

At dawn on Monday morning, Renzo Levi was called at his hiding place. He was told that an urgent matter had arisen and was urged to come at 10 a.m. Foa then called Settimio Sorani. Because Sorani was legal counsel to the CER, his presence was also essential. Foa was careful not to go into detail for fear that his phone was comprised. “Where Levi was forceful and decisive, Sorani was gentle and persuasive.”<sup>11</sup>

Throughout the early hours, a series of phone calls were made to members of the CER and other influential Jews to meet at 10 a.m., although the place of the meeting was never mentioned. It was understood that it was the Tempio Maggiore's boardroom. Levi, Almansi, and the other members of the CER were punctual when the meeting convened in an atmosphere of ominous tension. Rabbi Zolli sent word that his presence was not necessary, since the meeting was to center on financial matters. He assured Foa and the CER that they could count on him to do anything to assist the community. Foa began the meeting by encapsulating the encounter when the two presidents had met with the Gestapo chief. Fifty kilograms of gold had to be delivered by twelve noon on the September 28 or two hundred Jews faced deportation.

A few members of the CER were skeptical. Could they really trust the Germans? Some thought that the Germans would wait for large numbers to congregate outside the temple with their gold objects and then pounce on them. The vast majority of the leaders accepted Kappler's word that the gold would protect the Jews from deportation. Alexander Stille concluded, "The decision to pay was also consistent with the Jews' millennial experience as a small threatened minority in the hands of a mighty hostile power."<sup>12</sup> Hadn't they in the struggle to survive paid tribute to the oppressor? This seemed in some respect a contractual agreement, unwritten of course, but it was gold for lives. Piero Terracina was reassured: "It was the word of a German officer." On the other hand, Claudio Fano recalled that his father feared the Germans. "I don't trust them at all; (yet) this collection of gold is a thing we have to do to clear our consciences: I mean, the day something should happen and we haven't done it, they would ask us why didn't you do it."

Levi was chosen to direct the collection of the gold. Angelo Anticoli—a jeweler and goldsmith who lived nearby—was summoned and given the task of weighing the gold while two gold "experts" would first assay the offerings. The collection would take place in the temple's boardroom. Arrangements were hastily prepared, and the collection began just one hour after the meeting concluded.<sup>13</sup>

When the Di Verolis first learned of Kappler's demand, they wondered, "Fifty kilos of gold, where can we find that?" Were they risking their lives by going to the temple? They thought that "the Germans might come at any moment and just shoot the lot of us." Olga Di Veroli rushed to the CER offices and began making phone calls to all Jews, who were told of Kappler's demand for gold.

Like pebbles thrown into a pond, the word went out to the surrounding community. Some small delegations of Jews went out to other areas in the city, informing Jews of the ransom, its consequences, and solicited contributions. With the community's list of names in hand, frantic phone calls were made. Some Jews hung up, fearing that their phones might be tapped. Alexander Stille described what took place. "Word of the ransom had spread quickly through the streets and brought Christians and Jews from



all parts of the city to converge on the synagogue, carrying gold watches, earrings, pins, bracelets, cuff links, wedding rings, cigarette cases and coins.” The Jews brought what little of value they possessed. Fortunata Tedesco recalled, “I had a ring with a stone and I gave it, my husband gave his wedding ring.”<sup>14</sup> During the first two hours there wasn’t much of a response, which threw the leaders into a panic. At the present rate and given the ticking clock, they would not be able to meet Kappler ultimatum. They had run into an invisible brick wall.

Adriano Ascarelli, one of the Jewish leaders, suggested that they approach the Vatican. He knew the vice abbot, Padre Borsarelli, who could transmit their appeal for help to the Curia. Levi, along with Ascarelli, went immediately to Borsarelli’s residence. They quickly summarized their plight, which was reaching the crisis stage. Time was running out. They asked Borsarelli if he could contact Vatican officials with their plea to borrow gold to stave off disaster. They promised to repay it immediately. Borsarelli agreed and told the two men to come back later in the afternoon. He would provide a definitive answer. During the meeting with Borsarelli only fifteen kilograms of gold had been collected, and they still needed thirty-five more kilograms.<sup>15</sup>

By the time Levi and Ascarelli returned to the synagogue, a large number of people were in line ready to give their precious and limited possessions. The people were largely poor Jews from the ghetto and Trastevere. Seventy percent of Jewish heads of households were either itinerant peddlers or shopkeepers. It was the poor ghetto-Trastevere Jews who contributed the largest amount of gold. Wedding rings, cigarette cases, gold chains, earrings, locket, bracelets, and other gold objects were piled up, assayed, and weighed. Rabbi Zolli, while in hiding, felt that his presence would place everyone at risk, since the Germans would surely raid the synagogue. The rabbi sent Miriam, his daughter, with his gold chain and five thousand lire. “Word of the ransom had spread quickly through the streets and brought Christians and Jews from all parts of the city to converge on the synagogue, carrying gold watches, earrings, pins, bracelets, cuff links, wedding rings, cigarette cases and coins.”<sup>16</sup>

As the hours went by the lines grew larger, and many while responding to the call wondered if the Germans could really be trusted. Would the ransom truly save them? Some of the Jews, while skeptical, clung to the hope that the Germans would keep their word. “Also on line with their gold were many Catholics, including not a few priests—a fact that made a deep impression on the leadership.” Pucci Petroni, one of the Catholic contributors, testified that “I brought a brooch, I remember it belonged to my grandmother[,] . . . and two gold chains.”<sup>17</sup> The Catholic contributors were not sure if their presence would be welcomed. Giacomo Debenedetti described the scene when the Catholics entered the synagogue with their contributions. “Cautiously, as if afraid of being refused, uncertain whether to offer gold to rich Jews, some ‘Aryans’ presented themselves. They entered the hall adjacent to the synagogue full of embarrassment, not

knowing if they should take off their hats or keep their heads covered, according to Jewish custom. Almost humbly, they asked if they could—well, if it would be all right to. . . . Unfortunately, they did not leave their names.”<sup>18</sup>

Though the collection had picked up considerably, it appeared that they would still need help from the Vatican. It was decided that the community would accept cash instead of gold so they in turn could buy the gold if they still needed it.

At approximately four o'clock, Levi returned to the vice abbot's residence as he had been instructed. Borsarelli gave the Vatican's official reply that Pius had actually authorized the loan himself. Indeed, the Vatican would lend them any quantity of gold they needed in coins or ingots. There were no strings attached to the loan for repayment. There was no time limit and no interest required. Levi conveyed his gratitude and indicated that they may in fact be able to reach the required amount. Before leaving, he said that if he didn't come back by 6 p.m. that would indicate that the loan was no longer needed.

Levi returned to the synagogue and reported to Foa that the Vatican's offer was in the affirmative. It was a crucial overture to the Jewish community. Everyone was greatly relieved. The Vatican's offer was a guarantee that if they did not meet their goal there was a backup plan as insurance. The Vatican's offer was kept secret, since it might reduce the voluntary contributions of the community. As evening fell the synagogue's doors were closed, and the leaders were certain that they could meet the required goal the next day.

The following morning Luigi Pierantoni, a physician and partisan, came to Rabbi Zolli's room. Zolli had found refuge with the Pierantonis, a Catholic family. Luigi had learned incorrectly that the Jews had only collected thirty-five kilograms of gold. He didn't know about the Levi-Ascarelli mission to enlist the Vatican's help or that it was no longer needed. The younger Pierantoni arranged to bring the rabbi secretly into the Vatican so he could appeal for the remaining fifteen kilograms. Zolli wanted to help his congregants in their hour of need and leapt at the opportunity. He would appeal to his contacts within the Vatican for their assistance by providing the necessary gold. Zolli, in disguise, was accompanied by Dr. Giorgio Fiorentino, a Roman lawyer, and they were surreptitiously smuggled together into the Vatican through a back door. A prior arrangement had been made that someone would be waiting for the Rabbi. Zolli came right to the point with Bernadino Nogara, the Vatican's treasurer, and Monsignor Arata, the secretary of the Congregation of Oriental Churches. Zolli and Fiorentino were told to wait. After a short wait Pius, through Nogara, assured Zolli and Fiorentino that the Vatican would provide a loan for the necessary amount with no strings attached. Both men were told to return; the gold would be waiting. Ugo Foa felt the Holy See's offer to provide the gold was as a “noble gesture.” “The Holy See, learning immediately of the fact (of the extortion), spontaneously made it known to the president of the

Community through official channels that if it was not possible to collect all the fifty kilograms of gold within the specified thirty-six hours he would place at his disposal the balance [and] it could be paid back later without hurry when the Community was in a condition to do so.”<sup>19</sup>

Susan Zuccotti, on one hand, characterizes the Vatican offer as “commendable” but is quick to stress that it wasn’t “a gift but a loan.” She doesn’t concede that there were no strings attached to the loan and that it served as a fallback position for the Jewish community. Zuccotti failed to admit that the pope personally authorized the loan.

When Zolli left the Vatican, he wrote a letter to Foa reporting his overture to the Vatican. Zolli suggested that Foa prepare a rough receipt for the loan. The rabbi added that if the Germans reneged on their part of the arrangement and in the event that hostages were required, he wanted to head the list as a volunteer. Zolli was skeptical that the gold would satisfy the Germans. Miriam Zolli and Dr. Fiorentino delivered the letter in person to Foa, who cast it aside without comment. Foa interpreted Zolli’s actions as both unnecessary and a direct challenge to his authority as president of the CER.<sup>20</sup>

As Miriam Zolli left the synagogue, Jews gathered around her and asked if she could tell them of any reports. She urged them in her father’s name not to congregate around the temple in large numbers. Several months later Foa denied having received the letter, and it likely was destroyed.

The collection proceeded on pace and topped the fifty-kilogram requirement two hours before the required deadline. This fact was kept secret to allow for additional contributions. The day and a half spent collecting gold was a period “uninterrupted anxiety.”<sup>21</sup> Foa didn’t want Kappler to think that it was easy to obtain the required amount of gold or have him believe that the ghetto Jews had hidden wealth. Kappler might raise the required amount. Foa phoned Kappler and requested an extension of the deadline, claiming that they needed time to reach the required goal of fifty kilograms. Kappler agreed to an extension from noon to four o’clock that afternoon.<sup>22</sup> Eighty kilograms of gold had been collected along with over two million lire in cash donations. A substantial amount came from Catholic laymen and clerics.<sup>23</sup>

The Gestapo chief insisted that the gold was to be delivered not to the Villa Wolkonsky but instead to the new Gestapo headquarters and prison at 155 Via Tasso. The delivery site was intended to make the greatest impression on the Jewish delegation.<sup>24</sup> Kappler made it clear that he wouldn’t be present to accept the gold, a parting insult.

Another matter of major concern arose. How were they to ensure that the Germans wouldn’t deny they ever received the gold? Foa wrote to the chief of police describing Kappler’s extortion of Jewish gold and requested a police escort for the transportation of the gold to Via Tasso.

Fifty kilograms of gold were placed in ten cardboard boxes. At the appointed time, the police escort came to the synagogue. The delegation of Jews included Foa, Almansi,

their gold expert, and two other Jews to help carry the heavy boxes of gold. Genario Cappa, chief of the Race Office, was taken as a precaution and disguised as a Jew. Cappa would verify that the payment had been made on time and was accurate to the last kilogram. Renzo Levi declined to join them, fearing that the Jews were going to be arrested once they delivered the gold. The leaders added three hundred grams to the original demand as insurance in the event that “the Nazi scale registered a total less than theirs.”<sup>25</sup>

The delegation along with a police escort arrived at the appointed time at the Via Tasso’s entrance to the Gestapo headquarters on Via Tasso. Apprehended prisoners were taken to another entrance, at 145 Via Tasso. Foa and Almansi must have taken obvious notice of the setting of this meeting, a contrast to the previous one at the elegant Villa Wolkonsky. The Gestapo headquarters and the prison were lodged in a dreary nondescript six-story building. The windows of the upper floors were solidly sealed with concrete blocks. The entrance at 155 Via Tasso led to the Gestapo offices and living quarters of the command. The SS called it, “with a certain amount of perverted, though perhaps unconscious, humor, the ‘Educational Section of the German Consulate,’ and it was so listed in the Rome telephone directory.”<sup>26</sup> The second and third floors of the building contained eight- by eleven-foot holding cells with high walls and a single toilet without outside light. Each cell was crowded with twelve prisoners awaiting interrogation and torture. The prisoners had to sleep in shifts. The SD officer directly under Kappler was Hauptsturmführer Erich Priebke, who wasn’t inhibited from torturing inmates or from putting on brass knuckles and beating someone to a bloody pulp. Priebke undoubtedly was a maleficent bully. Those who were incarcerated were beaten, tortured, and ultimately executed. Those who did survive were never the same physically or psychologically.<sup>27</sup>

When the delegation arrived, SS Captain (Hauptsturmführer) Kurt Schutz was waiting for them. Priebke, Schutz, and the others just like them were venomous men to whom betrayal was second nature. The delegation couldn’t help but notice a picture of the führer glaring at them and displayed prominently. Kappler provided his own gold experts, an assayer, and another person who would do the weighing. Captain Schutz made it apparent that he wasn’t going to let the Jews defraud him. The two leaders responded in a tone of calmness that was maintained with great difficulty.

When the weighing ended, Schutz declared that they were fifteen kilograms short of the required amount of gold. An excited and angry argument ensued, with Foa and Almansi insisting that the gold should be weighed once again. It was now nearly 8 p.m., and everyone in the community was anxiously awaiting the outcome. Foa thought that Schutz was arrogant and brutal. The second weighing took place, and the Jews were vindicated. They had indeed delivered the prescribed amount. Foa had the presence of mind before the delegation left to ask for a receipt. Schutz disdainfully and abruptly refused. Later Kappler reasoned, “When you take the enemy’s weapon from them, you don’t give them a receipt for their rifle.”<sup>28</sup>

They had met Kappler's extortion, and his deception was complete. It foreshadowed a predetermined fate. The delegation returned, emotionally exhausted; in their minds, it was a price worth paying. Foa continued to counsel the Jews to remain calm, believing that this would give the Germans no cause for more drastic action. Both men were in denial bordering on delusion.

With the gold in hand, Kappler shipped it in a single crate to the scar-faced SS general Ernst Kaltenbrunner and included a covering letter. Kappler knew that the intelligence section and the espionage activities of the SS needed further funding. He emphasized that the gold was a possible answer. Those who met the huge, coarse man found him to be repellent. Walter Schellenberg described Kaltenbrunner as having cold eyes and "murderous paws." He said, "I always had the feeling that I was looking at the hands of an old gorilla."<sup>29</sup> Kaltenbrunner was given to heavy drinking and possessed a paranoid personality. He was clever and ambitious. Clever became cunning. Ambition became ruthlessness. Kaltenbrunner was a killer. Would the arrival of gold impress Kaltenbrunner? When Kaltenbrunner became chief of the RSHA, the deportations had been taking place for a year, and the gas chambers were fully operational. His devotion to Hitler and the implementation of the final solution were intertwined. Peter Black notes that Kaltenbrunner believed, as did so many others, that "those to be exterminated, sterilized, or sent to concentration camps were 'enemies' of the Volk as defined in Party dogma."<sup>30</sup>

Did Kappler truly believe that the gold would impress the RSHA chief? Would he trot off to Himmler and persuade him to call off the coming deportations? Kappler could not have believed that Kaltenbrunner was a neutral figure in advancing the final solution. Eitel Moellhausen was stunned when he learned of Kappler's extortion of gold from the Jews. He thought that the two men were aligned in attempting to abort the planned deportation.

Margarita de Wyss reacted to the extortion of gold and recorded in her diary that "all I could do is to warn some of them not to trust the Germans, who never keep their word." Jane Scrivener concurred and in her diary warned that the leaders should destroy the register of Jewish residents in Rome. Though the extortion demand by the Germans had been met, she wrote, "how can they be trusted."<sup>31</sup>

On Wednesday, September 29, the eve of Rosh Hashanah, one day after the gold was delivered, Foa was startled at the loud, angry banging at his door. Foa's apartment was in the Parioli district. When he opened the door, several SS were standing there glaring at him. Kappler had sent SS captain Mayer, an intelligence officer, and the other men. The president's home address had been shared with only a few select people, so Foa was startled when the Germans confronted him. How did the Nazis find him? Foa didn't know that the SS had been at the temple and had threatened Rosina Sorani with death if she didn't turn over Foa's address. Mayer quickly informed President Foa that he must come with him to the synagogue so they could conduct a search of the premises.

Mayer charged that the Jews were most likely collaborating with the new Badoglio regime and the antifascists. Mayer's men showed no warrant or legal document to justify the search. They ignored such legal necessities anyway. It was apparent to Foa despite the delivery of the gold that the community was being harassed.

The SS put Foa in a car and drove him to the synagogue. He was frightened as the car approached the building. A cordon of SS troops surrounded the synagogue and sealed the entire block around it. Tanks stood directly at the front entrance, their guns aimed at the front doors. "About forty German officers, interpreters, and soldiers armed with machine guns were inside, and the employees of the community offices had been warned not to move from their places."<sup>32</sup>

Onlookers tried to make some sense of this violation of the temple. Inside, doors were smashed, furniture was damaged, and papers were strewn all around. The search was thorough and reckless. Filing cabinets, which contained documents and the minutes of meetings, were loaded onto an awaiting van. "The searchers had smashed open the Ark, throwing two Torahs to the ground—an act of profanity to Jews."<sup>33</sup>

The searchers repeated the charge that the Jews were working with antifascists and were agents of the Badoglio government, thereby helping the Allied military effort. The search party expected to find a hidden transmitter but came up empty. They also expected to unearth material that might incriminate the Jews and substantiate the Germans' suspicions. Foa pleaded with Mayer to leave the treasury, containing religious articles and vestments, untouched. Mayer complied, and the room was left unopened. The situation seemed radioactive.

Foa was forced to open the CER's safe. Captain Mayer discovered an excess of two million lire collected as part of the gold ransom. Then the Nazis hit pay dirt when they found the most valuable information of all. They seized the registry of contributors and thousands of index cards with the names, addresses, and other vital data concerning virtually every Jew in Rome. Rabbi Zolli had urged Foa to destroy or at least hide the lists. Inexplicably, Foa had failed to destroy or hide this material elsewhere.<sup>34</sup> Did he realize his error at that moment? That mistake would have tragic consequence for the community. This was what the Nazis were really looking for all along, and it wasn't an accidental discovery. Since a deportation was being planned, Kappler had every intention to make it a success.<sup>35</sup> Whenever the Germans entered an Italian city searching for Jews, they immediately targeted the community's lists that would ensure success in locating Jews. With these lists in hand, they could descend on their homes so quickly that there would be little time for the Jews or their leaders to react. The situation was different in Rome. There had been one full month to take the necessary precautions, and the community leaders had been warned of the impending danger. Now that the community lists were in the Germans' hands, the Jewish leaders should have been convinced that they were in grave danger.

By the early afternoon, all of the material, books, and papers the Germans had identified were loaded onto trucks. This operation made it virtually impossible for the community offices to function properly. The Germans, Kappler in particular, were elated by the prospect that the coming roundup would be facilitated with the community lists in their possession. The list would be cross-checked with the material obtained from the Questura's office. The material they had collected provided a virtual road map to the homes of practically every known Jew in Rome. Foa was content that none of the papers the Germans seized were incriminating, apparently ignoring the import of the community lists.

After the Germans left the temple, Foa admonished Rosina Sorani for turning over his address to the SS. Sorani denied the charge and became distraught over the president's angry outburst. She explained that they threatened her unless she complied. "I would have to pay with my life," she said. When she refused, they went to the executive secretary of the CER, who immediately gave in to their demand and turned over Foa's address. It's likely that with or without the president's address they would have entered the temple and conducted their violent search. Their demand that Foa accompany them in the first place provided a thin veneer of legality to buttress their claim they were men of honor.

This incident alone necessitated that Foa should have called an emergency meeting of the CER Council to discuss what had just transpired and devise a plan of action. Though shaken, he didn't call a meeting or phone Almansi. Foa was paralyzed by indecision.

The following day, September 30, the Jews prepared to celebrate 5704, the Jewish new year. Two unassuming German professorial types, Dr. Pohl and Dr. Gruenwald, appeared at the temple. They were members of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Task Force (Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg, ERR), a commando-operational task force unit that had been established by Alfred Rosenberg, whose chief purpose was to "acquire" or rather loot, art collections, books, documents, and manuscripts from museums, and libraries, ostensibly for the purposes of research, in occupied countries. The ERR expanded its operations to the plundering of private art collections, including those held by individuals. Pohl and Gruenwald, like many others in the ERR, were "refined men of culture, superior education, and scholarly pursuits, incalculably distant from the provincial organizational men of the SS." That said, the ERR was an organization committed to "cultural robbery."<sup>36</sup>

When the two uniformed men arrived at the temple, Rosina Sorani was the only person present in the office. Both men told her that they wanted to meet Foa, but since he was not present they would return the next day. In a polite but condescending manner, they assured Sorani that she needn't disturb the president. The two men did not clarify who they were or reveal anything about themselves. They merely indicated that

they wanted to inspect the two libraries. They went to the second and third floors that housed the Biblioteca Comunale and the Biblioteca Collegio Rabbinico. The rabbinical college library of ten thousand volumes was transferred from Florence in the 1930s. The communal library consisted of seven thousand volumes and precious manuscripts. Pohl and Grunewald inspected the two libraries and left without further comment.

The next day two men appeared at the temple and told Foa they were Orientalists. One of them wore a captain's uniform and said that he was a professor of Hebrew in Berlin. They exuded a thin veneer of civility and politely requested permission to inspect the two libraries. The community library's vast collection had not been fully cataloged or thoroughly researched. The community library was by far more important than the rabbinical college library, since it contained a collection that spanned the two thousand years history of the Jews in Rome. The two men spent several hours in both libraries. When they left, they carried with them the partial and incomplete catalogs of the libraries. Foa called Almansi and informed him what had happened. Both agreed that no further action on their part was necessary.

The leaders should have noted another violation of the property, that of a Jew who lived in the ghetto. On October 2, men from the ERR and a locksmith broke into Rabbi Zolli's ghetto apartment and took his books, private correspondence, and papers. They were searching for information that would lead to his whereabouts and his possible ties to the Badoglio antifascist cause. The Nazis had put a price on the rabbi's head. Zolli took refuge with a Catholic family, who "did not know me." Zolli added that "the son was caught and shot. I had to hide somewhere else. Then another Catholic family . . . took me in[,] people who had never heard of me[,] and treated me like their father and even called me father."<sup>37</sup>

A few days after these initial visits an ERR representative, a lieutenant, came to the temple with several SS troops. He did not identify himself but announced that he was a paleographer and an expert in Semitic philology and that he was going to examine the libraries. He gave Rosina Sorani a typed list of the rarest books in the libraries. At this point, Foa had not arrived at the temple. Sorani hesitated to admit the German into the libraries. The stocky officer reassured her by requesting that she accompany him. The tall, thirty-year-old Sorani led him to the library and unlocked the door. Sorani realized that "he was an expert, in the way he opened a book, softly touching the paper and leafing through the pages." The SS lieutenant with long tapered fingers in white cotton gloves turned each page with incredulous ecstasy. He went about his task in silence. Giacomo Debenedetti described the scene "In those elegant hands, as if under keen and bloodless torture, a kind of very subtle sadism, the ancient books had spoken."<sup>38</sup>

After the officer finished his inspection with Sorani present, he phoned Otto and Rosoni, a shipping company, and arranged for the library's books to be taken and shipped. It was obvious that the vast holdings of the two libraries required a number



of freight cars. The SS lieutenant ordered the immediate sequestration of the temple's two libraries.

Before departing the officer turned to Sorani and told her that they knew how many books were in the libraries. His hostility was palpable beneath a polite smile. The lieutenant and his SS escort left the temple without further comment. Sorani wrote in her diary "that within a few days they would come to get the books and all [was] to be as they left it. If not, I would pay with my life."

When Foa finally arrived, Sorani reported what had transpired. Foa immediately telephoned Almansi, since Jewish community law empowered him with the responsibility for the administration of the libraries. When Almansi arrived, the two men composed a letter of protest. The letter summarized the visits of the ERR, the sequester order, and the value of the library and requested "that immediate and appropriate action be taken to protect the library." Copies of the letter were sent to four different ministers, all under the control of Guido Buffarini-Guidi, fascist minister of the interior, and a fifth letter went to General Rainer Stahel. Once again, they were relying on the intervention of their contacts in the ranks of the RSI and on the German general. The two Jewish leaders didn't receive a reply to their letters of protest.

Some Jews heard the BBC broadcasts reporting that Jews had been rounded up in other parts of Europe. "The leaders of Roman Jewry had decided to simply await the developments of events." At this juncture, Almansi abandoned his apartment and went into hiding in the Salaria district without informing the community at large. He decided to close the UCEI offices as a precaution. Levi and Sorani had preceded him by fleeing their apartments. Fearing the worst, several prominent Jews left their homes. Anna Ascarelli Blayer Corcos and her family didn't have much of a problem. "My father was a prominent doctor in Rome. We were well off financially. My parents owned other apartments in Rome. . . . Our family changed our residences eleven times. Whenever we never went out of our apartment onto to the streets never during the day, only at night before the curfew."<sup>39</sup>

## We Had the Moral Right

ON OCTOBER 4, 1943, REICHSFÜHRER HEINRICH HIMMLER ASSEMBLED A group of SS Gruppenführers in Posen and delivered a long speech. The timing of his speech was not accidental. Since Italy broke its alliance with Germany, the reichsführer “initiated a further escalation of the Europe-wide extermination policy.”<sup>1</sup> He had a secret conversation with Adolf Hitler, who instructed him to proceed with the deportation of Jews to the east in spite of any unrest that might develop. Hitler emphasized that it must be carried out “in an all embracing way.” At this point there were six killing centers in Poland alone. He was well into the speech when, in his cool antiseptic voice, he addressed a matter on which the SS never spoke publicly: “Today I am going to refer quite frankly to a very grave chapter. We can now mention among ourselves quite openly and yet we shall never talk about it in public. I am referring to the evacuation of the Jews, the extermination of the Jewish people. . . . This is an unwritten-never to be written-yet glorious page in our history.”

Himmler went directly to the heart of his address. He said that it was one thing to put the phrase “exclusion of the Jews” or “extermination of the Jews” in the Nazi program and quite another to carry it out. Himmler rationalized their liquidation. “If the Jews were not eliminated they would infect the German body politic. We had the moral right, we had the moral duty with regard to our people, to kill this race that wanted to kill us.”<sup>2</sup>

Two days later, the reichsführer addressed another select group of the Nazi elite. Near the end of his speech Himmler said, “For I did not consider myself justified in exterminating the men . . . and allowing their children to grow up to wreak vengeance on our children and grandchildren. The difficult decision had to be taken to make these people disappear from the face of the earth.” Himmler had an objective by openly addressing the extermination policy of the regime according. Peter Longerich states that “Himmler decided to involve the party, and the military in the final solution. By making them co-conspirators, he would compel them to continue to fight. Even if the Reich lost the war it would achieve the goals of the Führer and himself. If worse came to worst they would take millions of Jews with them.”<sup>3</sup>

To make certain that all received his message, Himmler had a list prepared specially of those Gruppenführers who were not present for his previous address. Karl Wolff and Herbert Kappler were not present at either of the meetings. Wolff certainly learned about Himmler's admission and probably deduced its implication for himself.<sup>4</sup> Kappler was aware of the crucial portions of Himmler's speech, especially with the deportation looming. Wolff and Kappler understood that Himmler's open admission of the final solution confirmed what they already knew. Both were complicit in the final solution and, by extension, so was Commandant Rainer Stahel. This would account for the crucial role that Stahel would play eleven days later.

Two days after the reichsführer's speech, a tall SS captain secretly came to Rome, checked into a small hotel, and then went directly to Kappler's office. The six-foot gangly, awkward man with a violent facial tic, which shook his head from one side to the other, was Theodor Dannecker. The colorless thirty-year-old had trained as a lawyer and was under the authority of Adolf Eichmann. Before Himmler's speech, Eichmann met with Dannecker, his Jewish expert, on special operations with a set of instructions to implement the deportation of all Roman Jews. The Judenaktion was to be entirely under his command.

Dannecker was born in Tübingen to a financially strapped petit bourgeois family. At age seventeen he tried to run the family laundry business but failed. There's no indication that he had been an anti-Semite prior to the establishment of the Third Reich. His girlfriend, Lisbeth Stern, the daughter of a Jewish businessman, didn't recall Dannecker making anti-Semitic remarks or exhibiting anti-Semitism in his behavior.<sup>5</sup>

Why did Dannecker join the SS and become a willing participant in mass murder? Claudia Steur makes it clear "he wasn't a thoughtless, motiveless, mass-murdering bureaucrat." She gives no room for Arendt's "banality of evil." Dannecker was an opportunist and, like others on the make, employed anti-Semitism as a means to advance his career in the SS. Herbert Ziegler adds to Dannecker's motivation, writing that "Dannecker[,] like his immediate superior Eichmann and other 'Jewish experts' (Judenberater), joined Himmler's Black Corps to get ahead in life. He was attracted to the elite pretensions of the organization. Dannecker enlisted in the SS because it offered status, a secure income, and comradeship."<sup>6</sup>

Early in his career Dannecker learned to accept and live the value system of the SS. He became chief of the Gestapo's Jewish Office in France. Dannecker was assigned the task of rounding up and deporting all the Jews in France, a task he pursued with unremitting zeal. "On March 27, 1942, he personally accompanied the first convoy of 1,112 Jews deported from France to the east, remaining with the train as far as Auschwitz."<sup>7</sup> Dannecker organized and led the roundup of Jews in Paris. The operation, code-named Spring Breeze, took place between July 16 and 17, 1942. At approximately 4 a.m. on July 16 (Black Thursday), 4,500 French policemen fanned out across Paris and the surrounding suburbs. According to Susan Zuccotti, "They carried handfuls of a total of 27,388

carefully prepared index cards with the names of Jews to be arrested.” Dannecker’s methodical planning led to the arrest of 13,152 Jews, 4,000 of whom were children. They were temporarily confined in the Velodrome d’Hive (stadium) and then forcibly shipped to their deaths at Auschwitz.<sup>8</sup>

Dannecker had impressed his superiors, especially Eichmann, with the operation in Paris; he wasn’t just a servile bureaucrat. Dannecker took to his job with unbounded enthusiasm in his ruthless pursuit of Jews. Like so many other Nazis, Eichmann and Dannecker were indifferent to human life. How did so many of them grow up to be killers, not only willing to kill but eager to kill, either up close or from afar behind desks? They went about their assignments with the indifference of turning off the lights before leaving their offices.<sup>9</sup>

Dannecker brought with him to Rome a team of forty-four SS veterans of the Deaths Head Corps. “They were part of an experienced and ruthless Einsatzgruppen, mobile killing squad. They would form the nucleus of his raiders, to be supported by the SS police or Wehrmacht troops, but not the (uncooperative) Italians.”<sup>10</sup> His team included fourteen officers and thirty soldiers who were as tall as Dannecker and appeared like fearsome giants to their victims. Later it was determined that some Italians would have to be included in some aspect of the operation. Dannecker was certain he could handle any who might balk. He might even scoop up any who were uncooperative and imprison them until the operation was completed. While in Rome, Dannecker operated with total autonomy and was “tied to no fixed headquarters.”

When Dannecker arrived at Kappler’s office, they exchanged “Heil Hitler” salutes. The armor of Dannecker’s superiority was impenetrable. Dannecker handed Kappler an authorized deportation order signed by Gestapo chief Heinrich Müller. Müller was intimately involved in advancing the final solution. Dannecker informed Kappler that he was to utilize all available police. Dannecker in all likelihood invoked Eichmann’s name in the process, even though Kappler testified at his postwar trial he never had heard of his name.<sup>11</sup> The roundup of the Roman Jews was the first step of an overall Italian operation.<sup>12</sup>

Dannecker proceeded to enumerate two things necessary for the success of this assignment. First was the importance of complete secrecy and surprise. To this end, he told Kappler that he required a complete and accurate list of the names and addresses of all the Jews of Rome. This had been the decisive factor in Dannecker’s success in so large a city as Paris. Kappler complied and turned over the CER’s extensive list of names and addresses of virtually every Jew in Rome. Before Dannecker left, Kappler called the fascist police chief and ordered him to place forty of his men at Dannecker’s disposal. They would secure the roads leading to the ghetto and serve as guards at the Collegio Militare. Dannecker left, confident that he could overcome any obstacle in his path. Hitler met with Himmler in early October and ordered that the Jews were to be sent to Mauthausen, and on his orders this was changed to Auschwitz.

Dannecker took up residence in a tiny hotel on Via Po, near the Piazza Barberini. His team was placed in the Collegio Militare, not far from the Roman ghetto. After the Jews were apprehended they would be taken there, a place his men would surely come to know. Members of his team were given city maps and told to “study” the geographic details of the city, especially the ghetto and Trastevere areas, as well other important points. His planning took place in the Via Tasso office of the Gestapo chief. This was the center for the forthcoming operation. Dannecker went about his task with the notion that he was born to solve puzzles. Once he compiled a list of names and addresses, he then pinpointed the areas of the heaviest Jewish concentration. He used a ghetto map and city street maps. On the former, he created precincts and then transferred them onto the city map. The ghetto was the section most densely populated by Jews.

Dannecker quickly went to work and met with Gennaro Cappa, the commissioner of the *Questura*, who subsequently assembled a team of forty of his own men to assist in the *Judenrazzia* (Jewish raid). The SS captain used the community lists with names and addresses and cross-referenced them with others, including the latest census he had obtained from the Ministry of the Interior. In this way, Jews who were not formally listed as members of the community could be located. Roman Jews numbered 8,207, but this was far below the actual number of Jews in Rome. There were an additional 4,220 Jewish refugees. After Dannecker methodically compiled the comprehensive list of the names and addresses of Jews, he placed the information on cards. He divided the city into twenty-six zones and discerned the residential patterns, placing pins on a detailed map of the city. Dannecker carefully studied the topography of the city and Rome’s Jewish quarter, since it was the center of the Jewish community. He obtained an assistant, a Hungarian Jew who served as his interpreter and had spied on Jews.<sup>13</sup>

Several days before the planned roundup of Jews, an Italian police commander warned Chulda Cassuto-Compagniano that it was imminent. She attempted to warn several Jews she knew who lived in the ghetto. They dismissed her overture as an exaggeration, refusing to believe her. Chulda and her children were given refuge in convents and the homes of Catholic families.

## Keep Out of All Questions Concerning Jews

ETHEL MOELLHAUSEN THOUGHT HE HAD HERBERT KAPPLER AS AN ALLY TO thwart the impending roundup. After their meeting with Albert Kesselring, Moellhausen sensed something was afoot by Kappler's demeanor. Why was he backing away? Was he complying with the deportation order all along? Moellhausen was stunned when he learned of Kappler's extortion of gold from the Jews and thought it preposterous and outrageous. Kappler's behavior left Moellhausen perplexed. He was also aware that Kesselring's decision to call up Italian males for labor service had failed, as did his appeal for Italian men and officers to join the Germany army. Perhaps this would provide an opening for his proposal to use the Jews to build fortifications for the Wehrmacht.

Moellhausen was brought together with three men, Commandant Ranier Stahel, Ambassador Ernst von Weizsäcker, and embassy secretary Albrecht von Kessel. Moellhausen and von Kessel had been in frequent communication with one another. Each of these men knew that a deportation had been ordered and as such were well-informed interlocutors. Though Theodor Dannecker's presence and mission were secret, they became known within a small circle of Germans. At this critical juncture Stahel, Kessel, and Weizsäcker concurred that the only chance to avert the roundup was through the Foreign Office and that the only person who could really act was Moellhausen.

On the same day that Kappler first met Dannecker, Moellhausen—without consulting his superior, Ambassador Rahn—forwarded a telegram to the Foreign Office. The telegram addressed to Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop was marked with a special and high unusual classification, *supercitissime* (very very urgent). The encoded telegram addressed to "Herrn Reichsminister personally" arrived in Berlin within two hours: "Obersturmbannführer Kappler has received orders from Berlin to seize the 8,000 Jews resident in Rome and transport them to northern Italy, where they are to be liquidated. The Commandant of Rome General Stahel informs me he will permit this action only if it is consistent with the policies of the Reich Foreign Minister. It would be better business, in my opinion[,] to use the Jews, as in Tunis, for work on

fortifications. Together with Kappler, I shall present this to Field Marshal Kesselring, Please Advise. Moellhausen.”<sup>1</sup>

For some inexplicable reason, Moellhausen indicated that he would present to Kesselring an alternative to deportation, something he had already done ten days earlier.

In a bold move, Moellhausen addressed this same message to the führer. Moellhausen also indicated that Commandant Stahel and Kesselring opposed the deportation but didn't state that Kesselring had only given a tepid response to his proposal. In addition, Moellhausen sent the telegram without informing Kappler, who had already received new orders upon Dannecker's arrival. Kappler kept the details of Dannecker's mission to himself. In effect, Moellhausen was making an end run around Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler and appealing directly to Adolf Hitler. Himmler was not pleased when he learned of Moellhausen's impertinence. General Stahel was none too happy to have been mentioned in Moellhausen's messages and was particularly alarmed when he learned that the vice consul had also sent a message directly to the führer.<sup>2</sup>

Without receiving a reply from the foreign minister, Moellhausen on October 7 took another “bold” but dangerous step by sending another telegram also marked “very very urgent” to Ribbentrop, the Herr Reich minister, personally. It arrived at the Wilhelmstrasse in Berlin at 10:05 a.m. the following day: “In connection with telegram of the 6th, no. 192 Field Marshal Kesselring has asked Obersturmbannführer Kappler to postpone Judenaktion for the present time. If however it is necessary that something be done, we would prefer to utilize able-bodied Roman Jews in fortification work near here. Moellhausen.”<sup>3</sup>

Moellhausen misrepresented Kesselring's position on the deportation. The field marshal didn't ask or authorize Kappler to postpone the forthcoming deportation. Moellhausen justified this obvious lie to allay the fears of the Foreign Office. Dannecker was obligated to report his presence to SS general Karl Wolff, and it is unclear if he did so directly. On the same day that Dannecker arrived in Rome, Kappler on his own initiative sent a radio message informing Wolff—who was now in Germany—that Dannecker arrived in Rome with authorized “orders to seize and deport all Jews.” British intelligence intercepted and decoded Kappler's communication to Wolff.<sup>4</sup>

On the same morning that Moellhausen's second cable reached Berlin, Kappler acted to ensure that the roundup was successful. On October 7, he decided to remove a logistical rival. The carabinieri were known to be loyal to Victor Emmanuel. Kappler employed the fascist colonial police to surround the barracks and armories of the carabinieri and took into custody as many as they could. More than 1,500 of the local force of 6,500 men and officers were captured, carried off in trucks, put into boxcars, and deported to Nazi concentration camps. Their removal eliminated a potential obstacle to the success of the impending roundup. An additional 1,000 were subsequently arrested. The Jews attached little or no significance to their removal.

That evening, Wolff met with Hitler at Wolfsschanze. Whether the forthcoming deportation in Rome was discussed is not known. If it was discussed, Wolff was astute enough not to recommend a change of course.<sup>5</sup>

Moellhausen's cables came to the attention of the RSHA. Himmler and Adolf Eichmann, angered by this interference, believed that Ribbentrop had overstepped his proper role and let him know it. Why was he getting involved in the entire "deportation matter"? Ribbentrop was outraged when he read both telegrams, in particular Moellhausen's rendering on paper the content of a previous order that contained the word "liquidate." He immediately called Ambassador Rahn in northern Italy. Rahn told Ribbentrop that he knew nothing of Moellhausen's action. The ambassador promised to investigate and ordered Moellhausen to come to his office in the north for an accounting. Both Rahn and Kesselring were alarmed that they had been brought into this matter.

Ribbentrop directed SS Eberhard von Thadden, expert on Jewish affairs and assistant to the chief of Judenreferat at the Foreign Office, to notify Moellhausen to stay out of this matter. On October 9, von Thadden complied and sent an urgent telegram to Moellhausen: "On the basis of the Führer's instructions, the 8,000 Jews resident in Rome are to be transported as hostages. The RAM requests you not to interfere in any way in this affair and that you leave it to the SS. Please inform Rahn."<sup>6</sup>

Von Thadden immediately followed with a second telegram, which was even more emphatic: "The Herr Reichsminister for Foreign Affairs insists that you keep out of all questions concerning Jews. Such questions, in accordance with an agreement between the Foreign Office and the RSHA, are within the exclusive competence of the SS and any further interference in these questions could cause serious difficulties for the Minister of Foreign Affairs."<sup>7</sup>

Two days after von Thadden's cables, Ernst Kaltenbrunner—with the gold now in his office—responded to Kappler's covering letter that was included with the shipment of the gold. He radioed an encrypted direct, clear order:

To Kappler. It is precisely the immediate and thorough eradication of the Jews in Italy, which is in the special interest of the present internal political situation and the general security in Italy. To postpone the expulsion of the Jews until the Carabinieri and the Italian army officers have been removed can no more be considered than the idea of calling up the Jews in Italy for what would probably be very unproductive labor under responsible direction by Italian authorities. The longer the delay, the more the Jews who are doubtless reckoning on evacuation measures have an opportunity by moving to the houses of pro-Jewish Italians or disappearing completely. [Garbled word, perhaps Dannecker] Italy has been instructed in executing the RFSS [Himmler's] orders to proceed with the evacuation of the Jews without further delay.<sup>8</sup>



Kaltenbrunner's direct and unequivocal order had come from the highest authority, most likely Hitler. The truculent Kaltenbrunner brushed aside Kappler's covering letter that had arrived with the gold. "Kaltenbrunner's personal knowledge of and involvement in the annihilation of the European Jews remained constant and consistent," and neither Kappler's letter nor the gold would dissuade him from his duty. Kappler, in reality, was worried whether he could successfully pull off the Judenrazzia. As for the crate filled with gold, it remained in Kaltenbrunner's office, unopened, until the end of the war. Kaltenbrunner was obviously unimpressed or not curious enough to inspect its contents. To bring the Gestapo chief further in line, Kaltenbrunner informed Kappler that he had been awarded the *Kriegsverdienstkreuz* First Class and the Iron Cross Second Class.<sup>9</sup>

The failure of Moellhausen's last-ditch attempt to prevent the deportation and Dannecker's arrival with a select group of the SS impelled Stahel to make his role clear to the troops under his command. He called the officers of three divisions and told them that he opposed the forthcoming deportation. There was little he could do to stop it. He pondered what further actions to take since the deportation was imminent.

Dannecker returned to Kappler's office exuding confidence. He told Kappler that he had discerned the residential patterns of the Jews and their location. Dannecker planned every minute detail, taking into account all contingencies. He even prepared for each man a set of instructions they were to hand to Jews when entering their homes. The specific instructions were written in Italian and German. They indicated that the Jews were to leave immediately for transferal out of Rome. Each member of the arresting armed squad would be assigned to specific locations, specific buildings, and would have the names of each occupant. The roundup was to take place at a time when the Jews were home and were still asleep. They were to be taken first to the *Collegio Militare* on *Via della Lungara*, a short distance from the ghetto and Trastevere. Then they were to be transported by train to Mauthausen. A total of 8,207 Jews were in Rome at this point. The ancient ghetto contained the heaviest concentration of Jews. The adjoining quarters of Trastevere, Monteverde, and Testaccio were especially targeted. Dannecker exempted no section of the city from the operation. He approached his assignment with confidence and with obsessively painstaking detail, certain of success. It would probably take two full days to complete the assignment.

Dannecker also told Kappler that the detachment under his command was only meant to be the nucleus of the force necessary for the success of this operation. His detachment and the German police numbered 365. He would require a supplemental force of least one motorized battalion. Kappler already knew that he would have to supplement Dannecker's force with men under his command. Kappler put in a call to the *Stadtkommandant's* headquarters, which determined that it couldn't transfer a battalion to Kappler's command. Dannecker may have taken the initiative, called Eichmann,

and asked for his intervention, since General Stahel was reluctant to comply. Within a few short hours two SS police companies—a battalion-size equivalent—attached to General Stahel's headquarters were transferred to the Gestapo. It was apparent that Stahel had no control over the impending razzia.

The Germans had been convinced that their high-level war communications were impenetrable. British code breakers at Bletchley Park cracked the Enigma encryption machine. Since the start of the war Ultra, the British intelligence system, was able to intercept and decode German war communications.<sup>10</sup> British intelligence intercepted and deciphered messages from the SD sent by Radio Berlin to Rome and vice versa from late August to February 1944. The SS police conveyed information by other means, through personal visits, couriers, and telephone calls. Despite these limitations, the intercepts provide insight into the Holocaust in Italy.<sup>11</sup>

In the fall of 1943, British intelligence was receiving a number of decrypted Nazi messages that dealt with the ongoing situation in Italy. They intercepted Moellhausen's telegram to von Ribbentrop and the resultant responses. In early October, the intercepted messages indicated that the Germans planned to seize the Jews. British intelligence had decrypted the October deportation orders from Berlin to Kappler at least a week before the forthcoming roundup. They also intercepted Kaltenbrunner's direct order. A number of questions confronted the British. What should they do with this information? Should they make a public declaration, a clear warning to the Jews of the impending roundup? A determination was made that a radio address or an open statement risked the code-breaking operations of the British (Ultra) and the Americans (Magic).

All messages had to be thoroughly reviewed and interpreted; the process took a full four to five days. It is unclear if the Jews could have acted or would have acted on this information. To remain silent was primarily a military decision. Could this information had saved the Jews? Robert Wolfe states, "This question is linked to a broader debate about what can or cannot be done with intelligence during a war. British intelligence was not in the practice of talking publically about what it was gleaning from German radio messages."<sup>12</sup> Franklin Roosevelt didn't receive information about "Nazi intentions in time to influence the outcome of events in Rome." He received a translation of Moellhausen's messages to Ribbentrop from Allen Dulles, Office of Strategic Services (OSS) chief in Bern, "two months after the event."

On October 8, only two days after the SD message announced Dannecker's arrival in Italy, Winston Churchill received daily digests from the Bletchley intercepts "but nothing about the forthcoming deportation of the ghetto Jews." Churchill discussed the idea of issuing another public statement denouncing Nazi atrocities with his war cabinet. Anthony Eden, the British foreign minister, disagreed and felt that such a statement accompanied by the threat of punishment for war crimes would be counterproductive.<sup>13</sup> Max Hastings argues that "in general, however, neither from Bern nor from

Allied intelligence sources was there much traffic about the Holocaust, even in the latter stages of the war. This reflected not a conspiracy of silence, but rather a pervasive consciousness that the Nazis were killing large numbers of people all over occupied Europe . . . together with a failure to recognize the scale and nature of the Jewish genocide transcended all other manifestations of mass murders. Allied intelligence-gatherers focused overwhelmingly on transmitting and analysing information that seemed relevant to winning the war, rather than to illuminating the plight of Hitler's victims."<sup>14</sup>

## Like Autumn Leaves Lay Waiting

ON THE MORNING OF WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 13, THE GERMANS PLACED two railroad freight cars on trolley tracks of the black tramline and rolled them to the front door of the synagogue. A representative of the shipping company Otto and Rosoni entered the temple and went directly to the CER's offices. Rosina Sorani was told that he was there to collect the books from both libraries. Sorani took it upon herself to call the shipping company for an explanation but received none. She was informed that a German officer would come to the temple to oversee the removal of the books. The officer didn't make an appearance as the day passed and tension mounted.<sup>1</sup>

The next morning, a team from the shipping company accompanied by two representatives from the ERR and armed Germans returned to the synagogue. They brought with them a team of movers, who began to remove portions of the contents of the two libraries.<sup>2</sup> Many of the Jews watched the robbery of their cultural heritage. The ERR men supervised the removal of the books, which were placed in the freight cars with care. The books were layered, and special paper was put between each of the books to protect them for their journey.

While the Germans went about sacking the libraries, Ugo Foa and three staff members gathered the temple's artifacts from the treasury and hid them. The Germans were too preoccupied to even notice. Mino Moscoti's father was certain that the Germans were going to blow up the synagogue. He and a temple custodian helped to drain the mikvah and placed some of the silverware and sacred vessels in it. Along with Foa they managed to hide some volumes of the CER's libraries. While the libraries were being emptied, someone copied the markings on the side of the freight cars indicating that they came from Munich. It was thought at the time that this might lead to the whereabouts of the libraries' holdings and a subsequent recovery. The Germans "requested" that Rosina Sorani supervise the moving men.

Nearly all of entire contents of the CER's library (the largest portion included the Talmud Torah) and the Rabbinical College library were emptied. Before they left, one of the German officers turned to Sorani and said that under the circumstances she had

been brave. Sorani said she was willing to be less than brave. Foa was completely at a loss to do anything to stop this latest outrage. Despite this latest violation, “he refused to believe that Hitler’s gangsters would dare to repeat the incredible slaughter which had already victimized their brothers in Poland and Germany, in Holland and Belgium.”<sup>3</sup>

When the two freight cars were fully loaded, they were hooked to a motorized car and then pulled forward on the tracks of the black tramline. After several hours had elapsed, the Nazis left with nearly two thousand years of the Jews’ cultural heritage. The shipment of the books to Frankfurt took place in two stages, the first on October 14, 1943, and the second on December 23. Giacomo Debenedetti lamented that “generations who indeed seem to have passed on this earth like autumn leaves lay waiting deep in those pages for someone to bid them to speak.”<sup>4</sup> In October 1943, Italian fascists had stormed the Jewish Community Library in Turin, taken most of its books, and burned them in a huge bonfire in one of the city’s piazzas.

The Jews were left to ponder and even debate the full significance of these developments. The recent events were interconnected. Far too many still clung to belief that “they had been inoculated against further persecutions.”<sup>5</sup> Some were content to believe that the plundering of their cultural heritage was a crime that involved books, not one that involved people: the gold extortion first, books now, but not Jewish lives. Did they connect each of these developments to one another? Some Jews were alarmed. Other Jews reasoned that gold and books for lives seemed a worthwhile trade-off. Were they really secure, or was this the prelude to something more perilous and devastating? Had the Jews put too much faith in the belief that evil had its limits? The answer would come three days later. They had miscalculated, and it would be too late for a correction.

The day after first shipment of books was made, Pope Pius XII received Harold Tittmann, US chargé d’affaires to the Holy See, in a papal audience. Neither the pope nor Tittmann disclosed any knowledge of an impending roundup of Jews. Tittmann sent a cable to the State Department reporting the substance of the meeting. At no point did Ambassador Ernst von Weizsäcker or members of his staff inform the pontiff that a deportation was imminent.<sup>6</sup>

On Friday afternoon, October 15, the ghetto sprang to life as many Jews were making last-minute preparations for the Sabbath. Dan Kurzman described the scene: “Kerchiefed housewives laden with umbrellas and shopping bags cried ‘Good Sabbath’ to each other as they darted along the winding cobblestone alleys from store to store, pushcart to pushcart sometimes to wait in long lines for precious items. Although little food was available, such staples as spaghetti could go a long way, and tomorrow shops would distribute one egg to each ration-card holder. . . . [T]omorrow the weekly tobacco rations would be sold.”<sup>7</sup>

The streets were emptying as sundown approached. Most people had already finished work, with few lingering in the streets. It had rained all day. Services were not going to be held in the synagogue; they were transferred to a location on Tiber Island.

A dark gray sky and strong winds were clear indications that rain was going to continue throughout the night. Despite the weather, there was a feeling of relative security since the gold had been delivered to the Gestapo chief. Some men who had feared being rounded up for forced labor found refuge with gentile friends had slowly returned home. In the ghetto apartments, women began to light the Sabbath candles and prepare a meager supper. Many of the ghetto Jews couldn't afford a meal more expensive, and in any event, food was scarce.<sup>8</sup> Elena Di Porto went to the ghetto to warn her friends of the impending roundup. She was tipped off by her employer, who was married to a policeman. Few of her friends gave any credence to her warning. They considered it odd, erratic and unreliable.

As the evening wore on, meals were consumed. Bedtime and rest beckoned. The ghetto residents were content in their slumber. The threatening gray sky gave way to rain. Outside, a strong wind drove diagonal sheets of rain against windowpanes, adding to the sense of calm and security indoors. Settimia Spizzichino recalled, "That night there was a silence—there was always silence, the curfew was on. . . . [T]rams did not run."<sup>9</sup> As midnight approached, gunshots disturbed the quiet night, awakening some while most continued to sleep. Shootings at night were not uncommon. These could be clashes with partisans or nighttime raids by soldiers. But as the sound of the bullets came closer and louder, few inside their apartments could remain asleep. The gunfire could only add to the nighttime tension internalized by Romans. What was this wild behavior all about? Perhaps there was no reason or explanation but rather "a gratuitous hell, so it would be more mysterious and therefore more frightening."<sup>10</sup>

Those who were brave enough or just curious enough looked out of their rain-soaked windows to see a group of German soldiers firing wildly. One threw a hand grenade at the side of a nearby building. "Had they gone completely mad? They were screaming, shouting unintelligibly, laughing raucously." The shooting accompanied by wild and shrill screaming continued throughout the night, ending about 4 a.m. "It was cold, the dampness of the rainy night penetrated the walls. . . . [W]ith aching bones and chattering teeth, people returned to their own homes and their own beds."<sup>11</sup> Was this a prelude to something else, or did simple insouciance prevail? Quiet returned to the ghetto. As the night wore on, all were sleeping soundly. The shadows achieved a solid geometry. It was two hours until daylight. That evening Montaldi Sternberg, a Jewish lawyer, and his wife from Trieste were arrested. They had been staying at the Hotel Vittoria. Their names did not appear on any register of the Roman population. If news of this incident was known, it may have interfered with the element of surprise for the scheduled roundup.

The Calo family had been warned of the impending roundup and took it seriously. They fled the ghetto to a bordello, and the madam agreed to hide them. They would remain hidden there for eight months.<sup>12</sup>

Earlier in the day, German paratroopers armed with submachine guns were added to the force “protecting” the Vatican and the pope. That evening, the *New York Times* reported that a German guard fired at the Vatican Palace when a light blinked in a window at regular intervals. The guard presumably believed that a secret message was being communicated.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, the Palatine Guard was in the process of “being considerably enlarged.”<sup>14</sup>

## Los! Raus! Schnell!

ON THE MORNING OF THE SABBATH THE RAIN CONTINUED UNABATED. It was the third day of Sukkoth. Stores and shops were closed in observance of the Jewish feast. As dawn approached, the ghetto was eerily quiet. The day was dark and gloomy. The fate of the Jews had been determined by those in Berlin and at the Wolfsschanze and in Rome among those whose depravity reverberated over the course of their tenure. The trajectory of events, the miscalculations and decisions, led to this moment in time where life and death hung in the balance.

Theodor Dannecker and Herbert Kappler were confident that everything was in place for the Judenrazzia's success. Quietly and with sudden efficiency, roadblocks were placed at all entrances to the ghetto along with the requisite sentries. The former ghetto was sealed off from outside interference. Visible were members of Dannecker's elite squad, dressed in their black uniforms with twin silver flashes on their collars and death heads on their black helmets. Other Germans wore either police or Wehrmacht uniforms.<sup>1</sup>

At 5:00 a.m. the signal was given, and the Judenrazzia began. Two heavily armed formations entered the Jewish quarter, the rhythmic clump of their boots echoing off the buildings. Some officers stationed armed guards at every intersection, while others accompanied each group of soldiers, assigning individuals to specific buildings and posting others at various strategic points. They were not only going to enter the buildings on Via Portico d'Ottavia. Squads fanned out onto the side streets covering all points of the ghetto. Other units scoured Trastevere while still others, with the names and addresses in hand, searched for Jews throughout Rome.<sup>2</sup> Giacomo Debenedetti wrote of a woman who "toward 5 am . . . was heard shouting, 'O God, I mammoni.' . . . Mammoni in Roman Jewish slang means cops, guards, police."<sup>3</sup>

Had a firm and credible alarm been sounded before this day, "it would have emptied at least half of the Jewish households."<sup>4</sup> The SS were the dominant force in the roundup, since they were trained to deal with the "Jewish problem." The Germans banged on doors, shouting angrily "Los! Los! Raus! Raus! Schnell! Schnell!" When they entered an



apartment, they immediately cut the telephone wires or ripped the telephone out from the wall. They believed that the tenants might call others to warn them. Confusion permeated the apartments. The Jews had little time to even get to a phone, but the Germans weren't taking any chances. In each apartment the fearsome intruder held a card in his hand, the text written in German and Italian. The soldier, a formidable presence, proceeded to read the instructions—in reality a command. The terrified occupants, still in their nightclothes, were confused and stunned and feared the worst. They could barely absorb the specific instructions.<sup>5</sup>

You, your family, and other Jews in your household are being moved.

You must take with you:

- food for at least eight days
- ration cards
- identification cards
- drinking glasses.

You may take with you:

- a small suitcase with personal effects and belongings,
- linens, blankets, etc.
- money and jewelry.

Lock your apartment up—also the house. Take along the key.

The sick, even those gravely ill, cannot under any circumstances remain behind.

There are hospitals in the camp.

Your family must be ready to leave twenty minutes after the receipt of this card.

There was little time to gather important things. While a glowering soldier stood watching their every move, some of the Jews went about taking items at random. The command to lock their apartments and take the key with them was a clever deception making the occupants think they would somehow return. Any complaints or questions were either ignored or angrily brushed aside. This process was repeated each time they entered an apartment.<sup>6</sup>

The Germans entered number 13 on Portico d'Ottavia and captured thirty people, one third of the inhabitants of the building. As the Germans went from one building to another, one young girl called up to her aunt "The Germans are taking everyone away." Celeste Di Porto, an eighteen-year-old girl, ran out of her apartment, leaving her mother to fend for herself. Celeste's mother ran to the window and pleaded for her to return to her side. "Don't go. Come back!" The beautiful dark-haired girl responded, "I'm going, Mamma, I'm scared. I've got to go." Celeste Di Porto was nicknamed Stella (Star) but later would be known as the Pantera-Nera (Black Panther). She ultimately escaped and become notorious for turning Jews over to the fascists and Germans.<sup>7</sup>

Sarina Vivanti owned an electric shop in the ghetto but lived elsewhere. Fortunately, she left her shop before the roundup began and escaped. Though she was safe from arrest, the Germans took her mother, one of her sisters, and her sister-in-law with her three children. Sarina would never see them again.<sup>8</sup>

Those who looked out their windows could see armed helmeted soldiers everywhere. As the Germans went from one apartment to another, panic evaporated—replaced by confusion and sheer terror. Outside of one building a woman named Elena hysterically screamed “Jews! Run! Run! The Germans!” Those who heard her looked out their windows to see the Germans lining up Jews. The Germans immediately took Elena. Meanwhile, one family who had been warned gathered their five children and went out the back entrance to a nearby church. They knew the priest, Don Gregoini, who sheltered them without a second thought.

Elsewhere a woman ran through the street shouting that the Germans had entered the ghetto. Many residents at first thought they were there to round up their men. The Germans frequently conducted raids throughout the city, scooping up men for forced labor. Marco and Fortunata Zarfati lived with their children on the top floor of a building on the fringe of the ghetto. Marco had a clothing stand at the market that enabled him to support his family. When the Germans rapped on their door, the Zarfatis thought they were there for the men. Fortunato told her husband to escape with their two sons and two girls as well. She feared that the German soldiers might violate the girls. Marco fled the apartment but returned immediately to retrieve his wife. Together they found a temporary haven in a hole in a nearby street that was undergoing construction. They were safe for the moment. Meanwhile, many young men—especially those between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five—were seen frantically fleeing across rooftops desperately seeking a place to hide.<sup>9</sup>

One of Mino Moscati's sisters who lived outside the ghetto decided the day before to stay overnight with her grandmother. The Germans came and took all of them downstairs and commanded them to wait to be put aboard a truck. While the Germans were preoccupied, their attention drawn elsewhere, the women fled to safety. As for the rest of family, Mino recalled, “My mother knocked at the door of a convent facing our apartment. They took in my sisters, just as the baker downstairs took in my brother.” The remaining Moscatis found refuge in the homes of a number of Catholics, including the home of the temple photographer. Meanwhile, Alberto Fatucci and his wife and six children were sheltered in San Ambrogio, a nearby church. Other Jews fled to nearby churches, including Santa Clemente and Santa Maria in Campitelli, where false IDs were prepared and printed. San Gregorio della Divina Pietà stood one hundred meters from the Tempio Maggiore, and the huge convent of Santa Francesca Romana was only four hundred meters away. Fifteen girls from the ghetto found safe haven in the convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph, and thirty-five Jews were sheltered by the Sisters of the

Sacred Heart, whose convent stood behind the Regina Coeli prison a short distance to the Collegio Militare. Dr. Giovanni Borromeo, head physician and director of the Fatebenefratelli Hospital, opened its doors to the Jews. The Catholic hospital located on Tiberina island across from the Jewish ghetto was a safe haven for twenty-five to one hundred Jews and political refugees. Dr. Vittorio Sacerdoti of Fatebenefratelli Hospital also had patients at the Jewish hospital in the ghetto. He and nurse Dora Focaroli brought forty-five Jews to Fatebenefratelli. Gabriele Sonnino and his sister were temporarily separated from their parents. A German soldier grabbed both children. The owner of a nearby store confronted the soldier, opened his shirt, and showed him a gold cross. He exclaimed, "I am a Catholic! These are my children." They were released, reunited with their parents, and found refuge at Fatebenefratelli. Dr. Borromeo knew that the hospital would be searched. He admitted Jews suffering from a fictitious deadly disease, K-Syndrome. They were placed in the K-ward. The "K" stood for Kesselring and Kappler. The Germans who feared being infected were discouraged from conducting inspections. In addition, over a hundred Jews were housed in St. Bartholomew monastery on Tiber Island.<sup>10</sup>

Soldiers ignored the futile cries for mercy and help. Their single-minded purpose was completing their assignments. The Jews stood in the rain, mothers trying to adjust and tidy the clothes of their children and shelter them from the rain. Mothers could be seen wiping the tears and drops of rain from their children's cheeks.

A lone SS soldier searched an old well-worn building on Via della Reginella. It was the only surviving street of the original ghetto. "The street was extremely narrow, just an alley." Angelo Anticoli lived on the floor below the Spizzichinos with his wife Rosa and four children. He was the goldsmith who had presided over the collection of gold intended to meet Kappler's extortion. Angelo owned a jewelry shop in the ghetto, eking out a meager living. The entire family was apprehended and brought downstairs with the other occupants of the building. The Anticolis were confronted by another soldier. The metallic taste of fear stuck in the back of Rosa's throat. She pleaded for mercy and said that her youngest was very ill. She knelt down before the German, who shot her a penetrating glare and then began kicking her, and with each kick he said "Jew! Jew!" All of them were put onto an awaiting truck.<sup>11</sup>

In contrast to that heartless beast, "a young pale blue-eyed Austrian SS trooper pushed an old man forward with the butt of his rifle, shouting incomprehensible words. They reached a half-open door and another soldier gave the old man a last kick, whispering in Italian: 'Quickly, get inside. I am a Catholic, I'm not like these others.'<sup>12</sup>

Alberta Levi stepped out of the balcony and looked out to see the Germans down below. Within minutes she would hear the soldiers rapping on the front door, and before she realized it the door to the balcony was silently closed. Her mother was determined to save her, though her mother and her other daughter were taken. Before being

placed on an awaiting truck she told the Germans that they were Catholics who had just come from Bologna to Rome. They were set free. Alberta joined her father, who was living elsewhere.

Early in the morning, a Catholic woman rapped on Ester Calò's door and cried, "Run! Run! They're taking all the Jews who are running here and there to escape." Calò's mother took her grandchildren and went in one direction, while Ester and her sisters ran in another attempting to go to her brother's nearby home. They were able to elude the Germans.<sup>13</sup>

Giorgio Fano's family fled from one location to another eluding the Germans. They were finally sheltered in a convent by Canadian nuns. Fano's in-laws were about to flee from their apartment when the German soldiers arrived. Their neighbor, the wife of a colonel in the Black Brigades, saw the elderly couple. She went down the stairs and confronted the two soldiers. She spoke German and asked, "Who are you looking for? Everyone has left." The soldiers believed her and left for a new address.<sup>14</sup>

Graziano Perugia and his wife acted instantly before the Germans even came to their door. "They slipped out the back door and made their way past the ruins of the Theater of Marcellus to the bank of the Tiber and on past the Pyramid of Cestius and into the countryside. It was a route others would follow."<sup>15</sup> Another family was not so lucky. A mother and her child hid in the attic when the Germans rapped on her door. She had left her child of one month in the room below. They feared that if they took the child with them and it cried, all of them would be exposed to capture. They returned when the Germans left, but the child was gone.

Olga Di Veroli recalled, "At six in the morning we heard a loud repeated ring. It was a girl of about twelve or thirteen who lived on the floor above, and she told me, 'Quickly . . . run away, because the Germans are here . . . on a raid and they're taking everyone in.' . . . We leaned out over the street and saw these Germans with machine guns going back and forth like madmen."<sup>16</sup> The initial reaction of the Di Verolis matched that of other families who thought that the Germans were after the men. Others correctly concluded that they were there to collect all Jews, regardless of gender or age. The Di Veroli family managed to escape and went into hiding, subsequently changing locations at least seven times. At first a Neapolitan salesman hid them, but they had to leave because they were seen entering his home. They then went to a relative of the salesman, also a Catholic who lived in Trastevere; from there they stayed in two convents. Many of her immediate and extended family were not so lucky. Olga's sister and brother-in-law and their children as well as aunts and cousins were all captured. Caught in the net were "the immediate families of the four Di Veroli brothers: two daughters, two sons-in-law and five grandchildren."<sup>17</sup>

Margarita de Wyss, a Swiss journalist, recorded in her diary that "the rumors proved right. Jewish persecutions started today . . . they hustle the unfortunate—small babies

as well as old persons [—] into closed cars and take them to an unknown destination.”<sup>18</sup> A Roman, a gentile eyewitness, stood outside the roadblock and described what he saw as a scene out of hell:

From a doorway in Via del Tempio several women with children are brusquely pushed toward the street. Children were crying, everywhere you could hear heart-breaking cries for help and cries of distress of the victims while the thugs—some violent, some indifferent—perform their duty without any sign of human pity. . . . I could not understand why these innocent creatures should be considered a danger to Germany. I was terrified, but I kept watching the scene, perhaps with the unconscious hope of somehow being able to help the victims. Suddenly a German N.C.O came up to me and told me to be off, accompanying his words with a persuasive push. There was nothing to do but leave the place.<sup>19</sup>

German soldiers went from one building to another, from one apartment to the next. They broke down doors that weren't opened immediately. The occupants were paralyzed by fear. “People were forced to leave as they were: women in night gowns[,] babies half nude. As they burst into the homes . . . [i]n some cases when asked a soldier might tell the occupant they were going to a labor camp or said they had no idea about their destination.”<sup>20</sup>

Sabatino Finzi and his family heard a loud banging on his door. His mother needed injections every morning, and both expected to see her nurse. Instead, a German soldier entered, barked in his guttural German, and presented the set of instructions. After twenty minutes elapsed, the Finzis were escorted down the stairs and joined the people below. The process was repeated for Settimio Sonnino and his wife and three children. Alexander Stille described the heart-wrenching scene. “Eyewitnesses and survivors have reported extraordinary scenes of escape and capture: entire families jumping out of windows; men running along rooftops; a mother tossing her infant to a stranger while another mother opening her blouse and squeezing her dry nipple in order to make a German soldier understand her child needed food; a dying half paralyzed old woman being hoisted, wheelchair and all[,] onto a truck with other Jews.”<sup>21</sup>

A woman attempting to escape confronted an unidentified official from the nearby Ministry of Justice. She held her five-year-old-child and pleaded, “Save us, Save us. The German's are taking everyone. They have my husband and two of our other children.” The official witnessed a repetition of the scene in front of the synagogue, where distraught women clung to their hysterical children. In each instance, he felt helpless to do anything.<sup>22</sup> The Marchese Fulvi Ripa di Meana saw the trucks full of Jewish children and described in a compelling account what she saw. “I read terror in their dilated baby eyes, in their little faces pallid with pain, in their little hands that gripped spontaneously

the sides of the trucks, the maddening fear that invaded them, the terror of what they had seen and heard. . . . They didn't even cry, those little children . . . fear had rendered them mute and had burned the infantile tears in their eyes. Only in the bottom of the trucks, thrown on wooden planks, some newborn babies, who were hungry and frozen, were shrieking piteously."<sup>23</sup>

Carlo Trabucco saw a truck loaded with Jews. He was struck by the "scene of young and old who were not crying but rendered mute by the sheer terror and ferociousness of the SS." The scene defied any sense of logic.<sup>24</sup> Another Italian, a gentile, stood close to a truck and looked into the eyes of the children. He recalled, "It seemed they were asking for an explanation for such terror and suffering. . . . A poor woman beside me took a rosary from her pocket and began to pray and to cry. . . . 'Povera carne innocente . . . .' A laborer nearby reacted to this scene and began 'cursing Mussolini and his cowardice' for having 'teamed up' with Hitler in the persecution of the people who had done nothing wrong."<sup>25</sup>

Emma Terracina was saved by chance, albeit temporarily. When the Germans came to her building, she placed heavy pieces of furniture behind the door of her apartment. The soldier at first was frustrated at not being able to gain entrance and thought the apartment was unoccupied. Though he had a list of all the inhabitants in the building, he believed it was the wrong apartment and went on to another. Most often, if the Germans didn't receive a response from anyone inside an apartment they'd break the door down. If unsuccessful, rather than waste time they would go on to another victim.

Angela Spizzichino left her apartment with her child of nine months and two grandchildren. She came face to face with a German truck loading the Jews. She told the children not to cry, and they fled in another direction to a nearby church and were saved. The Sabatellos were not as fortunate. Leone and his mother, father, aunt, five sisters, and a brother-in-law with two children were arrested and taken to a temporary staging area at the Teatro Marcello, then placed on a truck bound for the Collegio Militare. Only Leone's brother escaped, since he was not at home and spent the night with a friend who lived outside of Rome.<sup>26</sup>

When the Germans came to take Franca Spizzichino and her three small children, she had the presence of mind to act quickly and hid her children. She told them to not make a sound or move and stay in their hiding place until nighttime. Then they should go to their aunt's home. Her quick thinking saved the children but not herself from arrest and deportation.<sup>27</sup>

Lello Perugia and his family lived on the outskirts of the city. Lello was a partisan and a prime Nazi target. The family received a phone call with a warning that the Germans were coming for them. Father Libero Raginella hid them in the convent Sisters of the Garden. Afterward they fled Rome but returned and were captured. Lello and his brothers were sent to Auschwitz, but only Lello survived.

Father Raginella also intervened with another family and arranged for them to hide in a cloistered convent. At first, the mother superior said they were prohibited from entering a cloister especially since most of the family were males. The priest urged her to take the chain off the gate so he could push it open. The priest reasoned that he could claim he had broken into the cloister, relieving her of any responsibility. Raginella then told her, "It's better with a cloister broken into than to cause the death of people in the middle of the street."<sup>28</sup>

The courageous and humble priest was also busy hiding another Jew who was married to a Catholic. Father Raginella arranged to hide both of them even though she would have to remain apart from her husband. She insisted that she would follow her husband. This decision was repeated as Catholic women followed their Jewish husbands into hiding or were arrested.<sup>29</sup>

The entire Dell'Ariceia family lived outside of the Jewish quarter in San Lorenzo. Father Raginella and the Dell'Ariceia's were lifelong friends, and he helped them to flee Rome. They found safe haven in Santa Maria, a village in Abruzzi, where they were hidden by a Catholic family.<sup>30</sup>

The Jews were arranged in columns, with one soldier at the head while another barked orders and pushed their frightened prey from behind. Some of the people were hysterical with fear, some cried, and some were too stunned to give voice or reveal any emotion. Others restrained any outward signs of their hatred for the Germans. "Along the line came the sound of praying and the half-mad cries of the demented." All of this was too unreal to comprehend fully. "The line of prisoners was formed by a motley crowd, disoriented people, their clothes in disarray and their arms laden with useless objects they thought they would need."<sup>31</sup>

After the Jews were seized they were concentrated near Teatro di Marcello, sharing a common destiny. The lines of helpless men, women, and children were directed to the foot of a museum building near the Teatro di Marcello. "The Jews were gathered together in a pit and arranged in lines to await the return of three or four trucks that were shuttling back and forth between the ghetto and the site that had been set up as the first staging area."<sup>32</sup>

Francesco Odoardi, a gentile, passed those who were contained in the Theater of Marcellus and recorded what he had seen:

The men, some in jackets, some in overcoats, were sitting on the ancient rocks, or on suitcases, boxes or sacks. They were looking down absently, without turning their heads. . . . The women, however, were still housewives, even in the open air, on the pavement and under the rain. With slow and somber gestures, in some ways hopeless but always with love, some of them were tidying the little clothes and coats of their children. . . . One of the women, with a kerchief on the head of her daughter,

who was crying. She wiped the girls tears and the drops of rain on her face, but always in silence. She had no words to comfort her. She could not even tell the child that Papa would know what to do; for he was there beside her, motionless, his blood turned cold with helplessness.<sup>33</sup>

The Jews, “regardless of age, gender, or the status of their health, were hoisted onto an awaiting truck including the paralyzed woman in her wheelchair.” Augusto Capon, the seventy-two-year-old father-in-law of Enrico Fermi, was paralyzed and taken by the soldiers.<sup>34</sup>

The immediate destination of their human cargo was the Collegio Militare (Military College), a fortress-like structure on the Trastevere side of the Tiber at the base of the Janiculum Hill. Some were brought temporarily to no. 29, a tiny building on Via Portico d’Ottavia, or to Tiber Island. There weren’t enough trucks on hand for the large number of Jews who had been caught in the Germans’ murderous net. This necessitated taking repeated trips along Lungotevere Cenci and then to the Collegio Militare. Any questions about their destination went unanswered. Giacomo Debenedetti described the scene when a truck became available. “Their right sideboards were lowered and the loading began. The sick, the disabled, and balky were urged on by insults, shouts, shoves, and blows from gun stocks.” A number of the trucks were uncovered, and the rain drenched the occupants, some of whom were still in their nightclothes. The rain mixed with tears. Mothers sought to protect their children, while the old fought to brave the cold. The Jews and the men in particular were unable to alter the fate of their loved ones. “Before noon, the rain halted and a bright intermittent sun wrinkled through the clouds.”<sup>35</sup>

On Via della Reginella a mother’s heart-wrenching cry could be heard by all. She shouted to her small son “Run! Run! Bello di mamma, run away.” The black-haired twenty-two-year old Settimia Spizzichino lived in a building on Via della Reginella with her parents, Mose and Grazia, and three sisters, two of whom, Ada and Gentile, were married. Their husbands had gone into hiding earlier, fearing they would be scooped up for forced labor. Settimia sensed “there was something in the air. A cotton-wool silence.” Then she heard heavy footsteps, “soldiers’ footsteps, marching.” Settimia ran to the window and saw two fully armed Germans taking the Jews who lived in the next building. The Spizzichinos hid in the last room of their apartment. Her father left the door open, hoping the Germans would think they fled the apartment. One of Settimia’s sisters panicked and started screaming. She ran out of the apartment, only to come face to face with a German soldier. The soldier followed her up the steps, entered the apartment, and immediately arrested all of the occupants who were in the rear bedroom. The Nazi soldier handed them a piece of paper with instructions. They had twenty minutes to get ready and had to take enough food for eight days. Settimia



claimed that one of her sisters was their maid and that she and her son were not Jewish. The soldier was confused by this pronouncement and released the two of them. Settimia acted quickly “and took a piece of pecorino cheese and some cans of green peppers” to sustain them for the eight-day transfer to a labor camp. The rest of the family were taken downstairs and joined the others in the building awaiting to be put on a truck. This included Settimia’s sister Ada and her baby. The Spizzichinos were part of a group of Jews who were seized on Via Reginella and “other north-south running streets. They were marched to trucks parked in Via del Tempio. Mose broke away from the family and fled to a nearby alley. He hoped to alert his son who lived outside the ghetto.” Settimia and her mother were put one truck, the remainder of the family on another. Her mother had recently been imprisoned for dealing on the black market. She reasoned that this was why they were arrested. As the truck approached Regina Coeli prison, she thought that was their destination. She comforted her daughter with the assumption that at least they’d be able to eat well. But the truck continued on to its destination. Settimia’s mother was a simple woman, someone who found it difficult to comprehend evil in others. Both were relatively calm as they were herded into the Collegio Militare with the other Jews.<sup>36</sup>

An hour before the roundup began, the forty-four-year-old Settimio Calò quietly left his apartment and went to a nearby tobacconist. He joined a queue awaiting their weekly cigarette ration. Settimio was shocked when he returned home to discover that his wife and children were gone. Another daughter, “who lived around the corner in Via della Reginella, had also disappeared.” But where? Why? He recalled, “I thought I had gone mad.”<sup>37</sup> Jane Scrivener (Mother Mary) recorded in her diary, “It is a nameless horror. People you know and esteem, brave, kind, upright people, just because they have Jewish blood treated like this. Some of them are heroic. They came for the father of a family we know. He was out. The Germans said in that case they would take his wife. Whereupon the daughter said, ‘where my mother goes. I go too,’ and although they did not want her particularly, she was taken as well.”<sup>38</sup>

Gemma Terracina, who lived in Trastevere, fabricated a story when the Germans came to her apartment. She told the soldier that her husband drove a truck for the Germans. They left her and the children unharmed. Gemma’s brother Settimio had been a boxer and former light heavyweight champion of Italy. He was now serving with the US Army. Arminio Wachsberger lived in Trastevere with his wife, Regina, and Clara, his five-year-old daughter who had been stricken with polio. Regina had been born in Trastevere, and Arminio’s father was a rabbi. Also living with them were the Polaccos, his in-laws. Wachsberger worked in another part of Rome. “His business had expanded with the help of two Catholic friends, [and] he had established a small workshop for his optical and watch repair work.” His shop was often visited by German soldiers who needed his services. Wachsberger was able to pass himself as Aryan. He was

born in Austrian Fiume and became an Italian citizen after Fiume was transferred to Italy after World War I. He spoke Italian and German perfectly. Wachsberger heard the BBC reports of German atrocities but dismissed them as exaggerated. In either event, he was comforted in the belief that it could not happen here in Italy.

The Nazis knew exactly where Wachsberger lived. he was an active member of the community, and his name had appeared on their lists. When the doorbell rang, he was confronted by two armed SS soldiers who pushed passed him. Though he asked for an explanation, they handed him the paper with the set of instructions. When Wachsberger asked where he and his family were going, the Germans told him they were being sent to a labor camp. The apartment included his in-laws, Vittorio, and his brother-in-law's child, who was spending the night with them. Wachsberger tried to explain the circumstances of this child being in his home. One of the soldiers brushed this aside and said that all Jews were to be transferred with no exceptions. The two SS soldiers escorted the six Jews to an awaiting canvas truck.<sup>39</sup>

Rosina Sorani lived near the Jewish quarter and was on her way to the temple while the roundup was under way. She was warned not to go there, since the Germans were taking all Jews. At first she ignored the warning but then saw a truck loaded with Jews. Frantically she returned to her apartment and immediately called Ugo Foa. Sorani gave him a fragmentary report. She insisted that they meet. Foa apparently didn't know what was going on and offered to meet with her at his office. Sorani said this was impossible, but she would come to his apartment. She arrived sometime in the morning and immediately reported what she had heard and seen. She pleaded once again that he go into hiding with his children.

Rosina called her brother Settimio, an executive with DELASEM who was in hiding. He told her that he knew of a safe location for her to hide. She in turn urged him not to leave his hiding place. Settimio told Rosina to hide in a hotel in central Rome. Both had been working to shelter Jews.<sup>40</sup>

Those who were aware of the ongoing roundup, both Jews and Catholics, made frantic phone calls to relatives and friends who lived in other parts of the city. Piero Modigliani received a phone call at 8 a.m. from a Catholic friend who said "Giovanni has arrived," a code that he was in imminent danger, and he escaped to safety. Elsewhere, Aldo Gay was roused from his sleep by a phone call that warned him to find a place to hide. He fled to a nearby convent. Fortunata Tedesco, eight months pregnant, lived in the Testaccio district. Someone came to her apartment warning her and her husband that the Germans were taking the Jews away. Non-Jewish neighbors who lived in the same building rescued them. They remained in their apartment until the birth of their son. To protect their hosts, they fled to the convent of the Most Precious.

Silvana Di Nepi lived on Via Po, the same street where Dannecker's hotel was located. When the Germans arrived, Silvana immediately fled out of an open window. She made her way onto the street and then to the nearby home of a Catholic friend.

Enzo Camerino, a fifteen-year-old boy, lived with his parents, sister, and brother in an apartment on Portico d'Ottavia. At five o'clock in the morning, a lone German came to their apartment. He handed the Camerinos the set of instructions and carted them off.<sup>41</sup>

Sorani's report had hit Foa like a thunderbolt. He left his apartment, still clinging to the belief that he could employ the last vestiges of influence he possessed to appeal to his contacts with fascist authorities. He returned shortly realizing that his mission had failed, since the Germans controlled all fascist agencies. Foa felt helpless and shattered that he had been rendered impotent, a reality that should have set in weeks earlier.<sup>42</sup>

Some Jews, including UCEI president Dante Almansì and Renzo Levi, were secure in the homes of Catholics. Rabbi Israel Zolli fled to the safety of the Vatican. Those who took them in—whether they be individual Catholics or convents, churches, monasteries, and the Vatican itself—did so at grave risk to themselves. This process had begun before this October morning. German squads with names and addresses of Jews fanned out to other sections of the city. Those who lived outside the Jewish quarter were placed on trucks or smaller vehicles and then brought to the Collegio Militare.

Mario Fiorentini, a partisan, lived with his parents in the center of Rome. His uncle occupied an apartment in the same building. Fiorentini's father was Jewish, and his mother was Catholic. His parents' names were not included in the CER's master lists; however, his uncle was registered. This led the Germans to the Fiorentini's apartment.

When Mario heard the roar of a truck, he ran to the window and immediately recognized the uniforms of the SS police. There was little time to think or talk. His parents acted immediately. "Quick! Quick out the window." His parents urged their young son, a partisan, to flee to safety. If caught, he would be shot. The young Fiorentini maneuvered his lithe frame out the window and onto the rooftop. He then fled along the rooftops of adjoining buildings and made his way onto another street and safety.

Before the Germans burst into their apartment, Mario's mother had the presence of mind to gather some of her jewelry and hide it in her dress. While the Germans were at the door, Mario's father scribbled a note. After the Fiorentinis were placed in a van, a neighbor entered the apartment, found the note, and delivered it to Mario.

The Fiorentinis were taken to Regina Coeli prison. The Gestapo set aside the third arm of the prison for political prisoners. Mario's mother subsequently bribed the Italian guard with her jewelry. Both were allowed to escape while the guard "looked the other way." Mario would later reflect, "I am convinced that had it been a German guard they would have remained in prison and deported to a concentration camp."<sup>43</sup>

The Germans made their way to the apartment of Sofia Soria, a ninety-two-year-old widow. Sofia whispered a plea for help. She was so frightened by the fearsome men that she died of a heart attack. The SS returned after the funeral and arrested members of her family, a measure of their indifference to human life.<sup>44</sup>

Many Romans who witnessed these scenes out of hell did so with a mixture of incredulity and outright hatred. As the trucks passed, they could be seen shaking their fists with rage. Some expressed their feelings with facial expressions or resigned shrugs of impotence. Lello Di Segni observed a Catholic man who was visibly upset that he couldn't do anything to help the Jews.<sup>45</sup> When Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty learned of the deportation he lamented, "These gentle people are being treated like beasts." Another Italian eyewitness recorded what he had witnessed: "Everywhere you could hear pleas for help and cries of distress."<sup>46</sup>

Truck after truck entered the grounds of the Military College and "drove to the furthest arcade." And "when the trucks came to a stop . . . the Jews came face to face with 'a massive, fortress like structure. . . . It was actually four buildings in one. Each section stood at right angles to the other forming an almost perfect square.'"<sup>47</sup> Armed guards conducted the unloading "as summarily and roughly as the loading had been."<sup>48</sup>

Settimio Calò learned that his family had been taken to the Collegio Militare. He went there and began banging on the doors. An Italian guard grabbed him and said, "Are you crazy? Get out of here. Don't you know they'll grab you too if they see you?" The guard forced the tearful Settimio to leave and save himself. "While the Jews were going into the Collegio Militare, one woman ran up and grabbed a baby from an old woman and said: 'This is my baby, this is my son, this one is not Jewish.'" She pushed the Germans away and went off with the baby; she was a Catholic woman who risked her life to save a child she didn't know."<sup>49</sup>

While the roundup was still in progress, Heinrich Müller—head of the Gestapo—phoned Eberhard von Thadden. Müller referred to the ongoing roundup "as an order from Hitler (Führerbefehl)." They had met earlier in the day to discuss strategy concerning the continuation of the deportation.<sup>50</sup> The führer reversed course and informed Heinrich Himmler that the Jews were to be sent to Auschwitz, not Mauthausen. Either Himmler or Adolf Hitler then contacted either General Wilhelm Harster or Herbert Kappler.

## It Is Simply Impossible to Refuse

SINCE THE OCCUPATION BEGAN, ITALIANS SOUGHT TO ESCAPE THE CLUTCHES of the Germans. Young men sought to evade the roundup for forced labor, and partisans were being hunted around the clock. Allied soldiers who found themselves behind enemy lines attempted to evade capture. Rome's monasteries, churches, and convents opened their doors to Jews who sought refuge.

Some Jews who were perceptive enough and had the means either relocated within Rome or left the city entirely. Where could they go? Who could or would take them in? Those who hid them faced being shot. Some five hundred Jews fled Rome to the countryside before the roundup. Nuns, priests, pastors, Vatican officials, shopkeepers, taxi and bus drivers, teachers, mailmen, doctors, and "ordinary" everyday people responded to the cries for help of those Jews who remained in Rome. Catholic hospitals were ordered to admit as many Jewish patients as possible even if their ailments were fictitious.

The Vatican printing presses were busy supplying false identity papers and passes allowing the holders to move about Rome. Richard Evans asserted, "Several thousand Jews found refuge in the Vatican and in monasteries and convents in other parts of Rome." At the end of September, Silvana Ascarelli-Castelnuovo along with her four children found safety in the Convent of the Sacred Heart of the Infant Jesus. Because her son and father "could be identified during a search since they were circumcised," it was even more difficult to find a safe haven for them. Eventually a priest intervened and placed them in the Università Gregoriana.<sup>1</sup>

Between September 10 and early October, Pope Pius "approved the instruction lifting the so-called barriers of canonical cloister, so as to allow both men and women to be sheltered in female and male religious houses alike." To be released from the obligation for having cloistered areas in their convents and monasteries, the superiors needed proper authorization. Legally they couldn't do so of their own accord. Direct orders from the pope were made to open up all Church properties including convents, churches, monasteries, religious colleges, and institutions to shelter Jews. On October 1, the Augustinian Oblates received formal permission from the pope to shelter Jews in

the cloisters, and this applied to all such convents. They asked and received permission from Archbishops Montini and Traglia. Father Libero Raganella's actions on October 16 confirmed that it was precisely "an order from the top."<sup>2</sup>

By October, the number of people seeking safe haven grew dramatically. Refugees fled to Rome because of its open-city status. Foreign Jews knew that the Vatican was facilitating immigration to neutral countries and learned it were also hiding them in Church institutions. As days passed, Jews moved from private residences and went to churches, convents, and other protected Vatican institutions that were more secure. Churches and convents were not spared from German raids. There was immense pressure to act quickly and save as many as possible. Jane Scrivener (Mother Mary) reflected in her diary, "New demands come to increase the number of families already being welcomed, and there is beginning to be a lack of space. But how can we refuse the distressed." Then she wrote, "It is simply impossible to refuse." In another entry, she conveyed the same heartfelt concern. "The difficulty of hiding patriots and Jews is becoming more and acute." At the time of her diary entry, her convent housed four Sicilian refugees and sheltered thirteen Jews. Letizia Lanzeta recalled, "My mom, my grandmother, and my aunt were Jewish and taken in by the Sisters of the Holy Child. On the other hand my grandfather and my uncle were welcomed by the Augustinian convent who lived next door."<sup>3</sup>

Sylvia Lombroso and Luciano Morpurgo had sensed the impending danger but waited until October to take action. Fortunately, both were spared from the roundup.

Michael Tagliacozzo lived in an apartment in Bologna Square. On Black Sabbath, the Germans knocked on his door and demanded entry. He climbed out of a window and made his way onto the street, still in his pajamas, and then to a family who lived nearby and hid him for a short time. Tagliacozzo thought of his former teacher, Maria Amendola, a Catholic who sheltered him in her home. She proceeded to contact several priests in an attempt to find him safe haven. Tagliacozzo was brought to Don Vincenzo Fagiolo, who took him to the Pontificio Seminario Romano and safety. It was one of the Vatican properties under direct papal jurisdiction. The Seminario is part of a complex that includes St. John Lateran, the pope's seat as the bishop of Rome. "It was Don Vincenzo Fagiolo who warmly defended my cause with the rector of the seminary Monsignor Roberto Ronca who sheltered me." Tagliacozzo recalled, "I remember they treated me wonderfully. After not having eaten in two days, Father Palazzini gave me a meal with all God's goods, a bowl of vegetable soup, bread, cheese, and fruit. I had never eaten so well." Several members of his immediate and extended family were not as fortunate. They were arrested during the October 16 roundup and shipped to Auschwitz.<sup>4</sup>

Jews ran everywhere, and at least 1,324 found safe haven in Catholic homes and even more in religious institutions, including the Sant'Onofrio Convent, the Church and convent of San Benedetto in Trastevere, St. Paul outside the Walls, and the Vatican.<sup>5</sup> Two hundred Jewish men and women were hidden in the Convent of Notre Dame de

Sion on the Gianicolo.<sup>6</sup> A Jewish family escaped discovery by being walled in the upper reaches of Chiesa Nuova. The church had been Pius's first assignment after his ordination. The Institute of St. Joseph hid 80 Jews, while the Sisters of Botteghe Oscure—on papal order—hid 30 Jews. Augustinian Fathers, Jesuits, Redemptorists, and many others sprang into action.<sup>7</sup> Hundreds of churches and convents opened their doors to those fleeing, including Santa Maria ai Monti. The archive of the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus stated, "A day of great work on one hand and great terror on the other! . . . [T] here is a steady stream of frightened young people who come and ask to be taken in for fear of the Germans who want to deport them to Germany." Mother Mary paid tribute to her fellow religious "who fed the hungry and harbored the shelterless."<sup>8</sup>

Augustinian nuns of the convent Santi Quattro Coronati hid Jews and those who needed protection. Their recently discovered records contain the names of those hidden. They also include notes that the nuns were directed to take in the Jews: "In this painful situation the Holy Father [Pius XII] wants to save his children, also the Jews, and orders that hospitality be given in the convents to these persecuted, and that the cloisters must adhere to the wish of the Supreme Pontiff." The sisters of Santo Bambino Gesu hid thirteen Jews.<sup>9</sup> The diaries of the Monastery of Santa Susanna, Santa Maria dei Sette Dolori, and the Istituto di Maria Bambina refer to the decision to offer refuge to the persecuted came from above. The latter's register contains this entry: "At this time, Jews, fascists, soldiers, carabinieri, and nobility sought refuge with religious institutions, who, at great risk to themselves opened their doors to save human lives." This was the desire of Pius XII, who was the first to hide Jewish refugees within the Vatican and some thirty-eight in the Vatican Complex.<sup>10</sup> Andrea Riccardi analyzed the Istituto di Maria Bambina's diary, which states that "every day there was another request [and] every so often a telephone call from the Secretariat of His Holiness from the Vatican, and the reasons was always the same: someone on the run, a persecuted family to take in, to protect, to help. One could not have refused a request from the representatives of the Pope."

Within the churches and convents, priests, nuns, and Jews shared the same food. "Jewish women strolled down the hallways of the cloistered convents. Jewish men learned the Our Father and wore the habit as a precaution in case of German or fascist raids." Rose Di Veroli was asked to pray together with the others in church and did so reciting the Shema Israel under her breath. Mother Superior Virginie Badetti of Our Lady of Zion and her assistants provided refuge for one hundred Jews including Ruth Weinberg and her uncle. The nuns, Weinberg said, "shared their slim rations, and gave up their own beds for the people they were protecting—though so many had been sheltered in the convent that many had to sleep on the floor."<sup>11</sup>

Written records of the convents have been uncovered. The lists of names sheltered in the Seminario Maggiore Romano have been found and contain the names of the Jews they rescued but don't indicate on whose authority the convent was ordered to shelter them. There was always a concern that at any time the Germans might present

themselves and conduct a search of a convent. That documentation would be damaging. Their fears were well founded. On one occasion the SS tried to search the Oriental Institute, a property under Church jurisdiction. The rector, fluent in German, turned them away, helping to save the Jews, albeit temporarily. They had to go elsewhere for their own protection.<sup>12</sup> While Jews were hidden in convents and additional extraterritorial properties, the Vatican continued to feed and support them. When the convents, churches, and other institutions were full to capacity, the Vatican provided false identification papers to those who were turned away. According to the Geneva Convention, this activity violated the Vatican's status as a neutral state.

How did this extraordinary effort to save the persecuted come about? Individual Romans responded on the spot based on either people they knew or those who pleaded for help. As far as the Church institutions, this was not just a spontaneous act. According to Professor Anna Foa, "This could not have been simply the fruit of initiatives from below, but were clearly coordinated as well as permitted by the leadership of the Church."<sup>13</sup> Cardinal Maglione wrote to all superiors of religious orders urging them to help all refugees.<sup>14</sup> Pius XII was not just informed that the persecuted were being sheltered in Church institutions, nor was he a passive bystander.<sup>15</sup> Through selected papal emissaries, he personally ordered that all Church institutions open their doors to the persecuted, especially the non-Aryans. Susan Zuccotti maintains that there are no written documents, "an actual directive," to open Church institutions to shelter Jews. She admits that the pope was informed and permitted rescue efforts to continue. "No written order of the Pope to provide life-saving measures has been found." She contradicts her earlier assertion: "Any direct personal order would have to be kept very quiet to protect those who were actually sheltered." Robert Katz reiterates the Zuccotti position. Ian Kershaw concluded that "it is improbable that the simultaneous efforts to hide Jews in Church buildings arose spontaneously." Historian Michael Burleigh reached a similar conclusion. "It is inconceivable that such a large-scale rescue effort, which included religious houses across Italy, could not have been at the behest of the bishop of Rome."<sup>16</sup> The pope's orders were transmitted orally, not in writing, out of necessity. The Vatican had to be especially careful not to commit such an order in writing. The pope's representatives, whether priest or nun, weren't immune from being stopped and searched. If such a document was uncovered, this certainly would have triggered a move on all Church institutions and the Vatican, endangering all those who were being sheltered.

Monsignor Giovanni Battista Montini, assistant secretary of state and one of Cardinal Maglione's closest deputies, as well as Monsignor J. Patrick Carroll-Abbing, Father Pfeiffer, Father Anton Weber, Monsignor Vitucci, Cardinal Paolo Dezza, Cardinal Pietro Palazzini, Don Giuseppe Di Zotti, and other trusted prelates were capable emissaries for the pope's direct orders to shelter Jews. Monsignor Carroll-Abbing testified, "I spoke to Pope Pius XII many times during the war, in person, face-to-face, and he told



me not once but many, many times to assist the Jews. . . . I can personally testify to you the pope gave me direct face-to-face verbal orders to rescue Jews.” Michael Tagliacozzo concluded, “Pius himself ordered the opening of convents and Pius was the only person to intervene when the Nazis rounded up Roman Jews.” Martin Gilbert underscored the pope’s direct connection to Catholic rescuers. “You cannot argue that the Pope is the supreme head of the Catholic Church and said nothing, and then, in the next breath, speak of all of these wonderful acts of Catholic charity and rescue—especially by senior men of the Church who pledged fidelity to the pontiff—and claim that the Pope had nothing to do with their rescue efforts.” Two *notulen* books in the Vatican archive cite two hundred personal interventions by the pope on behalf of Jews who asked for help and were then hidden in convents, and three thousand others entered them after October 16.<sup>17</sup> Enzo Forcella wrote that it was better not to leave any trace of a written order from the pope, because “in the face of eventual challenge a response must be that it was done on the personal initiatives of individual priests unbeknownst to the higher authorities.”<sup>18</sup> Overlapping the assistance given in Church institutions was the work of Père Marie Benoît and the clandestine networks of Ferrofino and Centioni.<sup>19</sup>

It has been established that 4,112 Jews were sheltered in 235 convents alone, not including those hidden in churches, monasteries, and 750 other religious houses. At least 1,324 Jews found safe haven in Catholic private homes, while 30 were sheltered in the Vatican, and hundreds found refuge in extraterritorial buildings and other properties. By the time Rome was liberated, papal actions and those of his emissaries had saved two-thirds of the entire Jewish population.<sup>20</sup>

## Let's Go Make a Few Phone Calls

**D**URING THE EARLY MORNING OF OCTOBER 16, PRINCESS ENZA PIGNATELLI Aragona Cortes was awakened by a phone call from a friend. The anguish in her friend's was evident. She lived close to the Jewish quarter and witnessed the roundup that was still in progress. She told Pignatelli that the Germans were seizing the Jews and taking them away in trucks and urged her to do something.

Pignatelli had been sympathetic to the plight of the Jews. She had hidden them in her home and in the homes of Christian families. "What can I do?" she asked the caller. "You know the pope," her friend said. "Go and see him." Even if the pope was agreeable to meet with her this early in the morning, how was she going to get to Vatican? The diminutive and strong-willed princess sprang into action and called Gustav Wollenweber, who served in Ernst von Weizsäcker's embassy. She knew that Wollenweber opposed the Nazis' anti-Semitic policies. Distraught by the news she had received, Pignatelli telephoned Wollenweber and exclaimed abruptly, "Please come and pick me up immediately. I must go to the Vatican. I'll explain later."<sup>1</sup>

As soon as Wollenweber arrived, they drove directly to the ghetto to verify the accuracy of the report. The SS guards at first refused to allow the German diplomat to pass. Wollenweber flashed his diplomatic credentials. They were able to get close enough to see for themselves. The Germans indeed were taking the Jews. "They saw people, many still in their pajamas, being marched down the street in the rain and thrown into black-canvased trucks. They saw frightened children clinging to their mothers' skirts and old women begging for mercy. They heard screams, pathetic wails of prayer, and the slap of leather on cobblestones as some Jews tried to flee."<sup>2</sup>

Pignatelli and Wollenweber raced to the Vatican. Armed with his diplomatic pass, Wollenweber drove her right into the Vatican. The princess urged an official, "Please take me immediately to His Holiness!" She explained the purpose of her urgent request and was escorted by the *maestro di camera* to the papal chapel, where Pius XII was attending mass. "When he saw me, I knelt in his chapel. He was still wearing his chasuble after finishing mass. He came to me and said, 'What has happened?'" The

princess recounted what took place. The pope's piercing eyes framed by steel-rim glasses held Pignatelli's worried and distraught gaze. He asked her to walk with him to his study. Pignatelli could barely contain her anguish and blurted, "You must act immediately. The Germans are arresting the Jews and taking them away. Only you can stop them." The pope halted and stared at the princess, his angular face transformed by this report. This was the first word he had received of the roundup.<sup>3</sup> "But they promised not to touch the Jews in Rome!" The pope was referring to the promise given by Herbert Kappler that the gold ransom would save Jewish lives. The pope's shock gave way to anger and outrage.<sup>4</sup>

Pius was a trained diplomat who was not given to making bold public denunciations unless he thought it would produce results. His sharp intellect enabled him to assess critically the Vatican's options to influence a situation and to calculate the possibilities as well as the limits of its power. "He had little use for plans, no matter how idealistic, if there was no power to effect their actualization or to insure success." But this situation was a different matter entirely, since he had little time to consider the options. Those who knew him best realized that the pope was tenacious and cool under pressure.<sup>5</sup>

The pope turned to the princess and said, "Let's go make a few phone calls."<sup>6</sup> When they entered his study the pope's reaction was swift and decisive. Pignatelli stood nearby as Pius immediately telephoned Cardinal Maglione, secretary of state, and informed him what he had learned. The pope ordered Maglione to call Ambassador Weizsäcker immediately and make a strong protest. Pius quickly decided to move on two simultaneous fronts, and a frenzy of activity developed. His style was to select from a handful of trusted aides for special and often secretive assignments. They included Father Leiber, Father Pfeiffer, and his eldest nephew Carlo Pacelli, the Vatican's chief legal counsel. The pope walked Princess Pignatelli to the door and assured her, saying "I'll do all that I can." Pius knew that the Vatican phone lines were tapped. He instructed Father Pfeiffer to relay to him any information he was able to obtain from Commandant Rainer Stahel and Berlin. Monsignors Montini and Tardini were to monitor the religious institutions to be sure they were not in danger. Father Leiber was to contact Ambassadors Osborne and Tittmann to determine if Britain and the United States was going to issue a formal protest to Berlin.<sup>7</sup>

Cardinal Maglione summoned the sixty-one-year-old white-haired, taciturn ambassador to the Vatican. Maglione put aside diplomatic niceties when Weizsäcker arrived and got right down to the issue at hand. The cardinal made it abundantly clear that the pope was outraged by what was taking place and also emphasized the pontiff's deep distress over the fate of the Jews. Maglione asked Weizsäcker if he opposed this government's policy regarding the Jews. Weizsäcker responded that he did and said, "I always expect you to ask me, 'So why then are you staying in your position?'" Maglione urged him to save all these innocent ones and act without delay "on behalf of these

poor people, who were being persecuted just because they belonged to a particular race." Weizsäcker had always harbored a fear that the Gestapo might discover that he arranged to hide a Jewish family in the Teutonic College in the Vatican and also discover his earlier attempt to warn the Jews.<sup>8</sup>

The ambassador countered Maglione with the assurance that he would "try to do something for these poor Jews." Weizsäcker added, "What would the Holy See do if these things continued?" Maglione responded, "The Holy See would not want to be faced with the need to express its disapproval. . . . If the Holy See were forced to (protest), it would trust the consequences to Divine Providence."<sup>9</sup> Weizsäcker was visibly shaken and gave voice to his inner fear. "I think of the consequences that a protest by the Holy See might precipitate," he said.

Both Maglione and Weizsäcker were thinking in terms of a direct and violent move against the Vatican and its extraterritorial properties. They would surely take all of the Jews who were hiding in them in Rome and in similar properties in occupied Italy and Europe.<sup>10</sup> Maglione replied that if the operation was not halted, it would leave the pope no alternative but to express his opposition openly. Robert Ventresca said it succinctly. "Put simply, if the Nazis did not desist in their operation against the Jews in Rome, the pope would play his trump card, as it were, and issue an explicit public condemnation of Nazi actions."<sup>11</sup> Alarmed by the threat of an open protest, Weizsäcker declared, "For heaven's sake, don't make a public protest! You know what Hitler is like! Leave it to me, I'm going to take care of the matter." The ambassador continued and emphasized that "the directives for the roundup came from the highest authorities (Hitler-Himmler) in the Reich."<sup>12</sup>

When the ambassador left Maglione, he was not sure if a papal protest was forthcoming and in what form. Weizsäcker decided to play a double game.<sup>13</sup> First, he had to allay the fears of his superiors by persuading them that the pope was not going to act in a rash manner. He would attempt to calm Berlin by deception. Weizsäcker assured Maglione that he was already working on an effort "to do something for the unfortunate Jews."

Weizsäcker, fearing retaliation, urged Cardinal Maglione not to repeat or share their conversation with any German government official. The ambassador asked to be given a free hand to take whatever action he deemed necessary. Maglione agreed for the moment with the expectation that the ambassador would intervene. Weizsäcker didn't report to Berlin the "official conversation" he had with Maglione or that an open public protest was in play.<sup>14</sup> Albrecht von Kessel justified Weizsäcker's conduct. "Ambassador Weizsäcker had to fight on two fronts: to recommend to the Holy See, to the Pope, therefore, not to take inconsiderate actions, i.e. actions whose ultimate catastrophic consequences he perhaps had not foreseen. On the other hand, Ambassador

von Weizsäcker had to try to persuade the Nazis through artful (fabricated) reports, to try to persuade the Nazis that the Vatican was showing 'good will.'<sup>15</sup>

Weizsäcker met privately with Monsignor Montini, undersecretary of state, and counseled him that a public protest would have dire consequences. The deportations would not be stopped but would be carried out more vigorously.

While the Maglione-Weizsäcker meeting was still in progress, the pope acted on another initiative. He summoned Prince Carlo Pacelli, instructing him to go to Bishop Alois Hudal. The fifty-eight-year-old Hudal was rector of the Austrian-German National Catholic Church in Rome, Santa Maria dell'Anima. Hudal had been out of favor and isolated by the pope. The bishop had written a book in 1937 questioning the policies of Pius XI and his secretary of state, Eugenio Pacelli, regarding National Socialism, especially the encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* that openly attacked National Socialism. Hudal was a complex character who, according to Johan Ickx, actually hid Jews in his personal home.<sup>16</sup> Carlo Pacelli informed Hudal that the pope sent him and that he must write a letter of protest to Commandant Stahel and demand termination of the arrests. Pacelli emphasized that the pope would openly protest the roundup unless it was terminated. Hudal had close ties to German authorities and was Stahel's friend. It was assumed that the letter of protest from Hudal "would have a special credibility." The choice of Hudal as the author of the protest letter was a strategic one.<sup>17</sup>

Gerhard Gumpert served as legation secretary in charge of the economic section of the German embassy in Rome. The thirty-three-year-old secretary was placed as an aide and put at the disposal of General Stahel. During Consul Eitel Moellhausen's absence, Gumpert was in charge of the German embassy. He was the highest-ranking person on duty when Albrecht von Kessel, his close friend, arrived at the office. Gumpert was astounded by the news that Jews were being apprehended for deportation. He immediately called Stahel, who was startled with the news since the deportation had commenced with units outside of his command without prior notification. Gumpert and von Kessel drafted a letter of protest, and Father Pfeiffer brought their draft to Hudal. Hudal had his own written draft, and the final version of a protest letter was signed in his own hand and also bore Carlo Pacelli's name.<sup>18</sup>

I must speak to you of a matter of great urgency. Just now, a high Vatican source from the immediate surroundings of the Holy Father reported to me this morning the arrest of Jews of Italian nationality has been initiated. In the interests of the good relations that have existed until now between the Vatican and the High Command of the German armed forces—above all thanks to the political wisdom and magnanimity of your Excellency, which will one day go down in the history of Rome, I ask you with urgency to give the order to immediately stop these arrests in Rome and

the surrounding area. The German reputation in foreign countries requires such a measure and also the danger the Pope would openly protest against it which would undoubtedly be used by the anti-German propagandists as a weapon against us.<sup>19</sup>

Copies of the letter were to be sent to the Vatican and General Stahel. Before Hudal's letter arrived at Stahel's office, the commandant decided on an initiative of his own. He sent Nicolaus Kunkel, a staff officer in his command, with a letter addressed to Weizsäcker. Stahel decided to turn the matter over to the Ambassador Weizsäcker, arguing that it was in his jurisdiction and not a military matter. In essence, Stahel was also urging the ambassador to intervene to stop the roundup. Kunkel arrived at the Villa Napoleon and personally handed the letter to Weizsäcker. Kunkel recalled, "When I went to von Weizsäcker I waited in an ante-room and became angry because no one offered me a chair. The ambassador left the room and shortly returned with a letter, this time sealed by him." Weizsäcker told Kunkel to inform Stahel that unfortunately "he could do nothing in this affair." Kunkel returned in short order with the letter in a sealed envelope. He went to Stahel and recounted what Weizsäcker had said. Stahel was indignant and visibly upset by Weizsäcker's response and composed a letter in reply. "Concerning your letter the arrest of Jews have taken place in Rome and vicinity, I can report to you that I have personally nothing to do with this as Military Commander. It is purely a police action, over which I have no control, since my authority lies purely within the military area. I have nevertheless immediately made your misgivings known to the responsible authorities."<sup>20</sup>

Weizsäcker was none too happy when his eyes fixed on the phrase "misgivings known to the responsible authorities."

Father Pankratius Pfeiffer, superior general of the Salvatorian Order in Rome and the Holy See's liaison with the Germans, delivered Hudal's letter directly to General Stahel. Father Pfeiffer often dealt with Stahel, Kappler, and Eugen Dollmann. Pfeiffer was known in Rome as Father Pancrazio, the pope's trusted emissary, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of Hudal's letter. Pfeiffer, in all his rescue activities, was given *carte blanche* to work in the pope's name as a liaison between the Holy See and the German command without the need for official authorization.<sup>21</sup> Pfeiffer made daily visits to Stahel's headquarters with the Vatican's appeals and protests. Throughout the occupation, Pfeiffer through mediation and skill saved many imprisoned Jews and partisans from certain death. More than 404 victims appealed for his intervention. Stahel instantly knew that Pfeiffer was acting on behalf of the pope.<sup>22</sup>

Pfeiffer arrived at Stahel's office "*gegen Mittag*" (toward noon) — in reality late morning — and presented Hudal's letter. Pfeiffer warned Stahel that the pope was going to make a public protest against these arrests if they were not halted. Pfeiffer

emphasized that the pope wanted him to do something at once to halt the roundup.<sup>23</sup> Now the crisis was dumped in his lap. The pressure on Stahel mounted.

When Gumpert arrived at Stahel's office he cabled a complete text of Hudal's letter to Joachim von Ribbentrop in the German Foreign Ministry, who distributed copies to others including those in the RSHA.<sup>24</sup> Weizsäcker phoned Gumpert and requested the text of Hudal's letter and a copy of his telegram.<sup>25</sup>

Heinrich Himmler received the letter and promptly forwarded a copy to Adolf Eichmann. Eichmann was acquainted with Hudal. Later Eichmann recorded the following in his memoir:

At that time, my office received the copy of a letter, that I immediately gave to my direct superiors, sent by the Catholic Church in Rome, in the person of Bishop Hudal, to the commander of the German forces in Rome, General Stahel. The church was vigorously protesting the arrest of Jews of Italian citizenship, requesting that such actions be interrupted throughout Rome and its surroundings. To the contrary, the Pope would denounce it publicly. . . . The objections given and the excessive delay in the steps necessary to complete the implementation of the operation, resulted in a great part of Italian Jews being able to hide and escape capture, a good number hid in convents or were helped by men and women of the Church.<sup>26</sup>

Eichmann must have been reminded of an earlier warning from the Foreign Ministry that the Vatican had intervened and resisted the German order for the expulsion of Italian Jews. The Foreign Ministry had been warned that the pope would condemn Germany openly. That said, Eichmann wasn't swayed by Hudal's letter.

Meanwhile, Stahel immediately sent a copy of Hudal's letter to the "local Gestapo," namely Herbert Kappler. Stahel reasoned correctly that the letter might not halt the ongoing raid or its continuation into the following day. Time was of the essence. Berlin didn't respond immediately to Hudal's letter. When Ribbentrop read the letter, it surely conjured his clash with Pius XII, who had dressed him down after he had been threatened with physical harm.

Weizsäcker hid the truth from his superiors, including the führer, that the "Holy See had intervened promptly, threatening a protest."<sup>27</sup> As he did so often, Weizsäcker played "a subtle double game," at times censoring messages from the Vatican and sending "tactical lies" to persuade the Nazis that Pius was not a threat. Rather than just forwarding messages to Berlin, Weizsäcker would even occasionally reword them. In fact, he often sent one set of comments to Berlin while recording a different version in his private notes.<sup>28</sup>

With Pfeiffer's warning resonating in his mind, Stahel took matters into his own hands. He remembered that Karl Wolff had successfully employed a potential military

rationale and convinced Adolf Hitler to delay the invasion of the Vatican. Stahel quickly formulated a military rationale of his own to halt the deportation. He made a direct call to Himmler and urged him to stop the roundup not for humanitarian reasons but instead on military grounds that he invented.

Colonel Dietrich Beelitz knew Stahel. Beelitz served as the liaison officer between Albert Kesselring's headquarters and the führer's headquarters (Führerhauptquartier) and had been ordered to listen to each conversation between the headquarters of the two commands, including Stahel's phone call to Himmler in Berlin.<sup>29</sup> After some perfunctory formalities, Stahel in an urgent and firm tone said,

Herr Himmler, if you continue what you are doing now, you will make it impossible for me to provide our troops which are still fighting far to the south of Rome with the material they need, which is one of my chief tasks here. If you continue, I am afraid there will be an uprising in Rome, there will be an uprising south of Rome, and it will not be possible for me to provision our fighting troops—we can write them off, right away, if you want to do it, go ahead. I won't. . . . Look, during the day the Allies have absolute domination in the air. They are strafing our trains, our lorries, so that's very difficult. During the night, we have to deal with the partisans. This difficult situation is already very critical. You continue, and it's hopeless.<sup>30</sup>

Stahel, in inventing the possibility of a revolt by the general Roman population, placed Himmler in the position of having to accept the responsibility for the military consequences if the roundup continued. In reality, the prospect of an open revolt by Romans was highly unlikely.<sup>31</sup> Himmler was completely ignorant of military matters. An answer arrived close to 2 p.m. The order was to terminate the Judenaktion "due to the special circumstances of the City of Rome." Shortly after 2 p.m., the last truck entered the Collegio Militare. The original plan was to seize all the Jews. Michael Tagliacozzo asserted that "as a result of these protests, the operation providing for two days of arrests and deportations was terminated at 2 PM the same day." Pierre Blet added "The raid terminated as abruptly as it began."<sup>32</sup> Entire buildings in the ghetto had been emptied.

The following day, Stahel informed Hudal by phone. "Himmler ordered that these arrests be discontinued immediately in consideration of the particular character of Rome." Stahel emphasized that he had called Himmler directly and that due to Rome's special situation, the arrests were ordered ceased immediately. Stahel's call to Hudal confirmed the pope's intervention. Hudal made note of the conversation for his records.<sup>33</sup>

Sir D'Arcy Osborne, the British ambassador to the Holy See, cabled a report to Anthony Eden, his superior. Osborne attributed the suspension of the roundup to Weizsäcker's intervention. The ambassador later clarified the matter, and Eden was informed of Pius XII's direct intervention.<sup>34</sup>



Weizsäcker cabled the Foreign Ministry in Berlin and referred to Hudal's letter. The telegram arrived on Sunday, October 17. Weizsäcker conveyed a warning and, at the same time, hoped that the letter would not provoke a violent reaction. He reasoned that it would have the desired effect of preventing the resumption of the roundup. Weizsäcker artfully conveyed Cardinal Maglione's warning that a public protest could be forthcoming and should be taken seriously:

I can confirm that this represents the Vatican's reaction to the deportation of the Jews of Rome. . . . [T]he reaction could be dampened if the Jews were to be employed in labor service in Italy. Hostile circles in Rome are using this event as a means of pressuring the Vatican to drop its reserve. It is being said that when analogous incidents took place in French cities, the Bishops took a clear stand. Thus, the Pope as supreme leader of the Church and as Bishop of Rome, cannot but do the same. . . . [E]nemy propaganda abroad will certainly view the event in the same way, in order to disturb the friendly relations between the curia and ourselves.<sup>35</sup>

After the arrests had ended, Theodor Dannecker prepared a report for Kaltenbrunner at RSHA headquarters in Berlin. The report was addressed from Kappler's headquarters and bore the Gestapo chief's signature. Kappler had already received a copy of Hudal's letter. Late that evening Kappler filed a radio report, which he later filed by courier, and expressed his frustration as being unable to complete the job per his orders.<sup>36</sup>

Action (Judenaktion) against the Jews started and finished today in accordance with a plan worked out as well as possible by the office. All available (SS) forces employed. Participation of the Italian police was not possible in view of unreliability in this respect, as only possible by individual arrests in quick succession inside the twenty-six action districts. . . . 1,259 persons were arrested in Jewish homes and taken to a central collection point at a military college where in the course of the action which lasted from 0530 to 1400 hours. . . . Deportation set for Monday, 10/18 at 9 a.m. The attitude of the Italian population has been characterized in many cases by clear symptoms of resistance which in many cases has even developed into active aid. . . . Even in the moments when German police forces were breaking into homes . . . in many cases successful attempts to hide Jews in adjacent apartment were noted. The anti-Semitic part of the population was not noted during the action, while on the contrary, an amorphous mass which, individual cases even tried to separate the police from the Jews, was observed. It was not necessary to resort to the use of arms.<sup>37</sup>

By using the term "passive resistance," Kappler was compelled to conceal the fact that resistance had actually taken place. Jews were actively being hidden from the grasp

of the Germans. If Kappler admitted this reality, it would only confirm that he was unable to do anything about it.<sup>38</sup> Less than a fifth of Rome's Jews had been caught; the rest escaped the roundup. On October 16 there 8,207 Roman Jews and an additional 4,221 refugees, many of whom were Jewish from other parts of Italy.<sup>39</sup>

Robert Katz and Susan Zuccotti without a primary source assert that the pope knew in advance that the roundup was to take place. Both tendentiously paint a portrait of an immobile, conflicted pontiff during and after Black Saturday. Zuccotti admits that the roundup ended abruptly but inaccurately asserts that the pope played no part in accomplishing that objective. Katz concurs. Zuccotti enumerates several factors that influenced the pope's inaction, including a "pathological" concern for the Bolshevik peril. The reader is left to choose some or none at all. Zuccotti does admit that a public condemnation against any SS action on Black Saturday against the Jews "would not have forestalled the roundup." Then again, such an open condemnation would have had dire consequences, sparking the roundup to continue into October 17. How does her conjecture stand up against the uncompromising speech Himmler delivered to SS leaders in Posen? Historian Owen Chadwick asserts that Zuccotti's *Under His Very Windows* is "not history but guesswork." According to Professor Christopher Duggen, for the most part Zuccotti's text is a litany of such phrases as "it was not enough," "that was all," "it was very little," "lamentable," "he was wrong," "should have," "phrases that repeatedly raise questions about the author's intellectual, as well as moral, vantage point." Zuccotti without documentation asserts that there were no plans to continue the roundup. Katz and Zuccotti are unable to explain why the roundup came to such an abrupt end. Were the Nazis simply content with 1,007 victims while another 7,000 or more Jews were still alive and untouched? Was the roundup on Black Saturday an exception to similar operations by the Nazis? The SS with a single-minded purpose had emptied entire villages and cities of Jews. The volumes of Katz and Zuccotti are not based on the latest historiography.<sup>40</sup>

## Train X70469

**T**HE LAST TRUCK ENTERED THE COLLEGIO MILITARE SHORTLY AFTER 2 P.M. on October 16. The Germans had actually seized 1,351 Jews, including 896 women and children. Sixty-one Jews were able to escape before the convoy arrived.

Soldiers were barking orders as the Jews entered the imposing building. There was chaos and confusion, since they didn't understand German. Babies wailed, mothers cried, and the rest were frozen in terror. The terrified Jews looked at Theodor Dannecker standing on a table shouting incomprehensible commands. At six foot three, Dannecker was a frightening figure, an animated corpse. His facial tic became violent and rocked his head from one side to the other. The double lightning bolts on his collar and his tailored SS uniform and polished boots conveyed power and elicited fear. The twenty-nine-year-old Arminio Wachsberger stepped forward and explained the cause of the pandemonium. The Jews didn't understand what was expected of them. Dannecker ordered Wachsberger to become his interpreter. There was no alternative but to comply. Some semblance of order was restored when Wachsberger translated Dannecker's instructions. The Jews listened intently, concealing themselves behind a front of alert attention. Wachsberger indicated that they were to be divided into groups of seventy-five to as many as one hundred and taken to individual classrooms. Men were to be separated from women. Before they were taken to the classrooms, another matter arose.

The racial laws determined that the *Mischlinge*, the offspring of parents who were of mixed religion, would be released. Ugo Foa composed a letter for those caught up in the roundup who were classified as *Mischlinge* and were baptized and regarded as Catholics. Cardinal Maglione was made aware that a number who were caught in the roundup were *Mischlinge* according to the racial laws. Maglione sent a high Vatican official who informed Dannecker of the *Mischlinge* among those present. Monsignor Montini was the only high-ranking Vatican officer able to enter the Collegio Militare and deal authoritatively with the Germans.

In response, Dannecker commanded all non-Jews and part Jews were to come forward. Some in the crowd waved their identity papers and shouted that they were not Jews and should be released.<sup>1</sup> A person's religion was contained in these papers. Dannecker, with Wachsberger's help, inspected the documents of those who claimed that they weren't Jews. It became apparent that Dannecker was unable to recognize Italian Jewish names. Wachsberger recognized some of the claimants who were Jewish and signaled them to come forward and join the non-Jewish group. Dannecker ordered Wachsberger to warn that anyone who declared that they weren't Jewish and then were discovered to be so would be shot.<sup>2</sup> Later in the afternoon, 259 were released because they were non-Jews or part-Jews not deemed Jewish under Nazi standards.<sup>3</sup> Twenty-nine of all those arrested were not Italian.

One woman about to give birth was taken to the courtyard. She had asked for a doctor but was abruptly turned down. Meanwhile, Dannecker demanded that the Jews deposit all their jewelry and money in front of him. The prisoners, with resigned shrugs, lined up as ordered. They deposited their jewelry in a box to their right and their cash in a box to the left. Dannecker ordered them to also turn in the keys to their homes together with the address and apartment number written on paper. Wachsberger was exempted from this requirement. He recalled, "Through me, he told us that we were to be transported to Germany to a camp where according to our skill, we would have a job to do. Since the old, the invalid, and women with children would naturally be unable to work and since the German government had no intention of maintaining them free of charge, all money and other objects of value we brought with us had to be surrendered to create a communal fund. He concluded by saying that the rich Jews among us must pay for the poor Jews."<sup>4</sup>

Those who had not been released were reassured that "they were being transferred to a labor camp, presumably Mauthausen." This seemed to have allayed their worst fears.<sup>5</sup> Dannecker gave some keys to a group of his men and directed them to return to the ghetto apartments. They were told to bring back any food they could find in order to feed the Jews. Wachsberger went with them and witnessed what they had done. Instead of gathering food, they looted the abandoned apartments. Since the occupation, there was an extensive list of violations of the Jewish community. Dannecker stripped them of their remaining valuables, and the looting of their apartments added to the indignities and treatment during the roundup.

Dannecker's men returned without enough food. Dannecker took some of the money he had taken from the Jews. He then instructed several of his men to buy enough bread and medications to sustain the prisoners for their journey. Wachsberger went with them. When they returned, there was hardly enough food to feed the hungry victims. Some of the Jews took part in distributing the small supply of food.

As the day drew to a close, a crowd of Romans deposited blankets, bags of food, and notes of encouragement and placed them outside the Collegio Militare hoping their provisions would make their way inside. The Italian Red Cross brought food and blankets. "During the night, two women went into labor. Italian doctors discerned that both would have difficult births requiring medical assistance. . . . But the Germans would not permit moving them." The children who were born would have only a few days before their predetermined lives would come to an abrupt end. By nightfall, an uneasy quiet descended on the eternal city.<sup>6</sup>

On Sunday the sun lost the battle to make an appearance, and another dark gray sky added to the gloom in the Collegio Militare. All of Rome was quiet and sullen. *L'Italia Libera*, an underground newspaper, expressed the revulsion that Romans felt about what had taken place the day before. "The Germans during the night and all day long went around Rome seizing Italians for their furnaces. The Germans would like us to believe these people are in some way alien to us, that they are of another race. But we feel them as part of our flesh and blood . . . taken away to meet their fate. There is not a single heart that does not shudder at the thought of what that fate might be."<sup>7</sup>

Most of the Jews in the Collegio Militare were unable to sleep during the night and rose early in the morning, completely exhausted. They remained huddled together, keeping their loved ones close to them as well as their belongings. Some wrote letters hoping to tell loved ones of their status. They hoped to be able to mail them when they left for the labor camp. "If some child tried to play, the guards ordered the mother to make it stop, with the usual threat of a shooting." The situation in the Collegio Militare was horrific. There were limited toilet facilities, and the stench from over a thousand crowded bodies in a confined space was unbearable. "The goal of humiliating, demoralizing, reducing these people to human rags, without will, almost without self-respect, was quickly evident." That morning, Father Igino Quadraroli went to the Collegio Militare and reported back to his superiors, describing the deplorable conditions.<sup>8</sup>

The president of the Red Cross attempted to aid those who had been captured. He went to Herbert Kappler, who advised him that "it was useless to get excited; useless to be concerned; useless to inquire." Kappler added, "This was a matter that only concerned them, the Germans and nobody else. No success had been achieved by the subsequent interventions of several high Church dignitaries." It's uncertain if Kappler knew of Commandant Ranier Stahel's intervention. Kappler avoided any mention of the actual impact Hudal's letter had made. Ugo Foa concluded with nervous resignation that here was nothing he could do to help those being held captive or the remaining members of the community. He left his apartment and went to Leghorn.

On Monday, October 18, while preparations were under way to transport the Jews to Auschwitz, Monsignor Montini received several Jewish families. He told them that

“the Holy See is doing all that is in its power to rescue these poor wretches.” A public protest by the Vatican at this juncture would surely have triggered the resumption of the roundup.<sup>9</sup>

Before dawn on a dark and a gloomy Monday morning, the Jews were awakened as soldiers “kicked or prodded them with rifles.” Settimia Spizzichino and her mother were among those who were awakened in this manner. She could hear the sound of trucks outside. The Jews were loaded onto the familiar black-canvased trucks and driven eastward. There were few Romans on the streets to observe the scene, as the curfew was still in effect. The trucks drove to the cargo-loading dock of the Tiburtina train station in the San Lorenzo district. There were twenty freight trains waiting to transport their human cargo to Auschwitz. Lined up before each car were SS troopers. Standing to one side was SS Oberscharführer Arndze, the train commander, and Dannecker. Following the instructions of Wilhelm Harster, Dannecker handed Arndze the two lists he had prepared of Jews to be deported. Dannecker instructed Arndze that he was to turn over the copies when he arrived at Auschwitz. The two men “exchanged Heil Hitler salutes.” Dannecker’s job was completed, and he left feeling assured that he had successfully met the requirements of his assignment.<sup>10</sup>

The train had been assigned to motorman Quirino Zazza, who realized that the trucks contained people of “the Jewish race.” All the Jews were to be herded onto the awaiting cattle cars. Zazza was sickened by the sight and treatment of these poor people. Luckily, he would only have to direct the train to Florence. The Jews had “answered Foa’s appeal for gold under the guarantee of their safety,” and now they were en route to Auschwitz.<sup>11</sup>

The Germans had calculated that fifty to sixty Jews were to be packed into each car. The infirm, the elderly, and women holding their children—impotent do anything to alter the situation—were crammed into each car. Suitcases were piled in one corner of the freight car. When a car was filled, it was abruptly closed with a resounding bang and bolted from the outside.<sup>12</sup> Wachsberger, his wife Regina and their daughter, and the Polaccos were no exceptions. Arminio still believed that they were going to a labor camp. Those inside the cramped quarters were plunged into total darkness. The crowded interior left little room to move about, and it was extremely hot. The trucks left once again to pick up the next group of prisoners, and the process would not be complete until the early afternoon. The freight cars had no ventilation or light, and there were no toilets either.

A frantic woman, Costanza Calo Sermonetta, appeared at the Tiburtina station and saw the line of cars. That morning she had returned to Rome only to find her husband and five children gone from their apartment. The ghetto seemed to be devoid of human life. She learned what had happened to them and hurriedly made her way to the long line of trains. Costanza went to each awaiting car shouting aloud for her family. Those

trapped inside told her to go away. One person inside warned her that she would be seized as well if she didn't stop. "Pounding her fists on the box cars and shouting her husband's name, [Costanza] found her family, and in spite of her husband and others warning her to flee, she pleaded with the Germans to let her go with them, and they did."<sup>13</sup>

Shortly after 2 p.m., the twenty-car death train, X70469, lurched forward and left Rome. In less than twenty minutes the caravan disappeared, leaving a trail of black smoke as it proceeded to a final destination.<sup>14</sup> In the rubbish left behind on the platform, a sweeper found a crumpled, unaddressed message. Lionello Altarti, a well-known businessman, apparently trusted that the finder would guess his identity and take it to his company. Lionello, his wife, and his father-in-law thought they were bound for Germany. The message included a set of business instructions to his associates. His note ended with "We face our departure with fortitude, though of course the presence of my father-in-law in his poor condition alarms me. Try to be brave as we ourselves are. I embrace you all. Lionello."<sup>15</sup>

The train was escorted by a detachment of guards under SS Oberscharführer Arndze, who clung to the two lists confident that he was doing a good and worthwhile job, albeit one that was routine.

Wilhelm Harster, commander of the Security Police and SD for Italy, instructed Kappler to "radio Vienna and Prague [as well as Berlin] to arrange relief of the police escort when the train arrived there [Auschwitz]." Dannecker used Kappler's radio to report to his office (and thus to Adolf Eichmann) the departure of 1,007 Jews (actually 1,002) accompanied by a detachment of guards under SS-Oberscharführer Arndze.<sup>16</sup>

Allied planes strafed the train just outside of Rome, but it made its way to Orte, where Fara Savina "stopped to see the sealed train, from which hellish cries were coming."<sup>17</sup> When the train stopped at Ferrara, the cars weren't opened, and anyone who approached the train trying to observe what went on inside was driven away. This process continued as the train continued on its journey but made a brief stop to remove the body of an old woman who died during the trip.

Lazzaro Sonnino managed to open the door to his car as the train neared Padua. He jumped from the moving train and escaped to safety. When the train reached Padua's terminal, an Italian Red Cross nurse learned that the Jews were being deported and asked if "her organization would be permitted to help them." The Germans refused even to consider this appeal. A few armed fascist militiamen intervened and questioned the decision. The prisoners could be heard calling out for help and water. A standoff occurred when one of the fascists, submachine gun in hand, turned it on the SS guards. He shouted that he would kill them if they didn't let those inside have some water. The other militiamen also turned their weapons on the SS guards. The guards relented and ordered the cars opened up, but only some of the Jews from each wagon could get water for the others. There were only two water fountains available, and the German guards

watched carefully to prevent escape. Three young Jews ran from the train, shots rang out, and they were recaptured.<sup>18</sup>

The militiamen asked that the Red Cross be granted entry into the cars to dispense aid. The Red Cross entered and distributed some food and medicine. Before the train departed, dead bodies were removed. As the train began to lurch forward, Leone Sabatello, who had been outside the train, called for it to stop. He wanted to remain with his family, trapped inside. A German guard heard him and shouted for the train to stop, and Sabatello climbed aboard. After the train left Padua, the bishop of Padua reported the serious condition of the train's occupants to the Vatican.

During the afternoon, D'Arcy Osborne met with the Pope Pius and extended his gratitude for providing safe refuge for Jews and Allied soldiers. He informed the pope that his government was limited in what it could do to stop the train from arriving at its destination.

At 4 p.m. the train was resealed, and upon reaching the Brenner Pass on Wednesday, October 20, it turned toward Nuremberg. As the train sped along the tracks, the heat within the cars became unbearable. Some of the Jews looked out from the narrow openings of the freight cars and could see the names of the towns as they passed; they bore strange names not written in Italian. Arminio Wachsberger realized that their destination was not a labor camp.

Since there were no toilets for those who were crammed within the cars, an attempt was made to provide some modicum of privacy. Some held up blankets so they could relieve themselves. In other cars crude latrines were devised, with a blanket strung across a corner between nails that were loosened from the ends of the cars. The limited food the Jews were able to scoop up when they were arrested gave out in short order. The acrid stench of sweat, feces, and urine was so unbearable one could hardly breathe. Piero Terracina's father told him and the family as they had entered the Collegio Militare that they should never lose their dignity. Little did the Terracinas and those aboard the train realize that they would be stripped of their humanity and their lives in a few short days.<sup>19</sup>

Karl Wolff flew to Berlin to meet with Heinrich Himmler the day after the train left Rome. During their thirty-minute meeting Himmler explained why he called for the termination of the roundup. He likely revealed the contents of Stahel's phone call. He concluded that Stahel had been subject to Vatican pressure and the indirect threat of the pope. Wolff had in hand a telex providing the details of the roundup. Both men "drove to Wolfsschanze to take their midday meal with the Führer. It may be assumed that they talked about the recent action and the prospect of making the whole of Italy Judenfrei." General Harster sent a telegram to Berlin and assured his superiors that the train was on its way to Auschwitz. Dannecker telegraphed Eichmann that the train left on "18/10/43 at 19:000 hours. Complement of 10007 Jews."<sup>20</sup>



As the train proceeded on its fateful journey, the lives of the Jews seemed to have been suspended. It was beyond their comprehension that their lives would end when the train reached its final destination. Rudolf Höss, Auschwitz commandant, had received a communication to prepare for the arrival of the train on Friday, October 22.

The train creaked to a slow stop at the front door of Auschwitz II–Birkenau at 11 p.m. on Saturday, October 23. The camp stretched for miles in every direction, crammed with thousands of prisoners. There was only one entrance, with two large iron gates. There was also a barricade and a guardhouse. “The camp was encircled by two layers of twenty-foot-high fencing, topped with razor wire.” Guard posts built on wooden platforms were positioned every few hundred feet. Prisoners would be shot if they crossed the line or came close to the electrified fence.<sup>21</sup> SS guard dogs patrolled the perimeter of the fence. “Auschwitz contained five crematoria and gas chambers. . . . On a clear day, flames and black smoke could be seen for thirty miles, spewing from the chimneys of the crematoria.” It was impossible for anyone living even at that distance to claim they didn’t know what was going on inside the camp.<sup>22</sup>

The imprisoned Jews had endured the difficult and demoralizing trip for five days and nights. Since it arrived at night, the train would have to wait until morning before gaining entry. The Jews sealed inside waited anxiously for the doors to be flung open so they wouldn’t have to endure another night in the cars. Some may have concluded that they had arrived at the work camp. Perhaps they thought they would be released from their current horror, unaware they were entering a more deadly world. Some of the prisoners looked through the openings in their car only to see bright floodlights illuminate the camp. The train sat silently on the siding. One escapee and three or four of the elderly who succumbed to the rigors of the journey reduced the number on the train.

As dawn approached, Wachsberger peered through a narrow window and saw large balloons attached to a huge building. Their purpose was to serve as protection from strafing by Allied planes. He lifted his daughter to the small window so she could see the balloons swaying in the breeze. An SS soldier saw her tiny face, picked up a rock, and threw it at the window. The frightened child drew back. Her father wondered what kind of hell could this be that this should happen to a five-year-old child. The exhausted Jews felt the cold immediately and huddled together to stay warm. Auschwitz was quiet except for the sound of a contingent of guards who came out to relieve the SS who had escorted the train. Beyond the walls of the freight cars, it was ominously silent.

Inside the camp, two men were getting ready for bed and the selection on Sunday of the next “batch of subhumans,” this time from Rome. Dr. Josef Mengele was likely listening to music before retiring. He had earned a doctorate in philosophy and a medical certificate. “Mengele was well read, a student of Dante.” He enthusiastically joined the SS, the guardians of racial purity. His family was investigated for non-Aryan blood, as were all SS recruits. When they married, their spouses were investigated as well by

the Race and Settlement Office (*Rasse und Siedlungshauptamt*). Members of the SS were required to trace their family tree into the early eighteenth century. Not one ancestor was allowed to be Jewish. Hermann Göring and Reinhard Heydrich took pains to hide links to Jewish members in their families.<sup>23</sup>

Mengele was initially posted to the Race and Resettlement Office. In May 1943, the thirty-two-year-old Mengele arrived at Auschwitz. He joined twenty-one camp doctors when the extermination camp was fully operational. Mengele was one of the few physicians who was a decorated combat veteran, having served on the Eastern Front and been awarded the Iron Cross.

Dr. Mengele inspected new arrivals, disarming them with a wry smile and a kindly grin and whistling a Puccini or Wagnerian aria, even on occasion dispensing kind words, as he casually determined who would live and who would be marched to the gas chambers. He was interested in children, particularly twins on whom he could perform his heinous medical experiments. To Mengele, Auschwitz-Birkenau was a human laboratory. He was certain to be there tomorrow to make the selections. Mengele seemed to be a constant presence during a selection. An inmate physician believed that Mengele was “by far and away the chief provider for the gas chamber and the crematory ovens.”<sup>24</sup>

While the Roman Jews were still housed in sealed trains at Auschwitz’s doorstep, Rudolf Höss was at his Auschwitz home enjoying the warmth of his family. Höss was recruited to the SS after World War I. He became a sentry at Dachau and then was promoted as an officer in 1936. Before his selection as commandant of Auschwitz, he was stationed at Sachsenhausen concentration camp. While at Auschwitz, Höss admitted, “Even while I was carrying out the task of extermination I lived a normal life.” Höss and his wife could view the chimney stacks from their bedroom window. His family could see the flames piercing the nighttime sky. They became accustomed to the unbearable stench of burning human flesh. Yet Höss felt that “every wish of my wife, of my children, was met.” Höss’s wife Hedwig characterized her life in their large villa as “paradise” and said to someone, “I want to live here until I die.” Her home “was adorned with artwork and tapestries stolen from the Jewish prisoners. . . . Almost all of the house’s furniture was made by camp prisoners.” Female prisoners served as her hairdressers and tailors as well.<sup>25</sup>

Höss ran Auschwitz with unremitting zeal. As commandant, he concerned himself not with “the suffering of his victims, but rather the practical difficulties of carrying out his assignment with the maximum efficiency, questions involving the precise adherence to timetables, the size of transports, the types of ovens and methods of gassing.” These considerations were uppermost in his mind. He candidly admitted, “I really could not complain that life was boring.” Höss’s days were consumed with “meeting his senior officers, inspecting progress in the camp, hosting visits from party dignitaries, fielding telephone inquiries from Berlin—often late into the night—and drawing up plans for

further expansion.”<sup>26</sup> The arrival of the Roman Jews was of special interest to him. They were members of an ancient Jewish community. In his mind “they were rumored to be people of great wealth, garbed in furs and jewelry, the women dressed in the height of fashion,” but they were not human and were enemies of the Reich. Höss was not often on the platform when the trains arrived. He determined that his next day’s work included the inspection of the special cargo from Rome. He would surely be at the siding when the cars were unloaded.<sup>27</sup> The selection ramp, David Marwell writes, was a “siding located outside the Birkenau camp at the site of the Auschwitz freight station.”<sup>28</sup>

## Numbers 1581–158639

ON SUNDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 24, 1943, THE TRANSPORT WAS ANNOUNCED, and SS guards immediately encircled the ramp. The locomotive was detached, the sealed doors were flung open, and each freight car was cleared by SS squads dressed in black and shouting orders. “Raus, Raus!” Armed with guns and clubs and in harsh guttural German, they barked incompressible orders. Their shouts were like the cries of animals in the jungle, inhuman and alarming. Barking dogs were sacked onto prisoners. Babies cried, children whined, and whistles blared. The terrified, dazed, and confused prisoners were unaware that their journey was truly at an end. Pier Terrain’s mother rushed to her family. “She realized right away that this was the end. I remember that she gave . . . us her blessing. She laid her hands on our heads, and as the German guards came toward them with clubs raised, she was afraid for us, and said go, go. And she added, we will never meet again.”<sup>1</sup>

The prisoners were ordered to leave their luggage by the tracks with the assurance that it would follow them later. Many of the Jews looked about hurriedly for relatives who traveled in other boxcars. The guards continued to bark orders, while men in striped uniforms scurried about taking luggage and the dead from the train. “The enormous mass of goods—clothing, baggage, money, jewelry, precious stones—was meticulously sorted by a special crew. . . and shipped in whole trainloads to the Reich” and then to the Reich bank.<sup>2</sup> The Germans took years of savings and hard work. It was “larceny on the grandest of scales.” SS personnel helped themselves to the most expensive and needed items. Oskar Groening, a camp guard and a bookkeeper of Auschwitz, was responsible for counting the goods.

Where were they? Were they on another planet? Had they entered a surreal world? Was this truly a labor camp? Surely this was an invention of deranged minds. Some realized immediately that this was to be the end of their lives.

While the trains were being emptied, Rudolf Höss and Dr. Josef Mengele, the Angel of Death, had arrived on the platform with an additional coterie of SS officers. Beyond his SS uniform and the distinctive twin lightning bolts on his collar, Höss was not an

imposing figure at five seven, but he had something of a brutal look to his mouth. What caught the attention of his subordinates was his jutting jaw, “piercing brown eyes and a head of short-cropped fair hair.”<sup>3</sup>

An officer with a bullhorn told the Jews that men and women would subsequently be separated. Those selected for work would form one column, and the elderly, the young, women, and children would form the second column. “Tired, scared, filthy, sick, hungry, thirsty, men and women and children clutched one another.”<sup>4</sup> Protection from the Polish cold was nonexistent. The blackness outside had slowly lifted and ceded the sky not to sun but instead to the thickest cloud cover. SS soldiers armed with machine guns were placed every few yards. As the prisoners moved forward, they saw a handsome man with shiny black boots standing there. It was Dr. Mengele, of medium height, slightly built with dark hair, “his dark green tunic neatly pressed, his face well-scrubbed, his Death’s head SS cap rakishly to one side.” Soldiers herded the prisoners past Mengele, beating and prodding them to move faster. Not one of his smoothed black hairs was out of place. In another setting, he may have been seen as a typical village doctor. In reality, he was “the false front for the crematorium.”<sup>5</sup>

The Roman prisoners were confused by the orders being shouted in German. Arminio Wachsberger was identified as someone who could serve as an interpreter. Mengele immediately took him aside and told him that he was to convey the German commands. He ordered Wachsberger to speak to the Jews and tell them that as medical director of the camp he was going to choose those who were able to work and those who were not. The antennae of Wachsberger instincts was to obey, yet he sought to shield his wife and child. Elie Wiesel, though not present when the Romans arrived, remembered Mengele when he first saw him. “He looked like the typical SS officer; a cruel, though not unintelligent face, complete with monocle. He was holding a conductor’s baton and was surrounded by officers. The baton was moving constantly, sometimes to the right, sometimes to the left.”<sup>6</sup>

The prisoners didn’t know which was the better side—which led to a work detail and which would send them to the crematoria. Mengele’s eyes flashed with excitement when he spotted twins. He would exhibit kindness to children only to conduct his mad experiments or have them killed. His “studied detachment could be interrupted by outbreaks of rage and violence.”<sup>7</sup> As the Romans passed, Mengele casually pointed with his thumb and said “*links*” (left) or “*rechts*” (right); those unworthy of life who were sent to the gas chambers. At times, he flashed his ersatz grin. Husbands, wives, grandparents, brothers, and sisters cried out in desperation. The seventeen-year-old Enzo Camerino and his father and brother were waved to the left. They watched Mengele motion his mother and sister to the right. Piero Terracina and his brothers and uncle were waved to the left and the rest of the family to the right. They joined six hundred Roman men, women, and children placed on trucks destined for the gas chambers. Those selected

for work glanced backward as the trucks sped away. Entire families were separated as tears flowed, and those who exerted the power of life or death ignored shouts of despair. Settimia Spizzichino was separated from her mother and her sister Ada, who clung to her baby. Settimia was selected for a work detail.<sup>8</sup>

The remaining Jews were told they would have to walk ten kilometers on foot to their destination. They were younger men and some women. Mengele offered that anyone who was too tired to walk could join the others going by truck. Some 250 accepted the offer, many choosing not to be separated from their loved ones. Wachsberger started to join the 250, hoping to be reunited with his wife and daughter. Mengele and Höss insisted that he remain to serve as their interpreter. His fears were allayed with a vague assurance that he could see his family that evening. The work detail was reduced to 201 Jews, 154 men, and 47 women.<sup>9</sup>

Some 125 SS personnel were assigned to the gas chambers and lived on-site at the crematoria. Those who had been selected for death were told they were going to be transported to the showers and disinfectant rooms. From afar, the dreadful smell of burnt flesh filled the air. They were unaware that was to be their fate.

The special Sonderkommando squad, composed of other Jewish inmates, guided the Roman Jews to the gas chambers. Part of their job was to calm those who were being sent to their deaths. "A large door led to the so-called dressing rooms." In the rooms where they undressed, the victims noticed numbered hooks. They were told to remember their numbers in order to reclaim their clothing after a disinfectant shower. Towels and soap were distributed. Posters were placed along the hallway that proclaimed "Cleanliness brings freedom." Arrows on the wall pointed to the shower rooms. The lettering was in six or seven languages. "They were then taken to five rooms that were filled at the same time." They entered a long narrow chamber, and when it was filled the metal door was closed shut and sealed. There were two gas-proof doors in each room. A physician was there to certify the success of the gassing, and Mengele was often there as well. On occasion Höss would look through the peephole and watch the prisoners being gassed. He was there to set an example and prove that he could deal with the sight of the mass murders.<sup>10</sup> "A camp doctor patiently sat at one of the thick glass portholes. He could see the naked throngs standing there, waiting for the flow of water when suddenly they became aware of gas. The victims would stampede for the exits, and massive metal doors. They trampled on children, women, and the old and feeble."

Within four or five minutes, it was over. Then silence. After a half hour, the doors were reopened. "[T]heir bodies were hosed down, their hair and any gold teeth removed for shipment the same day to the Reich." The dentists in the camp melted gold from the teeth into bars. Hair cut from women was sent to a firm in Bavaria to be used in the war effort. The emptying of the corpses was carried out by the Sonderkommando. Members of the Sonderkommando were permitted to survive, but later upon orders

from Adolf Eichmann they themselves were immediately liquidated. By late afternoon, the bodies of the Romans were reduced to ashes as the “tongues of fire from the ovens leaped into the sky.” The Roman Jews were gone. Of the total sent to the gas chambers, “fifty-three men, women, and children named Di Porto including three babies of six and seven months and fourteen other children ten and under” were “joined by forty-five Di Veroli’s, thirty-three Spizzichino’s, thirty-one Piperno’s, and sixteen Limentani’s” as well as fourteen Terracinas and the twelve-day-old baby born in the Collegio Militare. The Di Verolis were the largest number of a family caught in the October 16 roundup. All of the Roman Jews slated for extermination were replaced by another trainload of Jews who would also be reduced to ashes. There were so many trains arriving that the crematoria, which had the capacity to cremate ten thousand daily, could not keep pace with the amount of corpses. Piero Terracina remembered that “at the edge of the camp they had opened enormous ditches. From the gas chambers they brought them by the truckload.” They were dumped into the ditches and when full set them on fire.<sup>11</sup>

Other Jews who had arrived the same day, one group after another, repeated the process. Men, women, and children regardless of age, sex, or the condition of their health, were turned to ashes and smoke. Höss described the process without a trace of emotion or conflict of conscience. “Technically,” he said, it “wasn’t so hard—it would not have been hard to exterminate even greater numbers. . . . The killing itself took the least time. You could dispose of 2,000 head in half an hour, but it was the burning that took all the time. The killing was easy; you didn’t even need guards to drive them into the chambers; they just went in expecting to take showers and, instead of water, we turned on poison gas. The whole thing went very quickly.”<sup>12</sup>

The thousands of prisoners still alive were housed in barracks that were situated in twenty-two blocks in the camp. Höss’s offices were housed in “a large stone-faced building next to Block 4.” Höss demanded and expected strict discipline and tolerated no disobedience to his orders. He often watched at the front gate as the prisoners selected for work were marched in rows of five. For the rank and file SS, theirs was murderous work, a job taxing at times but affording comfort, security, power, and advancement. A brothel, a library, a coffee house, and a theater were provided for the seven thousand SS personnel.<sup>13</sup>

Though mass extermination was the principal function of Auschwitz, it was also a slave labor camp. Actually, it also composed of fifty subcamps. The Romans selected for work became a larger “pool of workers for German companies contributing to the war effort. The strongest of the new prisoners were selected to live solely because they could be made to work until they dropped dead.” German companies such as IG-Farben, Krupp, and Siemens “made fortunes from the tortured labor of Jews” and other prisoners. IG-Farben, a vast chemical empire, manufactured the Zyklon B gas used in the gas chambers.<sup>14</sup>

The Romans were ordered to form ranks of five, and as they marched forward they could see the chimney smoke from the crematoria. Enzo Camerino, his father Italo, and his brother Luciano were earmarked for a work detail in a chemical mine. As they looked around them, they observed other inmates but didn't realize they would be like them. "They walked in squads, in rows of three, with an odd, embarrassed step, head dangling in front, arms rigid." Hannah Arendt said they appeared to be "ghastly marionettes with human faces."<sup>15</sup>

The Roman prisoners were stripped of all that they wore, showered, disinfected, and tattooed with an identification number on their left forearms. They had to remember their numbers in German. They no longer had names but were reduced to numbers. If they survived, the tattooed numbers would remain as an eternal reminder of their time in hell. The newcomers' heads were shaved, as were their pubic areas. Each week, this process was repeated. The new arrivals were dressed in dirty striped uniforms like the other prisoners. Within a matter of hours they were stripped of their very identity as human beings. Each of the new prisoners had their serial number sewn on to their uniforms. In addition, according to Myriam Anissimov, "Political prisoners wore a red triangle; the camps' tough common-law criminals a green one; 'asocials' and prostitutes, black; homosexuals, pink; Jehovah's Witnesses, violet; and Jews wore both a red triangle, pointing downwards and indicating their country of origin, and a yellow, upward-pointing triangle that combined with the other to form the Star of David."<sup>16</sup>

The new prisoners were to witness violence, brutality, and death on a scale they could not have possibly imagined before they entered this hell. They were exhausted, thirsty, and hungry—conditions that persisted throughout their days and nights. They worried about the fate of their loved ones.

The men and women prisoners from Rome were taken to separate barracks. They were placed with other prisoners in barracks crammed with upwards of 250 people, with 2 people allocated for each bed. Bunks were in triple tiers so close together that a person had to climb in from the foot. "Unable to stretch out completely, they slept there both lengthwise and crosswise, with one man's feet on another's head, neck, or chest." The barracks had a roof and four walls but no floor. Rain transformed the floor of the barracks into mud. The filth-littered floors were a disgusting sight. Those in the same bunk or even the same barrack didn't form friendships, since they might be gone the next day. Moreover, they might not be assigned to the same Kommando. "Ties of friendship or solidarity did not develop, but neither did the two tenants of the same bunk get to know or even necessarily recognize one another. They might not work in the same Kommando, and anyway the tenants were not necessarily the same from one night to the next." In addition, they might not understand one another, as they likely would not speak the same language.<sup>17</sup>

Elie Wiesel recalled his first night and the experience other inmates might well have shared. "Never shall I forget that night. . . . Never shall I forget that smoke. . . . Never



shall I forget the small faces of the children whose bodies I saw transformed into smoke under a silent sky. Never shall I forget those flames that consumed my faith forever.” The entry in the Auschwitz log for Sunday October 24, 1943, read “OSHA-Transport, Jews from Rome. After the selection, 149 men registered with numbers 1581–158639 and 47 women with numbers 66172–66218 have been admitted to the detention camp. The rest have been gassed.”<sup>18</sup>

At 4:30 on Monday morning, the Romans and the other prisoners who had arrived the previous day were awakened, lined up, and counted in a ritual roll call, *Zählappell*, the head count. They waited two to three hours in the cold for the arrival of SS officers. The prisoners were counted and recounted. The roll call was marked by selections for a work detail. They walked to their place of work, five abreast, in their striped uniforms without underwear or socks. It was imperative not to show any sign of being tired or illness, since they could be pulled from the line and sent to the crematorium. Mengele had Wachberger serve as his interpreter. Mengele interrogated each man to determine his health and medical history. The day before, while being tattooed, a Jewish prisoner warned them that this was going to happen. He advised them it was imperative to withhold any information that would indicate they were in poor health. They should show no sign of fatigue or illness. That would not work to their favor and would be a reason for Mengele to get rid of them. While they were assembled, an SS officer asked if they had any trades, such as mechanics, carpentry, or medicine. This would determine if they would remain in Auschwitz proper or sent to one of the subcamps. It was a common occurrence for the lineup to last for hours as the guards counted and recounted to make sure all were accounted for. Whether alive or having died the night before made no difference. “Every skeleton must be catalogued and counted.”<sup>19</sup> If an SS guard even looked at or spoke to a prisoner, he or she had to salute and recite immediately their serial number. It was obligatory not to make eye contact and imperative to keep one’s head bowed. That didn’t necessarily guarantee one’s safety. The threat of violence was omnipresent, with no recourse but total submission.

For their own survival, the new prisoners had to learn as soon as possible what was being said to them by a guard. Or at least they had to give the impression that they knew. Orders were shouted out in German. Myriam Anissimov described the consequences. “If they were not carried out at once they were repeated in conjunction with a beating, and perhaps an explanation of the beating, because the shouting and the beating were parts of the same speech.”<sup>20</sup> One had to stand by as a father, brother, or loved one was beaten in their presence. They had to watch and keep silent. Instant obedience was necessary for survival. Most of the Italians and the vast majority of inmates didn’t understand German. Beatings and killings were frequent and random. A soldier might shoot someone merely on a whim or for target practice. Martin Greenfield remembered, “What appeared random was, in fact, not random at all. It was a systematic psychological lynching, a strangling of the human heart’s need to believe in the rewards of

goodness, a snapping of the moral hinge on which humanity swings.”<sup>21</sup> Alberto Mieli recalled the soldiers. “They held 3–4 month old babies by their feet. . . . [T]hey kept them swinging in that position five or six times, [and] they violently pulled them up and shot them. They laughed, they made bets on who would hit the targets.”

The Roman inmates quickly learned that they would receive a minimum amount of rations, resulting in death by malnutrition. They received a hot drink in the morning. In the afternoon, they received what purportedly passed for soup that likely had human hair or dead insects floating in it. Piero Terracina recalled that the prisoners made a circle around the Kapo who gave out what they called soup. Violent arguments erupted among prisoners who fought over scrapes of food. In the evening, they were given a small ration of moldy bread mixed with sawdust. Freshwater was nonexistent. “The Germans had calculated that their rations offered a likely survival span of two or three months for a prisoner in hard physical work in the quarries.” If beatings, inadequate food, and exhausting work didn’t kill you, then rampant disease such as typhus and scarlet fever would. The barracks were infested with vermin. Latrines were inadequate. Dysentery and diarrhea added to their misery. Hunger, disease, and the physical and emotional loss of the will to survive took many lives.<sup>22</sup>

There seemed to be no tomorrows. The emaciated and morose walking skeletons shuffled along, attempting to keep pace with the work of others. Their blank stares signaled that the end was near. Those who clung to life were worked to the point of complete exhaustion and then turned into ashes. The struggle to survive led to “theft, ferocity, and unprincipled behavior.”<sup>23</sup>

What thoughts lingered in their minds as they clung to the slim threads of survival? Should they die, would anyone know or would anyone even miss them? Would they be remembered?

Mengele, an extremely volatile man, seemed to tolerate Wachsberger. Wachsberger used his association with Mengele to pry loose a vital piece of information. He had asked about the fate of his wife, daughter, and in-laws. “They no longer exist,” Mengele said. “Didn’t you see the camp chimneys?” He then walked Wachsberger to the registration files and took out the card that bore his name and number. There were no cards for his wife and daughter and the others. Wachsberger was incredulous. He asked, “Why did you offer those who initially had been selected for labor to mount the truck and join the others who were going to the showers?” Mengele casually and somewhat playfully reminded him that he said their destination was ten kilometers, but in reality it was much closer. Mengele, without a trace of emotion, said that if they couldn’t walk ten kilometers they “would be of no use.” His mordant personality was on full display. Wachsberger was shattered by this revelation.<sup>24</sup>

SS guards with trained attack dogs supervised the various work details. “The strongest of the new prisoners were selected to live but were worked until they dropped dead.”

By the end of the first week in camp, one of the Romans from Wachsberger's work detail had died. Some in the work detail remained in Auschwitz. Wachsberger and forty-four others were sent to Warsaw; only three would survive. Of the seventy sent to work in the coal mines of Jawiszowice, eleven didn't die immediately.<sup>25</sup>

In Birkenau, women prisoners did work as arduous as the men. They faced other dangers. They could either be sent to a brothel or selected for medical experimentation. Mengele thought nothing about submerging a woman in boiling water and then immersing her in freezing cold water.<sup>26</sup> Women were not spared from humiliation, beatings, and the violence that permeated Auschwitz. Their hair was cut, and they were forced to take off their clothes in front of everyone. As many instinctively attempted to cover themselves with their hands, they were immediately beaten and forced to stand upright.

Settimia Spizzichino was tattooed on her arm with the number 66210, corresponding to the number on her admission papers. She had been shaved and remembered, "I was sitting on a stool and the hair clipper passed through my long hair in the middle of my head. I felt a long lock slip down my naked back. Every time I recall that, I feel a shudder." From Birkenau, she was transferred to block no. 10 of the Auschwitz camp, where she was used as a human guinea pig. Of the forty-seven Roman women who remained in Birkenau, only two were alive after six weeks. The twenty-two year-old Settimia Spizzichino was one of them. She was selected for Mengele's medical experiments and injected with typhus and scabies. From her tiny cell, she looked out of the window and could see Italian prisoners marching. "Those from Rome used to pass by and say to me: 'Settimia be strong the Russians are coming soon.' Since the very day I got there in October 1943, I kept hearing that the Russians were at the threshold. But I had to stay there a year and a half."<sup>27</sup>

A "wild and uncontrollable temper" provoked Mengele's personal acts of cruelty. He was prone to violent mood swings. "Such a complete lack of remorse suggests a man in the grip of a complete psychopathic personality disorder."<sup>28</sup> He could tempt children with sweets and then proceed to conduct the most gruesome experiments while remaining detached.

During the summer of 1943, Mengele became ill from either typhoid or typhus. After he recuperated, "he was determined to attack the source of the infections with his usual vindictive rage. He arranged for the entire population of a women's barrack, between 750 and 1,500 people[,] to be immediately gassed, regardless of their individual health."<sup>29</sup>

## These Jews Will Never Return to Their Homes

ON OCTOBER 25, 1943, AMBASSADOR ERNST VON WEIZSÄCKER WAS alarmed by what he read in *L'Osservatore Romano*: “Persistent and pitiful echoes of calamities . . . continue more than ever to reach the Holy Father. The August Pontiff . . . has not desisted for one moment in employing all the means in his power to alleviate the suffering, which, whatever form it may take, is the consequence of (the) cruel conflagration. With the augmenting of so much evil, the universal and paternal charity of the Pontiff has become, it could be said, ever more active; it knows neither boundaries nor nationality, neither religion nor race.”<sup>1</sup>

Weizsäcker knew that Pope Pius had intervened to halt the roundup by not only initiating Bishop Alois Hudal’s letter but also putting pressure on Rainer Stahel to act as well. Weizsäcker also knew that anyone reading the commentary in the Vatican’s newspaper could discern the message and its intent. It was urging Romans to continue to do all that they could to help Jews.<sup>2</sup>

The following day in a radio transmission to Berlin, Weizsäcker told his superiors that the Vatican has apparently for a long time had been helping Jews to escape, and the population was turning against the Germans with each passing day. The ambassador knew that the Vatican’s institutions were packed with Jews. Robert Wolfe added, “As far as Kappler was concerned, the Vatican represented a hostile influence. That was undoubtedly what his superiors felt, too.”<sup>3</sup> Weizsäcker’s October 26 transmission was intercepted by Allied intelligence. Weizsäcker followed with a telegram to Berlin on October 28: “By all accounts, the Pope, although harassed from various quarters, has not allowed himself to be stampeded into any demonstrative pronouncements against the removal of the Jews of Rome. . . . He has done all that he could in this delicate matter not to strain relations with the German government and German circles in Rome. As there will be presumably no further German action to be taken in regard to the Jews here in Rome, this question, with its unpleasant possibilities for German-Vatican relations, may be considered liquidated.”

Weizsäcker was avoiding the truth. He carefully avoided any reference to Hudal's letter or Stahel's role in stopping the deportations. In addition, he hid the truth from his superiors that the "Holy See had intervened promptly, threatening a protest."<sup>4</sup> He completely papered over the open statement regarding the deportations printed three days earlier in *L'Osservatore Romano*. Weizsäcker reported, "It was written in the characteristically tortuous and obscure style of this Vatican paper."<sup>5</sup>

The Nazis took all the public statements from the Vatican, vague or otherwise, seriously and as direct attacks on the regime and its policies. The papal statement of October 25 would clearly have been interpreted as a direct reference to the Jews who had been deported. Weizsäcker had "misled and calmed Berlin by concealing the import of the papacy's statement." Michael Burleigh underscores the dismissal of the article in *L'Osservatore Romano* as Weizsäcker's tactical lie. "They served the purpose[,] the more urgent purpose[,] of diverting Berlin's malign attentions away from the thousands of Jews hidden in Catholic churches and private homes in Rome, by insinuating that Germany had missed a papal protest only by a hair's breadth, while concealing the Church's rescue efforts within the Vatican's elliptical verbiage."<sup>6</sup>

A papal public protest surely would have triggered the invasion of the Vatican as well as the resumption of the roundup. Weizsäcker's reports to Berlin throughout his tenure in Rome were a caricature of Vatican attitudes and tactical lies. "Weizsäcker's communication to Berlin was a deliberate misrepresentation in an effort to head off a more violent reaction from Berlin. As we have seen the Nazi government had reacted sharply to Papal statements even the very so-called mild or oblique criticisms. Weizsäcker's report . . . had misled and calmed Berlin by canceling the import of the papacy's statement in *L'Osservatore Romano*."<sup>7</sup>

Weizsäcker knew that although the arrests had been halted, they could be resumed at any time with greater intensity. Cardinal Luigi Maglione contacted Ambassador Weizsäcker and asked if any material assistance could be sent to the deportees. Weizsäcker responded one month later. He informed Maglione that he could do nothing and couldn't provide any information regarding their fate.<sup>8</sup>

On the same day as the Vatican's commentary appeared in *L'Osservatore Romano*, David Panzieri, deputy rabbi of Rome, wrote to the pope. In his letter Panzieri expressed his fear that the Jewish deportees would not survive a cold winter. He asked the pope to see that adequate clothing was sent immediately. Panzieri didn't know that the Jews had been gassed. On November 1, 1943, Senator Riccardo Motta informed Monsignor Giovanni Battista Montini that he went to General Stahel in October on the Vatican's behalf. Motta inquired about the fate of the deportees. Stahel told him that he was not responsible for the roundup and that there was no hope. "These Jews will never return home." The *Jewish Chronicle* reported that "the Vatican has made strong protestations

to stop the German Government and the German High Command against the persecution of the Jews in Nazi-occupied Italy.”<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, the number of convents hiding Jews increased. Cardinal Maglione arranged for the governor of Vatican City to issue a certificate to all religious institutions declaring that they could not be subject to search or requisition without prior agreement of the Sacred Congregation of the Religious.

Though the October 16 deportation came to end, the remaining Jews in Rome were still not secure and were in danger of additional arrests. The Gestapo accidentally arrested Settimo Sorani on October 28. She was taken to Via Tasso. “For ten terrifying days he was interrogated, beaten, and interrogated.” His false documents apparently stood up under intense scrutiny, and he was not identified as Jewish. He was subsequently released from custody. Few other Jews were as fortunate. Giudita Di Veroli was arrested in December 1944. She was deported to Auschwitz and survived her ordeal. In Rome, an additional 655 were arrested. Elsewhere in Italy, roundups continued in Florence, Venice, and Ferrara. The RSI on December 1, 1943, decreed that Italian Jews were to be deprived of their citizenship and considered public enemies.<sup>10</sup> German security forces in Rome were increased with the arrival of 2,000 extra SS and security specialists.<sup>11</sup> Herbert Kappler personally supervised a mass roundup of men of all ages who were seized on streets and “dragged off trams and buses.” By sundown, 2,000 men had fallen into the clutches of the Germans. Some were used as forced labor in Italy, and the rest were sent to labor camps throughout Europe. Reports of the indiscriminate mass arrests sent a chill across Rome.

News of Kappler’s operation increased fears that the Vatican and the Holy See would be next on the Gestapo chief’s list. After Black Sabbath, the Jews and those sought by the Nazis were by no means safe from their clutches, particularly those hidden in convents and other church properties. The earlier guarantees of Vatican sovereignty were not ironclad. The Vatican and Weizsäcker had every reason to be alarmed. In November 1943 a group of fugitives and Jews were walled in the attic of San Joachim (San Giocchino), a church in the Prati district. They remained walled in alive for seven months until Rome was liberated. During their ordeal, food and communications were passed through the church’s rose window by an ingenious pulley system.

Pietro Koch had established a special police unit. He was empowered to “investigate, enter premises, and arrest as Caruso’s police force.” The thirty-nine-year-old former wine merchant with the slick black hair and tiny mustache began his workday with enthusiasm and zeal. Though subsidized by Guido Buffarini Guidi, the interior minister of the RSI, Koch wasn’t under the direct control of RSI officials but instead reported directly to Kappler. Koch organized a band of sixty-five men and ten women whose specialty was the apprehension of Jews, partisans, and escaped prisoners of war. Koch took them to his personal prison and torture chamber that had “high walls and deep cellars,” suitable for keeping things quiet and secret. Those apprehended were

turned over to the Germans for a monetary reward. Beforehand, Koch and his sadistic band tortured their victims relentlessly and with pleasure. Koch worked in concert with Pietro Caruso, the thick-nosed Neapolitan who became the new fascist chief of police. Caruso was a lieutenant general in the fascist militia and a fascist zealot. When Caruso arrived in Rome, he set a goal of fifty arrests a day.<sup>12</sup>

Koch and Caruso were not the only ones who cast an ominous shadow over Rome. Celeste Di Porto was a black-haired, black-eyed, well-endowed girl of eighteen. She earned the nickname Stella (Star) for her beauty within the Jewish community. Di Porto fled the Jewish quarter during the October roundup, leaving her mother behind. Several of Di Porto's relatives were not so fortunate. Di Porto worked with the Koch and Rosselli squads and with Kappler capturing Jews and partisans. She became infamous, known among Jews as the *Pantera Nera* (Black Panther). Di Porto teamed up with her cousin. Together they identified and then turned in their fellow Jews. They received ten thousand lire per male, five thousand lire for each female, and three hundred for each child they turned over to Germans. Members of the Roselli band took her quarry to the Gestapo prison. Di Porto took special delight in pulling down a man's pants to prove he was circumcised, all to the laughter and pleasure of the Nazis and her fascist accomplices. Di Porto did not play favorites and turned in two of her own cousins. Di Porto's father was so distraught by his daughter's conduct that he turned himself into the Germans in an effort to atone for her sins.<sup>13</sup> A total of six such groups operated in Rome with the express purpose of capturing Jews. Member of a band were given special permits authorizing them to make arrests.

Kappler was intent on capturing partisans and Jews. He knew they were being sheltered in church properties. With Kappler's approval, Koch teamed with Police Chief Caruso. Their first target was the three properties within striking distance of one another near the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore. Each had posted a placard that proclaimed they were ecclesiastical properties and that "All searches and requisitions are prohibited." Koch with his men jointed 50 of Caruso's police and several of Kappler's and raided the Lombardo Seminary, uncovering 110 people being sheltered including Jews. They moved on to the nearby Pontifical Institute of Oriental Studies and the Russicum, taking partisans and Jews into custody.

At risk were other Vatican properties, including the Seminario Romano adjacent to the Basilica of St. John Lateran. The Seminario hid the antifascist elite, the heads of the six parties of the Committee of National Liberation. St. John Lateran was six blocks from Kappler's headquarters on Via Tasso. The raids deeply troubled the Vatican, especially when a reliable informant reported that the Germans were preparing a house-to-house inspection throughout the city. Convents, monasteries, churches, and properties covered by treaty were to be searched. According to the informant, Kappler was considering a direct raid on Vatican City. Kappler claimed that he had nothing to

do with Caruso's activities. Within hours Vatican officials received a report that the Germans had visited three Church properties.<sup>14</sup>

Ambassador Weizsäcker confronted Kappler, who denied considering a raid on the Vatican or ever hearing of such a thing. This was an obvious lie, since this matter had circulated among all German authorities in Rome.<sup>15</sup>

Koch, with Kappler's backing, suspected that Jews, partisans, and Italian soldiers were being hidden within St. Paul's Outside the Walls and planned to raid it and the adjoining Benedictine monastery, ignoring their extraterritorial status. Caruso's police overwhelmed the lone Palatine guardsman in the monastery, who was subsequently executed. Simultaneously, Caruso—with three hundred fascist police and Koch's men—stormed St. Paul's. They disarmed the Palatine guards, went from room to room and forced doors opened, and smashed furniture and slashed religious pictures. Sixty-seven people—which included nineteen Jews—were beaten, spat upon, and then carted off to prison. The Jews were deported.

While the raid was in progress, Count Enrico Galeazzi, the papal representative, rushed to the Basilica and told Koch and Caruso that it had extraterritorial protection, citing the placard, and that it was under papal jurisdiction. Caruso replied that he was acting on orders from his government. As the discussion became heated, Koch lent his support and said to Galeazzi that they couldn't disobey orders. Galeazzi's protest had no influence on halting the raid. Caruso and Koch justified the raid with the claim that the Basilica had weapons, ammunition, and gas masks that belonged to the partisans. In reality, the equipment belonged to the "authorized guard assigned to the property."<sup>16</sup>

What was the next target? Panic gripped the thousands of refugees hidden in churches, monasteries, convents, and other Catholic establishments throughout Rome who expected to be arrested at any moment. Where could they go? In one instance, the Germans raided a convent and took into custody a thirty-three-year-old Jewish woman and the mother superior. These raids raised serious issues for the Vatican. Could the guarantee of sovereignty extended personally by Adolf Hitler and codified by Joachim von Ribbentrop be withdrawn by a local Gestapo chief? Robert Katz, in an effort to criticize all things Pius XII, makes the specious claim that the pope was not moved to act when Church properties were raided.<sup>17</sup>

The Vatican was alarmed at the incursions on its sovereignty and lodged a vigorous protest with Weizsäcker. Eitel Moellhausen reminded the ambassador that a letter bearing his signature had declared that all Vatican extraterritorial properties were off limits and that this extended to the Italian fascist police and laypersons as well. Weizsäcker denied that the Germans were involved in any of the raids. When the Germans used the Koch and Roselli special squads as well as the fascist police, they could make the specious claim that they indeed had honored the rights of the Vatican. Albrecht von Kessel took a copy of the Vatican's protest to Consul Moellhausen, who was taken aback



by the force of the protest. Both men realized that they could not allow the violations of the Vatican to continue.

When he left Moellhausen, Kessel called Caruso to come to Weizsäcker's office immediately. Caruso told the ambassador that he had called Benito Mussolini about the raid and that the Duce apparently said, "Excellent, continue!" Vatican Radio responded forcefully to these incursions, announcing that it "would never yield in offering charity (sanctuary) to everyone. . . . [I]t is the demarcation line between good and evil." When Ribbentrop was contacted, he at first avoided direct intervention. The Spanish government informed Ribbentrop that the attack on San Paolo was resented in Catholic Spain. Ribbentrop intervened and ordered a halt to these incursions.

The threat to Vatican sovereignty also centered on specific individuals. Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty ran a clandestine organization designed to help escaped prisoners of war (POWs) and Jews by providing them with false identity papers, fake food coupons, and places to hide. Major Sam Derry, an escaped British POW, worked with O'Flaherty. The monsignor lived in the German College near the Vatican and would leave on his secret missions to visit the safe havens he had established. The Vatican cooperated by funneling funds to Derry through D'Arcy Osborne and Harold Tittmann, both of whom disavowed any knowledge of O'Flaherty's activities. O'Flaherty busied himself with protecting some 1,700 Jews from arrest and deportation. William Doyno cites Sister Noreen Dennehy's testimony corroborating O'Flaherty's activities. "I personally worked with Monsignor O'Flaherty in Rome during the tragic war years when he risked his life in order to help the Jews in Rome. Time after time, Monsignor came to our Franciscan Generalate, located at that time in the Via Nicola Fabrizio on the Jamiculum. He often asked us to house the persecuted Jews. Since we had a very large Generalate, we were able to accommodate as many as fourteen or fifteen at any one time."<sup>18</sup>

The flamboyant monsignor wore disguises and outsmarted German agents who attempted to follow him as he went about his mission. O'Flaherty repeatedly crossed the white lines separating Italy and Vatican City. Kappler was driven to distraction and obsession by his failure to capture O'Flaherty in the act. Ambassador Weizsäcker took O'Flaherty aside while they were at a mutual gathering and warned him that if he left Vatican City he would be arrested.

The monsignor often left the Vatican and made his way to Prince Filippo Doria Pamphili's residence in the heart of Rome. The prince helped O'Flaherty in his work and was targeted for surveillance. On one occasion, Kappler and his men surrounded all approaches to the prince's home, certain that O'Flaherty was inside. The prince's fuel was in the process of being delivered. O'Flaherty acted quickly. He went to the basement, shed his cassock, put it in a sack, and then spread coal dust on his face. He put the sack on his back and casually walked past the SS guards who thought he was

a deliveryman for the coal. Kappler was infuriated that he had been outsmarted and vowed to get O'Flaherty.

Kappler targeted the monsignor for arrest and even death. Kappler had had enough. One morning, he drove to the edge of St. Peter's Square with two Gestapo agents in plain clothes. He pointed to the six-foot figure at the entrance of St. Peter's Basilica. The tall figure was clearly visible, since his low-crowned hat and his black robe with red facings contrasted sharply with the background of the Basilica. O'Flaherty was reading his devotional prayer book, not noticing the three figures who fixed their gaze on him. Kappler said to the agent, "This is him — Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty, a mad but dangerous man, too dangerous to live." Kappler ordered his agents to return and attend the services of St. Peter's and, as worshippers were leaving, to follow behind the monsignor and "seize him down the steps and across the line. . . . When you get him away and onto a street free him . . . for a moment. I don't want to see him alive again. . . . He will be shot while escaping."<sup>19</sup>

An informant in the *Questura* tipped off the monsignor. The following day, the two agents joined the worshippers. They were taken by surprise when two Vatican gendarmes tapped them on their shoulders and ordered them to stand up. The guards flanked the two would-be assassins and escorted them out of St. Peter's.

Apart from the effort to silence O'Flaherty, another worrisome incident took place. The violation of the Vatican's rights came when a lone SS agent in plain clothes followed Anselmo Musters, a Dutch priest. Musters, code-named Dutchpa, worked with O'Flaherty as a member of the O'Flaherty-Derry escape line. Musters was ordered to halt or be shot. He ignored the agent's warning and fled, taking refuge in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, an extraterritorial property. Musters contacted Vatican authorities, who advised him to stay put. Thirty minutes later "a large squad of uniformed SS men[,] fully armed, surrounded the great church, and one group[,] led by an SS captain, pushed aside the protesting Palatine guard" and entered the church.<sup>20</sup> When Musters asserted that the church was extraterritorial property, the captain swung a submachine gun with full force on the priest's head. The captain and his men dragged Musters the full length of the Basilica and down the steps outside. Musters' head hit practically every step as they descended.

The SS thought that Musters was a British officer disguised as a priest. They carted him to the dreaded Via Tasso prison. Father Musters was interrogated, stripped of his clothes, beaten, and placed in isolation. Church authorities worked unsuccessfully to obtain his release. He remained in isolation in Via Tasso for thirty-five days. Musters was put on a train bound for a concentration camp in Germany. He managed to escape from the train when it stopped in Florence. He returned to Rome after it was liberated. Had he reached Germany, Musters surely would have been killed immediately or sent to a fate similar to what other priests experienced in concentration camps.<sup>21</sup>

Martin Gilbert maintained that the intensification of the final solution went beyond Rome. "In the first two weeks of November, Jews were seized by the Gestapo throughout German-occupied Italy, and six weeks after the deportations from Trieste, nearly ten thousand Jews had been deported to Auschwitz, where more than 7,750 of them were murdered."<sup>22</sup> As 1943 neared an end, *L'Osservatore Romano* published an unequivocal "bold and courageous protest" with regard to the treatment of the Jews. The RSI's Police Order 5 of December 1 announced that all Jews must be sent to concentration camps. Jane Scrivener recorded in her diary that the Vatican's paper said that it was "unreasonable, unchristian and inhuman." The paper emphasized that the order created untold suffering.<sup>23</sup> Despite the protest, "over one thousand more Jews were deported in the next seven months, and others were killed in Rome. They were captured, however, not in organized round-ups but in individual arrests, many by Italian Fascists seeking reward money" and by specialized bands of Italians who did the bidding of the fascists and especially the Germans. Dan Kurzman adds this caveat: "There is no doubt that behind each Jew who survived there is a non-Jew who helped him, even at the risk of his life; but behind each Jew who was deported, there is a Fascist who turned him in."<sup>24</sup>

On January 22, 1944, Allied forces came ashore on both sides of Anzio, a small port thirty miles from Rome. Shingle was an improvised operation assembled in three weeks. Major John Lucas had achieved all his preliminary objectives for the initial beachhead. He was supposed to move on the Alban Hills, the key to Rome. A jeep patrol was able to drive undetected and unopposed to the outskirts of the eternal city. Albert Kesselring realized that if the Allies moved on Rome and the Alban Hills, he was helpless. When the Americans failed to do so, Kesselring adroitly deployed his crack units into the Anzio perimeter, negating the element of surprise. The Anzio campaign deteriorated into a costly stalemate. The Germans tightened their grip on Rome, imposing a 5:30 p.m. curfew enforced by shooting first; questions came later.

In January 1944, Monsignor Montini met with the pope and reported the plight of refugees in the Castelli Romani where Castel Gandolfo, the papal summer residence, was located. That area experienced intense fighting and bombardment, turning thousands into refugees who fled from the Nazis. Some Romans were among them. The pope ordered the papal palace was to be opened to all those in need. On January 22, 1944, the doors were opened to anyone wishing to enter, and eventually between seven thousand and thirteen thousand displaced people were accommodated on the grounds. The numbers fluctuated. It should be noted that "no one was asked to produce a baptismal certificate, and no one was asked their political affiliation." It is likely that Jews were among the refugees, but there were so many people seeking protection that it was virtually impossible to log all of their names. Emilio Bonomelli, the director of the papal villa at Castel Gandolfo, in his postwar account wrote of caring for Jews as well as other refugees. Even some escaped POWs found shelter at the papal palace.

Monsignor Patrick Carroll-Abbing safely escorted two communities of sisters to Castel Gandolfo. He described what he saw upon his arrival. "The main staircase inside the palace had become a public dormitory; on each wide step someone was sleeping. . . . In the Hall, . . . there was a sea of beds and mattresses. People were eating and mothers were washing their babies." Women who were to give birth were housed within the papal residence. The papal apartment was transformed into a nursery, and children were birthed in the pope's apartment.<sup>25</sup> Two infants, the only twins born during those days at Castel Gandolfo, were given the names Eugenio Pio and Pio Eugenio Zevini in honor of the pope.

Within three weeks after Castel Gandolfo had been opened, newspapers in Rome "carried pictures of American prisoners under German escort marched through Rome. The local German command, with an eye of strengthening Fascist morale in the city, marched a column of 300 Americans, recently captured at the Anzio beachhead, through the main thoroughfares." This was clearly a propaganda stunt and a violation of the "Geneva Convention governing the treatment of POWs." Castel Gandolfo was hit from the air on February 2, 7, and 10 and again in May and June 1944. The air attacks caused the deaths of more than eight hundred refugees.<sup>26</sup> Rome once again became a target of Allied bombing. Bombs rained down on railway centers and the Testaccio and Garbatella districts between March 3 and March 14. Despite the Germans' firm control of the city, thousands jammed St. Peter's Square on March 16, two days after the bombing ended. William Simpson, who was present, recorded the scene:

A hush fell over the crowd. . . . A white-robed figure moved slowly through the glass doors. The crowd began to applaud and cheer. Massed cries of *Papa! Papa! Papa!* rose in a great crescendo. The Pontiff raised his arms and, as the crowd again fell silent, he spoke. His voice, in Italian, . . . was clear and distinct. Steadily his high tones became impassioned . . . [with] the fervent desire for an end to the ravages of war and, without addressing any nationality, a strong direct plea for the protecting of the Eternal City and its preservation in the difficult days ahead. When his fifteen-minute speech ended, the piazza reverberated again to fanatical cheers and applause. The Pope bestowed his Blessing on the crowd and slowly withdrew.<sup>27</sup>

During the second week in May a breakthrough occurred on the Anzio-Casino front, and the race for Rome was under way. The Germans, fearing encirclement, prepared to evacuate the city as the Allies drove closer to Rome. By early June they were poised to enter the eternal city. Were the Germans going to make Rome a second Stalingrad? Kesselring requested permission from Hitler to pull out of Rome uncontested. An Ultra decode of Hitler's cable to Kesselring indicated that he had been ordered to effectuate an immediate withdrawal from the city.

On June 4 the streets were virtually cleared of all German soldiers. Toward evening, American tanks neared the Tiber Island. The residents thought at first they were Germans and then realized they were Americans. People from the entire area from Trastevere to the Roman ghetto poured onto the streets, and the welcome was emotionally overwhelming for the tank crews. On June 5, 1944, the 271st and final day of the German occupation, Rome was finally liberated as Allied forces—including Palestinian soldiers—marched triumphantly in Rome. The Jewish Brigade had been stationed for some time in Fiuggi, a town south of Rome.

All of Rome sprang to life with wild cheering and laughter, and tears fell as people showered troops with flowers and gratitude. The population magically doubled as thousands came out of hiding. During the occupation, it was said that half of Rome was hiding the other half. Thousands of jubilant Romans filled St. Peter's Square. The tall, slender pontiff was visibly moved and blessed the crowd. He had become the personification of the deliverance from tyranny.

The seals of the gates of the synagogue were removed, and it was once again open for worship. Foa, Dante Almansi, and Rosina Sorani and her brother left their places of hiding. They returned to the temple and proceeded to take out the precious artifacts from the mikvah they had hidden from the Germans. Rosina went to survey an empty library. As evening approached, Mino Moscati accompanied his father to the Tempio Maggiore. Mino's father had been the custodian when the Nazis raided the synagogue. A number of Jews accompanied the Moscatis to the synagogue. Mino said that "the first thing my father did was kindle the candle in front of the Sacred Ark. . . . Then hugs and kisses among the survivors. We gave it (the synagogue) a big cleaning, we straightened things up and in the evening, we held a ceremony once again."<sup>28</sup>

Settimio Terracina, a young Italian American soldier, served in the US Fifth Army and was intent on going to the ghetto. He survived Anzio but was traumatized by the carnage and the loss of his comrades. Settimio was born and raised in the Roman ghetto where he lived with his family and friends. At the age of seventeen, he became the light heavyweight champion of Italy. He proudly displayed the Star of David on his trunks throughout his boxing career. After the first round of his debut at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, the fight was abruptly stopped. The claim was made that he weighed too much to fight in the light heavyweight match. He could no longer compete. All of the officials knew that he was Jewish. After the passage of the fascist racial laws, he was stripped of his heavyweight title and expelled from the Italian boxing team. General Mazzia told Settimio that he was a man without a country and advised him to emigrate. Settimio fled Italy for the United States and joined the US Army.

When the opportunity arose, Settimio quickly made his way to the ghetto looking for those he had left behind. He immediately went to his apartment building hoping to see his family and friends. The building was eerily silent. His tired eyes scanned

the hallways that had once been alive with people. He asked a few Jews who lived there about his family and friends. The Jews said that his family and friends were all gone. Settimio, not comprehending what they told him, wanted to know what they meant. Several of the Jews proceeded to recount the horror of the October 16 roundup. Stunned by the news, Settimio tried to come to grips with the dreadful news. A number of his immediate and extended families as well as his dear friends were gone forever. At that moment, he didn't realize that his sister and brother-in-law were alive.

The day after Rome was liberated, the cross-channel invasion took place not as the Germans expected at Pas-de-Calais but instead on the beaches of Normandy. The final assault on Nazi Germany was under way. The war in Italy continued, and the fate of Jews to the north of Rome hung in the balance.

Pinchas Lapide was part of a delegation of Jewish Brigade officers and soldiers who had looked forward to a papal audience in the latter part of 1944 "to express their thanks for all he had done for Jews in distress." During the audience Pius responded with a "broken Hebrew benediction: 'Vayshmer chem Hashem . . . May the Lord bless you.'" A front-page editorial in the Brigade's Bulletin read "To the everlasting glory of the people of Rome and the Roman Catholic Church we can state that the fate of the Jews was alleviated by their truly Christian offers of assistance and shelter. Even now, many still remain in religious homes and houses which opened its doors to protect them from deportation and certain death."<sup>29</sup>

## He Is No Longer Our Rabbi

**M**ICHAEL STERN JOINED THE US ARMY IN 1943 AS A WAR CORRESPONDENT for the North American Alliance. Initially he was sent to Algiers and traveled with American forces through Sicily and up the boot of Italy to Rome. On June 3, 1944, he and another war correspondent, Fred Rosen, entered Rome a day ahead of the advancing American and British forces. Rome was finally liberated the following day. The Brooklyn-born Stern and Frank Conniff, an editor for Hearst Newspapers, rode their jeep to the Tempio Maggiore in the Jewish quarter. Stern recalled, “Jews swarmed over my vehicle, not quite certain how to act in their new-found freedom or how to thank their liberators. Many wore mezuzah on strings around their necks.”<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Israel Zolli was standing in one of the doorways of the synagogue “trembling with excitement.” Stern and Conniff approached him. Zolli grabbed Stern’s hand and “gave thanks that his people had again been delivered from evil.” Zolli said, “The truth about the tragedy of my people must be made known.” Ugo Foa made his way through the crowd and publicly accused Zolli, “This man deserted his people in their time of need. He is no longer our rabbi.” Zolli responded angrily, “He knew my name was on top of the Gestapo list of all Jews to be liquidated. Dead, what good would I have been to my people?” Foa retorted by repeating his contentious charge. “No matter what might have happened to him his place was here.”<sup>2</sup> Foa had thrown down the gauntlet, initiating “a new and bitter fratricidal struggle that would virtually shatter the remains of the Jewish community in Rome.”<sup>3</sup>

Before the public encounter with Zolli, Foa, Dante Almansì, and Rosina and Settimio Sorani left their places of hiding. Zolli left the Vatican, where he had been given sanctuary. Father Anton Weber drove him to the Pallottine house. Zolli intended to resume his post as chief rabbi. The confrontation at the temple shattered the euphoria that pervaded Rome. Three weeks after the liberation, Zolli presided over the first Sabbath services despite Foa’s prior declaration. American jeeps were parked in front of the synagogue while the services were being held. Lieutenant Morris Kurt Kurtzer,

an American Jewish chaplain, took part in the services at which American Jewish soldiers were in attendance.

The rabbi devoted much of his sermon to prayers for the Jews who had perished and for those still in captivity. He asked the congregation to pray for the Allies to whom they owed their freedom. Zolli expressed the deep gratitude of the Jewish community for the aid extended to the Jews of Italy by the Catholic Church and its clergy. Kurtzer spoke to the congregation with the assistance of a translator. He said that many Jewish soldiers had died in battle in order to liberate Italy from the Nazis and the fascists. When the services ended, the Jewish soldiers poured out of the synagogue and returned to the front.

Zolli held a separate ceremony in honor of Father Père Marie Benoît, “showering him with praise.” Benoît responded to a grateful community. “I love the Jews with all my heart.” Benoît received the gratitude of the Jews not only of Rome but also throughout Italy and wherever his mission took him.<sup>4</sup>

Ugo Foa and Dante Almansì and the surviving members of the CER’s and the UCEI’s council expected to resume their posts. Foa sprang to the attack and urged the council to fire Zolli, repeating his earlier charges and blaming Zolli for the failure to protect the sacred objects and cultural treasures of the community. Foa didn’t assume any responsibility himself and placed it squarely on Zolli. General Mark Clark had other plans in mind and selected Colonel Charles Poletti as the Allied regional commissioner for Rome. Poletti’s adjutant, Captain Maurice Neufeld, was given a special role in dealing with the Jewish community. The fact that Neufeld was Jewish no doubt was crucial to his selection as their official liaison.<sup>5</sup>

On July 7, 1944, as part of a de-fascistization campaign, Poletti removed the CER leaders from their positions and disbanded the CER’s entire council. Zolli was to remain as chief rabbi. Foa, Almansì, and their respective council members were removed on the grounds that they were installed during the fascist regime and didn’t represent the will of the community. Some had held important posts in the regime. Poletti had taken this action on Neufeld’s recommendation. Neufeld advised the community that new elections should be held to select new members free of any fascist association. Neufeld selected Silvio Ottolenghi, a prominent member of the community, to arrange for a new election. Interestingly, Ottolenghi wasn’t free from the taint of his prior associations with the fascists. Factionalism intensified, with charges and countercharges leveled against one another. This disturbed Neufeld, leading him to write that “it’s a community rent by factionalism and petty personal jealousies, sick to the very core.”<sup>6</sup>

In his defense, Zolli told Herbert L. Mathews, a *New York Times*, that

Foa accuses me of having deserted my community, but let me tell you what happened elsewhere in Italy. The rabbis in Modena and Florence stayed with their flocks and were deported. The rabbi of Genoa did the same, and one day the German Elite



Guard came to his office. They beat him until he was covered with blood. Then they dragged him to a telephone and made him call the leaders of the community, asking them to come to the temple immediately with their families. They came in good faith, three generations of them. When they had entered the temple the Germans surrounded it, herded the people into trucks and deported all of them including the rabbi.<sup>7</sup>

During the following weeks, an intense flare-up of an internecine feud developed that had antecedents stretching back to the 1930s. Foa and Almansì sought to paper over their own failings and put the complete blame on Zolli. Both men denied that Zolli had warned them before October 16 to take precautionary measures. Foa denied that he had ever received a letter from Zolli during the gold-ransom crisis in which the rabbi offered himself as a hostage. Foa argued that the rabbi never counseled the community to go into hiding or that its lists should be secured. They made light of Zolli's overture to the Vatican resulting in an offer of the gold. Foa and Almansì condemned Zolli with the charge that he abandoned the community, and therefore "he is no longer our rabbi."<sup>8</sup> Foa never explained satisfactorily how he escaped the October 16 roundup, since the Germans knew precisely where he lived. Was this an oversight by the Germans?

Zolli countered the accusations of both men. Why did Foa allow the community lists to fall into the hands of the Nazis? Why did Foa not warn the community to go into hiding, despite the pleas of Zolli as well as those of Settimio Sorani? In response, Foa contended that the community lists didn't aid the Germans or had not been used by them for the roundup. Thousands of index cards containing the names and addresses of the Jews were discovered in the basement of Via Tasso, Herbert Kappler's former headquarters, where Theodor Dannecker had planned the roundup.

Zolli's name and reputation didn't survive this assault. Both Foa and Almansì put misguided reliance on their contacts with fascist authorities to provide an umbrella of protection from the Germans. Zolli contended that "many Jews could have fled before the Germans were able to carry out all their repressive measures had they not been lulled into a sense of false security by the president of the Jewish community, Ugo Foa, a magistrate and prominent Fascist."<sup>9</sup> Almansì, unlike Foa, did close the UCEI's office and hid important documents before the roundup. During the remaining weeks, charges and countercharges were bitterly exchanged. Allied authorities continued to support Zolli as chief rabbi until the election could select new members.

As the controversy continued into the summer of 1944, Rome was torn apart emotionally. This wasn't only because of the strife within the Jewish community. Four months had passed since the reprisal for the partisan Via Rasella attack in Rome. The audacious attack on the 158 men of an SS police regiment claimed the lives of 32

Germans. The 17 partisans escaped and were never apprehended. The brutal execution of 335 Romans, including 70 Jews, took place in the Ardeatine Caves. Don Pietro Pappagallo, a Catholic priest, was among the victims. As soon as Rome was liberated, Allied authorities were inundated with appeals to exhume the bodies for identification and an honorable burial. The emotional and heart-wrenching work started in July and extended over the next six months. Dr. Attilio Ascarelli, a Roman Jew and a prominent forensic specialist, took charge of the effort to identify the bodies. Only 322 of the 335 were identified. Among them were two members of Ascarelli's family. Robert Katz accepts uncritically a fabricated "plan" by Eugen Dollmann to abort the reprisals. Predictably, he blames Pope Pius for not doing so.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, the food crisis in Rome deepened as supplies trickled in slowly. Some people resorted to the soup kitchens of the Pontifical Aid and other charitable organizations or stood at the doors of hotels waiting for leftovers to be doled out. The black market operated but had always been problematic for ordinary Romans.

As the summer wore on, a group of Roman Jews in August 1944 came to thank the pope for their rescue. Pius told them, "For centuries, Jews have been unjustly treated and despised. It is time they were treated with justice and humanity, God wills it and the Church wills it. St. Paul tells us that the Jews are our brothers. They should also be welcomed as friends." Isaac Herzog, the Grand Rabbi of Jerusalem, expressed his gratitude for Pius's aid, "in the most tragic hour of our history."<sup>11</sup>

## A Connection to the Pope

**B**ETWEEN SEPTEMBER 1943 AND FEBRUARY 11, 1944, ANTI-HITLER CONSPIRATORS made three unsuccessful attempts on the führer's life. All were premised on Adolf Hitler's death and a planned coup.<sup>1</sup> Since 1940, Pius XII and Vatican officials had maintained a link with the conspirators.

Operation Valkyrie included the assassination of Hitler and a coup d'état. The plan was to use the German Home Army. William Doyno writes that "ironically, Valkyrie had originally been approved by Hitler himself, to restore order, in the event of an emergency; but Stauffenberg and his allies ingeniously devised a strategy to use the plan against the Führer." The plot was hatched within the German resistance movement, composed of high-ranking Wehrmacht officers.<sup>2</sup> Colonel Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg was a member of the anti-Hitler conspiracy. While Stauffenberg was posted in Russia, he determined that Hitler had to be removed and joined the conspiracy. Stauffenberg, a devout Catholic, drew on his faith to resist Hitler. Albrecht von Kessel was Stauffenberg's link to Pope Pius. The persecution of Jews convinced Stauffenberg that he must proceed with his mission. One of his brothers had married a Jewish aviatrix who had been removed from the Luftwaffe. Stauffenberg believed that Hitler was evil incarnate and had to be killed.

Stauffenberg had been promoted to chief of staff to the commander of the Home Army, the heart of Operation Valkyrie. This position provided frequent access to Hitler. Stauffenberg planned to assassinate Hitler on July 11 and July 15, 1944, but aborted his plan. Another opportunity occurred when Stauffenberg was summoned to the Wolf's Lair to participate in briefing Hitler about the military situation on the Eastern Front. Stauffenberg carried two bombs, each made of a kilo of plastic explosive. Before entering the conference room he went to anteroom, but while he was preparing the fuses one bomb was disturbed. He activated the remaining bomb and hid it in his briefcase. The conference began at noon in one of the wooden barracks. General Wilhelm Keitel introduced Stauffenberg to Hitler, who stared at him for a moment without comment. "SS men and stenographers stood around the massive, long oak table like nervous cats" as Hitler studied the maps.<sup>3</sup>

On July 20, 1944, Stauffenberg placed the bomb-laden briefcase next to Hitler. Shortly after the meeting began Stauffenberg left the room without his hat and belt behind, giving the impression he would be gone only briefly. He left the room with only a few minutes to spare. When Stauffenberg left, William Shirer records, "Colonel Brandt moved Stauffenberg's bulging briefcase to the far side of the heavy wooden table support, which now stood between the bomb and Hitler." At precisely 12:42 p.m. the bomb exploded, blowing out the walls and the roof as smoke enveloped the room. "The oaken table was blown to smithereens. Hair was on fire. The ceiling had descended to the floor. Several men lay dead." Stauffenberg fled to Berlin, certain Hitler was dead. Michael Beschloss confirmed why Stauffenberg reached this conclusion. "Outside the barracks, Stauffenberg saw men carry out a stretcher on which lay a body shrouded by what seemed to be Hitler's cloak."<sup>4</sup>

The führer survived when he went to another side of the table. The heavy oak table blocked the full force of the blast. Had both bombs been activated, all within the conference room would have been killed. The führer's left arm was injured, as were his eardrums, which bled. His blackened face was encrusted with soot.

The success of Stauffenberg's mission was designed to trigger the planned coup. Valkyrie was a military operation, and as such nothing went according to the original plan. When Stauffenberg returned to Berlin, confusion and hesitation permeated the ranks of the rebellion. While Stauffenberg was airborne, William Shirer concluded, "three precious, vital hours, during which the Führer's headquarters had been shut off from the outside world, had been lost." At approximately 3 p.m., Hitler met with Mussolini and recounted what had happened approximately two and a half hours before. Hitler raved with anger at those who sought to kill him. "I will sweep them off the face of the earth."<sup>5</sup> The initial reports regarding Hitler's fate were vague. That evening, a radio broadcast carried by all German radio stations announced that an attempt on the führer's life had been made but that he survived with no serious injury. The American embassy in Bern learned of Stauffenberg's attempt on Hitler's life. Allen Dulles, OSS station chief in Bern, informed Franklin Roosevelt and OSS chief William Donovan.

The following day, Hitler addressed the nation. "If I speak to you today it is first in order that you should hear my voice and should know that I am unhurt and well, and secondly that you should know of a crime unparalleled in German history. A very small clique of ambitious, irresponsible and, at the same time, senseless and stupid officers concocted a plot to eliminate me." He characterized his survival "as a confirmation of the task imposed on me by Providence."<sup>6</sup>

The revolt of July 20 sputtered and then collapsed for a host of reasons, including bad luck, ineptitude, and the failure of the conspirators to impose a news blackout and cut the telephone lines in Berlin.

The Gestapo launched an immediate hunt for those who took part in the plot and apprehended several hundred. Stauffenberg and several others were immediately

arrested and then executed on orders of General Wilhelm Fromm, commander in chief of the Home Army. Fromm sought to hide his own involvement to no avail. He was subsequently hanged. Anyone even remotely involved in the conspiracy or even suspected was arrested, interrogated, tortured, and killed. Ernst Kaltenbrunner led the investigation to identify all those who dared to take the führer's life. Nearly four hundred SD and Gestapo officers took part in an extensive investigation to identify and ferret out all of the conspirators. Many of the conspirators were captured and then tortured and beaten in order to extract any information they had, in particular their association with outside foreign sources of the anti-Hitler resistance.

Hitler vented his titanic fury and sought revenge. He ordered Heinrich Himmler and Kaltenbrunner to "lay their hands on every last person who had dared to plot against him." At a conference with the two men present Hitler raged, "This time the criminals will be given short shrift. No military tribunals. We'll haul them before the People's Court. . . . The court will act with lightning speed. Two hours after the sentence it will be carried out by hanging—without mercy." Kaltenbrunner was given the responsibility for the 'remorseless machine of vengeance.' Denunciations, charges, countercharges, accusations, and arrests multiplied, enveloping hundreds and then thousands. William Shirer described what took place. "The barbarism of the Nazis toward their own fellow Germans reached its zenith. There was a wild wave of arrests followed by gruesome torture, drumhead trials, and death sentences carried out, in many cases, by slow strangling while the victims were suspended by piano wires from meat hooks borrowed from butcher shops and slaughterhouses. Even relatives and friends were taken into custody and sent to concentration camps."<sup>7</sup>

Kaltenbrunner reported to Martin Bormann the results of the Gestapo's investigations. Bormann was convinced that the "officers caste had to be decimated and rendered powerless." Peter Black asserts that the investigation and violent retribution enabled the Nazis to settle accounts with the Wehrmacht establishment about whom they held a "deep-seated mistrust and contempt . . . with its caste like mentality."<sup>8</sup> Over fifty generals were executed. General Freytag von Loringhoven, who supplied the plastic explosive, committed suicide. General Fritz Halder was sent to a concentration camp on suspicion that he was involved in the plot.

Since 1940, the SD had been on the trail of the anti-Hitler conspirators centered in the Abwehr and extending to the pope. In August 1942, a Bavarian businessman attached to the Abwehr was arrested for currency violations. While he was interrogated, he revealed that he had knowledge of the Abwehr's involvement with the Vatican and its contact with the British between 1939 and 1940. The trail led to Josef Müller, Hans Oster, and Hans von Dohnanyi.

In September 1944, Ernst Kaltenbrunner's SD investigators accidentally came across crucial documents at an Abwehr annex at Zossen. The safe contained Dohnanyi's papers and incriminating documents tying Pius to the conspirators. The trove of doc-

uments included a note on papal stationery describing British conditions for an armistice with Germany and listing the *sine qua non* as “the elimination of Hitler.” The SS reported that the anti-Nazi conspirators who planned to kill Hitler “had maintained connections to the pope.” The SS discovered blueprints of Hitler’s bunker in Müller’s safe.<sup>9</sup> Kaltenbrunner presented his twenty-seven-page report, dated November 24, 1944, to the *führer*. It contradicted Hitler’s initial belief that a very small clique of ambitious officers were involved. The report traced the anti-Hitler resistance to the Vatican and specifically to Pius XII and stated that it commenced in 1940 and continued to the July 1944 bomb plot:

Canaris and Oster established a connection to the Pope with the help of the former Munich lawyer Dr. Joseph Müller, who was “built into” the *Abwehr* solely for this purpose . . . for Müller to go, during the war, namely in the fall of 1939, into contact with the Jesuit Father Leiber, the personal secretary of the Pope. From Leiber he received a lot of information on the position of the Pope and the enemy powers. He also discussed with him about a possible move toward peace and, when Leiber clear to him that the condition for negotiations about peace is a regime change in Germany. Through Leiber, Müller came in contact with English and American circles, especially with the American Taylor.<sup>10</sup>

Hitler, Bormann, and Himmler read the SD report naming the pope and Father Robert Leiber as coconspirators in the July plot. The anti-Hitler conspirators in the *Abwehr* were arrested, including Oster, Dohnanyi, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Müller. A year later while searching the *Abwehr*’s premises, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris’s detailed notebooks were discovered in a safe. Each notebook was about two hundred pages, “handwritten and dated.” Nazi crimes and atrocities were documented, as were the attempts of the *Abwehr* conspirators to bring down the regime. Dohnanyi and others within the *Abwehr* were listed. The so-called diaries made their way to Kaltenbrunner, who brought them to Hitler. Canaris’s diaries confirmed what Hitler had long suspected: that many of the threats to his life and his power were traced to “the Vatican which Hitler . . . regarded as the greatest center of espionage in the world.”<sup>11</sup> When the *führer* read them he flew into a rage, shouting “Destroy the plotters at once.” The *führer* ordered the execution of Canaris, Dohnanyi, Bonhoeffer, and Oster. They were all hanged in the Flossenbürg concentration camp. Dohnanyi was hanged by piano wire. Canaris was stripped naked and, with “medieval barbarity,” hung by piano wire. Müller was slated to be hanged, but there was a delay just as he was being prepared to meet his fate. He was transferred to Dachau as Allied troops approached Flossenbürg prison. Müller was saved from execution by the US Fifth Army on May 5, 1945.<sup>12</sup> Had Hitler been given conclusive proof in 1943 of the pope’s link to the conspirators he would not have been hesitated to invade the Vatican and remove the pontiff.<sup>13</sup>

After the liberation of Rome, Allied forces fought their way north of Rome with the help of partisan formations. Albert Kesselring was always fearful that the Allies would mount a landing along the Ligurian coast behind his formations. The Wehrmacht had to contend with the partisans, who were an effective fighting force. Kesselring instructed commanders to take any measures necessary to conduct reprisals on any civilians suspected of aiding the partisans. Kesselring unleashed a wave of atrocities that were committed against men, women, and children, laying waste to entire villages.<sup>14</sup>

Hitler had guaranteed ultimate victory, but it became clear that this would not happen. Eugen Dollmann decided to jump ship and began to explore the possibility of a surrender of German forces in Italy.<sup>15</sup> Dollmann broached the subject of a negotiated surrender with Karl Wolff. Wolff encouraged Dollmann to pursue several possibilities. Operation Sunrise was the cover name for a series of negotiations between representatives of Nazi Germany and the Western Allies. The objective was to conclude a local surrender of German forces in northern Italy. A vital part of this process was the secret negotiations between SS general Karl Wolff and OSS Bern station chief Dulles. There were several separate attempts by several Nazis to end the war. Jochen von Lang asserted that “in the wild race among the Nazi bigwigs for future security and alibis for the unavoidable day of reckoning, they were all competing with one another.”<sup>16</sup> Wolff, Kaltenbrunner, Hermann Göring, and Himmler were among them.

The Allies made it abundantly clear to all parties that there would be no compromise peace. Out of sheer self-preservation, Wolff proceeded with skill and cunning to pursue an end to the war in Italy. There were additional Germans in Italy—including Eugen Dollmann and Rudolf Rahn—who shared Wolff’s views and were impelled by the hope of saving their own skins.<sup>17</sup> Wolff planned to meet with Hitler but beforehand dispatched Dollmann to meet with Dulles. Dollmann was to indicate that Wolff was prepared to negotiate a surrender of all German troops in Italy. Dulles realized that “the successful conclusion of negotiations would provide a way to outflank both Germany and the Soviets, reduce Allied casualties in Italy, and begin a dual containment both of Germany and the USSR.”<sup>18</sup> Wolff met Dulles and convinced the OSS chief that he had unofficially left the regime and was acting on his own authority. Dulles told Wolff what he knew about the mass execution of Jews. Wolff feigned surprise and denied any knowledge of this matter. The SS general convinced Dulles that he could get Kesselring to accept the surrender of his forces. Wolff turned to Dulles and said, “Mein herren, have a little patience and I will present to you Italy on a silver platter.”<sup>19</sup> Wolff’s ability to charm others didn’t desert him at this crucial moment. Dulles became convinced of Wolff’s sincerity and ability to deliver. Wolff met with Dulles once again and seemed to have had misgivings about negotiating a surrender. Robert Wolfe wrote that as “Operation Sunrise unfolded it mirrored a performance of the ‘Commedia del arte’ replete with missed connections, surprise entrances and exits with everything in place in time for a final curtain.”<sup>20</sup> As the war in the Italian north played out, one city

after another fell to the Allies. A popular insurrection led to Milan's liberation, and on April 25 Genoa surrendered to the partisans, with Turin following shortly thereafter.

Hitler had been ensconced in the Chancellery air-raid shelter built with reinforced concrete buried fifty feet beneath the ground. The lower level formed the Führerbunker housing him, Eva Braun, the Goebbels family, and other key assistants. Alan Bullock described the atmosphere within the bunker. "The physical atmosphere of the bunker was oppressive, but this was nothing compared to the psychological atmosphere. The incessant air-raids, the knowledge that the Russians were now in the city, nervous exhaustion, fear, and despair produced tension bordering on hysteria, which was heightened by propinquity to a man whose changes of mood were not only unpredictable but affected the lives of all those in the shelter."<sup>21</sup>

On April 20, 1945, a number of the leaders of the doomed regime gathered for the führer's fifty-sixth birthday. According to Ian Kershaw, the atmosphere "was more funereal than celebratory." Hitler, stooped and pale, was a shell of his former self. The lines between the real world and his imagination were not only blurred but also destroyed. The Russians were poised to enter the center of the city and were closing in on the Chancellery. The führer vowed to stay in Berlin, and Goebbels declared that he would face death with him. Not everyone in the bunker was prepared to follow Hitler and sought ways to flee Berlin.

Göring radioed the Chancellery and asked if the führer's decision to remain in Berlin "invoked the edict of June 29, 1941 that named him, the Reich Marshal, successor to the Führer with full powers in case Hitler became incapacitated." Göring asked if he should assume total leadership of the Reich. He added that if he did not receive an answer by 10 p.m. "I shall assume that you have been deprived of your freedom of action, I shall act for the good of our people and the Fatherland." Hitler was outraged at Göring's impertinence.<sup>22</sup>

On April 28, Hitler received a report that Himmler was secretly plotting to work out an armistice agreement with the Allies with the false assumption that he and his SS could be of use to them. "Himmler even indicated that he was prepared to accept an unconditional surrender" to the Allies but not the Soviet Union. Himmler had worked over a three-month period to effectuate Hitler's removal from power. Hitler raved like a madman upon receipt of the news of Himmler's betrayal. The entire bunker fell silent. Bernard von Loringhoven, a member of the Army General Staff, remembered that "militarily, there was no hope left," and he felt betrayed. And now the man Hitler probably trusted the most had deserted him. Göring at least had asked permission to take over, but not the reichsführer. Hitler always had confidence in Himmler's loyalty, but this betrayal shattered him. Hitler stripped Himmler of all his official positions. News of Himmler's betrayal shocked the SS rank and file.<sup>23</sup>

The atmosphere and the closing scenes in the bunker were surreal. Hitler, "unshaven and visibly distraught," was removed from all reality.<sup>24</sup> On the morning of April 29,



Hitler married Eva Braun in a civil ceremony. Both swore that they were of “pure Aryan descent.” Hitler then went to another room with Traudl Junge, his secretary, and dictated his will and political testament. Martin Bormann was named executor of his will, which ended with “I myself and my wife—in order to escape disgrace of deposition or capitulation—choose death. It is our wish to be burnt immediately on the spot where I have carried out the greatest part of my daily work in the course of twelve years’ service to my people.” From the beginning to the end of his testament, Hitler admitted neither regret nor remorse. Alan Bullock underscored a recurring theme that ran through the document: “The fault is that of others, above all that of the Jews.”<sup>25</sup> The war, Hitler said, was “desired and instigated by those international statesmen who were either of Jewish descent or worked for Jewish interests.”<sup>26</sup> In the second part of the testament he selected his successors. “Above all, I charge the leadership of the nation and their subjects with meticulous observance of the race-laws and merciless resistance to the universal prisoner of all peoples international Jewry.” Hitler continued, stating that “centuries will pass away, but out of the ruins of our towns and monuments, hatred will grow against those finally responsible for everything. International Jewry.” He selected Admiral Doenitz as president of the Reich and Josef Goebbels as the new chancellor.<sup>27</sup> Himmler’s betrayal was “evidence of the collapse of the Reich and Hitler’s world.”<sup>28</sup>

The Reich Chancellery was under frequent bombardment. The Tiergarten was overrun by Russian troops who were closing in on the bunker. Alan Bullock wrote, “That Himmler should betray him was the bittersweet blow of all and it served to crystallize the decision to commit suicide.”<sup>29</sup>

News of Benito Mussolini’s death reached the bunker on April 29, 1945. Hitler was visibly shaken. The Duce and his mistress, Clara Petacci, were captured by partisans. They were shot on the shore of Lake Garda. Their bodies were brought to Milan, where the people vented their full fury. They were hanged upside down facing the Piazzale Loreto where the Gestapo had executed fifteen partisans. It is unclear if Hitler was provided with the gory details. He was given a report that the Russians would reach the Reich Chancellery on May 1.

The following morning with his staff present, Hitler bade them farewell. “He was wearing a simple uniform jacket with the Iron Cross pinned to the left side of his chest, displaying his decoration for wounds sustained in the First World War.” He summoned Hans Bauer, his personal pilot, and asked him to burn his and Eva’s corpses. Hitler went into his suite with Eva and closed the door behind him. For a few minutes, a small group waited outside and then entered the suite and saw the führer soaked in blood. At approximately 3:30 p.m., Hitler picked up his 7.65-caliber Walther pistol and shot himself in the mouth. Eva Braun swallowed poison and lay next to him. Both bodies, as per the führer’s instructions, were taken out and burned. Goebbels, Bormann, and those who had accompanied the bodies while at attention saluted Hitler and returned to the bunker. German radio announced Hitler’s death, avoiding the fact Hitler committed

suicide and stating that Hitler “died fighting to the last breath fighting Bolshevism.” On May 1, 1945, Josef Goebbels remained a fanatical true believer to the very end and followed the führer. Frau Goebbels administered poison to her six children. Husband and wife took poison together. “Like Hitler, Goebbels shot himself in the temple as he bit on his capsule.”<sup>30</sup>

Wolff resumed negotiations with Dulles, and the final terms were hammered out. Wolff needed the agreement of Kesselring, who was now supreme commander of all western and southern forces. Kesselring at first balked at Wolff’s demand that he should issue orders to surrender all forces in Italy. He still felt that he was bound by his loyalty oath to Hitler. According to Wolff, he told Kesselring point-blank, “If you don’t act now, then I want you to realize that you are one of the biggest and worst war criminals of all time.” Wolff decided to completely ignore Kesselring and proceeded to act on his own. Kesselring ultimately dropped his opposition.<sup>31</sup>

Operation Overlord’s success had forced Hitler to fight battles to the east and west and divide his forces in a final checkmate. German forces in Italy under General Heinrich von Vietinghoff’s command signed the surrender document, with a cease-fire that was to go into effect at 2 p.m. on May 2. The lives of hundreds of thousands of soldiers on both sides were spared five or six days of pointless killing and dying.<sup>32</sup> “On May 3, 1945, the process of the piecemeal surrender began as German commanders capitulated in Holland, Denmark and northwest Germany.” On May 7, 1945, General Alfred Jodl and his staff signed unconditional documents at a ceremony held in General Dwight Eisenhower’s headquarters in Rheims. The next day, Field Marshal Keitel followed suit and surrendered to the Russians in Berlin.<sup>33</sup>

## We Have Contended with Diabolical Forces

THE DAY AFTER THE REICH'S SURRENDER, POPE PIUS XII DELIVERED AN address on Vatican Radio. He told the listeners, "The task of this hour is to rebuild the world." He exhorted those to remember the "countless corpses of inhuman massacres," as "it seems to us that they, the fallen, are warning us the survivors . . . , the molders and masters of a better world."<sup>1</sup> On June 1, 1945, Josef Müller was escorted to the Vatican. The pope was fully informed of Müller's terrible ordeal while he was in captivity. Their private meeting was emotional for the both of them. The pope told Müller that he had prayed for him every day of his imprisonment. He embraced Müller and said, "We have contended with diabolical forces."<sup>2</sup> Pius gathered the Sacred College of Cardinals the day after Müller departed from Rome and expressed his sympathy for the countless victims of "the idolatry of race and blood." Pius made a vague reference to his meeting with Müller and his role in the anti-Hitler conspiracies.

Pius confirmed his role in the conspiracy of 1939–1940. He typed and corrected in his own hand an article for *L'Osservatore Romano*: "Following the principle to try anything possible which might serve the matter of peace in any way, the Holy Father Pius XII accepted at that time, when he was contacted by important political and military circles in Germany, to deliver some questions of this circle about their intentions and conditions for peace to the other warring side as well as the answers this side believed to give these questions."<sup>3</sup> The article appeared in 1946 unsigned.

During the war, the pope destroyed many of his documents and personal notes that related to this and other clandestine activities. Howard Deutsch maintained that "a mere reading of the documents of his pontificate, of which he destroyed all the more personal ones, will often fail to do justice to the firmness of which he was capable in dealing with some of the problems that arose in the Holy See's relations with the Third Reich. Least of all do they reflect his personal sentiments."<sup>4</sup>

During the war, Pius received words of praise and gratitude for saving the lives of many victims of Nazi persecution, including thousands of Jews. Among those lauding the pope were Albert Einstein, Chaim Weizmann, and Moshe Sharett.<sup>5</sup> When the war

ended, the pope received worldwide acclaim for his humanitarian aid and his resistance to the fascists and the Nazis. In particular, he received gratitude for saving thousands of Jewish lives during the Holocaust. The open declarations of admiration and gratitude came from religious and political leaders as well as newspapers around the world. Eighty Italian Jews who had survived the death camps met with the pope on November 29, 1945, and thanked him “for his generosity toward the persecuted during the Nazi-Fascist period,” a reference to the sanctuary he provided in churches and convents.<sup>6</sup> Some of the many who joined the chorus of gratitude were Rabbi Isaac Herzog, chief rabbi of Israel; Rabbi Elio Toaff; Leon Kubowitzky, secretary-general of the World Jewish Congress; and Raffaele Cantoni, an executive officer of DELASEM and president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities. Dr. Cantoni stated that “six million of my co-religionists have been murdered by the Nazis, but there could have been many more victims had it not been for the efficacious intervention of Pius XII.”<sup>7</sup>

For the pope, the current challenge was to provide immediate assistance to the displaced multitudes. He created the Children’s War Relief program and the International Committee of Catholic Charities and directed the Vatican Information Office to provide assistance for families to find their loved ones. The Vatican mobilized a worldwide relief initiative. The task of dealing with the physical devastation in Europe was beyond the Vatican’s ability to solve, and the governments of Europe lacked the financial resources. Ultimately, that void was filled by the United States.

The elation that accompanied the victory over the Third Reich and its fascist and Japanese allies was transformed into tragedy. More than twenty-five million persons—soldiers and civilians—had died. Six million Jews were murdered in the death camps. Another five million to six million non-Jews, mainly Christians, Gypsies, and homosexuals, were also slaughtered. Thousands of displaced people were in need of immediate assistance.

The world entered the terror-filled atomic age and incalculable moral dilemmas. Within four years, America’s atomic monopoly ended when the Soviet successfully tested an atomic bomb. The wartime Allies had entered the postwar era, each with its own objectives, and the Cold War took root in a witch’s brew.<sup>8</sup> The emergence of the Cold War led the pope to proclaim the Vatican’s neutrality, but he understood that its interests lay with the West, particularly with the United States. Robert Ventresca asserts, “As he had during World War II, then Pius XII would attempt to steer papal diplomacy deftly down a path of political neutrality between the two emerging power blocs.”<sup>9</sup>

Joseph Stalin was intent on placing Eastern Europe under Soviet domination. The persecution of the Catholic Church intensified as he extended Soviet control in the region. The Soviets targeted the pope in an intense disinformation propaganda campaign to undermine the Church’s influence in Eastern Europe. The campaign aimed to transform an anti-Nazi and anticommunist pope into a Nazi collaborator, “Hitler’s

pope,” by undermining his moral authority and branding him as a silent participant during the Holocaust.

Stalin’s purges extended to all facets of Soviet life, including the intelligentsia and the army. Thirty-two million persons were sent to forced labor camps. The murderous Gulag system was extensive.<sup>10</sup> He remained silent during the “genocidal slaughtering of the Jews by the Nazi conquerors in Poland.”<sup>11</sup> The Soviet Union was killing more people in eastern Poland than the Germans were killing in western Poland. Stalin paved the way for the extermination of 1.5 million unsuspecting Jews in White Russia and the Ukraine. His sins of omission and commission during the war “cost the lives of at least one million Soviet Jews in addition to the over 500,000 to 600,000 who died in prison or were slain as a result of the purges.”<sup>12</sup>

Stalin’s anti-Semitism grew obsessive in the postwar years. By 1948, he was certain that Israel and Jewish internationalists, including Russian Jews, were a threat to the Soviet state. No Jew in the Soviet Union could feel safe. The presentiment of pogroms grew.<sup>13</sup>

The satellite governments at the direction of Moscow began the vigorous persecution of the Catholic Church. Pope Pius XII understood the mortal danger that Adolf Hitler and Stalin posed to the world. At the end of the war the pope, in a different international setting, fought the expansion of communism. He sought to protect the interests of the Catholic Church within the Soviet bloc. The Soviet regime brought bishops and priests before show trials reminiscent of those held by the Nazis and undertook the naked persecution of the Catholic Church. The pope’s stature among Catholics in Eastern Europe was enhanced because of his willingness to fight communism beyond the Iron Curtain, where the Western powers were limited. He was an early advocate of the European Union with the goal of containing and ultimately defeating communism.<sup>14</sup>

Pius XII ultimately served for thirteen postwar years. He was frail and in ill health. Despite his declining health, those who met with him directly “marveled at the pontiff’s sustained capacity for long days of work, filled with meetings, study, and prayer.” He was warm and welcoming to all those with whom he had personal contact. Before the war, the pope was an outgoing, ebullient person. The strain of the war, the daily news of the tragedies, and the loss of innocent lives had tempered that personality trait. During his nineteen-year pontificate he promulgated forty-one encyclicals.<sup>15</sup>

In December 1954, Pius fell seriously ill and received the last rites. He slowly recovered, but by 1958 his health declined precipitously. The eighty-two-year-old pontiff succumbed on October 9, 1958. As he lay in state, tributes poured in from all quarters of the globe. The tributes were so numerous that for three days the *New York Times* published only their names. Numerous Jewish organizations, including the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, and the Rabbinical Council of America expressed their sorrow and their gratitude for the Jews saved from death and

torture. Several synagogues in New York City held memorial services. Golda Meir, Israeli foreign minister, offered, "During the ten years of Nazi terror, when our people went through the horrors of martyrdom, the Pope raised his voice to condemn the persecutors and to commiserate with their victims." Elio Toaff, the chief rabbi of Rome, said, "More than any other people the Italian Jews had experienced the great pity and supreme generosity of the pontiff during the unfortunate years of persecution and terror, when it seemed to them they had no open way to escape." Robert Ventresca adds, "Toaff went on to provide tangible evidence of the pope's work on behalf of Italian Jews, referring to 'the papal ruling to open the doors of convents and parish houses' to the Jews." Heads of state mourned the pope's passing. President Dwight Eisenhower voiced a common sentiment: "The world is a poorer place with the death of Pius XII." Susan Zuccotti disparages praise for Pius from Jews and gentiles as ill-informed and mistaken. In fact, she extends her criticism to most other sources including the press, as they "were rooted in benevolent ignorance."<sup>16</sup>

After the war, Josef Müller wrote of the pope's continual involvement with the anti-Nazi conspirators, "not as the Head of the Vatican State, but as a Pope, his conscience not only allows but obliged him to offer his life and the Church for peace." He added, "The Pope wanted nothing more urgently and dearly than a Germany liberated from Hitler and Nazism."<sup>17</sup>

## I Was Only an Executor of Orders

**I**N JULY 1944, RAINER STAHEL WAS SUMMARILY REMOVED FROM HIS COMMAND in Rome and transferred to German-occupied Poland. He was arrested by the Soviet Union's interior ministry, the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, when the Russians took control and was imprisoned in the Soviet Gulag system, where he died.

Karl Wolff was a prime target for those seeking to capture Nazi officials who committed war crimes. With Heinrich Himmler's suicide, Wolff was the highest-ranking SS officer to have survived the war. At the end of the war, he was arrested and then transferred from an internment camp to a US mental hospital. While in the camp, he provided information to the Nuremberg prosecutors. The French and the Soviets wanted him tried at Nuremberg, but they were blocked by the United States and Great Britain. Allen Dulles provided de facto protection for Wolff and Eugen Dollmann. Dulles worked behind the scenes on their behalf. Wolff was being rewarded for his role in Italy's surrender. Italian authorities issued warrants for the arrests of the two men, alleging that they were key participants in the mass execution of civilian hostages. Wolff was outside the jurisdiction of Italian law. Had Wolff been brought to trial in Nuremberg, he would have received at least a life sentence or likely been hanged.

In 1949, Wolff was brought before a denazification board in Germany. Once again Dulles came to his rescue, filing an affidavit on his behalf. Though the board knew all about Wolff, they concluded that the time spent in the internment camp was sufficient punishment. Wolff testified in 1952 at one trial and said that Adolf Hitler had not known about the extermination of the Jews. He also claimed that he learned of the final solution for the first time at his meeting with Allen Dulles in 1945. Wolff was brought before a West German court in 1964 and received a fifteen-year sentence for his role in the extermination of the Jews. He served only seven years and was released in 1971, claiming poor health. Wolff remained a loyal Nazi and visited former comrades in Argentina. He spent the remainder of his days with his second wife in a villa in Monaco.<sup>1</sup>

Eugen Dollmann was "shielded from British, Italian and German prosecution." Dollmann went to Switzerland with the help of the CIA. There he began working as

an undercover spy for the CIA and MI5 in anti-Russian espionage. He peddled “various absurd intelligence schemes.”<sup>2</sup>

In 1945, the British captured Herbert Kappler and scheduled him to stand trial. Prior to his trial, Kappler testified for three hours at the trial of General Kurt Malzer, the commandant of Rome, and General Eberhard von Mackensen, who had commanded the Fourteenth Army, for their role in the Ardeatine massacre.<sup>3</sup>

Albert Kesselring was brought to trial before the British Military Tribunal on February 17, 1947. He was charged with two counts for committing war crimes. The first count was the execution of 335 Italians in the Ardeatine massacre, in violation of the laws and usages of war. The second count stated that Kesselring incited and commanded the forces under his command to kill civilians as reprisals for partisan attacks. In June 1944, Kesselring circulated an order and assured those in his command that “I will protect any commander who exceeds our usual restraint in the choice of the severity of the methods he adopts against the partisans.” In July, Kesselring followed that order with another that stated, “A mistake in the choice of means is always better than omission or negligence.” The effect of these orders and assurances was to turn his men loose to adopt any means necessary to stamp out the partisans. The court dealt with the slaughter of 1,078 unarmed men, women, and children at Marzabotto and other atrocities.<sup>4</sup>

Though questioned about the execution of fifteen American soldiers, Kesselring was not charged. The British prosecutors didn’t pursue this matter except for some perfunctory questioning before the trial. Had they done so, they might have transferred him to American military authorities. If they had been able to uncover the details of this sordid affair, Kesselring would have been shot. They had already tried and shot Anton Dostler, who was under Kesselring’s command and had ordered the execution of the uniformed American soldiers.<sup>5</sup> Kesselring was in the area where the soldiers had been captured and executed. The quick dispatch of Dostler made a deep impression on Kesselring, and he “decided early on that it would be in his best interests to risk the consequences of assuming the responsibility merely for passing on Hitler’s order to execute 335 Italians.” He would also evade any responsibility for the atrocities committed by the Wehrmacht units under his command.<sup>6</sup>

In May 1947, the British Military Tribunal announced its verdict. Kesselring’s role in the execution of 335 Italians constituted a war crime, and he was guilty on both counts. He was sentenced to death. Winston Churchill lobbied for leniency. The sentence was commuted to life imprisonment and then further reduced to twenty-one years. Kesselring was released from prison in 1952 and died eight years later at the age of seventy-four.

In July 1947, the British turned Herbert Kappler over to the Italian authorities to be tried as a war criminal. He was imprisoned in Regina Coeli. Kappler was brought to trial under the Moscow Declaration on German Atrocities. This allowed for the transfer of any war criminal to be returned to the country and place where the crime took



place. By the time Kappler was brought to trial, he had developed a rehearsed script and a misleading time line.<sup>7</sup>

Kappler's trial began on May 2, 1948, before the Tribunale Militare di Roma in the Collegio Militare, a place whose significance was not lost on those present in the packed courtroom. In both Kesselring's and Kappler's cases, their trials took place before a military court that was predisposed to a line of defense that orders had to be followed. Kappler and five codefendants were charged with promoting, organizing, and directing the Ardeatine Caves massacre.<sup>8</sup> The second count accused Kappler of having extorted fifty kilograms of gold from the Jews, threatening them that unless payment was made he would take them hostage for deportation. The indictment charged him with the violation of a fascist law of using his position to gain an "unfair profit with considerable patrimonial damages to the Jewish community in Rome." Incredibly, he was not charged with his direct role in the roundup of the Jews on October 16, 1943.

The trial transcript documented details of the Ardeatine massacre, the roundup and deportation of the Jews, and the extortion of gold. Kappler testified in his own defense. He admitted that he directed the executions of 335 Italians but that he was following an order that compelled him to obey. The president of the court asked Kappler if any appeal had been made for the partisans to turn themselves in with the objective of preventing the reprisals. Kappler replied, "I had no authority to make such appeals," and "I had no time to do it." In addition, he maintained that the führer wanted the reprisals completed within twenty-four hours and that speed and secrecy were essential to prevent the partisans from actively stopping them. "I was only an executor of orders, which as a soldier, I could not evade."<sup>9</sup>

The testimony that dealt with the extortion of the gold lasted for two days. The key prosecution witness was Ugo Foa, who had been reinstated to the Italian judiciary and appointed deputy attorney general in the court of appeals. The court in essence accepted Kappler's version of his motives. It also accepted the former Gestapo chief's timeline when he first received a deportation order. On July 28, 1948, the court also accepted his explanation that the gold ransom was an attempt to abort the deportation of the Jews. The military judges ruled that Kappler attempted to "carry out his own plan which he hoped would be approved by the authorities in Berlin." The judges said that his motive "was to eventually abandon them anyway to the fate prepared for the Jews of Rome by Berlin." Kappler, in his testimony, fell back on the familiar assertion that he was ordered by Himmler to deport the Jews.<sup>10</sup> Kappler had presented his own justification for his motivation for extorting the gold from the Jews. He claimed that he attempted to present an alternative their deportation. The court did not fully explore his reasoning or challenge its validity.<sup>11</sup>

Kappler contended that he made numerous objections to the deportation orders, a patent lie. To the astonishment of many in the courtroom, he claimed that "I cannot say exactly what my rank in the SS was in October 1943." He couldn't recall who called

him with the first deportation order, an event that coincided with a significant promotion and the award of the Iron Cross. Kappler did admit that his orders were to seize “the Jews of Rome,” which meant all and not a specific number. He also denied seeing the telegrams that Consul Eitel Moellhausen sent to the Foreign Ministry offering an alternative to the deportation of the Jews or Berlin’s response. Kappler falsely testified that he had only heard Adolf Eichmann’s name after the war had ended. When Theodor Dannecker presented Kappler with a signed deportation order from Heinrich Müller, it defied logic that no discussion of Eichmann was broached at that time. Kappler had associations with Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich, whose offices were in the RSHA along with Eichmann’s. Moreover, Kappler knew that the Jews in Rome were to be “liquidated.” The prosecutors at his trial didn’t aggressively pursue the inconsistencies and inaccuracies of Kappler’s testimony. Kappler received firm and direct deportation orders by September 15 and another in October.

Two days before his meeting with Foa and Dante Almansì demanding fifty kilograms of gold, Kappler reported to Berlin the Vatican’s intervention in providing visas to Jews to escape Rome. Kappler promised to pursue this matter and prevent the escape of any Jews. This was a clear admission that he had no intention of preventing the deportation from taking place.<sup>12</sup>

The court didn’t convict Kappler on the second count of extorting gold from the Jews based on his self-described motivations but did find him guilty of having “acted without authorization of the competent authority.”<sup>13</sup>

When the trial turned to the Ardeatine massacre, the court cited the Hague Convention of 1907, which provided that behavior such as Kappler’s would have been permissible in an occupation zone only if “commanders of large units” had ordered it. The defense had argued that the partisan attack at Via Rasella was illegal and that the reprisal was legally allowable by the 1907 Hague Convention.<sup>14</sup> The defense also asserted that Kappler had to obey his superiors’ orders, even though the Nuremberg War Crimes trials had rejected this as a line of defense. The reprisals were retaliation for a precise and effective attack by the partisans on an SS Bozen police regiment on Via Rasella. The ratio of 10 to 1 for each SS killed resulted in the brutal execution of 335 Romans, including 77 Jews.<sup>15</sup> Kappler took the stand once again in his own defense. He testified for eight days in a businesslike manner, recounting the horrific details of the roundup of the victims following the Via Rasella attack. His ice-cold demeanor was devoid of any emotion or compassion as he justified the reprisals. Kappler admitted that he directed the executions but that he was compelled to obey the orders of his superiors. He also admitted that he shot some of the victims and described the process of the executions in vivid detail. The spectators in the courtroom, many of whom had loved ones killed in the caves, openly wept, the pain visible on their faces; others shouted out, voicing their hatred for the witness.

The Italian government held that the partisans were a legitimate military formation. The court held that the Ardeatine reprisal was not legitimate under international law. The Partisan Movement at the time had to act “in the orbit of illegality.” The court also cited the fact that ten of the total executed fell outside of Hitler’s order. The judges concluded that the reprisal “was a long way from qualifying as legitimate; it was a war crime.” Kappler was sentenced to life in prison for his role in the Ardeatine massacre.<sup>16</sup> His codefendants, with the exception of Erich Priebke, were acquitted of all charges. At no time did Kappler show any compassion or sense of guilt for his role in the death of the Jews, the extortion of gold, the sacking of the libraries, and those massacred in the Ardeatine Caves.

Kappler was sentenced to fifteen years for the charge of extorting gold from the Jews. His appeal in 1953 was turned down, and his appeal for a pardon in 1957 was also rejected. While in prison, Kappler was remarried to a German woman. In 1977, he was transferred to a hospital in Rome and diagnosed with cancer. His wife and another accomplice were instrumental in smuggling him out of Rome to Stuttgart. Italian authorities sought his extradition; however, Kappler died the following year. His version of those fateful events was later accepted for some time without question by many historians. The Italian court didn’t have the tools and documents that we have today to reconstruct the truth. The Nuremberg trials dwarfed Kappler’s trial. The American press scarcely reported his trial to the public at large. The world’s attention turned to the task of postwar reconstruction and the emergence of the Cold War.<sup>17</sup>

Ernst von Weizsäcker remained in the Vatican when Rome was liberated. When the war ended, he was promptly arrested upon returning to Germany. He was tried before an American court in Nuremberg at the same time that Kappler’s trial was under way. Weizsäcker and senior officials of the Foreign Ministry were accused of a number of crimes that included aiding and abetting the final solution. At Nuremberg, he was charged with taking part in the deportation of Jews. Pope Pius XII praised Weizsäcker in a letter to the court. Alois Hudal expressed his support in an affidavit. Weizsäcker’s aide, Albrecht von Kessel, testified how he and the ambassador attempted to warn the Jews. One Jew who had escaped the roundup and hid in a convent wrote a letter to the military governor in Berlin praising the ambassador for protecting her. Though anti-Nazi and anti-Hitler, he was sentenced to seven years in prison. He was released in 1950, having served eighteen months of his sentence. He wrote his memoirs and never dealt with the deportation of Jews of Rome. Weizsäcker died in 1951, a broken man.<sup>18</sup>

After Hitler’s death, Heinrich Himmler was the Nazi most sought after. He was captured on May 21, 1945. Two days after his capture he crushed a glass vial of potassium cyanide between his teeth and died.<sup>19</sup>

At the Nuremberg trial, Hermann Göring was examined about the 1941 directive drafted by Adolf Eichmann bearing his signature. Göring denied all knowledge of what

happened to the Jews and denied any complicity.<sup>20</sup> G. M. Gilbert, prison psychologist, concluded that Göring was a psychopathic personality with a complete lack of moral sense who denied all ethical and legal responsibility for any Nazi crimes. Göring was found guilty on all four counts and sentenced to death. He cheated the hangman by swallowing a cyanide capsule and died before he was to hang.<sup>21</sup>

Ernst Kaltenbrunner testified at his trial that he didn't know what was going on in the camps or anything about the extermination of the Jews. To Gilbert he asserted, "I had nothing to do with these executions." Kaltenbrunner added, "I never gave orders and never executed them." Gilbert asked, "Did these few people have the sole knowledge and responsibility for the murder of millions of people and the burning of children alive?" Kaltenbrunner replied, "Well, no—the people who actually participated in it did. But I had nothing to do with it."<sup>22</sup> As RSHA chief, Kaltenbrunner increased the pace of the final solution. He was found guilty of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity and was hanged on October 16, 1946. Joachim von Ribbentrop, Alfred Rosenberg, and Julius Streicher were found guilty on other counts and sentenced to death. The three defendants were also hanged on October 16, 1946, the third anniversary of Black Saturday.

After the October 16 roundup, Theodor Dannecker left Rome and extended the *Judenrazzia* to northern Italy. He led another roundup that netted seven hundred Jews who were deported. Dannecker conducted additional roundups in a number of cities including Florence and Milan. US military police captured him, and while in custody he cheated justice by hanging himself from the window of his cell.<sup>23</sup>

In 1960, a team of a dozen Mossad agents arrived in Argentina and apprehended Adolf Eichmann. He was brought to Israel to stand trial.<sup>24</sup> "On April 11, 1961, the theater of Beit Ha'am, Jerusalem's brand-new cultural center, was packed. Over seven hundred people filled the room for the trial of a man accused of being the chief operational officer of the Final Solution."<sup>25</sup>

Israeli attorney general Gideon Hausner signed a bill of indictment against Eichmann on fifteen counts including crimes against the Jewish people, crimes against humanity, and membership in criminal organizations. Each day of the trial, Eichmann was placed in a bulletproof glass booth. The prosecution's case was based on numerous documents, 112 witnesses, and depositions of key Nazis and it extended for more than fifty days. Hausner's opening statement to the court affirmed that "the Pope himself intervened personally in support of the Jews of Rome." Documents presented in the trial substantiated the pontiff's efforts to halt the Black Saturday roundup.

Robert Servatius, Eichmann's attorney, challenged the proceeding, arguing that the court lacked jurisdiction since the crimes for which his client was being charged occurred before Israel came into being and took place on foreign soil. He also challenged the objectivity of the court and whether his client could receive a fair trial.

Eichmann was determined to testify that he was a “little cog in a giant machine” and then blame others, both subordinates and superiors. He would even dismiss documentary evidence.<sup>26</sup>

The testimony of ninety-nine Holocaust survivors riveted the packed audience. Gideon Hausner’s cross-examination of Eichmann lasted for two weeks. When Eichmann took the stand, he admitted knowing that “some of the people” he had deported would “be killed in the camp.” Eichmann added he didn’t have a choice. “I had to carry out the transports in accordance with my orders.”<sup>27</sup> He maintained throughout the trial that the responsibility rested with his superiors despite the overwhelming documentation that proved otherwise. Hausner introduced Eichmann’s own words: “I will leap into my grave laughing because the feeling that I have five million human beings on my conscience is for me a source of extraordinary satisfaction.” Hausner proved that Eichmann visited the extermination camps and knew that the inmates were slated for death and that he was instrumental in the process.<sup>28</sup> Eichmann repeatedly asserted that he was obliged to follow orders. He maintained that he was just a little cog in the Nazi regime and thus felt no guilt, and he expressed no remorse.<sup>29</sup>

The roundup and fate of Rome’s Jews was addressed. Hausner stated, “The Pope himself intervened personally in support of the Jews of Rome.” Eichmann testified that although he sent Dannecker to proceed with the *Judenrazzia*, the order came from his superiors. Eichmann’s defense attorney put the overall responsibility for the persecution of the Jews in Rome more broadly on the overall Nazi ideology and not on Eichmann. The transcript of Herbert Kappler’s prison testimony was entered into the trial. Documents were entered into the record that substantiated the Vatican’s action to halt the ongoing roundup. Jenő Levi, the acclaimed Jewish scholar, testified as to the pope’s intervention on behalf of the Hungarian Jews.

In December 1961, the eight-month trial ended when the judges rendered their verdict. The court was guided by the International Military Tribunal’s charter stating that even if defendants had acted on orders from the government or a superior they were still responsible and subject to punishment. The court held that the Holocaust was “a criminal act according to the laws of all civilized nations.” It also asserted that the trial was not retroactive justice and ruled Eichmann that should be hanged.<sup>30</sup> Eichmann appealed the judgment, and ultimately it was rejected. The Israeli Supreme Court also noted the pope’s protest against the deportation of Hungarian Jews. Eichmann’s appeal for a commutation of the sentence was also rejected.<sup>31</sup>

Before he was to be hanged in Ramallah, the fifty-six-year-old German declared, “Long Live Germany. . . I am ready. . . I died believing in God.” On May 31, 1962, Eichmann was hanged, after which his body was placed in an oven and cremated. In the pre-dawn hours of June 1, 1962, the prison’s commissioner tossed his ashes overboard outside Israeli territorial waters. Deborah Lipstadt wrote, “Ultimately, Eichmann’s ashes

were scattered in the sea to prevent his burial site from becoming a place of pilgrimage for neo-Nazis and anti-Semites.”<sup>32</sup>

Josef Mengele escaped to Argentina, Paraguay, and eventually Brazil. His crimes were amply documented before the International Military Tribunal and other courts. West German authorities issued a warrant for his arrest and followed with a request for extradition. In 1979, Mengele suffered a stroke while swimming and drowned. He had remained a free man for thirty-four years.<sup>33</sup> Rudolf Höss, commandant of Auschwitz, was captured on March 11, 1946, and subsequently handed over to Poland’s Supreme National Tribunal, which tried him for the murder of thousands of Jews. The guilty sentence of death was carried out one year later. He was hanged next to the crematoria of the Auschwitz concentration camp.<sup>34</sup>

A common thread bound all Nazis, those who either took their own lives, were captured and tried, or eluded capture. They remained committed Nazis, unrepentant, devoid of remorse. They fell back on a common justification that they were following orders and were merely cogs in the machinery of death. The final solution, they claimed, was an invention of others. Those who were brought to trial for planning and implementing the final solution or were complicit represent a small sample of the total. Ian Kershaw underscored this point. “Many others, at different levels of the regime, had been instrumental in greater or lesser measure to the continuing and untrammelled process of radicalization. Complicity was massive, from the Wehrmacht leadership and captains of industry down to party hacks, bureaucratic minions, and ordinary Germans hoping for their own material advantage through the persecution and deportation of a helpless, but unloved, minority which had deemed to be the inexorable enemy of the ‘peoples community.’”<sup>35</sup>

## EPILOGUE

### I Must Go Back and Tell

**A**S SOVIET TROOPS ADVANCED CLOSER TO AUSCHWITZ, A CLEANUP OPERATION to conceal traces of mass murder was in full force. The crematoria and written records were destroyed. On January 17, 1945, the Germans evacuated fifty-eight thousand prisoners who could walk and left behind seven thousand who were too weak or too sick to walk.

Settimia Spizzichino joined the other prisoners in the infamous death march to Bergen-Belsen in Lower Saxony. The prisoners' thin garb provided scant protection from the harsh Polish winter. She remembered, "They walked us in a long line, a line of death. Day and night . . . if you dropped you were doomed to die in the snow." While in Bergen-Belsen, she said, "we were being practically starved to death. We used to scour the camp in search of something to eat." In a surreptitious moment, she said, "One day I found a kitchen. The smell of food was irresistible. I went in. I used to carry a bowl hanging from my belt—quickly I filled it up and I ran away across the camp, chased by a Kapo who was furious, and I left a trail of potatoes and turnips behind me." The mortality rate was extremely high; in one day alone sixty thousand died. In one regard, Spizzichino felt Bergen-Belsen was worse than Auschwitz. She said, "At Auschwitz at least the dead were collected and burnt, but at Bergen-Belsen the bodies remained. The hills around the camp were littered with corpses. The crematoria could not keep up with the number of bodies." Settimia recalled, "In the spring, a camp soldier with a machine gun went mad and began firing on prisoners. We lay on the floor trembling. . . . At every burst, I feared to be hit. I ran . . . I ran away towards the hills and hid myself in a pile of corpses. I stayed there, I don't know for how long, with nothing to eat, nothing to drink, sleeping once in a while. Then a Greek girl came: The Allies are here. Come."<sup>1</sup>

On April 15, 1945, Settimia's twenty-fourth birthday, the British VIII Army Corps liberated Bergen-Belsen. The liberators encountered emaciated bodies, walking skeletons. Settimia had been without water and unwashed for weeks. She and other prisoners were moved to a military base where they were given food and shelter. Soldiers from the Jewish Brigade approached her and other survivors. She recalled, "They said,

‘We’ve been told that there are Jewish girls here. We want to invite them for tomorrow’s Sabbath.’ I stepped forward, my legs shivering: ‘Are you Jews?’ I asked. ‘We’re all Jews,’ he answered, ‘Jews from Palestine.’ I burst into tears and I hugged the soldier. The next night we all went to the Jewish Brigade for Sabbath services. It was wonderful to hear the Kiddush, the prayer recited over a cup of wine to consecrate the Sabbath, after such a long time.”<sup>2</sup>

While in Auschwitz, Settimia said, “I made a promise when I was in the camp, I made a solemn promise to my companions, who were being picked out to be killed or dying from disease and abuse. I rebelled. I didn’t know whether to curse God or pray to Him, and repeated over and over, Lord, save me, save me because I must go back and tell.”<sup>3</sup>

When Settimia returned to Rome, she was reunited with her father and two sisters who survived the occupation and the war. Whenever Settimia looked in a mirror, she failed to recognize the face staring back at her. Of the 896 women captured on Black Saturday and deported to Auschwitz, Settimia was the only woman to survive. She spent the following years recounting not only her own ordeal but also that of all Jews. Settimia spoke openly about being selected by Josef Mengele for his hideous experimentation. She educated people of all ages about the Holocaust with television appearances and visits to schools. Etched in her memory was her mother, who attempted to comfort her during the selection process. While Settimia cried, her mother said to her “Come on, they won’t kill us all.” Her mother, brother, and two sisters, one of whom held her baby in her arms, were sent immediately to their deaths. Settimia remained unmarried until her death in 2000.<sup>4</sup>

Slowly, the survivors of the October 16 roundup made their way to Rome. Of the 1,015 who entered Auschwitz, only 16 survived. Entire families were sent to the gas chambers. Enzo and Luciano Camerino came home without their father, who didn’t survive the rigors of the work detail. Their mother and two sisters were sent immediately to their deaths. In 1945, both brothers were taken to Buchenwald until their liberation. In 1957 Enzo sought a fresh start, leaving Rome for Canada. Luciano died of a heart attack nineteen years after he was liberated. He was thirty-eight.

Lello Di Segni had been transferred from Auschwitz to the Warsaw ghetto and Dachau, where he was liberated by American forces. He returned to Rome and sought to reconstruct his life. Arminio Wachsberger returned to Rome, absent his wife, daughter, and in-laws. He subsequently remarried. Leone Sabatello and Sabatino Finzi were liberated from Buchenwald. They returned to Rome haunted by the memories of their time in Auschwitz and Buchenwald.<sup>5</sup>

The survivors returned to their empty homes in Rome, in several instances sacked of anything of value. They found their lives difficult and intolerable. Adjustment was emotionally and physically challenging. It was difficult to find a job, make friends, or



find a wife or husband.<sup>6</sup> Most were fractured amid the loss and degradation of the Holocaust. They found it impossible to celebrate their survival. They were reminded that they hadn't anyone with whom to celebrate their survival or, in the following years, the important events of their lives. The survivors faced the future with deep emotional ambivalence. Their tattooed numbers were a constant reminder of the evil, the madness that engulfed their family and friends. Most were haunted by an inability to comprehend what had happened to them and sought to find meaning in their lives, hoping to fill an enduring void. They shared with Holocaust survivors an inability to talk about their experiences until decades after their ordeal. All survivors were gripped by a need to understand a world in which cruelty and suffering were possible. Some were filled with paralyzing guilt that they had survived or were rendered impotent to help their loved ones. The first reaction of some ghetto residents was to avoid those who had returned. Settimia felt that we were a constant reminder of how many had not returned.

Trickling back to Rome were those apprehended after Black Sabbath. Rubino Salmoni had evaded the October 15 roundup and hid. His luck ran out when fascist police arrested him six months later. The twenty-four-year-old was sent to the Fossoli internment camp and then to Auschwitz. He recalled, "I was no longer Rubino Romero Salmoni but Jew number A15810 to exterminated." From Auschwitz, he was sent to a labor camp. His life in the camp was "hellish," a continual battle against hunger, cold, exhaustion, and the savage treatment of the guards. Morning roll calls lasted for hours while he and the other prisoners shivered barefoot in the snow. He managed to survive until the camp was liberated. Salmoni felt that he beat Adolf Hitler by surviving this ordeal. Years later Salmoni said, "I'm here, hale and hearty. I came out of Auschwitz alive. I have a wonderful family. I celebrated by golden wedding anniversary. I have 12 splendid grandchildren—I think I can say I ruined Hitler's plan for me." Along with other Holocaust survivors, Salmoni found solace and pride when a Jewish homeland was created. Its existence provided psychological assurance against the return of the evil that pervaded the very core of the Third Reich. In the decades following his liberation, Salmoni visited schools and colleges intent on educating students of all ages in the hope that the Holocaust would never be forgotten.<sup>7</sup> Alberto Sed survived Black Saturday with his mother and three sisters. They were captured in March 1944 and sent to Auschwitz. One of his sisters was mauled by SS dogs and died. His mother and the remaining sisters were sent to the gas chambers. For many years he remained silent about his past, even with his wife and children. He never was able to hold an infant because he witnessed guards tossing them in the air for target practice. Sed could never go into a pool because he witnessed an Orthodox priest who was beaten and drowned, to the delight of the guards.

Alberto Mieli was also arrested after Black Sabbath and then deported to Auschwitz. His experience paralleled those of other Romans. Ester, his sister, did not survive her

ordeal. Like countless other victims, it took many years for Mieli to talk openly about his time in Auschwitz. Eventually he devoted his time to Holocaust education. He said, “I was fortunate—or unfortunate enough to experience the apex of human cruelty, brutality and evil; to see the full extent of cruelty exerted by man against another man.” What determined survival? Strength, determination, and intelligence had not necessarily determined survival. In most cases, if not all instances, it required *mazel* (luck).<sup>8</sup>

Those who had immediate and extended families and dear friends who were exterminated would spend years trying to come to terms with their loss. Their stories coerce us to live inside terror and evil. Marco and Fortunata Zarfati escaped the October 16 roundup with their four children. Until April 1944 they had found locations to evade the clutches of the fascists and Germans. Marco left their hideout and was apprehended by the fascist police and sent to Auschwitz. His wife didn’t know what had happened to him. Fortunata spent months with her children hiding in cold, dark, insect-infected basements. She emerged periodically to search for food. After Rome was liberated, she learned of her husband’s fate. Marco suffered from gout, and the days spent on the train to the camp were especially difficult. When the train arrived at the camp, he could barely walk. The thirty-seven-year-old father of four children was immediately sent to the gas chambers.

Settimio Calo lost his wife, nine children, and sister-in-law, who were deported. His brother-in-law was killed in the Ardeatine Caves massacre. Silvio Bertoldi interviewed Calo nearly twenty-one years after Black Sabbath. Calo said, “I lived because I always hoped to have one back, just one, maybe Samuele, who was only four months old. . . . The day the war ended, I went as far as Brenner, looking for them. Nothing. Not one came back. . . . Only I remained alive, and I would like to be dead. I wake up at night, and I sleep little. I drink a glass of wine every night. . . . I drink to erase the nightmare.”<sup>9</sup>

The internecine conflict within the Jewish community in Rome erupted once again. On February 1, 1945, Rabbi Israel Zolli announced that he and his wife and daughter were planning to convert to Catholicism. Twelve days later, they were baptized in Santa Maria degli Angeli. The rabbi changed his name from Israel to Eugenio in honor of Pius XII. Zolli was excommunicated, actually declared dead by the synagogue’s authorities. His name was cancelled from the list of the chief rabbis of Rome. An edition of the *Jewish Weekly* was published with a black cover, a symbol of mourning. Zolli would be vilified until his death. He continued to live near the synagogue, subjected to daily harassment. He moved his family to the outskirts of Rome. David Panzieri, deputy rabbi, presided at all services until a new chief rabbi was chosen. Factionalism intensified, with charges and countercharges leveled against one another. Zolli’s ostracism made it possible for Foa and Dante Almansì to fashion their own narratives.

Zolli remained a scholar and received a post in the Vatican library. He also obtained positions at the University of Rome–Sapienza and at the Pontifical Biblical Institute,

where he taught Hebrew and literature. In 1945 he published *Antisemitismo* and followed in 1954 with his autobiography, *Before the Dawn*. In part it was his version of the critical events in Italy and his conversion to Catholicism. The seventy-five-year-old Zolli died in 1956 “a lonely and impoverished man.” Miriam, his daughter, returned to live in Trastevere near the Jewish quarter. In a rare interview some years after her father’s death, she said that “my father never abandoned his Judaism. He felt he was a Jew who had come to believe in the Jewish Messiah. But there was no rejection of his Jewish roots or of the Jewish people.”<sup>10</sup>

Ugo Foa resumed his career in the judiciary as deputy attorney general. He composed two sanitized reports containing a less than candid recounting of the years 1943–1944. Both reports largely dealt with the conflicts of leadership, the intervention of the Allies, and their removal of the leadership including himself, Almansì, and the UCEI. In 1946 Raffaele Cantoni was installed as president of the UCEI and served until 1954.<sup>11</sup>

Foa’s only admission or hint of a personal shortcoming occurred on October 16, 1943. He was shocked with what was taking place. Robert Katz rendered a critical assessment. “He was not prepared to concede that he had pursued a vain illusion. Blaming the victims — though only lacking a ‘Teutonic mentality’ — he saw their failure to foresee that they, like their fellow Jews in Germany and Poland, would suffer ‘unspeakable horrors’ as a result of their ‘Italian spirit.’ Foa omitted that sufficient warning to hide was the best course of action.” Despite his admission, Foa didn’t publicly repeat it or was contained in the reports he filed.<sup>12</sup>

The gold that had been extorted from the Jews has never been recovered. After the war, sixty cases of books taken from the rabbinical college were recovered and returned to the Jewish community. This represented a small portion of the total numbers of volumes. No trace of the Community Library has ever located. Two thousand years of the cultural history of Rome’s Jews was lost. In 1961, the West German government agreed to pay \$1.125 million as compensation for the extorted gold and the loss of the stolen libraries.

At the conclusion of the war, Italians were challenged to evaluate their nation’s past. The postwar Italian governments refused to admit the extent of fascist Italy’s role in aiding the implementation of the final solution. It posed deep and troubling questions. The RSI systematically rounded up Jews, interned them, and handed them over to the Nazis.

In 1946 amnesty was granted for those Italians who took part in the persecution of Jews during the war. No real war crimes tribunals were ever established as at Nuremberg and Tokyo. As Robert Gordon argues, “This tangled history left Italy with immense baggage, unresolved about itself, its historical responsibilities and its future after the war.”<sup>13</sup> Marshal Rodolfo Graziani, “the Butcher,” was the highest-ranking war criminal to escape postwar justice. General Mario Roatta, the “Black Beast,” was never brought to trial. The notorious Pietro Koch was captured, tried, and executed. Celeste Di Porto,

the infamous Black Pantera Nera, was brought to trial. She was released before fulfilling her twelve-year sentence. Di Porto returned to Rome and was nearly lynched when she was recognized.

Pietro Badoglio, certain that he was going to be tried for fascist crimes, found refuge in the British embassy. Winston Churchill protected him from prosecution. Victor Emmanuel III abdicated and was exiled to Egypt, where he died.

What happened to the Jews in Rome, throughout Italy, and in Europe remains a warning for future generations. Primo Levi declared it “a sinister alarm bell. . . . [T]hose who deny Auschwitz would be ready to remake it.”<sup>14</sup> Elie Wiesel added, “For in the end. It is all about memory, its sources and its magnitude, and of course its consequences.”<sup>15</sup>

# Notes

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# Index

- Afrika Korps, 45–46  
Alfieri, Dino, 11  
Allied forces: Axis powers and, 16, 27–28;  
in Europe, 183–90; Hitler and, 5; intelligence of, 54, 106–7; Italy and, xii, 25–31, 55, 164–65; to Kesselring, 17, 163; Nazis to, xi; Poland to, 7; in Rome, 175; Stalin to, 3; Vatican to, 64–65  
Almansi, Dante: Foa, U., and, 39–40, 84–87, 91–92, 96, 194–95; Levi, R., and, 41–42, 88, 97, 123; after occupation, 167–68; reputation of, xiii; for UCEI, 40–41; Zolli, I., and, 42–43, 75–76  
Altarti, Lionello, 143  
Alvarez, David, 53  
Ambrosio, Vittorio, 18  
Amé, Cesare, 50  
Amendola, Maria, 126  
American Jewish Committee, 2  
Anissimov, Myriam, 152  
Anticoli, Angelo, 88, 115  
Anticoli, Rosa, 115  
anti-Semitic laws, 38–40  
anti-Semitism, xi, 6–7, 66, 77, 98–101, 130  
Ardeatine Massacre, 169–70  
Arendt, Hannah, 152  
Ascarelli, Adriano, 89  
Ascarelli, Attilio, 170  
Ascarelli-Castelnuovo, Silvana, 125  
assimilation, 39  
Auschwitz-Birkenau, 145–55, 191–92  
Australia, 2  
Austro-Hungarian Empire, 37  
Axis powers, xii, 16, 27–28  
  
Badetti, Virginie, 127  
Badoglio, Pietro: Emmanuel III and, 21, 25, 28–29; as Prime minister, 25–27; reputation of, xii, 17, 20, 78, 196; to Weizsäcker, 34  
Bambina, Istituto di Maria, 127  
Batista, Fulgencio, 13  
Bauer, Hans, 177  
Beck, Ludwig, 4–5  
Beelitz, Dietrich, 136  
Benoît, Père Marie, 129, 168  
Bergen, Diego von, 33, 50  
Bernadino, Don, xii–xiii, 43  
Bertoldi, Silvio, 194  
Beschloss, Michael, 172  
Birkenau. *See* Auschwitz-Birkenau  
Black, Peter, 173  
Black Saturday. *See specific topics*  
Blet, Pierre, 136  
Bletchley intercepts, 106–7  
Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, 5, 174  
Bonomelli, Emilio, 163  
Bormann, Martin, 173  
Borromeo, Giovanni, 115  
Borsarelli, Marchese, 89–90  
Bottai, Giuseppe, 17  
Braun, Eva, 56–57, 176–77  
Brazil, 13, 50, 190  
Brouwer, Helene, 70  
Buffarini-Guidi, Guido, 41, 97  
Bullock, Alan, 21, 61–62, 177  
Burleigh, Michael, 128, 157  
  
Calò, Ester, 116  
Calò, Settimio, 121, 124, 194  
Camerino, Enzo, 123, 149, 152, 192  
Camerino, Italo, 152  
Camerino, Luciano, 152, 192  
Canadian Jewish Congress, 2  
Canaris, Wilhelm, 4–5, 50, 174  
Cantoni, Raffaele, 180, 195  
Capon, Augusto, 120  
Cappa, Gennaro, 84, 86–87, 92  
Carboni, Giacomo, 26–27

- Carroll-Abbing, J. Patrick, 128–29, 164  
 Caruso, Pietro, 159, 161  
 Cassuto, Nathan, xii–xiii, 43  
 Cassuto-Compagniano, Chulda, 101  
 Castellano, Giuseppe, 26  
 Catholic Church: authority of, 54, 65; in  
   Brazil, 13; Jews to, 7; National Socialism  
   to, 133; in Poland, 9–10; race to, 20; rep-  
   utation of, 23 on 40; Vatican and, 125–29;  
   World War II for, 3; Zuccotti on, 91, 128  
 Caviglia, Marshal, 29  
 Centioni, Giancarlo, 14  
 Central America, xi, 13  
 Central Intelligence Agency, US, 56, 183–84  
 CER. *See* Jewish Community of Rome  
 Chadwick, Owen, 138  
 Christmas Address, Papal, 64–66  
 Churchill, Winston, xi, 12, 64, 106–7, 184,  
   196  
 Ciano, Edda, 57  
 Ciano, Galeazzo, 19, 50, 57  
 Clark, Mark, 27, 168  
 Clement VII (pope), 51  
 codebreakers, 106  
 Cold War, 180–82  
*Comunità Ebraica di Roma. See* Jewish  
   Community of Rome  
 Conniff, Frank, 167  
 Constantini, Ceslo, 17  
 Conway, John, 63  
 Corcos, Anna Ascarelli Blayer, 97  
 Cuba, 13  
 curfews, 47–48  
  
 Dannecker, Theodor: Eichmann and,  
   72, 144, 186, 189; Jews to, 99–101;  
   Kaltenbrunner and, 137; Kappler and,  
   103, 105–6, 112, 169; leadership of, 142,  
   188; Wachsberger, A., and, 139–40  
 Deaths Head Corps, 100  
 Debenedetti, Giacomo, 89–90, 96, 109, 112,  
   120  
 Delegation for the Assistance of Jewish  
   Emigrants (DELASEM), 41–42  
  
 Dennehy, Noreen, 161  
 deportation: citizenship and, xii; extortion  
   and, xiii–xiv, 85–93; gold and, 85–93, 185;  
   of Jews, 77–84, 108–11, 139–47; Kappler  
   and, xiii–xiv; raids and, 43–44; round-  
   ups and, 30; treachery and, 94–95; to  
   Wolff, 106  
 Derry, Sam, 161  
 Deutsch, Harold, 6, 11  
 Deutsch, Howard, 179  
 Dezza, Paolo, 128–29  
 Di Nepi, Silvana, 122  
 diplomacy: with Axis powers, xii; in Europe,  
   32; foreign policy and, 32–33; with Hitler,  
   3–4; with Holy See, 10–11, 34, 50; intel-  
   ligence and, 38; Osborne in, 136; Pius  
   XII in, x–xi, 2–3, 5, 11–12, 22; politics of,  
   17–18; Rahn in, 34–35, 58; Ribbentrop,  
   Joachim von in, 15, 35–36; Ribbentrop  
   in, 15; from Secretariat of State, 53–54; in  
   World War II, 25–26  
 Di Porto, Celeste, 113, 159, 195–96  
 Di Porto, Elena, 110  
 Di Segni, Lello, 124, 192  
 Di Veroli, Giudita, 151, 158  
 Di Veroli, Olga, 88, 116, 151  
 Di Veroli, Rose, 127, 151  
 Di Zotti, Giuseppe, 128–29  
 Dohnanyi, Hans von, 5, 173–74  
 Doino, William, 161, 171  
 Dollmann, Eugen, 22–23, 56–58, 78, 84, 170,  
   175, 183–84  
 Dominican Republic, xi, 13  
 Donovan, William, 172  
 Dornelles Vargas, Getúlio, 14  
 Dostler, Anton, 184  
 Duggen, Christopher, 138  
 Dulles, Allen, 106, 172, 175, 178, 183  
  
 Eden, Anthony, 106–7  
 Eichmann, Adolf: authority of, 99–100, 105–6,  
   187–88; Dannecker and, 72, 144, 186, 189;  
   Heydrich and, ix; Himmler and, 79; Hudal  
   to, 135; leadership of, 71, 151; Moellhausen



- to, 104; Müller, Heinrich, and, x; punishment of, 188–90; Thadden and, 78
- Einstein, Albert, 179
- Eisenhower, Dwight, 17, 26–27, 178, 182
- Elser, Georg, 69
- Emmanuel III (king), 15–21, 25, 28–29, 58, 196
- ERR. *See* Reichsleiter Rosenberg Task Force
- Europe: Allied forces in, 183–90; Austro-Hungarian Empire and, 37; communities in, x; diplomacy in, 32; Germany and, 4, 34; Italy and, 68; Jews in, 38–39, 42, 61; Nazis in, 64; race in, ix; Rommel in, 26; US and, xi, 180; World War II in, 16
- Evans, Richard, 125
- extortion: deportation and, xiii–xiv, 85–93; legacy of, 185–87; to Moellhausen, 93, 102, 105; treachery and, 93–97
- Fagiolo, Don Vincenzo, 126
- Fahrener, Alfred, 35
- Fano, Giorgio, 116
- Farinacci, Robert, 66
- fascism: Fascist Party Congress, 58; Germany and, 48; in Italy, 2, 37–44, 109; Jews and, 16; politics of, 23, 30; RSI and, 30; Zionist cause and, 39
- Fatucci, Alberto, 114
- Fatucci, Amadeo, 75
- Fermi, Enrico, 120
- Ferrofino, Giovanni, xi, 12–14
- final solution: Himmler for, 30; Jews and, 69–73, 79; knowledge of, 61; Müller, Heinrich, for, 100; of Nazis, ix–x, xiv; in Poland, 61
- Finzi, Sabatino, 117, 192
- Fiorentini, Mario, 123
- Fiorentino, Giorgio, 90
- Flaherty, Hugh, 123, 161
- Foa, Anna, 128, 139
- Foa, Ugo: Almansi and, 39–40, 84–87, 91–92, 96, 194–95; for CER, 87; in hiding, 141; leadership of, 39–43; Mayer and, 94–95; Pius XII and, 2; reputation of, xiii; Sorani, R., and, 122–23; testimony of, 185; treachery to, 93–94, 96, 109; Zolli, I., and, 1, 74–76, 88, 90–91, 167–69
- Focaroli, Dora, 115
- Forcella, Enzo, 129
- foreign policy, 32–33
- France: Great Britain and, x, 4–6; Jews in, 99–100; Scandinavia and, xi, 10; Spain and, 13. *See also* Allied forces
- Franco, Francisco, 12–13
- Franken, Paul, 35
- Fraternal Order of Abraham, 2
- Funk, Walther, 78
- Galeazzi, Enrico, 3, 66, 160
- Gardiner, William, 26–27
- Gay, Aldo, 122
- Germany: Afrika Korps, 45–46; Europe and, 4, 34; fascism and, 48; Great Britain and, 9; Holy See and, xiv, 3–4; ideology of, 15–19; Italy and, 15–17, 20–21, 45–50, 125–29, 141, 191–96; Jews in, ix, 14; in Operation Student, 21–24; Poland and, 7–8, 109; politics in, 3; propaganda against, 47; Radio Berlin, 106; resources of, 25–26; Rome and, 20–24, 29–30, 43–44, 74–77, 164–65; RSI to, 57–58; in Sicily, Italy, 16–17; Soviet Union and, x, 3; surrender of, 178–79; US and, 164–65; Vatican and, 1, 110–11, 156–57. *See also* Axis powers
- Gestapo. *See* Schutzstaffel
- Giant II, 27
- Gilbert, G. M., 188
- Gilbert, Martin, 55, 65, 129, 163
- Goebbels, Josef: diary of, 7–8, 67; Himmler and, 22; Hitler and, 46, 50, 52; leadership of, 21; loyalty of, 176–78; Pius XII to, 14; Schellenberg on, 63
- gold, 78, 85–93, 104–5, 185–87, 195
- Goldstein, Samuel, 2
- Gordon, Robert, 195
- Göring, Hermann: Heydrich and, 146; Himmler and, 175–76; leadership of, ix, 10, 21, 55; punishment of, 187–88; Research Office of, 54

- Graham, Robert, 227n1
- Grandi, Dino, 17–19, 23
- Graziani, Rodolfo, 195
- Great Britain: codebreakers in, 106; France and, x, 4–6; Germany and, 9; Hitler to, xi; Holy See and, 8; London Radio, 43; against National Socialism, 10; Pius XII and, 8; US and, 50, 64. *See also* Allied forces
- Greenfield, Martin, 153–54
- Gregoini, Don, 114
- Guidi, Guido Buffarini, 158–59
- Gumpert, Gerhard, 133, 135
- Halder, Fritz, 173
- Harster, Wilhelm, 63, 78, 82, 124, 142–44
- Hart, Liddell, 28
- Hartl, Albert, 2
- Hass, Karl, 78
- Hassell, Ulrich von, 33
- Hastings, Max, 106–7
- Hausner, Gideon, 188
- Herzog, Isaac, 170, 180
- Hewel, Walther, 21–22
- Heydrich, Reinhard: death of, 79; Göring and, 146; Himmler and, 69, 186; on Jews, ix–x; Lammers and, 7–8; Müller, J., and, 12; reputation of, 87
- Himmler, Heinrich: authority of, 103, 173–74; death of, 187; Dollmann and, 78, 84; Eichmann and, 79; for final solution, 30; Goebbels and, 22; Göring and, 175–76; Heydrich and, 69, 186; Hitler and, xii, 87, 100, 124; Hudal to, 135; on Jews, 98–99; Kappler and, 23–24, 59, 70–72, 79–80; leadership of, 20–23, 62–63, 138; Pius XII and, 54–55; Ribbentrop and, 60; Skorzeny and, 56–57; in Soviet Union, 61; for SS, 16; Stahel and, xiv, 136; strategy of, 136; Wolff and, 144
- Hitler, Adolf: Allied forces and, 5; authority of, 84, 103, 105; Bullock on, 61–62; conspiracies against, 10, 171–78; death of, 177–78; diplomacy with, 3–4; Franco and, 12–13; Goebbels and, 46, 50, 52; to Great Britain, xi; Hewel and, 21–22; Himmler and, xii, 87, 100, 124; intelligence on, 11; Italy to, 27–28, 56; Jews to, 7; Kesselring and, 164; legacy of, 193; Mussolini and, 3, 15–18, 20–21, 41, 57–58, 77, 172; to Nazis, 6, 98; opposition to, 4–5, 33–35; Oster against, 4–5, 8; Pius XII and, 35, 171, 174, 180–81; psychology of, 63–64; on Radio Rome, 46; reputation of, 19, 38, 107, 132; rhetoric of, 79; Ribbentrop and, 160; Soviet Union and, xi; SS to, 60; Stalin and, x–xi; Vatican and, x–xi, xiv, 21–22, 136; Wehrmacht and, 10, 16; Wolff and, 67–68, 71–72, 104; worldview of, ix
- Hlond, August, 9
- Holocaust, ix–xii, 9, 41–42, 145–56, 191–96. *See also specific topics*
- Holy See: authority of, 53; diplomacy with, 10–11, 34, 50; Germany and, xiv, 3–4; Great Britain and, 8; Kessel for, 35; leadership of, 1; Montini for, 141–42; Pius XII and, 6, 90–91; US and, 109
- Höss, Hedwig, 146
- Höss, Rudolf, 145–51, 190
- Hudal, Alois, xiv, 133–37, 156
- ideology, 7–8, 15–19, 39
- intelligence: of Allied forces, 54, 106–7; from DELASEM, 41–42; diplomacy and, 38; funding for, 93; on Hitler, 11; on Italy, 106; on Jews, 105; by Kessel, 67; Montini and, 50, 66; from Müller, J., 5; from RSHA, 20, 30, 65–66; US Central Intelligence Agency, 56; on Vatican, 14
- international press: dictatorship to, 7; Holocaust in, 42, 156; information from, 54; Jews in, 97; Nazis in, 9, 11, 65–67; on World War II, 11–12
- internment camps, xiii, 145–55, 191–92
- Italian Social Republic (RSI), 30, 52, 57–58, 76–77, 163, 195
- Italy: Allied forces and, xii, 25–31, 55, 164–65; anti-Semitic laws in, 38; anti-Semitism

- in, 77; culture of, 124; Emmanuel III for, 15–18; Europe and, 68; fascism in, 2, 37–44, 109; Germany and, 15–17, 20–21, 45–50, 125–29, 141, 191–96; gold in, 78; to Hitler, 27–28, 56; intelligence on, 106; Jews in, xii–xiii, 30; Kesselring on, 28–29; Mussolini to, 22; Nazis and, 27, 45–50; in *New York Times*, 2; surrender of, 25–31; in World War II, xii, 15–16. *See also* Axis powers
- Jane Scrivener (pen name), 45–47, 49, 93, 121, 126, 163
- Janns, Leonore, 69–70
- Jewish Community of Rome (CER), xiii, xiii–xiv, 39–40, 87–88, 95, 108–9
- Jews: American Jewish Committee, 2; anti-Semitic violence, xi; at Auschwitz-Birkenau, 148–55; Black Saturday for, xiv; Cassuto for, xii–xiii; to Catholic Church, 7; Catholics and, 1; Central America for, xi; to Churchill, 106–7; communities of, xii–xiv, 25, 65–66; to Dannecker, 99–101; DELASEM for, 41–42; deportation of, 77–84, 108–11, 139–47; in Europe, 38–39, 42, 61; fascism and, 16; Ferrofino for, 12–14; final solution and, 69–73, 79; in France, 99–100; in Germany, ix, 14; Heydrich on, ix–x; Himmler on, 98–99; to Hitler, 7; intelligence on, 105; in international press, 97; in Italy, xii–xiii, 30; Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 9; to Kappler, 85–86, 91–92, 137–38; National Socialism and, 66; Nazis and, 30, 74–77, 87, 94–97, 102–7; after occupation, 167–70; Patriotic Action Groups for, 29; to Pius XII, 52, 130–35, 166, 170, 179–80, 225n1, 230n40; in Poland, 5; propaganda against, 8; as refugees, 12, 125–29; to RSHA, x; to RSI, 58; in Soviet Union, 180–82; SS and, 31, 35, 95–96, 112–24; totalitarianism and, 65; in Vatican, 52–53, 63–64; Weizsäcker for, 32–36; in World War I, 40; after World War II, 191–96; Zionist cause to, 37–38; Zolli, I., for, 1, 88–89. *See also specific topics*
- Jodl, Alfred, 22, 61, 178
- Junge, Traudl, 177
- Kaltenbrunner, Ernst: authority of, 173; Dannecker and, 137; on gold, 104–5; Kappler and, 87; leadership of, 21, 57–60; punishment of, 188; reputation of, 72, 79–80, 93; Wolff and, 175
- Kaminka, Armand, 38
- Kappler, Herbert: authority of, 158–62; Dannecker and, 103, 105–6, 112, 169; deportation and, xiii–xiv; Dollmann and, 56–58; Harster and, 124, 143; Hass and, 78; Himmler and, 23–24, 59, 70–72, 79–80; Jews to, 85–86, 91–92, 137–38; Kaltenbrunner and, 87; Kessel on, 70; Kesselring and, 115; leadership of, 93–95, 100; Mussolini and, 1; Preibke and, 92; punishment of, 184–87; Rahn and, 102; reputation of, 102, 104–5, 240n12; Schellenberg and, 22; with Skorzeny, 22–23; for SS, 46, 69–73, 80–84, 95; Stahel and, 78, 135, 141; treachery of, 131; Wolff and, 99, 103
- Kass, Ludwig, 5–6, 35
- Katz, Robert: on Dollmann, 170; on Pius XII, 10, 128, 160, 195; Zuccotti and, 66, 68, 138
- Keitel, Wilhelm, 67, 171, 178
- Kershaw, Ian, 3, 128, 176, 190
- Kessel, Albrecht von: Caruso and, 161; for Holy See, 35; intelligence by, 67; on Kappler, 70; Moellhausen and, 102, 133; Pius XII and, 171; Weizsäcker and, 187
- Kesselring, Albert: Allied forces to, 17, 163; authority of, 104; Hitler and, 164; on Italy, 28–29; Kappler and, 115; leadership of, 45–46, 48, 68; Moellhausen and, 82–83; punishment of, 184; Rahn and, 81; in Rome, 21, 27–29; Stahel and, 103; Westphal and, 27; Wolff and, 56, 178
- Koch, Pietro, 158–61, 195

- Kubowitsky, Leon, 180  
 Kunkel, Nicolaus, 50, 134  
 Kurtzer, Kurt, 167–68  
 Kurzman, Dan, 18, 109, 163
- Lammers, Hans, 7–8  
 Lanzeta, Letizia, 126  
 Lapide, Pinchas, 166  
 Lateran Pact, 6, 52  
 League of Nations, 35  
 Leiber, Robert, 5–6, 8, 10–11, 35  
 Lemo (cardinal), 13  
 de Leon, Levi, 29  
 Levi, Alberta, 115–16  
 Levi, Jenò, 189  
 Levi, Renzo, 41–42, 75, 88–90, 92, 97, 123  
 Lipstadt, Deborah, 189–90  
 Lombroso, Sylvia, 126  
 London Radio, 43  
 looting, 47, 148  
 Loringhoven, Freytag von, 173  
 Lucas, John, 163  
 Lynch, Jesse. *See* Jane Scrivener
- Mackensen, Eberhard von, 184  
 Mafalda (princess), 70  
 Maglione, Luigi: authority of, 14; leadership of, 50, 137, 157; Pius XII and, 6, 9–10, 36, 131–32; for Vatican, xiv; Weizsäcker and, 132–33  
 Magrini, Silvio, 30  
 Malzer, Kurt, 184  
 Marshall, George C., 27  
 Marwell, David, 147  
 Mathews, Herbert L., 168–69  
 Matteotti, Giacomo, 40–41  
 Mayer, Kurt, 94–95  
 McCormick, Anne O'Hare, 7  
 Meana, Fulvi Ripa di, 117–18  
 Mengele, Josef, 145–46, 148–50, 153–55, 190, 192  
 Miele, Ester, 193–94  
 Mieli, Alberto, 154, 193–94  
 Modigliani, Piero, 122
- Moellhausen, Eitel Friedrich: to Eichmann, 104; extortion to, 93, 102, 105; Kessel and, 102, 133; Kesselring and, 82–83; reputation of, 186; Ribbentrop and, 102–3, 106; Stahel and, 80–82; Vatican to, 160–61  
 Monelli, Paolo, 46  
 Montini, Giovanni Battista: authority of, 126, 128–29; for Holy See, 141–42; intelligence and, 50, 66; Motta and, 157–58; Pius XII and, 18, 163  
 Morpurgo, Luciano, 126  
 Moscati, Mino, 108, 114, 165  
 Motta, Riccardo, 157–58  
 Müller, Heinrich, x, 100, 124, 186  
 Muller, Herbert, 79  
 Müller, Josef, 5–6, 8, 10, 12, 173–74, 179, 182  
 Murray, Robert, 27  
 Mussolini, Benito: Badoglio and, 34; death of, 177; Emmanuel III and, 19; Grandi and, 19, 23; Hitler and, 3, 15–18, 20–21, 41, 57–58, 77, 172; Holocaust and, xii; internment camps of, xiii; to Italy, 22; Kappler and, 1; Lateran Pact to, 6; leadership of, 16; to Matteotti, 40–41; to Nazis, 56–57; politics of, 76; representation of, 11; reputation of, 25, 40, 46; rescue of, 69–70; Sacerdoti, A., and, 38; Vatican to, 16; Zuccotti on, 58  
 Musters, Anselmo, 162
- National Socialism, 1–2, 10, 66, 133  
 Nazis: to Allied forces, xi; anti-Semitic policy of, 130; anti-Semitic violence of, 6–7; anti-Semitism of, 98–101; communities of, 40; Deaths Head Corps, 100; Deutsch, Harold, on, 11; ERR for, 95–96, 108; in Europe, 64; final solution of, ix–x, xiv; Hitler to, 6, 98; Holocaust to, ix; ideology of, 7–8; in international press, 9, 11, 65–67; Italy and, 27, 45–50; Jews and, 30, 74–77, 87, 94–97, 102–7; Mussolini to, 56–57; to Pius XII, 44; propaganda by, 1–2; psychology of, 156–60; Race and Settlement Office, 146; ransom with,

- 85–94; refugees from, 38; reputation of, 12; in Rome, 45–50, 69–73, 78–84, 125–29, 139–47; to Roosevelt, 106; Vatican and, x–xi, 62–63; to Vatican Radio, 4, 9; after World War II, 183–90. *See also specific topics*
- Neufeld, Maurice, 168
- Newspapers, Nazi, 2, 65–66
- Night* (Wiesel), xiv
- Nogara, Bartolommeo, 66, 90–91
- North Africa, 15–16, 27
- Odoardi, Francesco, 119–20
- Office of Strategic Services (OSS), 106
- O’Flaherty, Hugh, 124, 161–62
- Operation Student, 21–24
- Orsenigo, Cesare, 55
- Osborne, Francis D’Arcy, 8, 50, 66, 136, 144, 161
- OSS. *See* Office of Strategic Services
- Oster, Hans, 4–5, 8, 173–74
- Ottolenghi, Silvio, 168
- Ovazza, Ettore, 30–31
- Pacelli, Carlo, xiv, 131, 133–34
- Pacelli, Eugenio. *See* Pius XII
- Palazzini, Pietro, 128–29
- Panzieri, David, 157–58, 194
- Pappagallo, Don Pietro, 170
- Patriotic Action Groups, 29
- Perez Chajes, Hirsch, 37
- Perugia, Graziano, 116
- Perugia, Lello, 118
- Petacci, Clara, 177
- Petroni, Pucci, 89
- Pfeiffer, Pankratius, xiv, 128, 131–35
- Phayer, Michael, 10, 66, 230n40
- Pierantoni, Luigi, 90
- Pignatelli, Enza (princess), 130–31
- Pio, Eugenio, 164
- Pius VI, 63
- Pius XI (pope), 1–2, 133
- Pius XII (pope): allies of, 5–6; anti-Semitic violence to, 6–7; death of, 181–82; in diplomacy, x–xi, 2–3, 5, 11–12, 22; Emmanuel III and, 58; encyclicals of, 20; Ferrofino and, 12; Foa, U., and, 2; to Goebbels, 14; Great Britain and, 8; Himmler and, 54–55; Hitler and, 35, 171, 174, 180–81; Holy See and, 6, 90–91; Hudal and, 156; Jews to, 52, 130–35, 166, 170, 179–80, 225n1, 230n40; Katz on, 10, 128, 160, 195; Kessel and, 171; leadership of, xiv, 11, 18, 36; legacy of, 127–29; Maglione and, 6, 9–10, 36, 131–32; Montini and, 18, 163; Nazis to, 44; Osborne and, 144; plots against, 66–68; reputation of, 33–34, 63–64; Roosevelt and, 3, 65; RSI to, 76–77; for sheltering, 125–26; Soviet Union to, 7; strategy of, 50–51; Tittmann with, 109
- Plehwe, Fredrich von, 23–24
- Poland: to Allied forces, 7; Catholic Church in, 9–10; final solution in, 61; Germany and, 7–8, 109; Holocaust in, 9; invasion of, ix–x, 3–4, 33; Jews in, 5; Polish Rabbinical Council, 2; to Soviet Union, 4; SS in, 145–46; Wehrmacht in, 4
- Poletti, Charles, 168
- politics: of CER, 87–88; of diplomacy, 17–18; of fascism, 23, 30; in Germany, 3; of Mussolini, 76; of National Socialism, 1–2; in Rome, 82–83; of RSHA, 87; of totalitarianism, 7; of Zionist cause, 2, 30–31
- Pontifical Relief Commission, 4
- Portugal, xi, 12–14
- POWs. *See* prisoners of war
- Prato, David, 39
- Preibke, Erich, 92
- Preziosi, Giovanni, 77
- Priebke, Erich, 187
- prisoners of war (POWs), 161, 164
- propaganda, 1–2, 8, 47, 66
- Quadraroli, Igino, 141
- race, ix, 20, 85–86, 139
- Race and Settlement Office, 146

- Radio Algiers, 27  
 Radio Berlin, 106  
 Radio Rome, 46  
 Raginella, Libero, 118–19, 126  
 Rahn, Rudolf: in diplomacy, 34–35, 58;  
     Dollmann and, 175; Kappler and, 70, 102;  
     Kesselring and, 81; Ribbentrop and, 104  
 Red Cross, 144  
 refugees, 12–13, 38, 84, 125–29  
 Reich, Walter, ix  
 Reich Security Main Office (RSHA), x, 20,  
     30, 65–66, 87  
 Reichsleiter Rosenberg Task Force (ERR),  
     95–96, 108  
 Repetto, Don Francesco, 41  
 Research Office, 54  
 Ribbentrop, Joachim von: Ciano, G., and,  
     50; in diplomacy, 15, 35–36; Himmler  
     and, 60; Hitler and, 160; Hudal to, 135;  
     loyalty of, 9–10; Moellhausen and, 102–3,  
     106; punishment of, 188; Rahn and, 104;  
     reputation of, 32–33; Weizsäcker and, 53  
 Riccardi, Andrea, 127  
 Ridgeway, Matthew, 27  
 Riebling, Mark, 10–11, 22  
 Rintelen, Enno von, 23–24  
 Roatta, Mario, 195  
 Romano, Maggiore, 127–28  
 Romano, Osservatore L', 66, 156–57  
 Rome: Allied forces in, 175; to Australia, 2;  
     Carboni in, 26–27; communities in, xii;  
     Germany and, 20–24, 29–30, 43–44,  
     74–77, 164–65; Kesselring in, 21, 27–29;  
     Nazis in, 45–50, 69–73, 78–84, 125–29,  
     139–47; after occupation, 167–70; poli-  
     tics in, 82–83; Radio Rome, 46; SS in, xii;  
     US in, 17–18; Vatican and, xiv, 35, 45–55;  
     Wehrmacht in, xiii. *See also* Vatican  
 Rommel, Erwin, 22, 26, 46  
 Ronca, Roberto, 126  
 Roosevelt, Franklin: Churchill and, xi, 12,  
     64; Donovan and, 172; Nazis to, 106;  
     Pacelli, E., and, 2; Pius XII and, 3, 65  
 Rosen, Fred, 167  
 Rosenberg, Alfred, 188  
 Rosselli, Enzo, 86–87  
 Royal, Robert, 53  
 RSHA. *See* Reich Security Main Office  
 RSI. *See* Italian Social Republic  
 Rychlak, Ronald, 7  
 Sabatello, Leone, 118, 192  
 Sacerdoti, Angelo, 38  
 Sacerdoti, Vittorio, 115  
 Sacred College of Cardinals, 1–2  
 Salmoni, Rubino, 193  
 Savina, Fara, 143  
 Scandinavia, xi, 10  
 Schellenberg, Walter: on Goebbels, 63; on  
     Kaltenbrunner, 93; Kappler and, 22;  
     Kunkel and, 50; Vatican and, 12  
 Schutz, Kurt, 92  
 Schutzstaffel (SS): authority in, 98–99;  
     Black network to, 12; CER and, xiii–  
     xiv; Einsatzgruppen and, ix; fear of,  
     34; Himmler for, 16; to Hitler, 60; Jews  
     and, 31, 35, 95–96, 112–24; Kappler for,  
     46, 69–73, 80–84, 95; looting by, 148;  
     Mengele for, 145–46, 148–50, 153–55; in  
     Poland, 145–46; reputation of, 4, 99, 138;  
     in Rome, xii; spies, 2; Vatican and, 51–52,  
     128, 130–38; Wehrmacht and, xii, 26, 48,  
     100; Weizsäcker for, 131–34, 156–58, 160–  
     61; Zuccotti on, 99–100  
 Secretariat of State, 53–54  
 Sed, Alberto, 193  
 Senise, Carmine, 76  
 Sermonetta, Costanza Calo, 142–43  
 Servatius, Robert, 188–89  
 Sharett, Moshe, 179  
 Shirer, William, 173  
 Silvani, Mauro, 13  
 Simpson, William, 164  
 Skorzeny, Otto, 21, 22–23, 56–58  
 slave-labor, 48  
 Smith, Bidell, 27  
 Sonderkommando squad, 150–51  
 Sonnino, Gabriele, 115

- Sonnino, Lazzaro, 143  
 Sonnino, Settimio, 117  
 Sorani, Rosina, 41–42, 93–97, 108–9, 122–23  
 Sorani, Settimio, 41–42, 75, 87, 122, 158  
 Soria, Sofia, 123  
 Soviet Union: Germany and, x, 3; Himmler in, 61; Hitler and, xi; Jews in, 180–82; to Pius XII, 7; Poland to, 4; in World War II, 64–65. *See also* Allied forces  
 Spain, xi, 12–14  
 Spizzichino, Ada, 121, 150  
 Spizzichino, Angela, 118, 120–21  
 Spizzichino, Franca, 118, 120–21  
 Spizzichino, Grazia, 120–21  
 Spizzichino, Mose, 120–21  
 Spizzichino, Settimia, 110, 120–21, 142, 150, 155, 191–92  
 SS. *See* Schutzstaffel  
 Stahel, Rainer: authority of, 46–47, 97, 105–6, 131, 133–34; Himmler and, xiv, 136; Kappler and, 78, 135, 141; Kesselring and, 103; leadership of, xiv; Moellhausen and, 80–82; Pfeiffer and, 134–35; punishment of, 183; reputation of, 99, 144, 156–57; Weizsäcker and, 102; Wolff and, 135–36  
 Stalin, Joseph, x–xi, 3, 180–81  
 Starace, Achile, 41  
 Stauffenberg, Claus von, 35, 171–73  
 Stern, Lisbeth, 99  
 Stern, Michael, 167  
 Sternberg, Montaldi, 110  
 Stille, Alexander, 88–89, 117  
 Streicher, Julius, 188  
 Student, Kurt, 21  
 Summi Pontificatus, 6–7  
 Switzerland, xi, xiii, 11, 13, 31–32, 35  
 Synagogue Council of America, 2  
 Tagliacozzo, Michael, 126, 129, 136  
 Taylor, Maxwell, 26–27  
 Taylor, Myron, 65  
 Tedesco, Fortunata, 89, 122  
 Terni, Giorgio, xii–xiii, 43–44  
 Terracina, Gemma, 121  
 Terracina, Piero, 88, 149–51, 154  
 Terracina, Settimio, 121, 165–66  
 Thadden, Eberhard von, 78, 104, 124  
 Thomas, Gordon, 38–39  
 Tittmann, Harold, 50, 66, 109, 161  
 Toaff, Elio, xii–xiii, 43–44, 180  
 totalitarianism, 7, 65  
 Trabucco, Carlo, 118  
 treachery, 93–97  
 Trujillo, Raphael, 13  
 UCEI. *See* Union of Italian Jewish Communities  
*Under His Very Windows* (Zuccotti), 138  
 Union of Italian Jewish Communities (UCEI), xiii, 39–41  
 United Jewish Appeal for Refugees, 13  
 United States (US): American Jewish Committee, 2; Central Intelligence Agency, 56, 183–84; Europe and, xi, 180; Germany and, 164–65; Great Britain and, 50, 64; Holy See and, 109; OSS for, 106; refugees in, 13; in Rome, 17–18; in World War II, 26–27. *See also* Allied forces  
 US. *See* United States  
 Vatican: to Allied forces, 64–65; authority in, 225n1; Catholic Church and, 125–29; Germany and, 1, 110–11, 156–57; Hitler and, x–xi, xiv, 21–22, 136; intelligence on, 14; Jews in, 52–53, 63–64; leadership in, xii; to Leiber, 11; Maglione for, xiv; to Moellhausen, 160–61; to Mussolini, 16; Nazis and, x–xi, 62–63; Portugal and, 13; Radio, 4, 9; refugees in, 84; Rome and, xiv, 35, 50–55; Sacred College of Cardinals in, 1–2; Schellenberg and, 12; SS and, 51–52, 128, 130–38; Vatican Information Bureau, 4; Vatican Radio, 55, 65. *See also specific topics*  
 Ventresca, Robert, 7, 180  
 Vivanti, Sarina, 114

- Wachsberger, Arminio, 121–22, 139–40, 142, 144, 149, 154–55, 192
- Wachsberger, Clara, 121–22, 142
- Wachsberger, Regina, 121–22, 142
- Weber, Anton, 14, 128–29
- Weinberg, Ruth, 127
- Weizmann, Chaim, 179
- Weizsäcker, Ernst von: Hudal to, 137; Kessel and, 187; leadership of, xiv, 32–36, 51–53, 109; Maglione and, 132–33; Ribbentrop and, 53; for SS, 131–34, 156–58, 160–61; Stahel and, 102; Wolff and, 67
- Westphal, Siegfried, 27
- Wiesel, Elie, xiv, 149, 152–53, 196
- Wise, Stephen, 64
- Wolfe, Robert, 106
- Wolff, Karl, 16; career of, 60–63; deportation to, 106; Dulles and, 175; Himmler and, 144; Hitler and, 67–68, 71–72, 104; Kaltenbrunner and, 175; Kappler and, 99, 103; Kesselring and, 56, 178; leadership of, 78; punishment of, 183; reputation of, 70–71; Stahel and, 135–36; Weizsäcker and, 67
- Wollenweber, Gustav, 130–31
- World War I, 37, 40
- World War II: for Catholic Church, 3; diplomacy in, 25–26; end of, 178–82; in Europe, 16; international press on, 11–12; Italy in, xii, 15–16; Jews after, 191–96; looting in, 47; Nazis after, 183–90; Portugal in, 12; Soviet Union in, 64–65; Switzerland in, xi, xiii, 11, 13, 31–32, 35; US in, 26–27. *See also specific topics*
- Wyss, Margarita de, 93, 116–17
- Zarfati, Fortunata, 114, 194
- Zarfati, Marco, 114, 194
- Zeitschel, Cartheo, 57
- Zevini, Pio Eugenio, 164
- Ziegler, Herbert, 99
- Zionist cause, 2, 30–31, 37–38, 39
- Zolli, Dora, 39, 74–76
- Zolli, Emma, 39
- Zolli, Israel (née Zoller): Foa, U. and, 1, 74–76, 88, 90–91, 167–69; in hiding, 96, 123; for Jews, 1, 88–89; leadership of, 37–43, 85, 94; after occupation, 167–70, 194–95
- Zolli, Miriam, 39, 89, 91, 195
- Zuccotti, Susan: on Catholic Church, 91, 128; Katz and, 66, 68, 138; on Mussolini, 58; as Papal critic, 7, 10, 25, 53; on SS, 99–100



# About the Author

PATRICK J. GALLO WAS BORN IN THE BRONX TO IMMIGRANT PARENTS FROM Avellino, Italy. He was educated in New Jersey public schools in Hoboken and Weehawken, New Jersey, and is an unabashed admirer of teachers, whom he considers our unsung heroes. Gallo received his BA from Montclair State College, his MA from Seton Hall University, and PhD from New York University. He was an adjunct professor of history and political science at New York University until his retirement. Gallo has taught at Loyola University's Rome Center, SUNY-Purchase, CUNY-Queens College, and William Paterson University. He is the author of ten books including two classic works about the Italian American experience, *Ethnic Alienation: The Italian-Americans* and *Old Bread, New Wine*. *Ethnic Alienation* was the first systematic study of Italian American political behavior to be published in the United States. Gallo's published works also include *The American Paradox: Politics and Justice*; *Enemies: Mussolini and the Antifascists*; *For Love and Country: The Italian Resistance*; *The Urban Experience of Italian-Americans*; *Pope Pius XII, the Holocaust and the Revisionists*; *Swords and Plowshares: The United States and Disarmament, 1898-1979*; and *India's Image of the International System*. His articles have appeared in the *New York Times* and in journals published in the United States and Italy. Gallo was a scholar-in-residence at the American Academy in Rome and was selected by the American Political Science Association for its Ethical Issues in Political Life project at Harvard University. He was the recipient of the DAS Research Prize, was named New Jersey Social Science Teacher of the Year, and won prestigious NEH and Fulbright grants. Professor Gallo has chaired or served on scholarly panels and has been a keynote speaker at conferences. He has been a consultant for Holocaust education for the New Jersey State Department of Education, Ethnic Studies, Intergroup Relations with Brotherhood in Action. He served as a consultant most recently for the documentary *Gold Makes You Free*. Patrick Gallo is the father of three children and the proud *nonno* (grandfather) of six grandchildren. He lives with his wife in New Jersey.

