



The tragic odyssey of Ferdinand Glaser: The search for the fate of my father in France and Italy 1939 - 1943

*by Willie Glaser
edited by Gerhard Jochem*



Ferdinand Glaser (1890 - 1943)
(Photo: Willie Glaser)

Credits

I am forever indebted to Mrs. Nancy Lefenfeld, who in 2004 gave me the information about St. Martin Vésubie, which started me out to complete my father's story and also guided me to many other sources.

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How things evolved until the outbreak of war

My father, Ferdinand Glaser was born on October 20, 1890 in Leipzig (Germany). In 1914, at 24 years of age, he became a soldier in the Austrian army, because his father was born in Galicia, which at that time was part of the Austrian-Hungarian empire. When the war ended in 1918 he returned to his parents' house in Fürth (Germany). In 1918 he married my mother Adele Krieser.

In 1921 he started a toy export business with a partner, Glaser & Gelberger in Fürth, Karolinenstraße 40. Due to the adverse commercial conditions for Jews in Germany, he gave up his toy export business and joined the toy exporting firm of S.D. Zimmer. This firm closed, the owners emigrated to England.

Jews from Fürth and Nuremberg started to emigrate in an ever increasing number. About 1937 my father recognized a financial opportunity to provide for the necessity of life for his family. Since 1921 he acquired a great knowledge in shipping goods abroad. Very wisely he used this knowledge to help Jewish people to ship their furniture and other personal belongings abroad. The remuneration from this and other part time activity helped to keep his family happy. Even the increasingly difficult times for Jews in Fürth did not affect the happy family life with a caring father and mother.



Ferdinand Glaser as an Austrian soldier during World War I

(Photo: Willie Glaser)

The six room apartment in Schwabacherstraße 22 was filled with the laughter and songs of five content children, three girls and two boys ranging in age from two to sixteen years, a happy family indeed. It was a pleasure to listen to my mother singing songs to her three daughters, while braiding their hair.

It was around this time that my parents started to discuss very intensively their options of leaving Germany. One destination, Palestine, was seriously beckoning my parents. In 1934 my father's brother Benno moved to Palestine with his family. He settled in the Kibbutz Givat Brenner. As a very early settler in this Kibbutz uncle Benno would have been helpful in providing a fast passage to Palestine. Uncle Benno's letters also described the very hard work and somewhat primitive life on a Kibbutz.

My father did not accept this option because he had his sights set on going to England. He had lots of business connections there. He spoke fluent English and also a good French, learned while attending the "Jüdische Realschule" in Fürth. He was very sure he would succeed in Great Britain.

A breakthrough happened in 1938 when my sister Lottie was able to go to England. Now my father started to work to get me to England, too. It seems my parents came to the conclusion that they should send their children one by one to England.

Towards end of July and beginning of August 1939, my parents had some very intense and secretive discussions, the details of which were kept from me. Around the 5th of August 1939,

my father told me that the next day he will be leaving for France. I would have to standby and help my mother during his absence. The next day we had word from the British consulate that in a few days I will be receiving my permit to go to England. Everything seemed to fall in place.

On the day of my father's departure he took me aside, swore me to secrecy and told me he was going to France via Switzerland with a small group of Jewish men. The border crossings from Germany to Switzerland and Switzerland to France were to be clandestine. It seems a Swiss person gave a guarantee to the Swiss border police that this crossing would be for transit only, none of the group was allowed to remain in Switzerland. At that time there was a very strict limitation placed on Jews leaving Germany: only ten German Reichsmark were allowed to be taken abroad. Somebody in Switzerland paid the bill.

I do not know how the crossing from Switzerland to France was handled. There was no mail from my father. My mother knew her husband was going to be mobile in France and she knew that for a period no mail would be forthcoming.

While the world's political horizon darkened, my landing permit for England arrived on August 31, 1939. My travel luggage was ready packed and I boarded the train for Hook of Holland, the ferry to Dover and train to London where I reported to the refugee committee in Bloomsbury House.

A few days after I joined my sister in Belfast (Northern Ireland) war was declared. My mother in Fürth and my father in France were facing a very bad situation now.

All intended communications came to an halt but this condition did not last very long. The people we stayed with in Belfast had relatives in Dublin, the capital of the neutral Irish Free-state. The mail to our mother was sent from Dublin to Fürth, my mother send her mail to Dublin and it was forwarded to us.

With the war a few weeks old, mother informed us that father is in Paris and his address is Hotel de Paris, rue de Maubeuge. I never heard from my father again.

My search for clues about my father

While serving with the First Polish Armored Division (First Canadian Army), I received several Red Cross messages about my father in France. Due to circumstances beyond my control these messages were lost.

In 1997 I started an intensive mail and internet search based on the few pieces of information obtained from the Red Cross. The messages provided me with names of the following French internment camps my father was forced to stay:

1. Camp de Saint Cyprien, Ilot I-43 (13 km southeast of Perpignan at the *Golfe du Lion*)
2. Camp de Gurs, Ilot J Baraque 19 (30 km west of Pau, 34 km north of the Spanish border)
3. Camp de la Viscoze, Baraque 8
4. Agde Hérault, Groupe 311, camp 3 (21 km southeast of Béziers at the *Golfe du Lion*)
5. Camp Drancy (10.5 km northeast of Paris in the *Ile de France*)

My father's odyssey in France

After France fell, my father must have seen the writing on the wall and started to initiate steps to take himself out of harms' way. France was filled with many refugees of different nationalities. It is obvious that the main topic of discussions amongst the refugee population was to find ways and means to get out of France. The most popular destinations were Spain, the south of France and to a lesser degree Switzerland. Of course the dream of everybody was to obtain a passage on a neutral ship, going to a neutral country.

Father was in the possession of a "Fremdenpass" (alien passport) issued in Germany before his departure. On October 28, 1939, he obtained an Alien Identity Card number 7607485 from the Prefecture de Police of Paris.

On June 14, 1940, the German army entered Paris. Around this date my father must have decided that the time was ripe now for an initial step to seek asylum in a neutral country by getting out of Paris.

My father's first attempt to gain freedom failed

My surmise is that around May or June 1940 he started his journey. He was not able to put a lot of kilometers between him and Paris, because during the time span May to June 1940 he was arrested not very far from Paris, in the small city of Croissy-Beaubourg located southwest of the French capital. This direction points to a destination in southern France.

He arrived in the south of France, but not the place he wished to be. Father was arrested and delivered to a civilian internment camp, "Camp de Saint Cyprien", originally a camp for Spanish Republican refugees of the civil war. It was squalid, housing many foreign Jews living in France.

My ongoing search for the whereabouts of my father produced a letter from the “Directeur des Archives départementales des Pyrénées-Atlantiques” stating Ferdinand Glaser was in the internment camp de Gurs from October 29, 1940, to December 5, 1940.

The whereabouts of my father for the three years from December 1940 to November 21, 1943, are a blank. I have to assume that some of that time was spent in Camp de la Viscose and in camp Agde Hérault. I have confirmation, that camp Agde was a GTE “Groupement de Travailleurs Étrangers”, (grouping of foreign workers). There was a large network of labor camps providing cheap labor force. It also explains why my father had a small amount of money.

According to a letter from the Red Cross International Tracing Service his last place of residence before November 21, 1943, was Hotel Victoria in St. Martin Vesubie, Alpes Maritimes. The questions which beg an answer are: How long was father staying in Hotel Victoria? By what means was he living? Why St. Martin?

Father’s final attempt to gain freedom, a freedom so close, yet so far

The answer to what my father was doing in St. Martin Vesubie only emerged at a later date. Since I wrote my father’s story in 2003 new and detailed information came to light. It is an astounding tale. It is a story filled with hope and despair, when he like many other Jewish refugees was sent for refuge to the beautiful mountain area along the French-Italian border.

I must assume that when my father was looking for a way out of Vichy France and was listening to the refugee grapevine regarding information about escape routes from there, the buzz word was Nice. Nice must have been the focal point and destination for my father, North Africa probably was his goal. It is to be noted that the Jewish Italian banker Angelo Donati, a distinguished refugee aid activist, was very involved with the moving of many hundreds refugees to “enforced residences” in the Italian zone of occupation in France. I believe this is how my father arrived in St. Martin Vesubie.

In Italian occupied France

It is necessary to be aware of the historical wartime background in Vichy France and Italian occupied France in order to understand why the focus in this chronicle is the very benign attitude of the Italian occupation forces towards the Jewish refugees from Vichy France. The Italian army occupied an area along the French-Italian Border including the département Alpes Maritime, in which the picturesque mountain resort St. Martin Vesubie is located, which is 1,000 meters above sea level.

The Vichy authorities thought because their administration remained in place and functioned according their directives they could go ahead and arrest foreign refugee Jews as they did in the past in Vichy France. However the Italian occupation authorities did not allow this to happen, telling the Vichy authorities that the Italian army had complete sovereignty over foreign Jews in the Italian zone of occupation. Naturally, the Germans expected their Italian allies to apply the same restrictive procedures as were carried out against the Jews in Vichy. The Italians engaged in a very skilful game of seeming to placate the Germans by promising them they would acquiesce to their demands while at the same time protecting the Jews and prohibiting their deportations.

Soon it became known throughout France that the Italian zone was a safe haven. Thousands of Jewish refugees from Vichy France fled to Nice and to other cities along the Côte d'Azur. It is estimated some 50,000 Jews had fled to the Italian zone, of those some 25,000 were foreign Jews. The Germans did not like this situation and started to pressure their ally to take tougher measures. It also must be pointed out that two distinct communities of Jews existed in Italy, the Italian Jews and refugee Jews.

To satisfy the German demand, the Italians worked out a plan to move many foreign Jewish refugees from the coastal areas into "assigned or enforced residences" in the inland areas close to the French-Italian border. The Italian authorities kept a certain control over the movements of the refugees in the assigned residences with a compulsory register.

St. Martin Vésubie was one of the three centers selected to house the refugees. St. Martin is located in France near to the French-Italian border, away from the German occupied zone. They all were resorts with many hotels. Due to wartime conditions the hotel rooms stood empty and served as lodgings for the refugees.

St. Martin was like a magnet for the Jewish refugees and some 1,000 Jewish refugees found a haven in St. Martin.



St. Martin Vésubie
(Photo: Russ Collins)

Thanks to the Italian protection and their very benign attitude towards the refugees in the “Assigned residences” areas, a Jewish community life soon developed in St. Martin. A local committee concerned with community needs was functioning. Compared to the life of Jews in Vichy France, St. Martin was a true harbor. At this point I have to assume that my father arrived sometime during May / June 1943 in St. Martin Vésubie.

Unfortunately, my father’s sojourn in St. Martin was overtaken by events, which dictated another course of action to be carried out by him. Several dates had a great bearing on my father’s decisions:

- July 24, Mussolini was deposed and arrested.
- September 3, allied troops landed on the mainland of Italy.
- September 8, Italy surrendered. In response to the Italian surrender, the Germans took over the Italian zone. The Italian army retreated across the border into Italy from the French zone, which they had occupied.

The trek to Italy

At this point the Jewish refugee population of St. Martin had no choice but to leave St. Martin, though a few did hide out in the mountains. Some 1,000 refugees packed their meager belongings and started out for Italy, many following the Italian military.

The only obvious route for Ferdinand Glaser was to put some distance between himself and the Germans and to follow the Italian soldiers going back to Italy from the French territory they had occupied and which would be taken over by the German military within a day or two.

It is reasonable to assume that orientation discussions took place amongst the refugees regarding the best way to cross into Italy. Because St. Martin was designated as an enforced residence, their movements were limited to the confines of the village. The refugees did not have the opportunity to explore the picturesque alpine areas close to St. Martin.

In reality there were only two very rugged, some 2,500 meter high mountain passes, Col de Cerise / Colle di Ciliegia (Cherry Pass) and Col de Fenêtre / Colle di Finestre (Window pass), which the refugees had to negotiate. The passes were high enough to surround them with clouds. Both passes were a perilous hike for everybody, especially women and children.

It was pointed out to me by historians that because my father was arrested in Valdieri he must have come down Colle di Ciliegia (Cherry pass), he passed Terme di Valdieri, the baths of Valdieri, a spa of some renown.



Col de Cerise (Cherry pass)

(Photo: Laurent Gernez / montagne photos)

The Jewish refugees, men, women and children, who undertook this difficult journey starting from St. Martin Vésubie had to cope with many hours walking over the difficult and rough mountain trails, which took them into Italy.

My father did have a small advantage. He was walking on mountain terrain very similar to the terrain in the Dolomites mountains in Italy, where in 1915 he fought as a soldier in the Austrian army. He was on very familiar ground.

In German controlled areas of Italy

Finally after leaving the foothills of Parco delle Alpi Marittimi my father found himself in the valley close to the town of Valdieri. The refugees scattered among the little towns or sought shelter with friendly farmers. In many cases the refugees were hidden or were given sanctuary by the local priests. All indications are pointing to my father staying in the town of Valdieri or its close proximity. It must be stated that the local population of this area helped many Jewish refugees to survive.



Valdieri

(Photo: Claudio Trova)

My father's hope of a final escape was dashed by the rapidly moving German military on the Italian side. Events were happening very fast. The Germans were in control and watching the two mountain passes leading into Italy. German army units were already in Cuneo, a principal town in this province. My father and many other Jewish refugees were trapped. The Germans were aware of this fact and took advantage of it.

The SS, the nemesis of the Glaser family

On September 18, 1943, the SS units distributed "Flugblätter" (leaflets) and posted "Maueranschläge" (wall posters), demanding, that all "foreigners" surrender themselves to the SS. The SS soon realized that using the designation "Jew" in a poster or leaflet would not mean anything to the local Italian population and replaced it with the word "foreigners".

The amazing fact is that for this action the German high command employed units of its most prestigious and elite fighting unit, Hitler's own "1. SS-Panzer-Grenadier Division Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler" under the command of Obersturmbannführer (Lieutenant Colonel) Joachim Peiper, to hunt down my father and several hundred Jewish refugees in the general area of Valdieri. The reason for this unit to be in Italy is another story.

It is a fact that many in this group of Jewish refugees surrendered to the German military about September 18, 1943, in Valdieri. The leaflets and wall posters threatened the Italian population with execution if they sheltered "foreigners". Many refugees, including family groups with children, were arrested. They had no place to hide, they were tired of running.

I do not believe that my father surrendered to the Germans. He was smart, he was alone, he had sufficient money on him, and he had become wise in avoiding arrests. His terms in four detention and labor camps in Vichy France gave him the expertise to cope with this new situation. I have to assume that he was surprised by a SS patrol wherever he was at that moment.

Many refugees were luckier and survived this action by the German military. In recent years they frequently assemble at reunions in St. Martin Vésubie. The crossing of the mountain pass leading to Valdieri is commemorated annually. The most recent reunion was organized in St. Martin in 2003 for the 60th anniversary.

Following his arrest, my father with a group of prisoners was sent to the town of Borgo San Dalmazzo. They were held in a makeshift "Polizeihaftlager" (police detention camp), which comprised of old Italian army barracks.



The places of Ferdinand Glaser's failed flight on both sides of the French-Italian border

(Source: Microsoft AutoRoute 2003)

The records of General Command, II SS Armored Corps from the Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv in Freiburg (RS 2-2/21, part 2) contain clear indications that Peiper's unit was actively and directly involved in the arrests. This action is laconically reported in the Kriegstagebuch (war diary) of the "Generalkommando II. SS-Panzerkorps" (the "1. SS-Panzer-Grenadier Division Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler" was a unit of this corps).

The morning report from September 20, 1943, reads as follows:

*Result of leaflets and wall posters:
Regarding: Ic-Morning report.
To: Army group B/Ic
216 Jews are detained in Borgo San Dalmazzo, waiting for SD.*

SD stands for "Sicherheitsdienst", the Security Service of the Nazi Party.

It is a remarkable quirk of history that the involvement of Ferdinand Glaser with the "Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler" in September 1943 had a sequel a year later during August 1944, in which his son Willie, serving with a tank regiment of the 1st Polish Armored Division was in grim combat with elements of the "1. SS-Panzer Division Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler" during the great battle of the Falaise pocket in Normandy.

No doubt there was a series of messages between the Gestapo headquarter staff sitting in Hotel Splendid in Nice and the commandant of the Security police and the SD in the area of the military commandant for France in Paris regarding the disposition of the Jews detained in Borgo San Dalmazzo.

Apparently the Gestapo needed more time to complete their cold-blooded bureaucratic assessment of this situation. The reason might have been that the intended destination Drancy, the transit camp near Paris, was overcrowded, even though already by end of July 1943 some 55,000 Jews in 58 train transports were shipped from Drancy to Auschwitz.

My father and 349 Jewish refugees, 148 women and 201 men, held now in the detention camp in Borgo San Dalmazzo since September 18, 1943, had no idea what was in store for them. It is remarkable that a document from the city archives in Borgo San Dalmazzo reveals that Ferdinando Glaser was drawing a cigarette ration while in the detention camp.



Military barracks in Borgo San Dalmazzo
(Photo: Enzo Cavaglion)

On November 21, 1943, after two months in detention, this group of some 340 refugees was brought to Gestapo headquarters in Nice. From Nice they were transported to Drancy.



Memorial in Borgo San Dalmazzo for the Jews deported from there to Auschwitz

(Photo: Commune di Borgo San Dalmazzo)

In a short while, on November 24, 1943, my father was delivered to the infamous transit camp Drancy. My father's luck had finally run out. I very much admire his resourcefulness, his ability to stay a free man, his resolve to stay out of internment camps and his determination to reach a safe haven outside of France.

My father at the age of 48 was in the prime of his life and healthy when he arrived in France. His four year service in the Austrian army as a frontline soldier in the Dolomite mountains and Serbia must have girded him for the ordeals he experienced during his last four years.

Camp Drancy

When Ferdinand Glaser was confined to Camp Drancy he was given the prisoner number 8696. His financial assets consisting of 1,100 francs and 756 lire were taken away from him and a receipt for these amounts was issued to him. Going by his past record I am sure my father was full of determination to make his confinement in Camp Drancy a short duration, but the German authorities took every precaution to foil escape ideas.

This time my father did not succeed. During July 1943, the French police administration of Drancy was taken over by German authorities and to make it even worse Camp Drancy was now under the heels of the feared SS-Hauptsturmführer Alois Brunner.

8696 2/1
 cc B V
 -7 DEC 1943
 Nom : GLASER
 Prénoms : Ferdinand
 Date Naissance : 20.10.90
 Lieu : Leipzig
 Nationalité : Polonaise
 Profession : Fabricant jouets
 Domicile : 57^{ème} Martin Vesulie
Hotel Victoria
M. 5 E.
 C. I. val. jusqu' Nov 24. 11. 43

Registration of Ferdinand Glaser at transit camp Drancy

(Photo: Willie Glaser by courtesy of Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine, Paris)

9
 Réçu
 M^r GLASER Ferdinand
 Borgo - Itali
 Le montant de
 mille cent francs
 sept cent cinquante six Lire
 italiens
 Drancy le 24/11/43
 Ce réçu est signé par
 % [Signature]

**Receipt issued by the authorities in Drancy for 1,100 francs and 756 lire
 which were taken away from Ferdinand Glaser upon his arrival**

(Photo: Willie Glaser by courtesy of Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine, Paris)

The same tentacles that had pulled his wife, two daughters and one son into the abyss of the Holocaust a year earlier, started to grope for the life of my father Ferdinand Glaser, another victim to be fed to the bottomless pit of the Holocaust.

After two weeks of grace in Drancy, on December 7, 1943, my father with some 1,000 other Jews was taken to the train station Bobigny near Drancy. Most probably they were informed, that they will be “evacuated to the east” or “umgesiedelt” (resettled).

Transport 64

According to the train manifest this deportation was designated as “Judentransport” (Jews transport). The train manifest can only be described as a perfect example of cold-blooded and deadly SS efficiency.

On December 7, 1943, transport no. 64 from Drancy left Bobigny at 12.10 o’clock under the control of SS-Obersturmführer (1st Lieutenant) Wannemacher. In the SS vernacular: “Die Juden haben die Himmelfahrt angetreten” (“The Jews started their journey towards heaven”).

| | | | | |
|-----|------------------|-----------|-------------------|------|
| 307 | GESZLIDER Hélène | 13. 2. 51 | Ohne | 8674 |
| 308 | GLASER Ferdinand | 20.10.90 | Spielwarenfabrik. | 8696 |
| 309 | GLASS Benjamin | ? 2.94 | Schwester | 8771 |

Clip from the list of deportees in transport 64 containing as number 308 Ferdinand Glaser, toy manufacturer (“Spielwarenfabrikant”)

(Photo: Willie Glaser by courtesy of Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine, Paris)

A few days later the train arrived in Auschwitz. According to the Auschwitz records 334 men and women received numerical tattoos and lived for a while. 657 men, women and children were gassed immediately. In 1945 there were 50 survivors of transport 64. My father was not among them.

The Glaser family and the SS

The destiny of my father, mother, sisters and brother from the day they were arrested to the day of their deaths was always in the hands of the SS. A constant and deadly thread connected the last few years of their lives to the SS. Who were these people that took charge of their lives and destroyed them?

All orders and death warrants flowed from Adolf Hitler to Heinrich Himmler, “Reichsführer SS” (Reich’s leader of the SS), down to his subordinates. Heinrich Himmler made sure that his “Engine of Genocide” was turning over very fast.

The first official SS thread linking the death of my father was Obersturmbannführer Adolf Eichmann. It was a telex from the Gestapo headquarters in Paris, informing Eichmann of the departure of transport 64 to Auschwitz (see below).

As their “Führer”, Himmler and Eichmann did not die a natural death. Himmler arranged for his own “Himmelfahrt”: When captured by the British in 1945 he committed suicide by biting on a cyanide capsule hidden in his mouth. The government of Israel gave Eichmann a ticket for his “Himmelfahrt”: In 1962 Eichmann was executed in Israel. Thus ended the lives of two of the foremost proponents of “industrial killing”, the worst crime in human history.

It is not only the higher and middle leadership of the SS and Gestapo that was instrumental in the destruction of the Glaser family. Whether it was Obersturmführer Wannemacher in charge of the transport train from Paris to Auschwitz or a simple SS-Schütze (SS private) performing his escort duties on this train. Whether it was a low level clerk from the Gestapo attending to his duties in the Langwasser transit camp near Nuremberg, or SS-Brigadeführer (Brigadier General) Dr. Benno Martin and Sturmbannführer (Major) Dr. Theodor Grafenberger in charge of the deportations from Nuremberg and Fürth. They were responsible for the deportation of my mother, sisters and brother to Poland and their death.

The SS man in Auschwitz who moved the lever to release the poison gas Zyklon B pellets into the chamber full of humanity. The SS man in Belzec who started the Diesel engine to pump deadly carbon monoxide fumes into the room full of men, women and children.

THE SS, HITLER’S INSTRUMENT OF TERROR AND DEATH, OWES ME THE LIFE
OF MY FAMILY.

In Memoriam

It is of some comfort today to know that my beloved family is inscribed and forever remembered in Memorial Sites in Fürth (Germany), Miami (Florida, USA), Paris (France), Roglit (Israel), Borgo San Dalmazzo (Italy) and the Fürth Memorial Book, both in its printed and online version.



Memorial for the deported Jews at Borgo San Dalmazzo railway station
(Photo: Comune di Borgo San Dalmazzo, Ms. Luisa Giorda)



Entry of Ferdinand Glaser (misspelled “Glaeser”) at the Memorial in Borgo San Dalmazzo
(Photo: Comune di Borgo San Dalmazzo, Ms. Luisa Giorda)

Willie Glaser and the SS

I do not know why, but ever since I was a twelve year old boy in 1933 and until my departure from Germany I always had an “in your face” attitude towards the SS.

From time to time and especially during the Reichsparteitage (annual Nazi rallies) in Nuremberg I sometimes met head on with SS and SA formations marching in the streets of Fürth.

If this formation carried a Hakenkreuzfahne (Swastika flag), a pedestrian was obliged to salute the flag with the outstretched right hand “Heil Hitler”. To avoid this, a Jewish person would duck into a doorway or turn around and walk away in the opposite direction. Jews were not allowed to give the “Heil Hitler” salute.

Whenever I met a flag bearing formation I never walked away. I did not salute either, nobody challenged me. Today I can say it probably was a foolish gesture of defiance.

This defiant attitude served me well in obtaining the release of a Jewish official important to me, arrested during “Kristallnacht” 1938 in Munich. I visited the Gestapo headquarters in Munich and during an interview with a high ranking Gestapo officer I demanded the release of the Jewish official. Not used to this kind of boldness from a Jew, the perplexed officer granted the release of the man.

My meetings with the SS did not end there. As a soldier fighting in Normandy, I soon found out the Waffen-SS soldiers facing me had a human side after all. As prisoners of war they stood before me, stripped of the veneer of superiority, visibly shaken when told that they were interrogated by a Jew. The big difference was that the Waffen-SS soldier saw his family again. For my family, when subjected to questioning by the Gestapo it meant death not being far away.

My father had only two weeks left in his life when he was imprisoned in Drancy on November 24, 1943. On December 7, 1943, he was sent to Auschwitz. My mother and children were deported on March 22, 1942, to Izbica. My family never returned.

J'accuse

My father was not only running and hiding from the German authorities. French officials are equally guilty for the atrocities carried out against my father. The Vichy regime under Pétain and Laval not only assisted the Nazi occupiers, they helped to hunt down and deport some 75,000 Jews to Poland. There were only a handful of survivors.

Who were these pitiless people involved in running down my father? Right beside the SS and Gestapo stood their French counterpart the “Milice Française”, the French militia, which was a semi-military formation, patterned on the SS.

The “Milice” was under the leadership of Joseph Darnand. In 1943 Darnand was given the Waffen-SS rank of Sturmbannführer (Major) and took an oath of loyalty to Hitler. In 1945 Joseph Darnand was executed for war crimes.

When in the fall of 1944 the allied advance in France drove the Vichy government to the German border, many members of the “Milice Française” joined their many thousands French comrades in the “33. Waffen-SS Grenadier-Division Charlemagne”, at that time regrouping in Germany after being smashed on the eastern front by the Red Army.

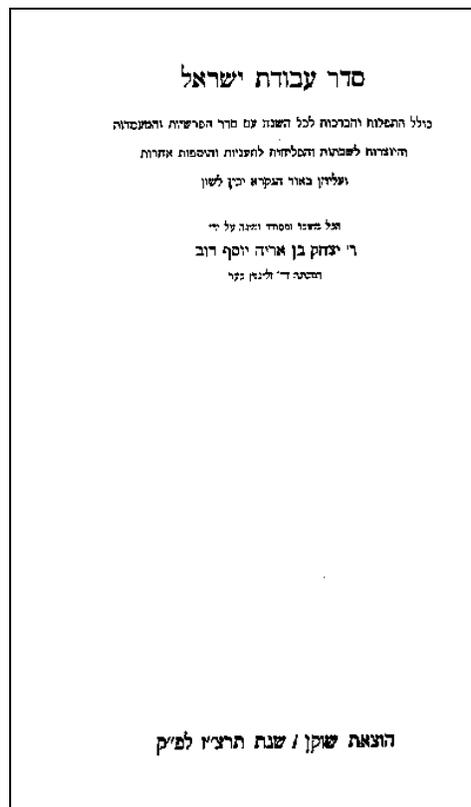
The legacies of my parents

My parents left me with a legacy each, which are my most cherished possessions. My father’s legacy is tangible. His gift for me for my 18th birthday in 1939 was a Siddur, a Hebrew prayer

book. This prayer book was special, it was the last Jewish prayer book printed in Germany by the Schockenverlag, a Jewish publishing house.

The Siddur accompanied me when I joined the army. I wrapped it in an oil skin, put it in my haversack hanging on the right side in the tank turret, always ready for an emergency “dive”. (tank crew vernacular for a rapid emergency exit).

So it came about, my tank was hit by a German Panzer, I grabbed my haversack and dived. I still use the prayer book on Shabbat and most Yom Tovim (Jewish holidays).



Frontispiece of the Hebrew prayer book. On the bottom it says: “Published by Schocken”.
(Photo: Willie Glaser)

סדר עבודת ישראל

Furtk, den 1.1.39.

Willie Glaser

Second page of the prayer book with the handwritten place
and date of the donation and Willie Glaser’s signature
(Photo: Willie Glaser)

My mother's legacy is intangible. Her legacy for me is a simple, but very powerful prayer and blessing, mailed to me to Belfast via the neutral Irish Freestate right after the war broke out: "Der Allmächtige möge Dich vor allem Schlechten bewahren, amen" ("May the Almighty protect you from everything bad, amen").

This prayer of my mother put a guardian angel on my shoulder guiding me safely out of harms' way on the battlefield and protecting me from a shower of bombs when American bombers mistakenly bombed our tank formation.

My mother sent a guardian angel to shield me, when a German Panzer scored a hit on my tank. The same guardian angel hovered protectively over me, when right after war's end I was taken deadly ill with septicemia and survived.

When in November 1963 my wife and I traveled with a TCA plane on a return trip from London to Montreal, this plane crashed on take off near the London airport. My mother's guardian angel was riding co-pilot and protected us from a fiery death.



Dans un champ de choux, près de l'aéroport de Londres, voilà ce qui reste du DC-8 d'Air Canada. On a encore du mal à croire que les 97 passagers à bord sont encore vivants, tous les membres de l'équipage ont aussi pu évacuer l'appareil avant que l'un de ses moteurs ne prenne feu.

Grâce à l'équipage d'un DC-8 d'Air Canada

97 passagers échappent à une mort certaine

Clip from a Franco-Canadian newspaper reporting the plane crash near London in which Willie Glaser and his wife were involved. The headline states: Thanks to the crew of an Air Canada DC-8 97 passengers escaped a certain death.

(Photo: Willie Glaser)



EDITION DE MONTRÉAL * 5¢ Montréal, vendredi 8 novembre 1963 / saint-Benoît, page.



Newspaper clip with picture of Willie Glaser (left) and his wife (right, kissing) being welcomed home after their return to Canada

(Photo: Willie Glaser)

In 1998 I became seriously ill with an aneurysm, my mother's guardian angel stood at the operating table, guiding the surgeon's hands.

This is my mother's legacy to her son.

April 2005 / August 2007

Willie Glaser

Appendix: Facsimile and translation of the telex announcing the departure of transport 64 from Bobigny to Auschwitz

Page 1

| Der Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD | | | | | |
|---|-------|---------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|----------|
| Im Bereich des Militärbefehlshabers in Frankreich | | | | | |
| Nachrichten - Uebermittlung | | | | | |
| Aufgenommen | | Beantwortet | | Form für Eingangskoppel | |
| Tag | Monat | Jahr | Zeit | Tag | Monat |
| | | | | 7 | DEZ 1943 |
| VON | | DURCH | | AN | |
| | | | | | |
| Nr. 92041 | | Verzögerungsursache | | | |
| Telegramm — Funkpruch — Fernschreiben — Fernspruch | | | | | |
| IV B - B4S - SA 225a | | | Paris, den 7. Dezember 1943 | | |
| 1) Fernschreiben: | | | | | |
| a) An das V 2915 U Reichssicherheitshauptamt - IV B 4 - z.Hd. H-Obersturmbannführer Eichmann o.V.i.d.Z. B e r l i n | | | | | |
| b) An den Inspekteur der KZ-Lager O r a n i e n b u r g ✓ 22 ⁰⁰ H | | | | | |
| c) An das KL. Auschwitz z.Hd. H-Obersturmbannführer Hess A u s c h w i t z / O S. | | | | | |
| <u>Betrifft:</u> Judentransport von Bahnhof Bobigny b. Paris nach Auschwitz/OS. am 7.12.1943. | | | | | |
| <u>Bezug:</u> Laufend. | | | | | |
| Am 7.12.1943 um 12 ³⁰ Uhr hat Transportzug D 901 den Abgangsbahnhof Bobigny in Richtung Auschwitz mit insgesamt 1.000 Juden verlassen. | | | | | |
| Die abgeschobenen Juden entsprechen den er- lassenen Evakuierungsrichtlinien. | | | | | |
| Der Transport wird ab Bobigny bis Reichsgrenze von 1:15 Sicherheitspolizei (H-Obersturmführer Wannenmacher) und von der Reichsgrenze bis Auschwitz von 1:20 Schutz- polizei begleitet. | | | | | |

(Photo: Willie Glaser by courtesy of Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine, Paris)

Folgende Lebensmittel wurden dem Transport in
einem Waggon mitgegeben:

| | | |
|-------|----|------------------|
| 3.500 | kg | Mehl, |
| 500 | " | Kartoffeln, |
| 500 | " | Margarine, |
| 80 | " | Kaffee, |
| 275 | " | Zucker, |
| 250 | " | Salz, |
| 275 | " | Nudeln; |
| 275 | " | Trockengemüse, |
| 500 | " | Konservengemüse, |
| 12 | " | Schokolade. |

Es wird gebeten, die hochwertigen
Lebensmittel nicht für KZ-Häftlinge zu verwenden.

Falls durch das Begleitkommando nicht
die genaue Anzahl von 4.000 Juden übergeben werden
sollte, erbitte ich FG-Nachricht von KZ-Auschwitz.

BdS Paris - Ref. IV B - I.V. *[Signature]* *[Initials]*

2) Wv. *[Signature]* *[Initials]*

(Photo: Willie Glaser by courtesy of Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine, Paris)

Translation

[Letterhead:] The commandant of the Security Police and the SD (Security Service) in the
area of the military commandant in France, [section for] Message Transmission

Sent: December 7, 1943 [...]

No. 92041

IV B-BdS - SA 225a

Paris, December 7, 1943

1) Telex:

- a) To the Reichssicherheitshauptamt [National Security Headquarters] - IV B 4 - To the
hands of SS-Obersturmbannführer [Lieutenant Colonel] Eichmann o.V.i.A. [?]
- b) To the Inspector of the Concentration Camps, Oranienburg
- c) To the Concentration Camp Auschwitz - To the hands of SS-Obersturmbannführer Hess
[misspelling of Rudolf Höß, camp commander of Auschwitz] Auschwitz/OS [OS =
Oberschlesien: Upper Silesia].

Regarding: Transport of Jews from the train station Bobigny near Paris to Auschwitz / Upper Silesia on December 7, 1943.

With reference to: Current

On December 7, 1943, at 12.10 PM, the train transport D 901 left the departure railway station Bobigny in the direction Auschwitz complete with 1,000 Jews.

The deported Jews are in compliance with the evacuation guidelines.

The transport will be escorted from Bobigny to the German border by 1:13 [one officer and 13 enlisted men] of the security police (SS-Obersturmführer [Lieutenant] Wannemacher) and from the border of the Reich to Auschwitz 1:20 [one officer and 20 enlisted men] by regular police.

[Page 2]

The following groceries contained in a freight car will accompany the transport:

- 3,500 kg Flour
- 6,500 kg Potatoes
- 300 kg Margarine
- 80 kg Coffee
- 275 kg Sugar
- 350 kg Salt
- 275 kg Noodles
- 275 kg Dried vegetables
- 500 kg Canned vegetables
- 12 kg Chocolate

It is requested not to use these valuable groceries for the concentration camp prisoners.

In case the escort detachment is not handing over the exact count of 1,000 Jews, I request a telex report from Concentration Camp Auschwitz.

BdS Paris - Ref. IV B

For

[Signature]

Obersturmbannführer [Lieutenant Colonel]

2. Resubmission

Sources

- Letter from *Archives départementales des Pyrénées-Atlantiques*, Pau (France), November 7, 1997.
- All copies of documents were provided by *Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine* (Mémorial Du Martyr Juif Inconnu), Paris (France).
- Mr. Michael *Duchowny*, veteran of the 10th Armored Brigade (Polish unit in France, later evacuated to England, became 1st Polish Armored Division). Michael told me about the very difficult escape route from the north of France to Spain.
- Letter from the *International Tracing Service*, Bad Arolsen (Germany), February 5, 1997.
- Letter from Mr. Serge *Klarsfeld*, May 1999, telling me about my father's arrest in Italy.
- The late Mrs. Laure *Kolb*, Paramus (New Jersey, USA), conversation about conditions in Camp de Gurs and later email follow-ups, starting 1997.
- The late Mr. Leib *Margulies*, Miami (Florida, USA), escapee from Drancy and member of the "Armée Juive" resistance group, conversation about life in Drancy and in France under occupation, specifically escape routes to Spain, 1996.
- Letter from the French *Ministère de la Défense*, Secrétariat d'État aux Anciens Combattants, Caen (France), May 26, 1998.
- Mrs. Hilda *Tayar*, Jerusalem (Israel), general conversation about wartime conditions in France, ongoing conversation since 1990.
- Website www.feldgrau.com/33ss.html.

Literature

- *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 1972.
- Serge *Klarsfeld*: La Mémorial de la Déportation des Juifs de France, Paris 1978.

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