The Nazi road to the "Final Solution"

Madagascar Plan

Before the "Final Solution" was devised to murder all Jews in Nazi jurisdiction, the scheme the Nazis planned to rid their land of the Jews was forced emigration. In 1940, plans were devised by the Nazis to ship all Jews under Nazi control to Madagascar, an island in the Indian Ocean. It was not until 1941 that Nazi bureaucrats were referring to the "Final Solution" (Gesamtlosung) in the context of genocide rather than a "Territorial Final Solution" (territoriale Endlosung) in the context of forced emigration. Some historians believe that the Madagascar Plan was a smokescreen for Hitler's desire to murder European Jewry (see page 62 of Marrus' The Holocaust in History).

Deportation

In response to this new "resettlement" policy, the first death camps were designed. Cheho was the site of the first gassing of Jews, which occurred on December 8, 1941. The Nazi war machine had limited resources, including slave labor, much of it Jewish. Even so, the Nazis made a decision that the annihilation of the Jews of Europe was a more important achievement than the value of their labor. Similarly, the Nazis made a decision not to let the need for transport for the war effort interfere with the need for trucks and rail cars to carry the Jews to concentration camps and death centers. It was Adolf Eichmann who masterminded the logistics of the deportation of Jews. (1)

Deportation was the first step in the "Final Solution." Typically, the Jews were informed that they were going to be resettled for work. Each was told to take some clothing, blankets, shoes, eating utensils (but no knife), a bowl, and some money. Rounded up, they were herded into trucks for the trip to the rail station, or were forced to walk. The rail cars were often strategically located at a distance from the passenger terminals, so that this scene would not arouse the ire of the local populace. Many who did see chose not to protest. The deportees were forced into rail cars, most of which were windowless, unheated cattle cars, and squeezed in so tightly that most were forced to stand. The doors were then sealed shut from the outside. Neither drinking water nor sanitary facilities were available. Each car held more than 120 people, and many froze or suffocated to death during the trip to the camps. The dead were not removed from the cars during the journey because the Nazi bureaucracy insisted that each body entering a car be accounted for at the destination.

1 Adolph Eichmann

Transporting enough Jews to feed the death camps was a major logistical undertaking. The Nazi officer in charge of this duty was Adolph Eichmann, who traveled from country to country that was under German occupation to systematically plan the deportation of the local Jewish population to the death camps. Eichmann received various levels of
cooperation from each of the various occupied governments. But in countries such as Holland, Belgium, Albania, Denmark, Finland and Bulgaria, some Jews were saved from their deaths by the action of the sympathetic populace and government officials. Denmark's government and populace were exemplary in their heroism in saving Jews. In other countries such as Poland, Greece, France, and Yugoslavia, the deportation of Jews to the death camps was facilitated by the cooperation of the government.

**Ghettoization (December 1939 to March 1942)**

Although the Nazis were successful in isolating Jews socially and economically, the actual physical isolation of the Eastern European population did not begin until December 1939. Jews had known the ghetto since the Middle Ages, although Jews were then permitted to leave the ghetto during the day and participate in the business of the general community. The purpose of the Nazi ghetto, however, was to create a total confinement for the Jewish population, turning entire neighborhoods into a prison unlike the ghettos of centuries past. The Nazis hoped that the wretched ghetto conditions would deplete the Jewish population quickly and naturally through starvation, disease and cold. The ghetto also served as the holding area for eventual transport to the death camps for those who were able to survive.

Ghetto inhabitants in many areas were forced to become slaves for German industry. Factories were built alongside or within ghetto walls so that industries could take advantage of this free labor. The administration of Jewish life was the responsibility of the Jewish Councils, the Judenräte.

Life in the ghetto was abominable, and thousands died. There was no medicine. The food ration allowed was a quarter of that available for the Germans, barely enough to allow survival. The water supply was contaminated in many ghettos. Epidemics of tuberculosis, typhoid, and lice were common. Bodies of new victims piled up in the streets faster than they could be carted away. In the Warsaw ghetto, more than 70,000 died of exposure, disease, and starvation during the first two winters. Almost all of those who survived the Warsaw ghetto were either killed when the ghetto was razed in 1943 or died in the death camps.

**Theresienstadt Ghetto**

The Theresienstadt ghetto was established by the Nazis in an 18th century fortress in Czechoslovakia on November 24, 1941. More than 150,000 Jews passed through the ghetto during its four-year existence, which was used as a holding area for eventual murder in Auschwitz. By 1943, rumors began circulating in the international community that the Nazis were exterminating Jews in gas chambers, and that the conditions of the ghettos did not permit survival. The Nazis rebuilt parts of this ghetto to serve as a "showpiece" for propaganda purposes. Flower gardens were planted in the ghetto. Shops, schools, and a café were built. When an investigating commission of the International
Red Cross came to visit, they did not see a typical ghetto. In July 1944 the Nazis made a documentary propaganda film about life in this ghetto. After the movie was completed, most of the Jewish "actors" were shipped to their death at Auschwitz.

**Wannsee Conference**

At the Wannsee Conference on January 20, 1942 in Wannsee, a Berlin suburb, the details of the "Final Solution" were worked out. The meeting was convened by Reinhard Heydrich, who was the head of the S.S. main office and S.S. Chief Heinrich Himmler's top aide. The purpose of the meeting was to coordinate the Nazi bureaucracy required to carry out the "Final Solution," which provided for:

- Deportation of Jews to killing centers.
- Immediate death for those who were unable to work or the very young, the old, and the weak.
- Segregation by gender of the remaining Jews.
- Decimation through forced labor with insufficient nourishment.
- Eventual death for the remnant.

**Concentration Camps**

The Nazi concentration camps were established beginning in 1933 for the purpose of imprisoning political opponents. After the "Night of the Long Knives", authority and management of the concentration camps was turned over to the S.S. The S.S. expanded the concentration camp system, and used these facilities to warehouse other "undesirables," including hundreds of thousands of Jews. Dachau, Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen were among the first concentration camps built by the Nazis near Munich, Weimar, and Berlin respectively.

Upon arrival at a camp, the inmates were usually stripped of all their valuables and clothes. They were then shorn of body hair, disinfected, given a shower, and issued a striped prison uniform without regard to size. Each step of the process was designed to dehumanize the prisoners, both physically and emotionally. Each prisoner was given a number. At Auschwitz, for example, the number was tattooed on the arm, but some camps did not tattoo their inmates.

Life in the camps was a living hell. As described by Judah Pichl in "Years of the Holocaust: The Factual Story," which appears in The Jewish Catastrophe in Europe, a typical day in the life of a concentration camp inmate began at dawn, when they were roused from their barracks which housed 300-800 inmates each. Their "beds" were bunks of slatted wood two and three tiers high. Frequently three to four prisoners shared each bunk, not permitting space enough for them to stretch out for normal sleep. The inmates were organized into groups to go to the toilets, marched to a distribution center for a breakfast consisting of some bread and a liquid substitute for tea or coffee, and then sent out to work for 10-14 hours in mines, factories, and road or airfield building, often in
sub-zero weather or the severe heat of summer. They were subjected to constant physical and emotional harassment and beating. The inmates' food rations did not permit survival for very long. Those who resisted orders of the guards were shot on the spot. Numerous roll calls were held to assure that no prisoners had escaped. If one did attempt an escape, all of the inmates suffered for it.

**Death Camps**

The German skill in adapting the 20th century techniques of mass production was applied in engineering the "Final Solution." In 1941, the engineers of the "Final Solution" utilized these same principles to cheaply and efficiently murder millions of Jews and other "undesirables." The plants established to carry out this mass murder were the death camps.

Unlike concentration camps, death camps had no barracks to house prisoners, other than those for workers at the camps. In order to process the murder of thousands of people, great pains were taken to deceive the victims concerning their fate. Jews deported from ghettos and concentration camps to the death camps were unaware of what they were facing. The Nazi planners of the operation told the victims that they were being resettled for labor, issued them work permits, told them to bring along their tools and to exchange their German marks for foreign currency. Food was also used to coax starving Jews onto the trains. Once the trains arrived at the death camps, trucks were available to transport those who were too weak to walk directly to the gas chambers. The others were told that they would have to be deloused and enter the baths. The victims were separated by sex and told to remove their clothes. The baths were in reality the gas chambers. The shower heads in the baths were actually the inlets for poison gas. At Auschwitz, the gas chambers held 2,000 people at a time. With the introduction of a cyanide-based gas called Zyklon B, all 2,000 occupants could be killed in five minutes. As a result of this technological "advancement," Auschwitz was able to "process" the death of 12,000 victims daily. Before the bodies were removed by workers with gas masks and burned in crematoria, the teeth of the victims were stripped for gold, which was melted down and shipped back to Germany. Innocent victims were exploited and desecrated to a degree unknown in human history.

Unlike the death camps of Treblinka, Chelmno, Sobibor, and Belzec, which were built and operated solely to kill Jews, the two death camps of Maidanek and Auschwitz also had a work camp attached. Upon arrival at these two camps, a selection was made at the train station concerning which Jews (about 10 percent of the arrivals) would be permitted to live and escape immediate gassing in the gas chambers. These "lucky" survivors were permitted to live only to the extent that they endured the physical and emotional trauma inflicted upon them. They were given a food ration that permitted them to survive for only three months. As they died from exhaustion, beatings, and starvation, they were replaced with newly arrived victims. Auschwitz was also used as the site for medical experimentation. Many of these experiments had little scientific value but were only exercises to discover how much torture a victim could endure until death. By the end of
1944, an estimated two-and-a-half million Jews had died at Auschwitz. More than a quarter of a million Gypsies also died there.

**Einsatzgruppen or "Special Action Squads"**

Specially trained units of the S.S. followed the first wave of German army troops in the invasion of the Soviet Union (June 1941). Their orders were to execute on the spot all Communists, Jews, and Gypsies. It is estimated that by the end of 1942, they had killed more than a million Soviet Jews. These victims were shot or loaded into enclosed trucks modified for the introduction of carbon monoxide to asphyxiate its victims. An additional 400,000 were killed by other S.S. units, anti-Semitic native civilians, police units, and the German army.

**Babi Yar**

The Jews of Kiev were rounded up by the Einsatzgruppen for "resettlement" in late September 1941. Thousands of Jews were brought to a ravine on the outskirts of Kiev and mowed down by machine guns. Many who were not wounded, including thousands of children, were thrown into the pit of bodies and were buried alive. According to an account in The Holocaust by Martin Gilbert, Ukrainian militia men joined in the slaughter. The records of the Einsatzgruppen unit which participated in the executions recorded 33,771 Jews killed at Babi Yar on September 29-30. In all, more than 100,000 persons, most of them Jews, were executed at Babi Yar between 1941-1943 by the Nazis. In the summer of 1943, the bodies were dug out by slave labor and burned to hide the evidence of the slaughter.

**Death Marches**

By the beginning of 1945, the Soviet troops were advancing through Poland. The retreating Germans forced all remaining Auschwitz prisoners to march toward Germany under indescribably cruel conditions. Approximately 20,000 of 58,000 prisoners died en route, from exhaustion, starvation, cold, beatings, and executions by guards.

In his bunker, in the Chancellory building in Berlin, knowing that the war was lost and that the "1,000 Year Reich" had lasted only a few years, Hitler committed suicide hours after marrying Eva Braun. Germany formally surrendered to the Allies on May 7, 1945. By the end of the war, more than 55 million had died and 35 million wounded. Only 17 million of the dead were soldiers.
Nazi Murder of Non-Jews

While the focus of Nazi genocide was unquestionably targeted toward Jews, the Third Reich's policy of mass murder was not restricted to Jews but devastated the ranks of other non-Aryans.

Michael R. Marrus, in his book, The Holocaust in History, writes about the targets of Nazi murder:

"The Nazis murdered between five million and six million Jews during the Holocaust, two-thirds of European Jewry and about one-third of the entire Jewish people. But a staggering 55 million may have perished in all theaters during the Second World War including some 20 million Soviet citizens...five million Germans, and three million non-Jewish Poles...In all, some 18 million European civilians may have died as a result of famine, disease, persecution, and more conventional acts of war.

"Awesome as they are, therefore, numbers do not in themselves prescribe the singularity of the Holocaust. But they provide a clue. For the proportion of European Jews killed during the Second World War, with roughly one of every three civilian deaths in Europe being that of a Jew, was undoubtedly greater than that of any other people, because of the Nazis' policy toward them. Unlike the case with any other group, and unlike the massacres before or since, every single one of the millions of targeted Jews was to be murdered. Eradication was to be total. In principle, no Jew was to escape. In this important respect, the Nazis' assault upon Jewry differed from the campaigns against other peoples and groups; Gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, Poles, Ukrainians, and so on. Assaults on these people could indeed be murderous; their victims number in the millions, and their ashes mingle with those of the Jews of Auschwitz and many other camps across Europe. But Nazi ideology did not require their total disappearance. In this respect, the fate of the Jews was unique."

Gypsies

Approximately a half million Gypsies (a dark-skinned, Caucasian ethnic group targeted by the Nazis) were murdered out of approximately 1.6 million who were living in Europe. The Gypsies in Germany and the occupied territories of the German War machine were subjected to many of the same persecutions as the Jews: restrictive, discriminatory laws, isolation and internment, and mass executions at their camp sites, in labor camps and death camps.

Polish Christians

Of the six million Poles murdered by the Nazis, half were Polish Christians. The Nazis considered the Poles and other Slavic peoples to be sub-human destined to serve as slaves to the Aryan "master race." The Polish intelligentsia and political leadership was sought
out specifically for execution, and other Polish civilians were slaughtered indiscriminately. Among the dead were more than 2,600 Catholic priests.

Ukrainians

Almost four million Ukrainians fell victim to Nazi slaughter, through combat, starvation, and terror, particularly as a result of the efficient Einsatzgruppen. Of these, 900,000 were Jews, according to Bohdan Wytwichky's, The Other Holocaust: Many Circles of Hell.

Other Victims of Nazi Genocide

The Germans rounded up thousands of Jehovah's Witnesses and homosexuals and sent them to the death camps for extermination. Homosexuals were forced to wear pink triangles on their clothing paralleling the yellow Star of David for Jews.

World War II devastated Europe. Railroads, bridges, water systems, sanitation systems, electric lines, and other infrastructure were in ruins. Millions of homes were reduced to rubble. Manufacturing plants, businesses, farms, and other places where people would ordinarily work were unusable. Millions of people who would have been working in those facilities were dead.

Sixty million refugees were made homeless by the war. Millions of other civilians had been caught in the cross-fire of war, unintended victims. And there were an estimated eleven million intended civilian victims, murdered by the Nazis because of their race, religion, sexual preference, physical or mental handicap, ideological opposition, or resistance to Nazi genocide.

After the War

After the surrender of the Nazis, Germany was divided into four zones of occupation, controlled respectively by the United States, Britain, France, and the Soviet Union. Authority over Germany was vested in the Allied Control Commission, composed of representatives of those four victorious nations. The Allies liberated the camps, and what they found there left an indelible impression. The camps were littered with thousands of corpses. The German army had apparently tried to murder as many prisoners as possible one step ahead of the advance of the Allies. Many other thousands of prisoners were found, most of them clinging precariously to life. Most of these victims were literally skin and bones, having wasted away from years of hunger, starvation, and forced labor. Once healthy human beings who had weighed 160 pounds before their deportation now weighed less than 75 pounds. Disease was so rampant that many of the camps had to be burned to the ground to prevent epidemics. Thousands of these survivors were in such poor condition that despite the offering of medical care and sufficient food, they died within days of their liberation.
Displaced Persons (DP) Camps

By the end of World War II, there were eight million persons who had been driven out of their native countries by the hostilities. By the end of 1945, as many as six million were able to return. There remained two million who were unable to be repatriated, and were put into Displaced Persons (DP) camps administered by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. Among them were 50,000 Jews who had been liberated from the concentration camps. Many from Germany or Austria had no desire to return to their homes, and many from other countries had nothing to return to. Entire Jewish towns and villages had been wiped out. Many of these Jews were the sole survivors of large families. The DP camps were for the most part former military camps. Conditions were overcrowded and far from luxurious. Jews who escaped the Nazis by hiding or by fighting in partisan units made their way to the DP camps after the war.

In August of 1945, a report commissioned by President Truman to investigate the status of stateless persons in Europe gave special recognition to the plight of Jews. The President requested that the British grant 100,000 visas to Jews to enter Palestine, under the British Mandate. The British, seeking to limit Jewish immigration, granted only 6,000 visas. But 40,000 other Jews, including 30,000 who had lived in the DP camps, emigrated to Palestine illegally.

Nuremberg Trials

As early as October 1943, the Allies had scheduled formal conferences to discuss future legal actions against German war criminals once the Axis Powers were vanquished. Within weeks after the German surrender, an International Military Tribunal was established in the German city of Nuremberg to try captured Nazi war criminals and other high-ranking Nazis who had eluded capture. The Tribunal consisted of eight judges, two each from the countries of the U.S., Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union. Twenty-one of 24 indicted Nazi leaders stood trial in the first series of what became known as the Nuremberg Trials. The charges brought against these men were conspiracy, crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

Conspiracy - A common plan to commit a crime in the future.

Crimes against peace - Launching a war of aggression.

War crimes - Violations of international agreements governing the conduct of war, such as mistreatment of prisoners, murder, or forced labor of occupied civilian populations.

Crimes against humanity - Committing crimes against people, such as murder, deportation, and religious persecution, regardless of whether the action violated domestic law at the time.
The first trial lasted ten months. Eleven of the defendants were sentenced to death, seven received long prison sentences, and three were acquitted. A year later, 24 more war criminals were sentenced to death, and 117 others received prison sentences. The scope of these trials was limited to punishing those leaders who had instigated and carried out the Nazi master plan to enslave the world. The judges refused to take jurisdiction over individual "barbarities and perversions," which may have occurred, according to the Chief American prosecutor. For many of the defendants, the legal defense was that they were "only following orders." The Nuremberg judges rejected that justification.

Individual nations which suffered under Nazi occupation were encouraged to bring to justice thousands of other war criminals who had committed atrocities against their citizens. Many nations did so, and thousands of other war criminals were sentenced to death or received prison terms. In one celebrated case, Israeli agents tracked down Adolf Eichmann in Argentina and kidnapped him to face trial in Israel. The person most responsible for finding Eichmann was Simon Wiesenthal, who hunted down and brought to justice more than a thousand Nazi war criminals. Eichmann, who was in charge of the Nazi deportation units which sent millions of Jews to their deaths, was tried in 1961 and hanged. This was the only case up to that time in which a Nazi war criminal was tried and accused solely of committing a crime against Jews.

Thousands of Nazi war criminals escaped the clutches of justice, settling in friendly countries and living under assumed identities. The United States government participated in several conspiracies to help war criminals elude justice. Many of these criminals were talented scientists and engineers, and the U.S. government at that time made a policy decision that it was in the interests of this nation to exploit that talent rather than see that justice was done. The U.S. rocket program in the 1950s and 1960s was heavily influenced by the work of German rocket scientists who had participated in war crimes.

Only about 20% of the 150,000 Nazi war criminals were ever put on trial. Millions of others whose complicity was necessary in order to bring about the "Final Solution" and to put the master plan into effect escaped punishment. Today, a half century after some of these war crimes were committed, the search continues to bring perpetrators to trial.
World Response to the Holocaust

In the aftermath of the Holocaust, the civilized world was shocked to see photographs of unimaginable horror; skeletons of victims stacked in piles of hundreds and thousands, living skeletons describing unspeakable brutality and atrocity, and searching for the truth as to what would permit this to occur without intervention. Could an event of this magnitude have occurred without the knowledge of the Allies? If the Allied governments knew this was taking place, why was nothing done? Why was there such deathly silence?

The American press had printed scores of articles detailing mistreatment of the Jews in Germany. By 1942, many of these newspapers were reporting details of the Holocaust, stories about the mass murder of Jews in the millions. For the most part, these articles were only a few inches long, and were buried deep in the newspaper. These reports were either denied or unconfirmed by the United States government. When the United States government did receive irrefutable evidence that the reports were true, U.S. government officials suppressed the information. U.S. reconnaissance photos of the Birkenau camp in 1943 showed the lines of victims moving into the gas chambers, confirming other reports. The War Department insisted that the information be kept classified.

Photographs of mass graves and mass murder, smuggled out under the most dangerous of circumstances, were also classified as secret. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill called for the death camp at Auschwitz to be bombed. He was ignored. Hundreds of thousands of innocent Jews could have been saved had the Allies agreed to bomb the death camps or the rail lines which were feeding them.

Desperate for war material, the Nazis offered the British a million Jews in exchange for 10,000 trucks. When asked why he had refused to negotiate the deal, a British diplomat responded, "What would I do with one million Jews? Where would I put them?"

Escaped prisoners from the death camps filed reports on what was occurring. Again, many of these reports were suppressed.

Eventually, President Roosevelt, under pressure from the public, agreed to issue a statement condemning the German government for its genocidal policy against the Jews. Other support followed. The Pope requested that his diplomats help hide Hungarian Jews. In September 1944, the British bombed factories and the railroad lines of Auschwitz.

Could actions of the Allies have prevented the Holocaust or limited the destruction of six million Jews and five million other innocent civilians? There is no question that the silence and inaction of the world community in the face of irrefutable evidence resulted in the senseless loss of millions of lives.
Jewish Resistance to the Nazi Genocide

Millions of Jews were ordered to board trains and were locked in until the trains arrived at an unknown destination. Thousands worked in forced labor. Millions of others led a brutal existence in concentration camps, slowly wasting away as musselmen until they died. Questions have been raised as to whether the Jews went like sheep to the slaughter, or whether there was resistance. Since the death camps required the work of Jews in order to make the camps function efficiently, the question has also been raised as to whether Jews share some of the responsibility for the horror of the Holocaust.

For most of the Jews who died in the gas chamber, the issue of resistance was not an issue at all. Until as late as mid-1942, the Jews were unaware that the Final Solution was being implemented. Stripped of weapons, facing starvation and disease, the prospect of deportation combined with offers of food was an incentive for Jews to board the trains which took them to their deaths. Most believed what they were told that they were going to be relocated to work. For virtually all, the reality that they faced immediate death did not occur until the doors of the gas chambers were sealed, the lights were turned off, and the smell of gas was perceived. By then, it was too late. Those who did resist, either by running from the trains, or attacking their captors, faced certain death. Some took advantage of this option and were summarily executed on the spot. Others chose to take their own lives when faced with the hopelessness of the situation. It might be argued that suicide under these circumstances was itself resistance.

For others, deciding not to commit suicide but rather to make an attempt at survival amidst the hopelessness and despair of this situation was their resistance. Those that resisted more actively found that any success resulted in unintended consequences. The Nazis practiced the doctrine of collective responsibility. Thus, if a Nazi soldier was murdered by a Jew, not only was that Jew executed, but also his family, and perhaps a hundred other Jews. As a result, few Jews even considered carrying out this active resistance for fear of reprisals.

Spiritual Resistance in the Ghettos

While there were examples of courageous armed uprisings in the ghettos, resistance also took forms without weapons. For many, attempting to carry on a semblance of "normal" life in the face of wretched conditions was resistance. David Altschuler writes in Hitler's War Against the Jews about life in the ghettos, which sustained Jewish culture in the midst of hopelessness and despair.

"All forms of culture sustained life in the ghetto. Since curfew rules did not allow people on the street from 7 p.m. until 5 a.m. the next morning, socializing had to be among friends living [in] the same building or visitors who spent the night. Card playing was very popular, and actors, musicians, comics, singers, and dancers all entertained small groups who came together for a few hours to forget their daily terror and despair."
Artists and poets as well entertained, and their works, many of which survive today, are poignant reminders of the horrors of the period (see Appendix II). Underground newspapers were printed and distributed at great risk to those who participated. Praying was against the rules, but synagogue services occurred with regularity. The education of Jewish children was forbidden, but the ghetto communities set up schools. The observance of many Jewish rituals, including dietary laws, was severely punished by the Nazis, and many Jews took great risks to resist the Nazi edicts against these activities. Committees were organized to meet the philanthropic, religious, educational, and cultural community needs. Many of these committees defied Nazi authority.

Some Jews escaped death by hiding in the attics and cellars and closets of non-Jews, who themselves risked certain death if their actions were discovered by the Nazis.

The writings and oral histories of survivors of the labor and concentration camps are filled with accounts of simple sabotage. Material for the German war effort, for example, might be mysteriously defective, the result of intentionally shoddy workmanship by Jewish slave labor.

Despite the myth to the contrary, Jewish armed resistance to the Holocaust did occur. This active resistance occurred in ghettos, concentration camps, and death camps. Many of those who participated in resistance of this type were caught and executed, and their stories will never be told. However, there are many verifiable accounts of major incidents of this resistance:

**Armed Ghetto Resistance**

1. **Tuchin Ghetto**: On September 3, 1942, seven hundred Jewish families escaped from this ghetto in the Ukraine. They were hunted down, and only 15 survived.

2. **Warsaw Ghetto**: By 1943, the ghetto residents had organized an army of about 1,000 fighters, mostly unarmed and without equipment. They were joined by thousands of others, mostly the young and able-bodied, still needed for forced labor. By that time, the half-million original inhabitants had been depleted to about 60,000 as a result of starvation, disease, cold, and deportation.

In January 1943, the S.S. entered the ghetto to round up more Jews for shipment to the death camps. They were met by a volley of bombs, Molotov cocktails, and the bullets from a few firearms which had been smuggled into the ghettos. Twenty S.S. soldiers were killed. The action encouraged a few members of the Polish resistance to support the uprising, and a few machine guns, some hand grenades, and about a hundred rifles and revolvers were smuggled in.

Facing them were almost 3,000 crack German troops with 7,000 reinforcements available. Tanks and heavy artillery surrounded the ghetto. General Himmler promised Hitler that the uprising would be quelled in three days, and the ghetto would be destroyed. It took four weeks. The ghetto was reduced to rubble following bomber
attacks, gas attacks, and burning of every structure by the Nazis. Fifteen thousand Jews died in the battle, and most of the survivors were shipped to the death camps. Scores of German soldiers were killed. Some historical accounts report that 300 Germans were killed and 1,000 wounded, although the actual figure is unknown.

3. Bialystok Ghetto: Jewish paramilitary organizations formed within the ghetto attacked the German army when it was determined that the Nazis intended to liquidate it. The battle lasted just one day, until the resisters were killed or captured.

4. Vilna Ghetto: Some inhabitants of the Vilna Ghetto began an uprising against their Nazi captors on September 1, 1943. Most participants were killed, although a few escaped successfully and joined partisan units.

Armed Resistance in the Death Camps

1. Treblinka: Seven hundred Jews were successful in blowing up the camp on August 2, 1943. All but 150-200 Jews perished, as well as over 20 Germans. Only 12 survived the war.

2. Sobibor: Jewish and Russian prisoners mounted an escape attempt on October 14, 1943. About 60 of 600 prisoners involved in the escape survived to join Soviet partisans. Ten S.S. guards were killed and one wounded.

3. Auschwitz: On October 7, 1944, one of the four crematoria at Auschwitz was blown up by Sonderkommandos. These were workers, mostly Jews, whose job it was to clear away the bodies of gas chamber victims. The workers were all caught and killed.
The Question of Jewish Complicity

Judenrat

As far back as 1933, Nazi policy makers had discussed establishing Jewish-led institutions to carry out anti-Jewish policies. The concept was based upon centuries-old practices which were instituted in Germany during the Middle Ages. As the German army swept through Poland and the Soviet Union, it carried out an order of S.S. leader Heydrich to require the local Jewish populace to form Jewish Councils as a liaison between the Jews and the Nazis. These councils of Jewish elders, (Judenrat; plural: Judenräte), were responsible for organizing the orderly deportation to the death camps, for detailing the number and occupations of the Jews in the ghettos, for distributing food and medical supplies, and for communicating the orders of the ghetto Nazi masters. The Nazis enforced these orders on the Judenrat with threats of terror, which were given credence by beatings and executions. As ghetto life settled into a "routine," the Judenrat took on the functions of local government, providing police and fire protection, postal services, sanitation, transportation, food and fuel distribution, and housing, for example.

Jewish leaders were ambivalent about participating in these Judenräte. On the one hand, many viewed these councils as a form of collaboration with the enemy. Others saw these councils as a necessary evil, which would permit Jewish leadership a forum to negotiate for better treatment. In the many cases where Jewish leaders refused to volunteer to serve on the Judenrat, the Germans appointed Jews to serve on a random basis. Some Jews who had no prior history of leadership agreed to serve, hoping that it would improve their chances of survival. Many who served in the Judenrat were arrested, taken to labor camps, or hanged.

When the Nazis required a quota of Jews to participate in forced labor, the Judenrat had the responsibility to meet this demand. Sometimes Jews could avoid forced labor by making a payment to the Judenrat. These payments supplemented the taxes which the Judenrat levied to finance the services provided in the ghettos. Underground Jewish organizations sprang up in the ghettos to serve as alternatives to the Judenrat, some of which were established with a military component to organize resistance to the Nazis.

Kapos

The German concentration camps depended on the cooperation of trustee inmates who supervised the prisoners. Known as Kapos, these trustees carried out the will of the Nazi camp commandants and guards, and were often as brutal as their S.S. counterparts. Some of these Kapos were Jewish, and even they inflicted harsh treatment on their fellow prisoners. For many, failure to perform their duties would have resulted in severe punishment and even death, but many historians view their actions as a form of complicity. After the war, the prosecution of Kapos as war criminals, particularly those who were Jewish, created an ethical dilemma which continues to this day.