



The Enemy I Knew: German Jews in the Allied Military in World War II

By Steven Karras



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Even Elie Wiesel, the Nobel Prize winning survivor of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, struggles with the question: Why didn't the Jews fight back? And finally, in view of the circumstances--even now, who would believe what was happening?--he concludes that the question is "not why all the Jews did NOT fight, but how do many of them DID. Tormented, beaten, starved, where did they find the strength--spiritual and physical--to resist?" In fact, over 10,000 German Jews—34 percent of the refugee population between the ages of eighteen and forty—fought in the allied armies of World War II.

This book honors those European-born Jewish combat veterans of World War II--refugees from the Nazi regime in Germany and Austria who faced their persecutors by joining the Allied Forces in a fight against the country of their birth. These twenty-seven interviews take readers into the unique and harrowing experience of German and Austrian Jews who served as Allied soldiers in North Africa and Europe--brave men and one woman whose service restored a sense of dignity and allowed them to rise above their former victimization at the hands of Nazi oppressors. All burned with anger at the Germans who had subjected them, often as young children, to cruelty in everyday life in their hometowns, and to ridicule in the national media. As soldiers who knew the language and psychology of the enemy better than any of their comrades, they struck back with new-found pride against the rampant injustice that had annihilated their families, destroyed their prospects, and subjected many of them to the worst forms of physical abuse, both random and terrifying. In *The Enemy I Knew* they tell their stories, and the world is richer for their heroic acts, and for their testimony.



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Even Elie Wiesel, the Nobel Prize winning survivor of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, struggles with the question: Why didn't the Jews fight back? And finally, in view of the circumstances--even now, who would believe what was happening?--he concludes that the question is "not why all the Jews did NOT fight, but how do many of them DID. Tormented, beaten, starved, where did they find the strength--spiritual and physical--to resist?" In fact, over 10,000 German Jews--34 percent of the refugee population between the ages of eighteen and forty--fought in the allied armies of World War II.

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Editorial Review

Review

Publishers Weekly

"Few stories can rival the ones told in *The Enemy I Knew*."

***Library Journal* (Starred Review)**

"This is a collection of 27 first-person combat accounts, sought out by the author, from German and Austrian Jews who served in the Allied Armed Forces in North Africa and Europe. These men (and one woman) had emigrated as children or young adults to the United States or Great Britain between 1937 and 1941. All of them jumped at the chance to fight the Nazis, and all served in combat (the woman was an ambulance driver). One man served in both the European and the Pacific theaters and returned to Germany in 1946 for occupation duty. These accounts, all newly published, are filled with terror and a simple courage, with a feeling of a duty fulfilled. Recommended."

Military Heritage

"Imagine fleeing Nazi Germany because of one's Jewish faith and then returning during the war as a member of the Allied forces. Author Steven Karras began interviewing Jewish refugees in 1999 who had fled Nazi persecution because of their religion and come to the United States and Great Britain, only to find themselves being inducted into the military and returning to their homeland. Following the oral-history format, Karras selected 27 individuals to interview for his book. One became a U.S. commando and actually liberated his own parents from a Nazi concentration camp. Another soldier was assigned to military intelligence and later questioned a former classmate who was serving in the German Army. Each vignette describes the individual's early life in German or Austria and his subsequent military service."

The Jewish Tribune

"Steven Karras has avoided what could have been a dry academic analysis of the motives of German Jews for fighting in Allied armies against the Nazis. Rather, he has produced a collection of twenty-seven personal interviews in which people recall their emotions more than fifty years after World War II...The tales of battle are mind-boggling, as young men risked life and limb for an ideal....the narratives are fascinating."

The Daily News

"Heroic, poignant and heartbreaking, it is a compelling book. Some of the memoirs, especially those concerning escape from Germany, provide graphic pictures of the desperation that the Jewish community felt in the late 1930s, especially after Crystal Night, when the Nazis were closing and there were very few places to flee."

America in WWII

"...the unique background of these 27 veterans give *The Enemy I Knew* value for students of Jewish

experiences before and during the war, as well as devotees of war stories."

Accent on Tampa Bay Magazine

"This book is a tribute to the overlooked men and women who risked everything to help rid the world of evil."

Intermountain Jewish News

"In prose, the first-person accounts are riveting and illuminating, shining a light on a little-known dimension of the vast and complex story of World War II. The veterans who bear witness to their wartime experience are sometimes direct and blunt in their descriptions, often eloquent and philosophical and always fascinating...If you're looking for powerful expressions of heartfelt patriotism—the kind that only personal experience can create—look no further than *The Enemy I Knew*. There is drama aplenty...After reading *The Enemy I Knew*, one is forced to conclude that the legendary Greatest Generation was even greater than we realized."

The Jewish Review (Portland, OR)

"For all those who have not heard this story at their father's or grandfather's knee, and for anyone who has considered the question, 'Why didn't the Jews fight back?' this book is essential."

North County Times

"A sort of real-life version of the film 'Inglourious Basterds' without the baseball bats, the oral history *The Enemy I Knew* lets more than two dozen Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria who served in the U.S. and British militaries in Europe during World War II tell their stories. The larger themes may be familiar, but the story of Jews who fought back against their oppressors -- who returned home in the conquering army -- is uplifting in the face of the horror of the Holocaust...The stereotype of the weak Jew, going meekly to his fate in the death camps, is put to rest here. Those Jews who had the ability to fight back surely did -- often in the uniform of the United States or Great Britain. (3 out of 4 stars)."

HistoryMike Blog

"*The Enemy I Knew* is an important contribution to the literature of the Holocaust and the Second World War, and I recommend the book to scholars and general readers alike. The book contains quite a few fascinating images not previously published, and readers will gain a much greater sense of this form of Jewish resistance to Nazi efforts to exterminate Jews and their culture."

Bookviews

"A little known story of WWII was the role of German Jews and it is told in *The Enemy I Knew* by Steven Karras. Though the Nazis rounded up and killed six million Jews, some German and Austrian Jews who had fled the Nazis were inducted into the Allied forces. The stories of 27 of them, including gripping recollections from Henry Kissinger, former US Secretary of State, are documented. They displayed

incredible courage.”

The Jewish Magazine

"This is not a dry academic analysis of the motives of German Jews to fight in Allied armies against the Nazis. Rather, this is a collection of twenty-seven personal interviews in which people recollected their emotions more than fifty years after World War II. Some of those relating events are known, such as Henry Kissinger. Most, however, are faceless Jews who stepped forward to serve their newly found country in time of need."

From the Inside Flap

The Enemy I Knew is a collection of twenty-seven first-person accounts from European-born Jewish combat veterans of World War II. All were refugees from the Nazi regime who fled Germany and Austria in humiliation and fear, then faced down their persecutors by joining the Allied military to fight against the country of their birth.

Serving in North Africa and Europe, these brave men, and a brave woman, gained a sense of dignity and vindication that enabled them to rise above their victimization at the hands of Nazi oppressors. All burned with anger at the Germans who had subjected them to cruelty on the playgrounds and streets of their native towns and to ridicule in radio broadcasts, movies, and newspapers.

Adolf Hitler's initial intention had been to drive every last Jew out of Germany. He implemented policies so hostile toward Jews that they would have little choice but to emigrate. Starting with a nationwide boycott of all Jewish businesses in 1933, the Nazi persecution of Jews rapidly grew harsher. They were expelled from government jobs, their children forced out of school, their assets confiscated. Enforcement came from the vicious Sturmabteilung—the “stormtroopers” or “brownshirts.” Hundreds of thousands of Jews fled.

But Hitler was creating his worst enemy. These refugees knew the psychology of the enemy better than anyone else in the Allied armies. They knew Germany deep down—its countryside, its people, its language and dialects, its cities and streets. As Great Britain and the United States entered the war, the refugees were eager to fight. They struggled to overcome their adopted countries' distrust of Germans and got their chance to strike back against the Third Reich.

From the Back Cover

The first mortar shell I ever fired, when I came to Anzio, was a white phosphorus shell that landed in a

ditch with five German soldiers in it. When some troops came back from the field, they said, “Hey, you fired the shell down there? Nice shooting buddy, you got five of ’em.” I felt a little queasy in a way, but then I figured that I am fighting a war and I am here because I wanted to be. Also, I felt that this was my job, and this was my way of coming back at the Germans for what they did to me. I didn’t know at that time if my parents were alive or not because they were trapped still in Germany and living in a hell under the Nazis.

But I was a Jewish boy fighting against an enemy that I knew, an enemy that was responsible for arresting, deporting, and killing my people. Refugee soldiers who were drafted or volunteered fought against the Nazis with fervor because they were our hated enemy and were responsible for us losing friends and relatives in concentration camps, through terror and beatings long before the ovens came. I still had vivid memories of Kristallnacht a few years earlier in 1938 and the pleasure most Germans got out of burning synagogues and businesses, dragging Jews through the streets. Fighting the Germans went very deep for me; I wasn’t going to give an inch.

—Eric Hamberg, Chapter 4

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Angela Hampton:

Reading a publication tends to be new life style in this era globalization. With examining you can get a lot of information that could give you benefit in your life. Along with book everyone in this world can easily share their idea. Books can also inspire a lot of people. Plenty of author can inspire their particular reader with their story or perhaps their experience. Not only the storyline that share in the publications. But also they write about advantage about something that you need example. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your sons or daughters, there are many kinds of book that you can get now. The authors on earth always try to improve their expertise in writing, they also doing some study before they write to their book. One of them is this The Enemy I Knew: German Jews in the Allied Military in World War II.

Glenn Pryor:

Reading can called thoughts hangout, why? Because if you find yourself reading a book specifically book entitled The Enemy I Knew: German Jews in the Allied Military in World War II your thoughts will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in most aspect that maybe unidentified for but surely might be your mind friends. Imaging every word written in a publication then become one form conclusion and explanation in which maybe you never get previous to. The The Enemy I Knew: German Jews in the Allied Military in World War II giving you a different experience more than blown away your head but also giving you useful information for your better life with this era. So now let us present to you the relaxing pattern this is your body and mind will likely be pleased when you are finished looking at it, like winning a sport. Do you want to try this extraordinary spending spare time activity?

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