LEARNING UNIT

BIOGRAPHIES

LEARNING MATERIALS

EXERCISE:

Give a presentation of the person's life story.
In doing so, look at the period before, during and after the German occupation of Greece.

Use the following questions to help you:

- What impact did the German occupation have on his life?
- How would you describe his personality?
  What makes him unusual?
- What questions would you ask him?
- Did the person speak about their experiences after the war?
  Why do you think they did or didn't do that?

SAM COHEN'S STORY

Samuel (Sam) Cohen was born in Thessaloniki in November 1922. He was the second son of David Abraham Cohen and Sarah, née Samuel Gategnio. His father was an estate agent. After the death of his father in 1930, Sam's mother worked at home as a seamstress to feed the family. She was religious and celebrated all the Jewish religious holidays with her two sons. Sam was very close to both his mother and his brother. After taking his final exams at the French school (lycée) in 1939, Sam worked for an import company that represented foreign pharmaceutical companies. The family lived first in Kolokotroni Street and later moved to 54 Filippou Street in the centre of Thessaloniki.

On 11 July 1942, the German occupiers order all Jewish men to assemble in Liberty Square in Thessaloniki in order to deploy them as forced labourers in various locations in northern Greece. Sam Cohen is one of them. He is released, however, because among the firms his office represents are two German pharmaceutical companies, Merck & Co. and Knoll. In February 1943, the Jewish population are moved into ghettos. Sam is taken with his mother and brother to the ghetto in the city centre.

In April 1943, when his best friend Tzako Karasso and other Jewish men are conscripted as forced labourers, Sam Cohen decides to follow him. During the selection process, when the German guards are not looking, he changes places with Tzako's brother Alberto. He and Tzako are transported to Karya. There, the two friends toil under harsh conditions in a cutting on a rocky mountainside. After around one month in Karya, Sam and Tzako flee the camp. At the end of a night shift, they hide behind a small wagon (mine cart) and escape south through the tunnel. After a few days they reach Kastri, where the villagers put them in touch with the partisans. The two friends join the armed resistance against the German occupiers. Sam takes over as administrative head of the ELAS (ETA – Epimelitia tou Andarti) partisans in the Sperchiada region. As part of his duties, he is in charge of procuring food, weapons and munitions. He also takes care of Jewish refugees arriving from Athens in the partisan-controlled territories in central Greece after September 1943.

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Sam Cohen returned to Thessaloniki in 1945. During the civil war, he served in the Greek army from 1946 to 1951. After he was discharged, he decided to live in the USA. Apart from the prospect of a better life, another reason for Sam's decision was the persecution encountered by former Jewish resistance fighters in the anti-communist climate of the civil war. When he emigrated to the USA, he automatically lost his Greek citizenship.

In the USA he married Micheline Gattegnio (born in Paris in 1928). They had three sons, Bernard Dave (1956–2021), Philip Albert (born 1958) and Jerome Mark (born 1963). In 1953, he and his family moved to San Antonio, Texas.

In 1960, he submitted an application for compensation, which was refused. The period of imprisonment in camps in Greece was not recognised by the German side. The German Government maintained that there were no camps in Greece. Eventually, a few years before he died, he started receiving around 350 dollars a month. In 1997, he gave a comprehensive biographical interview to the Visual History Archive of the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation. It is one of two testimonies in the archive from survivors of forced labour in Karya.

Sam Cohen died in San Antonio, Texas, in 2014.

Quellen

Interview with Sam Cohen, 2 November 1997, USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview Code 34795

Interview with Sam Cohen, Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library, Reference HVT-1258

Certificate for Sam Cohen, Jewish Community Thessaloniki, 21 April 1950, Archive of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki (IAIKTH)

ADDRESS BY JEROME COHEN

Sam Cohen's son gave this address at the opening of the exhibition »Karya 1943: Forced Labour and the Holocaust« on 4 September 2024 at the Nazi Forced Labour Documentation Centre, Berlin

The story that I came to share with you is one of survival. The survival of two young Jewish men, tied to each other by the bonds of friendship and comradery. I know this story well and I know it to be true because it is the history of my father, Sam Cohen and Jacques Carasso (Tsako Karasso).

The story starts, as many a biography begins, with a date of birth: November 22, 1922, and a place of his youth: Salonika. The Germans invaded Greece in April of 1941 by crossing through Bulgaria and Salonika quickly fell. Laws were soon put into place to restrict Jewish culture and life and a full campaign of antisemitic propaganda was instituted. My father said that all Jews had to register with the government. Being a good citizen, he followed the decree and went to Liberty Square in the town as directed. When he witnessed innocent Jews being beaten for no apparent reason, he left without registering.A subsequent decree required Jews to register at the Talmud Torah Hebrew school. Despite his mother's belief that it was safe, my father again saw the brutality and left without registering.

In 1943, another decree required all Jews to wear a yellow star. My father described Salonika as a »sea of yellow stars«. Propaganda claimed that Hitler planned to create a Jewish state and that Jews would be temporarily deported to Krakow until the war ended. The chief rabbi, Dr. Koritz, was coerced into urging Jews to comply with orders.

The next step was to confine the Jews to ghettos, with cramped quarters — one family per room. Initially, my father believed the Nazi propaganda. However, the true plan was to deport Jews to Auschwitz or forced labor camps in Greece. As Jews moved in and out of the ghetto, many were randomly taken away.

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My father and his friend Jacques Carasso had made a pact never to be separated. When Jacques and his brother were moved to a separate ghetto near the train station, Jacques' father asked my father to trade places with Jacques' brother so that one of his sons could stay with him. My father agreed instantly, even though his mother tried to convince him not to go. He hastily packed his backpack and put his pants over his pajama pants. With Jacques' (Tsako Karassos) father, my father went to the ghetto and asked a guard if they could say goodbye to his »cousin«. The guard agreed, and as my father hugged Jacques' brother, they switched places. My father covered his head with a hood, and Jacques' brother walked out with his father while my father stayed behind with Jacques. Their bond was inseparable.

After a day in the ghetto, they were boarded onto a rail car and told to leave their belongings, which would be sent separately. The conditions were miserable, with no room to lie down. They traveled for three days without food or waterThey arrived in Karya, a place my father described as »the most dreadful in the world«. The work was grueling: 12-hour shifts with picks, shovels, and jackhammers, digging through a mountain to create a supply route for the German army. The rocks were sharp, and my father's shoes soon disintegrated. He cut his jacket sleeves to reinforce what was left of them.

Once, a train of Italian soldiers passing thru, the jews would beg for food as they stopped at the rail station. As Jacques was begging for food, a German guard hit him with the butt of his gun on the back of his head causing him to fall on the rail tracks, knocking out all his front teeth. Despite this, my father and Jacques shared their food and comforted each other, always staying together.

One day, a young boy working next to my father injured his arm. The German Officer instructed him to work faster, pointing his rifle at the young boy's head. As the young boy pleaded for mercy the soldier shot the boy blowing his brains out. My father, covered in the boy's blood and brains, realized then that he had to escape to survive. Despite everything, he never lost his compassion for humanity or his determination to survive.

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Guards would throw cigarette butts on the ground, and Jewish prisoners would scramble for them. My father never wanted the butt even though he was a heavy smoker. One day, a guard threw a butt toward my father's feet and told the others it was »for Cohen«. My father, looking straight in the eyes of the guard, stepped on it with his bare feet, refusing to pick it up. This defiance led to his first severe beating. The next day the same guard threw a butt at my fathers feet, he was broken and picked up the cigarette butt and smoked it.

At the camp, the prisoners were grouped 4–6 people per group, and if one tried to escape, the others would be shot. My father had already decided that he would escape with Jacques. He told the others in his group of his plan, not wanting to bear the guilt if they were harmed. He told them to go ahead and escape before him. That night, someone betrayed my father, while sleeping the guards beat my father until he could not cry anymore, he was severely beaten. His prayers changed from hope for life, he prayed for death, but Jacques comforted him and kept their bond alive. They devised a plan.

On a moonless night, during shift change when the opportunity arose, they hid behind rail cars that were used to transport the mountain debris, until the guards passed. They ran through a tunnel and kept running all night. They rested during the day and ran at night for days, with no shoes and tattered clothes.

Eventually, some children spotted them and told the adults of two unknown people in the plains. At that point they didn’t know their fate, or whether they would be turned into the Germans? The adults took them in and gave them food and water.

Shortly thereafter they made their way to the general headquarters of the Greek resistance. They were enlisted in ELAS, the fighting arm of the Greek resistance, with a communist affiliation. They fought on the front lines, and one commander asked that the »Jew with the pajama pants« help secure food for the troops.My father kept a bullet in his pocket, vowing to use it on himself if he was ever captured again. He recounted stories of ambushing the enemy and handling logistics. At one point, he was shot, with a bullet lodging near his heart. As a child, I always noticed a scar under his armpit, but he never explained it until after a heart attack in 1981, the doctors questioned us as to what the foreign object was that was lodged into his heart. When he was well enough, he told us the story of being shot while fighting for the partisans.

My father loved sharing stories of his time in the resistance but rarely spoke of Karya. It is important that his story is told, and I encourage you all to listen to his testimony on YouTube. I want to thank Jacques Carasso (Tsako Karasso) for being the best friend anyone could have and Andreas Assael for without his extensive research and determination we would not be here and this story would be forgotten.

Sam Cohen was a true hero; he was too humble to boast about himself. He was a hero in Salonika when as a young man he kept a promise of friendship, he was a hero in Karya when he survived a brutal beating and escaped, he was a hero in the Resistance and as I grew up with him, I watched him positively influence the lives of so many people that he was a hero to all.

I feel guilty that it took me 60 years to find the determination to tell my father's story of the atrocities and hardships he faced, and I thank you here today for listening to his story and giving me the opportunity to share it. For this is truly the story of a man who never lost his humanity in an inhumane time.

TZAKO KARASSO'S STORY

Iakovos (Tzako) Karasso was born in Thessaloniki on 25 May 1922. He was the second son of Joseph Karasso and Vida, née Abraham Sefiha. He had two younger siblings, Berta and Albertos. Tzako attended the French school (lycée) in Thessaloniki. After graduating in 1940, he worked at the dye works that had been run by his family since 1880.

In April 1943, the family was moved to the Baron Hirsch ghetto, where Tzako Karasso was selected for forced labour. On 17 April, he was deported by German collective transport to Karya. His long-time school friend Sam Cohen was also on the transport.

In Karya, Tzako Karasso works at the mountain cut, where he experiences not only severe working conditions but also the brutality of his guards. One day, a supervisor hits his head so hard with a rifle butt that he falls head first and loses several teeth. After about a month in Karya, Tzako and his friend Sam Cohen decide to escape. Tzako buys a large piece of bread from a German guard using a 50-dollar note he had hidden in his shoe. Under cover of darkness, they escape and head south, running downhill through the tunnel. For a night and a day, the pair cut across country in a south-westerly direction. Tzako Karasso is exhausted and has great difficulty walking. They survive off the bread and the fruit and vegetables they find in the fields. At the first village they reach, they initially tell the community leader they are refugees from the Bulgarian occupation zone. Only later do they admit to being Jews – Tzako shows the villagers the yellow star he ripped off and kept in his pocket.

The villagers bring the two Jews to the nearest partisan outpost, where they are taken in and sent to Makrakomi, a town in ELAS-controlled territory. Both Tzako Karasso and Sam Cohen join the resistance. Tzako Karasso signs up for the 36th Regiment of the XII ELAS Division, which around the same time enrols other Jews who have escaped from the nearby OT construction site at Lianokladi. Tzako continues fighting as a partisan against the German occupying forces until the occupation ended in October 1944.

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After the war, he returned to Thessaloniki. He was the sole member of his family to survive. His parents and siblings, Albert and Berta, were murdered in the extermination camps. In Thessaloniki, he resumed his work as a dyer. He married Allegra Matalon (1930–2020) in 1950. The couple had two children. Tzako Karasso died in Thessaloniki in 1990.

Sources

Interview with Sam Cohen, 2 November 1997, USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview Code 34795

Sam Cohen Holocaust Interview, Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies

Yale University Library, Reference HVT-1258

Certificate for Iakovos Karasso, Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, 23 June 1950, Archives of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki (IAIKTH)

Archive of the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (KIS), File 71, Albertos Saul, letter to KIS, 7 April 1988

Email correspondence with Solon Karasso (son of Iakovos Karasso)

Interview with Solon Karasso, audio documentary produced by WDR 5 (German broadcaster) Neugier genügt – das Feature (Curiosity is enough – the feature) 21 April 2024, ARD Audiothek (last accessed 29 November 2024)
www.ardaudiothek.de/episode/wdr-5-neugier-genuegt-das-feature/karya-toedliche-ns-zwangsarbeit-in-griechenland/wdr-5/13328627/

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ADDRESS BY BERTA CARASSO

Adress by Tsako Karasso's daughter at the opening of the exhibition »Karya 1943: Forced Labour and the Holocaust« on 16 October 2024 at the Benaki Museum, Athen

Ladies and Gentlemen, Honored Guests,

Thank you all for being here today to honor the memory of the 400 men who were deported at the forced labor camp of Karya. It is heartwarming.

My name is Bertha Carasso, granddaughter of Karya labor camp survivor Jacko Carasso. I bear the name of a Holocaust victim—his sister, who, along with my grandfather's family, perished in Auschwitz. Thanks to his and his best friend, Sam Cohen, I have the privilege of standing before you today.

The story I want to tell you today is one of humanity and hope. It's one that has marked the person that I aspire to be today. But it's one that I saw to its full dimension in my early thirties.

From a very young age as Jews of the diaspora we have been taught about the horrors of the Holocaust. Unfortunately, in our city, most of these horrors were only kept quietly in the minds of the victims and between the echoes of a city that didn't embrace and accept it's own history and trauma.

After years of peaceful existence in Thessaloniki, during the 1943 deportations, my great-grandfather's two sons, Jacko and Alberto, were selected for transfer to the labor camps because of his business activities. To keep his younger son, Alberto, in Poland with him, my grandfather's best friend, Sam Cohen, decided to take Alberto's place. So, in the spring of 1943, the two friends were sent to Karya, where, along with 400 other Jews, they worked under brutal conditions, cutting through a mountain to make space for a railway line. The conditions were dire: they worked 12 hours a day with almost no water, surviving on moldy bread and cabbage soup.

Unable to endure it any longer and knowing their fate in Karya, the two friends decided to escape. One night, during a shift change, they stayed behind and hid, eventually fleeing through the cliffs. With the help of a village teacher, they reached the partisans and later fought against the occupiers. It wasn't only their determination but the actions of others that help them make it.

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Listening to Sam's interview and what Andreas Assael discovered is testament to these two young men's magnificent power of friendship, grit, and the willingness to live. Our ancestors endured the dark hours so that my family and many others can exist today. This is what I want to hold on to. Even in darkest times, there is light – and the power of humanity can prevail.

This is crucial now more than ever. We need to remember and talk about Holocaust testimonials, in the face of rising antisemitism and Holocaust denial.

These stories are not just historical facts; they are accounts of human endurance and the triumph of the human spirit against oppression. By remembering, we honor their memory and ensure that such stories keep the Holocaust memory alive, the memory of all those people that were living once normal lives like us.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to Andreas Assael for his relentless efforts over the past 20 years, and to my father, who has always supported Andreas in uncovering these stories. I also want to thank the Cohen family, without whom we would not have been able to piece together this history, and to all the researchers involved in preserving this vital legacy.

Lastly, to Jacko and Sam I want to say: we made it, we survived and we are still surviving.

ISAK KOENKA'S STORY

Isak Koenka, son of Moses and Rachel, was born in Thessaloniki in 1913. He had a brother named Maurice. Around 1930, Isak Koenka graduated from the Alliance Israélite Universelle, a French grammar school traditionally attended by many Jews from Thessaloniki. When German troops occupied Thessaloniki in 1941, 28-year-old Isak Koenka was living at 7 Deligiorgi Street and working for the oil company Steaua Ltd. The company was soon forced to close, leaving Isak Koenka unemployed. Little is known about his life during the occupation. On 11 July 1942, he was among nearly 9,000 Jewish men ordered by the local Wehrmacht commander, Lieutenant General Curt von Krenzki (1888-1962), to assemble at Liberty Square in Thessaloniki to register for forced labour.

Along with the entire Jewish population of Thessaloniki, Isak Koenka was moved to a ghetto towards the end of February 1943. In late March 1943, along with other Jewish men aged between 16 and 55, he was arrested in the ghetto and deported from Thessaloniki to work as a forced labourer in Karya. There he was made to carry out back-breaking excavation work. In a memoir from 1954, Isak Koenka describes his forced labour: »Life there was dreadful, there was little to eat, we were given 500 grams of bread. We had to work hard, under the constant supervision of three Germans as well as Croats and Romanians, 12 hours a day with just a one-hour break. We were treated so badly that to me, Karya seemed like hell on earth. Later, when I was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau with its gas chambers, I thought it was paradise compared to Karya. In fact, the guards of Karya were permitted to kill any Jew. One man who was struggling to haul a mine cart was shot by the foreman. Other foremen were even more sadistic. One killed a Jew hauling a mine cart by stabbing him in the back with a bayonet.«

Isak Koenka escaped from the camp on 6 August 1943. The following day, the camp was evacuated, the Jewish forced labourers were taken to Thessaloniki and soon afterwards deported to Auschwitz. Isak Koenka managed to make his way to Athens, where he hid for eight months under a false identity. On 24 March 1944, he was discovered during a raid by the German SS security services and detained

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along with 700 other Jews from Athens in the synagogue building in Melidoni Street, before being sent later that day to the Haidari concentration camp near Athens. Nine days later, the SS deported him to the extermination camp at Auschwitz, along with around 5,000 Jews from western, central and southern Greece. His prisoner number is 182484.

Isak Koenka survives and in June 1945 returns to Thessaloniki, where he lives until his death in 1989. He neither marries nor has children. In 1954, the Jewish community of Thessaloniki asked Isak Koenka for information about the camp and forced labour in Karya. He wrote down his experiences in Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) on 1 November 1954. This was the first known report about forced labour in Karya. It is now kept in the Archives of the Jewish Community Thessaloniki.

Sources

Personal details and report by Isak Koenka, 1 November 1954, Archives of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, folder 1618.

REPORT BY ISAK KOENKA FROM 1 NOVEMBER 1954

Historical Archives of The Israeli Community of Thessaloniki, Folder 1618.

I was born in Thessaloniki in 1913 and was 28 years old when the Germans invaded. At that time, I was working for Steaua Petrolios Ltd, an oil company. As a result of the German invasion, the company closed down and I lost my job. In July 1943, all men over the age of 18 were registered for forced labour and had to leave the city.
In March 1943, I was sent to Karya, near Lianokladi, where a railway line was under construction. Life there was dreadful, there was little to eat, we were given 500 grams of bread. We had to work hard, under the constant supervision of three Germans as well as Croats and Romanians, 12 hours a day with just a one-hour break. We were treated so badly that to me, Karya seemed like hell on earth. Later, when I was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau with its gas chambers, I thought it was paradise compared to Karya. In fact, the guards in Karya were permitted to kill any Jew. One man who was struggling to haul a mine cart was shot by the foreman. Other foremen were even more sadistic. One killed a Jew hauling a mine cart by stabbing him in the back with his bayonet. These things happened all the time, it was how it was, the guards were always ready to shoot. I stayed in Karya-Lianokladi until 6 August 1943. Brutality in the camp resulted in the murder of between 45 and 50 Jews. They were buried at a spot 500–600 metres to the right of the station building heading towards Athens. Before I arrived in Karya there were about 250 Jews there. Up until that point, there had been few deaths, no more than 4 or 5 … But death rates increased rapidly from then on because workers were exhausted. Eventually, at the beginning of August, ordinary labourers – Christians – were brought in to complete the unfinished work. The last of the Jewish workers in Karya-Lianokladi were deported to Poland on 8 August 1943.

Thessaloniki, 1 November 1954.

Source

USHMM, RG-45.011, IKTH-00323-00068,
Statement by Isak Koenka, 1 November 1954.
Translation (Ladino to German): Andreas Assael.

SAM NACHMIAS'S STORY

Sam Nachmias was born in Thessaloniki on 31 August 1920. His parents, Rafael and Eriketi (Riketa), née Ilias Skapa, had three other children: Ester, Ida and Dora. In 1940, Sam graduated from a commercial college and then worked as a baker and confectioner together with his father. The family owned a two-storey house at 27 Pavlou Mela Street in the centre of Thessaloniki.

After the start of the war and the German occupation of Thessaloniki in April 1941, Sam initially continued working as baker and confectioner. In late February 1943, the family was moved to a ghetto, then in mid-April transferred to the Baron Hirsch ghetto. On 15 April 1943, presumably just a day after their arrival, the Germans, aided by the Jewish ghetto police, searched the camp looking for able-bodied men. Sam was one of those selected for transportation to Karya as a forced labourer. When interviewed by Andreas Assael in 2004, he spoke about the raid: »It was early morning, around five o'clock, when they took us to the washrooms, which were somewhere nearby. We washed ourselves, then they shaved our heads. Our clothes were disinfected with high-pressure cleaners [pest control]. They then took us straight to the railway wagons.« The young men arrived at Karya station a few days later.

In the same interview, Sam Nachmias also described his arrival and the living conditions: »When we got off the train, each of us was given an empty tin to eat out of and another to pee into, because we weren't allowed to leave the barracks at night. One day, one of the men forgot his clean tin and had to eat out of the dirty one. We had our own blankets, but not our backpacks – they had been stolen.«

In Karya, Sam Nachmias is put to work on a mountain slope, where he hauls heavy mine carts loaded with rubble to the spoil heap. One day, his legs are badly injured in a rockfall. Instead of being shot, as happened to many other Jews who were injured or completely exhausted, he is sent to a clinic in Lamia. In the interview in 2004, Sam supposes he got this lucky break because Hans Rössler, the engineer overseeing the construction site, had taken a liking to him and his work group. The Karya construction site is closed down in August 1943, and the forced labourers are taken back to Thessaloniki. Sam is still being treated in Lamia at this time. A nurse helps him

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escape from the hospital. Charalambos and Chrysanna Morikis and their family take him in and hide him in the attic of their bakery. As a qualified baker, Sam Nachmias gets a job in the bakery and lives under a false name in Lamia until the German troops withdraw at the end of October 1944. He even acquires a false passport in the Christian-sounding name of Dimosthenis Dimitriadis.

In December 1944, Sam Nachmias returned to his house in Pavlou Mela Street in Thessaloniki. He was the only member of his family to survive. His parents and three sisters were murdered in a German extermination camp. In 1946, he married Auschwitz survivor Sara Sarfati (born 1927) from Thessaloniki. Their daughter Riketa was born in the same year. When Andreas Assael was researching the history of forced labour in Karya, Sam was one of the most important contemporary witnesses. David Sion, another survivor of forced labour in central Greece, had drawn Assael's attention to Sam Nachmias. It was one of the first occasions on which Sam talked about his experiences in Karya. Previously, he had hardly ever mentioned the subject of forced labour. Not even his own family knew what he had gone through in Karya. Sam Nachmias died in Thessaloniki in 2016. He kept in touch with the Morikis family until the end of his life.

Sources

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Chrysanna Morikis, daughter of Napoleon and
Maria Papalexis-Morikis, email, 4 September 2023.

ADDRESS BY ALBERTO SASSON, SAM NACHMIAS'S GRANDSON

At the opening of the exhibition »Karya 1943. Forced labour and the holocaust« at the Nazi Forced Labour Documentation Centre, Berlin

Ladies and gentlemen,

my daughter Erika and I would like to thank the Nazi Forced Labour Documentation Centre and the Foundation Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe for hosting the »KARYA 1943. Forced Labour and the Holocaust« exhibition and for graciously inviting us to attend.

We are here as the descendants – grandson and great grand-daughter – of Sam Nachmias, one of only a handful of the 400 Jewish workers to survive the inferno of Karya. He was born in Thessaloniki on 15 September 1920. His family owned two confectionery shops in Thessaloniki that were expropriated by the Nazi city administration. On 25 April 1943, the family was arrested and confined to the Baron Hirsch ghetto. The Germans set up a blockade in the ghetto with the help of their treacherous Greek-Jewish collaborators. During the blockade, Sam hid behind a trapdoor in the hut that housed the family in order to avoid forced labour. This was otherwise the fate that awaited single men. His one aim was to remain with his parents and sisters so they would have him as protector in the new life in Poland promised by the occupiers.

After his arrest, the wealthy father of Rofel Nachmias was interrogated and tortured by two Jewish traitors Edgar Kunio and Leon Zion, forcing him to reveal Sam's hiding place and hand over the family's valuables (gold and jewellery). Sam's parents and three sisters were deported to Auschwitz. None of them survived. As a single man, Sam Nachmias was taken to work as a forced labourer for Organisation Todt at Karya station in Fthiotida. The task of the Jewish workers incarcerated there was to excavate a cutting in the rocky mountainside and to build a bypass track that would improve the passage of Nazi trains between Athens and Thessaloniki.

The working conditions were inhumane. With their bare hands, without proper clothing, shoes or tools and with little food or water, the prisoners were made to perform work that anyone visiting Karya would consider not humanly possible. But the prisoners' will to live

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and their belief in the Nazi lie – that they would return to their families when the camp was closed down – gave them the strength to carry out this task. Unfortunately, the few that made it to the end were sent to Auschwitz and murdered. There were just a handful of survivors – fewer than twenty. Sam Nachmias was one of them. In July 1943, he injured his leg and hip in a rockfall while working at the site. Surprisingly, he was not executed by the guards for being unfit to work. Instead, they sent him to a hospital in Lamia, where he underwent an operation and was hospitalised for six weeks. Luckily for him, the Germans forgot he was there and never came to look for him.

With the invaluable assistance of a nurse by the name of Kunanos, Sam escaped from the hospital and made contact with the family of Charalambos and Chrysanna Morikis, who ran a bakery in the centre of Lamia. Both Sister Kunanos and the Morikis family risked their lives by harbouring a Jew and helping Sam escape.

Charalambos Morikis hid Sam in the attic of the bakery until Charalambos' son Napoleon obtained a forged passport for him in the name of Demosthenes Dimitriades. During these nights in the attic, the family's youngest son, Epaminondas, stayed with the Karya escapee to protect him. Once he had the fake passport, Nachmias worked in the bakery until the end of the war. Having saved Sam's life, in spite of the risk to themselves, the Morikis family was awarded the honorary title »Righteous Among the Nations« by Yad Vashem in 1990. When the war ended, Sam returned to Thessaloniki. He found almost none of his family's possessions. All that remained of the two fully equipped confectionery workshops were the machines for making halva. In 1945, he married Sarah Sarfati (1926–2004), the only member of her family to survive Auschwitz-Birkenau. His daughter was my mother Riketta, who was born in 1946. My sister Sandra Sasson and I are his grandchildren. He had the good fortune to live long enough to meet his three great grandchildren: Erika, Euthenia and Noah. Having lost his wife Sarah in 2004, he remained in Thessaloniki until 2008 and was then looked after at the Restion care home in Athens until his death on 30 November 2016.

Sam Nachmias never talked to his daughter or grandchildren about his abduction or forced labour in the Karya camp. As family members, we knew only of the stories he related himself – his admission to hospital in Lamia, his escape and subsequent rescue by the family of Charalambos and Chrysanna Morikis. He used to enjoy such reminiscing, but his gratitude towards his rescuers was always in the foreground. And in the decades that followed he made a point of expressing his gratitude. He would often visit Lamia and remained in close contact with the extended Morikis family, who saw him not only as a friend but as a member of the family. As a result, he campaigned for the family to be awarded the honorary title »Righteous

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Among the Nations« by the State of Israel. It was only by chance – thanks to the historical research carried out by Andreas Assael – that our family learned of our grandfather's imprisonment in Karya. As soon as Andreas Assael came into possession of the Karya photograph album, he started looking for survivors. He first found David Sion, a forced labourer on the neighbouring construction site in Lianokladi. It was he who gave Assael the name of Sam Nachmias, the only prisoner he knew to have survived Karya.

In his search for Sam Nachmias, Andreas Assael contacted Sam's daughter Riketta, my mother. He then met with Sam and obtained his first and only eyewitness statement in 2004. He showed him the photographs and Sam explained what they meant. Based on these photos, Sam told Assael his story and the story of all 400 Jewish prisoners in Karya. He did this only once. After that, he never spoke about Karya again. Even though we tried to talk to him about it as a family – and despite Andreas Assael's requests for a second meeting – Sam repeatedly refused. All my family knows about Grandpa Sam's imprisonment is what he revealed to Andreas Assael in their one and only meeting.

Why he refused to speak again about this time we will never know. At least that's what I think. I can only speculate. Ever since I was young, we thought it was my grandmother who suffered most in our family under the German occupation and the Holocaust. She was the only member of the large Sarfati family to survive Auschwitz-Birkenau and she told her story early on both to her family and to the Jewish community in Thessaloniki. Her eyewitness statements and video interviews can be found in the Archives of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, the Jewish Museum of Greece and the Spielberg Foundation. But there is no testimony from her husband Sam Nachmias, except for the statement given to Andreas Assael and the documents Sam signed in 1990 to support the award of the honorary title »Righteous Among the Nations« to the Morikis family.

In my opinion, my grandfather kept his silence because as a prisoner in a Greek forced labour camp he did not have a tattoo – unlike his wife, who was a prisoner at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Because he had no tattoo, no one asked questions. And since he wasn't asked, he never spoke about it. Until that day he agreed to talk to Andreas Assael – the day that saw the start of historical research into the camp in Karya. And this research has brought us all here this evening. In conclusion, allow me once more to thank the Nazi Forced Labour Documentation Centre and the Foundation Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe for organising this exhibition.

ADDRESS BY ERIKA SASSON, SAM NACHMIAS'S GREAT GRANDDAUGHTER

At the opening of the exhibition »Karya 1943. Forced labour and the holocaust« at the Nazi Forced Labour Documentation Centre, Berlin

Good evening.

My name is Erika Sasson. I am the great granddaughter of Sam Nachmias, who was a prisoner at the Karya forced labour camp in Fthiotida, Greece.

In 2022, when I was 13, I visited the site of martyrdom and suffering where my great grandfather was imprisoned. The image of a mountain sliced in half remains etched in my memory. With childlike astonishment, I found it hard to believe that work like this was possible without the use of machinery. More shocking still is the image of a beautiful grassy landscape that hides one or more as yet undiscovered mass graves, where those of my unfortunate compatriots who did not survive the inhumane living conditions and forced labour are buried.

My visit to the Karya camp was a lesson for life. A lesson about the true strength of humankind. Strength that enables people with a will to survive to perform tasks that are unimaginable under normal circumstances. Strength that empowers people, whose aim is to return to their loved ones, to overcome any physical obstacle.

The visit also taught me the reverse side of this life lesson. I learned what people are capable of doing to their fellow human beings simply because they are of a different religion, ethnic background or nationality. It is a lesson about how easy it is for people to cease being human. The story of the arrest and imprisonment of my great grandfather and the terrible fate suffered by his family shows the extreme depths to which humanity can sink. On the other hand, the story of his escape and rescue is evidence of the heights to which humanity can aspire. Both lessons are drawn from the same year. 1943.

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81 years on from these events, it is my duty and that of my generation to keep alive the memory of the past. Now more than ever, since the number of those who lived through the Holocaust is vanishingly small. And soon, when they are no longer with us, the onus will be on the younger generation to shoulder the responsibility. As eyewitnesses become fewer and fewer, it falls to the younger generation to bear witness to their history. Even though Holocaust survivors are still alive today, the voices that call the Holocaust into question are becoming ever louder. And in many countries of the world, there are political and military leaders who find reasons to spread misinformation and incite people to antisemitic hatred. With antisemitic values increasingly commonplace and antisemitic behaviour ever more aggressive, I ask myself whether after 81 years humankind has learned nothing from the catastrophe brought about by National Socialism.

So, it is incumbent on my generation to keep alive the memory in both respects.

On the one hand, the memory of the horrors of the Nazi final solution, the Holocaust that ensued, and the responsibilities of the Nazi forces of occupation and their corrupt and traitorous local collaborators in all countries under German occupation. And on the other hand, the selfless expression of humanity shown by those who risked their lives and the lives of their families to protect Jews from certain death by offering them refuge.

This exhibition, opened this evening in the presence of this 15-year-old, is a perfect way to help keep such memories alive. As a descendant of a prisoner of the Karya camp – and above all as a Greek Jew – I would like to thank all those who have contributed to organising this exhibition.

THE STORY OF THE ARDITTI BROTHERS

Jakob, Veniamin and Schmuel Arditti were brothers. Jakob was born in 1916, Veniamin in 1921, and their younger brother Schmuel was born on 19 November 1924. Their father was Joseph Arditti (1885–1943) and their mother Dudoun Agustari (1890–1943). The family had five children: Ida (1912–1943), Adela (1914–1943), Jakob (1918–1979), Veniamin (1921–1943) and Schmuel (1924–1977). The house they all lived in was at 30 Pavlou Mela Street. The family took great care to ensure all members received a good education. The brothers' grandfather, Samuel Raphael Arditti, was chief rabbi. Father Joseph was a qualified nurse and medical assistant, Jakob worked at a pharmacy and Ida was a teacher of French and English.

In 1939, Jakob is called up to the Greek army and in 1940–41 sees action in the Greco-Italian War. After leaving school, Veniamin studies physics at the University of Thessaloniki. During the occupation, Schmuel begins a degree in agriculture at the same university. In the summer of 1942, Jakob, Veniamin and Schmuel Arditti are drafted into forced labour and sent to the Tekeli (Sindos) labour camp, where underground fuel depots were housed. In October, they are able to return to their families.

But in February 1943, the family is forced to move to a friend's house at 21 Velissariou Street and then a short time later to the Baron Hirsch ghetto. They are housed in an apartment near the ghetto synagogue. Life in the ghetto is traumatic for Schmuel. In an interview from 1966 he recalls witnessing the execution of two Jewish merchants there. They had been captured attempting to escape.

On the afternoon of 16 April 1943, the Germans – with the help of the Jewish ghetto police – select men for forced labour. Those arrested, including the three brothers Shmuel, Jacob and Veniamin Arditti, are herded into a café surrounded by a barbed wire fence, where they spend the night. According to Schmuel, 470 men are arrested in total; Jakob's testimony, given during a post-war trial against the Jewish ghetto police in July 1946, puts the number at 225. Shortly before dawn, the men are taken to another location where they are made to take a bath containing disinfectant. They are ordered to leave their suitcases and backpacks behind. Afterwards, instead of returning to the ghetto, they are taken directly to the nearby railway station. Schmuel Arditti must board the train without his personal belongings. He later recalls travelling in just a short-sleeved shirt.

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The train journey – destination unknown to the detainees – lasted almost two days. The transport finally arrived in Karya on the morning of 20 April. There, the deportees met up with 250 other Jewish forced labourers from Thessaloniki, who were already in very poor health. Schmuel was appalled by conditions at the construction site. The barracks were full of lice and there was no drinking water. On the first night, he saw a German guard kill two young Jews in cold blood.

Veniamin and Jakob Arditti had to carry out back-breaking mining work. Schmuel also worked initially on the mountain cut, breaking rocks and removing rubble. But he had it easier compared to his brothers, because Hanns Rössler, the German engineer in charge of the construction site, chose him as his assistant. As Schmuel later recounted, he took measurements and cleaned Rössler's accommodation. This meant he was able to steal dog food and secretly pass it on to his two brothers, who ate it out of hunger and desperation.

On 1 May, Schmuel Arditti recognises his university chemistry professor Kavasidis on one of the passenger trains that stops in Karya. The two manage to have a brief conversation. The professor throws Schmuel a piece of bread and shouts: »I knew this man when he was a student, he was my best student.« Other passengers also throw Schmuel pieces of bread – about 20 of them land on the ground beside him. The German engineer, who is watching the scene, allows Schmuel to take the bread with him. Schmuel takes it to a barracks housing around 40 sick prisoners and distributes it among them.

In early August 1943, the Germans closed down the construction site at Karya and deported the forced labourers – the Arditti brothers among them – to Thessaloniki. The three returned to the Baron Hirsch ghetto for just a few days, before being deported on the nineteenth and final transport to leave Thessaloniki for Auschwitz on 10 August. Schmuel Arditti recalls: »We set off at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. It was unbearably hot. They loaded us into the wagons just as we were. I remember I didn't even have a jacket, I was wearing a short-sleeved shirt and shorts … Everyone was in a very bad way, dirty and sick. They sprayed disinfectant in the wagons. Some died on the ten-day journey to Poland.«

The three brothers reach Auschwitz together. Veniamin Arditti is already very weak. Along with most of the men on the transport, he is murdered by the SS in a gas chamber immediately upon arrival. Jakob and Schmuel Arditti were deemed fit for work and sent to the camp. They were given prisoner numbers 136922 and 136923. In October, Schmuel and 500 other Jews from Thessaloniki were transferred to the Warsaw concentration camp. They were made to carry out clean-up work on the site of the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw. To prevent escape attempts, the Greeks were divided into groups mixed with Polish labourers to stop them communicating with one another.

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While working there, Schmuel Arditti found a tin of money, some of which he managed to hide before the tin was taken from him. He would later use the money to pay a Polish civilian labourer to bring him food each day. Unlike Schmuel, the Pole was able to move around freely. Schmuel Arditti managed to escape following the Warsaw Uprising on 1 August 1944. However, he was soon recaptured and imprisoned at transit camp 121 Pruszków. He was liberated by the Red Army in January 1945.

Schmuel is reunited with his brother Jakob, who also survived. They return together to Thessaloniki on 4 November 1945, as is recorded in documents kept by the Jewish community of Thessaloniki. They are the family's only survivors. Like Veniamin, their parents and sisters were murdered.

Schmuel Arditti tries to enrol once again at the university's agricultural college to continue his studies. But he is not accepted on account of the political situation: as a resident of the Soviet zone during the liberation of the camps, he is considered a communist. He and Jakob leave Thessaloniki and travel to Athens, where they find accommodation among the Hakhshara community in Fragokklisia (a transit camp on agricultural land that prepared people for emigration to Palestine). In July 1946, the two brothers emigrate to Palestine aboard the Haviva Reik. Schmuel Arditti spends some time living on a kibbutz. In 1948, he takes part in Israel's War of Independence. He later moves to Tel Aviv, where he owns and runs a textiles business. Schmuel Arditti died in 1977 at the age of 53. His brother Jakob Arditti died two years later. Nothing more is known about him, as only Schmuel Arditti spoke about forced labour, imprisonment in a concentration camp and his life thereafter.

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DAVID BROUDO'S STORY

David Broudo was born in Thessaloniki on 13 May 1924. His parents were Mordechai Broudo and Miriam, née Isaac Levi. The Broudos were a deeply religious Sephardic family. David's grandfather Emanuel Broudo (1867–1921) was a rabbi in Thessaloniki, his father a rabbi at the Beit Saul Modiano synagogue in the Misrachi district of Thessaloniki and his uncle a rabbi at the synagogue in the working-class Jewish Quarter 151, also in Thessaloniki. David's elder brother Simantov (1916–1943) was cantor and shochet, which means he was responsible for ritual animal slaughter. David had ten siblings: Emanuel, Isaak, Simantov, Samuel, Michael (Michalis), Daisy, Zanna, Ida, Josef and Matilde. The family lived in modest circumstances, at first in the working-class Jewish Quarter 151, where David grew up, and later in the Misrachi district.

On 9 April 1941, German troops occupied Thessaloniki. The German occupiers plundered Greece ruthlessly. For the population of Thessaloniki, the occupation meant acute food shortages, which hit the city's poorer population groups particularly hard. In 1942, David Broudo completed his studies at the Alliance Israélite Universelle, a French grammar school traditionally attended by many Jews in Thessaloniki. To make ends meet, he polished shoes. Constantly hungry, he broke into German warehouses to get food. In February 1943, the Germans decreed that all Jewish families must move into the ghettos, the Broudo family included. In early March, David's elder brother Michael escaped from the Baron Hirsch ghetto. He joined the National Liberation Front (EAM), a resistance organisation, and fought as a partisan in the Greek People's Liberation Army (ELAS), the armed wing of the EAM in western Macedonia.

In mid-April 1943, David Broudo is one of around 250 men conscripted from the Baron Hirsch ghetto for labour duties and transported to Karya. Another group had been taken there a few weeks earlier. In an interview in 1995, David described their dire physical condition: »Extremely arduous work. We had to drill through rocks with pneumatic jackhammers. When they took me there, I saw those that had come before. If someone had said to them ›Run away, go home‹, they wouldn't have had the strength to do it.«

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One day, his cousin Alberto dies on the construction site and David has to bury him with his own hands. David himself is not required to do hard manual labour. As he speaks French, he is sent to work in the kitchen, where OT personnel from francophone Alsace are also deployed. David enjoys the trust of the guards and one day is sent with his friend Roberto Mitrani by train to Lamia to buy food and medicines.

The two take their chance and escape. On 17 June 1943, they board a train going south to Lamia. Shortly before reaching the city, they jump from the train and continue their journey on foot. Near Molos, they come across groups of partisans who take them to an ELAS battalion based in the village of Ano Agoriani. They are fighting in the Italian-occupied Parnass mountains. There, the two friends join the partisans.

David Broudo is ready to fight and soon takes part in his first attack on German occupying troops in Gravia Amfissa Street. When the Italians capitulate on 8 September 1943, he acts as interpreter in the negotiations with Italian officers who want to surrender with their units to ELAS. In December 1943, he is put in charge of the administrative section (responsible for organising supplies for the troops) of the ELAS Parnassida battalion. As leader of a group of 20 men, he organises numerous food and weapons transports throughout the region stretching from Arachova to Athens, often to German-occupied villages and provincial towns. On two occasions, his group confiscates trucks belonging to the International Red Cross that are taking milk to Mandra, near Athens. The captured milk churns are used to smuggle rifles, machine pistols and ammunition back to partisan territory. In 1984, the commander (Greek: kapetan) of the ELAS Parnassida battalion, Dimitris Dimitriou (cover name: Nikiforos) wrote in an affidavit that David »was most courageous in the execution of all his missions. His daring and ingenuity were exemplary.«

After ELAS was demobilised in February 1945, David Broudo returned to Thessaloniki. From his family of 13, only he and his brothers Michael (1920–?) and Samuel (1915–1979) survived, the latter by going into hiding in Athens.

During the Greek civil war, David Broudo's activities with the partisans sealed his fate. In autumn 1945, he was arrested by the Greek police and charged with shooting political opponents of EAM. He was sentenced to death in October 1945. The sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment and then again, in 1952, to 20 years in prison. He served his time in Averoff, Amfissa and other prisons. He was eventually banished to the island of Gyaros. The Greek security services considered him an »incorrigible communist«. Under a Greek-Israeli

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special agreement, he was released and his Greek citizenship immediately revoked. Accompanied by two Greek policemen, he was led away in handcuffs and deported by plane to Israel. For the first few months, David had no work and was unable to earn his keep. He had to rely on help from other Greek Jews who were already in Israel. One of those who helped him was Ido Simshi, his former ELAS comrade from Thessaloniki.

For a short period, David lived in the Beit Alfa kibbutz. At the end of the 1950s, he moved to Jerusalem to study at the Ulpan language school. Afterwards he worked as an insurance broker, first for 20 years at the Phoenix insurance company and then as a freelance broker until his retirement in 2000. In 1959, David married Rachil Nechama (1930–2012) from Jerusalem. She was a saleswoman in a clothes shop in Jerusalem's city centre. They had three sons: Moti (1960), Jakov (1963) and Itzhak (1967).

David Broudo returned to Greece only once, in 1975, after the fall of the Greek military dictatorship (1967–1974). In most of the interviews he gave he talked openly of the bitterness he felt about his experiences in the Second World War, under the German occupation and during the Greek civil war that followed. He also deplored the lack of recognition accorded to former resistance fighters by the State of Israel. In a written statement at Yad Vashem in the 1970s, he always referred to the German occupiers only as »criminals«. He died in Jerusalem in 2012.

Sources

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4. Moti Broudo (son of David Broudo), email to Iasonas Chandrinos, 10 September 2023.

TEXT BY KOBI BROUDO, DAVID BROUDO'S SON, ABOUT HIS FATHER (SOCIAL MEDIA POST/EMAIL)

Memories of my father from my childhood:

Having been subjected to the evil of the Nazis and their collaborators, some of them Jews, my father always found it very difficult to trust people and make new friends. On the other hand, he was fiercely loyal towards his partisan comrades, and the friendships he made there were unconditional.

My father loved to watch animated cartoons and documentaries as well as westerns, which we enjoyed together.

I always had a great fondness for Greek culture, perhaps because we had a lot of long-playing records in Greek. In fact, as a child I was fascinated by Greek songs and by Zorba the Greek in particular.

My father attached great importance to technical skills and professional integrity. I tried not to disappoint him; after many attempts, I finally managed to beat him in a game of chess.

My father didn't enjoy small talk or superficial conversation, so I would always be as succinct as possible when talking with him.

When I was young, he taught me about the important things in life – taking care of one's health, knowing what to eat, finding ready solutions to problems large or small. He taught me the importance of learning as much as possible, working hard and earning enough to avoid depending on others for help, God forbid. He taught me to make sure that my mother and her children always had what they needed and to prioritise basic needs over luxury. He taught me how to lead a modest and happy life.

THE RESCUE OF THE ASSEL FAMILY

Ida and Markos, Andreas Assael's grandparents, lived in Thessaloniki with their three children, Fred-Iossif (1919–2006), Sarah-Janine (born 1923) and Rachel-Loulou (1925–2007). They owned a factory for household goods in Frangon Street in the city centre.

Fred Assael attended the German school in Thessaloniki. When Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933, Markos removed Fred and his sisters from this school and sent them instead to the French school (lycée). Fred studied chemical engineering and afterwards worked at the Xenakis cooking-oil factory in Thessaloniki.

A German officer was billeted in the Assael's house in Vassilissis Olgas Street. He warned Markos about the deportations to Germany. The oil factory where Fred worked was requisitioned by the Wehrmacht. On 11 June 1942, Jewish men were required to attend an assembly in Liberty Square where they were registered for forced labour. While there, Fred was roughed up by Laskaris Papanaoum, who was known in the city as a collaborator. Max Merten, head of the German military administration in Thessaloniki, issued Fred with a certificate confirming that his work at the oil factory was essential to the war effort. As a result, he avoided being taken to a forced labour camp in 1942. However, shortly afterwards, the family had to move into the ghetto, where they lived in a house in Papakyriazi Street on the corner of Crete Street (Martiou ghetto). Markos Assael sold all his goods for a total of 150 English gold pounds before they could be confiscated.

After the war, Fred Assael told his story: »It was 30th April 1943. On that day, my family, my parents and my two sisters left the small apartment on the ground floor … in the ghetto, and went into hiding elsewhere.« While Fred was at work, he was ordered by a Jewish ghetto policeman to accompany him to the offices of the SS Sonderkommando (special unit), which was responsible for organising the deportation of the Jewish population in Greece. There, Fred was brutally beaten by Alois Brunner, head of the Sonderkommando. Brunner wanted to know why his family was no longer in the ghetto. As Fred was not wearing a yellow star, he was first sent to the Jewish community to get one.

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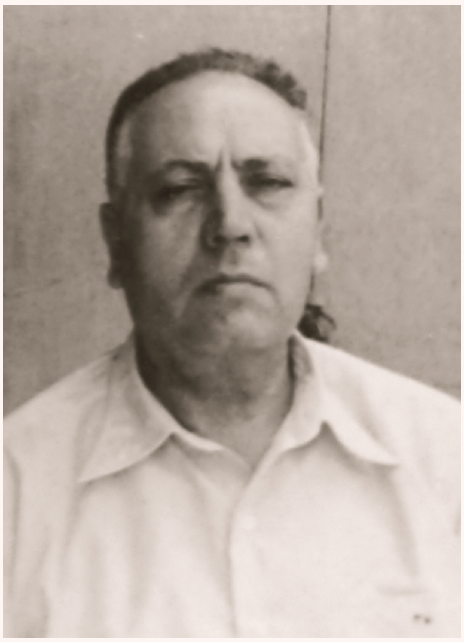
Fred and his sisters at their family home before the war, right to left: Loulou, Fred and Janine.



Markos Assael after the war

The SS villa in Velissariou Street, 2006.

Brunner's office was on the ground floor on the right next to the entrance.

Back in Brunner's office, Fred Assael showed courage. Later, he told his son Andreas: »I produced the certificate from Merton confirming that as a chemist I was needed for oil production, and said: ›You have ordered me to come here and beaten me, but you will be responsible for the fact that 10 tons of oil will go to waste because I am not there to supervise the processing. And if you don't believe me, call the military administration officers.‹« Fred was on good terms with these officers. Before he was summoned to the SS offices, they had agreed between them that they required his services. When Brunner called, the officer confirmed that there were production problems and demanded that Fred return to his workplace.

Fred also said that Brunner had given him his word that if he came back the next day with all his family, each of them would receive papers allowing them to stay in Thessaloniki. Fred returned the following day, but only with his parents. For this, Fred's father Markos Assael was immediately whipped. When Ida stepped in front of her husband to protect him, she was also beaten. Fred Assael could only look on helplessly. Brunner let Fred go; his parents had to stay. Fred did not want to leave without them and was beaten. In the end, they were all permitted to leave. Manolis Koniordos, a friend of the family who had already hidden the sisters, waited in the ghetto apartment for Fred Assael and his parents. They went into hiding the same night. Manolis took the Assaels to Maria Voudouroglou. Maria bought her house with the money she earned as a domestic worker at the British embassy. The Germans arrested her in 1941 and interrogated her for hours to obtain information about the British embassy. She received blows to the face, her nose was broken. This awakened in her a deep hatred of the Nazis.

She sheltered British soldiers who had become separated from their units during the German invasion of 1941 in order to save them from German captivity. This was courageous, the penalty was death. Maria and her son Antonis took in Markos and Ida Assael and their three children. The seven of them were able to cover the cost of rent and food thanks to the gold coins. Maria had to buy beans, lentils and other groceries in separate shops so that no suspicion arises because she needs so much food.

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All five of the Assael family now slept in one small room, blocking the door with a wardrobe. Markos and Fred set up an emergency hiding place in the kitchen. When visitors arrived unexpectedly, the parents hid there with the children. Whenever Maria left the house, the family stayed in one place so as to avoid making any sounds that might give them away. The newspapers printed headlines such as: A Jewish family is hiding among us; anybody sheltering them will be shot.

Many people were spied on and denounced. Maria was therefore extremely careful. Every few months she sent the Assaels to friends of her helper Manolis and threw a party to put curious neighbours off the scent. Once, German soldiers came into the house with the aim of requisitioning the property, but they found it unsuitable. The parents went through the emergency drill repeatedly with the children. To avoid being found, they practised hiding – ever more quickly - in a coal box under the bed in the cellar.

At the end of September 1944, ELAS partisans came to the house with the intention of confiscating gold belonging to Jews in hiding. The Assaels, fearing an attack, fled down the back stairs. They were now on their own, on the street without papers. Their own house was occupied by strangers. Their former neighbour, who had previously rented the rear building of their house, was pleased to see them all alive but afraid to give them shelter. Kostos and Kitsa Athiridis, acquaintances of Markos, took the Assaels into their home in Gravias Street. They gave the family their bedroom. That night, Markos and Ida slept in a bed for the first time in 18 months. Two weeks later, the Germans withdrew and the family was able to leave their hiding place.

Making a new start was difficult. Refugees from eastern Macedonia, at that time occupied by the Bulgarians, were living in the family's own house; the business premises had been confiscated by a collaborator. Janine married a British soldier and started a knitwear company in London. Loulou got married and emigrated to Argentina. She missed her home and later returned to Thessaloniki. Markos and Fred set up a metalware factory. In 1992, Manolis Koniordos, Maria Voudouroglou and their son Antonis were awarded the honorary title »Righteous Among the Nations« by the World Heritage Holocaust Center, Yad Vashem. In 2017, Kostos and Kitsa Athiridis also received this award.

Manolis Koniordos and
his wife Loulou Assael, 2006;
Photograph: L. Nissim.

Janine (right) and Loulou Assael (left),
Fred Assael (centre) shortly after the war