

Poland's Important Role in World War II

Lesson 5

*Poles **rescued** thousands of Jews despite Hitler's death penalty; Poland **warned** Allies of Hitler's atrocities; Poland **refused** to help Hitler while other countries helped willingly.*

Poles Rescued Jews under Threat of Death

Aiding Jews was **dangerous**.

- *German Decree: Any Pole aiding a Jew will be executed with immediate family.*

Poles aided more Jews than any other country.

- An estimated 700,000 to 1 million Poles aided Jews.
- An estimated 50,000 Poles were killed for aiding Jews.

Aiding Jews was **difficult**.

- Most Polish Jews did not speak Polish.
- Germans imposed near-starvation rations.
- Germans confiscated livestock and crops.
- Most Poles had little food and living space to share.
- *Many Poles were needed to aid a single Jew.*
- Jews had to move constantly to avoid German manhunts.



The entire Ulma family was executed for aiding Jews.



Władysław Szpilman of the movie "The Pianist" was aided by 40 Poles.

Two Polish Organizations Saved Tens of Thousands of Jews

Żegota – Poland’s official organization to rescue Jews

- Provided safe houses, food, medical care, money, false documents
- **Irena Sendler** placed 2,500 Jewish children with Polish families
- An estimated 50,000 Jews were aided by Żegota
- An estimated 20,000 Żegota members were killed for aiding Jews



Irena Sendler

Polish Catholic Church – rescued Jewish children on a massive scale

- Hid Jewish children in convents, orphanages, and rectories
- Priests forged birth certificates making them Polish children
- **Mother Matylda Getter** placed up to 750 children with Polish families



German Decree: Any Pole aiding a Jew will be executed with immediate family.

Mother Matylda Getter

Four Polish Diplomats Saved Thousands

Alexander Ładoś – Polish Ambassador to Switzerland

- Forged passports for up to 10,000 Jews
- Prevented their deportation to the death camps



*Alexander
Ładoś*

Tadeusz Romer – Polish Ambassador to Japan

- Issued visas to over 2,000 Jews
- Jews went to the US, Canada, Australia, and Palestine



*Tadeusz
Romer*

Wojciech Rychlewicz – Polish Consul in Turkey

- Issued false Catholic certificates to many Jews
- Jews went to Palestine and North and South America



*Wojciech
Rychlewicz*

Henryk Sławik – Polish Delegate in Hungary

- Issued false Catholic certificates to 5,000 Jews
- Executed by the Germans



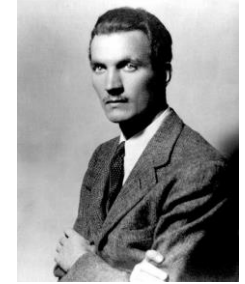
*Henry
Sławik*

Poland was first to warn of the Holocaust

1940 – Witold Pilecki begins reporting from Auschwitz



**Witold
Pilecki**

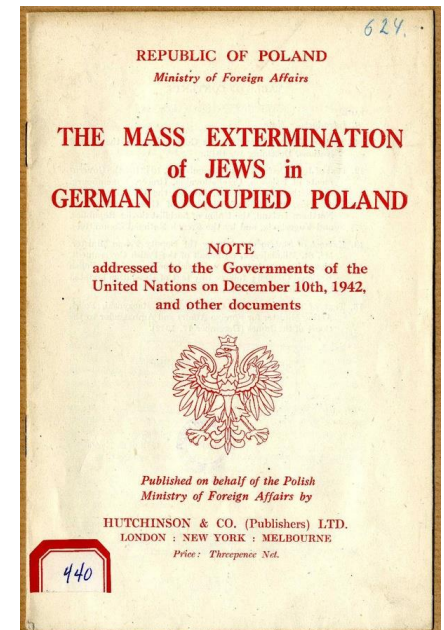


**Jan
Karski**

1941 – Polish diplomatic note warns Allies of atrocities

1942

- May - Polish underground reports atrocities
- Aug & Sep - Karski witnesses Warsaw Ghetto and Izbica camp
- December - Polish government reports atrocities to world



1943

- Jan Karski meets with President Roosevelt – atrocities ignored

**Poland was first to report
the atrocities to the world.**

Hitler's Holocaust Helpers

Countries that collaborated and deported their Jews to the death camps

- *France, Holland, Hungary, Slovakia, Belgium, Norway, Bulgaria, Austria, Germany*



Countries that formed militias that killed Jews

- *Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Croatia, Romania, Hungary*



Countries that formed SS units for Germany

- *Ukraine, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Latvia, Estonia, Italy, France, Croatia, Holland, Romania, Finland, Bulgaria, and others*





Poland was not Hitler's Holocaust Helper



- Poland never formed a collaborationist government that carried out German orders and deported Jews to the death camps.
- Poland never formed a militia that arrested and killed Jews.
- Poland never formed an SS unit to fight under German command.
- Poles were never guards or torturers in Hitler's death camps.