



9 May 2014 – 1939 to 1945 was one of the darkest periods in the history of the world. Mass atrocities, crime against humanity, and mass destruction tactics razed cities and devastated the world's population. On the 8 and 9 of May we remember those who lost their lives to World War Two.

In the search of racial purity, the Third Reich pursued a policy of identification and containment of Jews, homosexuals, Roma, physically disabled, social misfits and any others who did not fit into their Aryan master-race ideology. Through detainment and forced labour in now infamous concentration camps, the Nazi regime left over 10 million dead. Yet, in the darkest places light can shine through. And while some committed revolting horrors, brave people around the world risked their lives to protect the innocent.

Across the European continent from France to Poland, from North to South, heroic people resisted the spreading evil and protected their fellow human beings, regardless of creed, ability or race. Poland, at the time, was the heart of the European Jewish population, and this community suffered immense losses through targeted extermination. Amongst the first victims of the Nazi war machine, Polish people were immediately placed in a dire situation.

Yet, rather than concede, the Polish population was amongst the fiercest protectors of their fellow humans. The Polish resistance was the first to lift the veil on the Holocaust, and it is estimated that up to 3 million Poles resisted the Nazi invaders and aided Jews to evade capture. This resistance is credited with saving up to 450,000 lives from certain execution. The penalty for such action was immediate death, and 50,000 Poles lost their lives for their bold efforts.

Citizens took up these valiant acts across the European continent in defiance of the Nazi oppressors. The resistance of ordinary Belgians not only sought to disrupt military activities and supply lines, but as the poles before them, aimed to save as many lives as possible. Their efforts saved 20,000 lives, yet at a heavy cost. Nazi's detained nearly 30,000 Belgians as members of the resistance, of which 16,000 were executed. The Danish resistance, a movement organised by soldiers and civilians alike, scored a great victory by saving all but 500 of the total Jewish population in Denmark.

Stories of people risking everything to save innocent lives come from many nations and groups, and several have been honored for their noble efforts. Many of us have heard of the gallant efforts of Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who saved tens of thousands of lives. Or, we have seen Spielberg's historical epic Schindler's List showing the valiant efforts of Oskar Schindler, a German businessman, to save over a thousand polish Jews.

However, some of us have also heard the stories from our grandmothers and grandfathers, passed down in our families. Many people without vast resources, only a belief in decency with only a basement or attic to spare, risked everything and worked in secret to protect their fellow humans, one life at a time. Thus today, as we remember those who fell in the most destructive war of modern history, we also remember the courageous nameless who stood up for the rights of others.