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# 50 ITALIANS

The men who saved 50,000 Jewish lives

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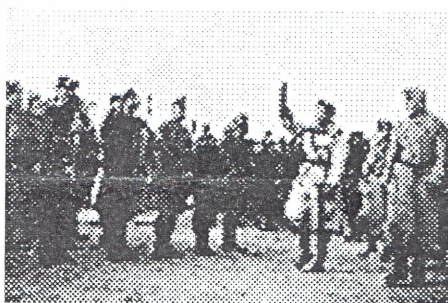
CONTACT

"All of us know the fate of Jews deported by the Germans.  
They are gassed.

All of them; women, old men, children.  
We must not take part in it,  
nor assist in such atrocities.  
Are you Duce, prepared to take on  
this kind of responsibility?"

### Giuseppe Bastianini

Italian Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs  
to Benito Mussolini (1941)



*Bastianini, one of the heroes, salutes*

### Research Partners

In order to realize the project, we will spend research time in the archives and film libraries of the **Simon Wiesenthal Center** and the **USC Shoah Foundation Institute** in Los Angeles, the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** in Washington, DC, the **Yad Vashem Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Authority** in Jerusalem and the **Italian Foreign Ministry** in Rome. Each of these organizations has been contacted and all have agreed to support the project.

*A feature-length documentary film about 50 exceptional men.*

In the darkest and most tragic moment of the twentieth century, when men were methodically working to destroy humanity, and it seemed impossible to resist the Nazi death machine, 50 high-ranking Italian diplomats and generals saved almost 50,000 Jewish lives, helping them to escape persecution, deportation and death.

In Italy's occupied territories - Croatia and Yugoslavia, the South of France and Greece - these men were chosen by Mussolini to represent his regime, and implement his policies. But in our story, they made a different choice. For reasons that are clear for some, mysterious for others, these 50 men were guided by a personal choice to do good, to do right ... to save human lives.

In May of 1939, when the Pact of Steel was signed in Berlin, Mussolini whole-heartedly committed Italy to the German cause. In August, German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop conferred with Italian Foreign Minister Ciano, who was Mussolini's son-in-law. Ciano was shocked by the true extent of Germany's ambitions. Within weeks, on September 1st, 1.5 million German troops invaded Poland. The war - and Germany's 'Final Solution' - had begun. After Germany's success in France, Italy joined the war in June 1940.

The documentary will follow events from 1940 until the proclamation of the armistice between the US and Italy on September 8th, 1943. We will crisscross through parts of Southern Europe where the 50 Italians were stationed, and where they used all the tools in their possession to avoid handing over the Jews - Italian and non-Italian - to the Germans. They were the protagonists of a revolt against a cruel, horrific power - a revolt which also illustrates the unique personality of the Italians: chaotic, courageous, rebellious and even comic ... but at their core, a deep sense of humanity.

In a time when "never again" is being tested, this documentary can show just how altruism's impact can change destiny.



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## 50 ITALIANS

a feature-length documentary film



*"There are people whose brilliance lights the world though they are no longer among the living. These lights are particularly bright when the night is dark.*

*They light the way for Mankind."*

**Hannah Senesh**

*Jewish Resistance Fighter & Poet*

## TREATMENT

### Introduction

Fifty Italians. Their actions were ingenious, courageous and at times comically creative. They were fifty men who saved the lives of over 50,000 Jews. More than in any other Axis occupied zone. These are their stories.

These men were among Mussolini's highest-ranking Generals and Diplomats, and they found different innovative ways to avoid complying with Hitler's "final solution". Not having any instinct for Hitler's anti-Semitic zeal, they found many ways to avoid turning over Jews in the Italian occupation zones to the Germans.

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After Germany's success in France, Italy joined the war in June 1940. Mussolini was granted occupational control of sections of southern France, Greece and Croatia. These zones quickly became known as safe havens for Jews.

Here are some of the stories we will tell in the film.

### The Stories

When Alberto Calisse took his office as Italian Consul in Nice, the Germans were beginning to generalize their treatment of Jews in all occupied zones; forcing them to wear the yellow Star of David; restricting their work and travel, seizing possessions. In unoccupied France, the Vichy government started registering Jews. In the Italian zone, Calisse refused to implement the law ordering the stamping of the word "Jew" on identity cards and ration books.

Thus began the dispute between Italy and Germany over the treatment of Jews.



*Hitler in Paris*



*The feared and hated Von Ribbentrop*

### **CROATIA**

In 1941, in recognition of their conflict of interests when dealing with the occupation of Croatia, Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano and German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop agreed that 'independent' Croatia would be divided: the northeastern section would be controlled by the Germans and Hungarians, the southwestern section by the Italians

Despite constant pressure from Germany, this Italian zone in Croatia became a haven for Jews. Foreign Minister Bastianini and the Generals in the region held that any discrimination against the Jews was incompatible with the honor of the Italian Army. Originally, there were few Jews in Dalmatia, but by August, thousands had arrived. The Italians set up several refugee camps, but they also sent many Jews to the Croatian Islands, and across Mare Nostrum to Italy.

"I called on ... the great professor of international law, to draw up for me a list of every possible reason why one more Croat of the Jewish faith could be granted Italian citizenship."

**Roberto Ducci**, *Italian head of Croatian Office of the Foreign Ministry*

**Imre Rochlitz**, now in his 80's and a businessman in London, was one of those protected in the Kraljevica Camp in Dalmatia. He had fled Austria to Yugoslavia and had been imprisoned by Croatian Fascists before the Italians arrived. Rochlitz says that his time in the camp, where he attended school, went to evening concerts and ate well, was the best time of his life. Almost nobody knew about the camp's existence and no one from Camp Kraljevica was ever deported as long as the Italians had control.

The Germans had evidence of the Italians' effective resistance to anti-Jewish measures.

"So far, the Croatian anti-Jewish legislation has been applied only in North Croatia. In the South, its application has been hindered by Italian opposition, in spite of the Duce's approval...It is imperative to apply the anti-Jewish legislation in South Croatia."

**Joachim von Ribbentrop**, *German Foreign Minister*

Ribbentrop sent a high-ranking SS official to Rome to meet with Mussolini and reinvigorate Italy's implementation of the orders. The Italian dictator declared he had no objections to the deportations of Jews in Croatia, and that he would convey this to his Army and Ministry officials there.

**Giuseppe Bastianini** and **General Mario Roatta** were able to convince Mussolini to reject Hitler's demands. But Mussolini still had to exhibit compliance with his ally. In a conversation with **General Mario Robotti**, Commander of the XI Corps, Mussolini said,

"I have no alternative but to yield to von Ribbentrop's nagging. Now it is your turn to find a way to circumvent it. Say that because of partisan activity there are transport difficulties, or something like that." **Joachim von Ribbentrop**, *German Foreign Minister*



General Mario Roatta: one of the Fifty

Horrible acts of genocide were happening all around Croatia, yet in the Italian zone, no Jews were surrendered. The Italians' acts of obstruction were not without their risks – for his efforts to rescue Jews in the Italian occupation zone in Croatia, the Germans executed General Giuseppe Amico, 32nd Division Yugoslavia, in 1943.

About 10,000 Jews found refuge and were saved in Croatia and Yugoslavia.

### SOUTH OF FRANCE

In 1942 massive deportations of Jews began in Vichy France. In Paris, Italian Consul Gustavo Orlandini intervened with German authorities to obtain the liberation of Italian Jews from custody. Later in the year, when the Italian occupation zone was expanded, Italians ruffled the feathers of both the Vichy and German governments again by insisting they control "their" area. Alberto Calisse, the Italian Consul in Nice went further, insisting that all non-French Jews in the zone were exempted from deportation. These master diplomats, using logical arguments and carefully worded communications, bought valuable time for the refugees.

"...the Germans are ceaselessly insisting that we should surrender to them all the Jews in areas under our occupation. They confirm that by the end of 1943 not a single Jew should remain alive in Europe. It is clear that they want to implicate us in the brutality of their policy."

**Count Luca Pietromarchi**, Superintendent, Italian Foreign Ministry

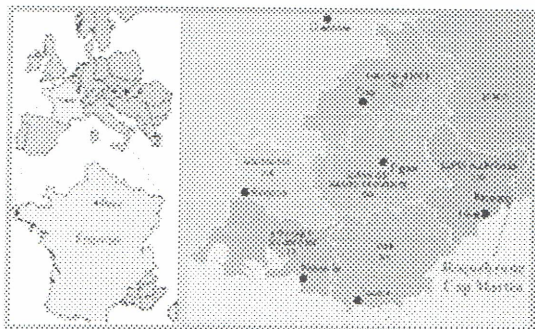
**Vittoriano Manfredi**, Vice Consul in Grenoble in southeast France prevented the round up and deportation of Jews by tipping off the local Italian General, who then blocked the tracks of the deportation train and negotiated the release of Jews bound for Auschwitz.

"It is intolerable that the final solution of the Jewish question in the newly occupied territories should be made more difficult – and to a certain extent, collapse, because of the Italians, who are Germany's allies." **Helmut Knochen**, SS Stamdartenführer

In response the Germany's dissatisfaction, Mussolini set up the polizia razziale (Racial Police), appointing Guido Lospinoso Inspector General of Racial Policy. Lospinoso was sent to Nice with assurances of compliance with Nazi policy. However, once in Nice, Lospinoso, with urgings from Capuchin priest Père Marie Benoit from Marseilles, refused to implement the deportation orders. He evaded the SS Gestapo and other Nazi officials who tried to meet with him by going into hiding. The Germans finally concluded that Lospinoso was not only ignoring orders, he was actively involved in saving Jews. Lospinoso didn't care. With the help of Father Benoit and Angelo Donati, a Roman Jewish banker, he delayed deportations and arranged the transfer of thousands of Jews to remote

"The Italian zone of influence, particularly the Côte d'Azure, has become the Promised Land for the Jews in France. In the last few months there has been a mass Exodus of Jews from our occupation zone into the Italian zone."

**Helmut Knochen**  
SS Standartenführer



Cap Martin: A Jewish Haven in Vichy France

areas of the South of France, like Cap Martin, near Monaco.

Serge Klarsfeld was a child living the South of France in 1942. Like many others, he was hidden in an Italian official's home before being smuggled out to safety on a remote island. He is now a lawyer in Paris who has dedicated his life to finding Nazi war criminals.

"We helped the Jews because they were human beings and we were not at war with innocent people."

**Vittoriano Manfredi**, *Italian Consul in Grenoble*

It is estimated that 25,000 Jews were saved in Southern France.

### GREECE

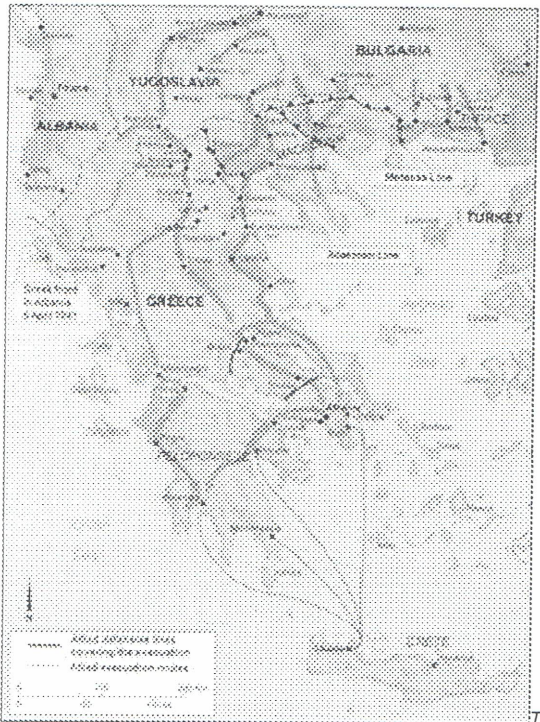
In 1943, **Isaac Daniel** was a 6-year-old boy living in Salonika, Greece with his family. Soon after the Germans occupied the region, his father was imprisoned. Isaac's mother wrote a letter immediately to Consul General **Guelfo Zamboni** who was stationed at the Italian Consulate in the city. He issued Italian passports to the Jewish men who were rounded up and to their families. He approached the German authorities, bullying them, insisting the men be released, telling them that the imprisoned men were Italian citizens.

Zamboni engaged in a flurry of diplomatic correspondence with the German Minister in Rome, demanding recognition of Italy's vested interests in the Mediterranean with its expatriate Jewish population. Approval for this general policy followed shortly from **Giuseppe Bastianini**, who had become Under Secretary of State in Rome, for Zamboni et al to conduct themselves "according to the criteria of generosity."

In the meantime, Zamboni, and his **Vice Consul Emilio Neri**, were issuing travel permits and helping to arrange transport by rail for Italian Jews to the Italian occupied zone around Athens. The Italian diplomats fought to issue provisional papers for other Jews of "unspecified" citizenship as well. Zamboni helped Isaac's whole family move to Athens, where the Italians protected them. **Dan Berger's** family was saved by these men. **Mary Ruben** (90) and the entire **Modiano Family** were also saved by these men.

We will hear their compelling stories. We will learn details of the actions by the Italians, such as when **General Neri** sent Italian soldiers to German detention camps in Salonika. The soldiers claimed that some of the women were their wives and the Germans released the women to their "husbands." These Italians made it their mission to save these Jewish people, using all their ingenuity and are thought to have saved 280 Italian Jews and 48 others in Salonika from deportation by the Germans.

*"The Germans told me that I was disobeying instructions when I was issuing the Italian certificates of nationality. I said to them, "No, that is not true. As long as I am here, I have my government's approval... When it no longer approves, I will be replaced." At first, I did not have approval at all, but I was certain my views were shared by all.*



The German invasion of Greece

issued hundreds of papers...  
 you wasn't. But still  
 have them?"  
 Salonika, Greece

Italy in Greece, the  
 to...  
 Only later were my policies approved. I issued hundreds of papers...  
 At the time, I didn't know who was Italian or wasn't... But still I  
 declared them Italians. How else could I save them?"  
**Guelfo Zamboni**, Italian Consul General in Salonika, Greece

In all about 15,000 Jews were saved in Greece, due to the efforts of the  
 Italians.

### The Fifty Italians

There is tremendous irony and tension in these stories. These "Fifty  
 Italians" remained key participants in Mussolini's international fascist  
 program while quietly creating a culture of non-cooperation with the  
 most brutal policies of the Nazis. The Simon Wiesenthal Center considers  
 these acts to be the most heroic of the entire Holocaust period, in part  
 because these 50 Italians saved more lives within the occupied  
 territories than any other persons or institutions. This story speaks to  
 the very special character and personality of the Italian military in World  
 War II. While the Mussolini government was indeed the first ally of  
 Germany, and signed the racial law against Jews in 1938, implementing  
 this law was entirely another matter.

### People and Resources

"Fifty Italians" will use extensive original interview footage, shot all over  
 the world, and location footage of historically relevant sites.

The filmmakers have already contacted and received promises of  
 cooperation from survivors and their families who owe their lives to the  
 Italians. They are eager to tell their stories.

**Isaac Daniel**, professor of mechanical engineering, Northwestern  
 University, Chicago. His entire family saved in Greece by Consul General  
 Guelfo Zamboni.

A charismatic, highly celebrated professor, Professor Daniel will not only  
 tell his personal story, but will also serve as narrator, guiding the viewer  
 through the emotional and geographical landscape of the film.

**Eva Deutsch Costabel**, lives in New York. Saved in Croatia by General  
 Mario Roatta.

**Serge Klarsfeld**, lawyer, Paris. Saved by Italian officials in the South of  
 France. Has dedicated his life to finding Nazi war criminals.

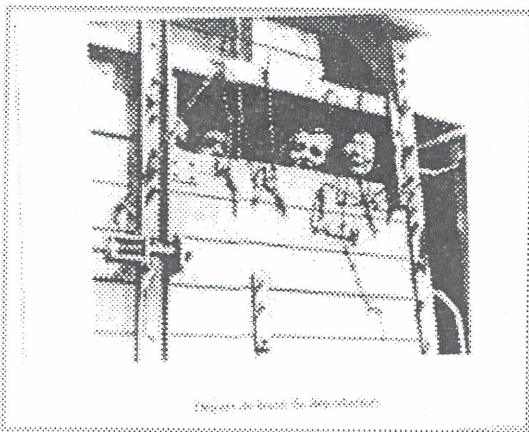
**Dan Berger**, doctor, Buffalo, New York. Dan's family was saved in  
 Greece by Vice Consul Emilio Neri.

**Mary Ruben**, a ninety-year-old San Franciscan. Also saved in Greece by  
 Emilio Neri in Athens.

**Armando Modiano**, retired, Athens. Most of the Modiano family was

"We did what was humanly possible to  
 prevent the deportation of the Jews. We  
 didn't do it to be heroes. We just happened  
 to be human beings."

**Roberto Ducci**, Head of Croatian Office of the  
 Foreign Ministry



*Programme de transport de déportés*

saved by the Italian diplomats in Greece. They are eager to talk about their experiences and show us where events took place. They are planning a family reunion in Salonika in June 2007.

We've also found relatives of some of the most instrumental officials of the "50 Good Italians" living in Italy.

**Vice Consul Vittorio Manfredi**, South of France  
**Governor of Dalmatia Giuseppe Bastianini**, Croatia  
**General Mario Roatta**, Croatia  
**General Mario Robotti**, Croatia  
**Consul General Guelfo Zamboni**, Greece  
**Vice Consul Emilio Neri**, Greece

And others not yet mentioned, including:

**Consul General Gastone Guidotti**, Yugoslavia. Guidotti issued passports to Jewish refugees even after the Italian Foreign Ministry had rejected their applications.

Our research will produce more people connected to these stories, many of which will be recounted for the first time.

We will speak to experts and specialists in this specific area of Holocaust history. These may include:

**Prof. David Bankier**, the John Najmann Chair of Holocaust Studies and the Head of the International Institute for Holocaust Research at Israel's Yad Vashem.

**Irena Steinfeldt**, Director of The Righteous Among the Nations Department at the Yad Vashem.

**Eric Saul**, a curator at the Simon Wiesenthal Center, who created the non-profit organization "Visas for Life – The Righteous and Honorable Diplomats," a traveling exhibition. He's also a historical author and documentary consultant.

**Ruth Ben-Ghiat**, Professor of Italian, History and Chair, Department of Italian Studies at New York University.

### Futher Research

In order to realize the project, we will spend research time in the archives and film libraries of the **Simon Wiesenthal Center** and the **USC Shoah Foundation Institute** in Los Angeles, the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** in Washington, DC, the **Yad Vashem Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Authority** in Jerusalem and the **Italian Foreign Ministry** in Rome. Each of these organizations has been contacted and all have agreed to support the project.

Where possible, the film will feature emotionally gripping historical



False

Italian Nationality Document, issued by the Italians to non-Italian Jews

newsreel footage, still photography and documentation. We wish to include filming of the process used by the **Yad Vashem** to determine its honor of "Righteous Among The Nations." In an important sequence, we will feature the Yad Vashem's official honoring ceremony of a number of the Italians from our film for their courageous acts of rescue.

### Production Details

We will begin photography in June 2008. We anticipate at least 6 to 8 months of non-continuous shooting in many countries, probably making a six or seven filming excursions that are one or two weeks in duration.

We'd like to wrap photography by February 2009.

The film will be edited during 2010.

Locations: Filming will take place in the U.S., Italy, France, Israel, Greece, Croatia, Yugoslavia and the United Kingdom.