



The Holocaust and Wales

Jewish Refugees in the British Armed Forces during the Second World War

Created by the Centre for the Movement of People (CMOP) at Aberystwyth University



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This resource looks at the stories of Jewish refugees who joined the British armed forces during the Second World War. Many Jewish soldiers who were formerly refugees served in Wales. Some were restricted to auxiliary units, while others trained as commandos and served in combat, including during the D-Day landings.

It contains:

- Background information on Jewish refugees in the British armed forces and where to find out more
- Short biographies of Herman Rothman, Herbert Patrick Anderson and Colin Anson
- Links to audio clips of oral history recordings of Herman Rothman, Herbert Patrick Anderson and Colin Anson
- Photograph of X Troop at Aberdyfi, 1943
- Transcripts of the audio clips

The resource assumes a basic understanding of the Holocaust. You may wish to cover the Holocaust Educational Trust's (HET) worksheet [‘Defining the Holocaust’](#) before exploring these resources. See also the HET's [‘General Principles for Teaching the Holocaust’](#).



Background information on Jewish refugees in the British armed forces during the Second World War

Some refugees were determined to fight back against those responsible for their flight, and many joined the British armed forces in the battle against the Axis powers. Initially, refugees from Austria and Germany were not permitted to join the British armed forces. This was relaxed in November 1939, when some were allowed special dispensation to join the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps (renamed the Pioneer Corps in 1940), an unarmed unit that provided manual labour for British units. Tasks included trench digging, bridge building, and clearing roads. Some 4,000 male Jewish refugees enlisted in the Pioneer Corps during the course of the war.

From 1942, Austrian and German refugees were permitted to enlist directly into technical units and the Special Forces, and eventually all restrictions on service were lifted. Refugees who served in the army were sometimes known as 'The King's Most Loyal Enemy Aliens'. In total, around 10,000 German and Austrian refugees joined the British armed forces from 1939 to 1945.

One of the most famous units made up of foreign nationals was No. 3 Troop of No. 10 (Inter-Allied) Commando, nicknamed 'X Troop', which was billeted at Aberdyfi, Gwynedd. This elite group of 87 German-speaking refugees trained in camouflage, street fighting, housebreaking and lockpicking in the rough terrain of Eryri/Snowdonia. Mostly Jews, they had to change their names and adopt different personas in case they were captured behind enemy lines.

Although X Troop never fought as a single unit, its members were seconded to other commando formations and deployed in operations in Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, Albania, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Germany. Forty-five members of X Troop participated in the D-Day landings at Normandy on 6 June 1944, of which 27 were killed, wounded or reported missing. The troop was formally disbanded in September 1945. In 1999, a memorial was erected in Aberdyfi commemorating their sacrifices, alongside a Commando Rose Bed. Over twenty veterans were able to attend the ceremony.

For more information on Jewish refugees in the British armed forces during the Second World War, see:

- <https://wp-research.aber.ac.uk/nsrefugeeswales/history/service-in-armed-forces/>
- Helen Fry, Churchill's German Army: The Germans who Fought for Britain in World War Two (Cheltenham, 2009)
- Leah Garrett, X Troop: The Secret Jewish Commandos of World War II (London, 2021)
- Peter Leighton-Langer, The King's Own Loyal Enemy Aliens: German and Austrian Refugees in Britain's Armed Forces, 1939-45 (Elstree, 2006)



Historical source 1: Short biography of Herman Rothman

Herman Rothman was born in Berlin, Germany, in 1924, to Polish Jewish parents. He arrived in Britain as a refugee on the Kindertransport in August 1939 and went to the hachshara (agricultural training centre) at Gwrych Castle, Abergele. He joined the General Service Corps in 1944, before being transferred to the King's Own Scottish Borderers. He later joined the Intelligence Corps and was among the first people to translate Hitler's original will and testament when documents were discovered sewn into the shoulders of a jacket belonging to Heinz Lorenz, Joseph Goebbels' press secretary. He subsequently wrote a book, Hitler's Will, detailing his experiences.

Historical source 2: [Audio Clip: Herman Rothman's motivation for joining the armed forces](#)

Historical source 3: Short biography of Herbert Patrick Anderson

Herbert Patrick Anderson was born in 1913 in Germany as Helmut Herbert Fürst. At the age of six, he moved to Vienna, Austria. He arrived in Britain in March 1939. After the outbreak of war, he was able to receive 'friendly alien' status, which enabled him to join the Pioneer Corps. He was stationed in Le Havre in France from March 1940 but returned to Britain following the retreat at Dunkirk. He was relocated to Wales and was lucky to escape from an accident involving a land mine at Pembroke Dock which killed 19 servicemen, including three

German-Jewish refugees. His unit was then relocated to Carmarthen. He later served in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, and became a British citizen in 1947. Herbert died in Norfolk in 2004.

Historical source 4: [Audio Clip: Herbert Patrick Anderson's time with the Pioneer Corps in Carmarthenshire](#)

Historical source 5: Short biography of Colin Anson

Colin Edward Anson was born Claus Leopold Octavio Ascher in Berlin in 1922. His father was arrested by the Nazis and died in the Dachau concentration camp in 1937. Colin fled to Britain on the Kindertransport in February 1939. He avoided internment and joined the Pioneer Corps, before being transferred to X Troop. He was badly injured serving in Sicily in 1943. Following a brain operation, he re-joined his unit and fought in Yugoslavia and Italy. After the war, he worked in Germany during the denazification process. He married fellow refugee Alice Gross and worked for various travel companies in London. He died in 2016.

Alison Shaw, 'Obituary: Colin and Alice Anson' in *The Scotsman*, 19 July 2016 (<https://www.scotsman.com/news/obituary-colin-and-alice-anson-1471868>)

Historical source 6: [Audio Clip: Colin Anson on changing his name to join X Troop](#)



Historical source 7: Photograph of X Troop at Aberdyfi, 1943



Source: People's Collection Wales

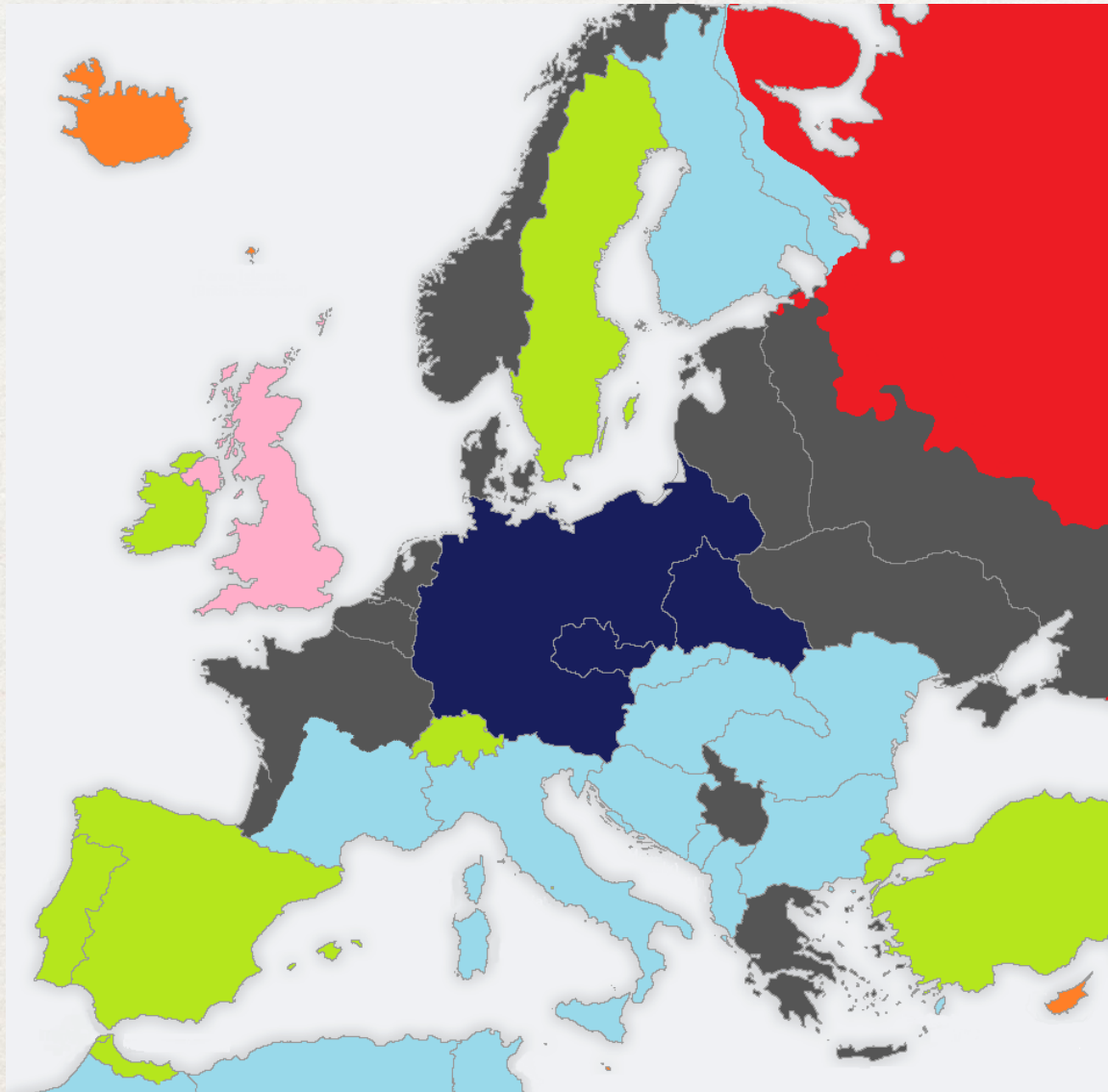
Link: <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/1896816>

Image from Commando Veterans Archive

(<https://gallery.commandoveterans.org/cdoGallery/v/units/10IA/x+troop/3+troop+photos/3-Troop+10+IA+Cdo+pic3.JPG.html>)



Historical source 8: Map of Europe, early 1942



Source: People's Collection Wales

Link: <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/2156946>

Adapted from

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:WWII_Occupied_Europe_Blank_Map.png



Transcripts

[Audio Clip: Herman Rothman's motivation for joining the armed forces](#)

To me, I equated 'to conform' with having an easy life, and, and also, you learn how to dodge things if you can. However, I, I did think 'I am doing it for a purpose'; I think this is something which may be endemic in people like myself. You know you were fighting for a cause, and therefore everything you did was for the benefit – we were idealistic in a way, I had this idealistic thought in my mind – that everything I performed and everything I did was for the benefit of society, and intimately of course – inclusive [of] – yourself. If you want to defeat Hitler, you had to do that, and that is something which prompted me, which motivated me.

[Audio Clip: Herbert Patrick Anderson's time with the Pioneer Corps in Carmarthenshire](#)

Eventually, I got to Carmarthen, in charge of a small détachment of about 20 men. Now we had a most ridiculous duty. We were to dig holes into the soil in various places all over the county. Into these almost man-high holes were inserted wooden kiosks and a seat, the idea being that men would be stationed in these holes, connected to each other by telephone, in the case of an invasion. We did the job; every morning we set off in a lorry, went to another place, all over Carmarthenshire, and wondering why, because who on earth, if you were Hitler or one of his commanders, would envisage an invasion of Britain by starting in south Wales? They would have to come all around southwest England, wouldn't they? [...] Well, the Germans never tried it, and we don't know – we were... I am often wondering whether they're still in various places all over Carmarthenshire.



[Audio Clip: Colin Anson on changing his name to join X Troop](#)

My name was a bit of a difficulty because there were various other people whose name began with 'A' and there was a tendency to pick a name in which both your surname and your Christian name would have the same initials – in case of embroidered handkerchiefs or what have you – and Andrews and Anderson, all the obvious 'As' had already gone. But at that moment, an Avro Anson [a type of aeroplane] happened to fly overhead, and it struck me as a very short and agreeable name, and a not very common name, so at that moment I became Anson, and the Claus in my original name became Colin. The middle name of Edward is purely on the spur of the moment, because Captain Hilton-Jones looked up and said, 'No middle name? It's usual to have a middle name.' So, I simply picked that out of fresh air, and that is how Claus Leopold Octavio Ascher was made into Colin Edward Anson.

