

Worksheet: Jewish refugees in the British Army during World War Two

TASK 1

a) Read a 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.

b) Listen to [Herman Rothman’s testimony describing his motivation for joining the armed forces](#).

c) Working in pairs or individually, answer the following questions:

- 1. Why did Herman want to join the armed forces?
- 2. Do you think his reasons were legitimate?

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TASK 2

a) Read a 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.

b) Listen to the clip of [Herbert Patrick Anderson describing his time in Carmarthenshire with the Pioneer Corps](#).

c) Working in pairs or individually, answer the following questions:

- 1. Would service in the Pioneer Corps have been disappointing for refugees?
- 2. How might the local population have reacted to the presence of Germans and Austrians in the British armed forces?

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TASK 3

a) Read about the elite group of 87 German-speaking refugees, named 'X Troop'.

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 Snowdonia. Mostly Jews, they had to change their names and adopt different personas in case they were captured behind enemy lines.



X Troop at Aberdyfi, 1943.¹

Photo courtesy of Colin Anson.

Image credit: Commando Veterans Archive.

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b) Read a short biography of Colin Edward 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

¹ Commando Veterans Archive, *X Troop at Aberdyfi, 1943*

<<http://gallery.commandoveterans.org/cdoGallery/v/units/10IA/x+troop/3+troop+photos/3-Troop+10+ IA +Cdo+pic3.JPG.html>> [accessed 15 august 2022].

operation, he re-joined his unit and fought in [former] 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 2016.²

c) [Listen to his testimony describing how he changed his name to join X Troop.](#)

d) Working in pairs or individually, answer the following questions:

- 1. How might you feel if you were a refugee asked to join an elite unit in the armed forces?
- 2. Would changing your name be an issue for you? Explain why.
- 3. If you had to change your name, what name would you choose?

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² The Newsroom, 'Obituary: Colin and Alice Anson', in *The Scotsman*, 19 July 2016
<<https://www.scotsman.com/news/obituary-colin-and-alice-anson-1471868>> [accessed 15 August 2022].



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