



DIPLOMATS OF MERCY



The Harriet and Kenneth Kupferberg
Holocaust Resource Center and Archives

QUEENSBOROUGH **CU**
COMMUNITY COLLEGE **NY**



DIPLOMATS OF MERCY

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JAN ZWARTENDYK

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RESOURCE CENTER AND ARCHIVES AT QUEENSBOROUGH
COMMUNITY COLLEGE.

“Most people during the Holocaust were bystanders.
There were a few precious rescuers.”

POLISH RIGHTEOUS GENTILE MARIA FLOREK (JTA NEWS SERVICE, AUGUST 31, 2006)

*Among the “few precious rescuers”
there were diplomats.*

“If Giorgio Perlasca [of Italy] had not been a Fascist,
he would not have been in a position to rescue
between 3,000 and 6,000 Hungarian Jews from
deportation and death, and he would not have won
a place in the honourable company of consuls and
attachés, diplomats and semi-diplomats – a Swede,
a Japanese, a German, a Portuguese – who gambled
their careers, sometimes their lives, to deny Hitler
his Final Solution.”

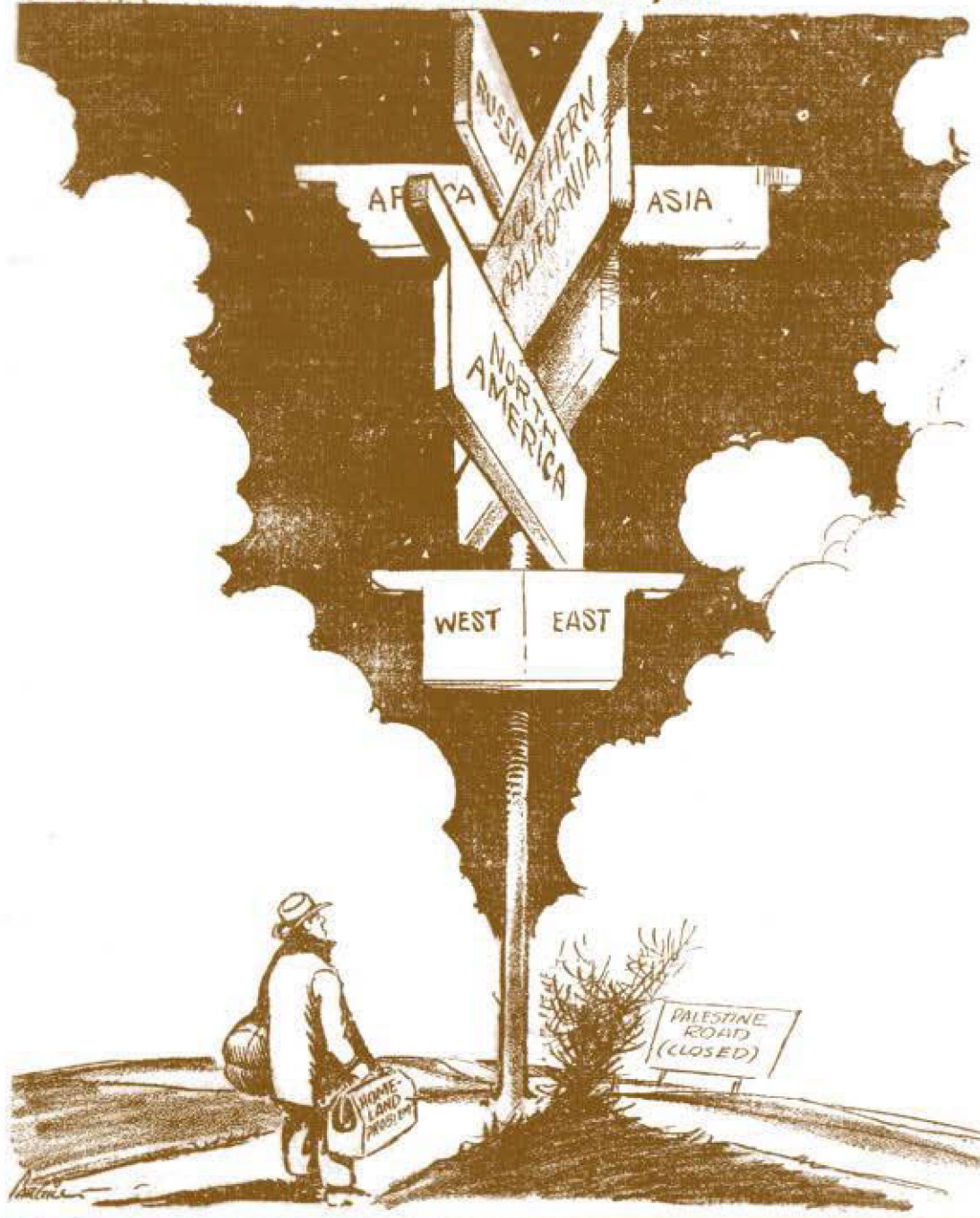
ERIC SILVER, *THE BOOK OF THE JUST*, P. 32



This exhibit's goal is to make known and to acknowledge with gratitude the extraordinary deeds of diplomats representing nations from around the world such as China, El Salvador, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey. When many Europeans collaborated with the Nazis in the persecution of Jews, and when most Europeans were bystanders, the actions of these diplomats stand out as beacons of light in an otherwise dark and grim time. There were individuals – the Righteous Gentiles – who hid Jews in attics and cellars, kept them alive through the war years and risked their lives in the process. Hand in hand with these compassionate souls, the “Diplomats of Mercy,” because of diplomatic immunity and in most cases without the approval of their governments, were able to save thousands of Jews, often against their own best interests.

The rescue work of Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish consul in Hungary, to save Jews from death has become legendary. Like him, however, there were many other diplomats whose names have come to the attention of researchers in the last few years and whose work to save lives deserves recognition.

Evening 4.2.41. THE WANDERING JEW



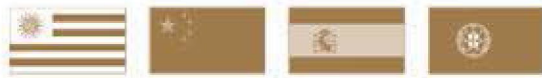
COURTESY OF THE USHMM



While many Jews had sought to leave Germany and Austria after the Nazis came to power, the anti-Semitism unleashed in 1938, culminating in the notorious Kristallnacht of November 9-10, heightened the sense of despair for thousands of Jews seeking refuge.

But the question from the very beginning of Nazi rule, when it was still possible for Jews to leave, was where to go. *A Shanghai Evening Post* (February 4, 1941) cartoon, published almost fifteen months after Hitler's invasion of Poland, reflected the dilemma of thousands of Jewish refugees. This problem became increasingly difficult to overcome with the Nazi advance to the West. There was no where to escape.

THIS HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL (RIGHT) WAS INAUGURATED ON NOVEMBER 10TH, 1994 BY THE FORMER PRESIDENT OF URUGUAY, DR. LUIS ALBERTO LACALLE. IT IS THE ONLY MONUMENT OF ITS KIND IN LATIN AMERICA. IT IS LOCATED IN THE CAPITAL OF MONTEVIDEO, ON THE BOARDWALK ALONG THE RIO DE LA PLATA. THE MONUMENT IS LIKE A CHUNK OF ROCK WITH A 120 METER LONG WALL, SYMBOLIZING THE JEWISH PEOPLE AND THE RUPTURE CAUSED BY THE HOLOCAUST. IN SPITE OF THE RUPTURE, THE WALL KEEPS ITS INTEGRITY AND LEADS TO HOPE. THE WALL ALSO CREATES A VISUAL ASSOCIATION WITH THE WESTERN WALL IN JERUSALEM.



COURTESY OF THE USHMM

DR. FENG SHAN HO

“This was the time when diplomats came to play such a significant role. On the very night of Kristallnacht, more than 150 Jews sought refuge in the Embassy of Uruguay in Hamburg. When S.S. personnel came after them, Consul FLORENCIO RIVAS stood at the door, Uruguayan flag in hand, blocking their way. He granted these Jews asylum and gave them Uruguayan visas that allowed them to depart from Hamburg.”

TERESA PORZECANSKI, *HISTORIAS DE VIDA DE INMIGRANTES JUDÍOS AL URUGUAY*.

Consul Rivas's deeds have remained unknown and unacknowledged. One of his better known colleagues from the other side of the world was DR. FENG SHAN HO (1901-1997), the Chinese consul general in Vienna who, between 1938 and 1940, issued thousands of transit visas via Shanghai for Jews seeking to flee Nazi-controlled Austria. He was probably the first diplomat we know of who issued such visas, a policy opposed by his superior in Berlin, Ambassador Chen Jie, and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, China's ruler and an admirer of Nazi Germany. Until after his death in 1997, Dr. Feng Shan Ho's deeds remained unknown. He was posthumously recognized by the Yad Vashem Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem on July 2000, as one of the Righteous Among the Nations.



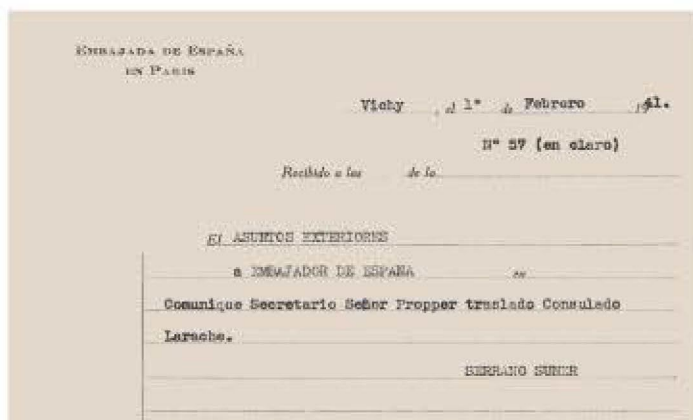
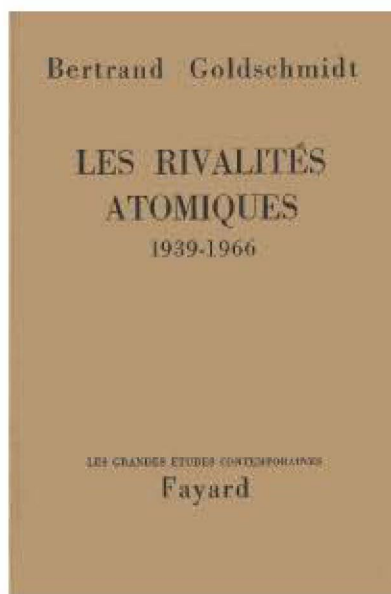
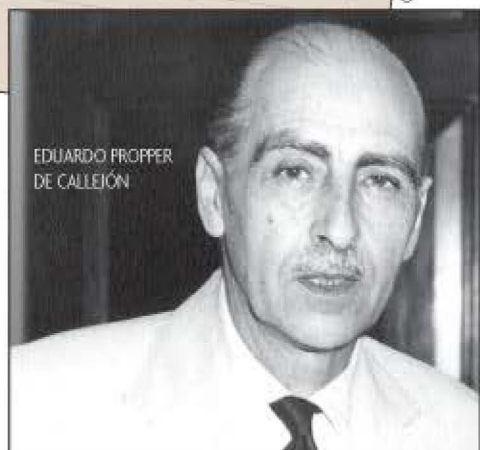
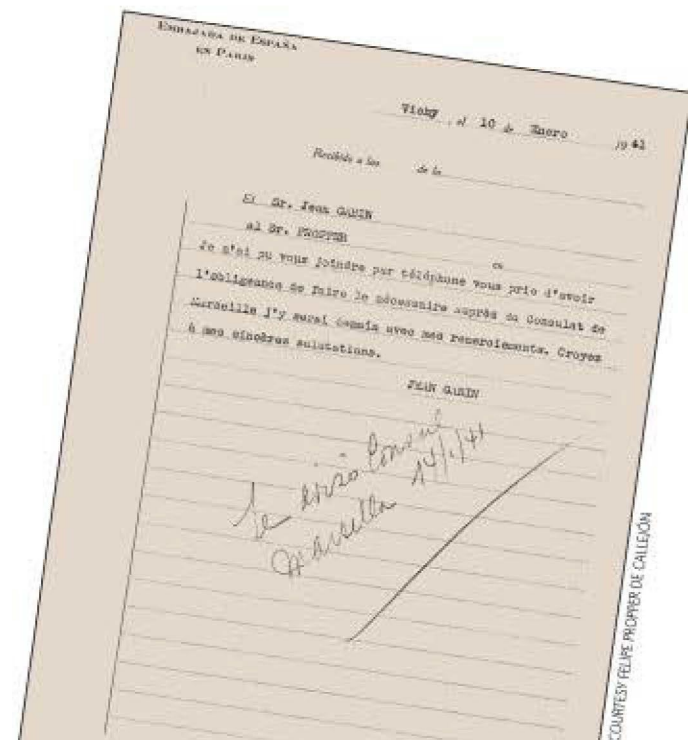
About the same time that Dr. Feng Shan Ho was issuing visas to Jews in Vienna, **EDUARDO PROPPER DE CALLEJÓN** (1895-1972), the First Secretary at the Spanish Embassy in Paris, also found himself confronting a critical assignment. Eduardo Propper's son, Felipe, recalls:

“On June 14th 1940, the German troops entered Paris and the French government that had fled to Bordeaux asked Spain to sue for an armistice. While Ambassador José Félix de Lequerica was busy negotiating a ceasefire, my father was suddenly overwhelmed by panicky hordes of refugees, who had congregated at the Spanish Consulate seeking a transit visa on their way to Lisbon. The situation was desperate. No visas could be granted without the prior authorization of the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Madrid. There was no time for such procedures, if all these desperate people were to get out of harm's way and escape the incoming German army. Thus, my father, with the approval of Lequerica, sat down at a desk, rolled up his sleeves, and in the sweltering summer heat, courageously begun to issue countless so-called 'Special Visas' – every single one of which was unauthorized!”

One of the many letters Secretary Propper received soliciting his assistance in obtaining a visa came from Jean Gabin, one of the great stars of French cinema before and after the occupation. The letter was dated in Vichy, January 10, 1941.

Yet another famous Frenchman who obtained Propper's help was Bertrand Goldschmidt, a French scientist, and a specialist in nuclear energy. A disciple of Marie Curie, he was the sole French researcher involved in the “Manhattan” project that undertook the development of the atomic bomb in 1945. Goldschmidt dedicated his book *Les Rivalités Atomiques: 1939-1966* to Eduardo Propper de Callejón and his wife, acknowledging the providential letter that he received from the Consul of Marseilles in 1941. Without it, the author would have never been able to flee France and save his life.

While stationed at the Spanish Embassy in Vichy, Propper de Callejón was summarily transferred by his Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ramón Serrano Suñer, to Larache, a remote army outpost in Spanish Morocco. The reason for this arbitrary move was never known, but we can assume that it may have been a consequence of those “Special Visas” Propper issued without ministerial approval. To bolster this argument, there is a letter written by Serrano Suñer to Ambassador Lequerica in which he accuses Eduardo Propper of “serving the interests of the French Jewish community.”





SOUSA MENDES, C. 1940

Soon after his appointment in this city, consul-general of Portugal **ARISTIDES DE SOUSA MENDES** (1885-1954), witnessed the German invasion of France and the city where he was stationed being flooded with refugees. Portugal's autocratic dictator, Antonio de Olivera Salazar, issued explicit instructions to his diplomatic representatives in Europe forbidding them from granting passports or visas, among others, to "Jews expelled from their countries and stripped of their nationality."

Witnessing the despair of the refugees, Sousa Mendes decided to do the "diplomatically unthinkable": he rebelled against the inhumane orders of his superiors. In the course of a few days and with the assistance of his family and other volunteers, he issued thousands of Portuguese transit visas to Jewish refugees for entry into his tiny, neutral country, saving them from the Nazis. "It was an assembly-line operation," to quote the apt description of Michael D. Hull.

Among these refugees was Rabbi Chaim Kruger, who had fled from Poland through Belgium with his wife and six children. A picture of the rabbi and the consul standing together remained as a testimony of their friendship.

By the end of June 1940, Sousa Mendes found that he had been relieved of his post and ordered to leave France. He remained disgraced by his government and his nation. The recognition of his heroic deeds came first from Israel in 1961. Yad Vashem posthumously declared him a "Righteous Gentile," and in 1987, Portuguese president Soares awarded the Portuguese Order of Liberty and the Grand Cross of the Order of Christ to the Sousa Mendes children.



"The Incredible Lightness of Disobedience – Aristides de Sousa Mendes," is the subheading of an article by Avraham Milgram entitled "Portugal, the Consuls and the Jewish Refugees." One could not find a more fitting description for this Portuguese consul who, like Propper de Callejón, was also stationed in the French southwestern port city of Bordeaux, beyond which lay the Pyrenees and neutral Spain and Portugal.



SOUSA MENDES' SIGNATURE ON A VISA GRANTED TO HERRY CHAIM WILENSAY



SOUSA MENDES AND RABBI CHAIM KRUGER



SOUSA MENDES' FAMILY WITH REFUGEES IN CABANAS DE VIRIATO, PORTUGAL, WHERE HE WAS BORN



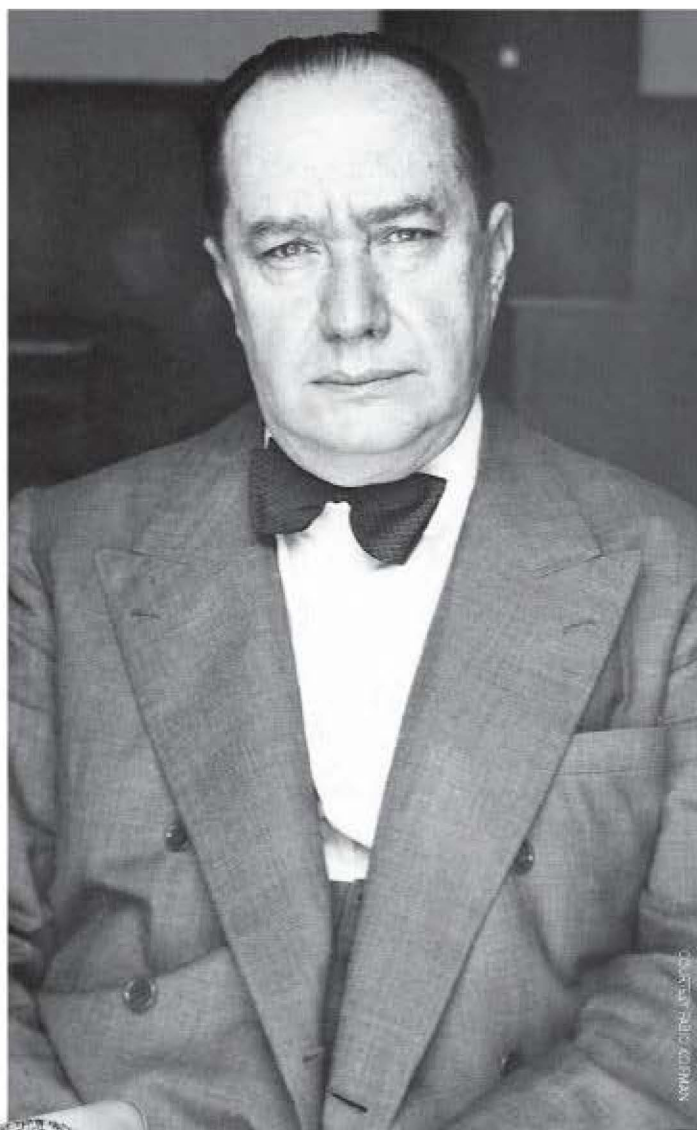
“Felix Rohatyn knew that he and a handful of relatives had been lucky to get out of Nazi-occupied France in the early 1940’s, when he was 12 years old. Rohatyn, now 77, is the financier who helped save New York City from bankruptcy in the 1970’s and later served as ambassador to France during the Clinton administration.”

— THE NEW YORK TIMES, APRIL 11, 2005, P. A19

Rohatyn’s family was Jewish, originally from Poland.

It was **LUIS MARTINS DE SOUZA DANTAS** (1876-1954), the wartime Brazilian ambassador to France and later to the Vichy government, who provided visas to Brazil (N. 447 on Souza Dantas’s list of people he granted visas to) that saved young Felix and his relatives.

LUIS MARTINS DE SOUZA DANTAS



CHRISTIAN HENRI/GETTY IMAGES

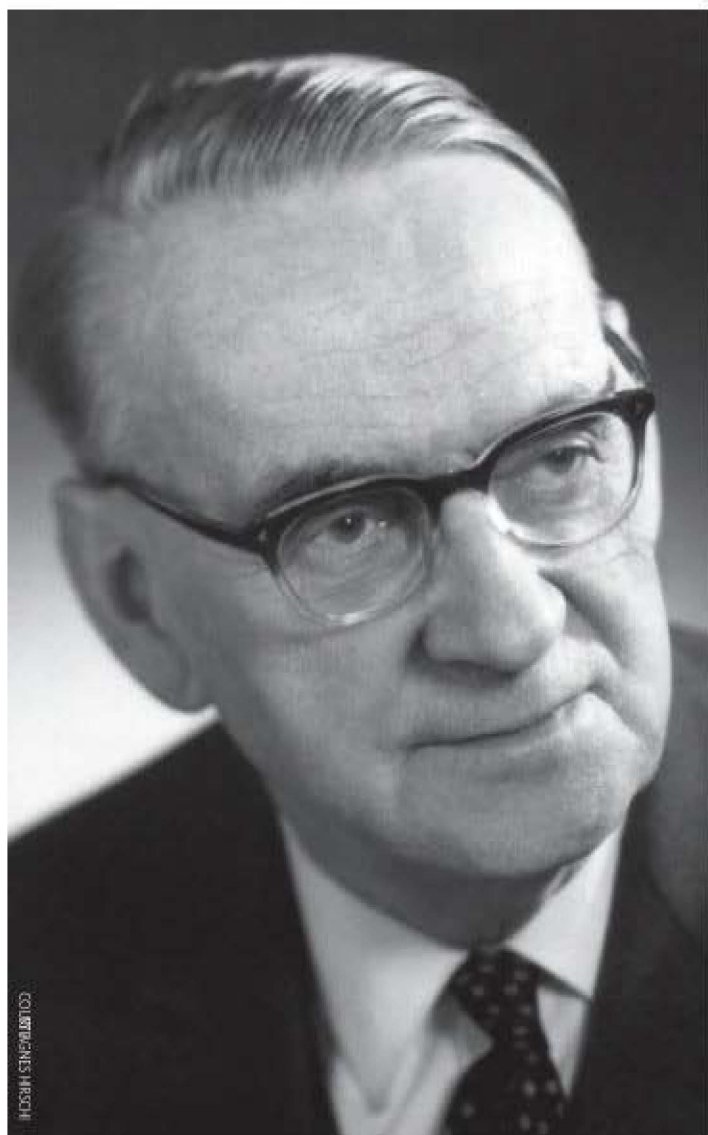


VISA SIGNED BY SOUZA DANTAS

COURTESY FABIO KOIFMAN



Rio de Janeiro Jewish historian Fabio Koifman who helped rescue Souza Dantas from oblivion actually identified 425 Jews saved by the Brazilian diplomat. After being ordered by his government to stop issuing these visas, Souza Dantas would often forge the issue date to a date prior to the order. Just as the Portuguese dictator had been opposed to the granting visas to Jews, so was the Brazilian president Getúlio Vargas. Luis Martins de Souza Dantas was recalled from his post, faced disciplinary hearings for his actions, and was found guilty of breaking the Brazilian Jewish immigration policy. He died in poverty in Paris and was proclaimed by Yad Vashem a Righteous Among the Nations in June 2003.



COLLETTANES HRSCH



There were other diplomats stationed in Western Europe who also became involved in an effort to save Jewish lives from the Holocaust. One of them was Swiss Consul General **CARL LUTZ** (1895-1975) stationed in Budapest from 1942-1945.

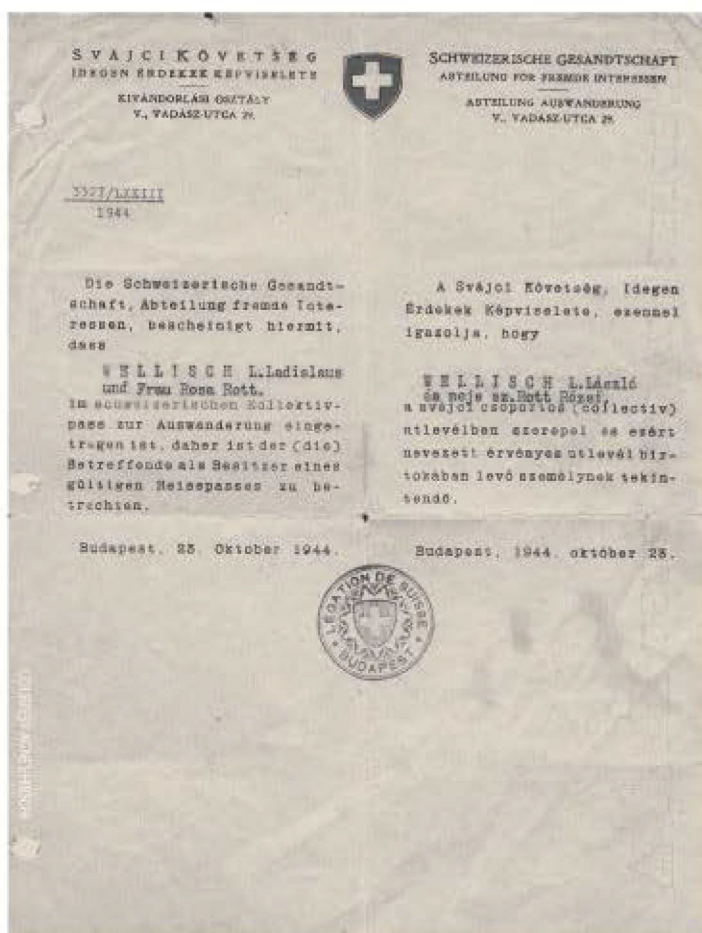
Having been in the Swiss diplomatic service in Palestine, Carl Lutz was acquainted with the problem of Jewish immigration. Simon Wiesenthal wrote that, "As long as the Hungarian government was still in control, Hungarian Jews were able to obtain emigration certificates, (some 800,000 Jews lived in Hungary, the last reservoir of Jewry during the Holocaust) and it was Consul General Lutz – at that time still vice consul – who cooperated with the authorities of that country on this issue. His efforts were so successful that week after week 50 to 100 persons obtained visas to leave for Palestine." Carl Lutz helped approximately 10,000 emigrants to leave Hungary up to March 19, 1944, the day of the German occupation. All emigration was suspended on that day. Three months later, more than 400,000 Jews had already been dispatched to Auschwitz.



Instead of being praised for his humanitarian deeds, government bureaucrats called Carl Lutz's independent actions high-handed disobedience. He wasn't punished but his heroism remained buried in archives. Only in 1995 did the Swiss Federal government officially apologize for its long neglect, declaring Carl Lutz to be one of the outstanding citizens in the nation's history.

Writes Wiesenthal "This interdiction led to a protest of the Swiss legation." When Hitler's envoy to Budapest, Veesenmeyer, inquired how many emigrants were still registered with the Swiss, Lutz said 8,000. The Germans consented to let these 8,000 emigrate, provided the Swiss consul did not insist on saving more. Lutz refused stating, "It would have meant that the Swiss consul agreed to the murder of the rest of the Jews."

Without making it known, Lutz began issuing additional tens of thousands of Schutzbriefe – letters of protection – far beyond the 8,000. In mid-1944, in order to increase his protection of Jews, he placed no less than 30,000 Schutzbrief holders in 76 Schutzhäuser, – protective houses, – for which he obtained diplomatic immunity, an unprecedented feat.



A SCHUTZBRIEF ISSUED BY CARL LUTZ



COURTESY AGNES HIRSCH

PEOPLE MASSING IN FRONT OF SWISS CONSULATE IN BUDAPEST



Carl Lutz risked his own life more than once in his rescue efforts on behalf of Jews hunted by the Nazis. However, during the final months of 1944 he was no longer alone – he was now able to count on the effective cooperation of Angelo Rotta (apostolic nuncio) and Raoul Wallenberg (Sweden). Less known is the fact that the legendary Wallenberg had been preceded at the Swedish legation in Budapest by second secretary **PER ANGER** (1913-2002), whose appointment to the Hungarian capital came on June 12, 1942.

As Elizabeth Skoglund writes, “The Swedish diplomats who protected the Jews did not even have an embassy in the city [Budapest]; it was only a legation. Today foreign countries establish an embassy in the capital of a country, while consulates are placed in other smaller cities. But things were different in the 1940’s. According to Per Anger: ‘Embassies did not exist at that time, except for the big powers. But all the other countries had what we called ‘legations.’”



A RECEPTION IN STOCKHOLM ON MAY 20, 1990. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: AMBASSADOR PER ANGER, ISRAELI AMBASSADOR MOSHE YAGOR, PRESIDENT OF ISRAEL CHAIM HERZOG, MRS. AURA HERZOG, AND HIS MAJESTY KING CARL XVI GUSTAF.

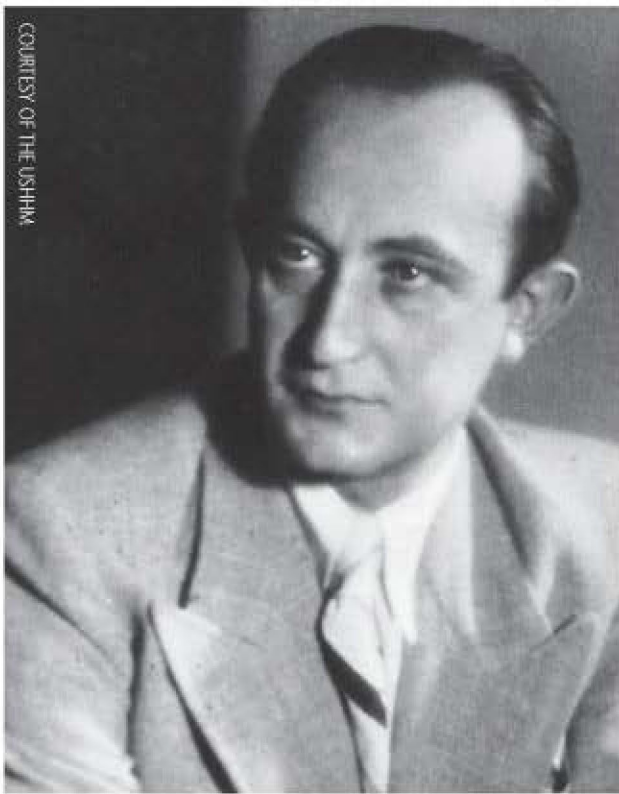


SWEDISH LEGATION, BUDAPEST

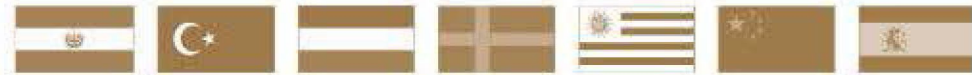


And yet, as a second secretary and from a small room in the Swedish legation, Per Anger came up with the idea of issuing provisional passports to Jewish refugees, a kind of travel document given to Swedish citizens abroad who had lost their real passports. He also started extending special certificates to the many Jews who had applied for Swedish citizenship. More than 700 such documents were issued. When Wallenberg arrived in Budapest on July 9, 1944 and saw the documents issued by Per Anger, he was inspired to issue the Schutzpasse – the protective passes – printed on flashy paper in color with signatures, seals and stamps topped by “The Kronor” – the three crowns representing the Swedish state. These documents had no legal support whatsoever, but the Germans, as well as the Hungarians, came to respect them. They saved thousands of Jewish lives.

THE CERTIFICATE PER ANGER RECEIVED WHEN HE WAS HONORED BY ISRAEL AS ONE WHO IS A “RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS.” THOSE SO RECOGNIZED ARE ALSO AWARDED A MEDAL AND HAVE A TREE PLANTED IN JERUSALEM IN YAD VASHEM’S MUSEUM GROUNDS.



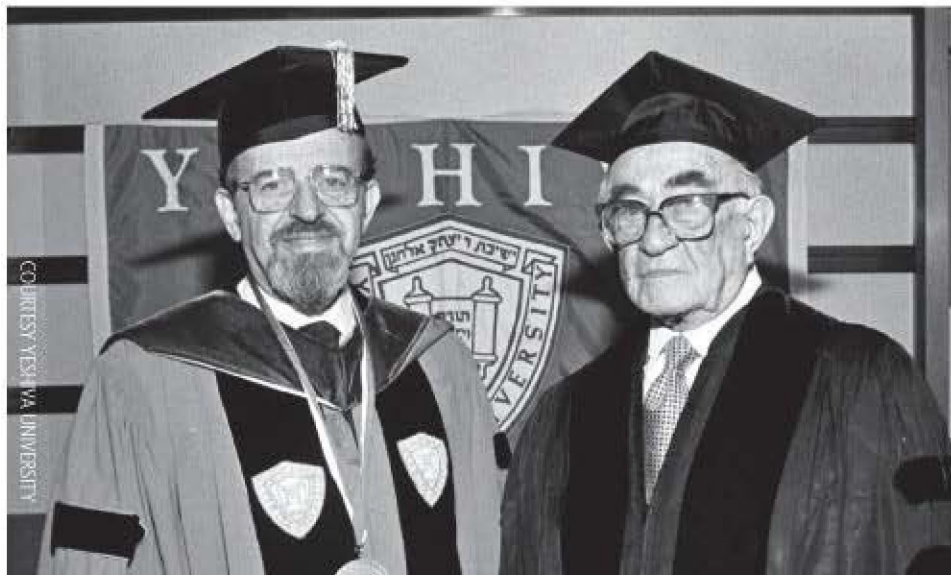
PORTRAIT OF DIPLOMATIC
RESCUER MANTELLO



Wallenberg's and Anger's courageous efforts were aided by yet another diplomat **GEORGE MANTELLO** (1901-1992), the only one of the diplomats who was actually Jewish. Mantello had been a very successful financier and textile manufacturer in Bucharest before the war. There he befriended Col. José Castellanos, the Salvadoran consul general in Geneva, Switzerland. In 1939, Castellanos first appointed Mantello El Salvador's honorary consul for Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania. In January 1942, Mantello obtained a Salvadoran passport and was appointed as first secretary of the El Salvador consulate in Geneva.

During 1944 and until the end of the war, Mantello was responsible for saving approximately 20,000-30,000 Jews throughout German-occupied territories. He accomplished this by issuing 10,000 Salvadoran citizenship papers, each good for an entire family, to Jews and to many endangered non-Jews as well.

Contrary to the position of most other governments, Mantello's rescue efforts of his Jewish co-religionists received the support not only of José Castellanos, but also of José Gustavo Guerrero, a former president of El Salvador and former judge at the International Court in The Hague, Holland, then residing in Geneva, and the government of El Salvador itself.



GEORGE MANTELLO (RIGHT) WITH YESHIVA UNIVERSITY CHANCELLOR NORMAN LAMM



JAN ZWARTENDIJK WITH HIS DAUGHTER, EDITH, AND SON, JAN JR., KAUNAS, LITHUANIA, 1940

Moving northeast from Budapest, another life-saving effort of Jewish refugees was taking place. It all started in the fall of 1939 when as a result of the Hitler-Stalin Agreement, Poland was divided between Germany and the Soviet Union with the Soviets transferring control of the city of Vilna from Poland to Lithuania. This transfer enabled some 15,000 Polish refugees, including 3,000 students and teachers affiliated with some of Poland's foremost yeshivot (Talmudic academies), to flee to nearby Vilna, now part of neutral Lithuania. What these refugees assumed would be a return to normality in moving to Vilna was soon interrupted by the Russian occupation. Jews realized that they could not live under Soviet rule, and the Nazi threat was looming from the west. Fleeing became imperative. The North Sea route had been closed by the Nazis. Escape was only possible through Japan via the Soviet Union. But how?

While many consulates in Kaunas, Lithuania's capital, had already closed, the Dutch consulate was still open. In June 1940, the Dutch ambassador to the Baltic states, L.P.J. de Decker – who resided in Riga, Latvia – appointed JAN ZWARTENDIJK (1896-1976) as temporary Dutch consul for Lithuania. The date was June 14, 1940, one day before the Soviet invasion.

Zwartendijk was a Dutch businessman who worked for Philips, the manufacturer of light bulbs and radios. In May 1939, he became Philips' director of Lithuanian operations. Far was it for him to imagine the role he would play in saving Jewish lives. With the support of Ambassador Decker, Zwartendijk aided Jewish refugees by issuing them permits to enter Curaçao, the Dutch colonial possession in the West Indies. The permits declared, "An entrance visa is not required for the admission of aliens to Surinam, Curaçao, and other possessions in America." This wording had no legal value whatsoever. Zwartendijk himself was doubtful of their value but in the course of four days, July 24-27, 1940 he wrote 1,300 visas by hand and at least another 1,050 more from July 29-August 2. He carried out his work from the Philips office which doubled as his consular site.

Jan Zwartendijk spent the entire war, from September 1940 on, in Holland. During the war, he never spoke to anyone about his consular activities. Only in 1963 did his name come to the attention of researchers. Yad Vashem bestowed upon him posthumously the title of "Righteous Among the Nations" in 1997.

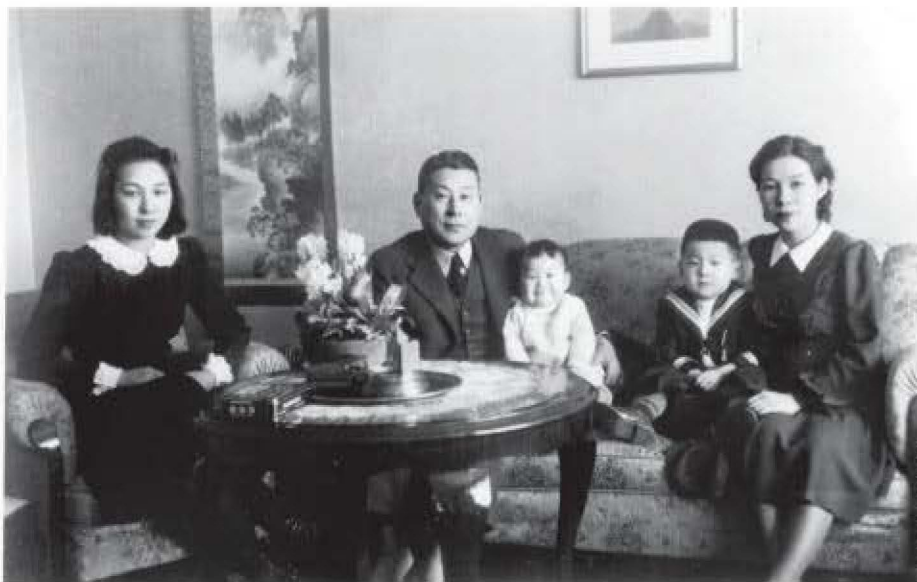


LEON ILITOVICH'S "CURAÇAO VISA," (BOTTOM, FAR LEFT, SIGNED BY ZWARTENDIJK), ISSUED ON JULY 31, 1940, AND JAPANESE TRANSIT VISA (TOP, LEFT CENTER) ADDED TWO DAYS LATER. BOTH WERE ENTERED ON HIS CERTIFICATE OF POLISH CITIZENSHIP.



The Dutch colonies did not normally require visas for entry, but the refugees needed papers indicating final destinations in order to get out of Lithuania. They also needed permission to pass through the Soviet Union and Japan. Many of them massed outside the Japanese consulate, asking for help.

Into the breach stepped in Japanese consul to Lithuania, **CHIUNE SUGIHARA** (1900-1986) who, according to Prof. Hillel Levine's fitting description, in a "conspiracy of goodness," persuaded Soviet officials to let Jews with Curaçao visas pass through Japan. But when he cabled Tokyo for permission to issue these transit visas, he was refused. Three times. Disobedience could mean disgrace and even retribution, as was the case with other diplomats.



THE SUGIHARA FAMILY SITS IN THE LIVING ROOM OF THEIR RESIDENCE IN KAUNAS SHORTLY AFTER THEIR ARRIVAL. SEATED FROM LEFT TO RIGHT ARE: SETSUKO KIKUCHI (YUKIKO'S SISTER), CHIUNE SUGIHARA, CHIAKI, HIROKI, AND YUKIKO SUGIHARA.

COURTESY OF THE USHMM



COURTESY OF THE USHMM

A JAPANESE PASS TO LEAVE THE DESIGNATED JEWISH AREA ISSUED TO ISRAEL MILBROD, A POLISH-JEWISH REFUGEE SAVED BY CHIUNE SUGIHARA IN KAUNAS



Sugihara decided to ignore his superiors' instructions. During the few weeks he remained in Lithuania during the summer of 1940, "he issued so many handwritten visas that his wife, Yukiko, had to massage the cramps out of his hands at night." (*The New York Times*, November 7, 1995, p.B3) Sugihara was still issuing visas out the window of the train as his family headed for Berlin of that fateful August. He signed over 2,000 visas before his consulate was closed by the Soviets.

Sugihara held other diplomatic posts before returning to Japan in 1947. He was then dismissed from the foreign service with a small pension. He and his family were convinced that he was paying the price for his insubordination in Kaunas, though the Japanese denied it. Yad Vashem awarded him with the Righteous Among the Nations recognition in 1985, a year before his death. He was too ill to attend the ceremony.

Sınıfı : ..Hava Teğmen
Adı ve Soyadı :Selâhattin Ülkümen



COURTESY OF THE USHMM

iny Savaşı'nın en kritik
ikinci askerlik görevini

IDENTIFICATION PORTRAIT OF ÜLKÜMEN



Off the European mainland and in the Aegean Sea lies the Greek island of Rhodes, home to about 4,500 Jews by the time World War II broke out. The island had been under Italian rule since the 1912 Balkan Wars. Following the capitulation of Italy to the Allies in September 1943, the Germans occupied the island and moved to close the Turkish consulate, the last remaining Turkish consulate in Axis-controlled territory.

On July 19, 1944, the Gestapo ordered all of the island's Jewish population to appear at its headquarters. Knowing what their destination was to be, the Turkish consul **SELÂHATTIN ÜLKÜMEN** (1914-2003), a Muslim, approached Generalleutnant Ulrich Kleemann demanding that he release 42 Turkish citizens who either held Turkish passports or were married to those who did.

The Germans relented and all those on the Turkish consul's list were freed. Several hundred other Jews were deported to Greece and onward to their extermination. 150 survived the war.

Immediately after Turkey joined the Allies and declared war on the Axis, German planes bombed the Turkish consulate in retaliation for his assistance to Rhodes' Jews, killing Ülkümen's pregnant wife Mihinissa Hanım as well as two other employees.

In 1989, Selâhattin Ülkümen was honored by the Yad Vashem Foundation as a Righteous Gentile.



THE ISRAELI POSTAL AUTHORITY HONORED SOME OF THE DIPLOMATS REPRESENTED IN OUR EXHIBIT. THE STAMPS WERE ISSUED TO COINCIDE WITH THE 1998 COMMEMORATION OF THAT YEAR'S HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: GIORGIO PERLASCA, ARISTIDES DE SOUZA MENDES, CHARLES LUTZ, SEMPO SUGIHARA, SELAHATTIN ÜLKÜMEN. THE FIRST DAY OF ISSUE ENVELOPE ALSO FEATURES SEVERAL KINDS OF VISAS THAT THESE DIPLOMATS ISSUED.

“The Holocaust is so big, the scale of it so gigantic, so enormous, that it becomes easy to think of it as something mechanical. Anonymous. But everything that happened, happened because someone made a decision. To pull a trigger, to flip a switch, to close a cattle door, to hide, to betray.”

THE LOST: A SEARCH FOR SIX OF SIX MILLION,
BY DANIEL MENDELSON, P. 479

Along with these cogs who made mass murder possible, there were unique souls – our “Diplomats of Mercy” – who gave visas, signed documents, protested against their own governments for their lack of mercy, who literally pulled Jews out of cattle wagons on their way to the factories of death, and who saved thousands of Jewish lives in the process.

This exhibit touches upon only a few of these diplomats. The International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation lists another sixty, and additional names of other diplomats are still coming to the attention of researchers.

Most were honored by Yad Vashem; others probably will be in the future. The Israeli Postal Authority honored six of these Righteous Among the Nations with stamps issued in April 1998.