

Chapter 4

SURFACING



The Allied liberation of Germany from twelve years of Nazi tyranny entered its final phase in January 1945. On the country's eastern and western flanks, the Allies swept over Germany's pre-1939 boundaries and began the quick, albeit costly, destruction of the Third Reich. By 31 January, the Red Army had reached what would soon be the new eastern border of the German state, the Oder River, a mere forty miles from Berlin.¹ The liberation of the city, however, took another three months. For the city's submerged Jews, victory could not arrive soon enough. The years submerged, during which they were almost continually on the run through the shadows of Berlin, had taken their toll on the health and emotional well-being of all those still alive in the city. However close victory was, the focus of the average submerged Jew remained day-to-day survival in a city that had become increasingly difficult to navigate, geographically as well as personally. The ferocity of the air raids continued, and the Soviet advance inundated the city with hundreds of thousands of refugees, making daily life chaotic. As the Red Army closed in during April and launched "Operation Berlin," the full horrors of the Nazi war were finally brought home to bear upon Berliners, non-Jews and Jews alike. When it was over, Berlin lay in ruins, but its Jewish residents were free. The cost of liberation, however, was heavy, and the experience of liberation complex.²

As World War II entered its final phase, the divisions between the surviving U-boats and the non-Jewish population began to blur. In-

ingly, the hopes and fears of the remaining Jews in the city began to intersect with those of the non-Jewish population in ways that were reflective of a specific Berlin wartime experience. Even in the chaos caused by the retreat of the German Army, Jews were able to use the circumstances created by the war to continually develop new strategies for survival; considering their circumstances, many divers proved quite adept at taking advantage of the turmoil. Indeed, as the city changed, they changed with it, and their aptitude for assessing the situation manifested itself, in particular, in their responses to the German refugee crisis and their manipulation of the effects of the air raids to obtain legal residency permits and procure ration cards. These actions were possible because, contrary to the assumed nature of hiding in which Jews lived almost completely removed from non-Jews, many U-boats never completely severed their ties to German civil society. Their connection to that life “aboveground,” the ability on occasion to resurface and come up for air, enabled them to keep abreast of the war’s progress and its effects on the city and to use that knowledge to survive these final challenging months.

The benefits that accrued from the increasing disorder in the city, however, could only go so far. The divers also suffered from the steady decrease in the quality of life in Berlin. Their position had always been a marginal one and often barely sustainable, and the Soviet advance wreaked even greater havoc on their lives. It destroyed whatever semblance of an everyday the U-boats had managed to build. Resting as it did on Nazi rule, everyday life in the Third Reich began to collapse in tandem with the regime, and such a collapse consequently disrupted the U-boats’ tried and tested networks of survival. The confusion in the city also began to disrupt the decision-making capabilities of some of the city’s submerged Jews, which put them in increasing danger of arrest. Although the last transports to the camps left in March 1945—the Nazis never wavering from their pursuit of the Final Solution—the city’s divers were not aware of that fact.³ Arrest and deportation continued to loom large in their minds even as the basic necessities for survival rapidly disappeared.

The pandemonium caused by the Battle of Berlin proved to be the final challenge for the approximately 1,700 U-boats who had survived for so long. Coming on the heels of years of deprivation, the battle also proved one of the toughest moments for the city’s divers and dashers; they were beset on all sides. As the city collapsed into anarchy, Jews were also caught up in the fighting. In a city that had lost its civil structure, identification of individuals was nearly impossible, and the divers, particularly men, risked being shot by fanatical Nazis either as Jews or as deserters. In addition, the Battle of Berlin, fought on every street in the city, claimed

tens of thousands of civilian lives, and the fighting posed a danger to Jews and non-Jews alike.

Nor was the liberation of the city by the Soviet Army a straightforward matter. Although freedom was long awaited and the knowledge that one was free elicited joy and relief, liberation entailed uncertainty, danger, and shock for the survivors. The behavior of the Soviet troops was a dark stain on the event; their crimes against the German civilian population extended to Jews as well. Unless one could prove otherwise, the invading troops assumed everyone they encountered was an enemy, and some of the city's remaining Jews fell victim to that assumption. Even those who did not personally experience Soviet vengeance often knew of someone who did. Although some survivors had largely positive memories of liberation, the freeing of the Jews of Berlin was not an easy experience. Removing the history of that event from the overall context of the Battle of Berlin distorts the complex impact it had on the survivors. Moreover, it mythologizes and whitewashes a moment in the history of submerged life that, when contextualized, reinforces the connection between the submerged Jews of Berlin and the city.

January–April 1945: New and Expanded Opportunities for Survival

On 12 January 1945, forty-one-year-old Paula Vigdor, who had dived during the Large Factory Operation of 1943, resurfaced. Tired of the difficulties illegal life posed for her and aware of the rapid Allied advance through Germany, Vigdor went to the Berlin civil authorities and registered as a refugee from Eydtkau.⁴ Eydtkau (today, Chernyshevskoye, Russia) was located in the easternmost part of East Prussia, a region recently taken by Soviet forces. With the territory now out of German control, the authorities had no way to verify Vigdor's statement. She therefore received ration cards and legal registration. Despite the dangers, the recent Allied advances had persuaded Vigdor to take the risk, thereby improving her health and providing her with some measure of stability. Nor was she the only illegal to take advantage of the fall of the Altreich and the ensuing flood of refugees.

Camouflaging as “Refugees”

The flight of German civilians from the eastern portions of the Reich created an important opportunity for Jews willing to risk claiming that they were refugees fleeing the advancing Red Army.⁵ Indeed, the number

of German refugees moving through Berlin was so large and the pressures they exerted on the civil and military authorities so great that some divers in the city felt safe enough to take advantage of the chaos to resurface. Once they had done so, they could obtain ration cards and, in the case of individuals like Vigdor, register as legal residents. According to one survivor, the chaotic nature of the city helped; with a little “chutzpah and bluster,” he could now get ration cards.⁶ Nor was this act a mere spontaneous response to the influx of refugees. Rather, Jews expanded upon a strategy to feed themselves that had been available to some of the more daring individuals since the heavy air raids began in March 1943. In doing so, their responses illustrate the adaptability of survival strategies, their acute understanding of the Berlin environment, and their awareness of the progress of the war.

The Red Army first breached the German *Altreich* in October 1944, only to be thrown back by the Wehrmacht, but not before the massacre of over two dozen inhabitants—women, children, and the elderly—of the small German farming community of Nemmersdorf.⁷ Besides reinforcing National Socialist propaganda claims of a bestial and destructive Soviet Army, this act set the stage for what became by 12 January 1945, the date of the Soviet invasion of East Prussia, a forced population transfer of historic proportions. Estimates suggest that over eight million Germans were fleeing into the *Altreich* by the middle of February.⁸ At least 120,000 individuals did not survive the trek.⁹ Some fell victim to the Soviets through murder or, after being raped, suicide.¹⁰ The refugees were predominantly women, children, and the elderly. During the brutal winter of 1944–45, temperatures dropped well below zero, and the snow piled high; individuals froze to death. Overwhelmed train capabilities prevented reliable transport westward; many journeyed on foot.¹¹ On their way, they brought with them their stories of flight and tales of the atrocities of the Red Army.

While much of Germany west of the Oder and Neisse Rivers soon experienced the flood of refugees, Berlin, as both capital and important transit hub, bore the brunt; by the end of January, over forty thousand refugees were arriving daily.¹² Despite attempts to reroute trains or push the refugees onward, the city was inundated, its train stations fast becoming makeshift camps.¹³ Gad Beck, a *Mischling*, recalled how the influx of refugees began to alter the subways: “The U-Bahn stations were turning more and more into emergency accommodations. People camped out on the platforms—entire families with their luggage; some had set themselves up quite a little home.”¹⁴ Many of the refugees were sick, and fears of an epidemic prompted the authorities to keep the refugees moving, often demonstrating an extreme indifference to their suffering.¹⁵ These efforts, however, were complicated by Berliners attempting to make their own way out of the city to the comparative safety of the countryside and smaller towns.

However much the authorities may have dreaded the inundation of the city by hundreds of thousands of impoverished and sick refugees, the influx was a welcome opportunity for Berlin's illegal Jews to share in the aid being passed out to the newcomers. For some individuals, the possibilities were similar to those provided by the air raids. Ever since the heavy bombing had started in the city in 1943, the increasing number of bombed-out individuals enabled some illegal Jews to procure ration cards, if only on a sporadic basis; it provided them, in the words of one survivor, with an "opportunity to get in on the act."¹⁶ Ruth Arndt was one of a number of U-boats who developed a somewhat systematic approach to obtaining ration cards. After an air raid, Ruth located a newly bombed-out street, remembered the address, and showed up at one of the local aid stations.¹⁷ After presenting the address of her now "destroyed" apartment, she then received her ration cards. Still, there was a risk that one of the people standing in the same line had actually lived at that address; to be careful, Annelies B., for example, always asked the people in front of her and behind her where they had lived, so as to avoid giving the same address.¹⁸ This was not an uncommon occurrence among divers attempting to resurface.¹⁹ Although the origins of this tactic are unknown (i.e., did survivors share the information with one another, or was it self-evident?) and the act was dangerous, the destruction of the city and the increasingly transient population made camouflaging oneself as an *Ausgebombte(r)* (bombed-out person) a viable alternative.²⁰

The ration cards supplied two weeks of food, a valuable asset. However, bombed-out Berliners were expected to have procured new housing by the time the next ration cards were delivered. In order to extend his supply, Bruno G. went back to the same registration center, slamming his fists on the table and demanding to know why his new ration cards had not been delivered:

What kind of Schweinerei is this?! Why weren't my ration cards delivered to me? Here, I'm working extra shifts for the Führer, and I have to sacrifice my sleeping hours; I come here and stand in line. Who's responsible for this, Missy? I want his name. I want to turn him in.²¹

With profuse apologies from the employee at the center, Bruno thus managed to obtain an extra period of ration cards, including clothing cards and the ever-valuable tobacco ration cards. Although this specific auxiliary tactic could work only one time per distribution center, Bruno remembers the opportunity presenting itself on several occasions. Many U-boats, however, made no record of having camouflaged themselves as victims of the air raids. Certainly, the risks of being recognized and denounced outweighed the benefits in the minds of many. Yet considering the usefulness of camouflaging oneself as an air-raid victim, the jump to

claiming to be a refugee from the eastern reaches of the German *Großreich* appears to have been the next logical step.

The influx of refugees served as a strong cover story, credible in the eyes of the civil authorities who were coping with providing for hundreds of thousands of refugees. That such a cover story was possible was due to the nature of the average refugee's flight. Many had to flee the advancing Soviet troops with little forewarning. In a rush to board trains, papers were lost. Possessions transported in wagons were often left behind in the drifting snow. Moreover, because so many German towns and cities were now either under Soviet control or under siege, authorities were not able to check the refugees' claims. Jews recognized this and were careful to pick towns and cities that were already lost to the Soviets, or else were soon to be lost. Thus, Paula Vigdor claimed that she was a refugee from farthest reaches of East Prussia.

In a similar fashion, after hearing about the evacuation of Breslau, Edith Ruth Epstein declared herself a refugee from the besieged city.²² Breslau was one of a number of cities declared "fortresses" by Hitler, to be held at all costs. After a rushed evacuation, announced at the end of January in the streets by loudspeakers on trucks, the city was finally cut off on 12 February 1945, trapping over eighty thousand civilians; it was not liberated until 6 May.²³ Epstein's alibi proved a safe one, and the circumstances illustrate the acute awareness the U-boats had regarding the progress of the war. Vigdor, too, credited the speedy advance of the Allies with her decision to register with the authorities.²⁴ Indeed, the city's divers did not just know that the Allies were coming; they knew, through word of mouth and listening to foreign radio broadcasts, where the Allies were, and they used this knowledge to their benefit. Yet the refugee crisis engulfing the city was only one element signaling the collapse of the Third Reich. Even still, although camouflaging oneself as a refugee may have benefitted some individuals, it was not an option for all the city's divers or at least not considered by them.

Visiting the Air Raid Shelters

One noticeable change that many of the illegals, including Bruno G., recognized, particularly during the final, chaotic month of the war, was that the focus of the civil authorities and the local populace shifted from the hunt for illegal Jews to the defense of the city.²⁵ A shift in the attitudes of the civilian population was also noticeable. They did not resist the Nazis, but they were not loyal either, nor were they interested in a final and bitter struggle to the death. The war was lost, and they wanted it over as soon as possible. The continuous air raids and the forthcoming battle had

shifted their priorities. In the words of one historian, “Bombs tended to privatize.”²⁶ Berliners had turned inward to steel themselves for the long fight, a shift allowing the dashers to focus a bit more on their own survival during the final battle and less on evading capture. As the war came home to Berliners and began to radically alter Berlin’s physical landscape, it consequently began to alter people’s behavior and outlook.

An important result of this shift in civilian attitudes was that air raid shelters and apartment basements became increasingly available to the U-boats. For years, many individuals living in illegality had eschewed the apartment bomb shelters as well as the public bunkers.²⁷ In particular, the public bunkers were subject to pass inspections, and many divers rightly feared them.²⁸ The U-boat Friedrich Rhonheimer, for example, always had avoided the shelters. However, this all changed in the final month of the war. During that period, Rhonheimer felt comfortable enough to visit the shelters, because “the atmosphere made this possible.” Indeed, his now credible pretext that the train connections were cut went unquestioned.²⁹ Even in the public bunkers, some now dealing with accommodating upward of thirty thousand souls at a time, the days of strict pass inspections were vanishing (see figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1. Berliners Storm Public Bunker. Already, in 1943, Berliners storm one of the public bunkers in Humboldthain Park in the Wedding District. By 1945, the chaos had only increased.³⁰

For most Berliners, Jew and non-Jew, the increasing air raids were a more pressing threat. On 21 April, Ruth Arndt and her friend Ellen Lewinsky decided to take the risk and visit a nearby air raid shelter; the previous day, the windows of the factory in which they were hiding had been blown in by the force of a bomb falling in the immediate area.³¹ Over the years, submerged Jews had learned to lie and bluff their way out of difficult situations, and in the chaos of the final weeks of war, visiting the shelters was now seen as an acceptable risk. If no one recognized them, they were safe. At least in the shelters, their fate was, to some extent, within their control. The bombs, however, were not. Thus, the air raids were helpful, up to a certain point; as they increased in intensity beginning in February, the confusion they caused at first worked in the U-boats' favor. Yet as the Soviets approached the Oder and Neisse Rivers, the ensuing rapid destabilization of life in the city also began to work against those dashing through the city in an effort to survive and often complicated their attempts.

January 1945–April 1945: The Dangers of a Disintegrating “Everyday Life” in Berlin

Returning to the city after her Spanish helpers had left Germany in autumn 1944, Ruth Arndt secured employment along with her friend Ellen Lewinsky as a maid for the family of a Wehrmacht colonel who knew they were Jewish. Ruth and Ellen also waited tables when the family hosted dinner parties for other officers, whose drunken advances Ruth and Ellen sometimes needed to fight off. The family provided Ruth and Ellen with food leftovers, including, once, the remains of a goose that Ruth and Ellen took back to their factory hideout to share with Ruth's brother Erich and his friend Bruno. Then, on 3 February, while Ruth was at work, the air raid siren went off. Ruth decided to take cover in the cellar, since she was not known in that neighborhood. Once it was all over, she left and headed for the subway, but it was closed. As she walked back to her lodgings at the factory, the devastation from the latest bombing raid increased as she got closer: smoke, debris, dead horses, and dead people littered the streets. Over 2,500 Berliners had perished; more than 100,000 were now homeless. Luckily, the factory was still standing, and her family and friends were unharmed. That February outing proved to be one of Ruth's last for the remainder of the war; as a result of the increasing air raids, the city was becoming too dangerous.³² Martin Riesenburger, caretaker of the Jewish cemetery in the Weißensee district of the city (which had over four thousand graves destroyed by the air raids), noted in his postwar account

the horrific destruction of the very same air raid that Ruth had experienced; as a result, from that point on, he, too, rarely left the cemetery.³³ Of course, danger had plagued the city's divers and dashers for more than two years by this point, but danger was part of the U-boats' daily routine; indeed, in the words of Ruth's chronicler, "They had lived with danger for so long that they felt immune to it."³⁴ While somewhat hyperbolic and certainly not applicable to all of the city's divers, it is undeniable that by this point, in pursuit of elemental survival and a sense of normality, many of them had developed a variety of tactics for navigating *through* the city while navigating *around* danger. Yet whatever level of control over their destinies some of the more confident dashers felt they had gained, they could not pretend to have any control over the bombs that were falling with increasing frequency and intensity and that had begun to twist the city's once familiar landscape out of all recognition. Indeed, in many respects, the fact that it was the air raids of 1945 that finally made the city "too dangerous" to navigate with any degree of familiarity and confidence is a testament to the tremendous survival skills developed by the U-boats over the preceding years.

Despite the increased, yet still limited, opportunities for obtaining ration cards and registration, submerged life became markedly more dangerous from February 1945 onward. Berlin began experiencing almost daily air raids; any semblance of normality, despite its root in a National Socialist vision, disintegrated, for both Jews and non-Jews.³⁵ The approach of the Soviets, the growing scarcity of food, and the continued hunt by the Gestapo for the remaining U-boats further destabilized life on the run. That the infrastructure of the city had not collapsed earlier was a testament to the wartime planning of the authorities as well as to the will of Berliners to carry on in the face of the numbing effects of the air raids.³⁶ Even so, by March 1945 at the latest, the last vestiges of daily life had all but vanished. The final months of the war witnessed the breakdown of Berlin society and a commensurate breakdown of standard U-boat responses to navigating Nazi society. All submerged Jews, whatever their particular form of evasion as the Third Reich entered its death throes, experienced mounting challenges to survival. The closer the war's end came, the more perilous life became.

For the first three and a half years of the war, Berlin had been spared the horrors and dangers of large-scale bombing runs on the city. Initial damage to the capital was minor. This all changed on 1 March 1943, when the Royal Air Force (RAF) dropped over nine hundred tons of bombs on the city.³⁷ Frequent and heavy air raids over the following two years completely changed the cityscape. Berlin was never engulfed in the kind of firestorms suffered by Dresden and Hamburg, thanks to its open spaces

and large boulevards, although almost 75 percent of damage in the city was due to fire.³⁸ This was not for lack of Allied efforts. Berlin had suffered more air raids—450 by the war’s end—than any other city. Over 45,000 tons of explosives had been dropped on the city.³⁹ Strategic bombing often was impossible, due to cloud cover, so the bombs fell at random.⁴⁰ The RAF continued its nightly bombings of the city, and the Americans continued the daytime raids that they had begun in the previous spring.⁴¹ By late winter 1945, the capital of the Third Reich was fast becoming a “ghost town” (See figure 4.2).⁴² Beginning with the massive air raids in March 1943, Goebbels had ordered the closing of all schools and the evacuation of over one million Berliners. At the start of the war, Berlin had a population of almost 4.5 million people. By early 1945, the population stood between 2 and 2.5 million.⁴³ By the war’s end, over one million Berliners were homeless.⁴⁴ Many of those who were not homeless could scarcely refer to their shelter as a home: blown-out windows, collapsed roofs, and half-burnt dwellings characterized many of these structures.

For Berlin’s U-boats, the air raids, in particular those toward the end of the war, were a complicated experience. Gad Beck described his attitude as such: “On one hand, we were in just as much danger and suffered as much from the bombs as everyone else; on the other hand, however, we were happy about anything the Allied forces were doing to hurt the Nazis.”⁴⁶ Indeed, although the bombs were directed at the Nazi state with an aim to ending the war, they were indiscriminate in their targets. Jews may have feared the air raids even more than others did, since shelters were not always available. On 3 February 1945, the family of Wiktor Pakman, who had died of food poisoning in October 1943 (see chapter 3), suffered three more losses. On that day, the Allies had made their most devastating strike on the city yet, dropping over eleven thousand tons of explosives.⁴⁷ Wiktor’s sister Tania, his wife Róża, and an acquaintance from the Warsaw ghetto were caught in the flames on the way to a shelter in the district of Kreuzberg. Wiktor’s two surviving sisters and niece also lost their apartment.⁴⁸ The latest raids may have brought hope and opportunity for some, but for many they provided hope only in an abstract sense. From the perspective of daily survival, the raids were an additional threat.

By early spring, civilian life in the city had ground to a halt, and although the collapse of German civil society did make some aspects of evasion easier for Jews, the overall state of life for the U-boats took a significant turn for the worse. Although never fully integrated into gentile daily life, Jews did not experience submerged living independently of that “other” life. Indeed, as the war approached its end, these two different lives moved closer together. The effects of the air raids and the disinte-



Figure 4.2. A Scene from the Destroyed Mitte District, ca. 1945.⁴⁵

gration of daily life on the German population have been characterized as follows:

Destruction forced you to take care of errands: finding protection, a roof over your head, family members; filing for government aid; arranging to get what is constantly lacking; and buying and selling on the black market. In Berlin, everything was out of the way.⁴⁹

In a number of respects, this description almost could serve as a description of daily life for Berlin's divers and dashers. However, the difficulties were even greater for Jews. Indeed, as much as Allied military successes carried with them the hope for liberation, the ironic, short-term consequence of such victories for the U-boats was the significant complication of daily life and the disappearance of various means of survival.

First, the disintegration of civilian life in the closing months of the war meant the end of employment for camouflaged Jews, even if a few did manage to maintain their jobs until the arrival of the Russians. Charlotte Josephy, still working for the Bender family near Danzig, was left behind to pack up the family's furnishings. In this way, she kept a roof over her head and her alias as family nanny.⁵⁰ For those still living in Berlin, however, employment began to vanish in February. Ruth Arndt had stopped going to work after her experience of an air raid in February. Her brother Erich and his friend Bruno managed to carry on working in their factory until early April, when Soviet advances shut down nonessential industries. Moreover, as young men, they ran the risk of forced conscription or arrest in a city where all males, from boys to the elderly, were preparing for the upcoming final battle.⁵¹

In March 1945, as a consequence of the rapidly deteriorating conditions in the city, Walter Sternberg also lost his job. Sternberg had been working illegally for the cosmetics firm Gebrüder Müller since 1939, and no one knew he was Jewish. Although such feats were not common, they were possible. In fact, the earlier one could camouflage oneself, the better chance one had of pursuing a continuous, stable existence without having to repeatedly dive and resurface. Sternberg had almost two years before the deportations began to lay the groundwork for his cover story as a non-Jew. By the time they started in 1941, there was no need to question his story. He also set himself up in a work environment where he was completely unknown, his initial residence being in one neighborhood and his place of employment being in another. He submerged in 1940, and he had been promoted to manager in 1943.⁵² The termination of his employment spelled the end of what must have been a remarkably stable thread of existence in an otherwise unstable life.

Even if businesses had stayed open and employed U-boats taken the risk of showing up, traveling around much of the city was almost impossible by March 1945. The air raids wreaked havoc on the city's public transportation. The Anhalter Bahnhof, a train station serving forty thousand passengers daily at its peak, was destroyed in February 1945.⁵³ Already in autumn 1944, transportation had become difficult for Berliners. Gad Beck remembered the difficulties of traversing the streets of Berlin:

The streetcar . . . was in terrible condition. Almost all the windows were broken, and the wind whistled through the car. Sometimes everyone would have to get out because the tracks were damaged. Then we'd have to walk a few blocks to catch another tram along the same line to continue along the route. . . . The closer we got to the city center, the greater the extent of bomb damage.⁵⁴

Such interruptions were only part of the difficulty for Beck. An active member in Zionist resistance circles, the twenty-one-year-old took up the mantle of resistance by helping to procure food and living quarters for over thirty illegal Jews hiding throughout the city. Beck's Zionist connections, as well as his status as a *Mischling*, meant that he had readier access to sources of food and shelter than many of the U-boats. However, by 1945, the air raids had disrupted his "network" of helpers as well as his connections to those in hiding. As the city's infrastructure collapsed, Beck passed the destroyed dwellings of both the U-boats and their helpers with increasing frequency, which complicated his efforts to provide for them.⁵⁵

The increasing destruction of the city not only impeded the activities of Beck, it was also responsible for the deteriorating living conditions of submerged Jews. Hiding places were often unsanitary and unheated. As more and more of the city fell into ruins, however, even the illegals who had once lived in the relative comfort of semi-heated pantries and apartments found their options for shelter now quite limited: "The large bombing attacks accumulated, all acquaintances and friends became, little by little, altogether bombed out, and we no longer had any accommodations."⁵⁶ In February 1945, the apartment in which Walter Sternberg had been living was destroyed in an air raid; the woman hiding him was able to secure new lodgings, however.⁵⁷ Yet even when shelters were still somewhat intact, blown-out windows all but negated the relative warmth of the apartment, and the U-boats were forced to cover the windows with paper, if they could.⁵⁸

The approach of the Red Army should have provided the U-boats with renewed hope; in most cases, it did. Yet having come so far, some individ-

uals, such as twenty-four-year-old Gerda Fink, began to doubt their ability to carry on much longer: “We would not have been able to hold out much longer, because, due to the persisting inspections and raids conducted by the Nazis, we would have been eventually discovered . . .”⁵⁹ Police patrols had, of course, always been part of the reality of submerged life. A forged passport or even a forged postal ID card was necessary to evade these patrols.⁶⁰ However, surprise raids and heightened pass inspections increased in frequency during the war’s final months, trapping those without the necessary forged documentation.

The surge in police patrols was noticed not only by the illegals but also by their helpers.⁶¹ This was a result of the rise in the number of Wehrmacht deserters and the need for the authorities to muster all able-bodied men and boys for the final battle against the Soviets. Julius Becker, submerged since the end of 1942, recalled the difficulties he had in avoiding pass inspections in a city with, according to his claims, eighty thousand deserters from the German army.⁶² By this date, well over one hundred thousand German soldiers had deserted, suggesting that Becker’s claims might not be as far off as they first seem.⁶³ Twenty-five-year-old Heinz T. remembered how the omnipresent patrols made him feel like “hounded game” (*gehetztes Wild*).⁶⁴ Thus, along with the mounting difficulties associated with the disruption of daily life and in procuring food and shelter, Jews had to contend with agents of the Gestapo who had given up neither their search for illegal Jews nor their dedication to the Final Solution. Indeed, on 15 January 1945, the Reich Main Security Office ordered all remaining *Mischlinge* and Jews in mixed marriages deported to Theresienstadt, beginning in February. The order, however, was not carried out in Berlin due to a lack of transportation caused by the last, desperate attempts of the Wehrmacht to hold off the advancing Soviet troops.⁶⁵

Indeed, the last scheduled train to Auschwitz, on 5 January 1945, was redirected to Sachsenhausen, carrying 30 individuals.⁶⁶ In total, four transports left Berlin in 1945, carrying 129 people to Sachsenhausen and Theresienstadt. The last train left Berlin for Theresienstadt on 27 March 1945, carrying 42 people.⁶⁷ Jenny Meisels, her daughter Gisela, and Gisela’s newborn son Michael were among the group. Gisela had entered the City Women’s Clinic (Städtische Frauenklinik) in the district of Charlottenburg in January to await the birth of her child; she had procured false papers in order to accomplish this. Gisela gave birth on 18 February 1945. Four days later, while her mother Jenny was in the hospital visiting her daughter and granddaughter, the three were arrested. They had been denounced and were sent to Theresienstadt. The three arrived there on 28 March, and they were liberated on 7 May 1945.⁶⁸ Although large-scale deportations were no longer possible and had ended completely in

March, submerged Jews could not have known this. Even if they were not deported, torture and the threat of execution remained very real possibilities. Indeed, arrests of Jews continued until the final days of the war.

Berlin's imminent collapse also disrupted the decision-making capabilities of the U-boats. Quick thinking was always a necessary skill for survival in the city. However, the stress of the final months and weeks of the war destabilized their grasp on their surroundings that had characterized the relationship of the U-boats with the city. Thus, on 14 March 1945, shortly after 10:00 P.M., passersby arrested eighteen-year-old Kurt W. in the Mitte district after he had attempted to escape from two members of the police; his accomplice, twenty-five-year-old Stefan W., escaped. During the escape, one of the two officers had been shot dead.⁶⁹ Having run in the opposite direction as Kurt, Stefan escaped but was wounded by a bullet. Kurt and Stefan had been working in Gad Beck's network of resistance and aid for illegal Jews since their escapes the previous year. Kurt, with Beck's help, had escaped a forced labor detail in the city. Stefan had escaped from Buchenwald and made his way to Berlin.⁷⁰ Working in Beck's circle, the two had provided aid to at least thirty-six illegal Jews in the city. The group had long managed to function with almost seamless efficiency. After Beck's own arrest on 2 March 1945, however, the group's network quickly began to unravel, endangering the lives of dozens of people.⁷¹

After his capture, Beck, adept at functioning in Berlin's underground, had to turn his work over to others. Thus, on the night of 14 March, Kurt and Stefan had been engaged in procuring horsemeat from a couple who owned a restaurant; the meat was to be distributed to submerged Jews throughout the city.⁷² The Gestapo, in its own report, claimed that twenty-five pounds of horsemeat had been purchased for 600 RM, supposedly from Switzerland.⁷³ A brutal interrogation followed Kurt's arrest and resulted in the interrogation of Beck's sister Margot and gentile mother Hedwig. Although unable to collect any useful information from Margot or Hedwig, the Gestapo kept Margot in custody; the Gestapo felt sure she would be able to provide more information concerning her brother's extensive illegal activities.⁷⁴

The circumstances surrounding the arrest of Kurt and Stefan reflected the disintegration of Beck's fine-tuned network of help. Beck remarked in his memoirs, "The final months of the war were unbearable. You could tell with every step that things were going downhill. Nothing worked anymore . . ."⁷⁵ Beck was referring to the infrastructure and overall daily life in the city; however, after his arrest, he just as well could have been referring to his network. On the evening of Kurt and Stefan's denunciation, a sudden air raid on the city had surprised them, and they ducked into an empty apartment in the district of Friedrichshain. Beck claims that one of

the two had used and flushed a toilet, notifying the air raid warden that someone was in the building. In having used the toilet, they “broke one of the fundamental rules of living underground.”⁷⁶ During their years submerged, Jews had learned to remain silent, in particular, when they were sheltering in an apartment that was supposed to be empty. This sudden lapse in judgment proved costly and reflected the chaos of the city and its effects on clear thinking.

In addition, as the group’s leaders were arrested, the network had to turn to individuals like Kurt, who were less prepared to take on the dangers and responsibilities of a leadership role. When the Gestapo arrested Kurt, he had on his person the names and addresses of thirty-six individuals to whom he was to deliver the horsemeat. This was a dangerous move, Beck remembered:

I have often thought how indescribably foolish this was. I would never have let Kurt have such a list. When I was in charge, there never even was a list; I always had all the names and addresses in my head. But of course, no one was really in charge anymore.⁷⁷

Through the escape of Stefan, one of the group’s non-Jewish connections was able to reconstruct the list through memory and, braving the air raids, warn all of the individuals on the list.⁷⁸ Indeed, Beck’s comment that “no one was really in charge anymore” highlights the increasing difficulties that the end of the war, itself much longed for, caused for the illegals.

In the final months leading up to the Battle of Berlin, the threat of arrest and deportation continued to hang over the U-boats. Those fears, a part of daily life from the very start of their lives underground, were compounded now by the impending arrival of war on their doorstep. The flood of refugees into the city and the breakdown of public transportation—indeed, of the city’s entire infrastructure—added unsettling new complications to the already difficult task of survival. Previous strategies no longer worked. Employment, often essential for the physical and emotional well-being of the divers, became impossible. Hiding places decreased in both quantity as well as quality as the air raids intensified. Jewish and gentile networks of aid and resistance began to crumble. These difficulties, however, paled in comparison to the upcoming battle for the capital of Nazi Germany.

The Battle of Berlin: 16 April 1945–2 May 1945

At the end of October 1945, Albert and Gisela Silberkleid submitted their application for recognition as Victims of Fascism (OdF). Their war-

time experience of illegal life had been characterized as “most abominable,” that is, “until the gloriously valiant Red Army . . . ransomed us.”⁷⁹ Doubtless, the liberation of the city’s Jews by the Soviets was a cause for celebration and relief. After twelve years of abuse and persecution, the last three of which were often spent living under horrible conditions, the U-boats were indeed grateful for their liberation. Most postwar applicants for recognition as an OdF remark upon their liberation by the Red Army, albeit not usually in the glowing terms used by the Silberkleid family. Liberation was more often a statement of fact. Indeed, the battle for the city and the closing days of the war received little attention from Jews in their immediate postwar testimonies, unless the survivor had an encounter with “fascism” in the final days of the war. Only in later accounts do the final days of the Third Reich receive substantial attention.

In part, these early omissions have to do with the fact that the Soviet-controlled sector of the city issued recognition as an OdF; criticism of the Red Army would have been counterproductive. Another explanation might have had to do with the fact that the battle brought liberation; despite the high cost, freedom was what mattered to the survivors. A final explanation concerns the issue of victimhood. The questionnaire for OdF status was not concerned with how, if at all, the victim of fascism was also a victim of the Soviet Army’s advance upon the capital. Moreover, the battle for the city was, in a number of respects, not a Jewish experience or a gentile experience but rather a Berliner experience. Thus, it had seemingly little relation to suffering under fascism, even though the battle was a direct consequence of that fascist experience. Silence on the issue, however, minimizes the pivotal experience of witnessing the destruction of the Third Reich and the difficulties caused by that destruction.

The Battle of Berlin, waged between 16 April and 2 May 1945, destroyed much of the city and with it the last traces of normality.⁸⁰ For the city’s divers and dashers, it also changed the ways that they navigated the city. The goal for all Berliners was to hang on: *durchhalten*, in the words of Berliners’ beloved Alter Fritz (Frederick the Great). Many of the old rules that had worked against Jews had disappeared. As the city began to fall apart, so did fears among the Jews of being captured; the invisible, yet powerful, walls separating them from gentiles began to crumble. Most non-Jews had their own worries. For Jews, many of the worries of the past three years were replaced by the more immediate worries of surviving the battle. Caught in the crosshairs of Nazi and the Soviet fighting, Jews and non-Jews alike perished in flame and by bullet in the now contested and ruined city. Exact casualty figures are unknown, but recent historical estimates put the number of German deaths, soldier and civilian, at 325,000. Soviet death estimates range widely between 78,000 and 305,000.⁸¹ The



Figures 4.3 and 4.4. Scenes of Destruction: The Soviets Battle through the City.⁸²

long-awaited liberation was thus fraught with danger: Jewish women feared rape at the hands of Soviet soldiers; Jewish men risked being shot as Nazis; and, proving one's Jewish identity was not easy. "Fortress Berlin" became a deadly environment, engulfing Jews and non-Jews. By the first week of May, liberation was secure but not before a most dangerous and destructive period unlike anything the U-boats had faced yet.

The Battle in the Streets: Final Encounters with the Nazis

The Battle of Berlin raged for over two weeks, as the Wehrmacht, the SS, and also the Home Army (Volkssturm), composed of boys as young as twelve and men in their seventies, fought over every square inch of the city. Throughout, panicked civilians hunkered down in bunkers, leaving the relative safety of their lodgings only during intermittent breaks in the fighting.⁸³ Ruth Arndt and Ellen Lewinsky donned helmets during lulls in the raids to fetch water for themselves.⁸⁴ The scenes that greeted them were of absolute devastation.⁸⁵ The fighting then recommenced, and they raced back to the shelter again, only to resurface during the next break in fighting. The Soviets patrolled the skies, and many civilians were caught unawares as the bombs fell and the planes shot at soldiers and civilians alike. Nor was the civilian populace a victim only of the Soviets. The German forces claimed their own share of German civilian lives, both through "friendly fire" and through summary executions.⁸⁶

On 27 April 1945, at the height of the battle for the city, forty-two-year-old Artur Isaaksohn was hiding in the basement of a parsonage. Members of an SS commando unit arrested him there and took him to the infamous Gestapo headquarters on the Prinz-Albrecht Straße. Isaaksohn already had had a number of encounters with Nazi brutality over the years: arrested in his hometown of Pyritz in November 1938, he had spent two months in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp; arrested in late 1942 on his way home from work, he had been sent to the collection camp in the Große Hamburger Straße to await deportation; two days later, he had jumped out of the window and submerged; for the remainder of the war, he worked in the resistance. This time, however, as the Soviets coursed through the city, the Gestapo had little need and no time to imprison Isaaksohn. Members of the Gestapo interrogated and beat him. They took him out back into the garden and forced him to dig a hole. They then ordered Isaaksohn to kneel down and shot him in the back of the head, execution style.⁸⁷

Isaaksohn awoke some time later to find himself partially buried in the hole; the shot had misfired. Heavy artillery fire also had prevented his would-be murderers from completely burying him. With tremendous ef-

fort, Isaaksohn managed to extricate himself from the hole and made it to the Anhalterstraße, where he collapsed before being carried by privates to a nearby bunker for medical treatment. As the bunker cleared out, Isaaksohn was brought first to a Russian prison, and he was later able to make it to Rudolf Virchow Hospital, but only through “roundabout methods” (*auf verschiedenen Umwegen*). Isaaksohn survived, but he lost his left eye, suffered a life-threatening infection of the wound, and spent one month in the hospital.⁸⁸

Three days later, during the final day of bitter fighting, heavy artillery fire forced forty-four-year-old Herbert Labischinski and his protector to leave their attic and seek out the relative safety of the building’s basement.⁸⁹ As the fighting continued, fleeing German soldiers passed through the basement. Also passing through the basement were members of the security service (SD); they were looking for soldiers who had hung back to avoid fighting. Upon encountering Labischinski, they questioned him about his military affiliation. Labischinski was not able to give a proper account of himself, and the SD took him out onto the street to join the fight going on near the Bendlerstraße. As they approached a bridge that had been blown up, Labischinski pretended he could not make it across. One soldier then hit him over the head with a pistol. As he tried to carry himself back to the basement, a soldier shot Labischinski through his left hand and then left him for dead.⁹⁰ That Labischinski was not shot immediately as a deserter is somewhat surprising, especially as he had not encountered Wehrmacht soldiers but rather members of the dreaded security service. The number of deserters in the city cannot be verified; however, eyewitness accounts attest to the frequent summary executions of supposed deserters during the battle.⁹¹ The Soviets arrived on the scene a couple of hours later. Labischinski’s helper explained to the officer what had transpired, and Labischinski was taken to a Soviet field hospital where he underwent surgery for his cracked skull; soon thereafter, with his skull still open, Labischinski was transferred to a German civilian hospital for his lengthy and difficult recovery.⁹²

The final days of fighting had a direct impact on both Isaaksohn and Labischinski, as they got caught up in the Nazis’ nihilistic battle against the Soviets. Of note, however, are the differences surrounding these encounters. Isaaksohn testified that his arrest occurred due to his being Jewish. Even with their defeat assured, fervent believers in the Nazi cause still posed a threat to Jews in hiding. Unlike the earlier arrests that sent Jews first to the collection camps in the city and, if they could provide no useful information for the Gestapo, immediately on to the concentration camps, the final days of the war precluded the “orderly” processes of annihilation. Even arrests occurring a month earlier would have led

to questioning and then detention in the Jewish Hospital, under the assumption that the transports to the east would resume one day. Instead, the Nazis now carried out the Final Solution on the streets with little bureaucratic fanfare and according to individual whims. In some cases, this worked in the Jews' favor. For example, the head of the collection camp at the Jewish Hospital, Walter Dobberke, refused to liquidate the inmates, presumably to demonstrate his "humanity" in case of arrest.⁹³ In the heat of battle on the streets, however, the result often was immediate death. Isaaksohn suffered a botched execution and survived. The number of U-boats who perished through summary execution and crossfire, however, remains unknown.

Labischinski's case is different. At no point does he mention his arrest having been caused by his being Jewish. In fact, the security forces were more interested in knowing why he was not joining in the fight. Probably, the authorities did not even suspect him of being Jewish. With the battle at its peak, the SD was looking for both cannon fodder and deserters. Likely, Labischinski was not executed due to the proximity of battle and the desperation of the SD to find people to fight. In fact, that Labischinski was pistol-butted and shot through the hand rather than executed when he tried to escape demonstrates how near the fighting had come. The particulars of his arrest and forced conscription also illustrate the bitter irony of successfully camouflaging one's self as an Aryan in these final days of fighting. Earlier, a man of fighting age not in uniform would have been suspected of being Jewish. Now, however, his lack of military affiliation led immediately to suspicions of being a cowardly German deserter, a betrayer of the Fatherland.

The Experiences of Liberation

The campaign of violence perpetrated against the U-boats during the battle was as much about their perceived identity as German civilians as it was about their identity as Jews. In this sense, the battle reflected the heightened ambiguity of the average submerged Jew's position in the city. By its very nature, an illegal life in Berlin was always ambiguous. This was especially true for the "camouflaged," who continuously had to negotiate their dual "identities" as Aryans and Jews. The arrival of the Soviets, however, further blurred these distinctions. Initial encounters with the Soviets were a positive experience for many. Sixty-one-year-old Morris Weissmann and his wife Charlotte had lived illegally for over two years in the town of Rangsdorf, about thirty kilometers outside of downtown Berlin. The Weissmanns had camouflaged themselves well under the name Meissner, and Morris worked as an esteemed air raid warden in the town.

According to his testimony, Weissmann, among his other accomplishments, had consulted with local military and civilian leaders and arranged for the town to be handed over to the Soviets without a shot. Whether that is strictly true or not, Morris Weissmann had captured the respect of the townspeople as well as that of the Soviet authorities, who nominated Weissmann for the position of the town's first post-Nazi mayor, a claim that likely would have been verified by the OdF commission when Weissmann applied for recognition.⁹⁴ Although Weissmann declined the offer, he did return to Berlin to work as an administrator (*kommisarischer Leiter*) for the mayor of Berlin's Tiergarten district. For Weissmann and his wife and doubtless some others, the Soviet liberators brought freedom and a relatively smooth transition into a post-Nazi Germany.

The experiences of the Weissmanns, however, while in keeping with narratives regarding the Soviets as liberators, are only one side of the experience of liberation. For many Berliners, including the U-boats, the invasion of the Red Army was a dangerous and frightening event. In a postwar report on her liberation, Dr. Charlotte Bamberg could speak of a new dawn and yet only two paragraphs later write about finding a shelter that provided protection against the "ignominious access" of the Russians.⁹⁵ The "gloriously valiant Red Army" was, in the eyes of many survivors, anything but. Survivor experiences of rape, murder, imprisonment, and disappointment often preceded or accompanied feelings of relief, joy, and gratitude for their liberation.⁹⁶ Even survivor gratitude did not preclude feelings of suspicion or disdain for the liberators, and a single narrative of the liberation experience among the surviving U-boats is nonexistent. Rather, the perspective of each survivor depended upon the nature of their first encounters with the Soviet troops. Moreover, these encounters were shaped not only by initial Soviet behavior and the realization that the Red Army had saved their lives but also by racialized German attitudes toward the "Bolsheviks," the troops' often violent and drunken behavior, and the gendered treatment of the conquered Germans.

Soviet behavior toward the German population varied wildly, even within initial encounters. During the closing days of April, Siegmund and Margarete Weltlinger, living submerged since the Large Factory Operation, were forced to leave the apartment in which they had been hiding and take cover in the building's basement; they passed themselves off as bombed-out civilians. When a Russian lieutenant arrived in their shelter, he came with words of comfort: "Russki are not barbarians; we are good to you."⁹⁷ The officer had once studied in Berlin and knew the language. He gave food to the hungry inhabitants of the cellar, and all seemed well until the soldiers searching the cellar discovered six revolvers. Suddenly, the atmosphere changed. The soldiers lined up the inhabitants against

the wall of the basement, a prelude to execution. At that point, Siegmund, in a move that presaged his future work in the field of Jewish and Christian reconciliation in postwar, occupied Germany, intervened. He told the lieutenant that he and his wife were Jews and that the weapons did not belong to the inhabitants of the building but rather to members of the Volkssturm who earlier had passed through. Moreover, he explained, the residents of the building had known that he and his wife had been hiding in the building and had not betrayed them. In truth, no one in the building had known anything about the Weltlingers. The lieutenant believed them, though, and the atmosphere again became one of relief and celebration. Still, as Weltlinger remarked years later, “We really lucked out with the first soldiers.”⁹⁸ All around him, plunder and rape were occurring, a fact that shocked many of the U-boats and confirmed the German people’s worst suspicions.

The rumors of Soviet atrocities brought to the capital by refugees from the east confirmed for many what Goebbels and his propaganda machine had always claimed: the Bolsheviks were animals who would spare nobody. The behavior of the troops on their way to the city seemed to bear this out. Their thirst for revenge was inflamed by the words of the Soviet writer and propagandist Ilya Ehrenburg:

Do not count the days; do not count the miles. Count only the number of Germans you have killed. Kill the German—this is your mother’s prayer. Kill the German—this is the cry of your Russian earth. Do not waiver. Do not let up. Kill.⁹⁹

Although the behavior of the troops in the eastern provinces initially had proven useful to Stalin as a means of cleansing the future Soviet and Polish territories of its German inhabitants, the policy proved counterproductive once troops crossed the future Oder–Neisse line, the eastern boundary of the new postwar Germany.¹⁰⁰ In Berlin, full Soviet control over the troops vanished, and the Berliners witnessed rape, murder, and robbery. For the Jews who had managed to survive the years evading arrest and deportation by the Nazis, the first encounters with members of the Red Army often were bizarre and unsettling.

In the first case, the appearance of the Soviets was shocking. On 26 April, Ruth Arndt and Ellen Lewinsky went out to get water during a lull in the street fighting. They were stunned to run into two Russian soldiers. They were not afraid, however; the presence of the soldiers meant that freedom was near. Yet Ruth was flabbergasted. The soldiers looked “dilapidated,” a common state of affairs among the less-skilled infantry units.¹⁰¹ The appearance of these lower infantry troops did not appeal to Berliners, Jew or non-Jew, however grateful they may have been for their

liberation. Jewish Germans had been persecuted and almost annihilated by the Nazis; that fact did not mean, however, that the Soviet peoples were equals. Rather, the look of the troops was “fierce”; to Ruth, they looked like “Mongols.”¹⁰² Indeed, postwar accounts sometimes remember the Soviets as having “Asiatic” features or being “Mongolians,” even if that was not the case.¹⁰³ In part, such descriptions of the invaders came directly from Nazi propaganda.¹⁰⁴ Yet although Nazi propaganda often directly linked the threat of Bolshevism to the Jews, attitudes of German cultural superiority existed long before the Nazis came to power and had as much of an impact on Jewish perceptions of the East as they did on non-Jewish perceptions.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, the “Asiatic” nature of the Russians had been taught to all schoolchildren as far back as the Wilhelmine Empire.¹⁰⁶ As a result, the rhetoric of cultural superiority influenced all Germans, regardless of faith.

These cultural prejudices drew much of their strength from the appalling behavior of some of the troops. When the Red Army liberated Zoppot bei Danzig in March 1945, Charlotte Josephy tried to hide from them. Doubtless word of the soldiers’ behavior had reached her, and she was unsure of what to expect. The Bender house had been overrun by refugees, and the dwelling was subject to frequent attacks by the Soviets. Although Josephy does not elaborate on the nature of those attacks, her words are still telling: “The raw manner in which they behaved is impossible to describe. I attempted to conceal myself from them, but I was discovered and robbed of all of my possessions.”¹⁰⁷ Josephy only mentions being robbed; whether she experienced physical or sexual violence at the hands of the soldiers is unknown. After the war, shame and grief prompted many women to remain silent about their experiences of rape. Indeed, Soviet soldiers raped German women on a staggering scale.¹⁰⁸ Well over one million German women, ranging from children to the elderly, were victims of rape during the Soviet campaign; in Berlin alone, the soldiers raped between 95,000 and 130,000 women.¹⁰⁹ Rape and fear of rape also explain many of the more than 10,000 female Berliners who committed suicide during this period.¹¹⁰

The unbridled sexual violence against women reflected Soviet desires for vengeance, occasional lack of discipline among the troops, as well as the primitive view of women as “spoils of war.”¹¹¹ Nor was this atrocious act carried out only against non-Jews. Soviet troops also raped Jewish women, and they did so as individuals as well as in groups.¹¹² The extreme level of sexual violence against women caught many individuals off guard.¹¹³ Moreover, the behavior of Soviet troops must have come as a particular shock to Jewish women, who had expected the Soviets to be their liberators.¹¹⁴ Ruth W., for example, hid on the top floor of an apart-

ment to avoid falling prey to marauding soldiers. In those final days of the war, she recalled hearing the Russians screaming at night for women; she also personally knew of people who had been taken off the streets and raped.¹¹⁵ Annelies B. and her sister Marianne also hid upstairs in a top-floor apartment to evade the troops.¹¹⁶ Such a tactic was widespread among Berlin women, and it appears to have developed through the assumption that the soldiers were either afraid of being ambushed on the upper levels of buildings or else not inclined to make the effort of climbing multiple flights of stairs.¹¹⁷

Jewish men also had to beware the Soviet troops. While women needed to guard against becoming sexual victims of the Red Army, men had to avoid being mistaken for a Nazi official or soldier; after such intense fighting, the Soviets were wary of all German men, especially those of fighting age.¹¹⁸ Considering that the Battle of Berlin conscripted boys as young as twelve and men as old as seventy, the scope for suspicion was broad indeed. Berliners also needed to take care that they were not robbed. When Ruth and Ellen first encountered Soviet troops as they went to the pump to fetch water, they immediately returned to their shelter and came back with Ruth's brother Erich and his friend Bruno G, so that the two men could meet their liberators. Yet instead of greeting them as victims now liberated, one soldier pointed a rifle at Erich and took his leather jacket.¹¹⁹

The antiquarian Ralf Kollm had similar difficulties. Fifty years old, scion of an old Berlin Jewish family that had been in the city for over 150 years, Kollm had served valiantly in the First World War and, after receiving numerous injuries, been recognized as a "severely injured [veteran]" (*Schwerbeschädigter*). His documentation from the First World War, coupled with false papers and a non-Jewish name (the family had changed it from Kohn in 1887), had served Ralf well during his years on the run, providing him with his "best mask" (*beste Maske*). Kollm also made use of a yellow armband signifying him as blind. However, most Russians could not speak German and thus could not or would not differentiate between the various armbands. The consequence was that Kollm's armband caused the Soviets to mistake him for a soldier.¹²⁰

Kollm does not mention any negative consequences arising from this encounter, other than the presumed indignity of suffering for so long only to be rejected as an enemy combatant. Others, however, were less fortunate. Thirty-five-year-old Werner Wunderlich was liberated outside of Berlin on 21 April 1945, but he spent almost three weeks in a Soviet prison. He was released only when he managed to provide witnesses who could testify as to his true identity. Wunderlich credits his imprisonment to the Nazis; the new authorities did not trust the Jewish credentials that he had saved. Because he was the only person in the small town of Straus-

berg with Jewish papers, the Soviets were even more suspicious, taking him to be either a German officer trying to escape or else a spy.¹²¹

Soviets were fearful of German officials trying to pass themselves off as civilians or even as victims of Nazi persecution, and this could have dangerous consequences not only for Jews but also for their helpers. When real Nazis, eager to conceal their past lives, actually did insert themselves into the situation, the matter became even more complicated. The dentist and decorated soldier of the First World War Kurt Michaelis (see figure 4.5) experienced his liberation in the town of Ferch, located about forty-five kilometers outside of downtown Berlin. Michaelis's experience of liberation was bittersweet, especially because he blamed himself for the death of one of his helpers, a man who would have become his brother-in-law. The Rook family, including Michaelis's fiancée, had helped shelter Michaelis under the alias "Neumann" for over two years in a house they owned in the town. After being bombed out of their own home and losing their pub in Berlin in air raids in February 1945, the Rook family relocated to Ferch to await the war's end. When the Soviets moved in on



Figure 4.5. Dr. Kurt Michaelis.¹²²

2 May 1945, they commandeered the first floor of the home; the Rook family, including Michaelis, took the second floor, and a certain Frau Röper continued living on the third floor, although now with the Russian commander of the unit.

Michaelis's true identity had been revealed to the commander and his troops upon their arrival. Frau Röper, however, had continued to refer to Michaelis as Herr Neumann. Michaelis knew that the Röper family had always been Nazi sympathizers and suspected them of belonging to the party and even to the SS. A few days after the Soviets' arrival, around lunchtime, Michaelis was ordered to report to Frau Röper's floor. When he got there, he found the captain, Herr Rook, and Frau Röper engaged in an energetic debate, and the captain demanded to see Michaelis's papers. Evidently, Michaelis's true identity as a Jew had been revealed, but Frau Röper continued to deny that Michaelis was Jewish. The controversy, however, aroused the captain's suspicions, and Rook and Michaelis were taken away and locked in a room. The captain soon approached them with a revolver, screaming, "You both are Gestapo informants and will now be shot!"¹²³ Michaelis tried his best to explain, asserting his innocence and suggesting that Frau Röper was of a mind to seek revenge on them. Michaelis and Rook were taken out to the pump house and locked in with sentries posted outside.

After an agonizing fifteen minutes, during which time Michaelis's fiancée, Frau Rook, the captain, Frau Röper, and a translator discussed the matter, Michaelis and Herr Rook were freed. The troops soon left. At that point, Herr Rook, knowing that Frau Röper had been responsible for the mess, ordered her to leave the property. Michaelis testified that Röper had always hated the family; she knew they were anti-Nazis and the previous month had denounced the family to a member of the Volkssturm, who had in turn warned "Herr Neumann" that the family should be careful. Michaelis stayed in his room as Rook accompanied Röper off the property, but he heard what happened next from eyewitnesses. Rook and Röper had a scuffle (*Handgemenge*). She screamed, and the departing troops returned. One of the soldiers shot Rook, and he was killed instantly.¹²⁴

On 21 October 1945, while submitting his application for Odf status, Michaelis added this story as an addendum to his application; the event clearly represented a traumatic point in his hiding experience. Michaelis wrote, "It is a tragedy that directly through my person a death should have been caused, that Herr Rook had to die only two days before the war's end."¹²⁵ That Michaelis should blame himself is difficult for us to see. The perpetrator, by all accounts, was Frau Röper, and her method of murder was the frightened and mistrustful Soviet troops. She demon-

strated the pernicious and vindictive spirit of the Nazis in the war's final days and used the chaos of this period, when everyone was a suspect and everyone an enemy, to take her revenge. Although he survived the event, Michaelis, having benefitted from the Rook family's protection and having built strong emotional ties with them, could not think about his experiences of war and liberation without also thinking about the fate of Herr Rook. For Michaelis, his experiences and the experiences of the Rooks were inextricable.

As the early encounters with the Soviets indicated, proving one's identity as Jewish was not always easily accomplished. The problem, according to Bruno G., was that the troops were "uneducated Mongolians" who could not tell the difference between Jews and Germans. Bruno perhaps forgot in his testimony, given decades later, that these "differences" were largely the product of Nazi antisemitic imagination. Yet in their desire for revenge and as a product of their bitter experiences on the front, the Soviets were not taking any chances. Moreover, having liberated Auschwitz and other camps and having encountered the victims of Nazism on their way to Berlin, the Soviets believed that most Jews had been exterminated. Even a Jewish ID card, kept for years in hiding at great peril, did not afford automatic protection. When Charlotte Josephy tried to show her card to Polish soldiers who had moved into the area around Zoppot, they refused to believe her.¹²⁶ When the Russian troops, who had stolen Erich Arndt's leather jacket at gunpoint, were told by Ruth that they were Jewish, one soldier looked at them, pulled his finger across his throat, and said, "Juden kaputt" (The Jews are dead).¹²⁷ Not even the Jewish ID cards that Erich and Ruth's mother had sewed in their coats helped. Nor was this an isolated experience. What the Russians had seen convinced them that the Jews were dead and that those who claimed to be Jews were lying.¹²⁸

For over two years, survival depended upon the concealment of one's Jewish identity. As the Soviets poured into the city, however, a drastic reversal occurred, and the best way to secure help and protection was to prove beyond a doubt that one was Jewish. Friedrich Rhonheimer had managed this feat during the battle when he encountered Jewish officers of the Red Army fighting in the Wichertstraße.¹²⁹ Rhonheimer does not say, however, how he accomplished this. As the case of Michaelis suggests, not all Soviets necessarily denied the survival or existence of Jews in Germany; indeed, at first, the captain had believed Michaelis. If identification did not suffice, however, U-boats were able to prove themselves most easily if they ran into Jews serving in the Red Army. Ruth Arndt and her family proved themselves when an officer asked her to recite the Sh'ma Yisrael (Hear, O Israel), a cornerstone of Jewish prayer.¹³⁰ Char-

lotte Josephy also managed to receive recognition as a Jew by reciting the same prayer.¹³¹ After years of persecution due to their faith and supposed race, the act of expressing their faith openly must have come as a tremendous and gratifying relief to many individuals. Rather than a cause for persecution, the prayer was a guarantee of their salvation and an end to the nightmare of the Third Reich.

Conclusion

The Second World War ended on 8 May 1945. After years of camouflaging their true identities, the city's divers could surface—this time for good. As Lydia Haase, who survived the war to be reunited with her son Falko, remarked, “With the invasion of the Russians . . . I once again took my old name.”¹³² Still, some had lived under a false name for so long that the adjustment was not automatic. Martin Riesenburger held his first synagogue service on 11 May. He recalled the panic he noticed on the faces of some former U-boats when he called them by their real name for the first time; fear of denunciation and the Gestapo did not vanish overnight.¹³³ Thekla Beyer put her liberation in other words: “My proper life began again only with the invasion of the Red Army.”¹³⁴ However they expressed themselves, Jews slowly allowed the realization that the nightmare was over to set in.

The years of living submerged in the capital of the Third Reich had been challenging, even brutally so. The final months were no exception. They presented the U-boats not only with new challenges to survival but also with new opportunities for survival. The city they had learned to navigate in the previous two years fell apart, worsening an already precarious position. However, the ingenuity and resourcefulness of the U-boats helped them to survive, and so did their willingness to take advantage of the chaos caused by the Allied invasion of Germany. Yet the chaos soon started to work against the submerged as well, and during the Battle of Berlin, they faced their last challenge to survival. In confronting the realities of war at home and the invading troops, the U-boats had to come to terms with what was now a mostly uncomfortable dual identity as German and Jew. As far as the bombers were concerned, U-boats were Germans. To the Nazis they encountered, they were Jews. To the Soviets, they were suspect, perhaps an enemy or perhaps a friend. The average Berliner did not much care one way or the other, so long as the war ended. Yet despite the complicated experiences of liberation, freedom was the ultimate result of the Soviet advance, and the one that mattered most to survivors. Liberation came for Paul and Helene Helft when they approached a Rus-

sian officer while waving a white towel. This officer inspected their papers and believed their story. What he told them was heartening: “You are free and can move around anywhere. You can choose English, American, or Russian citizenship.” After recording this in his postwar application for OdF recognition, Paul Helft remarked, “May he be right!”¹³⁵

Notes

1. Tony Le Tissier, *The Battle of Berlin* (Shroud: Tempus Publishing Limited, 2007), 37.
2. The tremendous difficulties associated with the experience and process of liberation in Europe receive excellent attention and analysis in Dan Stone, *The Liberation of the Camps: The End of the Holocaust and its Aftermath* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).
3. Gottwaldt and Schulle, “*Judendeportationen*,” 466–67.
4. LAB, C Rep. 118-01 Nr.: 31551.
5. See also Maurer, “From Everyday Life,” 370
6. Bruno G. Holocaust Testimony (T-1764), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library.
7. Thomas Darnstädt and Klaus Wiegrefe, “Vater, erschieß mich!” in *Die Flucht: Über die Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten*, edited by Stefan Aust and Stephan Burgdorff (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2002), 21–22.
8. Beevor, *Fall of Berlin*, 48.
9. Darnstädt and Wiegrefe, “Vater, erschieß mich!,” 28.
10. Darnstädt and Wiegrefe, “Vater, erschieß mich!,” 28.
11. Beevor, *Fall of Berlin*, 47–48.
12. Beevor, *Fall of Berlin*, 48.
13. Beevor, *Fall of Berlin*, 49.
14. Beck, *Underground Life*, 144.
15. Beevor, *Fall of Berlin*, 49, 52.
16. Bruno G. Holocaust Testimony (T-1764), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library.
17. Ruth G. Holocaust Testimony (T-1763), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library.
18. See Annelies H. Holocaust Testimony (T-276 AND T-1866), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library.
19. See Ruth W. Holocaust Testimony (T-619), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library.
20. For the use and practice of the term, see, for example, CJA 4.1, 3101. See also Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair*, 209; Maurer, “From Everyday Life,” 370.
21. Bruno G. Holocaust Testimony (T-1764), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library.
22. LAB, C Rep. 118-01 Nr.: 35368.
23. Beevor, *Fall of Berlin*, 48, 126, 401.
24. LAB, C Rep. 118-01 Nr.: 31551.
25. Bruno G. Holocaust Testimony (T-1764), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library.

26. Friedrich, *The Fire*, 317.
27. See also Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair*, 211.
28. LAB, C Rep 118-01, Nr.: 38677.
29. CJA 4.1, Nr.: 1694.
30. LAB, F Rep. 290, 01 NS Zweiter Weltkrieg, Luftschutz, 372688.
31. Ruth G. Holocaust Testimony (T-1763), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library.
32. Ruth G. Holocaust Testimony (T-1763), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library. See also Ruth Gumpel, interview with author, and Lovenheim, *Survival in the Shadows*, 167–70.
33. Riesenburger, *Das Licht verlöschte nicht*, 40, 46–48.
34. Lovenheim, *Survival in the Shadows*, 170.
35. Le Tissier, *Battle of Berlin*, 19.
36. Le Tissier, *Battle of Berlin*, 20.
37. Moorhouse, *Berlin at War*, 307–8.
38. Le Tissier, *Battle of Berlin*, 19. See also, Friedrich, *The Fire*, 98.
39. Friedrich, *The Fire*, 316. See also, Le Tissier, *Battle of Berlin*, 19.
40. Le Tissier, *Battle of Berlin*, 19.
41. Moorhouse, *Berlin at War*, 348.
42. Moorhouse, *Berlin at War*, 357.
43. Le Tissier, *Battle of Berlin*, 19–20.
44. Beevor, *Fall of Berlin*, 419.
45. LAB, 01 NS Zweiter Weltkrieg, Luftangriffe, Bestell-Nr. 172508.
46. Beck, *Underground Life*, 143.
47. Friedrich, *The Fire*, 316.
48. Weinstein, *Aufzeichnungen aus dem Versteck*, 376–77.
49. Friedrich, *The Fire*, 317.
50. ZfA, File of Charlotte Josephy, “Erlebnisse,” 4. See also, ZfA, File of Lola Alexander, “Bericht über meine Illegalität Während der Nazizeit in Deutschland von Lola Alexander, Berlin-Lichtenberg.”
51. Bruno G. Holocaust Testimony (T-1764), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library.
52. LAB, C Rep. 118-01 Nr.: 31545.
53. Moorhouse, *Berlin at War*, 184, 202.
54. Beck, *Underground Life*, 143.
55. Beck, *Underground Life*, 143.
56. CJA 4.1, 495.
57. LAB, C Rep. 118-01 Nr.: 31545.
58. See Anlage I zu Formblatt C. in LAB, E Rep. 200-22, Nr.: 7 + 8.
59. LAB, C Rep. 118-01 Nr.: 33971.
60. LAB, C Rep. 118-01 Nr.: 35368.
61. LAB, C Rep. 118-01 Nr.: 34878. See also the testimony of Hans Lang concerning the increasing difficulties for Jews in hiding during the last months of the War in LAB, C Rep. 118-01 Nr.: 38043.
62. LAB, C Rep. 118-01 Nr.: 33122.
63. Norbert Haase estimates that well over one hundred thousand German soldiers deserted the Wehrmacht in Haase, “Wehrkraftersetzung und Fahnenflucht,” in Benz and, *Lexikon des deutschen Widerstandes*, 316.
64. LAB, C Rep. 118-01 Nr.: 31804.
65. Gruner, *Judenverfolgung*, 91.

66. Gottwaldt and Schulle, *Judendeportationen*, 441.
67. Gottwaldt and Schulle, *Judendeportationen*, 466–67.
68. LAB, C Rep. 118-01 Nr.: 30895. See also, LAB, C Rep. 118-01 Nr.: 30901.
69. LAB, A Pr.Br. 030-03 Tit. 198 B Nr.: 1811.
70. Beck, *Underground Life*, 131–32, 156.
71. Beck, *Underground Life*, 147.
72. Beck, *Underground Life*, 156.
73. LAB, A Pr.Br. 030-03 Tit. 198 B Nr.: 1811.
74. LAB, A Pr.Br. 030-03 Tit. 198 B Nr.: 1811.
75. Beck, *Underground Life*, 147.
76. Beck, *Underground Life*, 156.
77. Beck, *Underground Life*, 156.
78. Beck, *Underground Life*, 156–57.
79. CJA 4.1, 2303.
80. Moorhouse, *Berlin at War*, 365.
81. Alan Axelrod, ed., *Encyclopedia of World War II* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2007), 165
82. LAB, F. Rep. 290, 01 NS/ 2. Weltkrieg Eroberung Berlins, Bestell-Nr. 183845, 183854.
83. Moorhouse, *Berlin at War*, 367–368.
84. Ruth G. Holocaust Testimony (T-1763), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library.
85. Moorhouse, *Berlin at War*, 366.
86. Moorhouse, *Berlin at War*, 364–65.
87. CJA, 4.1, Nr.: 759.
88. CJA, 4.1, Nr.: 759.
89. Moorhouse, *Berlin at War*, 366.
90. LAB, C Rep. 118-01 Nr.: 34878.
91. Moorhouse, *Berlin at War*, 364–65.
92. LAB, C Rep. 118-01 Nr.: 34878.
93. Beck, *Underground Life*, 162–63.
94. CJA, 4.1, 2898.
95. ZfA, File of Dr. Charlotte Bamberg, “Untergetaucht.”
96. This also applies to camp survivors. See, for example, Stone, *Liberation of the Camps*, 53.
97. Weltlinger, “Hast du es schon vergessen?,” 27.
98. Weltlinger, “Hast du es schon vergessen?,” 28.
99. In Beevor, *Fall of Berlin*, 169, 196–97.
100. Le Tissier, *Battle of Berlin*, 16.
101. Le Tissier, *Battle of Berlin*, 17.
102. Ruth G. Holocaust Testimony (T-1763), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library.
103. Moorhouse, *Berlin at War*, 375. See also Bruno G. Holocaust Testimony (T-1764), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library.
104. Atina Grossmann points out that as a result of Goebbels’s propaganda, the Russian soldiers were “invariably coded as Mongols.” See Atina Grossmann, “A Question of Silence: The Rape of German Women by Occupation Soldiers” in *West Germany under Construction: Politics, Society, and Culture in the Adenauer Era*, ed. Robert Moeller (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 52.

105. Aristotle A. Kallis, *Nazi Propaganda and the Second World War* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 82. See also, Stephen G. Fritz, *Endkampf: Soldiers, Civilians, and the Death of the Third Reich* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 44.
106. Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 126.
107. ZfA, File of Charlotte Josephy, "Erlebnisse," 4.
108. The earliest postwar report of the rape of German women appeared in a stylized semiautobiographical and anonymously written pseudo-diary: Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1954). For a discussion of the rape of German women at the hands of members of the Red Army and its social consequences, see "Gendered Defeat: Rape, Motherhood, and Fraternization," chapter 2 in Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*. Also see Grossmann, "A Question of Silence: The Rape of German Women by Occupation Soldiers," in Moeller, *West Germany under Construction*.
109. Moorhouse, *Berlin at War*, 376. See also, Beevor, *Fall of Berlin*, 410
110. Goeschel, *Suicide in Nazi Germany*, 158.
111. Beevor, *Fall of Berlin*, 326–27.
112. Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 63–64. See also Beevor, *Fall of Berlin*, 345–46; and Moorhouse, *Berlin at War*, 378.
113. Beevor, *Fall of Berlin*, 312–13.
114. See Annelies H. Holocaust Testimony (T-276 and T-1866), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library. See Grossmann, "Question of Silence," 53.
115. See Ruth W. Holocaust Testimony (T-619), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library.
116. See Annelies H. Holocaust Testimony (T-276 AND T-1866), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library.
117. Moorhouse, *Berlin at War*, 379.
118. Beck, *Underground Life*, 163.
119. Ruth G. Holocaust Testimony (T-1763), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library. See also Bruno G. Holocaust Testimony (T-1764), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library.
120. LAB, C Rep. 118-01 Nr.: 38443.
121. CJA, 4.1, 3140.
122. LAB, C Rep. 118-01, OdF Kartei, A-31212.
123. LAB, C Rep. 118-01 Nr.: 31212.
124. LAB, C Rep. 118-01 Nr.: 31212.
125. LAB, C Rep. 118-01 Nr.: 31212.
126. ZfA, File of Charlotte Josephy, "Erlebnisse," 5.
127. Ruth G. Holocaust Testimony (T-1763), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library. See also Bruno G. Holocaust Testimony (T-1764), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library.
128. See Moorhouse, *Berlin at War*, 306.
129. CJA, 4.1, Nr.: 1694.
130. Ruth G. Holocaust Testimony (T-1763), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library. See also Bruno G. Holocaust Testimony (T-1764), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library.

131. ZfA, File of Charlotte Josephy, "Erlebnisse." See also Benz, *Überleben im Untergrund*, 25–26.
132. LAB, C Rep. 118-01 Nr.: 31209.
133. Riesenburger, *Das Licht verlöschte nicht*, 53.
134. LAB, C Rep.118-01, Nr.: 30500.
135. CJA, 4.1, Nr.: 698.