

Oskar Schindler: Behind Enemy Lines Is Where Freedom Lies

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In the whole of the Catholic Cemetery on top of Mount Zion in Jerusalem, Israel, there rests one German Nazi. The only member of the Nazi party to be buried there, Oskar Schindler's legacy lives on through the descendants of those he saved during the Holocaust. Oskar worked from within the Nazi regime to keep some 1200 Jewish laborers, all employed in his enamelware and ammunitions factories in Occupied Poland, from going to Auschwitz and perishing. Schindler lost his money, safety, identity, and country in the process.

In 1936, Oskar Schindler joined the Abwehr, Nazi Germany Intelligence, and spied on troop movements and railroad usage for the front lines; in 1939 he officially joined the Nazi Party. That same year Schindler bought an enamelware factory in 1939 in Kraków, Poland, from a Jewish owner who was being relocated to a nearby ghetto (Wikipedia). At the height of the factory's production, he employed 1750 people, 1000 of whom were Jewish prisoners from the Kraków ghetto (United).

In August 1943, SS officers designated Plaszow as a concentration camp, and Oskar had to bribe contacts in the regime to keep them from taking his Jewish workers to Auschwitz. To prove their "indispensability" to the war effort, he opened an ammunitions factory where he moved his Jewish workers to (Bülow). Oskar convinced the SS to operate his factory as a sub-camp, where an additional 450 Jews would be brought to live. Initially, Schindler was only invested in protecting his workforce, his factory, and his millions in profit, but over time it became more than that. His workers took refuge in the factory, where Oskar maintained operational authority, sheltering them from the standard lifestyle in concentration camps. Schindler had to relocate his

plant to Brünnlitz, and he had his assistant draw a list of approximately 1200 Jewish names he “needed” to run the factory. The SS granted him those workers—who would later be known as “Schindler’s Jews” or “Schindler’s List”—only because of the huge bribes and gifts he presented them. Schindler entered the war a millionaire and adventurous businessman, and at its end he came out penniless. He bought hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of black-market goods to use as bribes, and he spent more money than was necessary on his factories. Oskar’s ammunitions factory never actually aided the German cause; he produced only one wagonload of live ammunition in the eight months his ammunitions factory was used by the SS; how he remained open is credited to the fraudulent production figures he reported to his superiors (United).

Schindler left his factory for the first and last time when Soviet troops took the camp and liberated the Jews. On May 9, 1945, Oskar left his office at 12:05 AM and never returned (Bülow). After the war he was stripped of his nationality and eventually forced to flee Germany for fear of his life. Schindler applied for entrance to the US, but he was denied due to his membership to the Nazi party (Wikipedia). In South America Oskar tried to open several businesses, all of which failed and drained the last of his money. The Jews he helped gathered together and set up a fund to repay him for his efforts in the war; each gave a month’s salary once a year. He lived the rest of his life off the pension from “his Jews,” and he often kept in touch with them until his death on October 9, 1974. In a nationwide decision made by the Jews he saved, he was taken to the cemetery on Mount Zion and buried, where a memorial still stands in the church (United).

Works Cited

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