Weill, Joseph

(1902--1988), French Jewish physician who was active in the underground and in welfare organizations during World War II.

Germany attacked France in May 1940; in June, France surrendered. Germany then established a German administration in northern France and installed a puppet French government in the southern French town of Vichy. Because of his good government connections, Weill was allowed into the detention camps in southern France where the Vichy authorities had interned tens of thousands of Jews. Weill sent reports to American and Swiss humanitarian agencies about the terrible conditions at the camps, and as a result, thousands of children and old people were released.

When the Germans began deporting the Jews of France, Weill and his aides saved the lives of hundreds of Jewish children by providing them with forged papers which concealed their Jewish identity. He also helped establish an underground organization, called the Garel Network, which found places of refuge for the children among non-Jewish families. In all, some 4,000 children were cared for by this network, including 1,000 who were smuggled into Switzerland.

In 1943 Weill himself fled to Switzerland, where he continued his work on behalf of refugee children. After the war, he served as president of the Jewish communities of Alsace. (For more on Vichy, see also France.)