



Finland

Country in Northern Europe. In 1939 there were some 2,000 Jews living in Finland, including about 300 refugees from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. Most of the local Jews had arrived in Finland from Russia in the nineteenth century.

Before and during World War II there was almost no antisemitism in Finland, and in fact, the Finnish government refused to condone the Nazis' anti-Jewish platform. When Finland also refused to cooperate with the Soviet Union in late 1939, Soviet troops attacked Finland. As equal Finnish citizens, the country's Jews joined the army to fight the Soviets; some 15 were killed and many others were wounded. After fighting for several months, Finland came to terms with the Soviet Union in March 1940 and was forced to hand over some of its territory to the Soviets.

In 1941 Germany deployed troops in northern Finland and Finland then joined Germany in its attack on the Soviet Union. Some 300 Jews served in the Finnish army during the war. The German authorities requested that the Finnish government hand over its Jewish community, but the Finns refused. Reportedly, when SS chief Heinrich Himmler brought up the Jewish question with Prime Minister Johann Wilhelm Rangell in mid-1942, Rangell replied that there was no Jewish question in Finland; he firmly stated that the country had but 2,000 respected Jewish citizens who fought in the army just like everyone else, and thus closed the issue to discussion. The Germans did not press the issue, as they were afraid to lose Finnish cooperation against the Soviets.

However, later that year, Gestapo chief Heinrich Muller convinced the head of the Finnish State Police, Arno Anthoni, to deport Jewish refugees. Undertaken in secret, the deportation plan was discovered by the Finnish cabinet, which managed to stop it from being fully implemented. Nevertheless, eight Jews were handed over to the Germans. Ultimately, only one of the eight survived. Many clergymen and politicians condemned the deportation, and as a result the Finnish government refused to surrender any more Jews to the Germans. Apart from that one incident and those Finnish Jews who died on the



battlefield, the Jews of Finland, both local Jews and refugees, went through the war unharmed. It should be noted, however, that Finnish authorities apparently have some responsibility in the death of other Jews. The Finns handed over to the Germans Soviet soldiers taken prisoner during the winter war in 1940 as part of a scheme to exchange prisoners. Among them were Jews who perished in German custody.

Underscoring Finland's unique position during World War II, in the winter of 1944-1945, the Finns began fighting against the Germans, who had not interfered in their first war with the Soviet Union and with whom Finland had been a co-belligerent when Germany later attacked the Soviet Union. The Finns successfully expelled German forces from northern Finland and repulsed a German offensive to occupy a strategic island in the Gulf of Finland.