

Tunisia

Country in North Africa under French rule. Right before World War II, 85,000 Jews lived in Tunisia.

During the first few weeks of the war, anti-Jewish feeling increased in Tunisia. In many areas, Jewish homes and stores were attacked. When France fell to Germany in May 1940, the Tunisians' longing for independence was stirred up, so they took their frustration out on the Jews.

In late 1940, there were calls to implement race laws in Tunisia. However, the governor-general, Vice Adm. Jean-Pierre Esteva, was sympathetic to the Jews, so he implemented only some of the Statut des Juifs (Jewish Law). In addition, the Italian authorities also helped prevent the implementation of anti-Jewish laws: they demanded that the French refrain from confiscating the property of the 5,000 Jews in Tunisia who held Italian passports.

In November 1942 German and Italian troops invaded Tunisia in reaction to the invasion of Algeria and Morocco by the Allies. The Germans soon began initiating anti-Jewish measures. On November 23 they arrested four Jewish community leaders, including its president. On December 6 the Germans dissolved the Jewish Community Board and ordered the creation of a new one, whose first responsibility was to round up 2,000 Jews for forced labor. Eventually, 5,000 Jews were made to do forced labor under harsh conditions. In the Italian forced labor camps, the Jews were treated much better.

The Germans also carried out other anti-Jewish actions. Twenty Jewish political activists were arrested and deported to extermination camps in Europe, where they all died. Much Jewish property was seized, and heavy fines were exacted from the Jews. In certain places, Jews were forced to wear the Jewish badge (see also Badge, Jewish). These steps were meant to be the beginning of the destruction of the Tunisian Jewish community. However, the Allies entered the capital, Tunis, on May 7, 1943, and quickly vanquished the Germans. The Jews were saved from annihilation at the hands of the Germans, but they were also subjected to harsh treatment by the returning French authorities, who arrested and imprisoned dozens of Jews with Italian

passports as "collaborators." Several weeks went by before those Jews were released.