

Jewish Army, France

(*Armee Juive*, AJ), French Jewish resistance and fighting organization that was created in January 1942 in the southern French city of Toulouse. Its founders were the Zionist activists Abraham Polonski and Lucien Lublin, who had decided to create a Jewish militia as a response to the German occupation of France in mid-1940.

The AJ was a completely secret operation. Its members were recruited secretly, they swore their loyalty to the AJ on the Bible and the Zionist flag, and they even began training to fight before the organization had procured arms. It is unclear how many members the AJ actually had. Not all Zionist groups supported or trusted the AJ.

In the fall of 1943 the AJ began sending members over the Pyrenees Mountains into Spain, from where they were to travel to Palestine and join the Jewish units of the British army. Some 300 men successfully made it over into Spain, braving brutal conditions. That number included 80 members of the Dutch *He-Halutz* youth movement who had clandestinely entered France. Other AJ members fought in Toulouse, Nice, Lyons, and Paris. In Nice, they destroyed a deadly group of collaborators who were often able to recognize Jews by their facial features. The AJ members active in Lyons received tens of millions of francs from the Jewish Agency and from the American Jewish joint distribution committee; they in turn passed out the money to other rescue and fighting organizations. AJ troops also attached themselves to the French resistance fighting in the south of France; four AJ officers fell in battle in Lyons and Toulouse.

The AJ's worst losses came as a result of actions carried out by the *Gestapo*. In May 1944 five of the AJ's Dutch members who were working in Paris were tracked by the *Gestapo*, and in July the *Gestapo* arrested 25 AJ fighters in Paris (destroying the AJ's base in the city). The captured soldiers were tortured and then deported to Buchenwald with the last transport from Drancy.

The AJ also participated in the general French revolt against the Germans in August 1944.

