

GROUP 3

JULIUS MADRITSCH AND RAIMUND TITSCH



Madritsch at Yad Vashem ceremony of his honor

Julius Madritsch arrived in Krakow after doing everything in his power not to be drafted into the German Army. Madritsch was a Viennese youth who was meant to join the army like anyone else his age, but he attempted to avoid serving Hitler's ideology or Nazism in any way. At the end of 1940, he breathed easier as he successfully reached Krakow as a textiles expert. In December, he took on management of two factories, a position to which he was appointed by the Economic Ministry of the Generalgouvernement. There he met Jews, and this meeting transformed him from a draft-dodger who opposed the government to a man who externally identified with the German government but privately risked his life to save helpless Jews.

From the beginning, the Jews in his factory sensed that they were dealing with a different type of German, one who was not hostile. Madritsch immediately promised to work for their welfare, and in return, he earned their trust. It was not easy to place trust in a German. At first, orders were slow to come to the factory, but with the help of the right connections, the orders began to flow in. At this point, a surprising line of communication opened – Madritsch connected with members of the Jewish community to supply textile workers from the ghetto. The Judenrat (Jewish ghetto leadership) was enthusiastic, as its mission was to supply as many factory workers as possible, especially those factories whose working conditions were good. Jewish work groups were formed and Madritsch supplied them with prized work certificates from an employer that declared them “essential to the war effort”; in other words – they needed to remain alive.

Madritsch's trusted assistant was a fellow Viennese named Raimund Titsch. His formal title was work manager at the two factories that had been established, while his underground title was confidante and aide to the factory's Jews. When Madritsch received another draft notice in April 1941, he understood how much he was already in the midst of his own personal war. The Jewish factory workers had become a closed group that very much needed him. He was often reminded by his Viennese friends and others that he was to bring only temporary workers into the factory. They threatened him indirectly that he was “sabotaging the expulsion of the Jews,” and warned that he would run into trouble with the Gestapo. But Madritsch continued on his mission, taking on more and more Jewish workers, worrying about their welfare and refusing to disengage from them. Over time, some 800 Jews worked at each of his factories. His responsibility was great, and he had to surge forward, working against his longtime friends and acquaintances, as well as the formidable Nazis surrounding him.

In March 1943, the Germans violently and mercilessly closed the ghetto and gathered its residents in the public square, where they performed a selection. In doing so, many were murdered in the streets. "Madritsch and Titsch are here," whispered voices heard. Workers heard that the two were wandering the ghetto, as if from curiosity, standing indifferently and watching the expulsion, when in actuality they were looking for their workers, to bring them to the factory and take care of them. They were able to transfer 300 people to an additional factory in Tarnow, where it was relatively quiet, and from there many fled to Slovakia.

Madritsch's connections with another Viennese citizen, Oswald Bosco, helped him act. A few Jews managed to avoid expulsion, and afterwards hid, frightened and entirely dependent on the kindness of others. Bosco, whose formal role was head of the German police in the ghetto, was a trusted helper of Jews and brought many of them to the factory. He did not bring all of them in one day. At tremendous risk of paying the ultimate price, over the course of ten days he transferred Jews, including children who were given sleeping pills and brought over in large sacks. Madritsch received the transferred Jews, but needed to hide them, as their presence threatened the lives of all his official workers, as well as his own. He was eventually able to find a Polish family to temporarily take some of them in. Again, their objective was to escape into Slovakia, and some succeeded. Bosco, however, was captured. He tried to run to the mountains and pose as a priest, but the Germans, who knew what he had done and considered him a traitor, recaptured and killed him.

Even after the great expulsion, Madritsch's troubles continued. One day, an order was published stating that Jewish workers would only be allowed to work in munitions factories, and the permit for receiving workers would be granted exclusively by the SS. Madritsch, concerned, managed to contact an acquaintance and obtain the permits. Thanks to his background, he was familiar with German attitudes and understood their language. Madritsch bought more and more sewing machines. Each sewing machine justified hiring more workers; three workers were on each machine, not for the sake of economic profit but for human benefit. Those working at his factory were the lucky ones from among the camp's Jews. A year after liberation, a number of Jews saved by Madritsch wrote him a letter: "The truth is that we should thank you for many moments of lightness. At a time when Jews lost their basic human rights you were more for us than just a regular person ... all the prisoners of the camp that could work in your factory were the lucky ones, and your sensibilities enabled you to find ways to protect us from many dangers." Over time, the nickname "Madritschim" stuck to describe the lucky ones who were entirely dependent on the kindness of this stranger who believed with all his heart in the triumph of justice. Madritsch took care of their sustenance, and the ration of bread supplied to each employee

was big enough that some were able to sell it in the black market in exchange for a sausage. Most of the food smuggling into the Plaszow camp, known by the prisoners as “Smugel,” was done via Madritsch and Titsch’s cars, under piles of fabric. Madritsch knew this and all he asked of the Jews was that they be careful. His factory even had a kosher kitchen, and the cook who oversaw it was an observant Jew named Akiva Eisen.

During this entire time, Madritsch and Titsch lived in great fear of having their double life exposed. They feared not only for their own, but also for those who looked into their eyes and pleaded for help. Titsch became friendly with several of the workers and passed along news about the war’s progression that he heard on the radio, signs of life from the outside world, bringing hope that maybe this terrible nightmare was close to ending. One day the doctor Chaim Veksel, who worked in the factory, received many zlotys from Titsch. It turned out that on the day the Tarnow ghetto was liquidated, Veksel’s father handed Titsch US \$100 to pass on to his son. Carrying and exchanging US dollars was dangerous, so much so that anyone caught doing so would be killed, even if they were German. Yet Veksel received his money, as Titsch did not refuse the request of Jews. Titsch would consult with Veksel on medical issues, and speak to him as an equal. The Jewish doctor never forgot this.

In the end, the Germans overwhelmed the Jews of Plaszow. In the framework of the camp liquidation, the Plaszow camp was also liquidated and its Jews sent to other camps. Madritsch did not believe that he had any more power to help the Jews and felt that things had reached a dead end. With great sorrow and pain, he parted from his Jewish friends.

Discussion Questions:

- What motivated Julius Madritsch’s and Raimund Titsch’s acts of rescue? What aspirations for saving others appear in this account?
- Describe Julius Madritsch and Raimund Titsch: age, gender, political and religious outlook, etc.
- What difficulties and dangers did Julius Madritsch and Raimund Titsch face?
- Was the rescue a result of a one-time decision or perhaps were they called upon to take responsibility for rescuing at several points? If the latter, what were they?

