

knew Goering. It was his idea, not just theirs. He already had these beliefs. No pogroms—that's just beating up a few hundred Jews. We need a big aktion! We need something systematic and coming from the state....

The letter forms part of a larger project of the Center, namely their Library and Archives. They maintain a vast repository of original books, letters, and documents which record key pieces of recent history. The Archives contain over 30,000 volumes and were recently recognized by the State of

California's legislature for their importance in helping to assure an accurate account of what really happened from the years leading up to the Holocaust down to the aftermath. They include the writings and photographs of various European Jews from before and during the war, Jews who have otherwise disappeared from history. This preserves the legacy of a vibrant, active Jewish world in pre-War Europe.

Additionally, the Simon Wiesenthal Center has begun to collect other documents pertaining to the general struggle for civil rights in the United States and beyond.

Making a Difference

Rabbi Hier's message to **Zman** readers is a summary of his own life's work:

Do you think the Master of the Universe created a person and told him, "What I would like from you is to open a business, have three meals a day, and that's all?" Or, does the Ribono Shel Olam want us to perfect His world?

This world is not Gan Eden. Not yet. We live in a physical world. Every Jew has, in his own power, a chance to make thousands of friends for the Jewish people and for Eretz

Yisrael—if they behave in the right way. If they do, their non-Jewish acquaintances will say, "I like that guy."

We can't help that the Ribono Shel Olam created only 14 million Jews in the world... but we Jews don't have to only talk to ourselves. We can talk to the whole world. Every Jew can make a Kiddush Hashem by his personal conduct, and in this way we can be around until the coming of Mashiach.

You know how in the airport they have a "fast track?" I'm waiting to see the fast track to Mashiach! ■

A Nazi's Worst Nightmare Simon Wiesenthal

The Life and Times of the World's Most Famous Nazi Hunter

You either loved him or hated him. It was hard to be neutral about Simon Wiesenthal. To the thousands of Nazis hoping to escape justice after the war, he was their worst nightmare. Those who fled to South America could not feel safe... even decades later.

To most Jews, he was the legendary fighter for a cause that made them proud, the voice of the six million kedoshim. He was also the irritating conscience to a non-Jewish world that increasingly wanted to forget their plight and forgive their unrepentant tormentors and murderers. But he irritated fellow Jews too, including fellow Nazi hunters and Holocaust survivors.

Read about his life and times, including some of his numerous brushes with death before, during and after the Holocaust, as well as some of his most important successes in hunting Nazis. Whether you hated him or loved him, one thing was certain: when it came to Simon Wiesenthal, there was never a dull moment.

Yaakov Astor

Peter Miller, a blond-haired, blue-eyed, non-Jewish German freelance reporter, has been hot on the trail of a secret, post-war Nazi organization called ODESSA, which stands for *Organization der ehemaligen SS-Angehörigen*, meaning “Organization of Former SS Members.” The purpose of the ODESSA is to establish and facilitate secret escape routes, “ratlines,” to allow SS members to avoid capture and prosecution for war crimes. Although designed as a worldwide clandestine escape network, it is also rumored to be pursuing the reorganization of a Fourth Reich by networking with remote Nazi colonies overseas.

Miller’s interest in ODESSA has little to do with Jews. Rather, his focus is upon one man: Eduard Roschmann, commandant of the Riga ghetto during 1943, a man also known as “The Butcher of Riga.” Although Roschmann has the blood of thousands of Jews on his hands, it is one particular victim that captures Miller’s primary concern: a German Army captain wearing an unusual military decoration. Miller believes it matches a unique decoration of his late father who had died serving in that area. The diary entry of a Holocaust survivor has led him to believe that it was none other than Eduard Roschmann who killed his father, and for a petty reason.

Miller began his pursuit of Roschmann through the normal channels, such as Germany’s Attorney General’s office. What he found, though, was frustrating. No one in post-war Germany was prepared to search for or prosecute former Nazis. After almost giving up, Miller turned to the one man who had not given up, renowned Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal.

Based on Wiesenthal’s file about the Nazi commandant, Miller closes in on the whereabouts of Roschmann. However, as he does so he does not realize that his own life is in danger. One day, he gets into his car and, only due to a lucky accident, walks away from it just before it explodes. Unscathed but shaken, he realizes now how high the stakes are, how close he is to some

important truth—and how bloodthirsty these Nazis are. Now he is more determined than ever to find Roschmann.

Paranoid that every shadow is an ODESSA assassin, and wondering if the government officials he’s contacted are somehow in cahoots with the Nazi organization, Miller finally tracks down Roschmann in a castle hideout in Austria. Under the cover of night, Miller sneaks inside.

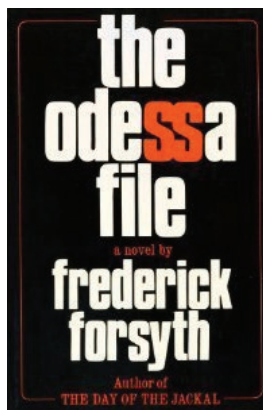
After almost getting caught, he finally enters a room where a distinguished-looking, gray-haired man is pouring himself a drink. It is Roschmann!

Pulling out a gun, Miller tells Roschmann to remain quiet. He then reminds him of the murder of the German officer with the unusual decoration. Roschmann remembers and admits killing the man. However, at that moment, Miller lets down his guard for an instant and Roschmann escapes... eventually fleeing to Argentina.

If this sounds like the plot of a spy novel—well, it is.

The story comes from a bestselling piece of fiction in the 1970s called *The Odessa File* by Frederick Forsythe. However, in this case, not only would truth turn out to be stranger than fiction, but fiction would bring a true criminal to justice.

At the time, Eduard Roschmann, the real-life former commandant of the Riga ghetto, was living free in Argentina, like many other Nazis after the war. However, the worldwide popularity of *The Odessa File* put a spotlight on him. As a result, remarkably, the embassy of West Germany in Argentina initiated a request for his extradition to Germany to face charges of multiple murders of Jews during World War II.



Eduard Roschmann, commandant of the Riga ghetto during 1943, escaped to South America in 1948.

Even more remarkably, Roschmann was identified and arrested by the Argentine police!

Unfortunately, he skipped bail and fled to nearby Paraguay. Although he was never caught, he died alone and on the run a year later (1977).

The other factual person in Forsythe’s otherwise fictional novel was, of course, Simon Wiesenthal. When Forsythe was researching his book, he employed Wiesenthal’s service as a “documentary advisor.” He initially wanted to make his villain a fictional Nazi, but why use a fictional one, Wiesenthal suggested, when there were plenty of real ones around.

It was then that he brought the name of Eduard Roschmann to Forsythe’s attention. Wiesenthal did so, he later admitted, to cast light on Roschmann and hopefully bring about his arrest. Although the Roschmann of *The Odessa File* was fictionalized, the real-life drama around his discovery and the successful attempt to bring him to some measure of justice is not. Once more, Wiesenthal had gotten his man.

In some ways, the saga of bringing Roschmann to justice characterizes the incredible life and methods of Simon Wiesenthal. It was his combination of brash showmanship and dogged determination that made Simon Wiesenthal the legendary Nazi hunter he was.

Holocaust Experiences

Simon Wiesenthal was born to Rosa and Asher Wiesenthal on December 31, 1908, in Buczacz (now Buchach), almost 200 miles southeast of Lvov in present-day Ukraine. Like many Jews, his father had fled the pogroms in Russia in 1905. Despite poverty and rampant anti-Semitism, Asher Wiesenthal made a good living trading in commodities such as sugar, and the family enjoyed a certain level of affluence.

In 1915, Asher, a reservist in the Austro-Hungarian Army, was killed while serving on the Eastern Front. In order to escape the marauding Cossacks, the family moved to Vienna, where they settled in the Jewish quarter. They returned to Buczacz two years later.

Wiesenthal used to tell the story of how, when he was 12, horsemen of the Ukrainian leader Simon Petliura attacked the town.

“I can still see it as vividly as if it happened yesterday,” he told a biographer years later. “We were virtual prisoners in our houses.”

Venturing outside in search of food for



The Riga Ghetto and Latvian Holocaust Museum in Riga, Latvia.