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Megan Koreman, *The Escape Line: How the Ordinary Heroes of Dutch-Paris Resisted the Nazi Occupation of Western Europe*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. xiv + 410 pp. Maps, appendices, glossary, timeline, archives consulted, notes, bibliography, and index. \$29.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-19-066227-1.

Review by Shannon L. Fogg, Missouri University of Science and Technology.

Scholars have long noted the difficulty in researching resistance networks due to the clandestine nature of resistance and the lack of written sources. Drawing on material from thirty-two archives in seven different countries, Megan Koreman has meticulously reconstructed the work of one network that operated across the Netherlands, Belgium, and France to bring “enemies” of the Nazis to safety in both Spain and Switzerland. This escape line was the only resistance network that spanned all these countries in the effort to help Jews, downed Allied airmen, and Dutch *Engelandvaarders* (individuals who left the Netherlands to join the Allied effort based in England) reach safety. In addition to helping individuals flee Nazi-occupied territories, the organization also hid Jews in both France and Belgium and served as a courier service delivering documents across multiple borders for other resistance groups. Koreman’s study of the “Dutch-Paris” network carefully traces the underground organization in operation and examines how its 330 identified members were able to support 1500 refugees in hiding and transport another 1500 people to safety.

Koreman’s account is not an argument-driven or theoretical study of resistance but rather “the story of how the unarmed students, housewives, civil servants, businessmen, bankers, and ministers in the Dutch-Paris escape line banded together to fight the Nazis by protecting their victims, and the price these otherwise ordinary heroes paid for their resistance” (p. 27). At the center of this story is Jean Weidner, a Dutch businessman who had grown up as the son of a Seventh-day Adventist minister on the Franco-Swiss border. In the summer of 1942, a Jewish business acquaintance who had illegally fled the Netherlands to avoid deportation turned to Weidner for help after being arrested by Vichy police officers. Rather than seeing the Jewish man and his wife sent to an internment camp or assigned residence after the standard one-month prison term, Weidner and his wife, Elisabeth Cartier, decided to smuggle the couple over the border into Switzerland. It was this decision that would lead to the creation of a larger network of rescue and resistance.

Koreman has carefully tracked down the individuals involved in the network as well as their relationships with each other. The importance of personal and national connections is apparent throughout the book. Once Weidner and Cartier “chose their principles over the law” (p. 35), they needed an ever-increasing circle of helpers in order to be effective. Initially Weidner drew on his religious beliefs and his nationality in drawing others into the network. He approached people who shared a Christian belief in helping others or who were fellow Dutch men and women. He used his knowledge of the region along the Swiss border, Seventh-day Adventist connections, family relationships, and legal means to maximize the effectiveness of the network. The people who were helped by Dutch-Paris also relied on connections to ask for aid. Koreman finds that they either knew Weidner personally, were referred to him by the Dutch consulate in

Lyon, or were brought to his attention by his contacts in France. As a result, two-thirds of the people helped by Dutch-Paris had some kind of connection to the Netherlands.

Koreman's book emphasizes the "ordinary" nature of the people participating in the extraordinary decision to risk their lives to help others. She is able to identify some common characteristics among resisters, including the facts that many had Dutch citizenship or heritage, a significant number were businessmen with sons of draft age, others were university students, and many were involved with the textile trade (like Jean Weidner). Women were also instrumental to the success of the network, but Koreman notes that "the overall membership of Dutch-Paris is more noteworthy for its diversity or ecumenism than it is for any particular commonality found among a circle within the larger group. The only characteristic that every man and woman in Dutch-Paris shared was a willingness to help other men and women escape the Nazis and their collaborators despite the risks to themselves" (p. 131). She also carefully grounds the study within the context of daily life under wartime conditions to further underscore the difficulty of helping others.

The book proceeds chronologically and outlines individual escape missions and the various methods used by Weidner and others to cross borders. The aid the network provided varied according to the progression of the war. Dutch-Paris initially started helping Jews attempting to flee France during the mass deportations of 1942. By the following summer, many Jews had been arrested, had fled, or had gone into hiding, but the Germans were demanding more labor to meet shortages within Germany. As a result, more young men tried to escape the labor draft in occupied Western Europe. Some also attempted to join the Allies abroad and turned to the Dutch-Paris escape line for help. The German occupation of the Italian zone of France in the fall of 1943 led to another wave of Jewish refugees attempting to reach the safety of neutral Switzerland with the support of Weidner's network. At the same time, the Allies were increasing their bombing campaign of Germany and the number of aviators shot down over the Netherlands, Belgium, and France increased. Rather than Switzerland, Spain was the preferred destination for these crews trying to return to Britain, altering and extending the Dutch-Paris routes.

In addition to tracing the successful missions, Koreman notes the failures. As the network grew, so did the danger of discovery. Dutch-Paris tried to limit the potential problems of exposure by dividing the network into three separate groups: *transportwerk* for the escape line, *sociaalwerk* to provide financial and material support to people in hiding, and the courier network to deliver microfilmed documents to the Dutch government in exile. These divisions would prove essential in the spring of 1944. One member of the network was stopped in Paris carrying a valise with food supplies for aviators to take on their journey over the Pyrenees. She also happened to be carrying a notebook with the names and addresses of colleagues involved in the escape line. This chance questioning started a chain reaction of arrests and torture by the Gestapo that seriously hampered the network's escape line. Koreman documents the consequences for individuals participating in the network: eighty-two men and women associated with Dutch-Paris were arrested during the war; sixteen faced torture; forty-nine were deported to concentration camps; and twenty-seven died as a result of German mistreatment (p. 260).

In her conclusion, Koreman offers an overview of Dutch-Paris's work and returns to the fundamental question of why these men and women risked their lives to oppose the Nazis. Most members did not address this question directly and Koreman offers her own interpretation. First and foremost, she says, "the men and women of Dutch-Paris stubbornly maintained the habits of free citizens, such as thinking for themselves and interacting with strangers" (p. 268). Rather than turning inward during the war, the members of the network continued to connect with others and found the courage to stand out. She argues they were willing to put themselves in danger for the sake of human rights and to become members of an imagined community of resistance to subvert the Nazis' aims.

The Resistance in France continues to fascinate scholars and hold an important place in the history and memory of wartime France. Megan Koreman adds to this literature with a carefully researched and

detailed account of one network that never took up arms and yet fought against the Nazis. The study in itself adds to the historiography of the Resistance, but does not deeply engage with extensive scholarship or the questions that have been raised about what constitutes resistance in the text itself. Koreman's approach clearly takes a wide view that encompasses humanitarian resistance and rescue as well as the activities of men and women, perhaps demonstrating how much our understanding and definition of resistance has changed over time. *The Escape Line* paints a richly detailed portrait of what ordinary people were able to do to help others in extraordinary circumstances.

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