



WARTIME

When Britain declared war on Germany in September 1939, refugees from Germany and Austria became 'enemy aliens' and were subject to a curfew and other restrictions.

In the summer of 1940, when France fell, the British government ordered the mass internment of enemy aliens. Some 27,000 were interned, mostly on the Isle of Man. Some were deported on to Canada and Australia. A German submarine sank one of these transports, the Arandora Star, with great loss of life, and the resulting public outcry caused the government to initiate a change of policy.

Many refugees were eager to fight Hitler. At first they were only allowed to join the non-combatant Pioneer Corps, which had several 'Aliens Companies', but in time both men and women refugees were accepted into many branches of H.M. Forces. Some gave their lives fighting for their adopted country against Nazism.

Refugees served with distinction, and there were even special German-speaking Commando units manned by refugees. Civilian refugees contributed to the war effort in munitions factories, in civil defence and by performing other essential tasks. They shared the terrors of the Blitz and the privations of wartime life with the British.

Refugee families were frequently split up by internment or war service, and many women were left to fend for themselves and their children. The Association of Jewish Refugees in Great Britain (AJR) was founded in June 1941, to safeguard the interests of the refugees in these dark days.



Robert Parker (previously Werner Cohn from Berlin), Holland, January 1945