

Case Study #1: Arie van Mansum

Arie van Mansum was born March 5, 1920 in Utrecht, the Netherlands. In 1926 Arie’s father, a railway worker, was transferred to the city of Maastricht, near the border of Belgium and Germany. Maastricht was mostly Catholic, but Arie’s family belonged to the Reformed Church and Arie attended a Protestant elementary school. It was there that Arie experienced prejudice for the first time. Older boys from the Catholic school chased him and called him names, and some even threw rocks through the windows of his church. In high school, Arie began to learn about antisemitism from Jewish students at school whose families had fled Germany after the election of Adolf Hitler.

Germany invaded the Netherlands in May of 1940, killing thousands and defeating the Dutch after only five days. Persecution of Jewish people started immediately after the German invasion. Arie noticed how Jews were required to wear a yellow star. In addition, Jewish people were forbidden to visit public places and fired from government jobs, and Jewish students were removed from public schools and universities. In 1941, the Nazis began deporting Dutch Jews to the Buchenwald and Mauthausen concentration camps.

In 1941, Arie got a job as a salesman for a wallpaper company and received a rail pass that allowed him to travel freely. His church asked him to deliver an underground newspaper called “Free Netherlands” during his business trips, and Arie agreed. According to Arie’s church, Nazism was anti-Christian. The illegal newspaper challenged German propaganda and encouraged people to resist the Nazis. A church elder later asked him to accompany a Jewish couple on the train to a hiding place in the center of the Netherlands. Since Jews were already being sent to concentration camps, hiding was one of the few ways to survive. Individuals who helped Jews risked being imprisoned or sent to a concentration camp themselves.

Consider Arie’s situation. Discuss and record your thoughts in response to the following questions:

(a) What were the choices available to Arie after his church asked him to get involved?	(b) What were the risks and possible consequences for Arie if he chose to get involved?	(c) What are some of the factors that might have motivated Arie to get involved?	(d) What are some of the factors that might have motivated him to remain uninvolved?

Case Study #2: Renee Scott

Renee Scott was born on February 13, 1906, in Calais, France. Her grandfather was a Methodist minister and Renee grew up attending church. When Renee was two, her family moved to the United States, where her father was the director of textile factories in New Jersey and Rhode Island. In 1918, after World War I, the family returned to Europe, eventually settling in eastern France. Renee and her sister became professional dancers and performed internationally, which exposed them to many different cultures and types of people. Later, Renee married and gave birth to a daughter, Alice, in 1925. In 1938, Renee moved with her parents, siblings, and daughter to Paris.

In May 1940, German forces invaded and quickly defeated France. In June, the French government fled Paris and the German military took control of the city. Life was difficult under the Nazis. A curfew was put in place that barred residents from being out after 9 p.m. Nazi propaganda was spread through French newspapers and radio. Food and supplies were rationed, causing shortages and skyrocketing prices. Jewish people in France were forced to wear a yellow star to identify themselves and prohibited from certain jobs and public places. In 1942, the Nazis began rounding up French Jews for deportation to concentration and extermination camps. Underground groups formed to resist Nazi brutality. Those who were caught participating in such activities were punished severely.

During this time, Renee split her time between Paris and Belgium, where she found work with the Chamber of Commerce, a group of local business leaders. It was there that she met Simone Pheter, the director of the Belgian Chamber of Commerce. Renee was impressed with the intelligent 25-year-old woman who spoke several languages. Renee worked as a courier for Simone, delivering important documents. When Renee returned from one such trip, Simone revealed that among the documents she had asked Renee to carry, Simone had included illegal papers for the underground that would help Jewish people. She explained the dangers involved and asked Renee to continue to support their efforts to create and transport false passports and identification cards. Jewish people with false identities were able to pass as non-Jewish citizens or leave Nazi-occupied countries. It was one of the few ways their lives could be saved.

Consider Renee's situation. Discuss and record your thoughts in response to the following questions:

(a) What were the choices available to Renee after Simone asked her to get involved?	(b) What were the risks and possible consequences for Renee if she chose to get involved?	(c) What are some of the factors that might have motivated Renee to get involved?	(d) What are some of the factors that might have motivated her to remain uninvolved?

Case Study #3: Roddie Edmonds

Master Sergeant Roddie Edmonds was born in 1919 in Knoxville, Tennessee. He had three brothers and their family attended a Methodist church in South Knoxville. Edmonds graduated high school in 1938 and later served in the U.S. Army during World War II.

Edmonds participated in the landing of the American forces in Europe and was taken prisoner by the Germans in December 1944, during the Battle of the Bulge. He was taken to Stalag IXA, a prisoner-of-war camp in Germany. As the ranking officer at the camp, Edmonds was responsible for the 1,275 American POWs (prisoners of war), which included about 200 Jews.

By this time, the Nazi regime had already murdered millions of Jews across Europe. In line with their anti-Jewish policy, the Germans singled out Jewish POWs, and many of them on the Eastern Front were sent to extermination camps or killed. The Jewish prisoners at Stalag IXA were at great risk for deportation to an extermination camp or being killed on the spot.

Sometime in January 1945, the Germans announced that all Jewish POWs in Stalag IXA (and only Jewish POWs) were to report the following morning. Master Sergeant Edmonds defied the order, and instead ordered all the POWs—Jews and non-Jews alike—to stand together. When the German officer in charge saw that all the camp’s inmates were standing in front of their barracks, he turned to Edmonds and said, “They cannot all be Jews,” threatening Edmonds with his pistol.

Consider Roddie’s situation. Discuss and record your thoughts in response to the following questions:

(a) What were the choices available to Roddie when the German officer confronted him?	(b) What were the risks and possible consequences for Roddie if he refused to identify the Jewish POWs?	(c) What are some of the factors that might have motivated Roddie to stand his ground?	(d) What are some of the factors that might have caused him to identify the Jewish POWs?