

JEWISH NEWS

of Greater Phoenix

April 2, 1999/16 Nisan 5759, Vol. 51, No. 27

British bank implicated in Nazi dealings

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LONDON - The manager of the French branch of Britain's leading commercial bank, Barclays, not only acted as the Nazis' banker during World War II but also volunteered to hand over Jewish staff members, according to documents found in the U.S. National Archives.

The materials were located by researchers working on a BBC television documentary, "Banking With Hitler," which examined the role of European banks during the war.

According to the material, senior officials at the bank's Paris branch "volunteered" information about its Jewish employees to the Nazis and helped to arrange financing for projects that aided the Nazi war effort. The records also show the bank received a substantial cash deposit from the Drancy transit camp, located in a Parisian suburb, where valuables were plundered from Jewish prisoners bound for Auschwitz.

The full extent of the bank's involvement with the occupying Nazis has never been fully investigated, but Barclays has acknowledged that of the 16,000 accounts held by its Paris branch in 1941, some 335 depositors may have been Jewish. Facing the prospect of a lawsuit last year from survivors living in the United States, the bank announced in December that it was establishing a \$3 million fund to repay unclaimed assets held by its Paris branch.

According to the material in the National Archives, U.S. Treasury officials who conducted an investigation in France immediately after the war discovered a close collaboration between the British bank's French officials and the Nazis. Their report says that bank manager Marcel Cheradame had been "very amenable to the wishes of the German administrator, Hans Joachim Caesar."

Barclays continued to employ Cheradame as its Paris manager until he retired in the 1960s.

One of the most startling findings was that a French official of Barclays told Caesar that the bank had a few Jewish employees - and, surprisingly, Caesar rejected the information. The Treasury officials noted that "this is one instance of the bank's unsolicited efforts to fall in line with German views."

Barclays denies that it had any knowledge of the activities of its Paris branch during World War II.

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