Dear Friend:

In the little town of St. Margarethen in northeastern Switzerland, there is a bridge that extends over a small river to Austria. A sentry box stands midway on the span.

Had you been in St. Margarethen last year, it is not likely that you, any more than most of the citizens of the town, could have used the bridge. On one side lay neutral territory; on the other a Nazi-dominated country at war.

But -- you might have wondered how it was that day after day the Swiss guards permitted an elderly, careworn man, obviously a Jew, to go out on the bridge. As he walked toward the sentry box, his coated figure bowed to the wind, you could have seen another figure moving out from the German side, a precise, military swagger marking him for a Gestapo man.

The name of the elderly Swiss Jew? -- Saly Mayer, leader of Switzerland's Jewish community and for more than a decade the Joint Distribution Committee's volunteer representative in his country.

His business on the bridge? -- the saving of the lives of hundreds of thousands of Jews trapped inside Nazi-occupied Europe.

Yes, there in the little sentry box, high over the river, in eight months of negotiations, J.D.C. history was made -- stirring, heartening history to offset at least part of the great Nazi-created tragedy of persecution and extermination. By his incredible skill and persuasive power as a negotiator, Saly Mayer induced Hitler's agents to cancel the deportation of 200,000 Jews from Hungary to almost certain death in Poland. He browbeat them into releasing another 1,700 from Bergen-Belsen. And he won permission to send truckloads of food to starving inmates of other Nazi camps.

And what did Nazi Germany gain from these negotiations? -- Not a cent -- nothing more than endless bits of pungent philosophy and apt observations which Saly Mayer could offer the Gestapo agents from the wealth of Talmudic literature and the plays of Shakespeare, equally at his command, on which he undoubtedly was forced to draw to bolster eight months of touchy conversation.
We could go on for some time with this amazing but true story of Saly Mayer -- or of the other significant rescue operations of the J.D.C. during the war period. But we know you will want to read an outline of these operations in the accompanying "Final Summary Report" of the United States War Refugee Board.

This official publication tells for the first time the story that the J.D.C. has been unable to divulge until now. We call your special attention to the last paragraph on page 13 which reads:

Approximately $20,000,000 in private funds were licensed by the United States Treasury Department for transfer abroad for private rescue and relief projects, which were coordinated and carried out under the guidance and control of the Board's representatives abroad. Over $15,000,000 were provided by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, over $1,000,000 by the Vaad Hahatzala Emergency Committee, and over $300,000 by the World Jewish Congress.

Some day, when the present desperate situation of Europe's Jewish survivors has eased -- when the full effort of the J.D.C. leadership is not required as it is now for the job in hand -- it may be possible for the J.D.C. to issue its own report on its fruitful collaboration with the War Refugee Board which saved thousands marked for death. For the present the attached report will give you a thrilling indication of what was accomplished. Because it has been possible to publish only an extremely limited number of copies, may we ask that when you have finished with your copy you pass it on to one or more friends who should be informed of its facts.

And finally, as you read the War Refugee Board report, we ask that you bear in mind just this: The job is far from finished.* Men, women and children once saved from Hitler still have to be saved from hunger and other dangers. Only with your continuing full interest and support can the Joint Distribution Committee keep up its life-saving and life-rebuilding work.

Sincerely,

Jonah B. Wise
Vice-Chairman

* The current activities of the J.D.C. will be reviewed at its Annual Meeting, Sunday, December 9, 1945 in New York at the Commodore Hotel. Members of the National Council and Board of Directors should reserve this time. We hope you will attend.