

Silent Rebels – The true story of the raid on the twentieth train to Auschwitz
by Marion Schreiber
Atlantic Books 2003.

The pace of production of books related to the subject of the Holocaust would be extraordinary enough, but the stories that are emerging as the years pass by are even more incredible and involving.

Silent Rebels is one such story, relatively minor in itself yet in many ways ranking with the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and the revolt at Sobibor in moral importance.

It starts by describing the invasion of Belgium by Germany and the gradual nazification of the country, a process resisted actively and passively by many Belgian citizens. It introduces the main protagonists on both sides, and details how ordinary Jews in Belgium –either citizens or refugees – were progressively more and more affected as Nazi measures bit deeper and deeper into their everyday lives. It then tells the story of the courageous raid on the twentieth train to take Jews to the Auschwitz death camp from which 231 Jews were freed by three inadequately equipped but supremely brave and honourable young men.

Interwoven in the major events are the stories of some of the Jews who were freed from the train, their liberators, and their Nazi persecutors.

This is a stunning tale – for its heroism, its immaculately researched and well presented events, and its central characters. It is also a further reminder not just of the utter obsession of the Nazi regime with the Jews but of the madness with which they smothered and polluted every country they invaded in pursuit of their mindless vendetta.

As the Holocaust recedes further into history, and its statistics become ever harder to assimilate, books like Silent Rebels, which tell a simple human story, are the best kind of testimony to what occurred, as well as powerful reminders of the depths to which some men may sink, and the heights which other men and women may attain.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh