

## The Nazi Officer's Wife

William Morrow Paperbacks

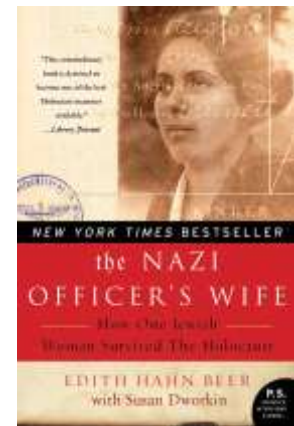
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ISBN: 9780062378088

### Introduction

Edith Hahn was an outspoken young woman studying law in Vienna when the Gestapo forced her and her mother into the Jewish ghetto. Edith was soon sent to a labor camp, but she convinced the officials to leave her mother alone. When Edith received her notification to “resettle” in the east, she rushed home to Vienna only to find that her mother had already been deported. Knowing what the future would hold for her, Edith tore the yellow star from her sleeve and went underground. A brave Christian friend gave Edith her identity papers, which allowed Edith to assume a new and safe identity. As Grete Denner, Edith fled to Munich and began working for the Red Cross. It was there that she met Werner Vetter, a Nazi Party member who fell in love with her. Despite her protests and even her eventual confession that she was Jewish, he married her and kept her identity secret.

A testament to one woman's extraordinary courage, *THE NAZI OFFICER'S WIFE* captures the constant terror of being a Jew hidden living in Nazi Germany. During the war years, every single human encounter was perilous for Edith, and the psychic costs of her deception were incalculable. Included in a photo insert are all the documents that so eloquently articulate her story - including every document and set of papers issued to her, letters from her lost love, and photographs she managed to take inside the labor camps.



### Questions for Discussion

1. *The Nazi Officer's Wife* opens with the story of a nurse smuggling an onion in to the hospital to feed to an enemy soldier. Throughout the memoir, Beer recounts how men and women like this put their lives in jeopardy through their work to help others. Where do you think this nurse and others, like Christl Denner, who gave Edith her identification papers, got the courage to take such risks?
2. While working as a nurse for the Red Cross, Edith's vocabulary threatened to reveal her true identity as an educated Austrian woman. How did Edith's intelligence and education help her in the time of war? How did it become a burden?
3. Edith's two lovers – Pepi and Werner – played very different roles in the war. Compare the two men and discuss how each contributed to Edith's life. Which helped her the most?

4. Although it was illegal, Edith used Werner's radio to tune in to the BBC broadcasts. What does the radio come to represent for the couple? How did restricted news contribute to the Nazis attempt to control the population?
5. Given Werner's party loyalties as well as his flash temper, what was Edith jeopardizing by telling him that she was Jewish? Why didn't Werner turn Edith in to the authorities?
6. After Edith's mother was deported to Poland, she never saw her daughter again. Should Edith have come out of hiding with Werner in Germany and instead risked her life to travel to Poland in search of her mother?
7. Throughout her time at Osterburg, Edith corresponded with her mother, Pepi, and her friends from home. What significance did this communication with the outside world have for Edith and the other girls who worked at the plantation?
8. Edith recalls that when she was growing up, her family did not strictly follow Jewish religious tradition. What role did her faith have in her will to survive in Nazi Germany?
9. In 1946, Edith visited a transit camp and a group of Jewish survivors berated her after learning that she married a German soldier. Do you think that these men were justified in their actions? How did their view of German soldiers differ from Edith's?
10. Under the influence of anesthesia during childbirth, many women confessed illegal activities that could have led to extreme punishment by Nazi officials. Were you surprised that many of Edith's neighbors were hiding secrets of their own? What role did fear play in the context of Nazi Germany. What role did trust play?
11. Why was Werner so upset about having a girl? Was he afraid she would have a handicap like his first child?
12. Did you believe that Edith loved Werner? Why or why not?