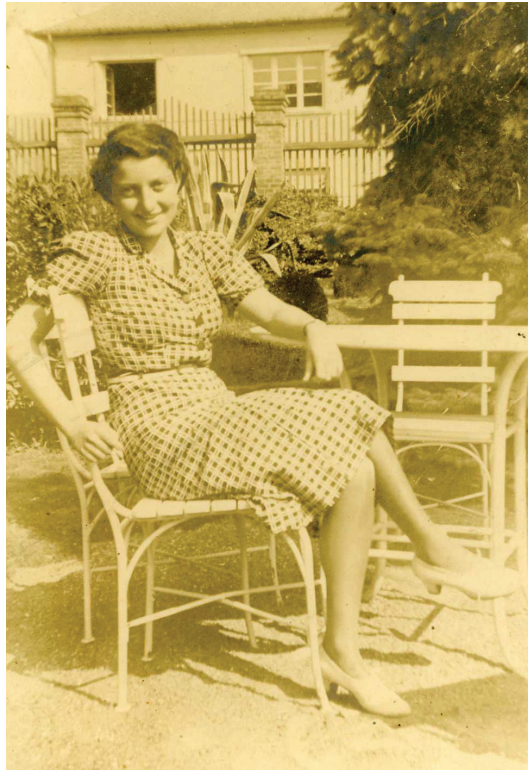


Hannah Senesh

Resistance Fighter, War Hero, Poet



Hannah Senesh memorial center via the PkiWiki - Israel free image collection project.
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To some, Hannah Senesh is one of the most beloved, respected, and revered heroes of the 20th century. Throughout the Holocaust and all of World War II, only one military attempt was made to enter Nazi Germany and save the Jews from death camps—Hannah Senesh was part of this group.

Hannah was born in 1921 in Hungary to a wealthy family. Her father, who died when Hannah was six, was a talented writer and a well-known journalist and playwright. Hannah attended a nearby Protestant school that also allowed Catholics and Jews to attend. Catholics had to pay double the cost of tuition and Jews had to pay triple the cost.

Hannah Senesh

As Hannah grew older, anti-Semitism became much worse across Europe and in Hungary. Anti-Semitism is discrimination against people who are Jewish. Hungary began passing more and more restrictive laws that made life for Jews very difficult.

Hannah was a notably talented student who wrote poetry, plays for school productions, and even tutored her classmates. Hannah experienced increasing anti-Semitism in school, but wasn't moved to do anything about it after she was elected president of her school's literary society and then told by her school that she could not be president. The school would not let Hannah take the post because Hungary had just passed a law saying that Jews could not be president of any type of organization, club, or society.

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Hannah had had enough. She began to learn Hebrew and applied to the Nahalal Agricultural School in Palestine. She was accepted and moved there in 1939, before Nazi rule made it nearly impossible for Jews to leave Europe.

Hannah joined the Haganah in 1941 after she moved to Kibbutz Sdot Yam in Caesarea. The Hagana (which means "defense" in Hebrew) was an underground paramilitary group in Palestine. It was run kind of like an army and also trained its members in combat and defense. In 1943, Hannah enlisted in the British Army. She trained as an aircraftswoman and soon joined the British Special Operations Executive (SOE), a government organization similar to the CIA.

The SOE moved Hannah and about 110 other Jewish resistance fighters to Egypt for training. They trained this elite group to be paratroopers, soldiers that parachute into enemy territory.

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By 1944, the Jews' situation in Europe was dire. The Nazis were moving millions of Hungarian Jews into Auschwitz, the well-known death camp. Hannah and four others parachuted into neighboring Yugoslavia. They worked with a group of partisans, a group of rebels, for three months before entering Hungary by foot. There, they planned to help form a Jewish resistance group that would try to prevent Nazis from moving more Jews into Auschwitz.

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They never got the chance—Hannah's group was arrested as soon as they crossed the border into Hungary. The police found the British military transmitter in Hannah's backpack. They wanted to know the code to the transmitter so they could use it to find the other paratroopers.

Hannah was taken to jail and tortured. They tied her to a chair and beat her with clubs to try to get her to tell them information about her mission, like the names of other paratroopers, the code to the transmitter, and other military secrets. They even brought in her mother, who still lived in Hungary, and threatened to torture her as well. But Hannah never told them any more than her own name and, in the end, they released her mother unharmed.

Hannah was tried for treason and executed by firing squad several months later on November 7, 1944 at the age of 23. The Jewish prisoners who saw Hannah in jail spoke of her bravery: how she defiantly withstood torture to keep others safe, how she refused to be blindfolded during her execution so that she could look into the eyes of her executioners.

Like Anne Frank, Hannah kept a diary and wrote in it up until her last day. She also wrote several plays and numerous poems, a number of which are famous and have been turned into well-loved songs.

Hannah Senesh's remains were moved to Israel in 1950. She was buried in the military cemetery on Mt. Herzl in Jerusalem.

