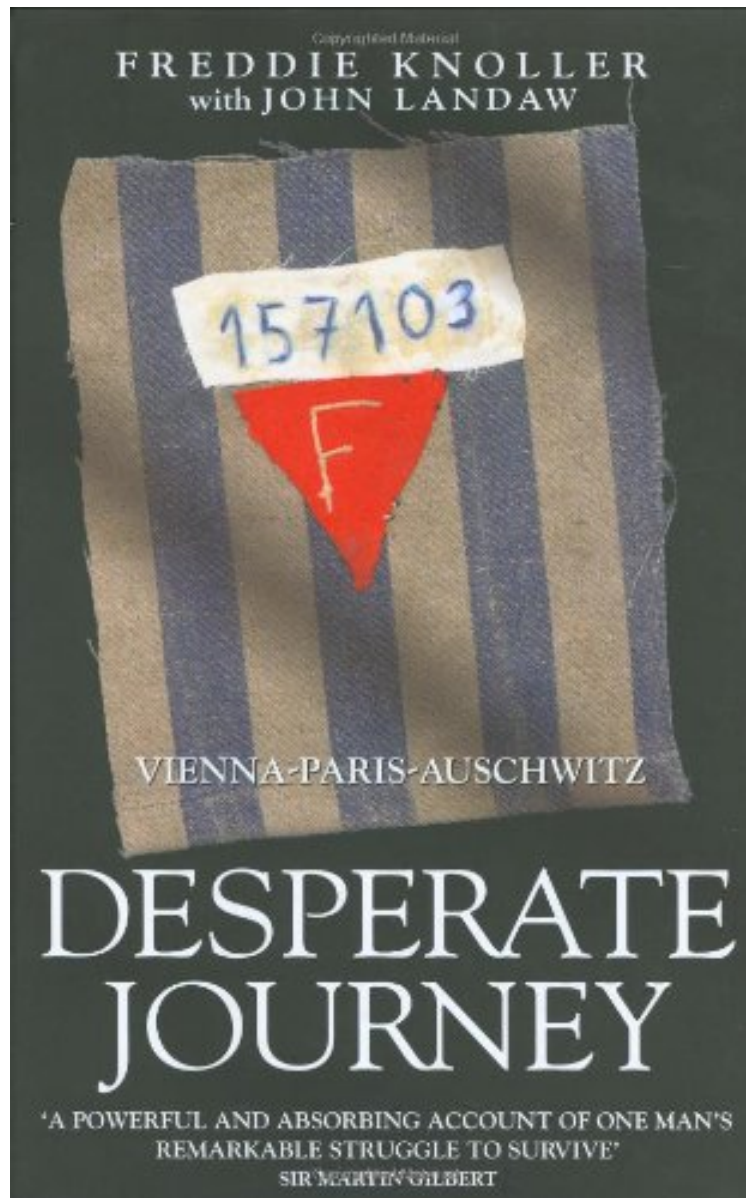


## Desperate Journey: Vienna-Paris-Auschwitz

*Freddie Knoller, John Landaw*

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**Freddie Knoller, John Landaw : Desperate Journey: Vienna-Paris-Auschwitz** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Desperate Journey: Vienna-Paris-Auschwitz:

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Deeply honest, horrific, personal account of the Holocaust. By M. D Roberts The absorbing true story of the experiences of Freddie Knoller, a Jew born in Vienna in 1921. The story follows Freddie's childhood and the worsening situation and threats surrounding the growth of the Nazi regime in

Europe. Eventually the situation becoming untenable and resulting in the break-up of his family following Kristallnacht when the Nazis invaded his family's apartment block and threw a neighbour to his death from a window. At his parents' behest, Freddie fled alone with directions to take him to friends in Belgium. Here he was eventually caught and interned, with a period of imprisonment in Southern France. His experiences throughout this time are documented. Freddie was able to escape from his captors and made his way to Paris where he forsook his Jewish identity and adopted a German/Alsace identity, beginning a rather dubious lifestyle during which he would meet German soldiers at a railway station and escort them to venues of ill-repute/brothels in the Paris sidestreets. It was at this time, during May 1941, that he witnessed the beginnings of the brutal round-ups in Paris of his fellow Jewish civilians. He was chilled as he stood back and watched with revulsion at the zeal and almost religious enthusiasm that Jews were brutally and ferociously rounded up, irrespective of their age, sex, health, age or frailty. What sickened him most was the revelation that those doing the dirty work here were not Germans. There was not any SS or Gestapo personnel to be seen. It was the ordinary French gendarmes that were doing the dirty work of the Third Reich here in Paris, just like others did throughout Eastern Europe, the Ukraine etc.. The French gendarmes were the 'flesh and blood' part of the Nazi killing machine in Paris, wilfully and enthusiastically arresting their own people, for no other reason than that they were Jewish. Knowing full well what end awaited their victims. Freddie eventually came to the attention of the Gestapo himself and fled once more, joining the Resistance where he served until he was betrayed to the Germans, probably due to his intimate confessions to a French girl. He then describes his journey in a cattle-car to Auschwitz, where the horrors of daily existence are examined in some detail. As the Russian forces approached Auschwitz from the East, Freddie and his co-prisoners began a death march in the opposite direction. His comrades who stumbled and fell, and even those who stopped and bent to tie their laces, were shot in the head and thrown into the ditch alongside the road. During a brief rest stop on the march, Freddie discovered that the prisoner next to him had died or frozen to death during the interlude. He noticed that the prisoner wore the red 'F' triangle patch on his rags, which denoted him to be a Frenchman, probably a communist. Knowing that ANY class or category of prisoner received better treatment than those wearing the Jewish 'Yellow Star/Shield of David', Freddie replaced it with the red triangle which he tore from his dead companions rags. Freddie believed that this patch might ultimately save his own life. Indeed Freddie's treatment by his captors and fellow prisoners did improve as he again forsook his Jewish identity. The death march was followed by periods in Nordhausen and Bergen Belsen concentration camps. Freddie witnessed countless episodes of brutal and sadistic treatment of his fellow inmates. Callous public executions being commonplace. As the Nazi regime crumbled with the approach of Allied Forces, Freddie witnessed the lowest ebb of humanity when cannibalism occurred in front of his own eyes. Two prisoners tracked another who was staggering in a 'drunken-like' stupor which preceded death. As this person fellow to the ground in death, his 'fellow' inmates pounced on his body, cutting away lumps of flesh with a knife. They then cooked the 'hacked-off meat' over a fire behind a barrack block. Not long afterwards the camp of Bergen Belsen was liberated by British Forces. However, the prisoners were too weak to celebrate being on the verge of starvation. Dead bodies were everywhere and the British soldiers made the SS dig mass graves for the prisoners who had died in their 'care'. Having restored his Jewish identity and then interviewed by a British Reverend Freddie revealed that he was from Vienna. The shocking reply informed Freddie that the Germans had declared Vienna to be 'Judenfrei'...free from Jews and that the city was now occupied by the Russians. Freddie's parents, who had refused to see the personal threat to them from the Nazis in Vienna, had been gassed at Auschwitz during Freddie's own imprisonment there, unknown to him.

During the Holocaust, 17-year-old Freddie Knoller escaped to France, was interned, escaped again, and made his way to Paris where he spent two years living on commissions from guiding German Soldiers to night clubs and brothels. Arrested by the Gestapo, Freddie fled and joined the Resistance, but was soon caught and deported to Auschwitz. Freddie survived the camp and the infamous death march through the resources of luck, friendship, and optimism. After a period in Dora Nordhausen, where he was forced to witness the hideous executions of other slave laborers, he was finally liberated from Belsen-Bergen by the British on April 15th, 1945. This book tells his story, in all its harrowing and haunting detail.

About the Author Freddie Knoller now lives in England with his wife and children. After many years of suffering nightmares his children asked him to tell him about his life during the war and the camps he had been in. He started talking and hasn't stopped since. He embarks on talks throughout the country, especially to schools to speak to teach and to make sure that it can never happen again. He has been involved in many Holocaust memorial projects and you can see and hear his story at the Imperial War Museums permanent Holocaust exhibition. John Landaw was educated at Mill Hill School and Oxford University where he did an English Degree. He practised at the Bar until 1999 and then changed careers to become a psychotherapist. This is his first collaboration in a book. He is a keen amateur violinist and enjoys fine wine and is currently working on collection of short stories.