

*Dangerous Diplomacy*, by Theo Tschuy

Reviewed by [Victoria J. Barnett](#) in the [May 2, 2001](#) issue

One of the most unusual rescuers of European Jews during the Holocaust was Swiss diplomat Carl Lutz. Long ignored, his story is well told in this account by historian Theo Tschuy (with a preface by Simon Wiesenthal). As a free-spirited young man, Lutz emigrated to the United States and worked at a variety of jobs before deciding to study diplomacy at George Washington University. He became a career diplomat for the Swiss government, serving in Palestine and London before becoming Swiss consul in Budapest from 1942 to 1945.

In those years Hungary, Romania and Czechoslovakia were the site of a diabolical chess game that pitted the Nazis against regional leaders and international diplomats. Tschuy brilliantly portrays the political complexity of that region and the dilemmas that confronted diplomats. Faced with ruthless Nazi leaders such as Adolf Eichmann and Proconsul Edmund Veesenmayer, most diplomats (and their governments) responded timidly and hedged their bets.

In contrast, Lutz reacted with a degree of chutzpah that makes him stand out even among rescuers. He began by striking a Faustian deal with Eichmann to allow 8,000 Jews (many of whom Lutz was sheltering in Swiss diplomatic offices) to go to Palestine, on the condition that Lutz would not offer refuge to any others. No sooner had Eichmann agreed than Lutz began to stretch the parameters of the deal. Working with Budapest's Jewish leaders, he moved about 4,000 people into a glass house (literally) that had belonged to a wholesale glass merchant. He then declared the house an annex of the Swiss legation, and eventually extended diplomatic immunity to 72 buildings in Budapest, moving as many Jews into them as possible.

By August 1944 Lutz was directly protecting 20,000 people. After he discovered that British immigration quotas would still permit 40,000 Jews to leave for Palestine, he unsuccessfully tried to persuade British and Hungarian authorities to allow Hungarian Jews to fill those slots.

Lutz eventually issued 80,000 diplomatic letters of protection. It was, as Tschuy notes, the technique adopted by Raoul Wallenberg, who visited Lutz in the summer of 1944 and shortly thereafter began to issue similar documents on behalf of the Swedish government. Like Wallenberg, Lutz also personally intervened to rescue people, on one occasion saving a drowning woman who had been shot and thrown into the Danube. Of the estimated 124,000 Hungarian Jews who survived the Holocaust, 62,000 were saved by Lutz; he helped an additional 10,000 children emigrate to Palestine between 1942 and 1944.

Tschuy's book tells a straightforward but thought-provoking story. One aspect of it is all too familiar. Long after 1945, Carl Lutz remained an unsung hero in his own land. Although Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, honored him early as a "righteous gentile," his own Swiss government didn't know what to do with him. He had broken far too many rules.