

CLAIMS RESOLUTION TRIBUNAL

In re Holocaust Victim Assets Litigation
Case No. CV96-4849

Certified Award

to Claimant [REDACTED]

in re Account of Josef and Klara Berman

Claim Number: 218966/ME, 218967/ME

Award Amount: 156,000.00 Swiss Francs

This Certified Award is based upon the claim of [REDACTED] (the “Claimant”) to the accounts of Josef and Klara Berman (the “Account Owners”) at the Zurich branch of the [REDACTED] (the “Bank”).

All awards are published, but where a claimant has requested confidentiality, as in this case, the names of the claimant, any relatives of the claimant other than the account owners, and the bank have been redacted.

Information Provided by the Claimant

The Claimant submitted a Claim Form identifying the Account Owners as the sister of his maternal grandmother, his great-aunt, Klara Berman, née [REDACTED], and her husband, Josef Berman, who were born on 25 April 1880 in Ventpils, Latvia, and in 1880 in Latvia, respectively. According to the Claimant, his great-aunt and her husband, who were Jewish, lived at Blaumana iela 5/16 and Terbatas iela 50/11 in Riga, Latvia, from 1933 to October of 1941, when they were forced into the Zeleny Yar Ghetto, where they perished. The Claimant stated that his grandmother, [REDACTED], was executed in the Zeleny Yar Ghetto in January of 1942, while his mother and the Claimant were freed from the Ghetto by the Soviet Army on 28 March 1944. In support of his claim, the Claimant submitted a copy of his late mother’s address book, which contains the names and addresses of his grandmother’s sister and her husband. Additionally, the Claimant submitted copies of his mother’s and father’s marriage and death certificates, his own birth certificate, and a copy of a statement from a Zeleny Yar municipal authority concerning his family’s incarceration in the Zeleny Yar Ghetto. The Claimant indicated that he was born on 17 May 1937 in Odessa, Ukraine.

Information Available in the Bank Records

The bank records consist of a joint account opening contract dated 7 May 1931 in Zurich and printouts from the Bank’s database. According to these records, the Account Owners were Josef

and Klara Berman who resided at Blauman Strasse 5, W.16 in Riga, Latvia. The bank records indicate that the Account Owners held a custody account.¹ The bank records do not show when the account at issue was closed, or to whom it was paid, nor do these records indicate the value of the account. The auditors who carried out the investigation of this bank to identify accounts of Victims of Nazi Persecution pursuant to instructions of the Independent Committee of Eminent Persons (“ICEP” or the “ICEP Investigation”) did not find this account in the Bank’s system of open accounts, and they therefore presumed that it was closed. These auditors indicated that there was no evidence of activity on the account after 1945. There is no evidence in the bank records that the Account Owners or their heirs closed the account and received the proceeds themselves.

The CRT’s Analysis

Joinder of Claims

According to Article 43(1) of the Rules Governing the Claims Resolution Process (the “Rules”), claims to the same or related accounts may be joined in one proceeding at the CRT’s discretion. In this case, the CRT determines it appropriate to join the two claims of the Claimant in one proceeding.

Identification of the Account Owners

The Claimant has plausibly identified the Account Owners. His grandmother’s sister’s name and the name of his grandmother’s sister’s husband match the published names of the Account Owners. The Claimant identified his relatives’ country of residence, which matches published information. The Claimant also identified his relatives’ street address, which matches unpublished information about the Account Owners contained in the bank records. In support of his claim, the Claimant submitted documents, including a copy of his mother’s address book, which contains the name and address of the Account Owners.

Status of the Account Owners as Victims of Nazi Persecution

The Claimant has made a plausible showing that the Account Owners were Victims of Nazi Persecution. The Claimant stated that the Account Owners were Jewish, and that they perished in the Zeleny Yar Ghetto.

Moreover, the CRT notes that a database containing the names of victims of Nazi persecution includes a person named Josef Berman, and indicates that he was married, which matches the information about one of the Account Owners provided by the Claimant. The database is a compilation of names from various sources, including the Yad Vashem Memorial of Israel.

¹ The bank records contain a joint account opening account that references a “*Titeldepot*,” which is a custody account. Such forms were typically used by the Bank at the time regardless of whether the account in question was in fact a custody account. The CRT concludes that it is plausible that the Account Owners held such an account.

The Claimant's Relationship to the Account Owners

The Claimant has plausibly demonstrated that he is related to the Account Owners by submitting a family tree demonstrating that his grandmother was the sister of one of the Account Owners.

The Issue of Who Received the Proceeds

Given the application of Presumptions (h) and (j) contained in Appendix A,² the CRT concludes that it is plausible that the account proceeds were not paid to the Account Owners or their heirs. Based on its precedent and the Rules, the CRT applies presumptions to assist in the determination of whether or not Account Owners or their heirs received the proceeds of their accounts.

Basis for the Award

The CRT has determined that an Award may be made in favor of the Claimant. First, the claim is admissible in accordance with the criteria contained in Article 23 of the Rules. Second, the Claimant has plausibly demonstrated that one of the Account Owners was his grandmother's sister, and that relationship justifies an Award. Finally, the CRT has determined that it is plausible that neither the Account Owners nor their heirs received the proceeds of the claimed accounts.

Amount of the Award

Pursuant to Article 35 of the Rules, when the value of an account is unknown, as is the case here, the average value of the same or a similar type of account in 1945 is used to calculate the present value of the account being awarded. Based on the ICEP Investigation, in 1945 the average value of a custody account was 13,000.00 Swiss Francs. The present value of this amount is calculated by multiplying it by a factor of 12, in accordance with Article 37(1) of the Rules, to produce a total award amount of 156,000.00 Swiss Francs.

Initial Payment

Article 37(3)(a) of the Rules provides that where the value of an award is calculated using the value presumptions provided in Article 35 of the Rules, the initial payment to the claimant shall be 65% of the Certified Award, and the claimant may receive a second payment of up to 35% of the Certified Award when so determined by the Court. In this case, the CRT has used the value presumptions of Article 35 of the Rules to calculate the account values, and 65% of the total award amount is 101,400.00 Swiss Francs.

² An expanded version of Appendix A appears on the CRT II website -- www.crt-ii.org.

Scope of the Award

The Claimant should be aware that, pursuant to Article 25 of the Rules, the CRT will carry out further research on his claim to determine whether there are additional Swiss bank accounts to which he might be entitled, including research of the Total Accounts Database (consisting of records of 4.1 million Swiss bank accounts which existed between 1933 and 1945).

Certification of the Award

The CRT certifies this Award for approval by the Court and payment by the Special Masters.

Claims Resolution Tribunal

31 December 2002

APPENDIX A

In the absence of evidence to the contrary, the Tribunal presumes that neither the Account Owners, the Beneficial Owners, nor their heirs received the proceeds of a claimed Account in cases involving one or more of the following circumstances:¹

- a) the Account was closed and the Account records show evidence of persecution, or the Account was closed (i) after the imposition of Swiss visa requirements on January 20, 1939, or (ii) after the date of occupation of the country of residence of the Account Owner or Beneficial Owner, and before 1945 or the year in which the freeze of Accounts from the country of residence of the Account Owner or Beneficial Owner was lifted (whichever is later);
- b) the Account was closed after 1955 or ten years after the freeze of Accounts from the country of residence of the Account Owner or Beneficial Owner was lifted (whichever is later);
- c) the balance of the Account was reduced by fees and charges over the period leading up to the closure of the Account and the last known balance of the Account was small;
- d) the Account had been declared in a Nazi census of Jewish assets or other Nazi documentation;
- e) a claim was made to the Account after the Second World War and was not recognized by the bank;
- f) the Account Owner or Beneficial Owner had other Accounts that are open and dormant, suspended, or closed to profits, closed by fees, or closed to Nazi authorities;
- g) the only surviving Account Owner or Beneficial Owner was a child at the time of the Second World War;
- h) the Account Owners, the Beneficial Owners, and/or their heirs would not have been able to obtain information about the Account after the Second World War from the Swiss bank due to the Swiss banks' practice of withholding or misstating account information in their responses to inquiries by Account Owners, Beneficial Owners, and heirs because of the banks' concerns regarding double liability;²
- i) the Account Owners, Beneficial Owners, or their heirs resided in a Communist country in Eastern Europe after the War; and/or
- j) there is no indication in the bank records that the Account Owners, Beneficial Owners, or their heirs received the proceeds of the Account.³

¹ See Independent Commission of Experts Switzerland - Second World War, Switzerland, National Socialism and the Second World War: Final Report (2002) (hereinafter "Bergier Final Report"); *see also* Independent Committee

of Eminent Persons, Report on Dormant Accounts of Victims of Nazi Persecution in Swiss Banks (1999) (hereinafter "ICEP Report"). The CRT has also taken into account, among other things, various laws, acts, decrees, and practices used by the Nazi regime and the governments of Austria, the Sudetenland, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the Free City of Danzig, Poland, the Incorporated Area of Poland, the *Generalgouvernement* of Poland, the Netherlands, Slovakia and France to confiscate Jewish assets held abroad.

² See Bergier Final Report at 443-44, 446-49; *see also* ICEP Report at 81-83.

³ As described in the Bergier Final Report and the ICEP Report, the Swiss banks destroyed or failed to maintain account transactional records relating to Holocaust-era accounts. There is evidence that this destruction continued after 1996, when Swiss law prohibited destruction of bank records. Bergier Final Report at 40 (stating "[i]n the case of Union Bank of Switzerland . . . , however, documents were being disposed of even after the Federal Decree [of 13 December 1996]"). The wholesale destruction of relevant bank records occurred at a time when the Swiss banks knew that claims were being made against them and would continue to be made for monies deposited by victims of Nazi persecution who died in the Holocaust and that were (i) improperly paid to the Nazis, *see Albers v. Credit Suisse*, 188 Misc. 229, 67 N.Y.S.2d 239 (N.Y. City Ct. 1946); Bergier Final Report at 443, (ii) that were improperly paid to the Communist controlled governments of Poland and Hungary, *see* Bergier Final Report at 450 -51, and possibly Romania as well, *see* Peter Hug and Marc Perrenoud, Assets in Switzerland of Victims of Nazism and the Compensation Agreements with East Bloc Countries (1997), and (iii) that were retained by Swiss Banks for their own use and profit. *See* Bergier Final Report at 446-49.

"The discussion on "unclaimed cash" persisted throughout the post-war period due to claims for restitution by survivors and heirs of the murdered victims, or restitution organizations acting on their behalf." *Id.* at 444. Nevertheless, the Swiss Banks continued to destroy records on a massive scale and to obstruct those making claims. ICEP Report, Annex 4 ¶ 5; In re Holocaust Victim Asset Litig., 105 F. Supp.2d 139, 155-56 (E.D.N.Y. 2000). Indeed, "[i]n May 1954, the legal representatives of the big banks co-ordinated their response to heirs [of account holders] so that the banks would have at their disposal a concerted mechanism for deflecting any kind of enquiry." Bergier Final Report at 446. Similarly, "the banks and their Association lobbied against legislation that would have required publication of the names of so called 'heirless assets accounts,' legislation that if enacted and implemented, would have obviated the ICEP investigation and the controversy of the last 30 years." ICEP Report at 15. Indeed, in order to thwart such legislation, the Swiss Bankers Association encouraged Swiss banks to underreport the number of accounts in a 1956 survey. "A meager result from the survey," it said, "will doubtless contribute to the resolution of this matter [the proposed legislation] in our favor." ICEP Report at 90 (quoting a letter from the Swiss Bankers Association to its board members dated June 7, 1956). "To summarize, it is apparent that the claims of surviving Holocaust victims were usually rejected under the pretext of bank secrecy . . . ", Bergier Final Report at 455, or outright deception about the existence of information, while wholesale destruction of bank records continued for over a half century. Under these circumstances, utilizing the fundamental evidentiary principles of United States law that would have applied to Deposited Assets claims had the class action lawsuits been litigated through trial, the CRT draws an adverse inference against the banks where documentary evidence was destroyed or is not provided to assist the claims administrators. *See In re Holocaust Victim Asset Litig.*, 105 F. Supp.2d 139, 152 (E.D.N.Y. 2000); Reilly v. Natwest Markets Group, Inc., 181 F.3d 253, 266-68 (2d Cir. 1999); Kronisch v. United States, 150 F.3d 112, 126-28 (2d Cir. 1998).