

CLAIMS RESOLUTION TRIBUNAL

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

Certified Award

to Claimant Ellen Ruth Ducat

in re Account of Ellen Ruth Wolff

Claim Number: 224259/MG

Award Amount: 684.00 Swiss Francs

This Certified Award is based upon the claim of Ellen Ruth Ducat, née Wolff (the “Claimant”) to the account of Ellen Ruth Wolff (the “Account Owner”) at 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 owner, and the bank have been redacted.

Information Provided by the Claimant

The Claimant submitted a Claim Form identifying the Account Owner as herself. The Claimant stated that until 1933, she was domiciled in Koblenz, Germany. Then, at the age of twelve, her parents sent her, together with her brother, to a school called “Haus Belmont” in St. Moritz, Switzerland. The Claimant stated that she attended the school for six years. The Claimant further stated that in 1939, she and her brother went to join their parents in Belgium, where they remained until 1940. According to the Claimant, in 1940, she and her family went to Lyon, France, and then fled to the United States in 1941. During a telephone conversation with the CRT on 30 July 2002, the Claimant explained that her parents opened the account under her name in order to pay the school fees. The Claimant also explained that she was not able to have access to the account, as she was very young at the time. The Claimant indicated that she was born on 18 December 1921 in Koblenz, Germany.

Information Available in the Bank Record

The bank record consists of a balance statement. According to this record, the Account Owner was Ellen Ruth Wolff, who was domiciled in Koblenz. The bank record indicates that the Account Owner held an account of unknown type. According to this record, the balance of the account as of 31 December 1934 was 57.00 Swiss Francs. The bank record does not show when the account at issue was closed, or to whom it was paid. 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 therefore presumed that it was closed. These auditors indicated that there was no evidence of activity on this account after 1945. There is no evidence in the bank record that the Account Owner or her heirs closed the account and received the proceeds themselves.

The CRT’s Analysis

Identification of the Account Owner

The Claimant has plausibly identified herself as the Account Owner. Her name matches the published name of the Account Owner. The Claimant identified her place of domicile as Koblenz, which matches unpublished information about the Account Owner contained in the bank record. In support of her claim, the Claimant submitted a copy of her American passport.

Status of the Account Owner as a Victim of Nazi Persecution

The Claimant has made a plausible showing that she was a target of Nazi Persecution. The Claimant stated that she was Jewish, and that she survived the Nazi persecution, having managed to flee to the United States.

The Claimant’s Relationship to the Account Owner

The Claimant has plausibly demonstrated that she is the Account Owner by submitting a copy of her passport, indicating that her name is Ellen Wolff.

The Issue of Who Received the Proceeds

Based on its precedent and the Rules, the CRT applies presumptions to determine whether Account Owners or their heirs received the proceeds of their accounts. These presumptions are contained in Appendix A.¹ The CRT concludes in this case that Presumption (j) applies and it is therefore plausible that the account proceeds were not paid to the Account Owner.

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 Governing the Claims Resolution Process (the “Rules”). Second, the Claimant has plausibly demonstrated that she is the Account Owner and this justifies an Award. Finally, the CRT has determined that it is plausible that neither the Account Owner nor her heirs received the proceeds of the claimed account.

¹ An expanded version of Appendix A appears on the CRT II website -- www.crt-ii.org.

Amount of the Award

The bank records indicate that the value of the unknown type account as of 31 December 1934 was 57.00 Swiss Francs. The present value of the amount of the award is determined by multiplying the balance by a factor of 12, in accordance with Article 37(1) of the Rules. Consequently, the total award amount in this case is 684.00 Swiss Francs.

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 her claim to determine whether there are additional Swiss bank accounts to which she 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

APPENDIX A

In the absence of evidence to the contrary, the Tribunal presumes that neither the Account 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, and before 1945 or the year in which the freeze of Accounts from the country of residence of the Account 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 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 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 was a child at the time of the Second World War;
- h) the Account 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 and heirs because of the banks' concerns regarding double liability;²
- i) the Account 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 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).