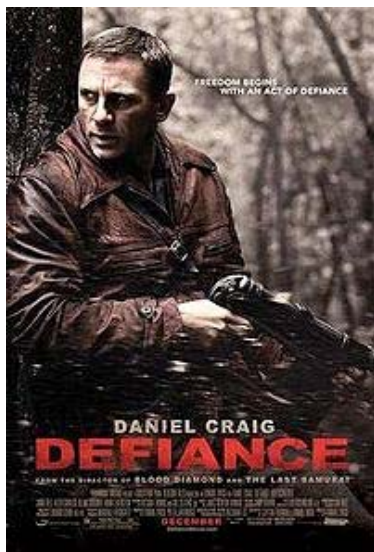




Presents

GlenVIEWINGS: Tragedy or Triumph? *Defiance*

"Nothing is impossible, what we all have done is impossible!" – Asael Bielski



Director

Edward Zwick

Producers

Edward Zwick
Pieter Jan Brugge

Writers

Edward Zwick
Clayton Frohman

Starring

Daniel Craig
Liev Schreiber
Jamie Bell
George MacKay

Music

James Newton Howard

Cinematography

Eduardo Serra

Editing

Steven Rosenblum

Studio

Grosvenor Park

Distributor

Paramount Vantage

Release date

January 16, 2009

Running time

137 minutes

Budget

\$50,000,000

Box Office gross

\$55,215,358

Defiance tells the true story of the Bielski brothers, who avoided certain death at the hands of the Nazis during World War II by hiding in the woods of modern Belarus. The unlikely partisans become heroes to many other Jews who join them, but have to face the realities of building community anew in the forest while grappling with the harsh elements and lurking dangers.

As their struggle to survive also becomes a quest for vengeance, the many philosophical and ethical quandaries faced by the partisans are articulated through discussions between competitive brothers Zus and Tuvia, brilliantly played by Liev Schreiber and Daniel Craig. Although there are many scenes of gripping action, it is in these moments that the film is often at its best.

An emotionally demanding and occasionally stunning film, *Defiance* refuses to shirk away from uncomfortable realities. As director Ed Zwick admits, "The Bielskis weren't saints. They were flawed heroes, which is what makes them so real and so fascinating. They faced any number of difficult moral dilemmas that the movie seeks to dramatize: Does one have to become a monster to fight monsters? Does one have to sacrifice his humanity to save humanity?"

To its credit, the film does not offer easy answers to these questions, and presents the facts in a way that is dramatic and inspiring. Serving as both a tense, involving thriller and a history lesson about a remarkable true story, *Defiance* is ultimately a testament to the indomitability of the human spirit.

Did you know?

- At its height, the Bielski camp consisted of long, camouflaged dugouts for sleeping, a large kitchen, a mill, a bakery, a bathhouse, two medical facilities, a tannery, a school, a jail, and a theater.
- The film was shot in a remote, wooded area in Lithuania, about a hundred miles away from the real location of the Bielski brothers camp.
- Director Ed Zwick was born in Winnetka and attended New Trier High School. His other works include the TV series *thirtysomething* and the films *Glory*, *The Last Samurai*, and *Blood Diamond*.



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Defiance

"Jews Don't fight." - Russian Army Officer

"These Jews Do!" - Tuvia Bielski

Things to Explore

- What does *Defiance* add to the numerous books and films about the Holocaust already available? How does it differ from these accounts?
- After the film's release, a number of Polish historians pointed out numerous historical inaccuracies and simplifications. To what extent does fidelity to the exact matter with a story like this one?
- The Bielski partisans were forced to steal from Polish villagers and killed those who opposed them. How does the film juggle these truths with a depiction of the brothers as heroes?
- With whose philosophy for survival do you emphasize with the most: Zus' or Tuvia's?
- How does life in the woods alter the usual social hierarchies?
- In reality, the Bielski partisans tried to avoid conflict and did not battle with the German army. Why do you think these action sequences were inserted into the story? Do they detract or enhance the film's message?
- What do you think of the film depictions of the 'forest marriages' and the romantic life and gender politics of the partisans?
- What does the title "Defiance" mean in the context of the Bielski partisans' choices?

Themes

- Community
- Faith
- Sibling rivalry
- Heroism
- The Holocaust
- Sacrifice
- Survival
- Leadership



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"Every day of freedom is like an act of faith." - Tuvia Bielski

Library Resources

1) *Defiance : The Bielski Partisans*, Nechama Tec

Noted Holocaust Scholar and Stanford Professor Tec's 1993 book was the basis for the film. The book was awarded the First Prize for Holocaust literature by the World Federation of Fighters, Partisans and Concentration Camp Inmates, Israel and an International Ann Frank, Special Recognition Prize.

| Copy | Material | Location |
|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 940.5318 TEC | Book | Due: 1/27/09 |

2) *The Bielski brothers : the true story of three men who defied the Nazis, saved 1200 Jews, and built a village in the forest*, Peter Duffy.

Less academic than Tec's book, Duffy presents the events for general audiences, but without diminishing any of the story's power and complexity.

| Copy | Material | Location |
|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 940.5318 DUF | Book | Nonfiction |

3) *Escape to the forest : based on a true story of the Holocaust*, Ruth Raffe Yadin

The life of the Bielski partisans is presented for a younger reader through this story of a young Jewish girl recalling her time in the forest during World War II.

| Copy | Material | Location |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| jjH RAD | Book | Youth Junior High |

4) *Popular culture and the shaping of Holocaust memory in America*, Alan L. Mintz

Mintz's 2001 book covers the history of cinematic and other media depictions of the Holocaust, including detailed chapters on *Schindler's List* and *The Pawnbroker*.

| Copy | Material | Location |
|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 940.5318 MIN | Book | Nonfiction |

5) *Defiance [videorecording (DVD)]*

The DVD contains a fascinating audio commentary to the film by director Ed Zwick, and featurettes on the making-of the film and the real Bielski partisans.

| Copy | Material | Location |
|-------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| DVD DEF | DVD, Fiction | Audio-Visual |



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"Our revenge is to live." – Tuvia Bielski

Online Resources

<http://www.defiancemovie.com/>

The film's official website contains the rousing trailer, DVD bonus clips, and detailed background on the real historical events that inspired the film, including some fascinating historical video and audio of the period that covers everything from the firearms used to a translation of the partisan's song.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1034303/>

The film's page at the Internet Movie Database, where it currently has an average rating of 7.3 out of 10 from over 27,047 users.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=peehG3_NTjA

A video interview with Ed Zwick in which he describes his interest in this story of "ordinary men in extraordinary circumstances," and the difficulties of bringing the story to the screen.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1106186/Jewish-saviour-butcher-innocents-Daniel-Craigs-depiction-Polish-partisan-comes-fire.html>

This article from British newspaper *The Daily Mail* offers considerable background detail on the real Bielski partisans, charting many of the differences between the film and historical fact.

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/BielskiBrothers.html>

The Jewish Virtual Library entry on the Bielski brothers contains actual photos of the brothers and entries from Tuvia's diary.

<http://movies.nytimes.com/2008/12/31/movies/31defi.html?scp=2&sq=defiance&st=cse>

New York Times critic A. O. Scott's controversial review of the film.

http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/cinema/2009/01/12/090112cricinema_denby

David Denby's excellent review of the film in *The New Yorker*.

<http://movies.nytimes.com/person/118079/Edward-Zwick/biography>

A biography of Ed Zwick, detailing his long and highly successful career in film and television.