

Holocaust Remembrance

Yom Ha Shoah

The Nazis came to power in Germany in January 1933. Among their doctrines was the belief that Germans were "racially superior" and that the Jews and other groups were deemed "inferior." The Nazi went so far as to say Jews and others were "life unworthy of life" and "not quite human." Germany instituted systematic discrimination against Jews from employment restrictions to seizing property and assets.

Hitler's Final Solution sealed the fate for any Jew left in Germany and, by then, occupied territories. An estimated nine million people were killed during the Holocaust. Of that, six million were Jews. Nearly a quarter of a million gypsies were killed. The remaining victims were homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Communists, the mentally disabled, some of the Slavic peoples, and other minority groups.

Recently, the General Assembly of the United Nations designated January 27— the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp -- as an annual International Day of Commemoration of the Holocaust. Below are some historical tidbits and brief profiles of notable people of the Holocaust. More information can be obtained from the U.S. Holocaust Museum's website at www.ushmm.org.

Forced Labor

Most people think of Holocaust-era slave laborers as having been forced to work in factories to support the German army. It was more than that. Slave laborers, primarily from Poland, were forced to plow fields and make food in Germany.

Many Polish slave laborers were prisoners of war; some even brought their families to help. Remember Poland was starving. Many were well-treated, living and eating meals with the German families or living in a camp in villages. There were about 22 of such projects in Germany. About 500,000 slave laborers worked there.

Although Germany has made reparations to victims of the Holocaust and its concentration camps, slave laborers were not included. One town, Grodersby, organized itself in 2001 and made a symbolic \$1,000 contribution to a survivor. At that point, no German industry had compensated slave laborers. Although \$5 billion had been raised, German businesses refused to pay individuals without assurance of no future lawsuits. (based on a *Chicago Tribune* article by Nora FitzGerald, April 25, 2001)

Homosexual Victims: Paragraph 175

Using an obscure 19th century German law forbidding homosexuality, More than 100,000 homosexuals were arrested by the Nazis. Approximately 15,000 homosexuals were sent to concentration camps. They were identified by Paragraph 175 on their uniforms then later by pink triangles. Two-thirds died as victims of slave labor, castration, or surgical experimentation. A touch, look, or gesture was enough to get a man arrested. Most lesbians were not arrested.

Surprisingly, Ernst Rohm, a high ranking aide to Hitler was homosexual. Eventually Rohm was murdered at Hitler's behest along with 300 others during the "night of the long knives."

Facing The Holocaust in Asia

The atrocities of WWII were not limited to the Germans. Another Holocaust took place at the hands of the Japanese. The Japanese engaged in genocide in Korea, the Philippines, and China. Instead of gas chambers, Japanese soldiers routinely shot dead civilians and used bayonets to kill adults and children alike. Even babies were not spared. In Nanking, babies were thrown into vats of boiling water. In the four years before Pearl Harbor, the Japanese Imperial Army killed an estimated 350,000 people, hacking many of them apart.

Japanese journalist Katsuichi Honda (a pseudonym) has worked for three decades in trying to get the Japanese to realize and acknowledge the full extent of Japanese war atrocities. For years, the average Japanese citizen was unaware or in denial about the atrocities. A full, accurate reporting of World War II has been absent from Japanese news and school textbooks. In 1999, Honda collected testimonies of survivors in his book The Nanjing Massacre.

For years, Honda has lived anonymously for fear of right-wing attacks. Other Japanese including Hiro Hitomi, Hiroaki Kobayshi, and Chigusa Ogino have spoken out and attempted to bring Japanese wrongdoing during WWII to the public's attention.

Heroes

King Boris III of Bulgaria

Bulgaria sided with Germany during WWII but did not send troops to aid the Axis powers. It is believed that King Boris joined the Axis alliance to prevent an imminent German invasion in Bulgaria.

In spring 1943, 49,000 Bulgarian Jews were ordered to board train boxcars to be deported. At the last minute, King Boris III rescinded the deportation order, as protests from lawmakers, Muslim and Christian clergy, intellectuals and others encouraged him. King Boris died suddenly after a meeting with Hitler; it was widely believed he was poisoned.

Ben Meed (born Benjamin Miedzyrzecki)

Meed was born and lived in Warsaw. At the start of the German occupation, he was detailed to a work crew near the Jewish ghetto. He was selected as a leader in the underground, smuggling food, munitions, and information into the ghetto and smuggling out items to sell on black market. Meed and the woman who would become his wife would find hiding places for Jews outside the ghetto.

In later memoirs, Meed recalled one striking incident. On Palm Sunday, the Warsaw ghetto uprising coincided with the celebration in 1943. While people were singing songs in church, others were being slaughtered in the ghetto.

After the war, Meed emigrated to the U.S. He arrived in 1946 with \$8. He and his then wife created teacher training programs on the Holocaust. He was on the advisory board to the President's Commission on the Holocaust which led to the creation of the American Holocaust Museum in 1993. He was instrumental in organizing the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors. He died October 2006 at 88. (based on article by Adam Bernstein)

Jan Schep

After the invasion and occupation of Holland, the Germans organized an identity card program. Jews had to carry identity cards stamped with a "J." Later, IDs were required to have fingerprints to prevent forgery. ID cards were necessary for any freedom of movement and to get food stamps. When the order was received for new ID cards, several clerks in the Zeist city government set up an underground system to issue forged IDs to people in hiding, including Jews. Schep was the head of the clerks, personally authorizing the forged ID cards even though he did not know most of the recipients. The cards gave the Jews new identities and helped saved their lives. The Nazis discovered the forging operation in August 1944. Schep was arrested and sent to a concentration camp. In April 1945 with Allies rapidly approaching, he was sent on a death march to Bergen-Belsen. He died there just before the camp was liberated by British troops. Schep was named as Righteous Among The Nations by Yad Vashem in late 2006. (based on article by Etgar Lefkovits)

Refuge in China

Shanghai was the only port in the world that would let in Jewish refugees without visas. 20,000 European Jews lived there in poverty under Japanese control throughout the war. They were well-treated in comparison to the slaughter in Europe. In the rarest cases, there were beatings and even deaths at the hands of the Japanese military administrator.

In getting there, several people risked their lives to help Jews escape. Alfred Sachs, an amateur photographer, made duplicate identity papers so Jews could get exit visas. He and his wife worked night and day, covering the windows so no one would see the lights going on and off. In the end, Sachs had his money impounded by the government but was able to book passage on a German ship to Shanghai. It was the last boat to leave Germany. Sachs' work saved hundreds. (based on a *Houston Chronicle* article by Louis B. Parks, April 1, 2003)

Japan's Welcome

Despite Japan being an Axis power allied to Germany, Japan actually helped Jewish refugees. For instance, Jewish refugees were issued visas headed for Vladivostok in what was then the Soviet Union; the refugees went on by regular ferry to Tsuruga, Japan, in 1940. The people of Tsuruga welcomed the Jews by opening the town's sento, public baths, to them. There was a small group of Jewish expatriates in Kobe, Japan, who helped the refugees. Some refugees were able to go on to other countries; however, most, at this point, were destitute. In total, nearly 2,000 Jewish refugees found temporary sanctuary in Japan. They were later deported to

Japanese-occupied China in mid 1941. (based on an article printed in *Yomiuri Shimbun* and the www.ushmm.org website)

William Herskovic

In 1942, three months after being sent to Auschwitz concentration camp, William Herskovic escaped by cutting through a chain-link fence using a pair of wire cutters he had hidden.

Herskovic escaped with two other prisoners and they helped inspire Belgium's resistance to the Nazis during World War II. The three hopped a train to Breslau, Germany where they were throw out of a synagogue by a rabbi when they tried to tell him about the horrors.

In his prewar home of Antwerp, Belgium, Herskovic delivered one of the earliest firsthand accounts of the atrocities of the Holocaust. The resistance swiftly mobilized, placing bricks on railroad tracks to stop a train packed with hundreds of Jews bound for the camps. About 250 prisoners escaped. The resistance saved hundreds. Herskovic survived the war and died in 2006.

Manuel L. Quezon

Through the work of Manuel Quezon and a family of Jewish-American expatriates in the Philippines, about 1,200 German and Austrian Jews eventually found sanctuary in the Philippines in the late 1930's. At that time, the Philippines was then an American protectorate. Before the war, Manila had housed a community that had fewer than 200 Jews.

It began when Philip Frieder saw European Jews arriving in Manila's port from Shanghai while it was under siege by the Japanese. Shanghai remained an open port and eventually harbored 17,000 German Jews. Frieder, his brothers and Quezon went to work.

The Frieder brothers focused on getting people in occupations the country needed, like doctors. A friend of Phillip Frieder, Paul McNutt, the high commissioner, helped get visas for 1,000 Jews a year, well over the State Department's quota for visas. Frieder combed lists of imperiled Jews for needed skills and advertised in German newspapers. The brothers and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee arranged jobs and housing as well as raised thousands of dollars for sustenance.

When the Japanese invaded after Pearl Harbor, the operation ended. The Japanese occupation of the Philippines did not bring new peril to the refugees. The Japanese treated refugees first as Germans, then as stateless. However, they were not put in internment camps. Throughout the occupation, refugees and Filipinos were forced to survive on meager rations, often crackers and coconut milk. When the Americans recaptured the Philippines in 1945, the retreating Japanese torched much of Manila including Manila's synagogue, Temple Emil. Sixty-seven refugees were among the 100,000 people killed. (based on article by Joseph Berger)

Also see the Frank Ephraim book, Escape to Manila: From Nazi Tyranny to Japanese Terror (University of Illinois Press, 2003).