Last year, prompted by an e-mail I received from CRRA regarding Notre Dame’s desire to contribute to the History Unfolded project of the US National Holocaust Museum in Washington DC, I embarked upon a journey to research some key events leading up to and associated with the Allied war against the Nazi regime. I have always had a special interest in the topic as, for one, my father was an Army Air Force pilot during World War II and participated in fifty-nine missions in the European theater to halt the German advance. Like many of us, I have sought to understand the escalating reality of the Nazi power that came to be and its horrific disregard for humanity in all its aspects. Thirteen years ago, US National Holocaust Museum researchers began cataloging ghettos, forced labor camps, and concentration and death camps throughout Europe. The grim discovery was that substantially more innocent victims were killed under the Nazi regime than had been previously determined.

With the liberation of the concentration camps at the end of World War II, we have forever changed by this tragedy of grand proportion, with millions having died unfathomable deaths at the hands of their captors. We are still perplexed by the hostility and atrocities that were inflicted upon the Jews; other ethnicities and religions; those who were disabled, homosexuals, mothers, and children; and others unmercifully targeted by the Nazis, and we will forever examine its impact on generations before and after us.

We can gain significant insights by hearing the voices of Holocaust survivors and teaching others about this insidious campaign of genocide so that it may never be forgotten. One of these survivors, Shep Zitter, was a former Polish citizen who lost most of his family and friends to Nazi persecution. Zitter visited the campus at the Academy of Our Lady in Marrero, Louisiana, to share his stories and experiences with senior students who were working on Holocaust projects while studying theology and social justice. He stressed the importance of teaching today’s youth about the importance of the Holocaust. John Menzer, who worked with Zitter, stated, “If we allow the memory of the Holocaust victims to pass away, they will die a second death.”

At Castel Gandolfo, Italy, in 1965, Pope Paul VI welcomed about 250 veterans of World War II and expressed his gratitude at seeing “...men once divided by the absurd necessity of war...,” and told them, “Your presence as the survivors of the violence of combat, though bearing the marks of that danger and courage, tells the world how great the desire for peace is in the family of man.”

To get a Catholic perspective on the Holocaust, I searched the Catholic News Archive (thecatholicnewsarchive.org) to gain greater awareness and broaden my understanding of this dark time in history, tracing a progression of events from the onset of Nazi domination to the advent of World War II in Europe, which ultimately led to the fall of the Third Reich and the liberation of prisoners in the Nazi concentration camps.


Search terms: Nazi, Nazis, Nazi Germany, Hitler, Munich, Faulhaber, Third Reich, Dachau, Holocaust, Holocaust survivors, concentration camps, refugees, veterans, World War II.

Articles Researched in the Catholic News Archive, Catholic Research Resources Alliance:
15 June 1933. Dr. Max Jordan, Mass prevented as Hitler Forces Attack Meeting... “Clashes between the Catholics at the national convention of Roman Catholic Journeymen, held in Munich, and the Nazis, in that city, came to a climax on last Saturday, as the Nazi
storm troopers forcibly prevented Cardinal Faulhaber, the Archbishop of Munich, from celebrating Mass in the convention hall.” — The Catholic Transcript (Hartford, CT)

22 Oct. 1938. German Emigres need aid of all Catholics Says Report to United States Bishops... “...a conservative estimate places at 7,000 the number of Catholic refugees outside of Germany but still in Europe and that nobody can foresee to what extent the refugee problem will grow.” — The Monitor (San Francisco, CA)

12 June 1939. Reich intends to deprive Church of all influence of education...“The Church is enjoined from exercising any influence whatever on school activities.” — Catholic News Service Newsfeeds (U.S.)

11 July 1941. Church is Forced Underground in Poland. “Faithful Secretly Gather in Caves in Wee Hours for Mass.” — St. Louis Register (St. Louis, MO)

10 Sept. 1965. Pope Receives War Veterans. “Several hundred ex-soldiers who took part in the battle of Monte Cassino were welcomed by Pope Paul...” — The Catholic Transcript (Hartford, CT)


24 Nov. 2007. Blair Bordelon. Teen Faith: Holocaust Survivor visits AOL. “Students working on Holocaust-era assignments at Academy of Our Lady in Marrero were treated to a poignant testimonial Oct. 23 from Shep Zitter...” — The Clarion Herald (New Orleans, LA)


Learn about the political philosophy of Hannah Arendt (1906-1975), a Nazi refugee, including her famed examinations of Nazi totalitarianism and the nature of evil, in a talk given by Fordham University professor Gail Presby at a Catholic Worker Friday night meeting in New York. Presby has written several works about Arendt that can be found in the collection at Raynor Memorial Libraries, Marquette University. Hannah Arendt met and was a contemporary of Dorothy Day (1897-1980).