

Catholic Courier

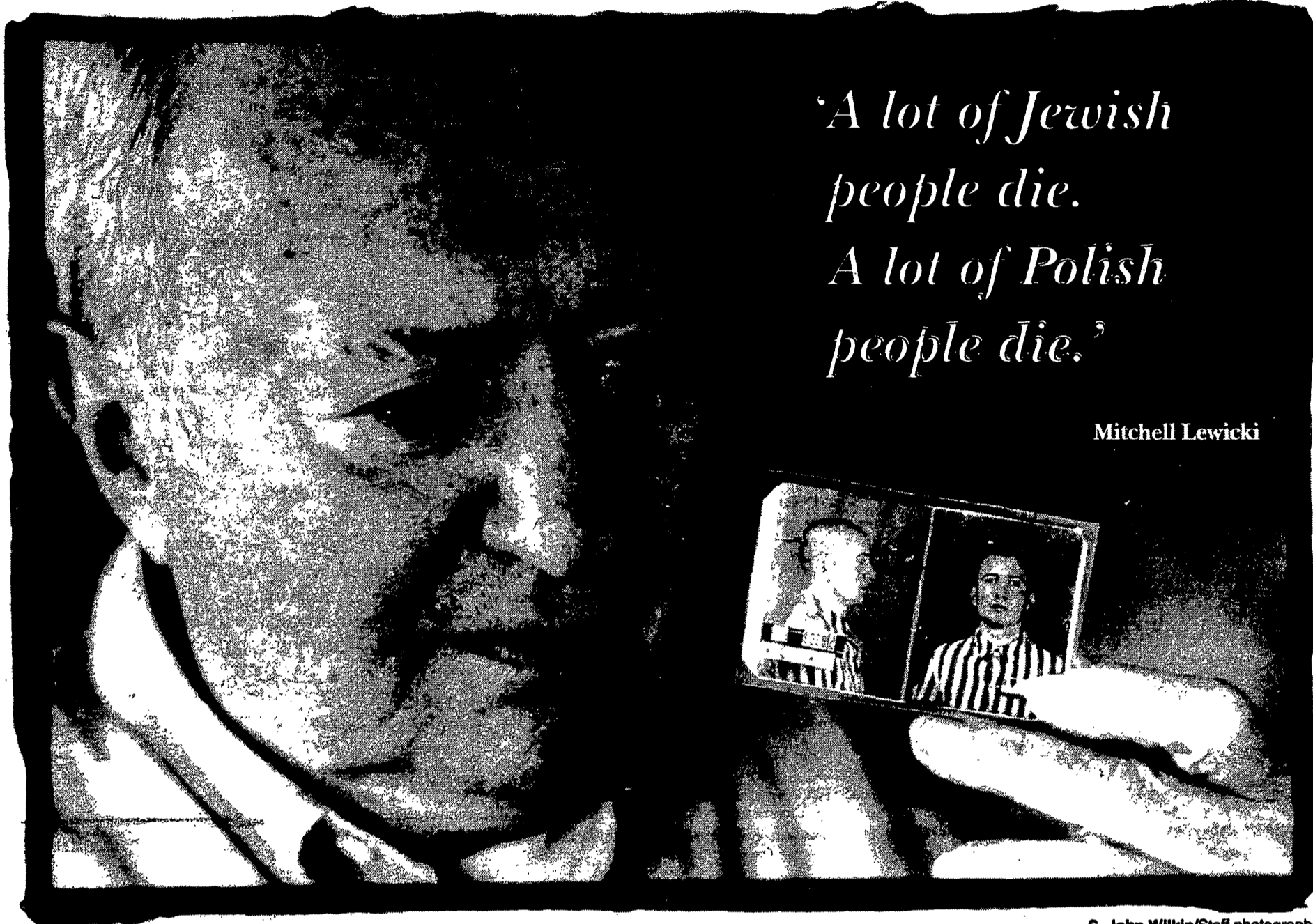
DIocese OF ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

VOL. 105 NO. 29

THURSDAY, APRIL 28, 1994

75¢

24 PAGES



'A lot of Jewish people die. A lot of Polish people die.'

Mitchell Lewicki

S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Mitchell Lewicki, a Polish survivor of the Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz, displays his identification photo during an interview in his Auburn home.

Nazi's crimes crossed ethnic boundaries

A few years ago, Mitchell (Mieczyslaw) Lewicki visited the former Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz.

The man guiding Lewicki's group noted that approximately six million people died at the hands of the Nazis. Lewicki waited until he got the man alone, then showed him the numbers tattooed on his own arm. The numbers identified him as a former inmate of the camp.

"You know more died," Lewicki recalled telling the man.

The guide acknowledged to Lewicki, now a member of Auburn's St. Hyacinth Parish, that the number was much higher. But, Lewicki said, the man explained that no one knows how high.

That the Nazi regime murdered millions of people is beyond doubt. They carried on these atrocities in concentration camps through such direct means as gas chambers as well as through mass hangings and shootings. Others died of assorted diseases, overwork or starvation in the camps.

But the Nazis did not limit their activities to the camps. Millions of victims were killed during "death marches" to and from the camps. They were massacred while they were transported to the camps or to work sites, while they worked as slave laborers in Nazi factories, in jails, through executions and reprisals.

And these atrocities ravaged more than Jews —



although the Jewish people were clearly singled out in a way no other group was except, perhaps, the Gypsies.

The Nazis murdered Russian civilians and prisoners of war; Poles; homosexuals; the mentally and physically disabled; religious leaders; Jehovah's Witnesses; members of fundamentalist groups; political prisoners and others.

The dead included many Catholics, among them St. Maximilian Kolbe, who voluntarily took the place of another man who was to be executed; Blessed Edith Stein, the Carmelite nun who was arrested and died in a concentration camp because she was born Jewish; and thousands of priests.

In his 1992 book, *Democide: Nazi Genocide and Mass Murder*, R.J. Rummell compiled the various death toll estimates, offering ranges and in some cases likely death totals.

Rummell estimated the combined total of Poles and Russians killed at between nine and 13 million (other sources, which separate the two nationalities, offer estimates of the Polish dead at between 750,000 and six million, with three million the most commonly given figure); of Gypsies, between 200,000 and 500,000; of homosexuals at approximately 220,000; of Russian POWs between 2 and 3.7 million; and of the mentally and physically disabled who were euthanized at about 173,000.

All told, Rummell estimated that "the Nazis

probably murdered in cold blood 16,315,000, possibly as many as 23,974,000 ... Overall, the Nazis probably murdered one out of every eighteen Europeans they controlled during the war."

Yet when one thinks of Nazi mass murder, the fate of Europe's Jews receives much of the attention — in books and such films as *Schindler's List*.

And this seeming focus angers Lewicki.

"We hear just Jews, just Jews, just Jews," Lewicki said. While not denying the suffering of the Jews he added, "I was getting madder and madder. A lot of Jewish people die. A lot of Polish people die."

Historians certainly do not deny the death of millions of non-Jewish people at the hands of the Nazis. The U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., contains information and displays about these other groups. The memorials in the concentration camps contain memorials of these other groups as well.

But the Jewish dead receive the attention they do, in part, because of the nature and the extent of the Nazi assault on them, noted Charles Maier, professor of history at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass.

"The 'final solution of the Jewish problem' clearly had the object of chasing down the Jews of Europe and killing them," Maier said. "I think there were as many Poles killed by the Germans, but they wanted to wipe out the intellectuals and subjugate the church, not wipe out the Poles as a people."

Continued on page 22

By Lee Strong, Senior staff writer