

Nazi's crimes

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ple per se."

Thus while the total number of deaths of Poles and Russians at Nazi hands may equal or even exceed the number of Jews killed, Maier observed, proportionately, the number of Jewish deaths was much higher. The estimated Jewish death toll of six million accounts from more than half of the approximately 11 million Jews living in Europe before World War II began.

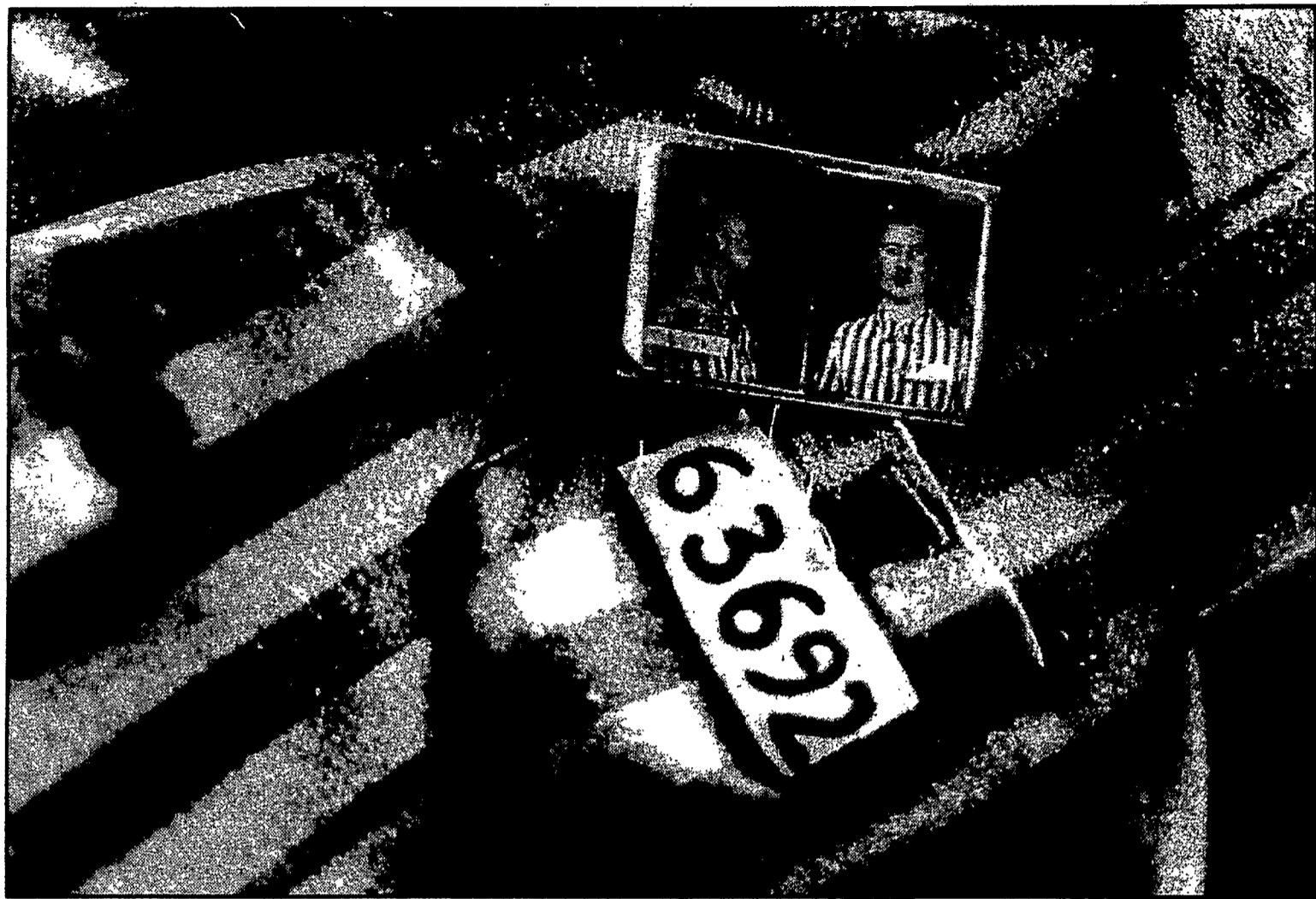
The Jewish focus is also the result, in part, of the fact that the other groups have not been as organized about telling their stories, noted Father John T. Pawlikowski, OSM, a professor of social ethics at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and an activist in Christian/Jewish relations.

"Some of this focus is due to the fact that the Jewish community is far more organized and takes a greater interest," noted Father Pawlikowski, who will deliver three upcoming talks in Rochester on the Holocaust: Colgate Rochester Divinity School, 1100 S. Goodman St., Rochester (Sunday, May 1, at 7 p.m., and Monday, May 2, at 8 a.m.) and The Dugan Center at St. Mary's Church, 15 St. Mary's Place, Rochester (12:10 p.m. on May 2).

"I think that this has been exacerbated by the fact that communities like the Poles have failed to bring knowledge about their own victimization to the forefront," the Chicago priest added.

The focus of the Nazis on the Jews is often referred to as the "Holocaust." According to the four-volume *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, the term "holocaust" is religious, arising from the Greek word meaning "a burnt offering to God." The Hebrew form of the word is "sho'ah," often written simply as Shoah.

"The Holocaust was the sui generis wiping out of a people," said Rabbi Judea Miller of Brighton's Temple B'rith Kodesh, 2131 Elmwood Ave. He ac-



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer
Mitchell Lewicki has kept his concentration camp uniform which bears his identification number. The red triangle above the number wrongly signified him as a 'political prisoner.'

knowledged that while the Nazis killed millions of other people — such as the Poles — these people did not have to expect death simply because of who they were. The Jews could expect death because they were Jewish.

Thus, Rabbi Miller said, when he talks about mass killings of other people by the Nazis or about such contemporary situations as Bosnia, he uses the term genocide, reserving Holocaust for the Nazi murder of the Jews.

However, Scott Miller, academic program coordinator at the Research Insti-

tute of the U.S. Holocaust Museum, said his institution uses the term Holocaust to include more than Jewish victims of Nazi murders.

"The Holocaust was a Nazi assault on the 'other,' a Nazi assault on non-Aryans," Miller said.

Father Pawlikowski said there is an ongoing shift in the way scholars look at the Nazi killings.

"I think there is a growing sense among a number of scholars, including Jewish scholars, that when looking at the non-Jewish victims, one has to see the link with the Jewish victims in the overall Nazi plan," Father Pawlikowski said.

That plan, the priest explained, called for the "purification" of the human race. The first two victims of that purification policy were the disabled and the Jews. And, he said, there are indications that had the Nazi regime lasted longer, it would have extended those policies to other groups.

Indeed, the Jewish people's wholesale slaughter did not start when the camps first opened, Miller noted. A number of the camps began as holding centers for political prisoners, and in some of the camps, the non-Jews outnumbered the Jews.

But following the Wannsee Conference in January, 1942, the Nazis began their "final solution:" the extermination of the Jews.

"The extermination camps were the last steps in a policy," Miller said. "The extermination camps were started for the purpose of gassing Jews and Gypsies."

Father Pawlikowski noted that while some of the non-Jewish prisoners were subject to the mass slaughter enacted on the Jews in the camps, one of the ways the Jewish and non-Jewish victims differ is that while the Jews in the camps were killed en masse, the non-Jewish victims were more likely to die from illness and mistreatment.

Lewicki was an eyewitness to the policies in the camps, and to the treatment of non-Jewish prisoners.

He was arrested on Sept. 1, 1942, while walking home from work at his father's shoe factory in the city of Radom. He was rounded up with other men who had the bad luck to be on the street at that moment. He was shipped by train to Auschwitz on Sept. 14.

Lewicki had heard stories about Auschwitz and the atrocities committed

there from fellow Poles, and from the Jewish people with whom he worked and near whom he lived.

"We know this is a hard, critical concentration camp," Lewicki said. But although he and his neighbors had heard much about the camp, they had a hard time accepting what they heard. "Jews not believe. Nobody believe."

At Auschwitz, he was eventually sent to the Gypsy camp to work as a male nurse. One day the Gypsy camp was simply cleared out. The healthy were sent to Germany to work as laborers. The rest were sent into gas chambers.

Lewicki was then sent to Dora Nordhausen Concentration Camp in Germany, where he helped to make V-1 and V-2 rockets. When the rockets misfired or missed their targets, some of the workers were hanged from the overhead cranes in the tunnels where they worked.

Lewicki, with tears in his eyes, pointed out that he worked for years in an Auburn factory where there were similar cranes. Co-workers looking at those cranes in the Auburn factory saw only the machine parts being moved.

"I see bodies," he said.

Eventually, American soldiers liberated the camp. Lewicki became a "war groom" after he met and married an American nurse, Victoria Pelc. The couple lived in Auburn, where they raised two children, Mitchell and Jane.

Lewicki was among those who visited the Holocaust Museum in Washington before it opened last year. At first, he said, he was angry because he thought it focused only on the Jewish victims. But then his anger quelled when "I see the Polish corner."

Father Pawlikowski noted that more efforts need to be made by groups and individuals to collect and tell the stories of the non-Jewish victims of Nazi atrocities such as Lewicki. And both Jewish and non-Jewish survivors and groups need to continue to work together to keep the memory of what the Nazis did alive.

Meanwhile, Rabbi Miller said that both groups need to seek out healing. He said that while in Poland, he met a Polish priest who summed up his own views.

"Jews and Poles both died in Poland," Rabbi Miller recalled the priest as saying. "But until we learn to grieve together, neither of us will be healed."

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