

Judge:

Holocaust Unforgettable Lesson

By Jane Oppy
Enquirer Staff Writer

The names — fearful, guttural, Germanic, final — fell from the lips of six ministers and rabbis as each lit a candle to the memory of those who died.

They died in places called Auschwitz. Dachau. Buchenwald. Treblinka. Bergen-Belsen. Theresienstadt.

The first local interfaith service honoring the dead in those places and others in lesser-known camps drew an overflow crowd to Shearith Israel Synagogue Monday night to listen, pray and sing hymns of forgiveness.

They came also to hear Judge Aaron Cohn, a liberator of one of the smaller camps — Ebensee in Austria — tell them first-hand what it was all about.

His brow knitted in indignation, his hand raised in righteous anger, Cohn called Adolph Hitler "a reincarnation of the devil" and said, "You and I are gathered here tonight to commemorate an event that was a debacle to all humanity."

"The flower of Europe died in those camps," said Cohn, who saw buildings the size of the synagogue stacked to the ceiling with bodies when he, then an Army Major, entered a satellite camp housing 15,000, to 18,000 survivors in May 1945.

"All religions were classified as enemies of the state," said Cohn. "Some died because of their political views. Some because of their physical handicaps. But it's historically true that the Jews were special. If you had one-eighth Jewish blood by ancestry, you were doomed."

Cohn said he would not dignify with a rejoinder the doubters of Hitler's responsibility. "We fought the right people," he said, calling upon the crowd to consider the great lesson learned.

"We are here to say, 'Never again,'" said Cohn. "What is the great lesson learned? That this magnificent country is the greatest experiment politically that the world has ever seen. All men must be first-class citizens."



(L-R) Rabbi Eisenberg, Judge Cohn, Rabbi Chesman
Father Charles Roper

"When we allow any group to persecute or discriminate, we allow the fabric of our democracy to be torn and eventually destroyed. The people of Germany of 1938 gave up their individual liberties for their so-called place in the sun and their so-called national destiny."

Ministers from nine protestant churches and one Roman Catholic church, an Army chaplain and two rabbis read prayers and literature of the holocaust to which the people responded.

And at the close of his speech, after prayers, the crowd sang "America the Beautiful" and "My Country 'Tis of Thee."

As the crowd was leaving, a father was discussing with a woman what to say to his children when they asked why the holocaust happened.

"You don't worry about answering the question," the father said. "You worry when you stop asking."