AMERICAN JEWS HONOR POLISH HOLOCAUST RESCUERS

BY ROB STRYBEL, REUTERS

Poles who risked their lives a half century ago by taking in fugitive Jews during the Nazi Holocaust were honored in Warsaw in July, in what may be one of their final gatherings.

They recalled how they tucked Jews into odd hiding places when German soldiers were on the prowl, risking the death penalty for themselves and their families.

"At various times we had up to nine people living in our flat. They had free run of the house, but when they heard a knock at the door, they would all run down to a special hiding place next to the coal bin," said Waclaw Nowinski, 83.

He was one of about 60 ageing Poles invited to the event by the U.S.-based Jewish Foundation for the Righteous (JFR), all of them medal-holders of the Yad Vashem Institute's Righteous among the Nations decoration.

Since its inception in 1986, the JFR has spent millions of dollars supporting needy Gentile rescuers like Nowinska and Irena Senderska-Rzonca, who was only 13 in 1943 when her family provided a safe haven for a Jewish doctor's family in the eastern Polish town of *Boryslaw*, now in Ukraine.

She recounted how a Jew named Dr. Bander asked her father if he could help his wife and five-year-old son, she said.

"We hid them in the dovecote, and I would take food and water up to them. They were later joined by the father."

On one occasion, Nazi officers were billeted in the house and German soldiers bedded down in the attic, separated from their quarry by only the thinnest of slats.

Like many Yad Vashem medal-holders, Senderska-Rzonca has stayed in touch with her beneficiaries. "Miron Bander was just a little boy back then. He is now a successful physics professor in California," she said.

Nowinski said he had been in contact with a rescued Jew named Bronowski until his death in Israel last year at 103.

"We're still in touch with Janina Panski of Tel Aviv. My dad arranged forged Aryan (racial-purity) documents for her, and because she didn't look Jewish she could freely walk the streets," he explained.

During World War Two, Poland was the only country in German-occupied Europe where anyone aiding Jews risked death. In was also the only occupied country whose government-in-exile set up an underground organization for the express purpose of aiding and saving Jews.

According to estimates, up to 120,000 Jews who could not have survived the Holocaust without help were rescued, and over 6,000 Poles were subsequently awarded the Righteous Among Nations medal, more than any other country.

There was a bittersweet note to the Warsaw ceremony.

"Due to the rising age of the rescuers, it will likely be the last," said one of the organizers.

CZECH HOLOCAUST VICTIMS REMEMBERED IN TEREZIN

A crowd of 1,000 people, headed by Czech Senate chairman Premysl Sobotka, paid respects to all the inmates of the war-time *Terezin* ghetto and the local Gestapo prison.

The *Terezin* mourning ceremony was held for the 61st time.

"This year is strange. Due to a thief, bronze plates with the names of the people who perished here are missing on a number of graves," Terezin National Memorial's director Jan Munk said.

Munk said this barbarous act had provoked a tremendous wave of solidarity.

"We must not be reconciled with the theft. On the other hand, we have seen a positive response and help. Sculptor Oldrich Hejtmanek will make the new plates free," Munk said.

The staff of the Czech Terezin National Memorial pasted the first 115 new resin

Poignant statue on grounds of infamous concentration camp Thereisenstadt.

plates on the graves that are to replace the total 824 bronze plates stolen there earlier this year.

Unlike the bronze plates, they will not attract metal scrap thieves.

The thief, who has been detained, inflicted a damage of more than $150,000 on the National Memorial in Terezin. He faces up to eight years in prison, if found guilty.

The *Terezin* prison and ghetto and the *Litomerice* concentration camp made up the largest complex of its kind in the Nazi Protectorate of *Bohemia* and *Moravia*. Some 220,000 people from all over Europe passed through it during the war.

Only about one third of them lived to see the end of the war. Some of the prisoners died in *Terezin*, others in extermination camps.

The *Terezin* Memorial was established in *Terezin's* Small Fortress in May 1947.

NAZI CAMP GUARD LOSES U.S. CITIZENSHIP

A U.S. appeals court revoked the citizenship of a Pennsylvania man who worked as a Nazi concentration camp guard.

The 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed a ruling by the U.S. District Court in Pittsburgh revoking the U.S. citizenship of Anton Geiser of Sharon, who served during World War II as an armed SS guard at Nazi concentration camps.

Geiser admitted under oath that he served during most of 1943 as an armed SS guard at *Sachsenhausen* near Berlin. His duties included escorting prisoners to slave labor sites and standing guard in the camp's guard towers. He said he was under standing orders to shoot any prisoner attempting escape.

Geiser also admitted serving as a guard at *Buchenwald* and its *Arolsen* subcamp.

While Geiser served at *Sachsenhausen*, more than 3,000 prisoners were murdered or died from brutal treatment, including hard physical labor. Many prisoners died from exhaustion or disease; many were shot or hanged.

Geiser, 81, immigrated to the United States from Austria in October 1956, and was naturalized as a U.S. citizen in March 1962. Efforts to denaturalize him began in 2004.

"Individuals like Anton Geiser, who assisted the Nazis in their quest to extinguish the lives of millions of innocent men, women and children, do not deserve the benefits of U.S. citizenship," said U.S. Attorney Mary Beth Buchanan. "The 3rd Circuit's decision affirms that the United States will not be a sanctuary for perpetrators of the Holocaust."

CHINESE DIPLOMAT WHO SAVED THOUSANDS DURING HOLOCAUST HONORED

The heroic actions of a Chinese diplomat who saved thousands of Jews from the Holocaust by issuing visas for them to flee Austria are being honored in an exhibition at the US Congress.

Against the orders of his superiors, Feng Shan Ho, the Chinese consul-general in Vienna from 1937 to 1940, facilitated the safe departure of the Jews in the years immediately preceding the Second World War, including those sent to Nazi concentration camps.

Ho's extraordinary rescue efforts were not known until after his death in 1997 – thanks to his reporter daughter's nose for news.

Ho had lived after retirement in 1973 for almost a quarter of a century in San Francisco, California, not far from some of the people he had saved, but they never knew it.

"He did not seek publicity, he did not seek recognition, he did not seek compensation. It was enough for him to know that he had done the right thing," said Martin Gold, a member of the US Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad.

The commission launched the exhibition "*On the Wings of the Phoenix: Dr Feng Shan Ho and the Rescue of Austrian Jews*" at the rotunda of a Senate office building on Capitol Hill.

Ho, born in *Yiyang, Hunan* Province and who became fatherless by age seven, had witnessed firsthand the *Anschluss*, the annexation of Austria by Germany in 1938 and the subsequent imposition of Nazi racial laws and terror unleashed on Jews.

Many Jews sought to leave Austria, but

found almost no country willing to allow them entry.

Some of those who obtained Chinese visas were able to escape to *Shanghai* or made their way to North and South America, Palestine, the Philippines, Cuba and elsewhere.

Manli Ho poses next to a photograph of her father, Dr. Feng Shan Ho.

The Chinese visas were used to obtain transit visas from countries like Italy, which required proof of an end destination.

The Washington exhibition was developed with the help of Ho's daughter Manli Ho, a former reporter with the *Boston Globe* newspaper, who helped unravel her father's heroic actions.

Ho was among the first of a small number of diplomatic rescuers who took "extraordinary steps at some personal risk to themselves" to save the Jews, Gold said.

Most of the Jews who escaped were refugees from Poland or residents of Lithuania.

Ho was posthumously bestowed the title of "Righteous Among the Nations."

BULGARIA ACCEPTS BLAME FOR 11,000 HOLOCAUST DEATHS

President Georgi Parvanov, during a visit to Israel, took responsibility for the deaths of 11,000 Jewish residents of *Thrace* and *Macedonia*, areas that were annexed to Bulgaria in April 1941.

Acting under Nazi orders, Bulgarian police arrested Jews in those territories and deported them to Treblinka in 1943. The history of those Jews often has been played down in the face of the saving of 48,000 Jews in Bulgaria proper by the country's religious and political leaders.

"When we express justifiable pride at

what we have done to save Jews, we do not forget that at the same time there was an anti-Semitic regime in Bulgaria, and we do not shirk our responsibility for the fate of more than 11,000 Jews who were deported from *Thrace* and *Macedonia* to death camps," Paranov said at the Israeli president's residence in Jerusalem.

Parvanov, a member of the socialist –- formerly Communist – party, is the first Bulgarian leader to accept responsibility for the deaths.

HUNGARIAN ARMY OFFICER WHO SAVED JEWS DURING WWII COMMEMORATED AT EU PARLIAMENT

A Hungarian army officer, who saved the lives of around 2000 Jews in Budapest from Nazi persecutions during the last months of World War II, was commemorated at the European Parliament in Brussels.

Captain Laszlo Ocskay, who was recognized as a "Righteous Among the Nations" by the Yad Vashem in Jerusalem in 2003, acted consistently against the policies of the "Arrow Cross Militia," the Hungarian pro-Nazi authorities headed by Ferenc Szalasi.

Between October 1944 and January 1945, he used

Captain Laszlo Ocskay.

a former Jewish high school building in Budapest as a shelter for the 2,000 women, men and children, feeding them with army rations and defending them with military force.

After WWII, Ocskay lived in Austria before immigrating to the United States

where he joined his son. He died in 1966 of a trauma after a fall.

During the commemoration event at the EU parliament, under patronage of Hungarian MEP Andras Gyurk, whose family members also saved Jews in WWII, and B'nai B'rith Brussels, Leslie J. Pardon, a 83-year-old Israeli who was among the people saved by Ocskay, saluted his heroism and dedication.

"He was an outstanding and brave human being who protected a group of helpless human beings from annihilation under the most critical conditions, and risked his own life by standing up against the power of institutionalized terror," he said.

"Thanks to him I could miraculously escape from a train bound for Auschwitz."

Over 600.000 Jews were killed by the Nazis in Auschwitz and in Hungary during the last few months of WWII.