

.....STUDY GUIDE FOR THE DOCUMENTARY VIDEO.....



JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

**STAND
FIRM**

AGAINST NAZI ASSAULT



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CHRONOLOGY

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT (*Stand Firm*, classroom edition)

WHY STUDY ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST?

THE events that occurred in Germany and surrounding countries in the years 1933-45 are among the most studied and perhaps the least understood of history. The terror inflicted on the peoples of Europe at the hands of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis defies comprehension. During the event called the Holocaust, millions of Jews were systematically persecuted and murdered by the Hitler government. In all, six million Jews and five million others died. The Nazi period raises disturbing questions about human nature and morality:

- ▼ How could a civilized society descend into a frenzy of cruelty resulting in the murder of 11 million people?
- ▼ Why was there no mass protest against the atrocities?
- ▼ How much did the ordinary citizen know?
- ▼ What led the judicial system to abandon its role as the protector of justice?
- ▼ Where were the traditional guardians of society—the educators? the clergy? the philosophers?

While some would like to close or even rewrite this chapter in history as too gruesome and terrifying, similar things are happening again before our eyes. While the cry of “Never again” still echoes, current events around the world are stark reminders that humans are capable of carrying out the unthinkable against their fellowman. In many countries hostility is building between ethnic groups or against immigrants, as record numbers of refugees strain the resources of even the most affluent countries. It is for these reasons that a study of the Holocaust is relevant and important in education.

WHY STUDY ABOUT JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IN THE NAZI ERA?

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES in Nazi Germany represented a tiny, nonthreatening group of so-called other victims of the Holocaust. Then why consider the story of Jehovah's Witnesses? Their story is unique for several reasons: (1) The Witnesses were offered a choice: Unlike other prisoners, each Witness could be set free from prison or camp simply by signing a statement renouncing his or her faith. Very few Witnesses ever signed this document. (2) The Witnesses were the only religious group to take a consistent, organized stand against the Nazi regime. In the Nazi camps, they were the only religious group designated by their own symbol—a purple triangle. (3) The Witnesses spoke out boldly by word and printed page against the evils of Nazism, even while under ban. The Gestapo and SS expended enormous energy to eradicate this small group—but without success.

The persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses and their response occurred at a time when nonconformity to Nazi ideology often proved fatal. Every young person today could face similar dilemmas in his or her life: When do I go along with others, and when do I stand up for what I believe in? Is it possible to maintain conviction in the face of threat of serious harm? Is it worth it? Does the law of conscience and human decency ever overrule national law? If so, when?

The story of Jehovah's Witnesses raises important moral and ethical issues about intolerance, peer pressure, personal responsibility, respect for human life, and the law of conscience. The Witnesses' response to tyranny demonstrates how the human spirit can triumph in the face of prejudice, propaganda, and persecution.

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE DOCUMENTARY VIDEO

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES were a small Christian group of about 25,000 in Germany in 1933. When the Nazis came to power, Jehovah's Witnesses were targeted almost immediately as enemies of the State. Thousands of them suffered in Nazi prisons and camps. About 2,000 of them died—a small number compared with the 11 million Jews, Poles, Roma and Sinti (Gypsies), and others who perished.

Jehovah's Witnesses stood firm as a religious group, but each individual Witness had personal decisions to make as he or she faced daily pressure to conform. Even young children were forced to make difficult choices, since they were pressured to join the Hitler Youth, give the Hitler salute, and accept Nazi indoctrination.

Jehovah's Witnesses were regarded by the Nazis as being among their principal religious antagonists. "In considering the possibilities for Christian response to National Socialism," wrote Susannah Heschel, Professor of Jewish Studies, "the Witnesses emerge as an important model of resistance against which other groups . . . might be measured." Professor Christine King said of the Witnesses, "They spoke out with one voice. And they spoke out with a tremendous courage, which has a message for all of us."

Note: The historians presented in this documentary video are not Jehovah's Witnesses, nor is Madame Geneviève de Gaulle. All others appearing in the video are Jehovah's Witnesses.

Study Guide — **Jehovah's Witnesses Stand Firm Against Nazi Assault**

	Scholar's Edition (78 minutes)	Classroom Edition (28 minutes)
Part I: Introduction and seminar	3:19	1:03
Part II: Pre-1933 Germany	2:40	1:36
Part III: 1933 Germany	6:56	1:55
Part IV: Nazi Assault—Battle Lines Drawn	13:57	6:14
Part V: Jehovah's Witnesses Speak Out	21:53	5:42
Part VI: Nazi Assault—Death Sentences	15:52	6:17
Part VII: Jehovah's Witnesses Stand Firm	11:07	4:15

Video Fact Sheet

Medium: Videotape (available in NTSC, PAL, and SECAM format)

Produced by: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania

Languages of initial release: English and German (24 other languages to follow)

Total running time:

▼ Scholar's Edition 78 minutes

▼ Classroom Edition 28 minutes

Scholars (in order of appearance in Scholar's Edition)

Dr. Sybil Milton, *Senior Historian*

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Dr. Michael Berenbaum, *Director*

Research Institute, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Professor Christine King, *Vice-Chancellor*

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Dr. Sigrid Jacobeit, *Director*

Ravensbrück Memorial, Germany

Dr. Susannah Heschel, *Professor of Religion*

Case Western Reserve University, United States

Joachim Görlitz, *Director*

Brandenburg Archive, Germany

Also interviewed: *Madame Geneviève de Gaulle, President*

Association of Former Women Camp Inmates of the Resistance

Survivors interviewed: 24

World premiere: *Ravensbrück Concentration Camp Memorial, Germany—November 6, 1996*

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- Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc. *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*. Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 1993. Published by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., Brooklyn, New York, 1993.
- On Video:
- Jehovah's Witnesses Stand Firm Against Nazi Assault*, Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 1996. Distributed by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 25 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, NY 11201-2483.
- Purple Triangles*, Starlock Pictures forTVS, 1991. Distributed by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 25 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, NY 11201-2483.

LESSON PLAN

Purpose:

To present one minority's response to tyranny and to examine how the human spirit can triumph in the face of prejudice, propaganda, and persecution

BACKGROUND: Prior to viewing and discussing the documentary video *Jehovah's Witnesses Stand Firm Against Nazi Assault*:

- ▼ Explore the meanings of the following terms: prejudice, tolerance, persecution, conscience.
- ▼ Provide general information on Nazism and the Holocaust.
- ▼ Explain the relevancy of studying about Jehovah's Witnesses under Nazism.
- ▼ Discuss how the Witnesses' experiences relate to contemporary world events.

OBJECTIVES: Students will be able to:

1. Recognize various forms of social pressure and political coercion to achieve conformity.
2. Identify optional responses for peaceful resistance to prejudice and persecution.

Related terms and concepts: authoritarianism, conscience, conscientious objector, freedom of speech, genocide, minority groups, nationalism, persecution, prejudice, propaganda, religious freedom, tolerance, totalitarianism

PROCEDURES:

A typical 45-minute class period allows time to introduce and view the documentary video as well as to discuss issues raised in it. Two options to facilitate discussion and learning are suggested.

LESSON PLAN

Option A: Ask students to look for answers to these two questions:

1. What strategies were used to get Jehovah's Witnesses to compromise their beliefs and change their position? (*Examples: isolation, threats, humiliation, reeducation, imprisonment, beatings, deprivation, false promises, torture, threat of death*)
2. What did the Witnesses do to speak out against the evils of Nazism, and what helped them to maintain their firm stand? (*Examples: being part of a strong social support network, organized distributing of literature, assisting others, seeing others maintain conscientious stand, having strong religious beliefs*)

Following the video, discuss the questions first in small groups, if time permits, and then with the entire class.

Option B: Distribute the Video Work Sheet. (Pages 14-15) Assign questions from the work sheet to individuals or to groups of students who will be responsible to find answers as they view the video. After viewing the video, assigned students can report the answers as a short review of key points.

Additional questions for discussion:

1. If someone in authority ordered you to commit an act of brutality, would you resist? If so, how? What if you were ordered to commit a lesser violation of your conscience, such as the destruction of someone's private property?
2. What is the difference between genocide and persecution?
3. What is propaganda? What are some examples of propaganda today?
4. What responsibility does a community bear when a minority is persecuted?

LESSON PLAN

5. How might history have been different if more of Germany's social institutions (universities, businesses, religions, judicial systems) had opposed the principles of Nazism?
6. Can a person hold strong personal views and convictions and still be tolerant of other people who have different beliefs? Explain your answer.
7. What lessons can be learned from those within Germany who resisted Nazism?
8. Some people claim that the Holocaust is a hoax. After seeing the film and listening to the testimony of survivors, how would you respond to this kind of thinking?

Extension Activities:

1. **Case Studies.** Select one of the survivor profiles (pages 22-38) to read aloud with the class. Then have groups of students select three questions for discussion, or assign selected questions to groups.
2. **Research.** Hand out the brief description of the Nazi camp system. (Pages 18-19) Ask students to research one of the camps or prisons. They can find out where and when it was established, what went on there, who the prisoners were, how they were treated, and what happened to them at liberation.
3. **Poetry and Prose.** Consider the two writings on the handout entitled "Why Should I Care?" (Page 16) Ask students to write their own poetry or prose on modern examples of inhumanities or on reasons why people should care about brutality against an unpopular minority.
4. **Resistance.** Consider together the handout "What Is Resistance?" (Page 20) Assign one of the essays under "Reflections," page 21.

LESSON PLAN

5. **Role Play.** Show the Declaration document that was used to pressure Jehovah's Witnesses, also called International Bible Students. (Page 17) Using the document, ask students to imagine being in a situation in which they have a choice to take the "easy way" and go along with the crowd or to take the "integrity way" and not compromise personal principles. Discuss what it means to "stand firm" for one's beliefs or against false accusations. Then ask students to identify modern-day situations that call for individuals to stand firm against peer pressure, political pressure, or prejudice. Have students role play a modern situation and demonstrate possible effective responses. Contrast the differences between aggressive and non-aggressive resistance.
6. **Analysis:** According to historian Ervin Staub, Hitler's ideology consisted of three main components:
 - ▼ Racial purity and the racial superiority of Germans, with strong anti-Semitism.
 - ▼ Nationalism, with the goal of extending German power and influence.
 - ▼ The leadership principle, which required unquestioning obedience to Hitler.

Historian Brian Dunn identifies three basic reasons why the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses were incompatible with Nazism:

- ▼ The Witnesses' opposition to racism in any form.
- ▼ The international scope of the religion, implying international equality.
- ▼ The Witnesses' political neutrality and their refusal to swear allegiance to the State.

What does a comparison of Staub's and Dunn's analyses show?

VIDEO WORK SHEET

Introduction and Seminar Excerpts

1. How many of Jehovah's Witnesses died as a result of the Nazi persecution? _____

2. According to Professor Christine King, what factors helped the Witnesses stand up to the Nazis? _____

Pre-1933 Germany

3. What activities were the Witnesses known for before Hitler took power?

4. What reaction did the National Socialists have toward the Witnesses and their activities? _____

1933 Germany

5. When and how did Adolf Hitler become dictator? _____

6. What was the immediate result for the Witnesses and others? _____

Nazi Assault—Battle Lines Drawn

7. What daily pressure to conform did some Witnesses face? _____

VIDEO WORK SHEET

8. What happened to some of the children of Witnesses?_____

9. What symbol did Jehovah's Witnesses wear in the concentration camps?

10. What unusual offer did the Nazis make to the Witnesses?_____

Jehovah's Witnesses Speak Out

11. What activities did the Witnesses carry out secretly?_____

12. What happened on *Kristallnacht* (Crystal Night, or Night of Broken Glass)?

13. Why did the SS punish and isolate the Witnesses?_____

Nazi Assault—Death Sentences

14. Who was the first conscientious objector of World War II to be executed, and why?_____

15. How did the solidarity of the Witness community affect individual members? _____

Jehovah's Witnesses Stand Firm

16. In what ways did the Witnesses "stand firm"?_____

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

"NO MAN is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."—Seventeenth-century English poet John Donne.

“First they came for the Communists
and I did not speak out—
because I was not a Communist.

Then they came for the Socialists
and I did not speak out—
because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists
and I did not speak out—
because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews
and I did not speak out—
because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—
and there was no one left
to speak out for me.”

—Protestant minister and
concentration-camp survivor
Martin Niemöller.

Translation of *Erklärung*

Concentration camp.....

Department II
—

Declaration

I, the

born on..... in.....

herewith make the following declaration:

1. I have come to know that the International Bible Students Association is proclaiming erroneous teachings and under the cloak of religion follows hostile purposes against the State.
2. I therefore left the organization entirely and made myself absolutely free from the teachings of this sect.
3. I herewith give assurance that I will never again take any part in the activity of the International Bible Students Association. Any persons approaching me with the teaching of the Bible Students, or who in any manner reveal their connections with them, I will denounce immediately. All literature from the Bible Students that should be sent to my address I will at once deliver to the nearest police station.
4. I will in the future esteem the laws of the State, especially in the event of war will I, with weapon in hand, defend the fatherland, and join in every way the community of the people.
5. I have been informed that I will at once be taken again into protective custody if I should act against the declaration given today.

....., Dated

Signature

KL/47/4.43 5000

THE NAZI CAMP SYSTEM

THERE were three main types of camps set up by the Nazis: labor camps, concentration camps, and death camps. Some were used for more than one purpose. Many camps were named after the towns that they were located in or that they were near. Altogether about 9,000 camps operated in Germany and the other countries of Nazi-occupied Europe.

The first concentration camp was established in March 1933 in Dachau, in the south of Germany. The early camp population consisted of political opponents of the Nazis, including Communists, Social Democrats, trade unionists, and members of other rival parties. A large number of Jehovah's Witnesses were also held prisoner. Criminals and homosexuals were rounded up as well. Those considered racially inferior by Nazi standards were later brought to the camps: Jews, Poles, Roma and Sinti (Gypsies), and others.

Many camps had subcamps under their jurisdiction. Since the prisoners were often used for forced labor in military, construction, and agricultural projects, hundreds of sites throughout the Third Reich became designated as camps. Many prisoners were used for medical experimentation.

Before World War II, the camp population was about 25,000. The numbers swelled rapidly once the war began.

In addition to those in the camps, numerous deaths took place at other facilities under the so-called euthanasia program. Doctors and health-care workers participated in the program. People with mental retardation, mental illnesses, physical disabilities, and chronic illnesses, as well as children with severe birth defects and the elderly, were all victims of gassing and lethal injection. The bodies were then cremated. One estimate put the number of such victims at 275,000. The methods used involving gas chambers and crematories were eventually adopted in the killing centers carrying out the "Final Solution" (the Nazi name for the planned genocide of the Jews).

The Nazis established six death, or extermination, camps in Poland after the occupation: Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Majdanek.

These centers were designed for the sole purpose of killing enormous numbers of people with factorylike efficiency. The main victims were Polish Jews, as well as Jews and Roma and Sinti (Gypsies) from other parts of Europe. Of the six million Jews who perished during the Holocaust, approximately 3.5 million were murdered in the death camps.

Prisons and camps named in the *Stand Firm* documentary:

Berlin-Plötzensee*

Brandenburg*

Buchenwald*

Dachau*

Esterwegen

Hamburg-Fuhlsbüttel

Lichtenburg

Neuengamme

Ravensbrück*

Sachsenhausen*

Stutthof

Wewelsburg*

* Named in the Classroom Edition.

Activity: Research one of the above camps or prisons. Find out where and when it was established, what went on there, who the prisoners were, how they were treated, and what happened to them at liberation.

WHAT IS RESISTANCE?

THE term “resistance” in a time of war is usually associated with armed revolt. But in relation to the Nazi era, resistance has come to mean any conscious attempt to stand up against the National Socialist regime. Thus, historians identify many different forms of unarmed resistance to Nazism. Some people smuggled food or messages. Others secretly printed pamphlets exposing Nazi crimes. Rescuers risked their own lives to help fugitives escape or hide.

“Spiritual resistance” during the Nazi era included defying the rules by continuing religious and cultural practices. Some kept secret diaries and other documents. Students attended underground schools. In the face of terror and brutality, just maintaining the will to live was an act of resistance.

In the camps, where prisoners were often under strict surveillance, resisters struggled for physical and psychological survival. Networks of inside and outside help provided food, money, and medicine for suffering inmates. Resistance groups met in secret for political or religious meetings. Prisoners smuggled out reports to let the outside world know what was happening in the camps. Individuals smuggled in printed material or news about the progress of the war.

In studying about resistance to Nazism, however, it is important to recognize that resisters were a small minority compared with the overwhelming majority, who were bystanders, collaborators, or perpetrators. Then why consider the role of resisters? “We need the stories of the heroes and martyrs,” explains Dr. Franklin H. Littell, “to give us eternal reminders that there were those who were surrounded by darkness far more intense than most of us can comprehend—and still affirmed the dignity and integrity and liberty of the human person.”

Pierre Sauvage, one of five thousand Jews hidden by Protestant villagers in Le Chambon, France, said: “If we remember solely the horror of the Holocaust, it is we who will bear the responsibility for having created the most dangerous alibi of all: that it was beyond man’s capacity to know and care.”

REFLECTIONS:

- ▼ Analyze the comments of Dr. Littell. What makes a person a hero? What is a martyr? What can we learn from these kinds of people?
- ▼ Write an essay about the possible reasons people had for participating in acts of resistance to Nazism.
- ▼ Write an essay about the reasons that people might have had for choosing to be bystanders during the Holocaust.
- ▼ Write an inner conversation that a man or a woman might have had with himself or herself while deciding whether or not to perform an act of resistance to the Nazis. What situations today might call for a similar mental process?

Simone Arnold Liebster:

TAKEN FROM MY FAMILY

FROM as far back as I can remember, art and music were a part of my life. Father was an artist, and I loved going with him on walks through the woods because we enjoyed nature together. My family lived near the beautiful mountains of Alsace-Lorraine in France. In 1938 my mother became one of Jehovah's Witnesses, and my father was baptized as a Witness soon after. In 1941, I also decided to become a Witness.



Photographed two weeks before I was put into the reeducation home

Three weeks after I was baptized, my father was arrested for being one of Jehovah's Witnesses. I was at home waiting for him to come from work. The doorbell rang. As I ran to the door and jumped into my father's arms, I heard someone behind him say, "Heil Hitler." Then I realized that I had hugged an SS soldier. They had come to say that Father had been arrested. They questioned and threatened my mother for four hours.

We learned that they had taken Father's salary, closed our bank account, and refused to give Mother a working card, so that she could not get a job. Father was sent to prison at Schirmeck, then to Dachau concentration camp, later to a concentration camp known as Mauthausen-Gusen, and finally to Ebensee. I didn't see him again for four

years.

During the next two years, Mother and I lived as best we could. Friends helped by giving us food in exchange for little jobs. Mother taught me to knit, wash, and cook, since we didn't know what would happen to either of us.

At school I was under more and more pressure to heil Hitler. But I refused because in my heart I could never honor a man in this way as if here were a god who could save people. Several times the teachers stood me in front of the whole school and tried to force me to say "Heil Hitler." One time, I was beaten unconscious, since I wouldn't do work to support the war. Finally I was expelled.

One day, I had to see two “psychiatrists.” They put me in a room with a bright light in my face and asked me question after question. They tried to get me to tell the names of other Witnesses that I knew. I wouldn’t do it; I didn’t want these Witnesses to be arrested as my father had been. The two “doctors” turned out to be SS soldiers.

I was arrested at the age of 12 and was sent to a penitentiary house in Konstanz, Germany, where the Nazis intended to reeducate me. Before they actually took me away, Mother had some photographs taken of us. We didn’t know if we would ever see each other again.

On the way to this place, my mother told me, “Always be polite, kind, and gentle, even when suffering injustice. Never be obstinate. Never talk back or answer insolently. Remember, being steadfast has nothing to do with being stubborn.”

At the home we had to wash, sew, cook, garden, and even cut down trees. We were not permitted to talk. We had a bath twice a year and washed our hair once a year. For punishment they would take away our food or give us a beating.

I was assigned to clean the room of one of the teachers, and she demanded that I clean the springs under the bed every day. I had a small Bible that I had smuggled into the house, so I wedged it into the springs. Thereafter, I was able to read parts of the Bible every day while lying on my stomach under the bed. When it came to cleaning, they thought I was the slowest child they ever had.

Several months after I entered the penitentiary school, my mother was arrested and was sent to Schirmeck, the same



Together again after the war

camp my father had been sent to. Later she was transferred to Gaggenau. While being moved to Ravensbrück, she became very sick. She could have died, but at that time the Germans fled, and the prisoners en route to Ravensbrück were suddenly free.

As the war came to an end, my mother came to get me. Her face was cut and bruised. They told me it was my mother, but I just didn't comprehend it. Mother was told she needed a paper from the judge to secure my release. She took me by the hand and off we went to a building to get this paper. The judge was not in, so she went from office to office insisting on getting this document. It was when I saw her fighting for my freedom that I fully realized that this was my mother. I held her tight and cried. It seemed like all the feelings I had held in for the last two years just came out. France was liberated a few days later.

We went back to our apartment. There we got the news that Daddy was listed as dead. But one day he came home! He was in terrible shape. He could hardly make it up the stairs to our apartment, and he had lost his hearing. The first two years after we were reunited were very hard. But with time, our physical and emotional condition improved; we were a family once again.

Questions for discussion:

- ▼ How might the actions of Simone's parents have influenced her? What evidence is there that Simone's decisions were her own, not those of her parents?
- ▼ Simone's mother advised her to resist without being rude. Why might that have been difficult? How might that be a more effective form of resistance?
- ▼ If you had gone to the same school as Simone, how might you have reacted to her?
- ▼ If you could talk with Simone today, what questions would you want to ask her?
- ▼ How might Simone's experiences and position when she was young have influenced her decisions and attitudes about life when she was an adult?

Activity:

- ▼ Write a page of a journal that Simone or another child in the reeducation home might have kept.

Max Liebster:

A JEWISH SURVIVOR'S STORY

MY FATHER, Bernard Liebster, was born in Oświęcim (Auschwitz), Poland. He came to Germany to marry my mother, Babette Oppenheimer. He became a German citizen. The day I was born, my father was away, serving in the German army during World War I.



We were one of ten Jewish families who belonged to the synagogue in our town. All the neighbors got along well except for one family who supported the National Socialists. I remember that one day one of the boys splattered my forehead with pig's blood. He and his brother later joined the SA, or storm troopers, and the SS.

I moved to the town of Viernheim near Mannheim to work in a relative's clothing shop. Often there were violent National Socialist and Communist marches. When Hitler came to power, I began to see signs at parks and cinema entrances reading, "Dogs and Jews Prohibited." Then came the flare-up of hatred on *Kristallnacht* (Crystal Night). Synagogues were burned. Houses and shops were vandalized. The clothing shop where I worked was looted and destroyed. I moved away to Pforzheim in the Black Forest. There I was arrested in September 1939, at age 24, simply for being a Jew. I didn't understand what was happening. More important, I didn't understand why these things were being done to innocent people by their fellow countrymen.

We were transported through Karlsruhe to a concentration camp. On the train an SS guard kicked me into a cell. I landed on top of the man with whom I would travel for the next two weeks. Despite the terror, abuse, and uncertainty we faced, he seemed unusually calm. I learned that his wife had already died in the Ravensbrück concentration camp and that his children had been taken away to a Nazi reeducation center. Now he was being sent to a concentration camp. He and his family were Jehovah's

Witnesses. He had been arrested because he refused to kill his fellowman and because he would never say “Heil Hitler.” This impressed me very much!

We were taken to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, near Berlin. There were about 400 Witnesses in this camp of 50,000 prisoners. The Witnesses were kept in two isolation barracks surrounded by electric wire. Any prisoner caught talking to a Witness was given 25 strokes. The SS often singled out the Witnesses for special torture. Sometimes in the winter they had to stand outside drenched in cold water until they froze. One out of every three of Jehovah's Witnesses in Sachsenhausen died in the winter of 1939/40. My traveling companion died in this camp.



Simone and I now live in Aix-les-Bains, France

I was put in a barrack for Jews. Four of us slept on one straw mattress—like sardines, one with his head on one side and the next with his head on the other side. One day a prisoner told me about another *Liebster* in the camp. I found this “other *Liebster*”—it was my father. He lay on the floor, his legs swollen from frostbite. I saw him as often as I could for the next several days. One day, he placed his hands on my head, blessed me, and died. I had to carry his body on my back to the crematorium furnace.

In October 1940, I was among 30 young Jews transferred to the Neuengamme concentration camp. The camp commander screamed: “We’re going to put these stinking Jews with the Witnesses because they believe in the same Jehovah!” The Witness barrack was quiet, clean, and orderly. At night my bunkmates and I whispered in the darkness about God, the Scriptures, and hope.

Then one day I found out that I was to leave for the city of my father's birth—Auschwitz. They were sending me to the extermination camp there. I was terrified. I was tattooed with the extermination number 69 733 and put to work building a factory in Buna, one of the work camps near Auschwitz.

Study Guide — **Jehovah's Witnesses Stand Firm Against Nazi Assault**

One day, I had to take an SS bicycle to a repair shop. I put one foot on the pedal and scooted along. For defiling an SS bicycle, I was strapped to a post and given 25 strokes on the buttocks. For weeks I could only lie facedown. One time, I was so weak from exhaustion that I could not walk anymore. An SS man saw my situation and sent me to work in the SS cafeteria so that I could get more food and regain my strength.

In January 1945 with Germany's defeat approaching, we were taken to Buchenwald. All the Jews were to be killed. Every day, groups were loaded like animals onto trains. They were taken to the forest, forced to dig their own graves, and shot. Then it was my turn. Another Jewish prisoner, Fritz Heikorn, and I decided to spend our last quiet moments behind a pile of wood. He had a few pages of Revelation, the last book of the Bible. While we were reading what we thought were our last words, the train pulled away and the guards disappeared. We were left behind!

Suddenly we heard a call for Jehovah's Witnesses to assemble in barrack No. 1. We joined them, and we were liberated in the same night by the U.S. troops.

I had been a prisoner for nearly six years in five concentration camps. I lost seven family members in the Holocaust. In 1956, I married Simone Arnold, one of Jehovah's Witnesses, whose family had also suffered persecution under the Nazis.

In 1995, I returned to Buchenwald and found the very woodpile that Fritz and I sat behind when the death train pulled away



Questions for discussion:

- ▼ What abuse did Max and his family suffer for being Jewish?
- ▼ What feelings did Max have about this treatment?
- ▼ What contrast do you see in the way different SS men treated Max?

Louis Piéchota:

THE DEATH MARCH

IN 1939, I was arrested by the Nazis in France for my religious activities and imprisoned in Belgium and in the Netherlands. But when the war started going badly for the German army, the SS started moving prisoners to camps in Germany. So in January 1944, along with 14 other Witnesses, I was transferred to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. There, my purple triangle was accompanied by the number 98827.

By April 1945 the western Allies were pressing in on the Berlin area from the west, and the Russians were advancing from the east. The Nazi leaders studied various ways of liquidating the prisoners. It would have been impossible to kill off hundreds of thousands of people and dispose of their bodies in a hurry without leaving behind any evidence of the murders. So they decided to kill off the sick and march the rest to the nearest seaport. There the remaining prisoners would be loaded onto ships and taken out to sea. The ships would be sunk, sending the prisoners to a watery grave.



From Sachsenhausen, we were supposed to march about 250 kilometers (150 miles) to Lübeck. We left on the night of April 20/21, 1945. The SS grouped the prisoners by nationality. But the SS let all of Jehovah's Witnesses stay together. There were 230 of us, from six different countries. Any sick prisoners in the infirmary were to be killed before the evacuation. So some of our group risked their lives to rescue other Witnesses, too sick to walk, and carried them out of there.

It was chaos in the camp. Prisoners were stealing supplies to take on the march. Soon our turn came to begin the long march. They told us we were going to a reassembly camp, but actually we were headed to a planned watery death. The prisoners left in groups of 600—first the Czechs, then the Poles, and so forth—about 26,000 in all. The group of Jehovah's Witnesses was the last to leave. The SS had given us a cart to

haul. I learned later that it contained some of the loot the SS had plundered from among the prisoners. They knew that Jehovah's Witnesses would not steal it. That cart turned out to be a big help. The old and sick ones took turns sitting on top of it for the 14 days of the death march.

It was in every sense a death march not only because our destination was to be a watery grave but because death lurked along the way. Those who could not keep up got an SS bullet immediately. We would not leave any of our group on the roadside to be shot. But some 10,700 others were killed before the march ended.

The first 50 kilometers (30 miles) were a nightmare. The Russians were so near that we could hear their guns. Our SS taskmasters were scared of falling into the hands of the Soviets. So that first lap, Sachsenhausen to Neuruppin, turned out to be a forced march that lasted 36 hours.

I had started out carrying a few meager belongings. But as I grew more tired, I threw away one thing after another until I had nothing but a blanket to wrap myself in at night. Most nights we slept outdoors, with just twigs and leaves to keep us from the damp ground. One night, however, I was able to sleep in a barn. The following morning our hosts gave us something to eat. But that was exceptional. After that, for days on end we had nothing to eat or drink, except for a few plants we were able to obtain for use in making herb tea at night, when we stopped to sleep. I remember seeing some prisoners rush over to a dead horse and devour the flesh in spite of the blows of the SS, who hit them with their rifle butts.

All this time, the Russians were advancing on one side and the Americans on the other. By April 25, the situation was so confused that our SS guards no longer knew where the Soviet or the U.S. troops were. So they ordered the whole column of prisoners to camp in a wooded area for four days. While there, we ate nettles, roots, and tree bark. This delay proved to be lifesaving. If they had kept us marching, we would have reached Lübeck before the German army collapsed, and we would have ended up at the bottom of Lübeck Bay.

The Russians and the Americans were closing in on the remnants of the German forces, and shells were whistling over our heads from both sides. An SS officer told us to walk on unguarded to the American lines, about six kilometers (4 miles) away. But we were suspicious of this, and we finally decided to spend the night in the woods. We later learned that those prisoners who had tried to get through to the American lines had been shot down by the SS. About 1,000 of them died that night.

As the fighting grew nearer, our SS guards got panicky. Some of them slipped away into the night. Others hid their weapons and uniforms, donning the striped garb taken from dead prisoners. Some prisoners recognized the guards and shot them with weapons that had been left behind. The confusion was indescribable! Men were running back and forth, and bullets and shells were flying everywhere. By morning the SS were gone. The death march was over!

We had marched about 200 kilometers (120 miles) in 12 days. Of the 26,000 prisoners who left the Sachsenhausen concentration camp on that death march, barely 15,000 survived. Amazingly, every last one of the 230 Witnesses who had left the camp came through that ordeal alive.



Questions for discussion:

- ▼ What was the purpose of this death march?
- ▼ How does the behavior of the SS early in the war compare with that during the last days of the war?
- ▼ What factors helped some to survive the death march?

Franz Wohlfahrt:

WE DID NOT SUPPORT HITLER'S WAR

MY FATHER, Gregor Wohlfahrt, served in the Austrian army during World War I (1914-18) and fought against Italy. After the war, Father married and settled in the mountains of Austria near the Italian and Yugoslav borders. I was born there in 1920, the first of six children. When I was six years old, we moved a few miles east to St. Martin near the resort town of Pörtlach.

By the time Hitler came to power in Germany, several members of my family had become Jehovah's Witnesses. We heard about the troubles our fellow believers were experiencing under the Nazi regime, and we felt that hard times were probably coming for us too.



Maria and me before we were married

In the meantime, at the age of 16, I started to apprentice as a house painter. I lived with a master painter and attended a trade school. An elderly priest who had fled Germany to escape the Nazi regime conducted a religious instruction class in the school. When students greeted him with "Heil Hitler!" he showed displeasure and asked: "What's wrong with our faith?" He felt that the Church should not be involved in war, with fellow believers killing one another.

On March 12, 1938, Hitler marched into Austria without resistance and soon made it a part of Germany. Seemingly overnight the political mood in Austria changed. Storm troopers in their brown uniforms with swastika armbands popped up like mushrooms. The priest who had earlier said that the Church should not be involved in war was one of the few priests who refused to say, "Heil Hitler!" The following week a new priest replaced

him. The first thing that he did on entering class was click his heels, raise his arm in salute, and say, "Heil Hitler!"

Pressure to Conform

Everyone had to face the pressure of the Nazis. When I greeted people with "*Guten Tag*" (Good day) instead of "Heil Hitler," they became angry. Some 12 times I was reported to the Gestapo. Once a horde of storm troopers threatened the master painter with whom I was living, saying that if I didn't give the salute and join the Hitler Youth, I would be sent to a concentration camp. The painter, a Nazi sympathizer, asked them to be patient with me, since he was sure that in time I would change. He explained that he didn't want to lose me because I was a good worker.

With the Nazi takeover, there were big marches that went late into the night, and people fanatically screamed slogans. Every day, the radios blared with speeches by Hitler, Goebbels, and others.

Despite the tense atmosphere, I decided to be baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. My fiancée, Maria Stossier, and I were baptized in August 1939 by her brother Hans. Maria and I agreed that if we survived the troubles ahead, we would be married.

My Father's Decision

The next day, Father was called up for military service. His poor health, resulting from hardships suffered during World War I, would have prevented him from serving anyway. He made it clear that even if he were physically able to serve, his conscience would not allow him to take up weapons to harm his fellowman. He was going to stay neutral, regardless of the consequences.

One week later Germany invaded Poland, which started World War II, and my father was taken to Vienna. While he was being held there, the mayor of our district wrote claiming that Father was responsible for other Witnesses' having refused to support Hitler and that therefore Father should be executed. As a result, Father was sent to Berlin and was soon afterward sentenced to be beheaded. He was kept in chains day and night in the Moabit jail.

Hearing of my father's sentence, a former mayor and school director of St. Martin took up a petition in behalf of my father. Many people in the village signed the peti-

tion, which stated that my father was a good citizen with a fine family. Nazi officials threatened to send the former mayor to a concentration camp if he continued to support Jehovah's Witnesses. The petition was ignored.

In the meantime I wrote Father on behalf of the family and told him that we were determined to follow his faithful example. Father generally was not an emotional man, but we could see how he felt when his last letter to us was stained with tears. He was so happy that we understood his stand. He sent words of encouragement, mentioning each one of us individually by name and urging us to keep faithful to our principles.

Besides Father, about two dozen other Witnesses were being held in the Moabit jail as conscientious objectors. High-ranking officials of Hitler tried to persuade them to give up their faith but without success. In December 1939, about 25 Witnesses, including my father, were executed.

Smiling in the Face of Death

A few weeks later, I was called up for "work service" but soon learned that the main activity was military training. I explained that I would not fight in the war. When I refused to sing Nazi fighting songs, the officers became furious.

The next morning I appeared in civilian clothes rather than in the army uniform we had been issued. The officer in charge said he had no alternative but to put me in the dungeon. There I subsisted on bread and water. Later I was told that there would be a flag-saluting ceremony. The officer warned that I would be shot if I didn't participate.

On the training grounds were 300 recruits as well as military officers. I was commanded to walk by the officers and the swastika flag and give the Hitler salute. Drawing spiritual strength from the Bible account of the three Hebrews in the days of Daniel, I simply said "*Guten Tag*" (Good day) as I passed. I was ordered to march past again. This time I didn't say anything but only smiled.

When four officers led me back to the dungeon, they told me they were trembling because they expected that I would be shot. "How is it possible," they asked, "that you were smiling and we were so nervous?" They said that they wished they had my courage.

A few days later, Dr. Almendinger, a high-ranking officer from Hitler's headquarters in Berlin, arrived in the camp. I was called before him. He explained that the laws had become much tougher. "You are not aware at all of what you are in for," he said. "Oh, yes, I am," I replied. "My father was beheaded for the same reason only a few weeks ago." He was stunned and fell silent.

Later another high-ranking official from Berlin arrived, and he also tried to make me change my mind. After hearing why I would not break God's laws, he took my hand and, with tears streaming down his face, said: "I want to save your life!" The guards led me back to the dungeon where I spent 33 days altogether.

Trial and Imprisonment

In April 1940, I was transferred to a jail in Fürstenfeld. A few days later my fiancée, Maria, and my brother Gregor visited me. Gregor was only a year and a half younger than I was, and he too was standing firm as a Witness. We spent one precious hour encouraging one another. It was to be the last time I saw him alive. Later, in Graz, I was sentenced to five years of hard labor.

Toward the end of 1940, I was put on a train destined for a labor camp in Czechoslovakia, but I was detained in Vienna and put in prison there. The conditions were horrible. The hunger was bad enough. To make it worse, large bugs bit me at night, leaving my flesh bleeding and burning. For reasons then unknown to me, I was returned to prison in Graz.

A professor was interested in my case because the Gestapo described Jehovah's Witnesses as fanatic martyrs who wanted the death sentence in order to get to heaven. After two days of questioning, the professor said: "I have come to the conclusion that you have both feet on this earth. It is not your desire to die and go to heaven." He said he was sorry about the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses and wished me the best.

Early in 1941, I found myself aboard a train headed for Rollwald, a hard-labor camp in Germany.

Harsh Camp Life

Rollwald was located between the cities of Frankfurt and Darmstadt and held about 5,000 prisoners. Each day began at 5:00 a.m. with roll call, which took some two

hours while officers took their time updating their prisoner list. We had to stand motionless, and many prisoners were beaten severely for not standing perfectly still.

Breakfast consisted of bread made of flour, sawdust, and potatoes that were often rotten. Then we went to work in the swamp, digging trenches to drain the land for agricultural purposes. After we worked in the swamp all day without adequate footwear, our feet would swell up like sponges. Once, my feet developed what appeared to be gangrene, and I feared they would need to be amputated.

At noon on the job site, we were served an experimental concoction of so-called soup. It was flavored with turnip or cabbage and sometimes included the ground carcasses of diseased animals. Our mouths and throats burned, and many of us developed large boils. In the evening we received more “soup.” Many prisoners lost their teeth, but I had been told the importance of keeping teeth active. I would chew on a piece of pine wood or on hazel twigs, and I never lost mine.

In an effort to break my faith, the guards isolated me from contact with other Witnesses. When transports from other camps passed through, I sometimes would spot prisoners with the purple triangle. If we couldn't speak, we would encourage each other to stand firm with a nod of our head or a raised clenched fist.

Occasionally I received letters from Maria and Mother. In one I learned of my dear brother Gregor's death, and in another, toward the end of the war, of the execution of Hans Stossier, Maria's brother.

Later, a prisoner was transferred to our camp who knew Gregor when they were together in the Moabit jail, in Berlin. From him I learned of the details. Gregor had been sentenced to die by guillotine for his stand as a conscientious objector. But in an effort to force him to renounce his faith, the customary waiting period before execution had been extended to four months. During that time all kinds of pressures were exerted to make him compromise—heavy chains bound his hands and feet, and he was rarely fed. Yet, he never wavered. He was faithful to the end—March 14, 1942. Though saddened by the news, it strengthened me to remain faithful to God, no matter what.

In time I also learned that my younger brothers Kristian and Willibald and my

younger sisters Ida and Anni were taken to a convent used as a correctional home in Landau, Germany. The boys were severely beaten because they refused to hail Hitler.

Most of those in the barracks where I lived were political prisoners and criminals. I often spent evenings discussing the Bible with them. One was a Catholic priest from Kapfenberg named Johann List. He had been imprisoned because he had spoken to his congregation about things heard on British Broadcasting.

Johann had a very difficult time, since he was not accustomed to hard physical labor. He was a pleasant man, and I would help him reach his work quota so that

he would not get into trouble. He said he was ashamed that he was imprisoned for political reasons and not for standing up for Christian principles. "You are really suffering as a Christian," he said. When he was released about a year later, he promised to visit my mother and my fiancée, which promise he kept.



The Wohlfahrt family

Life for Me Improves

Late in 1943, we got a new camp commander by the name of Karl Stumpf, a tall, white-haired man who started to improve conditions in our camp. His villa was due for painting, and when he learned that I was a painter by trade, I was assigned the job. That was the first time I got away from working in the swamp.

The commander's wife had a hard time understanding why I had been imprisoned, even though her husband explained that I was there because of my faith as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. I was so skinny that she took pity on me and fed me. She arranged more jobs for me so that I could be built up physically.

When prisoners from the camp were being called for fighting on the front lines toward the end of 1943, my good relationship with Commander Stumpf saved me. I explained to him that I would suffer death before becoming bloodguilty by taking

part in war. Although my stand on neutrality put him in an awkward position, he was able to keep my name off the list of those called up.

Last Days of the War

During January and February of 1945, low-flying American planes encouraged us by dropping leaflets that said the war was near its end. Commander Stumpf, who had saved my life, gave me civilian clothes and offered his villa as a hiding place. Leaving the camp, I saw overwhelming chaos. I saw children in battle gear with tears streaming down their faces as they ran from the Americans. Fearing that I would run into SS officers who would wonder why I was not carrying a gun, I decided to return to the camp.

Soon our camp was completely encircled by American troops. On March 24, 1945, the camp surrendered, flying white flags. I was surprised to learn that there were other Witnesses in camp extensions who had also been held back from execution by Commander Stumpf! What a joyous meeting we had! When Commander Stumpf was jailed, many of us approached the American officers and testified personally and by letter in his behalf. As a result, three days later he was freed.

To my astonishment, I was the first one of the some 5,000 prisoners allowed to go free. After five years of imprisonment, I felt as if I were dreaming. I cried tears of joy. Germany did not surrender until May 7, 1945, about six weeks later.

In July, I was able to buy a motorcycle, and then my long trek home began. The journey took several days, since many of the bridges along the highway had been blown up. When I finally arrived home in St. Martin, I drove up the road and spotted Maria harvesting wheat. When she finally recognized me, she came running. Mother threw down her scythe and also came running. You can imagine the happy reunion. Maria and I were married in October 1945.

To this day, I often think of the 14 members of our small congregation in St. Martin during the 1930's and 1940's who, out of love for God and their fellowman, were willing to give up their lives rather than support Hitler's war.

Back in 1944 in the Rollwald labor camp, when I thought I would be executed like my father and brother, my thoughts turned to my mother, to Maria, and to my fellow believers. I wrote the poem "I Stand Firm."

When I thought I would be executed like my father and brother . . . I wrote the poem "I Stand Firm"

I Stand Firm

In my faith, I will always stand firm,
Though this world may taunt and cry,
In my hope, I will always stand firm,
For a beautiful, better time.
In my love, I will always stand firm,
Though this world repays with hate,
Devoted, I will always stand firm,
Though this world disloyal stays.
From God's Word, flows the might of the strong,
And the weak ones it powerful makes,
In God's grace I will always stand firm,
On my own I could never remain.
With my life, I will even stand firm,
And as I my last breath confer,
You should with that dying gasp hear:
I stand firm, I stand firm, I stand firm.

Questions for discussion:

- ▼ As a conscientious objector, Franz refused to perform what acts?
- ▼ What is the meaning of "altruism"? What were some altruistic acts of others toward Franz? What acts of altruism did Franz perform for others?
- ▼ What degrees of resistance to the Nazi system does Franz describe among the different people he met?
- ▼ Analyze Franz' poem. How did his religious beliefs affect his actions and the choices he made? What elements of resistance can you identify?

CHRONOLOGY

- November 11, 1918:** Germany signs the armistice ending combat with the Allies in World War I.
- June 28, 1919:** Germany signs the Treaty of Versailles, with its “war guilt” clause that placed blame on Germany for World War I. The country agrees to disarm and to pay huge war reparations. Under the agreement Germany loses its colonies and some European territory. The country suffers political and economic turmoil.
- 1933:** About 600,000 Jews live in Germany (less than 1 percent of the total population); 25,000 of Jehovah’s Witnesses live in Germany.
- January 30, 1933:** Adolf Hitler is appointed chancellor of the German Reich by President Paul von Hindenburg.
- February 27, 1933:** Reichstag building burned; Nazis blame the Communists.
- February 28, 1933:** Emergency decree enacted “for the Protection of the People and the State.”
- March 20, 1933:** Dachau concentration camp established.
- March 23, 1933:** Enabling Act passed.
- April 1, 1933:** Government-sanctioned nationwide boycott of Jewish-owned businesses. All religious literature printed by Jehovah’s Witnesses was banned from circulation in Germany.
- April 7, 1933:** “Non-Aryans” excluded from government employment.
- April 24, 1933:** First SA (storm troopers) and police raid on the Magdeburg branch office of Jehovah’s Witnesses; literature confiscated.
- April 28, 1933:** Ban on Jehovah’s Witnesses in Prussia lifted; property was returned the next day.
- May 10, 1933:** Nazi burning of books authored by Jews and political opponents.
- June 24, 1933:** Prussian State Police ban the work and organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses.
- June 25, 1933:** *Declaration of Facts* is sent to Hitler, explaining the politically neutral position of the Witnesses and insisting on their right to teach the Bible to the German people. Two million copies are distributed. Some Witnesses are arrested and sentenced to terms in labor and concentration camps.

CHRONOLOGY

- June 28, 1933:** Second raid and closure of Watch Tower office in Magdeburg.
- July 14, 1933:** The “Law for the Prevention of Progeny With Hereditary Diseases” legalizes forced sterilization of individuals considered by the Nazis as biologically inferior. Some 300,000 to 400,000 people are sterilized under this law.
- August 16, 1933:** The *Golden Age* magazine mentions existence of concentration camps within five months of Dachau’s opening.
- August 21-24, 1933:** Burning of 25 truckloads of confiscated Watch Tower publications.
- November 12, 1933:** Jehovah’s Witnesses fired from jobs and arrested for refusing to participate in mandatory vote.
- October 7, 1934:** Telegrams of protest sent to Hitler by Jehovah’s Witnesses in 50 countries, including Germany.
- April 1, 1935:** Jehovah’s Witnesses are banned from all civil service jobs and arrested throughout Germany. Pension and employment benefits confiscated. Being married to a Witness becomes legal grounds for divorce. Witness children banned from attending school. Some children are taken from Witness parents to be raised in Nazi reeducation homes.
- September 15, 1935:** Citizenship and racial laws announced at Nazi Party rally in Nuremberg, legally excluding Jews from German society. Subsequent laws severely restrict “non-Aryan” marriages.
- 1936:** Sachsenhausen concentration camp established.
- March 7, 1936:** Rhineland invaded by German forces.
- June 1936:** Central Office to “Combat the Gypsy Nuisance” opened in Munich.
- July 12, 1936:** German Roma and Sinti (Gypsies) are arrested and deported to Dachau concentration camp.
- August 1-16, 1936:** Summer Olympic Games in Berlin. Anti-Jewish signs are taken down until after the Games.

CHRONOLOGY

- August 28, 1936:** Mass arrests of Jehovah's Witnesses. Several thousand are sent to concentration camps and many stay there until 1945.
- December 12, 1936:** Jehovah's Witnesses secretly distribute 200,000 copies of the Lucerne Resolution, a protest of Nazi atrocities.
- 1937:** Buchenwald concentration camp established; first known use of the purple triangle as a symbol for Witness camp inmates; 6,000 Witnesses in prisons and camps.
- April 22, 1937:** Gestapo order directs that all of Jehovah's Witnesses released from prisons are to be taken directly to concentration camps.
- June 20, 1937:** Jehovah's Witnesses secretly distribute an open letter supplying detailed accounts of Nazi atrocities.
- 1938:** Neuengamme and Mauthausen concentration camps established.
- March 13, 1938:** Austria annexed by Germany.
- October 2, 1938:** Watch Tower Society President, J. F. Rutherford, speaking over a network of 60 radio stations, denounces Nazi persecution of the Jews.
- November 9/10, 1938:** Nationwide attack on Jews and on their homes, businesses, and synagogues—in a pogrom called *Kristallnacht* (Crystal Night, or Night of Broken Glass) 20,000-30,000 Jewish men are deported to concentration camps.
- November 15, 1938:** All Jewish children are expelled from public schools.
- 1939:** Ravensbrück concentration camp established.
- March 15, 1939:** Czechoslovakia invaded by the German army.
- Pre-World War II:** Jehovah's Witness prisoners make up 5 to 10 percent of the concentration camp population. The proportion decreases sharply with the start of the war and the mass deportations of Jews, Poles, and others to the camps.

CHRONOLOGY

- September 1, 1939:** Poland invaded by German army. Following the invasion, three million Polish Jews are forced into some 400 newly established ghettos, where starvation, overcrowding, cold, and disease kill tens of thousands.
- September 15, 1939:** August Dickmann, one of Jehovah's Witnesses and the first conscientious objector of the war to be executed, dies by firing squad at Sachsenhausen concentration camp.
- October 1939:** Hitler orders "incurable" institutionalized patients and people with physical disabilities to be killed under a so-called euthanasia program. An estimated 275,000 people were victims of "euthanasia."
- Spring 1940:** Germany invades Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and France.
- June 22, 1941:** German army invades the Soviet Union in violation of the German-Soviet Pact of nonaggression. *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing units) follow the German army and commit mass slaughter throughout Eastern Europe. By the spring of 1943, these special killing units kill more than one million Jews and tens of thousands of others.
- September 28-29, 1941:** Over 33,000 Jews are massacred during a two-day period at Babi Yar near the Ukrainian capital, Kiev.
- December 1941:** Some 5,000 Austrian Roma and Sinti (Gypsies) killed at Chelmno in mobile gassing vans. Estimates for the total numbers of deaths of Roma and Sinti range from 200,000 to 500,000.
- January 20, 1942:** Wannsee Conference of Nazi officials to plan for the so-called Final Solution—the extermination of European Jewry.

CHRONOLOGY

- November 3, 1943:** *Erntefest* (Harvest Festival) operation launched to kill all remaining Jews in the central and southern region of Poland, called the Generalgouvernement. About 40,000 Jews are shot to death on this one day.
- March 19, 1944:** Germany occupies Hungary.
- May 15–July 9, 1944:** Over 437,000 Hungarian Jews are deported to Auschwitz to be murdered by gassing.
- April 1945:** U.S. army liberates Buchenwald and Dachau concentration camps.
- April 20–May 3, 1945:** Twelve-day death march from Sachsenhausen. Some 26,000 prisoners began the march of 200 kilometers (120 miles). Barely more than 15,000 survive and are liberated by Allied forces.
- May 3, 1945:** Sinking of the *Cap Arcona*, with 7,000 prisoners on board. Some survive.
- May 7, 1945:** Germany surrenders, and the war in Europe ends.
- November 1945:** Nuremberg war crimes trials begin.
- September 30, 1946:** Verdicts of the war crimes trials announced; Jehovah's Witnesses hold public convention at the *Zeppelinwiese*, formerly used for Nazi Party rallies.

SUMMARY: According to incomplete figures, nearly 10,000 of Jehovah's Witnesses became direct victims of National Socialism from 1933 to 1945. This included suffering the loss of work, old-age pensions, and social-security benefits, as well as being fined or sentenced to prisons, camps, or reeducation homes. Some 840 children were taken from Witness parents. About 6,000 Witnesses were in Nazi prisons and camps. Ultimately, about 2,000 died, over 250 by execution.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Allies: Nations that fought in World War II against Germany and the other Axis powers; includes the United States, Britain, and the former Soviet Union, as well as the Free France movement.

Anschluss: The annexation of Austria by Germany on March 13, 1938.

Anti-Semitism: Discrimination against or hostility toward Jews.

Bethel: A Hebrew name meaning “House of God.” Designation used by Jehovah’s Witnesses for Watch Tower Society headquarters and branch offices, all staffed by volunteer workers.

Bibelforscher: German term for Bible Students.

Bible Student: Name for Jehovah’s Witnesses before 1931. The Witnesses preferred to use their new designation after 1931, but the term “Bible Student” continued in common usage among some non-Witnesses for a time.

Boycott: Individual or group refusal to deal with or buy from a business in order to express disapproval or to force acceptance of certain conditions.

Brother: Witness term for fellow believer.

Brownshirts: See SA.

Cap Arcona: A luxury steamship anchored in the Baltic Sea toward the end of the war. The SS, under orders to liquidate all prisoners, loaded 7,000 prisoners on board, intending to sink the ship in the open sea. Before this was done, on May 3, 1945, British bombers attacked and sank the ship, which was flying the German flag.

Chancellor: The chief minister of state in some European countries.

Concentration camp: Location where a population of political and religious dissidents, resisters, and ethnic and racial opponents were detained, or concentrated, usually under harsh conditions. Prisoners were often held without regard to due process of law and legal norms of arrest and imprisonment.

Confiscate: To seize property, usually by an authority or government.

Conscientious objector: One who refuses to serve in the armed forces or bear arms on the grounds of moral or religious principles.

Consolation: Magazine published by Jehovah’s Witnesses from 1937 to 1946, replaced by *Awake!*

Conviction: A strong persuasion or belief.

Coup de grace: A death blow or shot administered to end the suffering of one mortally wounded.

Crystal Night: See *Kristallnacht*.

De Gaulle, Charles: French general and statesman, leader of the French Resistance against Germany in World War II. Later, he became president of France’s Fifth Republic.

De Gaulle, Geneviève: Niece of General Charles de Gaulle and a member of the French Resistance. Currently President of the Association of Former Women Camp Inmates of the Resistance.

Death camp: (Also called extermination camp or killing center.) Six camps specially designed to carry out genocide, especially of the Jews, though other groups were also victimized.

Death march: Term probably coined by camp inmates. Toward the end of the war, the SS forced camp prisoners to march long distances to keep them from falling into Allied hands. Harsh conditions and brutal treatment caused high casualty rates. Weak or sick prisoners who could not keep up were shot.

Enabling Act: A piece of legislation forced through the Reichstag on March 23, 1933, which “enabled” Hitler’s government to issue decrees independent of the Reichstag and the presidency. Hitler, in effect, assumed dictatorial power.

Erklärung: German word for “declaration.”

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Evacuation: The hurried emptying of prisoners from camps by the SS as enemy forces advanced. Before leaving, camp officials often attempted to destroy evidence of mass murder.

Fatherland: One's native country or land.

French Resistance: An armed movement of French forces led by General Charles de Gaulle against Nazi Germany.

Front: A line of battle; a zone of conflict between armies.

Gallows: A frame or scaffold from which a noose is hung as a means of execution, or punishment by hanging.

Gestapo: German Secret State Police or *Geheime Staatspolizei*.

Golden Age, The: Magazine published by Jehovah's Witnesses from 1919 to 1937, replaced by *Consolation*, now *Awake!*

Guillotine: A device for beheading using a heavy metal blade that slides down in vertical guides.

Heil Hitler: Spoken German greeting, said with upraised arm.

Himmler, Heinrich (1900-45): Powerful Nazi leader of the SS and Gestapo.

Hindenburg, Paul von (1847-1934): German military hero of World War I and president, 1925-34.

Hitler, Adolf (1889-1945): Nazi Party leader and German chancellor.

Holocaust: Literally, a destruction by fire. Often refers to the mass slaughter of European civilians and especially Jews by the Nazis during World War II.

Internment: Confinement, especially during a war.

Interrogation: A formal and systematic questioning, sometimes of an accused person.

Jehovah's Witnesses: Members of a Christian religious group, characterized by witnessing, or spreading Bible education by word of mouth and printed literature. Formerly known as Bible Students (German: *Bibelforscher*).

Jew: A person belonging to a continuation through descent or conversion of the ancient Jewish people; one whose religion is Judaism. Under Hitler's rule, the term was given a distorted meaning based on the racist views of the Nazis.

Judaism: The cultural, social, and religious beliefs and practices of the Jews.

Juden: German word for "Jews."

Kapo: Inmate who was given certain responsibilities in the camps.

Kristallnacht: German for "Crystal Night," or the "Night of Broken Glass." Nazi-organized pogrom against the Jews in Germany and Austria, November 9/10, 1938. Thousands of Jewish-owned stores and homes were vandalized and looted. Synagogues were burned down. Jews were attacked by SA mobs. Some 20,000-30,000 Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps.

Labor camp: A Nazi concentration camp in which prisoners were used as slave laborers.

Liberation: The freeing of concentration camp prisoners by Allied troops in 1944 and 1945.

Magdeburg: City in the western part of former East Germany, where Jehovah's Witnesses had an office and printing facility, beginning in 1923. The facility was shut down by the Nazi government from 1933 to 1945. It resumed operations after the end of the war until 1950 when it was closed down by the East German government.

Magistrate: A local official exercising administrative and often judicial functions.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Martyr: One who voluntarily suffers death for the sake of principle or as the penalty for witnessing to and refusing to renounce his religion.

Mimeograph: A duplicator for making many copies that utilizes a stencil through which ink is pressed.

National Socialist: The National Socialist German Workers Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei*), a right-wing political party formed in 1919. Adolf Hitler became the party leader in 1921. It assumed power in Germany in 1933 and quickly moved to restrict human and civil rights in line with its strong anti-Communist, anti-Semitic, racist, nationalistic, and militaristic ideology.

Nazi: Abbreviated term for National Socialist German Workers Party.

Neutrality: The position of those who do not take sides with or give support to either of two or more contending parties. From the standpoint of Jehovah's Witnesses, political neutrality means keeping separate from all political participation such as voting, running for office, saluting national emblems, taking an oath of allegiance to a head of state, sharing in patriotic ceremonies, or joining the armed forces.

Niemöller, Martin (1892-1984): Protestant minister, leading figure of the Confessing Church, and founder of the Pastors' Emergency League. He was incarcerated in Sachsenhausen and then Dachau for protesting the Nazi anti-Christian agenda and Nazi interference in church affairs.

Nuremberg: (Nürnberg) City in Bavaria, Germany, where the Nazis held large party rallies at a parade ground called *Zeppelinwiese*. This city was also the site of the Nuremberg war crimes trials following the war.

Nuremberg Laws: Announced at the Nazi Party rally in Nuremberg on September 15, 1935, the laws removed the Jews' right of German citizenship and prohibited Jews from marrying German citizens. The laws defined the Jews racially.

Penal colony: Group of prisoners singled out for punishment.

Persecution: To harass in a manner designed to injure, grieve, or afflict; specifically to cause to suffer because of belief, origin, or social outlook.

Pogrom: An organized massacre of helpless people; usually, such a massacre of Jews.

Principle: A fundamental law governing a person's conduct.

Propaganda: Ideas, facts, or allegations spread deliberately to further one's cause or to damage an opposing cause.

Protective custody: Charge or control over another for his safekeeping. In Nazi terms, however, the term was often used to refer to imprisonment in concentration camps.

Reich: The former German State, especially the Third Reich—the Nazi regime, 1933-45. (First Reich—the Holy Roman Empire, 962-1806; Second Reich—the German Empire 1871-1918).

Reichstag: The German parliament.

Resistance: In reference to the Nazi period, a variety of defiant acts, ranging from armed revolt to spiritual or ideological defiance. It could include continuing religious or cultural practices, disobeying orders, aiding or hiding fugitives, smuggling, or simply maintaining the will to live.

SA: Storm troopers or *Sturmabteilung*, shock units of the Nazi Party.

Sister: In Witness usage, a term for a female fellow believer.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Solidarity: Unity (as of a group or class) that produces or is based on community of interests, objectives, and standards.

Special Court: (*Sondergericht*), Nazi court staffed by Nazi judges for trying offenders against the State.

SS: (*Schutzstaffel*, or Protection Squad) Originally, guard detachments formed in 1925 as Hitler's personal guard. Under Heinrich Himmler the SS developed into a powerful military and political force with primary jurisdiction over the concentration camp system.

Subversive: Describes a systematic attempt to overthrow or undermine a government or political system by persons working secretly from within.

Synagogue: A Jewish congregation; the house of worship and communal center of a Jewish congregation.

Underground: A movement or group organized in strict secrecy among citizens, especially in an occupied country, for maintaining communications, popular solidarity, and concerted resistive action pending liberation.

Watch Tower Society: The legal corporation of Jehovah's Witnesses, instrumental in the publishing of Bible educational material.

Watchtower, The: Magazine published by Jehovah's Witnesses from 1879 to the present.

Sources: *From Terror to Systematic Murder*, *Historical Atlas of the Holocaust*, *Resistance During the Holocaust*, and *Teaching About the Holocaust*, all published by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Also *Concise Oxford Dictionary (US)* (1993), *Encyclopædia Britannica Macropædia and Micropædia* (1994), *Webster's Dictionary* (1994), *World Book Information Finder* (1994), William Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, and Michael Berenbaum's *The World Must Know*.

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES STAND FIRM AGAINST NAZI ASSAULT

Classroom Edition Video Transcript

Part I: Introduction and Seminar

NARRATOR: This uniform belonged to Helmut Knöller. He was one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Like him, thousands of Witnesses were thrown into Nazi prisons and camps for what they believed—a small number compared with the millions exterminated by Nazi terror. Yet nearly 2,000 Witnesses died, more than 250 by execution.

From the start of the Nazi regime, this small Christian group were brutally assaulted—but not silenced. They let the world know that the Nazi killing machine was engulfing not only them but Jews, Poles, and others.

The history of Jehovah's Witnesses—how they stood firm in their beliefs and how they spoke out—is a record few have heard about today. It is a story that must be told.

MILTON: I'd like to welcome you to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. It is both a privilege and an honor to have you as our guests today because your story is an extremely important one.

BERENBAUM: They would not utter the words 'Heil Hitler.' And it is very intriguing to feel the social dissident character of that when you walk into a room and you hear the words 'Heil Hitler' and somebody says 'Good morning.'

KING: One of the SS guards said of Witnesses singing hymns in the death cell, 'I could run a steam-roller over you lot and it wouldn't quiet you.' They think that the steam-roller will silence faith, and integrity, and courage, and the family belief that Jehovah's Witnesses have, and of course, it cannot under any circumstances. Stand firm indeed the Witnesses did, as we know, to death.

Part II: Pre-1933 Germany

NARRATOR: Germany struggles to recover from its World War I wounds. Well-known as "*Bibelforscher*," or Bible Students, before 1931, Jehovah's Witnesses offer comfort and hope but also warn of rising militarism.

In Magdeburg, at a Watch Tower plant, called Bethel, a million copies of the magazine *The Golden Age* rolled off the presses each month. This publishing and preaching did not go unnoticed by the growing Nazi movement.

GARBE: There was talk about Jehovah's Witnesses because of things that were repulsive to the National Socialists.

They were talked about because they refused military service, and because they did not give allegiance to the fatherland as a German ought to, according to the National Socialists.

NARRATOR: The Nazis falsely branded Jehovah's Witnesses as Communists, menaces to the State, conspirators with the Jews to take over the world. By 1933 the stage was set for battle!

Part III: 1933 Germany

NARRATOR: On January 30th, 1933, Adolf Hitler comes to power—appointed Chancellor by President von Hindenburg. Hopes run high for a strong, new Germany.

The Reichstag building, the seat of the German Parliament, burns. The Nazis immediately blame the Communists, and Hitler pressures President von Hindenburg to issue an emergency decree. The Enabling Act soon follows.

Hitler, now with dictatorial powers, suspends human rights. Anyone could be arrested and imprisoned without trial.

The Nazis now have a weapon to silence their enemies. In one German state after another, the police shut down meetings of the Witnesses and prohibit their door-to-door preaching.

POHL: On June 28, here a band of 30 storm troopers, Hitler's Brownshirts, forced their way in and occupied the premises. A ban was declared.

When this building was closed, we no longer had a central office but were forced to go underground.

NARRATOR: A few weeks later, the Nazis return. Twenty-five truckloads of Bible literature are carted off to the Magdeburg city limits and burned.

Part IV: Nazi Assault—Battle Lines Drawn

GARBE: Put in relative terms, the murder of six million Jews as a crime by the State, [carried out] with factory-like precision, was certainly an occurrence without equal in the history of mankind.

But there was also something distinctive about the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses. They were persecuted with very great severity and brutality. The goal was to destroy this religious group; there were to be no more Witnesses in Germany.

NARRATOR: Hitler gave the people jobs. He restored their faith in the fatherland. He is hailed as their savior.

But the Witnesses could not give to a man what they believed belonged to God. Thus, a battle line was drawn over a simple greeting—"Heil Hitler." Jehovah's Witnesses refused to say "Heil Hitler" because it meant "salvation comes from Hitler." At his job in a steel mill, one Witness faced this test.

DICKMANN: I was the only one among 2,000 who did not raise my hand and did not return the German salute. . . . Every day running the gauntlet, since I was required to give the German salute, and I simply said "Good day."

NARRATOR: Children were drawn into the battle. Six-year-old Paul Gerhard Kusserow, like other Witness children, was pressured by students and teachers.

KUSSEROW: The head teacher and the pupils confronted me and tried to make me say "Heil Hitler," to salute the flag, and to sing Nazi songs. . . . Going to school was not nice, since one never knew what would happen.

NARRATOR: More than 800 children were taken away from their Witness parents by the Gestapo. Paul Gerhard, along with his brother and sister, was placed in a Nazi school. Three years under ban, and the Witnesses are still active. The Gestapo have to mobilize a special unit to hunt them down. A confidential Gestapo report boasted that in just one sweep they arrested 120 Witnesses.

KING: Jehovah's Witnesses were amongst the first of the prisoners to go into Dachau which was the first, the so-called model concentration camp, and into the labor camps, and I have evidence of that in 1934 and certainly by 1935.

BREBECK: Starting in 1937, Jehovah's Witnesses were given a purple triangle as a sign. Jehovah's Witnesses were the only religious group that made up a separate category of inmates.

JACOBET: And the triangle was relatively big, so that a person must have been able to see it from quite a distance, and the color also, this stigma of the prisoner's category.

HOLLWEG: Upon arrival I was beaten into unconsciousness in the political section. When I came to, I could spit out my teeth.

NARRATOR: The Nazis, obsessed with breaking the Witnesses' stubborn commitment, stepped up the psychological assault and made them an extraordinary offer. Each Witness could buy his freedom for a price—his signature and his faith. Witnesses in prisons and camps were repeatedly handed a piece of paper and a pen. Very few signed.

POETZINGER: When I was to be released from prison, I was given a paper to sign. It required that I give up my faith and recognize the German government as the highest authority, place myself under the Hitler government, and consider the Bible as a false doctrine.

I said: "That's out of the question!"

NARRATOR: Madame Geneviève de Gaulle, a niece of General Charles de Gaulle, was imprisoned by the Nazis in 1944 as a member of the French Resistance. In Ravensbrück she met Jehovah's Witnesses. By the time she arrived at the camp, many had been captive for ten years.

DE GAULLE: What I admired a lot in them was they could have left at any time just by signing a renunciation of their faith. . . . Ultimately, these women, who appeared to be so weak and worn out, were stronger than the SS, who had power and all the means at their disposal.

NARRATOR: Many Witness couples were separated for years, like Heinrich and Aenne Dickmann. When they discovered that they were both in the Ravensbrück camp, they risked their lives just to see each other.

DICKMANN: From Buchenwald I was put . . . in the camp where Aenne was . . . And there is where I had the chance to see my wife again after seven years. She had to bring laundry for the SS to the main gate. And I had to pick it up there. And so we had the chance to see each other after seven years. But without a word, since they were standing in the guard tower, watching. They would have hanged us both!

Part V: Jehovah's Witnesses Speak Out

HESCHEL: The position of the Jehovah's Witnesses is a unique position of Christians, of all Christians of all kinds, in Nazi Germany. It stands by itself. . . . People living in Germany knew who the Jehovah's Witnesses were and knew what they stood for.

NARRATOR: The 1936 Summer Olympic Games in Berlin—Nazi Germany is on display at its best. But it is only a front. Right on the heels of the Olympic Games, the Witnesses launch a campaign to reveal the ugly face of the Nazi regime. Nazi persecution is exposed in a convention resolution adopted at Lucerne, Switzerland. Two hundred thousand copies of the Lucerne Resolution are distributed in Germany on one December night in 1936.

Whenever the Nazis smashed an underground organization, another quickly filled the breach.

SIMONE LIEBSTER: At night, in a small apartment, we shut off the windows with blankets, put quilts on the table, and the machines on the quilts, so that the noise would not be heard. It was here that the *Watchtowers* were translated and reproduced.

Afterwards, we had to dismantle and hide everything, because if the Germans had found any of the equipment, it would have meant the death of whoever the material belonged to.

HOMBACH: The Gestapo reckoned that every time they arrested a group, we were completely finished. They were utterly mistaken . . . But right up until the end [of the war], *The Watchtower* was being distributed all over Germany.

NARRATOR: The book *Crusade Against Christianity* was published in German, French, and Polish. This 1938 Witness exposé included diagrams of concentration camps and firsthand reports of cruel mistreatment of the Witnesses in Germany. Nobel prize winner Dr. Thomas Mann wrote:

NARRATOR #2: “You have done your duty in publishing this book and bringing these facts to light. It seems to me that there is no greater appeal to the world’s conscience.”

NARRATOR: On October 2, 1938, 50 radio stations around the world carried Watch Tower President Rutherford’s lecture “Fascism or Freedom.” He spoke out against the vicious attacks on the Jews.

RUTHERFORD: “In Germany, the common people are peace-loving. The Devil has put his representative Hitler in control. He cruelly persecutes the Jews because they were once Jehovah’s covenant people and bore the name of Jehovah, and because Christ Jesus was a Jew.”

NARRATOR: Just one month later, Nazi hatred for the Jews would explode in all its ugliness.

HESCHEL: November 9, 1938, came a massive destruction of Judaism, an end to German Judaism when almost all the synagogues in Germany were burned down overnight.

POHL: On November 10, 1938, I came to work here early in the morning, and we were surprised. All of the shops had been destroyed. The windows had been smashed. Glass was scattered all over the street. Everyone was walking on glass.

HESCHEL: On the night of *Kristallnacht*, 20,000 Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps in Germany.

CONWAY: So when the ‘Crystal Night’ pogrom takes place in November 1938, that shocking and very visible evidence of Nazi anti-Semitism, the churches were totally silent.

GARBE: Not a few representatives of the churches called publicly for a hatred of the Jews. Such a situation was definitely not the case among Jehovah's Witnesses. . . . For them, all persons were of the same merit, were equal.

NARRATOR: The hundreds of Jehovah's Witnesses in the camps began to see a large influx of Jewish prisoners. The magazine *Consolation* asked, "How can one remain silent?"

JOHN: They could punish them when they observed that Bible Students attempted to witness to other inmates. Then they were punished, but the [SS] could not stop their activity, could do nothing about it.

NARRATOR: Max Liebster was arrested and sent to Sachsenhausen for being a Jew. He and the other prisoners were warned repeatedly not to speak to Jehovah's Witnesses.

MAX LIEBSTER: There were around 400 Jehovah's Witnesses in Sachsenhausen. As soon as young [German Witnesses] arrived, they were given 25 strokes.

They were locked away, surrounded by barbed wire, and the camp commander often announced that anyone speaking to Jehovah's Witnesses would be punished with 25 strokes.

Part VI: Nazi Assault—Death Sentences

NARRATOR: September 1, 1939. German army forces invade Poland. The world begins its bloody plunge into total war. The Nazi government has no tolerance for conscientious objectors.

REHWALD: August Dickmann had refused to perform military service, and Baranowsky, the commander, whose nickname was Foursquare, asked Himmler to confirm the death sentence. I just want to mention that the commander delivered a talk before the shooting. His microphone was standing about there. I can clearly remember one sentence, when he said: "The prisoner August Dickmann does not regard himself a citizen of the German Reich, but rather a citizen of the Kingdom of God." An officer with the rank of *Sturmbannführer*, that is with four stars, gave the order to shoot. When the shots were fired, he fell straight to the ground.

HESCHEL: What if the Lutheran Church had acted the way that the Witnesses had acted? What if the Catholics had? In my opinion, the whole history would have been very different.

NARRATOR: At Wewelsburg the solidarity of the Witnesses made the difference for 26 of them who were doomed to death by hard labor. The 26 had refused military service. The SS wanted them dead.

BREBECK: They were beaten and driven by the *Kapos*, as well as by SS personnel who were sent there, and by other prisoners who allowed themselves to be used for that purpose. During the work some collapsed under the load of heavy stones, only to be forced to get back up again.

NARRATOR: The weakest of the 26 now became the sole target.

HOLLWEG: He had to push a wheelbarrow full of stones, very heavy, in a circle around the courtyard until he collapsed.

NARRATOR: The other prisoners were made to pour water over him till he revived. Then the ordeal was repeated. After the third time, the prisoner did not get up. The commander, assuming he was near death, kicked him up against the barracks wall.

HOLLWEG: As soon as the lights went out during the night, we were able to pull him by his legs out of sight of the guards, rubbed him until he was warm, and gave him something to eat. The next morning he was standing in line again. Not one of them died.

NARRATOR: Protestant church leader Martin Niemöller, once a prisoner himself, paid tribute to the Witnesses in a sermon:

NARRATOR #2: “The *Bibelforscher* by the hundreds and thousands have gone into concentration camps and died because they refused to serve in war and declined to fire on human beings.”

NARRATOR: At Brandenburg prison, the lives of 2,743 men were cut short. Passing through a metal door, they came face-to-face with a guillotine's blade or a hanging hook.

GÖRLITZ: There were 32 Jehovah's Witnesses among these. . . . The names of all 32 Jehovah's Witnesses who were executed are known. I'll name just one, for instance, Wolfgang Kusserow. Wolfgang Kusserow, a young man who stuck resolutely to his convictions and did not give in. He met his death here fearlessly, in the absolute conviction of having behaved properly in this life.

NARRATOR: Horst Schmidt was among more than 250 Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to death. He was sitting in a death cell at Brandenburg with two other men, awaiting execution.

HORST SCHMIDT: We heard a very loud clattering noise, the clattering of keys, and doors were opened and slammed shut.

NARRATOR: The guard opened their cell door. He called the first man out.

HORST SCHMIDT: Then the guard looked at his list once more and read out the name of the other, and said again: "Step outside!" Well, you think, of course, "It's my turn now!" And he looked at his list, and then he looked at me, and then the door closed. Then, of course, you just collapse, that's obvious.

NARRATOR: Horst Schmidt escaped the guillotine. His foster-mother, Emmy Zehden, did not. She was imprisoned in Berlin-Plötzensee for concealing Horst and two other conscientious objectors. On June 9, 1944, she was beheaded. A street just outside the prison has been named in her honor.

Part VII: Jehovah's Witnesses Stand Firm

NARRATOR: The tide of the war had turned. The fall of the Third Reich was within sight. The sounds of distant artillery fire raised hopes among the prisoners that freedom was near. But with the Nazi front on the verge of collapse, the SS tried to empty the camps and forced the prisoners to march west and south. Joseph Schoen was on the death march to Dachau.

SCHOEN: They are with the rifles hitting the doors, "Step out! Step out!" and it was the beginning of the death march. And they said to us, "None of you will be turned over to the enemies!" That means they will finish us off before. Everyone who grew weak was shot.

NARRATOR: The SS at Wewelsburg planned to kill all 42 Witness prisoners before abandoning the camp. Why? The Witnesses knew where the SS had hidden stolen art treasures plundered from across Europe. Suddenly, the Allied troops bombarded Wewelsburg. The guards scattered. Max and ten other prisoners ran for cover in the north tower of the castle. Ironically, it was the very place that Himmler envisioned as the center for SS cult worship.

HOLLWEG: In this shaft we hid ourselves, and the wall, three meters thick, protected us. We waited until darkness. The SS had disappeared, and we were free!

NARRATOR: Franz Wohlfahrt expected to be executed like his father and brother before him. Thinking of his mother, his bride-to-be, and his fellow Witnesses, he wrote his farewell poem in 1944 while captive in a Nazi camp.

WOHLFAHRT: “In my faith, I will always stand firm,
Though this world may taunt and cry,
In my hope, I will always stand firm,
For a beautiful, better time.
In my love, I will always stand firm,
Though this world repays with hate,
Devoted, I will always stand firm,
Though this world disloyal stays.
From God’s Word, flows the might of the strong,
And the weak ones it powerful makes,
In God’s grace I will always stand firm,
On my own I could never remain.
With my life, I will even stand firm,
And as I my last breath confer,
You should with that dying gasp hear:
I stand firm, I stand firm, I stand firm.”

NARRATOR: These words echo the determination of the thousands of Witnesses—living and dead—who stood firm against Nazi assault.

Survivors appearing in *Stand Firm* Classroom Edition (in alphabetic order)

Geneviève de Gaulle
Heinrich Dickmann
Max Hollweg
Maria Hombach
Paul Gerhard Kusserow
Max Liebster
Simone Liebster
Gertrud Poetzinger
Willi Pohl
Josef Rehwald
Horst Schmidt
Joseph Schoen
Franz Wohlfahrt

