



## HOLOCAUST CRIMINAL-HUNTER DIES

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*Simon Wiesenthal, a survivor of Nazi concentration camps who dedicated the rest of his life to tracking down fugitive World War II criminals, died Tuesday at the age of 96.*

Calling himself "the bad conscience of the Nazis," Simon Wiesenthal helped find and prosecute hundreds of war criminals.

His goal, he said, was not vengeance but ensuring that Nazi crimes "are brought to light so the new generation knows about them, so it should not happen again."

### **Post-World War II**

Wiesenthal's quest for justice began when World War II ended in Europe May 1945. The Allied victors established the International Military Tribunal for the prosecution of the major German war criminals and a series of trials, known as the Nuremberg Trials, took place in Nuremberg, Germany from 1945-49.

But after the Tokyo Trials, which served the same purpose in the Pacific, enthusiasm for such prosecutions dimmed.

"The Allies were already focused on the Cold War, the survivors were rebuilding their shattered lives and Simon Wiesenthal was alone, combining the role of both prosecutor and detective at the same time," Rabbi Marvin Hier, founder of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, a human rights agency, said in a statement.

### **Famous Nazi targets**

Wiesenthal claimed to have helped bring 1,100 ex-Nazis to trial, and though that number is disputed by some, he was influential in the cases of many top-ranking Nazis.

They included Adolf Eichmann, who is considered the man who implemented the "Final Solution," Hitler's goal to rid Europe of Jews and other undesirable peoples. Eichmann, who vanished after the war, was eventually captured by Israeli agents in Argentina in 1960, brought to Israel, tried and hanged in 1962.

Fritz Stangl, a commander of two killing centers -- Treblinka and Sobibor -- also was found in South America. Taken from Brazil to Germany in 1967, Stangl died in jail in 1971 during a life sentence.

Wiesenthal began the search for Karl Silberbauer, the Gestapo officer who arrested 14-year-old Anne Frank, after meeting Austrians who said her story was a hoax and "Jewish propaganda."

Silberbauer was eventually discovered working for the Vienna, Austria police. At his trial, Silberbauer claimed he had no choice but to follow orders and he was released.

Another of Wiesenthal's targets, Hermine Braunsteiner-Ryan, a supervisor at various concentration camps, was found living as a housewife in Queens, N.Y. She was later sentenced to life in prison in West Germany.

### **His life**

Born the son of a Jewish businessman in Ukraine in 1908, Simon Wiesenthal's father died in the First World War, his stepfather in the second, and his mother was sent to a concentration camp in 1942.

Within months, Simon Wiesenthal and his wife lost 89 members of their immediate families.

Wiesenthal himself survived three death camps. On liberation, he weighed less than 100 pounds.

### **His legacy**

In recent years, Wiesenthal spoke out in favor of war crimes trials for genocide in the former Yugoslavia, and lent his name to a Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles.

"Survivors should be like seismographs," he wrote. "They should sense danger before others do, identify its outlines and reveal them. They are not entitled to be wrong a second time or regard as harmless something that might lead to catastrophe."

To those who knew him, Wiesenthal's legacy is a model of justice for the victims of mass violence.

"The desire to recreate and reestablish justice in the aftermath of destruction is part of the ways in which societies restore themselves. That will be his legacy, not to the past, but to our collective future," Holocaust historian Michael Berenbaum told the NewsHour.

*--Compiled by Annie Schleicher for NewsHour Extra*  
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