

A Time to Remember

From Israel to America,
Jews observe Holocaust
Remembrance Day each year



Looking at a guard's post through windows in the arrivals hall, Birkenau, Auschwitz, Poland.

BY ALLISON CANDREVA

In 1932, unemployment in Germany had peaked.

The dreary economic and political climate aided Adolf Hitler in establishing the Nationalist-Socialist Party – with “Mein Kampf” as its manifesto. With his rise to power in 1933, the national policy of organized persecution of the Jews began, lasting until the end of World War II in 1945, according to kneset.gov.il.

“The modern German anti-Semitism was based on racial ideology which stated that the Jews were sub-human (untermensch) while the Aryan race was ultimately superior,” the Web site states. “The Jew was systematically portrayed as a low-life, as untouchable rot (faulniserscheinung) and as the main cause of Germany’s problems.”

At the end of those 12 years, about 6 million Jewish men, women and children would be murdered.

When the Holocaust ended, Jews wanted to remember the tragedy but could not agree on a date on the Jewish calendar.

Some wanted the 10th of Tevet, which fell on Jan. 6 this year, because it marked the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem. However, it holds no direct relation to the Holocaust. Others

wanted to commemorate the beginning of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, which was April 19, 1943, but this day fell on the 15th of Nissan – the beginning of Passover.

The Warsaw Ghetto uprising was significant because it showed great strength among the Jewish people.

“When an Israeli is thought of, people think of a strong person who can stand up for them self,” said Korin Weinstok, Israeli emissary for the Jewish Council of North Central Florida.

In the summer of 1942, about 300,000 Jews were deported from Warsaw, Poland, to Treblinka, Poland. Reports of the mass murder leaked back to the ghetto and caused the formation of an organized resistance. On April 19, 1943, the remaining 30,000 Jews staged an organized uprising against the Nazis who had come to remove them, according to yadvashem.org.

The date was debated for two years, and in 1950, the 27th of Nissan was chosen. The date falls beyond Passover but within the time span of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.

Some Jews were still unhappy with the date because Nissan is traditionally a happy month. As a compromise, if the 27th of Nissan

falls on Friday or Saturday – affecting Shabbat – Yom Hashoah will be moved. If it lands on a Friday, Yom Hashoah is moved to the preceding Thursday. If it falls on a Sunday, Yom Hashoah is moved to the following Monday, according to about.com.

On April 12, 1951, the Knesset – Israel’s Parliament – proclaimed Yom Hashoah U’Mered HaGetaot (Holocaust and Ghetto Revolt Remembrance Day) to be the 27th of Nissan. The name was later changed to Yom Hashoah Ve Hagevurah (Devastation and Heroism Day), and then later simplified to Yom Hashoah.

Weinstok said that in Israel, Yom Hashoah is an official holiday throughout the country. Starting in elementary school, children learn about the Holocaust, and there are different topics for each age group.

She said that during Yom Hashoah, every school, university and organization has some type of program or ceremony. However, she said, the main ceremony is in Yad Vashem – a large museum dedicated to the Holocaust and the 6 million lost– and is broadcast on television.

In Israel, places of entertainment are closed and memorial ceremonies are held throughout the country, accord-

ing to yadvashem.org.

In the Jewish tradition of marking the day, Yom Hashoah begins at sunset and ends the following evening. On the morning of the event, “the ceremony at Yad Vashem begins with the sounding of a siren for two minutes throughout the entire country. For the duration of the sounding, work is halted, people walking in the streets stop, cars pull off to the side of the road and everybody stands at silent attention in reverence to the victims of the Holocaust,” according to yadvashem.org.

This year, Yom Hashoah is on April 21 and marks the 60th anniversary of Holocaust remembrance. The Jewish Council of North Central Florida will be observing the event at Congregation B’Nai Israel in Gainesville on April 26.

Council President Abe Goldman said there are usually featured speakers, and this year he hopes to have Professor Ken Wald, the child of a survivor.

Whether saying prayers in one’s home or standing in silence as a nation, Jews all over the world observe Yom Hashoah as a day to remember the millions lost. §

Allison Candreva is a student in UF’s College of Journalism. She may be contacted at: allison.cand@yahoo.com.