

Rally tomorrow to remember 3 million Poles killed by Nazis

A survivor: 'They worked you until you dropped dead'

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David Newman was a 16-year-old high school student in 1940, the year the Nazis broke into his home near Lodz, Poland, late one night and carted his family to a concentration camp.

"They pulled us out of bed and made us go as we were. They wouldn't even let us get dressed," he said.

"We didn't realize what was going on. They took us to a warehouse with about 500 people. I was separated from my family. We were taken to a field near the Polish-German border and forced to lay railroad tracks. We didn't know it at the time, but the track we were laying would be used by Hitler to invade Russia."

"They worked you until you dropped dead from exhaustion. The ones who tried to run away were brought back and hung ... The

entire camp was forced to watch. Of the 500 I went with, about 30 survived," said Newman, who lives in Providence.

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HE WAS TRANSFERRED to a number of labor camps in Poland and Germany, including the camp near the Polish town of Auschwitz, where he encountered Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, and Italian, French and English prisoners of war.

"The Jews were known as the evil people of the race," said Newman, who is Jewish. "The Gypsies were never given a chance. They were gassed immediately."

That millions of people were killed in Nazi concentration camps during World War II has been well documented. Less well-known was the wide variety of ethnic groups that faced the gas chambers and firing squads.

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TOMORROW at 3 p.m., a rally has been scheduled at the State House rotunda to inform people about the 3 million Polish political prisoners who died in Nazi concentration camps.

The rally, sponsored by the Polish Holocaust Commemorative Committee, is part of Holocaust Commemorative Week, being recognized across the country from April 14 to 21.

Speaking will be Newman, two other survivors — Sophie Sojalys of East Greenwich and the Rev. Canon Bronislaw Szymanski of Providence — and a camp liberator, the Rev. Edward Paul Doyle of Providence. Governor DiPrete is also scheduled to speak.

"The Jewish people — many of whom were Polish — suffered the most punishment from the Nazis, losing some 6 million people," said Francis Babiec, a member of the Polish committee. "But many other groups also suffered. The Gypsies of Poland were almost eliminated. The Catholic Poles lost three million people. The Czechs, Lithuanians, British, French, Hungarians, Spanish and other groups lost many, many people in the nine Polish camps."

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THE GROUP has been researching the Polish experience in library archives and through lists of books

published in other countries. It has compiled 26 books on the subject — some of which can be found at the Pawtucket Public Library — and has asked school departments around the country to include those books in their courses on the Holocaust.

— They have also donated books to area colleges and libraries. Jean Babiec, head of the group, was recently named state liaison to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council. Her job is to keep the national informed on local events.

She said her group knows of 55 Poles in Rhode Island who survived the concentration camps. "Every once in a while a new name will crop up. But many people will not talk about it. They just want to forget that time."

THE BABIECS' interest in the Polish experience began in 1979 after they were taken on a tour of the former Auschwitz camp. It is now a memorial to the people who died there, the buildings and artifacts left untouched.

"A former inmate gave us a tour of the camp. We asked why he did it. How could he relive that horror day after day? He said because he wanted to make sure no one distorted the facts," Mrs. Babiec said.

"He took us to the chambers, where the Nazis dropped gas pellets to start the gassing, but we couldn't go in. It was just too much to take."