

## 103-year-old Holocaust survivor to speak in St. Petersburg

By Waveney Ann Moore, Times Staff Writer  
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Prisoners walk out of the Buchenwald concentration camp after being freed by U.S. Army troops in April 1945. For refusing to renounce his faith, Leopold Engleitner was sent here and to two other camps.



[File photo (1945)]

Leopold Engleitner is 103 years old, has lived through two world wars and is believed to be the oldest male survivor of the Holocaust.

At his advanced age, Engleitner continues to travel from his home in Austria to share his story with audiences in Europe and the United States.

This week, he'll be in St. Petersburg for appearances at the Florida Holocaust Museum and the Palladium.

Before World War II, Engleitner left the Roman Catholic Church to become a Jehovah's Witness.

When the Nazis annexed Austria in 1938, he refused to renounce his beliefs, which forbid swearing allegiance to any government or joining its military. His religious convictions were to cost Engleitner his freedom.

His story is recounted in the book *Unbroken Will: The Extraordinary Courage of an Ordinary Man*, and a documentary film.

His is an important story, said Robert Buckley, a consultant for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

While most people are familiar with the Jewish experience, few realize that other groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses, also were persecuted by the Nazis, Buckley said.

Many groups were targeted because of their perceived racial inferiority, the museum Web site notes. Among them were Roma (Gypsies), the disabled, Poles, Russians and blacks. Others, including communists, socialists, homosexuals and Jehovah's Witnesses, were persecuted for political, ideological and behavioral reasons.

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Jehovah's Witnesses were among the first to be targeted for persecution after the Nazis rose to power in Germany in 1933. Their printing presses were shut down and literature burned. Children were taken from their families and adults sent to prisons and concentration camps.

As Nazi terror spread across Europe, Jehovah's Witnesses in other countries became victims.

More than 2,000 died for their faith. At least 250 were executed.

Engleitner could have ensured his freedom by renouncing his faith. For his defiance, he was imprisoned in three concentration camps — Buchenwald, Niederhagen and Ravensbruck.

Brutal conditions and inhumane treatment left him sterile and with poor hearing. He was born with a curvature to his spine, and imprisonment aggravated his back problems.

The Holocaust survivor now lives alone in the Austrian countryside. His wife died in 1981.

"He has a person come in from town every day to make sure he's okay," said Buckley, who has visited Engleitner in Austria.

"He reads the Bible daily. He has this large magnifying glass, and he puts it over this computer he has so he is able to keep up with current events and the Bible publications he reads."

This will be Engleitner's third lecture tour in America. He will speak at Harvard University before traveling to St. Petersburg.

He speaks only German and uses an interpreter. His biographer, Bernhard Rammerstorfer, will accompany him.

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**If you go**

Two programs on the Holocaust

**The Palladium: 2 p.m.** May 10, 253 Fifth Ave. N, St. Petersburg. \$12. Call (727) 822-3590. Leopold

Engleitner, Holocaust survivor, will speak through an interpreter; Robert Buckley, consultant to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, will speak about "Nazi Propaganda Used Against Victim Groups"; and George Eisen, director of international studies at Nazareth College, Rochester, N.Y., on "The Ultimate Deception: Nazi Germany and the 1936 Olympic Games."

**Florida Holocaust Museum:** 7 p.m. Wednesday, 55 Fifth St. S,

St. Petersburg, without Eisen. Free, but \$8 donation suggested. Call (727) 820-0100, ext. 271.

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