



## The oldest survivor of the concentration camps: Extraordinary story of 107-year-old who was imprisoned in THREE Nazi prisons

on November 16, 2012 at 15:00

Handed a simple sheet of paper Leopold Engleitner was given a choice – renounce your faith, or face death in a concentration camp. With a flick of ink, the Jehovah's Witness could have saved himself from his unknown fate, a fate which saw him starved and forced to labour in not one but three Nazi prisoner camps.

He refused.

At 107 Austrian born Mr Engleitner is the world's oldest known holocaust survivor, and has had a film made about his unflinching faith. Now Mr Engleitner will be guest of honour at the film's LA screening where with help of an interpreter, he will be talking to audience members. Ladder in the Lions' Den charts Engleitner's journey as survivor of three concentration camps, Buchenwald, Niederhagen and Ravensbrueck. Born in 1905 with a curved spine and raised in a village not far from where Hitler grew up, the young Engleitner was horrified by the atrocities of World War I and joined the pacifist religious movement in the early 1930s.

When Austria joined the German Reich in 1938, Jehovah's Witnesses were rounded up and unlike their Jewish counterparts, given a choice. They would be allowed to get out of the camps if they signed a paper – the Ladder in the Lions' Den – turning their back on their religion and joining the Nazis. According to the film, the Austrian Witnesses, including Engleitner, refused to do so, with many losing their lives.

The film charts their story, and details Engleitner's own horrific ordeal.



© United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of the film 'Ladder in the Lions' Den'



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One scene documents the time when, starving on a march back to camp from hard labour, his testicle was crushed by an SS guard's boot, the San Gabriel Valley Tribune reports.

The incident prevented him from ever fathering children.



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**Determined: Witnesses were told they would be allowed to get out of the camps if they turned their back on their religion. Engleitner refused**

The documentary's narrator and script-editor, Frederic Fuss, said that among the things that captivated him from the beginning was 'the strength of Leopold's unbroken will and determination never diminished his positive outlook, and the intensity of his trial never made him bitter'. He added: 'Ladder in the Lions' Den takes a slice of Leo's experiences and puts them into a more direct historical context.

'You get to the significance of the stand he took as a conscientious objector, not going along with Nazism and and its ideals.

'The name Ladder in the Lions' Den is about Leo's experience as a Jehovah's Witness in the camps.

'A document was regularly presented to the Jehovah's Witnesses, who were conscientious objectors and who objected to the principles of Nazism, and they did not subscribe to any of the racist ideas. 'To get out of the camp, they were told 'just sign this document where you renounce your beliefs, say you go along with Nazism and go along with Hitler'.

'They [Jehovah's Witnesses] would also not say the 'Heil Hitler' greeting, and the film comments on that, that the words ascribe salvation to Hitler.

'They said, no, he's not God so we're not going to do that.'

The survivor is still active and tours schools around his home country telling children 'You don't need to go along with peer pressure, you can stick by your conscience...'