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A 107-year-old Christian who is the oldest living victim of the concentration camps who was imprisoned because of his beliefs is to fly to New York for the premier of a film about his life.

Leopold Engleitner, 107, from St. Wolfgang in Upper Austria, will be in the US to attend the Los Angeles premier of the documentary called "Ladder in the Lions' Den".

The film charts Engleitner's experiences as a conscientious objector and a Jehovah's Witness who was imprisoned by the Nazis for his beliefs. He is the survivor of three concentration camps, Buchenwald, Niederhagen and Ravensbrueck.

Born and raised on a farm in Austria he refused to join the German army because of his religion that meant he was sent to a concentration camp in 1939. In 1943 - weighing just 28 kilos - his sentence was commuted to hard labour for life in agriculture, but when they again tried to draft him in 1945 he fled - and hid in the mountains until the war ended.

Engleitner is flying in from Austria especially for the screenings and, with the help of an interpreter, will be talking to audience members.

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 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.

Despite his age Leopold is active in going to schools in Austria telling kids "You don't need to go along with peer pressure, you can stick by your conscience."

SOURCE: austrianindependent.com