

Earlier in the semester both gentlemen had come to campus and explained their experiences in the Holocaust and the Auschwitz death camp to the students in the Hitler course. The reaction of cadets to the two survivors' testimony is typically to examine the issues in greater depth—in this case, Holycross's and Pressgrove's desire to participate in the Holocaust memorial. Indeed, in student reviews, cadets repeatedly cite the evening with the Holocaust survivors as the highlight of the course.

In 1978, I began teaching the Hitler class. It is my academic field of specialization, and the topic fascinates me because it deals with the moral and political suicide of a nation that one could argue stood foremost in culture, education and freedom in Europe at the time of the 1933 Nazi takeover. Germany had a free press, which in fact Hitler understood and manipulated far better than any of his opponents. Its universities were the best in Europe, if not the world; its fledgling democracy was modeled after that of the United States and Switzerland, and it was the first major power to grant women the franchise. Hitler made very clear what he intended to do: put me in power, he said, and I'll set up in a legal manner an authoritarian state—and he did just that to thunderous acclaim. The political suicide of the German people—turning over their democracy to a man pledged to destroy it, is half the course; the other is coming to grips with the Holocaust. Like the political abdication to authoritarianism, the German nation was involved. Hitler did not kill a single Jew; he got others, lots of others, others who were ordinary people, to do it for him. Who the others were and how they could commit such inhuman actions constitute the second major objective of the course. Lurking in the background is the unspoken question whether other nations, perhaps even ours, could, under the right circumstances, perpetrate similar actions.

The hubris of Germany is fascinating in itself and, of course, generates student interest. In addition, the Nazi regime profoundly affected the world. One need but look at the names of graduates killed in combat listed on the front wall of Summerall Chapel to gauge the impact of that era on The Citadel. Consequently, this course has always drawn a huge enrollment. Following my first semester with the course, I thought about ways to improve it. I had just received a flyer about an oral history project of some sort, and I thought about applying oral history of a fashion to this class. A quick look in the phone book found the local synagogue, and a call to the rabbi inquiring if there were Holocaust survivors in the community resulted in a list with instructions to call the first name on it, Pincus Kolender. That was 25 years ago, and he and his fellow survivor, Joe Engel, have come and talked to students every year since then. It is

the main attraction of the class. Indeed, their presentation is open to The Citadel community and they have routinely filled the auditorium in Bond Hall.

Both men were teenagers in Poland when the Nazis invaded in 1939, and both went to Auschwitz in 1942. Their presentation to the class starts hesitantly, somewhat haltingly at first. The first few questions from the audience are equally awkward, even fumbling, and they initially elicit one-syllable answers, but as both the audience and the speakers warm to the occasion, the questions become nuanced and penetrating; the answers lengthy and detailed, and the horror simply mounts beyond comprehension. On and on,



in relentless and excruciating detail, the Nazi brutality comes to life. Questions and answers, no holds barred. What was once dry data becomes a human tale of the most unspeakable suffering. Stalin, whose murders matched those of Hitler, understood the inability of the human mind to comprehend a million deliberate deaths, when he said, "A single death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic." When Mr. Kolender tells how his mother was shot in front of him in a random execution aimed at instilling terror, students begin to comprehend both the tragedy of the Holocaust and the nature of the Nazi state and why our nation and their college sacrificed so much to destroy the Axis powers.

In addition to their own experiences, the two survivors invariably discuss local and world reaction to their plight during the Holocaust. As Hitler's persecution of the Jews mounted, few voices rose in protest; fewer still took action. Churches and nations remained silent and looked the other way. The students know these topics