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SIMON WIESENTHAL | 1908-2005

Nazi Hunter Loyal to the Dead

■ A Holocaust survivor who doggedly tracked war criminals, he sought justice even if others didn't. His crusade kept the horror 'a living event.'

By Henry Weinstein

Simon Wiesenthal, who survived a dozen concentration camps, then spent his life bringing Nazi war criminals to justice and searing the Holocaust into the conscience of the world, died Tuesday. He was 96.

Wiesenthal died peacefully in his sleep at his home in Vienna, said Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean and founder of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles.

He had been in declining health since the death of his wife, Cyla, in November 2003.

"The Jewish people owe him a great deal, and I believe that humanity in general does too — because he dealt in a systematic way, determinedly and unrelentingly, with the prosecution of war criminals," Avner Shalev, the chairman of Israel's Holocaust memorial, Yad Vashem, said Tuesday. He set "a standard for the need to establish some sort of justice and to work for moral values the world cherishes."

Wiesenthal's biographers credited him with ferreting out 1,100 of Adolf Hitler's major and minor killers and other Nazi war criminals after World War II. He was instrumental in bringing to justice well-known figures such as Adolf Eichmann — the Nazi bureaucrat who implemented Hitler's "Final Solution," the state-sponsored extermination of millions of Jews — and lesser-known officials such as Franz Stangl, commandant of the death camps at Treblinka and Sobibor, in German-occupied Poland, who had a role in at least 900,000 deaths.

But Wiesenthal's contribution to history was far more complex. For years, especially during the Cold War, when many wanted to forget or evade the horrors of Hitler and his followers, Wiesenthal was an insistent reminder that their evil acts must be remembered and accounted for.

He frequently called himself a "deputy for the dead."

"When history looks back," Wiesenthal said, "I want people to know the Nazis weren't able to kill millions of people and get away with it." He said on many occasions: "If we pardon this genocide, it will be repeated, and not only on Jews. If we don't learn this lesson, then millions died for nothing."

Wiesenthal's chief legacy, said Robert J. Lifton, author of "The Nazi Doctors," a book about physicians who helped perpetrate the Holocaust, "wasn't so much his identifying particular Nazi criminals, because that could be exaggerated and oversimplified." Rather, Lifton said in an interview, "it was his insisting on an attitude of confronting what happened and constantly keeping what happened in mind and doing so at times when a lot of people would have preferred to forget."

He "bullied, cajoled and massaged" officials and ordinary people to confront those horrors, said Hella Pick, author of "Simon Wiesenthal: A Life in Search of Justice," but he "never swerved from his conviction that an essential part of the process of coming to terms with the Holocaust is to catch the mass murderers and give them fair trials. He deserves to be counted as one of the handful of individuals who have helped to condition moral and ethical attitudes during a period of great upheaval and self-doubt."

Wiesenthal's efforts were unprecedented, said Michael Berenbaum, former president of Survivors of the Shoah, a visual-history foundation. "In one sense, the entire quest for justice in the aftermath of genocide is futile, because you cannot punish all the killers, and the punishment itself is

incommensurate with the nature of the crime," said Berenbaum, who is now the director of the Sigi Ziering Institute at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles.

"And yet the need for the illusion of justice is so essential to the task of rebuilding that we need to go forward on it.

"What Wiesenthal did is to harp on this as a lifelong commitment, because he really believed in justice."

Wiesenthal was lionized and mythologized in books, films and television. But he made it clear that he was not a "Jewish James Bond" engaging in acts of derring-do. Instead, with a photographic memory and extraordinary tenacity, he investigated elaborate disappearances and brought to bay men and women who had committed unspeakable acts.

"The crusade he was on, hunting down war criminals, symbolically gave a sense of immediacy and contemporaneity to the Holocaust," said historian Peter Novick, author of "The Holocaust in American Life." Wiesenthal's efforts to snare villains from Queens to Buenos Aires made the Holocaust "a living event, rather than something to be memorialized."

A character in "The Odessa File," Frederick Forsyth's 1972 novel about hunting down former officers of the SS, an elite Nazi unit that included those who ran the killing camps, offered a concise description of Wiesenthal: "He lives in Vienna. Jewish chap, came from Polish Galicia originally. Spent four years in a series of concentration camps, 12 in all. Decided to spend the rest of his days tracking down wanted Nazi criminals."

"No rough stuff, mind you. He just keeps collating all the information about them that he can get; then, when he's convinced he's found one, usually living under a false name — not always — he informs the police. If they don't act, he calls a press conference and puts them in a spot. Needless to say, he's not terribly popular with officialdom in Germany or

Austria."

When Wiesenthal began his quest for justice in 1945, he was unknown, a cadaverous man whose survival had made him believe in miracles. Yet he was known to say, "God must have been on leave during the Holocaust."

Fifty years later, on the anniversary of Austria's liberation, Wiesenthal was such a symbol of justice in the postwar world that he was asked to address thousands from the same Vienna balcony where Hitler stood in 1938 when he took over that country.

Amid triumphs and acclaim, Wiesenthal also faced controversy, rancor and setbacks. He failed to find Josef Mengele, the physician who had conducted brutal experiments on prisoners at Auschwitz. He was called a bully and a zealot by friends and relatives of Nazis he pursued, sometimes well into the quarry's later years.

He was excoriated by an Israeli intelligence official who said Wiesenthal had claimed too much credit for the 1960 capture of Eichmann. He was severely criticized by fellow Jews for refusing to condemn former Austrian President Kurt Waldheim as a war criminal.

No less a personage than novelist Elie Wiesel, who survived Auschwitz and won the Nobel Peace Prize four decades later, challenged him on his position that non-Jews slaughtered by the Nazis should be counted as Holocaust victims.

But accolades when Wiesenthal's death was announced Tuesday demonstrated that he had made an indelible impression on people around the world as someone who had sought "Justice Not Vengeance," the title of his second memoir.

"Mr. Wiesenthal's efforts to pursue justice for the victims of the Holocaust sent an important message to the world that there should be no impunity for genocide and crimes against humanity," said U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

"Simon Wiesenthal, like few others ... personally felt the shadow of history in its brutality.... Despite this, I was always touched by the fact that he was not bitter and fought for justice admirably," said former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl.

"He became the permanent representative of the victims, determined to bring the perpetrators of history's

greatest crime to justice," Rabbi Hier said. "There was no press conference, and no president or prime minister or world leader announced his appointment. He just took the job. It was a job no one else wanted."

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Early Anti-Semitism

Simon Wiesenthal was born Dec. 31, 1908, in Buczacz, a town that was then in the Austro-Hungarian Empire province of Galicia but is now in Ukraine.

At 9, he got his first taste of an anti-Jewish pogrom and a Ukrainian soldier cut him on the thigh with a sword, leaving a lifelong scar. Because of a quota limiting Jewish enrollment at the technical institute in the nearby then-Polish city of Lvov, he left at 19 for Prague, where he earned a degree in 1932 in architectural engineering.

He returned to Lvov and opened an architectural firm that designed houses. He also edited a Jewish student magazine satirizing a growing political force in Germany — the Nazis. In September 1936, at a rabbi's house in Lvov, he married Cyla Mueller, his high school sweetheart.

In 1939, Poland was partitioned, and Lvov fell to the Soviets, who forced Wiesenthal to close his architectural firm. He took jobs making bedsprings and stuffing bedcovers with chicken feathers, biographer Pick wrote. In 1940, he bribed a Soviet commissar to save him and his family from deportation to Siberia. Then, on June 22, 1941, Hitler invaded the Soviet Union and the Soviet-occupied portion of Poland.

Within weeks, 6,000 Jews in the area had been slaughtered. On July 6, Wiesenthal was arrested and had his first brush with death. The Nazis lined him up with more than three dozen other Jewish professionals and began to shoot them one by one through the neck.

The executioner, he said years later to Alan Levy, the late author of "Nazi Hunter, the Wiesenthal File," took a break now and then to down a vodka.

Suddenly, among the echoing gunshots, Wiesenthal said, he heard church bells. It was time for evening Mass. Before getting to Wiesenthal, the executioner put down his weapon and went to pray.

Wiesenthal was locked up.

He spent nearly four years in captivity, part of the time in forced-labor camps, where he quarried stone, carried

armor and dug burial pits. Often, Wiesenthal wrote in "The Murderers Among Us," his first memoir, he lived on a few ounces of bread.

He considered Janowska, a concentration camp near Lvov, to be among the most brutal. If anyone escaped, 25 prisoners were killed. If an escapee was not found, his family was killed. Another survivor, Leon Wells, said in his memoir, "The Janowska Road," that camp inmates were shot, hanged, pushed into a pit of hot lime, lashed with a bullwhip, sliced with knives and obliterated in bonfires.

Wiesenthal and his wife spent parts of 1941, 1942 and 1943 in a camp near Janowska that serviced the Eastern Railroad Repair Works. At first, he painted swastikas on captured Russian locomotives; she polished brass. Then Heinrich Gunthert, who ran the camp, discovered that Wiesenthal was an architect. That meant he could draw.

Gunthert's assistant, Adolf Kohlrantz, put him to work as a draftsman. Kohlrantz signed Wiesenthal's technical drawings and took credit for their excellence. In return, he gave the Wiesenthals a separate hut and had food smuggled to Wiesenthal's mother in the ghetto at Lemberg, the German name for Lvov.

In August 1942, however, Wiesenthal watched as the Nazis loaded his mother and 300 other women into three freight cars bound for Belzec, a killing center. It had gas chambers that held 1,200 people, according to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Commission, and 600,000 died there.

Wiesenthal did not see his mother again.

Then Cyla Wiesenthal learned that her mother had been shot to death.

In early 1943, Simon Wiesenthal made a deal with the Polish underground to save his wife. He drew charts of railroad junctions for saboteurs. In return, underground agents spirited Cyla to Lublin, where, as a blond, she passed as "an Aryan." Documents said she was "Irene Kowalska." The Nazis thought she was Polish and took her to Solingen, in western Germany, where she worked in a machine-gun factory.

On April 12, the SS removed Wiesenthal from the railroad work camp and took him back to Janowska. Guards marched him to a burial pit and lined him up with 40 others. The guards ordered them to strip.

Six SS men stood nearby with sub-machine guns.

"The end was surely near," Wiesenthal told Levy. "The Nazis killed you only when you were naked, because they knew, psychologically, that naked people never resist."

Wiesenthal was saved for the second time. An SS corporal appeared and told the executioners to let him go.

He dressed and was returned to the rail works, where he was greeted warmly by Kohlrantz, who had been telephoning other camps, trying to find him. It was Hitler's 54th birthday, and Kohlrantz needed Wiesenthal to draw and paint a large sign:

"*Wir danken unserem Fuhrer.*" ("We thank our leader.")

Five months later, Kohlrantz warned Wiesenthal that Jews at the rail works would be sent to killing centers.

"What are you waiting for?" Kohlrantz asked.

Wiesenthal took it as an invitation to escape. On Oct. 6, 1943, he did.

His experiences with Kohlrantz and Gunthert would later influence Wiesenthal to reject collective guilt. Jews "are the eternal scapegoat," he wrote in "The Murderers Among Us." "We know that we are not collectively guilty, so how can we accuse any other nation, no matter what some of its people have done, of being collectively guilty?"

For eight months, Wiesenthal stayed on the run. But he was captured in mid-June 1944 and taken to Gestapo headquarters in Lvov.

Fearing torture, he tried to kill himself, first by slashing his wrists, then by trying to overdose on sleeping pills, finally by hanging himself with his trousers. He was hospitalized for five weeks.

When he recovered, he was taken back to Janowska. By then Allied forces were closing in on the Nazis. Wiesenthal and 33 others — out of an original 100,000 prisoners — who had not died or been moved out of the camp were lined up to be shot. For a third time, Wiesenthal was saved.

Commandant Friedrich Warzok decided to let the prisoners live so they would need guarding — and the officer and his men would not have to go to the eastern front to fight. "We 34 Jews," Wiesenthal wrote, "became the life insurance for almost 200 SS men."

Warzok moved his prisoners west.

Some were shot. Searching for food, Wiesenthal and a corporal named Merz fell into a conversation. In "The Murderers Among Us" Wiesenthal recounted their talk:

Merz asked what he would do if he ever got to New York and people inquired about the concentration camps.

Haltingly, Wiesenthal replied, "I believe I would tell the people the truth."

"You know what would happen, Wiesenthal?" Merz said, smiling. "They wouldn't believe you. They'd say you were crazy. Might even put you into a madhouse. How can anyone believe this terrible business — unless they lived through it?"

With that, biographer Pick wrote, Wiesenthal made a decision: If he survived, he would show the world that the Nazis really had committed these atrocities, so there would be no erasure of history.

SS officers from the southern Polish city of Krakow found Warzok and his prisoners. They shot more of the Jews, then took Wiesenthal to the Plaszow camp in Poland and subsequently to the Gross-Rosen camp in what was then Germany but is now Poland. At Gross-Rosen, he found a fellow captive who knew "Irene Kowalska," the name his wife was using, in Warsaw.

The Nazis, this fellow prisoner said, had burned the homes on her street with flamethrowers and blown up the remains.

"No one on Topiel Street survived," he said.

Days later, Wiesenthal faced death for the fourth time. An SS guard lifted a rock to bash in his head. Accidentally, the guard dropped it, smashing Wiesenthal's foot. The Nazis amputated a toe, without anesthetic. The next day the quarry was evacuated. Using a broomstick to prop himself up, Wiesenthal hobbled out.

Guards took him and others to the Buchenwald concentration camp, then finally to Mauthausen, outside Linz, Austria.

The horror of Mauthausen indelibly shaped Wiesenthal's view of the Holocaust, especially its victims. More than 199,000 prisoners passed through the camp, according to the Encyclopedia of the Holocaust. About 119,000 died. Of those, 38,120 — fewer than a third — were Jews.

The others included Gypsies, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses,

Spanish Republicans, common criminals and "anti-social elements." Altogether, the prisoners came from 25 countries, among them Albania, Canada, China, Egypt, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Hungary, Poland, South Africa, the Soviet Union and the United States.

It would become Wiesenthal's lifelong conviction that non-Jews must be counted among the victims of the Holocaust.

He arrived at Mauthausen on a train that carried him and 2,000 others for six days without food or water. He stood in freight cars where 800 died. The cars were so crammed that many of the dead remained on their feet, unable to fall.

An additional 180 died during a four-mile walk from the train station to the concentration camp. Wiesenthal collapsed in the snow and was lifted onto a truck carrying the dead.

Other prisoners revived him, but took him to the "death block." Guards gave him one bowl of foul-smelling soup a day. His weight fell to less than 100 pounds. He told Pick that he had stayed alive only because of a Polish trusty, who occasionally gave him a piece of bread.

The trusty also helped him stay sane. He gave Wiesenthal pencils and paper, with which the captive sketched prisoners and the commandant, Franz Ziereis, who boasted, according to biographer Levy, that he had given his son a birthday present: "50 Jews for target practice."

Wiesenthal drew a nearby quarry, as well, depicting it as Dante's Inferno. From the bottom, prisoners carried paving stones up 186 steps. Many died on the way. To entertain SS chieftain Heinrich Himmler, guards threw 1,000 Dutch Jews from the rim to their deaths 165 feet below. The SS called it "parachute jumping."

"The last day at Mauthausen," Wiesenthal told The Times during a July 2000 interview in Vienna, "I say to my friends in the death block, 'I wish to live another 15 minutes, because I want to see the look on the Nazis' faces when the Americans come.'"

On May 5, 1945, Col. Richard Seibel led troops of the U.S. 11th Armored Division into the camp. Wiesenthal saw a large gray tank with a white star on its side and the Stars and Stripes waving from its gun turret. He struggled to reach the courtyard.

"I was hardly able to walk," he

wrote in "The Murderers Among Us." "I was wearing my faded striped uniform with a yellow J in a yellow-red double triangle. The tank with the white star was about a hundred yards in front of me. I wanted to touch the star, but I was too weak. I had survived to see this day, but I couldn't make it the last hundred yards. I remember taking a few steps, and then my knees gave way, and I fell on my face.

"Somebody lifted me up. I felt the rough texture of an olive drab American uniform brush up against my bare arms. I couldn't speak; I couldn't even open my mouth. I pointed to the white star, I touched the cold, dusty armor with my hands and then I fainted."

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Horrible Discoveries

Seibel and his troops found as many as 10,000 bodies in a single grave. Among the living "were thousands who had been starved, beaten and cruelly tortured," Seibel told his superiors in a report quoted in Pick's book. "I viewed the gas chambers where people were packed so tightly they couldn't move and little children were thrown on top of their heads before they were gassed. I saw the dissection rooms and the cooling rooms where the bodies were stacked like planks of wood.

"I viewed the private execution rooms where prisoners were hanged or shot by the commandant. I saw the highly charged electric fences where prisoners, who could no longer endure the suffering, threw themselves for a swift death. I saw the bunkheads [sic] in the barracks, bunks made for one man, where prisoners so emaciated could sleep three to a bed.

"Mauthausen did exist. Man's inhumanity to man did exist. The world must not be allowed to forget the depths to which mankind can sink, lest it should happen again."

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'What I Had to Do'

Wiesenthal was too shattered physically to leave. Two days after liberation, he was beaten by a disgruntled trusty. His friends urged him to report the incident. He went to U.S. Army offices and walked through a door with a scrawled sign: "War Crimes."

He watched as American officers gathered information for possible prosecutions. "I had to do something to keep me from having nightmares when it was dark, and daydreams in the

daytime," he wrote in "The Murderers Among Us." "I knew exactly what I could do, and what I had to do."

Wiesenthal went back to the War Crimes Office and offered his services. A lieutenant colonel saw how weak he was and simply shook his head. The Americans urged him to return to Poland and resume his architectural career. He refused.

Ten days later, after gaining some weight and rubbing his cheeks with red paper to give them color, he returned to the War Crimes Office.

This time U.S. Army officers told him he could start at once.

He was sent to arrest an SS man named Schmidt, who had been a guard at Mauthausen. Schmidt lived on the second floor of a nearby apartment building. He did not resist. Wiesenthal said he himself was so weak that Schmidt had to help *him* back down the stairs.

Wiesenthal tried to find his wife's body so he could arrange a proper burial. He wrote to a lawyer in Krakow and asked him to go to Warsaw to look for her remains. A few days after receiving Wiesenthal's letter, the lawyer got an unexpected visit from a woman on her way to Lvov hoping she might find her husband. It was Cyla Wiesenthal.

They were reunited in Linz. "We sat down with a paper to see who is alive," Wiesenthal recalled in his interview with *The Times*. "I put the names of her family. I put the names of my family. No one [in either family] is alive in Europe." In all, 89 people in both families had been killed.

To have a family, they decided, they had to have a child. Their daughter, Paulinka, was born in September 1946 in Linz. Eventually she would marry a lawyer in Israel and give her parents grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

From the start, Cyla Wiesenthal was not enthusiastic about her husband's new line of work, which was demanding and dangerous and paid little.

She once said that living with the Nazi hunter was like being "married to thousands, or maybe millions, of dead."

Cyla wanted him to resume architecture, perhaps go to Israel with her, and leave the Holocaust behind.

"I couldn't," he said, because he had an obligation to the victims.

Although they disagreed, Cyla Wiesenthal stood by her husband. Still, she rarely joined him at functions and

declined interviews. They lived quietly and had few close friends in Austria. They were married for 67 years.

She was buried in Herzliya, Israel, where Paulinka lives and where Simon Wiesenthal will also be buried Friday after a memorial service today in Vienna. In addition to their daughter, they are survived by three grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

Among those who plan to attend the funeral is Martin Mendelsohn, a Washington attorney and a former director of the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations, which hunts Nazi war criminals. Mendelsohn, who visited his old friend recently in Vienna, said Wiesenthal had been suffering from kidney problems. He said Wiesenthal's death was "a monumental loss" both for him personally and for the rest of the world.

Decades before the Justice Department started to pursue Nazis, Wiesenthal, with 30 volunteers, opened his own Jewish Historical Documentation Center in Linz in 1946.

He had grown frustrated when, with the onset of the Cold War, the United States and its allies were more concerned with helping West Germany rebuild its army as a bulwark against the Soviet Union than finding and prosecuting German war criminals.

He developed correspondents among 100,000 Holocaust survivors across Germany, Austria and Italy. They distributed photographs to identify and find former SS officers, who, according to Wiesenthal, rarely used their real names after 1945 and sometimes had pseudonyms even during the war.

Within three months, Wiesenthal knew of 1,000 places where war crimes had been committed. He sent his information to the Allies. When the International Military Tribunal met at Nuremberg in 1945 and 1946 to try Nazi war criminals, it used some of his files.

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Eichmann's Crimes

Wiesenthal's work drew his attention to Eichmann, described by historian Raul Hilberg as "the supreme practitioner" of extermination. Eichmann was a participant in the infamous Wannsee Conference in 1942, at which the Nazis adopted their "Final Solution," and he was assigned to implement the plan.

Eichmann expedited the deaths of millions of Jews. "He constantly asked for and was given large funds for

building more gas chambers and crematoriums," Wiesenthal wrote in "The Murderers Among Us." He "financed special research institutes investigating lethal gases and methods of execution."

In his book "Nuremberg: Infamy on Trial," writer Joseph E. Perisco cites one SS officer who testified that Eichmann had told him "he would leap laughing into the grave, because the feeling that he had 5 million people on his conscience would be for him a source of extraordinary satisfaction."

After the war, Eichmann vanished.

His wife, Veronika Liebel, obtained a divorce and asked a local court for a declaration that Eichmann was dead, so she could receive a pension. A clever hoax, Wiesenthal thought. If Eichmann were declared dead, he would disappear from wanted lists, and his case would be closed.

Liebel submitted an affidavit from a man saying he had seen Eichmann killed during a battle in Prague. But Wiesenthal had affidavits from people saying they had seen him alive since. He sent an investigator to Prague, who learned that the man who had signed the affidavit was Liebel's brother-in-law.

Armed with this evidence, Wiesenthal persuaded a judge to reject Liebel's request.

"I believe," he wrote years later, "that the most important thing I was able to contribute to the search for Eichmann was destroying the legend of his alleged death."

In 1951, Wiesenthal learned that Eichmann had gone to Rome and hidden in a monastery. In 1953, he was told that the Nazi had been seen near Buenos Aires. Wiesenthal had no resources to search in South America. He informed the Israelis and Nahum Goldmann, head of the World Jewish Congress.

Neither, Wiesenthal said, responded with the enthusiasm he expected.

"Obviously," Wiesenthal wrote later with disgust, "no one cared about Eichmann." He closed his documentation center and sent 1,100 pounds of information about various Nazis to the Yad Vashem historical archives in Jerusalem.

Nevertheless, he held back his largest file. It was on Eichmann.

The 45-year-old Wiesenthal became extremely depressed and collapsed physically. His doctor ordered him to rest, according to biographer Pick. For six years, he supported his family by writing articles about neo-Nazis and doing

vocational rehabilitation training for a Jewish organization.

Another Chance

In 1957, a German prosecutor told the Israelis he had learned that Eichmann was indeed in Argentina. Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion ordered Isser Harel, chief of the Mossad, the intelligence service, to find the fugitive. Wiesenthal said he had passed along information that Eichmann's mother-in-law was telling friends that her daughter had remarried and was living in Argentina with a man named "Klemt."

The man turned out to be Ricardo Klement, who turned out to be Eichmann.

In 1960, the Mossad kidnapped Eichmann in Buenos Aires and took him to Israel.

Yad Vashem officials flew Wiesenthal to Jerusalem. "He was widely feted and, for the first time, he savored fame," Pick wrote. "He loved being center stage. It was vindication for all of the delays, disappointments and slights he had suffered in pursuing his cause."

At a news conference, Wiesenthal said, "Eichmann's seizure was in no way a single person's achievement. It was a collaboration in the best sense of the word. I can only talk about my own contribution, and I do not even know if it was particularly valuable."

But Wiesenthal, who initially resisted the idea, eventually wrote a book called "I Hunted Eichmann," which made him famous overnight. The book accurately described what he had done, Pick said, but it left him open to attack because of the title, which suggested, some believed, that he had played the primary role in capturing Eichmann.

Harel, the Mossad chief, grew angry. Ben-Gurion's government had been condemned by the U.N. Security Council for violating Argentine sovereignty. Ben-Gurion ordered the Mossad to say nothing about Eichmann for 15 years. When the gag order expired, Harel wrote his own memoir and did not even mention Wiesenthal.

Years later, Harel was still bitter. He told the Jerusalem Post that Wiesenthal had contributed nothing of value to Eichmann's capture. Wiesenthal responded that Harel had done an "absolutely perfect" job, but that he too deserved some credit.

Others said Harel had been remiss. Wiesenthal had to be given credit, Zvi Aharoni, a senior Mossad operative, told Pick, "for having been the only person to persist with the search for Eichmann, even when others had given up."

On April 11, 1961, the opening day of Eichmann's trial, Wiesenthal saw his quarry for the first time. He was stunned.

"In my mind I had built up the image of a demonic superman," Wiesenthal wrote in "The Murderers Among Us." "Instead I saw a frail, nondescript, shabby fellow in a glass cell between two Israeli policemen; they looked more colorful and interesting than he did.

"There was nothing demonic about him; he looked like a bookkeeper who was afraid to ask for a raise."

A Yad Vashem archivist said prosecutors had put Wiesenthal's files to good use. Eichmann begged for mercy; he said that the deaths of the Jews had not been his fault, that he had acted "under orders." He was convicted and hanged.

The Israelis cremated Eichmann. His ashes were scattered in the Mediterranean, so his burial place could never become a shrine.

More important than the outcome of the trial, Wiesenthal wrote, was Eichmann's testimony.

It "destroyed the fairy tale that Auschwitz was just a lie," Wiesenthal said, referring to the infamous death camp where historians say the Nazis murdered 1.1 million people.

"Since then," he said, "the world has been familiar with the concept of the 'murderer at his desk.' We know that fanatical, near-pathological sadism is not necessary for millions of people to be murdered; that all that is needed is dutiful obedience to some leader."

A New Beginning

Eichmann's capture inspired Wiesenthal to reopen his Jewish Documentation Center in 1961, this time in Vienna, where the couple moved that year. Over the next four decades, he operated out of two nondescript three-room offices cluttered with files.

One success came in a case prompted by "The Diary of Anne Frank," which recounted the experiences of Dutch Jews who had hidden in an attic in Amsterdam but eventually were captured by the Nazis. Anne, her sister and their mother died later at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in north-central Germany.

When a stage version of the book opened in Linz, young Austrians picketed the play. Wiesenthal confronted a boy who claimed that there was no evidence the Franks had ever lived. "Nobody will believe you," the boy told Wiesenthal, according to Pick, "unless you find the man who arrested her."

So Wiesenthal embarked on a five-year search, starting with a scrap of information he had found in the diary appendix. It said a family employee, trying to intercede with the Nazis, had spoken to an Austrian SS man identified only as "Silver."

Tracing the name, Wiesenthal found Karl Silberbauer, a Vienna police inspector, who admitted having arrested the Franks. Austrian officials refused to prosecute him, saying that there was no evidence he had been responsible for Anne Frank's deportation to a concentration camp.

Wiesenthal took comfort, however, in his having authenticated the Franks' arrest and blunted challenges to the diary. Pick said he called it "the most important book written about the Third Reich" because it went "straight to the heart of young people."

"That," Wiesenthal said, "is why the neo-Nazis had to do anything they could to question its authenticity."

Another success came in his pursuit of Stangl, commandant at the Treblinka and Sobibor killing camps in Poland. Stangl had also run Hartheim, a facility for euthanasia experiments near Mauthausen.

In "The Murderers Among Us," Wiesenthal described an inventory, signed by Stangl, of items taken to Berlin from Treblinka:

Twenty-five freight cars of women's hair, used by the Nazis for insulation and mattress stuffing; 248 freight cars of clothing; 100 freight cars of shoes; 254 freight cars of rugs and bedding; \$2.8 million in U.S. currency; 400,000 British pounds; 12 million Soviet rubles; 140 million Polish zlotys; 120 million zlotys' worth of various gold coins; 400,000 gold watches; 145,000 kilograms of gold wedding rings; 4,000 carats of diamonds larger than 2 carats; and several thousand strings of pearls.

Stangl was arrested after the war. He spent two years in prison, then escaped. Wiesenthal heard that an organization of former SS members, known as ODESSA, had helped him and his family flee to Syria.

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New Information

Fourteen years later, in 1964, a woman who had read Wiesenthal's scathing statements about Stangl in the press went to see him in Vienna. "I had no idea," Wiesenthal quoted her as saying in "Justice Not Vengeance," "that my cousin Theresa was married to such a terrible man."

They were in Brazil, she said. The woman refused to say more.

The next day, also prompted, perhaps, by Wiesenthal's public statements, a former Gestapo man arrived at his office and said he knew where Stangl was. Wiesenthal promised to pay him \$7,000 if his information was correct. The man said Stangl was in Sao Paulo working at a Volkswagen factory.

Wiesenthal could not afford to go to Brazil, so he asked German and Austrian officials for help. He also asked U.S. Sen. Robert F. Kennedy (D-N.Y.) to apply pressure.

In June 1967, the Brazilians extradited Stangl to West Germany. Almost immediately, the former Gestapo man demanded his money. Wiesenthal paid him.

During Stangl's trial in Dusseldorf, witnesses spoke of a 10-foot-wide path at Treblinka called the "Road to Heaven," where guards forced women and children to run naked 100 meters to the "baths" — gas chambers — where they were killed with carbon monoxide.

Stangl was sentenced to life in prison. The court said he shared responsibility for 900,000 deaths at Treblinka alone.

Wiesenthal told reporters that Stangl's conviction by a German court was at least as important as Eichmann's by an Israeli court. "If I had done nothing else in my life but get this evil man," he said, "I would not have lived in vain."

Stangl died in prison months later in 1971.

Another success was Wiesenthal's search for Hermine Braunsteiner, an Austrian guard at Majdanek, a killing center in Poland where more than 200,000 prisoners died.

Braunsteiner was known as Kobyla, "the mare," because she kicked women prisoners at Majdanek with her steel-studded leather boots. Witnesses said she also had shot children and whipped women to death.

She had been convicted of kicking and whipping women at Ravensbruck,

another concentration camp, and had served three years. But she had gotten away with her savagery at Majdanek.

Wiesenthal learned that she had married an American named Russell Ryan and was living in Nova Scotia. Wiesenthal contacted a friend in Toronto, an Auschwitz survivor, who reported back that the former guard had moved to Queens, N.Y. He provided Wiesenthal with an address.

Wiesenthal gave his information to a New York Times reporter in Vienna, who said the paper would check it out. Ten days later, on June 14, 1964, the Times printed a story headlined: "Former Nazi Camp Guard Is Now a Housewife in Queens."

Hermine Ryan had become a U.S. citizen, but because she had lied on her application by not revealing her conviction for the crimes at Ravensbruck, her citizenship was revoked. She was the first accused war criminal extradited from the United States.

After a trial in Germany that lasted five years, a judge sentenced her to life in prison. She died there in 1999.

Her case called attention to the fact that the United States had no system for investigating war criminals and prompted the Justice Department to create its Office of Special Investigations.

Many Nazis died before Wiesenthal could bring them to justice. Chief among them was Mengele, a specialist in genetics, who became known as "the exterminating angel."

At Auschwitz, Wiesenthal said, Mengele was responsible for at least 300,000 deaths, including many in horrifying human experiments. "If I could get this man," Wiesenthal told a reporter, "my soul would finally be at peace."

Wiesenthal never found Mengele, nor did French Nazi hunter Beate Klarsfeld or agents of the Mossad or the CIA. In fact, they all made inaccurate statements at various times about his supposed whereabouts. In 1979, Mengele drowned accidentally in Brazil after a stroke, a fact that German officials uncovered in 1985.

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'A Genuine Hero'

Movies and television burnished Wiesenthal's image. But he gave his name and entrusted his legacy to the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles.

It was created in 1977 by Hier, an Orthodox rabbi who moved to Los

Angeles from Canada with the goal of opening a center named for the Nazi hunter.

"Simon was a genuine hero to Hier," Efraim Zuroff, who runs the center's Jerusalem office, told *The Times* in an interview. "There weren't many Jewish heroes. We had Wiesel, but he is a hero of suffering. And we had Wiesenthal. He is more like the John Wayne of the Jews."

The Wiesenthal Center became known for investigating neo-Nazis and other extremists, challenging Holocaust deniers and seeking compensation for survivors. Membership grew to nearly 400,000. The Los Angeles center also houses the Museum of Tolerance, which has drawn 4 million visitors.

Wiesenthal insisted that the center be dedicated to all of the 11 million people of different nationalities, races and creeds who he said had died at the hands of the Nazis — not just the 6 million who were Jews.

"I'm not dividing the victims," he told the *Washington Post*.

On this point, he clashed with Wiesel, who said: "My position is that the Holocaust is a Jewish tragedy with universal implications. Any attempt to dilute or extrapolate it can only distort its meaning. As a Jew, my duty is to evoke the Jewish tragedy. But in so doing, I incite other groups to commemorate their own."

Wiesenthal told biographer Levy why his view was different: "I was over four years in different camps with people from 15 nations: Jews, Gentiles, Gypsies, communists. Through this experience, my view on the Holocaust and the whole problem of Nazism is a lot different from Elie Wiesel, who was only six months in camps and only with Jews."

The dispute peaked when President Carter took initial steps to create the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. In the end, the museum reflected Wiesel's position, although all victims of the Nazis were treated with respect.

Some historians questioned Wiesenthal's overall figure of 11 million killed in the Holocaust. They did not dispute the figure of 6 million Jewish deaths but raised doubts about whether there had been 5 million non-Jewish deaths.

Given Wiesenthal's personal history, however, and his "lifetime mission of

ferreting out Nazi criminals and enlisting the help of European governments in that task," University of Chicago historian Novick wrote, it was not surprising that he would interpret Nazi crimes "in an 'ecumenical' way."

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Life in Austria

Over the years, Wiesenthal resisted his wife's efforts to move to Israel. "If I did my work from Israel," he once told a group of students, "immediately people would dismiss it as Israeli propaganda."

Living in Austria may have aided Wiesenthal's credibility, but it wasn't always easy. He received death threats, he was assaulted by a neo-Nazi, and his home was bombed. "Viennese postal authorities," wrote historian Robert Herzstein, "had a special bomb-proof room, which they used to examine packages addressed to Wiesenthal."

Bruno Kreisky, the popular Austrian chancellor, battled with Wiesenthal politically for 20 years. Their differences began when Kreisky, a Jew, appointed ex-Nazis to key positions in his government. Wiesenthal objected loudly and persistently. Kreisky called him a "Jewish fascist."

Wiesenthal also clashed with the New York-based World Jewish Congress. Their dispute was over Waldheim, the former secretary-general of the United Nations who ran for the presidency of Austria.

The *New York Times* reported in 1986 that Waldheim had served on the staff of Gen. Alexander Lohr, an Austrian, when Lohr's units deported 42,000 Greek Jews who were then killed at Auschwitz, Lublin and Treblinka. The newspaper quoted a historian as saying that witnesses had described trains leaving Salonika, Greece, daily, carrying the Jews to their deaths.

Waldheim conceded that he had served under Lohr, but said he had played a minor role and knew of no war crimes for which his units had been blamed. This, he said, was the first he had heard of any mass deportations from Salonika.

Wiesenthal was skeptical of Waldheim's claims that "he knew nothing at all," but considered it "highly unlikely" that Waldheim had been in a top Nazi organization. Wiesenthal doubted that Waldheim was a war criminal.

Critics noted, however, that Wiesenthal had been amicable with Waldheim in the past. They also noted

that Wiesenthal had not been on good terms with the World Jewish Congress, whose president had called Waldheim "a sleazeball." They discounted Wiesenthal's fears that such name-calling would precipitate an anti-Semitic backlash and help Waldheim in the election.

Finally, the critics said, it was embarrassingly possible that Wiesenthal had missed something when he had looked into Waldheim years before.

His reluctance to condemn Waldheim frustrated Rabbi Hier, who met Wiesenthal for dinner in New York City. Marty Rosen, a friend who joined them, recalled Wiesenthal saying, "Maybe he was a Nazi, but not a criminal."

"I said, 'We know he lied.'

"But Simon wouldn't budge."

Wiesenthal's fears of backlash were prescient. Waldheim won the election.

Then, at Wiesenthal's urging, he asked a commission of military historians to review his war record. Two years later, the commission reported that it had been unable to determine whether Waldheim was a war criminal but that the Austrian had "repeatedly assisted in connection with illegal actions and thereby facilitated their execution."

Wiesenthal said Waldheim should resign. Waldheim declined, but did not stand for reelection.

In 1986, when Waldheim won the presidency, Wiesenthal was nominated a fourth time for the Nobel Peace Prize. It was rumored that he would share it with Wiesel. The night before the announcement, Wiesenthal called Rosen.

"Get your tux ready," he said.

But on Oct. 14, the Nobel committee awarded the prize to Wiesel alone.

Rosen said Wiesenthal was crushed.

He thought that Wiesenthal had not been chosen because he had refused to brand Waldheim a war criminal. Biographers Levy and Pick said that was possible. The Nobel committee declined to comment on its selection process.

When Wiesenthal was asked about his reluctance to condemn Waldheim, he frequently said that he had to be very careful about his accusations. He said he had never had a case of mistaken identity.

In fact, he had slipped at least once.

In 1974, Wiesenthal accused Frank Walus, a Polish American in Chicago, of having delivered Jews to the Gestapo. The accusation began a lengthy ordeal

for Walus that ended only after a federal appeals court found his documentary evidence to the contrary to be "compelling."

Years later, Allan A. Ryan Jr., who headed the Justice Department's Nazi-hunting unit, said Walus had been innocent.

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A Wider Focus

As Wiesenthal grew older, he adopted a broader focus on human rights.

During the 1970s and '80s, he tried to determine whether Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat who had saved more than 100,000 Jews in Hungary, was still alive. Wallenberg was arrested by the Soviets in 1945. Although they said he had died in 1947, some people believed decades later that he was still alive in a Soviet prison.

Believing this, Wiesenthal acknowledged, was to believe in a miracle. But, he said, "a Jew must believe in miracles if he wishes to be a realist." He cited himself: Again and again he had survived at the brink of death, even when he tried to kill himself. "I believe in miracles."

In 2001, a Russian and Swedish commission said there was no conclusive answer to the Wallenberg mystery.

Periodically, Wiesenthal condemned tyrants, including Saddam Hussein. He supported both U.S. wars against the Iraqi dictator.

He urged President Clinton to take action against Bosnian Serbs Radovan Karadzic and Gen. Ratko Mladic for their alleged roles in "crimes against humanity" in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Wiesenthal warned constantly that genocide could happen again.

"All you need," he once told an interviewer, "is a government program of hatred and ... crisis. If it happened in a civilized nation like Germany, which was a cultural superpower, it could happen anywhere."

He found it hard to forgive war criminals. In "The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness," he wrote that a nun in a concentration camp had once taken him to a dying SS man, who said he had helped herd hundreds of Jews into a house. It was set on fire and they had burned to death.

He asked Wiesenthal, as a Jew, for forgiveness.

Uncertain what to do, Wiesenthal left him without responding.

He pondered whether he had done the right thing, and his book presented reflections on the question from death camp survivors, including noted Italian chemist and writer Primo Levi, from Nobel Peace Prize winners Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama and even from Nazi war criminal Albert Speer.

In a New York Times review, theologian Robert McAfee Brown wrote: "Readers of Simon Wiesenthal's disturbing and probing book must seek their own answer to the question, 'What would I have done?'"

Well into his 90s, Wiesenthal worked in his office regularly for at least half a day.

"Maybe it's my craziness," he told The Times in 1990. "Because I will never stop. I tell my wife, 'The great things in life are never done by normal people. They're done by crazy people.'"

Wiesenthal spoke often of a Sabbath dinner he had attended at the home of another survivor of Mauthausen, who had become a wealthy jeweler. The man speculated that Wiesenthal could have become a millionaire if he had gone back to architecture instead of hunting Nazis.

"When we come to the other world," Wiesenthal said he responded, "and meet the millions of Jews who died in the camps, and they ask us, 'What have you done?' there will be many answers.

"You will tell them, 'I became a jeweler.'"

"Another will say, 'I smuggled coffee and American cigarettes.'"

"Another will say, 'I built houses.'"

"But I will say, 'I didn't forget you.'"

"

□

Voices

'For many, his greatest achievement was turning the phrase "Never again" from a catchy slogan into an effective international campaign against the perpetrators of genocide.'

Rabbi Jonathan Romain
spokesman for the Reform
Synagogues of Great Britain

□

'There is no doubt that without his information, which the [Israeli intelligence service] Mossad used with such great effect, it would have been impossible to bring Eichmann to trial.'

Shevah Weiss

former speaker of the Israeli parliament

□

'Wiesenthal was a tireless fighter against forgetting. He always sought justice, not vengeance. This was the motto of his life.'

Wolfgang Schuessel
Austrian chancellor

□

'He did not view his work as making amends for the past. He viewed his work as protecting the future.'

Rabbi Marvin Hier
dean and founder of the
Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles

□

'Simon Wiesenthal was a magnet for young Germans, many of whom felt an overwhelming sense of guilt. [They asked Wiesenthal:] "Can you please help me understand what my father did during the war?" He rejected the idea of collective guilt.... "Every trial," he said, "was an antidote to hatred."'

Abraham Cooper
associate dean of the Wiesenthal Center

□

'Throughout his long career, he relentlessly pursued those responsible for some of the most horrific crimes against humanity the world has ever known. Simon Wiesenthal fought for justice, and history will always remember him.'

President Bush

□

Times staff writers Patricia Ward Biederman in Los Angeles, Laura King in Jerusalem, Jeffrey Fleishman in Berlin and Alissa J. Rubin in Vienna contributed to this coverage.

Times Staff Writer

Photo:

YOUNG COUPLE: Simon Wiesenthal and his wife, Cyla, in a photo from 1936, the year they married.

ID NUMBER:20050921hre8c4kf

Photographer:

Simon Wiesenthal Center

Photo:

LIBERATION DAY: The Nazi symbol is pulled down at the Mauthausen death camp. The horror of the camp indelibly shaped Wiesenthal's view of the Holocaust.

ID NUMBER:20050921hre8j2kf

Photographer:

Simon Wiesenthal Center

Photo:

LEADER OF THE TROOP: Wiesenthal, center, in a 1923 photo of Boy Scouts in Buczacz, now in Ukraine. Of the youths in this portrait, only one survived the Holocaust.

ID NUMBER:20050921hre8jmkf

Photographer:

Simon Wiesenthal Center

Photo:

BROUGHT TO JUSTICE: Adolf Eichmann, in booth, listens Dec. 11, 1961, as the guilty verdict on charges of genocide and war crimes is read at his trial in Jerusalem.

ID NUMBER:20050921gbzuk0ke

Photographer:

Associated Press

Photo:

A FREE MAN: Simon Wiesenthal's identity certificate is part of the "I Am My Brother's Keeper" exhibit at the Museum of Tolerance.

ID NUMBER:20050921f9uu6rgy

Photographer:

Simon Wiesenthal Center

Photo:

PUBLIC MAN: Wiesenthal, to the right of the table with his hands in his pockets, awaits his turn to speak at a gathering of displaced persons in the Austrian city of Linz in 1948. The rally was held to mark the declaration of independence by Israel.

ID NUMBER:20050921gaghidke

Photographer:

Simon Wiesenthal 1997/BBC

Photo:

AT HIS DESK: Simon Wiesenthal, seen here in 1983, reopened his Jewish Documentation Center in Vienna in 1961. Over four decades, he operated out of two nondescript three-room offices. "If I did my work from Israel," he said, "immediately people would dismiss it as Israeli propaganda."

ID NUMBER:20050921in59w3nc

Photographer:

Gerard Rancinan Polaris

Photo:

LIFELONG PURPOSE: "If we pardon this genocide, it will be repeated, and not only on Jews. If we don't learn this lesson, then millions died for nothing."

ID NUMBER:20050921hre8jbnkf

Photographer:

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WIESENTHAL, SIMON

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