

J.C. Lexow/The Anniston Star

Henry Stern holds up a plaque which will be affixed to his headstone upon his death. Stern was the keynote speaker at JSU's Days of Remembrance of the Holocaust of World War II ceremony.

'Days of Remembrance' at JSU allows Holocaust survivor to tell his story

By Brian Lazenby

Star Staff Writer

JACKSONVILLE

Henry Stern was six years old when he boarded the S.S. Washington in Hamburg, Germany with \$10 in his pocket and his arms loaded with cameras, pictures and just about anything he and his family could carry.

That was 1937. The Holocaust had been going on for about six years, but only in isolated pockets of Europe. His family was not aware what was happening — just that his uncle, who was living in Opelika at the time, insisted that

they get to the U.S. as soon as possible.

Stern's parents were reluctant to leave, he said. But luckily for them they did. The 344 passengers aboard the ship were the last Jews allowed to leave Europe freely.

Stern related these memories to a crowd gathered in Jacksonville State University's Houston Cole Library Thursday night for "Days of Remembrance 2001," an annual Holocaust commemoration service presented by the JSU Student Government Association and the

Please see Holocaust

Holocaust: 'Days of Remembrance' was started in 1982 to honor the 6 million Jews who died

From Page 1A

JSU Holocaust Memorial Committee.

Days of Remembrance, which began in 1982, started as a way to honor the 6 million Jews who died during one of history's bloodiest times.

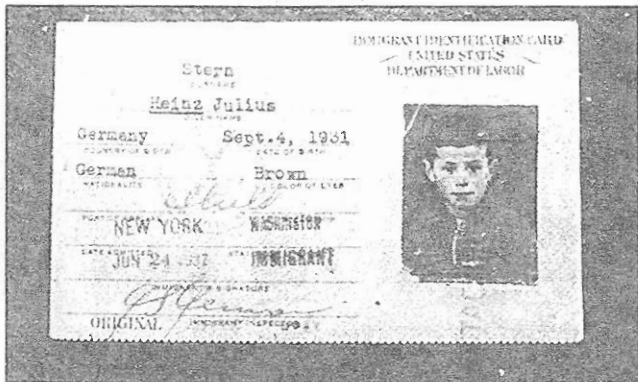
Dr. Russel Lemmons, a history professor at JSU and a Holocaust Commemoration Committee member, addressed the crowd, calling the 20th Century the bloodiest century ever.

Now that it is over, Lemmons said, we must look back and learn so it doesn't happen again. We must commemorate other genocides that have taken place as well, he said.

Many were there to emphasize the importance of remembering

"We're meant to be humane, and we need to have reminders," said Dr. Steven Whitton, also a Holocaust Commemoration Committee member.

Henry Stern remembers all too well, or maybe it's because he has



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Identification card that Henry Stern received upon emigrating to the United States from Germany.

heard the stories told again and again all his life, he said. And that's the purpose of "Days of Remembrance."

"Six million Jews were killed and five million Catholics," Stern said. "You can't let 11 million people die

without remembering."

Stern remembers the weeklong passage across the Atlantic, and arriving in New York with his family, unable to speak a word of English, he said.

Stern's uncle greeted them there

and helped them board the Crescent, a train that made daily trips between New York and New Orleans, he said.

They got off in Opelika, where they began a new life as Americans, he said.

Most of Stern's extended family remained in Germany and were never allowed to leave, he said.

"We never really knew what happened to them," he said. "All we knew was they died in the concentration camps."

Many years passed before Stern attempted to return to his homeland, he said. He tried several times, but couldn't force himself to make the final leg of his flight that would take him into Frankfurt.

He got as far as London, but deliberately missed his flight. Another time found him in Paris, where he again refused to board the plane, he said. Yet another time, in Rome, he watched his plane pull away from the terminal without getting on board.

Three years ago, Stern and his

wife finally made it to Frankfurt, which was only possible because of a non-stop flight from Atlanta, he said.

Germany wasn't at all what he expected.

"There were no signs whatsoever of the Holocaust," he said.

They rented a car and found his old neighborhood, his old home, which brought back a flood of memories and emotion, he said.

He has no plans to return, he said. "It gave me closure," Stern said. "If something happens in your life

and you can't get closure, it eats away at you like a cancer."

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