

“THE MAN IN THE GLASS BOOTH” EXHIBIT ENDS AT FLORIDA HOLOCAUST MUSEUM

By MARK WEISENMILLER of ALKA PRESS INTERNATIONAL July 16, 2018

ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA (API)---An exhibition devoted to the capture, trial, and execution of a Nazi official accused, tried, and convicted of being partially responsible for the deaths of millions of people during World War Two closed here yesterday.

“Operation Finale: The Capture and Trial of Adolf Eichmann” was located on the second floor of the Florida Holocaust Museum (FHM). The exhibition also could have been referred to as “The Man in the Glass Booth” display, for located near the end of the exhibition is a duplicate of the bullet-proof glass box that Eichmann sat in during his 1961 trial in Jerusalem. The box was constructed by the Israelis to protect Eichmann from would-be assassins. “The Man in the Glass Booth” quickly became a well-known international phrase when actor-playwright Robert Shaw had his play of the same title produced on Broadway in 1968. The play, which was a fictional fantasia of Eichmann and his trial, was, in 1975, made into a movie.

Adolf Eichmann (1906-1962) joined the Austrian Nazi Party in 1932 and seven months later, he joined the Nazi intelligence agency Schutz-Staffel (“protective squadron” in German; this was better known by the acronym SS). By 1938, Eichmann was in charge of the Austrian Nazi office for Jewish emigration. One year later, in 1939, he was promoted as the chief of the political police unit of the Gestapo’s department in charge of the deportation of Jewish people.

His two main job responsibilities were to oversee the abuse, deportation, and eventual murder of Jewish people, as well as the mass extermination of deported Jews (who were kept in concentration camps in Europe) through the use of poison gas chambers. Although he was arrested by the Allies shortly after the Second World War ended in 1945, he escaped and eventually lived in Argentina under the alias Richard (or Ricardo) Klement.

In 1960, Israeli intelligence agents (who called themselves “The Jewish Volunteers”) located Eichmann, seized him, and took him to Israel to be tried on numerous charges against humanity in general and the Jewish people in particular. After a trial that began on April 11, 1961, he was found guilty by a three judge court panel on December 11th of the same year, and was executed at midnight (by way of hanging) on May 31, 1962.

All of the above was presented---in audio, video, people-participatory, and other types of forms---in “Operation Finale: The Capture and Trial of Adolf Eichmann.” In the exhibition were various artifacts from both Eichmann and his Israeli kidnappers; these range from the items that Eichmann had when captured (such as a comb and a small penknife) to reproductions of the many black-and-white photographs that Israeli commandos took of Eichmann when he was unwittingly under surveillance by said agents (the former Nazi was under surveillance for them for months before he was abducted by them, near his home located in a suburb of Buenos Aires, on May 11, 1960). Documents such as false passports used by Eichmann were also in the expo.

The exhibition had various, short-in-length, black-and-white or color videos pertaining to it’s theme. One of these was a black-and-white video, comprised of snippets of Eichmann’s trial, which was the first international trial to be televised. There was a group of elderly people here---some chatting quietly amongst themselves; some watching the video and noticeably intense---when this reporter visited the exhibition. Bruce L. Brager explained in his 1991 book “The Trial of Adolf Eichmann” that:

“The technology did not exist for the immediate, live coverage possible today, so the trial was filmed by a single television network which then made copies available to all other networks and stations. In the United States, for example, ABC (American Broadcasting Company) presented a weekly one-hour summary. ABC’s New York affiliate offered a half-hour summary each evening.”

On the walls of the exhibition were numerous black-and-white photos; these photographs, in turn, corresponded to the pertinent topic which was explained in the expo's many segments. In one of these segments, visitors could listen to, by way of a min-megaphone shaped device held to one's ear, audio remembrances by Holocaust survivors. On the first floor of the FHM---and acting as a type of anchor to the FHM's permanent devotion to education and preservation---is Boxcar #113069-5. This wooden and steel railroad car was used by the Nazis to deport Jews and other (to use a word favored by Nazi personnel) "undesirables" (Christian Scientists; gypsies; homosexuals; natives of various European Slavic countries) to the Auschwitz and Treblinka concentration camps. A placard near the boxcar informs visitors that many of the people transported in this boxcar, during the time of the Holocaust, died of asphyxiation before the train-car arrived at the concentration camps.

The plot by the Israelis to both abduct Eichmann from Argentina and then transport him to Israel to stand trial has long been the subject of interest for film-makers interested in making movies about the topics. In 1996, "The Man Who Captured Eichmann," starring Robert Duvall as the Nazi, was released and in September of this year, the film "Operation Finale," with Ben Kingsley as Eichmann, will be released.

Much dissension occurred amongst people due to the capture and (some would say) forced trial upon Eichmann in the early 1960's. "From the start, the trial provoked international controversy," wrote Frank McLynn in the 1995 book "Famous Trials: Cases That Made History." "The objections were straightforward: Eichmann had been illegally abducted and Israel had no right to hold him; he was being tried for crimes that did not exist in the law books at the time he committed them; and his trial was being conducted by a nation-state that did not exist during World War II. Strictly speaking, the entire proceedings were illegal." Yet David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973), the Israeli statesman who as the country's Prime Minister formally backed the capture and trial of Eichmann, powerfully lobbied his fellow Israeli political colleagues for all of this to occur---and so, it did. Also, Ben-

Gurion wanted younger generations of Israelis (who either did not know of, or purposefully did not want to know of, the Holocaust) to be aware of what had transpired less than 20 years beforehand.

Also, the continuous coverage of the capture and trial of Eichmann---and all related events before, during, and immediately after Eichmann's trial---seemed to give validation to the proceedings. More than 500 print, radio, and television reporters were accredited to cover the trial. On the first day of the trial, they produced an astonishing 280,000 words of reportage---and that number, of course, grew as the trial last for months.

After his execution, Eichmann's body was cremated and the ashes dispersed into the Mediterranean Sea. The death sentence and the execution created as much controversy as the subjects of Eichmann's kidnapping and trial. Some critics believed that he should have been sentenced to life imprisonment. The Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt, whose articles about the trial for "The New Yorker" magazine comprised her 1963 book "Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil" wrote in it (in rather haughty prose) "We find that no one...no member of the human race, can be expected to share the earth with you. That is the reason, and the only reason, you must hang."

With the showing of the Eichmann exhibit, the FHM continues with it's mission statement which is (as per a FHM brochure) to "honor the memory of innocent men, women, and children who suffered or died in the Holocaust. The Museum is dedicated to teaching the members of all races and cultures the inherent worth and dignity of human life in order to prevent future genocides."

Copyright © 2018 by Mark Weisenmiller All Rights Reserved