

Remains of the Reich

Nazi Germany's most infamous backdrop still bares a painful reminder for visitors

By Ginny Dumond

NUREMBERG, Germany — One might never guess the beautiful town of winding rivers and immaculate architecture dating back to the 11th century once served as the home base for one of the most terrifying regimes in history.

Nuremberg — the town that played host to those now infamous Nazi Party rallies in which hundreds of thousands of Germans raised their hands screaming "Seig Heil!" — has moved past the war years but can never fully be rid of its painful heritage.

On the city's southeast corner lies the remnants of the Zeppelin Grandstand. This stadium with its Romanesque columns and exalted pulpit from which Adolf Hitler gave many of his most famous speeches is one of the most identifiable landmarks of the Third Reich.

"And when the great columns of our movement march victoriously through Germany today I know you will close ranks with these columns," Hitler said in reference to the Grandstand columns, "and we know before us lies Germany, within us marches Germany, and behind us follows Germany." Though weeds grow up through the stadium steps and skateboarders have built ramps near the entryway of the building, which now stands as an exhibit hall, thousands of people each year come to see what remains of the great pulpit of World War II.

"We have about 50,000 people come to see the exhibition and about another 50,000 more just to see the building," said Thomas Meyer, exhibit specialist. Though he sees the exhibit every day, Meyer finds it difficult sometimes to look at the pictures of concentration camps and war victims.

"That this could happen in Germany, with German people, it's hard to believe sometimes," he said. Many of the most awkward moments for Meyer come when Jewish people visit the building. "I don't feel guilty, but sometimes when people who were in the concentration camps come to see the exhibition it's strange," he said. Meyer said many of Nuremberg's Jewish population fled to Israel after the war and now some are coming to look at postwar Nuremberg. "We took a class in high school on the Holocaust and knew this was where the [Nuremberg] Trials were, then heard about the chance to see this," said Jason Lukasik of Chicago. It was on Sept. 1, 1939, when Hitler had called the annual rally in Nuremberg, ironically named the "Rally of

Peace," that the Nazis attacked Poland and began World War II. Because it was a center for arms production and the political center of the Third Reich, Nuremberg was heavily bombed by allied forces leaving 90 percent of the city's historic center demolished and, more than 6,000 dead. On April 20, 1945, the "City of the Party Rallies" was taken by allied troops, and from Nov. 20, 1945, to October 1946, the Nuremberg Trial took place in the city's Palace of Justice.

Conspiracy, preparation of a war of aggression, war crimes, and crimes against humanity were the charges that faced those on trial before the International Military Tribunal.

Many of the defendants in the 13 separate trials were doctors, lawyers, military men, and industrialists who had each in his own way played a part in the rise or running of the Reich.

Of the 12 defendants in the first trial, those closest to Hitler and his regime, seven received the death sentence.