

Groen recalls Nazi horror...from page 1A

horrific deaths, traditionally referred to as The Holocaust, included the murder of six million people labeled as being Jewish, more than 800,000 gypsies and a half million people accused of being homosexuals. It also included the deaths of millions of Soviet and Polish prisoners of war as well as civilians from Nazi-occupied countries.

The deaths of an estimated 11 million people can be linked to Hitler's Nazi Germany.

"I lost four grandparents, all my uncles and aunts, my cousins," Groen said.

Groen thought he had lost his parents too, but unbeknownst to him, they had been protected by the Underground throughout the years of World War II.

In late 1940, Groen, then 16 years old, was arrested and sent to Auschwitz, one in a series of concentration camps created by the Nazis for slave labor and or the extermination of prisoners. The camps were overseen by kapos, or convicted German prison-

ers, who served as guards over the concentration camp prisoners in exchange for a reduced sentence or parole.

"They were mean people, murderers, rapists, thieves," Groen said, referring to the prison guards. "If they reported that you were a bad worker, you were sent to the gas chambers."

Groen worked very hard as a ditch digger, helping build a sewerage system for his Nazi captors.

Later, he was one of 28 people selected from his camp at Mauthausen for Dr. Josef Mengele's medical experiments.

"They injected my arms with cancers," Groen said, rolling up his sleeves to show the scars on his arms.

Only four people, including Groen, survived the medical experiments by the vaunted "Angel of Death."

After the war and his return to Amsterdam where he found his parents, Groen said he had to fight to get the education he was robbed of by the Nazis.

Most of all, Groen had

to learn how to be a human being all over again. He had no table manners to speak of upon his liberation because he had eaten with his fingers as a concentration camp prisoner.

"In four years, I had not seen a spoon, knife or a fork," he said. "Your teen-age years are when you really learn to be a human being. I never had that for four years; it was something I had to learn again."

Groen has written a book about his experience in Nazi concentration camps, including time spent on the "Death March" along with other prisoners from one encampment to another.

Only a few copies of the book were ever printed, he said.

"I wrote the book for my family, not the world," Groen said. "I wanted them to know what happened."

Jaap Groen knows what happened, unfortunately, he lived it.

"But I'm thankful I'm here today to tell it," he said.



Towns County Schools World History teacher Jeff Stowers introduces a special guest on Thursday in the school's auditorium. Jaap Groen of McCayesville, was a prisoner in Nazi concentration camps for four years. Photo/James Reese