

DEAF and HARD OF HEARING PEOPLE + World War II

Of interest not only to the HOH and the Deaf, but also historians, the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), a college of the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), recently launched a Web site to preserve the history of the experience of D/HH during World War II, a rarely examined dimension of WWII and Holocaust studies. At a time when certain contingencies deny there ever was a Holocaust, the Web site organizers are responding with first-hand testimonies, documentations and research on the Shoah (Hebrew word for great calamity) from the D/HH perspective. NTID/RIT saw the importance of amassing materials of the D/HH experience in WWII and sharing them with students and the world at large. The web site, www.rit.edu/deaf/ww2, covers three global spheres of global experience – Europe and the Holocaust, North America and Asia.

The in-depth European sphere includes discussion of how some D/HH gentiles sought to become Nazis, and details of the eugenics movement involving the sterilization, forced abortion and euthanasia of D/HH gentiles, as well as other “undesirables.” The Jewish D/HH story is recounted also, in particular by means of streaming captions of several Deaf testimonies from Shoah (hebrew word for calamity) Foundation and Yad Vashem. Various video clips and a short documentary are also available on the Web site.

In the North American sphere immigration discrimination and interment camps for D/HH Japanese-Americans are the focus. Also covered are the roles of D/HH Americans and Canadians who supported the war effort by working in factories and military service and by purchasing war bonds.

The Asian sphere is the least developed subject on the site. The site’s developers are in the process of searching for and procuring more materials that focus on D/HH in Asia during WWII. At present, offerings in this sphere include a book excerpt about victims of a Deaf school in Nagasaki, Japan, one of the cities on which the U S dropped an atomic bomb,

Clearly, there is a great worth in collecting and disseminating these materials and the effort has only just begun to document the unique experience of D/HH people during this horrific time in history. Through the personal histories documented on the Web site we can all bear witness, never forget and hopefully work to stop the current genocide and combat racism and bigotry.

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