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WWII's other victims recalled

**Exhibit focuses on German-Americans rounded up by U.S.**  
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**Pioneer Press**

Law enforcement officials in the Twin Cities helped the U.S. government arrest 11,000 German-Americans and nationals during World War II, held many without trial for years in internment camps and deported some to fend for themselves in wartime Germany, a new St. Paul museum exhibit shows.

Hidden on the second floor of the Landmark Center — itself the site of a number of the interrogations — the four-month-old TRACES Center for History and Culture tells how wartime hysteria almost destroyed some American lives. Under government orders, families were split up, breadwinners lost their jobs and homeowners lost their houses.

It's a little-known story. So far it has largely gone unacknowledged by Congress, which has apologized for the wartime internment of 120,000 Japanese-Americans and nationals.

But World War II historian and TRACES Executive Director Michael Luick-Thrams said understanding how the federal government could mistreat its own citizens is key to understanding today's civil liberties debate over the war on terrorism. "If U.S. citizens could be interned with no legal representation in the 1940s," he said, "we see no reason why it couldn't happen again."

TRACES has what Luick-Thrams calls the world's largest collection of German-American internment photos, and it is the only permanent exhibit of its kind in the world.

The internment exhibit is one of a number of WWII subjects the museum covers, most of which have a Midwestern angle. They include information on the Midwestern soldiers held in prisoner-of-war camps in Nazi Germany, German POWs held in the Upper Midwest and Holocaust survivors who fled to the Midwest.

The internment section is perhaps the most striking, and TRACES is sending a traveling version of it to sites in half a dozen states in March.

Its stories tend to share a thread: German immigrants settle in America and start families but maintain ties through German cultural organizations. As war hysteria builds, overly suspicious residents — many of whom have an ax to grind — pass rumors to federal agents. Officials begin tapping phones, intercepting mail and secretly searching immigrants' possessions.

With a knock on the door in the middle of the night, the families' problems begin. In numerous placards, vintage artifacts and videos, stories such as these emerge:

- Walter Greis, an American from Milwaukee, served in WWII. His two American brothers, German parents and German-born brother sat in internment camps — for about two years after the war had ended.
- Art Jacobs, an American boy from Brooklyn, was interned with his American brother and German parents and eventually "repatriated" to Germany, where the U.S. Army imprisoned him at age 12.
- Eddie Friede, a German-Jewish lawyer, fled the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in Germany only to be arrested while selling Viennese pastries in San Francisco and held

for six months at Fort Lincoln near Bismarck, N.D.

In a bizarre, even lesser-known twist, such internees often shared camps with more than 4,000 Germans and German-Americans who had relocated to Central and South America only to be taken from those countries as part of a U.S.-sanctioned roundup.

It's not known how many Minnesotans were interned. The FBI arrested 27 German-Americans and nationals in Minnesota during the war. But Jacobs, the former internee who now runs an internment Web site, said the number is probably much greater, because records do not list the interned family members of those arrested. Internees found themselves surrounded by barbed wire and guard towers at more than 60 detention centers across the country.

Closer to home, some were held at the Ramsey County Jail, St. Paul's Home of the Good Shepherd and Camp McCoy in Sparta, Wis.

Even Ellis Island, the symbol of freedom for many immigrants, held internees — though Luick-Thrams said museum officials there don't acknowledge it. Neither do many American government officials and that disturbs a number of German-Americans.

"I want the government to publicly acknowledge that they interned Germans," said Eberhard Fuhr, an 80-year-old former internee from Chicago. "I don't see what the hell the big mystery about it is, why they have to keep it quiet."

After all, Congress decided in 1988 to apologize and pay compensation for its internment of Japanese-Americans. In 2000, it acknowledged violating the civil liberties of Italian-Americans, an estimated 2,500 of whom were interned during wartime.

It's unclear why that hasn't happened with Germans. TRACES consultant Karen Ebel, an internee's daughter who has helped U.S. Sen. Russ Feingold of Wisconsin pursue legislation acknowledging the German-American internments, gave some possible reasons: preoccupation with the Sept. 11 attacks and the war in Iraq, which makes any talk of civil liberties sensitive; lack of a strong German-American lobby; and fear that acknowledgement would lead to costly reparations for Germans as well as other ethnic groups.

Yet Ebel and Luick-Thrams contend that acknowledging the internment of German-Americans is key to preserving civil liberties today.

"Certainly over 50 percent of Minnesotans and Iowans are of German ancestry, so it hits close to home," Luick-Thrams said. "If you can be interned — and are part of the majority — anyone can be interned."

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