

# Holocaust remembrance speaker 'lucky to survive,' and share Sonja's legacy

By Michael Tuttle

CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

The speaker at this year's Holocaust remembrance program said he was "lucky to survive" and be able to share the story of his cousin Sonja's imprisonment in Nazi concentration camps.

Dr. Robert Fischl told NSA-Philadelphia employees April 23 that he was a third-grader in 1939 when the German Gestapo, their secret state police, took over his family's house in Czechoslovakia, forcing them to move in with his grandparents in Prague.

His family eventually escaped to Israel. But Sonja, two months older than Fischl, and her family were taken to the Terezin concentration camp just outside of Prague. She died in 1944 after being sent to the Auschwitz death camp.

Fischl is a retired Drexel University engineering professor and now presents Sonja's story to schools and other organizations on behalf of the Goodwin Holocaust Museum and Education Center.

Defense Logistics Agency Troop Support's Equal Employment Opportunity and Diversity Office and NAVSUP Weapons Systems Support's Equal Employment Opportunity Advisory Committee hosted the program.

Before introducing Fischl, Navy Capt. J.B. Theriault, NAVSUP WSS comptroller, noted that the 2014 Days of Remembrance marks the anniversaries of two events in Holocaust history: the refugee crisis in the spring of 1939 and the deportation of Hungarian Jews five years later.

This year's theme, *Confronting the Holocaust: American Responses*, is meant to invite reflection on confronting mass atrocities, including American responses to the persecution and murder of European Jews during the Holocaust, according to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum website.

Before escaping to Israel, Fischl's family wanted to move to America. But immigration policies then made it difficult for refugees to enter the country.

After Fischl finally arrived in the U.S. in 1949, he said he



photo by Ed Maldonado

Dr. Robert Fischl tells NSA-Philadelphia employees about his cousin Sonja's imprisonment in Nazi concentration camps during a Holocaust Remembrance program April 23. Defense Logistics Agency Troop Support's Equal Opportunity and Diversity Office and NAVSUP Weapons Systems Support's Equal Employment Opportunity Advisory Committee hosted the program.

**For more on Sonja Fischer:  
[www.sonjaslegacy.com](http://www.sonjaslegacy.com)**

wanted to forget about the Holocaust. But that changed when he took his family to visit Prague in 2000.

At a museum, they saw artwork made by children at the Terezin camp

and recognized his cousin Sonja's name as one of the artists. He then began showing Sonja's work, including drawings of the camp and a water color of their grandparents' house, and sharing her story.

Evelyn Smith, from Customer Operations, said she was struck by Fischl's ability to shed light on the thousands of children who suffered during the Holocaust by sharing Sonja's story.

"Through her memory, he was able to give a face to all of the young victims of the Holocaust," Smith said. "Without ever expressing bitterness, hatred or even using words that would suggest such, Dr. Fischl was able to convey the injustice and atrocity of a tragic period in world history." 🇺🇸

**EEO Name change: EEO is now DLA Troop Support's Equal Employment Opportunity and Diversity Office.**