

'Nazis must never come...'

Skokie president vows fight-in court

By Marcia Kramer

Albert J. Smith wasn't able to fight the Nazis in World War II so he's waging his own battle against them now.

Smith is the village president of Skokie and in the forefront of the village's efforts to keep a small band of Nazis from marching there. His battleground for the fight is in the courtroom; his weapon is the past.

"I know so many people with tattoos on their forearms who tell me what they went through and how they still wake up with nightmares," he said in an interview. "We who weren't there just can't understand the depth to which those people have been scarred.

"And that is why the Nazis must never come here."

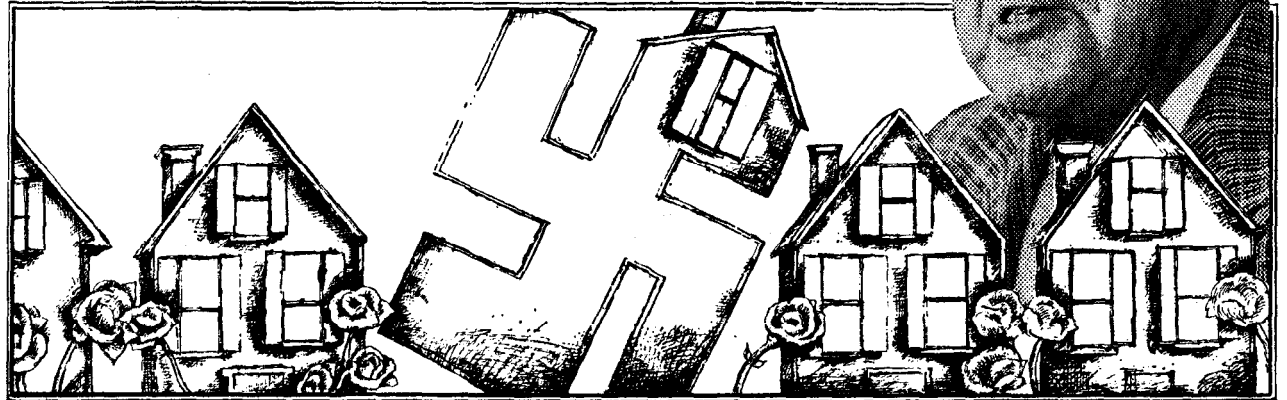
AS A DEVOUT ROMAN CATHOLIC, Smith, 63, may seem an unlikely person to be spearheading the heavily Jewish suburb's campaign. He attended parochial schools in Rogers Park and Evanston, where he grew up, and the University of Notre Dame. He goes to mass weekly at St. Lambert Church in Skokie.

But to Smith and others, the effort to keep the Nazis out of Skokie transcends religious lines. He has received more than 400 letters in the last two weeks alone from around the country and abroad, more than 90 per cent opposed to the Nazis.

"A good deal of the letters I am getting are from Christian people who lost their father or a brother or an uncle or cousin or a husband in World War II fighting Nazism," he said, motioning toward a stack of letters on his desk. "They don't like the idea of Nazis coming to Skokie or anywhere else."

LIKEWISE, THE VILLAGE BOARD consists of both Jews and Gentiles. But every vote on the Nazi question has been unanimous: Fight them.

So far, however, the village is not faring well. A U.S. District Court judge has struck down three ordinances the village



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board passed to keep the Nazis out. The village is appealing.

To Smith, it's a moral as well as a legal issue. "How do you decide who gets the First Amendment rights" of free speech and assembly? he asked. "I'll tell you how. The only people who can't are those who can be proven to be responsible for 10 to 20 million murders.

"When you're talking about Nazis, you're talking about murder, genocide, hatred. . . .

SMITH TRIED TO FIGHT the Nazis when World War II broke out but was classified 4-F because of a bone infection that developed in his left leg when he was 6. He appealed to President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The reply came back: Sorry, son, it would take an act of Congress, and they're a little busy now.

He watched, frustrated, as friends, cousins and brothers-in-law trooped off to war, and listened, horrified, as they came

back and told what they had seen.

The years since have been good to Albert Smith. He and his wife bought a house in Skokie and reared their family there. He entered politics after a friend challenged him to "put up or shut up" and is now in his fourth term as president — the longest anyone has held that office in the village — winning by a slightly larger margin each time. His business has grown, and he is now an independent trader in soybean futures at the Chicago Board of Trade.

But rumblings by the Nazi group last year that it wanted to march through Skokie interrupted the calm and brought back the memories of the war years.

Albert Smith still walks with the limp from his childhood infection. But this time, he says, the government can't keep him from fighting Nazism. "Whatever we have to do," he said, "we will do. We will be ready."