

JDL has day in the Skokie sun

The man in the white knit shirt stood at the fringes of the crowd listening to the speeches. The speakers told him how Jews should be proud and unafraid and how they should fight Nazis.

Every few moments, the woman at his side would translate the words into Yiddish.

They were in Skokie, at the Jewish Community Center, where a group of about 100 Nazis was supposed to march July 4. The Nazis had picked Skokie as their target because it was, in their words, "a Jew suburb."

A few days before the Fourth, the Nazis were advised by their lawyers in the American Civil Liberties Union to delay and wait for the courts to make their march legal. Several hundred Jews and Jewish supporters went out to Skokie to rally anyway.

A BUSLOAD OF YOUNG men and women from Jewish Defense League chapters in New York and New Jersey stood in front of the community center. They wore khaki uniforms, dull-black motorcycle helmets, and shiny black combat boots.

One of their leaders, wearing a dark blue ski mask in the baking heat, practiced karate kicks. The crowd applauded.

"We came here to break Nazi heads," Simon Greenstein, chief of security for the New York JDL, said, "If the Nazis had shown up, they would have seen another-type Jew. They would have seen a fighting Jew."

Although both the JDL and Nazis are theatrical, neither side can be taken lightly. Some 50 nightsticks, clubs, baseball bats and lead pipes were confiscated from the JDL when it showed up in Skokie. Early Sunday, a Nazi was arrested in Chicago while carrying a .357 revolver, a 7-inch dagger and a 5-inch pocket knife.

IN A CERTAIN PERVERSE sense, both sides need each other. The JDL needs the Nazis to convince complacent, middle-class Jews that they do have real enemies. The Nazis need the Jews as an object of their hatred and a reason for existing.

But on Monday in Skokie, it was like a picnic where the ants refused to show up.

But that did not stop the speakers. Rabbi Joel Lehrfield, whose congregation is in Lincolnwood, quoted the Psalms of David, where

Roger Simon



the name of God is blessed because He "trains my hands for war and my fingers for battle."

The message was not lost on the crowd. "I am not Jewish and I am here," said Etta Alejandro. "I live in Chicago near Wrigley Field, but I took an L and then a cab. I wanted the Nazis to show up. I am a fighter, not a lover."

Like many in the crowd, Mrs. Alejandro knew the arguments against being there. The Chicago media were virtually unanimous in editorially advising the Jews to ignore the Nazis.

"Ignore it and it will go away," she said with contempt. "That is what they tell us. But I will tell you something. That was the exact mentality of the Germans in the 1930's.

AND THAT WAS THE exact message of JDL founder Meir Kahane, who addressed the crowd on a bullhorn after being lifted off his feet by well-wishers.

"More than 50 years ago, a comical man with a comical mustache and 11 men began a small and insignificant movement in a beer hall in Munich," he said. "From those 11 followers came thousands and from the thousands, millions, and from the millions came the Holocaust."

A separate coalition made up of radical groups urged the Skokie rally to join it in a march on Nazi headquarters in Chicago.

Kahane vetoed the idea. "Nazis you don't demonstrate against," he said, "Nazis you either do nothing with or physically break their heads. If not worse."

About 150 persons marched on the Nazi headquarters on Chicago's Southwest Side anyway. About 15 uniformed Nazis stood outside carrying chains, tire irons and auto jacks. The two groups shouted back and forth for a while, and then parted. There were no arrests there or in Skokie.

KAHANE SAID HE was pleased with his rally. He said he had gotten his message across. "I tell you as a rabbi," Kahane said to the crowd, "that violence is terrible but sometimes necessary. If they use the sword, let us use the sword."

"The crowd was middle-class, well-to-do," Kahane said later. "That is good. We have radicalized — in a good sense — the Jews of

Skokie. We are a catalyst, forcing the Jews into things they never were."

After the speeches, Kahane signed a few autographs as the JDL signed up new members, Kahane will soon be back in Israel, where he lives. "I have to finish my reserve service in the Israeli army," he said. "I am with an anti-aircraft unit.

"But if the Nazis try to come to Skokie, I will be back."

The crowd dispersed slowly, breaking up into small groups, arguing here and there over what was heard. Some bought buttons from the JDL showing a boot with the Star of David crushing a swastika.

THE MAN IN THE white knit shirt still stood to one side and I asked him how he felt, if his mind had been changed one way or another, if he thought it was really necessary to take the Nazis seriously.

The woman at his side translated into his ear. He turned and made a fist, raising his arm. I thought it was a sign of anger, but I was wrong. He turned his forearm toward me, and on it was a blue tattooed line. The numbers given him in the Nazi death camp were unfaded by time as his memory was unfaded by time.

He didn't say anything. He didn't have to.



RALLYING in SKOKIE even though the Nazis didn't show up, Rabbi Meir Kahane, Jewish Defense League leader, huddles with the Rev. C. H. Turner, of the Martin Luther King Jr. Movement.



GATHERING at the Meyer Kaplan Jewish Community Center in Skokie, several groups listened to a number of speakers denounce the Nazis. Ralph Locker a JDL official, uses

a bullhorn to get his message across. The JDL did not join a later march on the Nazi headquarters in Chicago. (Sun-Times Photos by Larry Graff)