

PIUS XII'S HEROISM

Nikolaus Kunkel served in the German Army at the time of the Holocaust. In a recent interview, he credited Pope Pius XII with saving the lives of many Jews, arguing that less would have been saved had the pope been more vocal in his public pronouncements condemning Hitler at the time.

Kunkel recalled that German troops were told in October 1943 to round up all the Jews in Rome, numbering some 8,000 to 9,000. But because most took refuge in the Vatican, only 1,000 were actually arrested. Kunkel also said the German army had been ordered to draw up plans for the forcible occupation of the Vatican and the arrest of Pius XII. The plans never materialized, he said, because the pope delicately and effectively dealt with the Nazis by choosing not to be confrontational.

It is worth remembering that during the war many Jews begged the pope not to appear too forceful in his public statements on Hitler for fear of antagonizing the Fuhrer any further. While today's revisionists find this position unacceptable, the view held by Nikolaus Kunkel is persuasive: unlike the pope's critics, Kunkel is not hamstrung by ideology and speaks from experience.

But don't expect Kunkel, now 80, to be interviewed by "60 Minutes." They'd prefer to deal with James Carroll and other foes of the Church.