

A&M history prof fascinated by wartime Nazi Germany

By CRAIG RENFRO
Reporter

You walk into his office and first thing that catches your eye are the autographed pictures of The Lone Ranger and Tonto, Superman and The Cisco Kid and Pancho. The second thing you notice are the dozens of books on wartime Nazi Germany.

The office belongs to Dr. Arnold Paul Kramer, 43, a history professor at Texas A&M. The pictures are reminders of his youth. The books are reminders of the brutal past.

Now Kramer has just finished his fourth book, "Hitler's Last Soldier in America." It is about George Gaertner, a former Nazi prisoner of war and the longest running fugitive on the FBI's Most Wanted List.

Kramer has been in the history department at A&M for 12 years and been promoted to full professorship.

The classes he teaches cover the horrors of wartime Nazi Germany, an area of study that has fascinated him for years.

"It is like looking at a tarantula in a glass cage," Kramer says. "We are attracted to it because it is both scary and evil and the glass is all that separates us from that evil becoming reality."

Kramer received a bachelor of science degree in German history and chemistry from the University of Wisconsin in 1963. He also received a diploma in German history from the University of Vienna, Austria, in 1964. In 1970 he got his doctorate in German history from the University of Wisconsin.

Kramer has devoted his adult life to researching wartime Germany and has been well rewarded for his efforts.

"I'm doing what I want to do and getting paid for it," Kramer says. "You can't beat that, can you?"

In 1983 he was awarded the Texas A&M University Association of Former Students Distinguished Achievement Award in Teaching. While awards are nice, Kramer says he would rather be doing research.

"I'm curious as a cat," Kramer says. "The more I learn, the more I can pass on to my students."

Kramer began his career as a

teaching assistant at the University of Wisconsin in 1968. From 1970 to 1974 he was assistant professor of history at Rockford College in Rockford, Ill. While at Rockford, he wrote numerous articles and technical papers about Israel, Russia and Germany.

In 1974 he came to A&M as an associate professor of history. Here he has had his greatest success.

"The history department at A&M ranks with some of the best," Kramer says. "We are strong in American history, military history, women's history and Nazi Germany history."

Because he has a background in chemical engineering, Kramer was chosen to head a project that served as the principal investigator for the German Document Retrieval Project. The project has received a fellowship for the last 10 years from Dow Chemical, Union Carbide and Shell Development.

In 1977 he appeared in Time magazine and testified before the U.S. House of Representatives' subcommittee on his presentation, "Coal Conversion: Liquefaction and Gasification."

As a result of his research he received the Congressional Award from the Missouri House of Representatives for research on German synthetic fuel.

While he is intrigued with research on the chemical warfare efforts of Nazi Germany, he is even more fascinated by the horror and death of the Holocaust.

You walk into his office and first thing that catches your eye are the While Kramer enjoys researching the chemical warfare efforts of Nazi Germany.

Kramer says he accepts the findings of the experts but is upset that Mengele could not be found alive and brought to trial.

"Mengele's an animal," Kramer says. "Anyone who can kill that many people and can perform human experiments without even administering an anesthetic is sick."

While the search for Nazi war criminals is not in the public eye as much as it used to be, Kramer says he thinks that it should be.

"Still thousands are implicated —

the truck drivers, trains, the towns' people and the people who ran the death factories," Kramer says. "They couldn't be oblivious to what was going on."

Kramer also is an expert on POWs. In 1979 he published his second book, "Nazi Prisoners of War in America." He was also a consultant to two film companies that were doing films on German POWs.

Kramer has written articles that appeared in Time, Newsweek and Esquire. He also has written many reviews on books about the Russian and German war machines.

Kramer travels on the lecture circuit when time permits. In 1979 he was awarded the Conference Prize in American history for his paper, "Industrial Data as War Booty: The Technical Oil Mission to Europe, 1945."

In 1984 he appeared at an invitational lecture at the National Archives in Washington. At that conference he presented "Nazis in America: German Prisoners of War 1942-1946."

President Reagan's trip to the Bitburg cemetery upset Kramer.

"It was terribly outrageous on the administration's part," Kramer says. "They were supposed to be looking for SS men's graves and they were over there looking at BMWs."

If it seems that Kramer is a workaholic, he is. But there is another side to the warm, intelligent and sincerely dedicated man.

Kramer received his scuba certificate from A&M and, whenever he has the opportunity to dive, he takes advantage of it. Kramer also earned a pilot's license while teaching at Rockford. He has a stamp collection and plays guitar, mostly country and western.

Kramer speaks German and Hungarian fluently and serves as faculty adviser on the A&M Europe Club. He also is faculty adviser for Memorial Student Center's Great Issues. He has held these positions since 1978.

Reading is one of his favorite hobbies, but most of all he says he enjoys teaching and research. He says he plans to stay at A&M for life.

"When they close the Harrington building down, I'll be the last one in there and I'll turn out the lights," Kramer says.

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