

Fresh investigation into Victorian Holocaust survivor's claims, but he insists ...



I have nothing to hide

THE German and US governments are investigating new allegations that Victorian Holocaust survivor Alex Kurzem's wartime memoir is false.

Mr Kurzem, 75, claims he watched the Nazi-driven execution of his Jewish mother and siblings before becoming a child mascot for a murderous SS unit in wartime Europe.

His international best-selling book *The Mascot* portrayed him as a five-year-old Russian Jew who survived the Holocaust by working closely with an SS extermination squad during World War II.

The memoir was turned into an award-winning 2004 ABC documentary and Mr Kurzem appeared on *60 Minutes* in the US in 2009. A French company is making a film about his life.

Mr Kurzem told the *Herald Sun* he stood by his claims and said Academy Award-winning actor Sir Anthony Hopkins would play him in the film.

"My story is true. I have nothing to hide," he said.

Mr Kurzem refused an offer by the *Herald Sun* to organise and pay for

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medical and DNA tests to help prove his identity and whether or not he is Jewish.

He said those who doubted his story would have to pay him about \$100,000 before he would submit to a DNA test.

"I don't have to prove anything to these people," Mr Kurzem said.

"It is up to them to prove it isn't, so why should I do anything to help them for nothing? If they want my DNA they should pay me for it."

Chief among his doubters are world-renowned forensic genealogist Colleen

Jewish Claims Conference — the US-based body which compensates Jewish Holocaust survivors from funds provided by the German government — to stop paying Mr Kurzem's pension on the grounds he might not be Jewish.

A dossier prepared by Dr Fitzpatrick and her team, which details doubts about Mr Kurzem's authenticity, has sparked three investigations into his background.

The Jewish Claims

Survivors should be anxious and willing to confirm their Holocaust experiences any way they can

— DR COLLEEN FITZPATRICK

Fitzpatrick, senior staff at the Melbourne Holocaust Centre and US-based psychologist Dr Barry Resnick, who lost relatives in the Holocaust.

Dr Fitzpatrick and her team of researchers are attempting to persuade the

Conference is probing the new allegations, as is the German government department which administers the compensation and pensions. The US Attorney's office also is investigating Mr Kurzem.



New doubts: Alex Kurzem today and when he was a child. His memoir is under renewed scrutiny.

Holocaust experiences any way they can."

Mr Kurzem, who migrated to Melbourne at the age of 15, said he stood by the accuracy of his memoir, but would take a DNA test only if he was paid.

"If they want to put \$100,000 up I will go and prove it, whatever they want from me," he said.

Three years ago, Dr Fitzpatrick played a major role in the exposure of Holocaust fakes Misha Defonseca and Herman Rosenblat.

Ms Defonseca was forced to admit her best-selling book *Surviving with Wolves* was fabricated and Mr Rosenblat confessed he had made up much of his memoir *Angel at the Fence*, which Oprah Winfrey declared was the greatest love story she had heard.

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HE SAYS

THE book *The Mascot*, written by Alex Kurzem's son Mark, makes a number of remarkable and shocking claims, including that Mr Kurzem:

WATCHED soldiers execute his mother, brother and sister during a wartime massacre in his Russian village in 1941.

SURVIVED on his own as a five-year-old for nine months by sleeping rough and foraging for food during one of the coldest European winters.

MANAGED to hide his Jewish origins and circumcision from an SS extermination squad after members of it took him under its wing as its mascot.

WORE a miniature German army uniform and carried a gun while accompanying Nazi soldiers on missions that included committing atrocities against Jews.

WAS used by soldiers to hand out chocolate bars to lure Jews into cattle trains destined to travel to Nazi death camps.

PERSUADED young girls to follow him into his SS camp, where they were raped and beaten by the soldiers who had made him their mascot.

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THEY SAY

DR Colleen Fitzpatrick (below) claimed she and the team of experts working with her had doubts about the truth of some of Alex Kurzem's account of his wartime experiences because the team's research allegedly revealed:

SEVERAL historical inaccuracies in claims made in *The Mascot* book and documentary;

MR Kurzem said the executions he claims he witnessed of his family and 1600 other

Russian villagers in Koidanov were done over two days whereas reliable

witnesses to the 1941 massacre have testified the killings were committed in only a few hours;

HISTORICAL accounts indicate Mr Kurzem would have been at least nine and not five when he was supposedly taken in by soldiers, yet he claims he did not know his name or those of his parents or siblings or the village where he came from;

CLAIMS that as a child Alex survived alone in the forest around Minsk for nine months during the winter of 1941 were unbelievable because the winter that year was the coldest on record, leading to the Baltic Sea freezing for the only time in recorded history.

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