

MEN of GOODWILL

Story by Elizabeth Applebaum ■ Photography by Glenn Triest

Bernard Gross can feel the souls of soldiers every time he enters the shrine at the Jewish War Veterans building in Southfield. "There's something here," he says, walking slowly around the dark room. "Do you get the feeling they're looking at you? I get it every time I walk in here. I feel their *neshomas* (souls)."

The room is filled with photographs of young men. Some are smiling. Some are wearing uniforms. Some have curly hair. Some have glasses. Some are so handsome they almost take your breath away.

They're all dead.

The photos hang in a room used as a shrine to Jewish vets from Michigan who died in the wars.

For most people, thoughts of soldiers are like wisps of dreams or the smell of a sweetheart's long-forgotten perfume: distant, melancholy, revived only on rare occasions.

But for Mr. Gross, publicity chairman for JWV Post 510, and other Jewish war veterans, the memories of men who died fighting for freedom must be kept alive. Soldiers who linger in veterans' hospitals must be cared for. New U.S. citizens and Soviet Jewish veterans must be welcomed. Money must be raised for scholarships for deserving students. Shelters must be found for homeless veterans. American values must be preserved and defended.

Even with these projects, and others, in hand, JWV members are concerned the

community knows little about their organization, and they constantly fight an image as a group of old men who do little more than play bingo.

The local JWV numbers 1,000 members, 10 posts of male members and eight auxiliaries of women. Most men are World

They were ready to die for their country. Now, members of the Jewish War Veterans fight to keep alive the memory of fallen comrades.

War II veterans, though some survived Vietnam and the Korean War. It is one of 27 JWV chapters nationwide whose projects are funded mostly through dues, bingo and donations.

The organization is reaching out to younger Jews. In 1988, the local JWV started two descendants' chapters, which now have 36 members. The older JWV

At right, Jack Schwartz looks through a book containing photographs of fallen Jewish soldiers. A page is turned each day so all will be remembered, if only for 24 hours a year.

members hope some of these men and women will be around to guard their memories, just as the vets now care for soldiers who preceded them.

"We hope they'll carry on," says Michigan JWV Commander Ely Katz. "We're not going to be here forever. The idea is for them to take over and perpetuate what we leave for them."

The oldest active veterans' organization in the United States, the Jewish War Veterans was started in 1896. It was created because of talk at the time that Jews were not interested in serving their country, though over the years this has proven false.

More than 10,000 Jews — 500 of whom were killed — served in the Civil War. Some 5,000 Jews fought in the Spanish-American War. A good 5 percent of the Jewish population — 250,000 — served in World War I; the figure for the rest of the population is 3 percent. World War II saw 10,500 American Jews killed of 550,000 who served. And 150,000 Jews fought in the Korean War, while another 30,000 served in Vietnam.

Pictures of some of those men are in the JWV building.

Men like Gerald Shapson, who was born in Milwaukee and studied at the University of Michigan. Mr. Shapson received the Purple Heart and died in Okinawa. His picture in the shrine is signed, "To Mother."

Men like lieutenant Philip Bernstein, who attended Central High School and Wayne State University. He died in Germany when he was 29.