John Demjanjuk Biography

John Demjanjuk

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Contents

John Demjanjuk Biography.....1

Contents.....2

Biography.....3

Biography

Born in Ukraine, John Demjanjuk immigrated to the United States after World War II and became a citizen. A retired auto worker living in Ohio in the 1980s, Demjanjuk had his citizenship called into question by government officials amid an investigation that led to the allegation that he was the notorious Ivan the Terrible, a guard who ran the gas chambers in the Nazi death camp at Treblinka, Poland. In 1981, in the United States District Court for the Northern District of Ohio, a judge considering the allegations ruled that Demjanjuk was, in fact, a Nazi war criminal. As such, the judge stripped Demjanjuk of his citizenship and returned him to Israel, where he faced the death penalty.

In Israel, Demjanjuk was sentenced to death for the crimes of Ivan the Terrible, but won release on appeal when further evidence from the Soviet Union indicated that he might not be Ivan. Based upon this finding, the Israeli government returned Demjanjuk to the United States. In 1998, Demjanjuk regained his citizenship. The following year, the United States government sought to revoke his citizenship once again in light of his alleged failure to reveal that he worked as a prison guard at three Nazi concentration camps during World War II. In response to the allegations, Demjanjuk asserted that the charges amounted to double jeopardy. Demjanjuk also claimed that the allegations were false. He stated that the Nazis captured him as a prisoner in 1942, after which he was forced to work as a laborer for them. In 2000, Demjanjuk filed a $5 million lawsuit against the United States government, claiming that its attempts to strip him of his citizenship amounted to mental torture. United States District Judge Paul Matia dismissed Demjanjuk's lawsuit, however, explaining that the doctrine of sovereign immunity protects the government from such lawsuits.

In May of 2001, Demjanjuk was scheduled to go on trial again, this time for citizenship revocation proceedings. The government alleged that Demjanjuk applied for refuge in the United States under false pretenses, and thus invalidated his claim. Demjanjuk denied the allegations.