

# How Arno Klarsfeld Sent Touvier to *Le Slammer*



**WAITING FOR TOUVIER: Arno Klarsfeld as a child with his parents, the famed Nazi-hunters, Serge and Beate.**

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In the recent trial of Paul Touvier, the first Frenchman ever charged — and convicted — of crimes against humanity, the sense of historical drama would have seemed hopelessly absent from the courtroom if not for a 27-year-old lawyer who cre-

ated a greater stir even than the accused.

Arno Klarsfeld, the son of the famed Nazi-hunting team of Serge and Beate Klarsfeld, became an overnight celebrity and the darling of the French press when he took over the prosecution of the Touvier case. He cut a dashing figure in his

tight-fitting Western jeans, Western boots peeking out from beneath his lawyerly robes. Indeed, he often seemed as if he'd be more comfortable playing at a rock concert than addressing a somber court.

He stood out even more once he began to challenge not only the accused, but his own colleagues on the prosecution team. Mr. Klarsfeld, the youngest of the more than two dozen lawyers representing the victims of both Touvier and his pro-Nazi militia, chose to read from a prepared text. "People are trying to deceive you," Mr. Klarsfeld told the jury at one point, speaking not of Touvier's attorney, but of the prosecutors, who in keeping with the definition of what constitutes crimes against humanity under French law, sought to prove that Touvier had acted on German orders when he ordered the killing of seven Jews at Rillieux-la-Pape in 1944. Mr. Klarsfeld wanted to show that Touvier had acted on his own initiative. As the prosecution fumed, he proceeded to

*Please turn to Page 4*

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*Continued from Page 1*

pick apart, piece by piece, the case his colleagues had so carefully mounted. One misstep, the prosecution feared, and Touvier's crimes would be redefined as "war crimes," which are subject under French law to a statute of limitations, and Touvier would have walked.

## New to Bench

When Paul Touvier was sentenced to life imprisonment, the greatest punishment under French law, Arno's parents cheered. For Serge and Beate Klarsfeld, who've devoted their lives to tracking the murderers of the Holocaust, their young son's lonely course made him into a hero of sorts.

"From the moment we learned

that Touvier would finally be brought to trial, it was agreed that Arno would go to battle," Serge Klarsfeld told the *Forward*. "It was a very, very great satisfaction for Beate and me to see him go to battle alone and have the courage to fight not only the defendant, but the prosecutors [and their] own definition of crimes against humanity."

While relatively new to the bench, Arno Klarsfeld, the grandson of a Wehrmacht soldier and of a Romanian Jew who died at Auschwitz, and whose name he bears, was groomed to be a Nazi hunter. He was only two years old in 1968 when his mother, Beate, carried him in her arms to Germany while waging her campaign against the West German chancellor, Kurt-Georg Kiesinger, a

former Nazi official. In her autobiography, Mrs. Klarsfeld recalled how, when an aide to Kiesinger advised him to hold little Arno in his arms as a gesture of good will, the chancellor replied: "He would bite me." Mrs. Klarsfeld described an anti-Kiesinger rally she helped organize where she was accosted by a German woman who proceeded to berate her, saying: "It's shameful to bring up a child [as] a fanatic. The poor kid ought to be in bed. ... He's dead tired." Mrs. Klarsfeld fired back: "It's strange that ... you didn't have any such pity for the Jewish children they jammed into cattle cars before burning up in Auschwitz."