

MILLIONS OF JEWS DIED AT TREBLINKA

By J. V. McAREE

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THERE was never a more terrible story written since the invention of the printed word than the record of the Treblinka extermination camp in Poland which appears in Voks Bulletin, a Russian publication, from the pen of Vassily Grossman. In this desolate region of alternating sands and swamps, interspersed with forests not far from Warsaw, the Nazis destroyed millions of Jews, declare the Russians, men, women and children, in 1942 and 1943. It was the burial ground, the last link in the chain forged by the Nazis, whose purpose was to exterminate the Jewish population of Europe. It is not more the wholesale slaughtering that turns the blood cold when one reads Grossman's narrative, than the apparent delight that the Storm Troopers took in the work. By normal standards they were insane, and their mania was murder. Behind them there was a more subtle cruelty, probably something evolved in the brain of Himmler. They mingled comedy with the horror. They had fun out of it, real convulsive laughs as they looked at the faces of their victims who, when they arrived at the little station of Treblinka, thought they were merely changing trains on their way, perhaps, to liberty, at least to an alleviation of their miseries.

Intended to Be Secret

There was another amazing feature. The murder slaughtering was done in secret. Not even a field marshal of the army was permitted to visit Treblinka. German planes were forbidden to fly over the area on penalty of being shot down. Any one who chanced within a kilometre of the camp was shot without warning. It seems to have been the determination of the Nazi chiefs that when the work of the camp had been completed it would be destroyed and not a trace left to prove what had happened there. There would have been the handful of SS men, and their superiors who planned and directed the whole enterprise. In later years if the Nazis had deemed it necessary to deny even the existence of the camp they thought that no witness could rise up against them. Never was there a more fantastic idea. Though millions perished, some few escaped. In the surrounding country there were thousands of peasants and villagers who, month after month, saw the solid column of black smoke arising from the crematorium. There was a stench of burning human flesh that poisoned the air for many miles around. There were the sinister train movements day and night with passengers on their one-way journey.

Mammoth Exhumation

After the murder camp had been in operation for some months Himmler visited it. Before he left he gave orders that the bodies of his victims who up to this time had been buried in the greatest graves should be dug up and burned. This was a troublesome task, which consumed months. But in the end it was accomplished and thereafter the dead and dying were hurled into huge fires as soon as the murderers had done their work. They were killed in various ways. Often, in order to save ammunition, they were not shot. They were gassed; they were put in chambers from which the air was gradually extracted and thus died of suffocation. Thousands were murdered by their guards with clubs as they walked to their doom. One guard in particular, proud of his strength, used to snatch up children as they passed, and dash their brains out or tear their bodies apart. The prettiest of the young women were raped, and the next morning killed by the guards who had ravished them.

Sold Tickets For Death

There were two camps at Treblinka. One was a labor camp for prisoners of various nationalities, chiefly Poles. They were sent there for trifling offenses which had not merited death on the spot where they were committed. They toiled at many tasks for their masters, and some of them were not killed. The real horror camp was for the Jews. When the trains bearing the prisoners arrived within a short distance of the camp, the regular crews were replaced by SS men; and when Treblinka itself was reached the victims were delighted to see posted on the walls of the station railway time tables, all fictitious. There were no more trains outgoing anywhere. They were at the end. Yet some of the Jews had bought tickets for some other destination, thus ministering to the ghoulish humor of the Nazis. Sometimes they even had welcoming bands at the station. Apparently the basic idea was to conceal from the doomed Jews the fact that they were to be murdered in an hour or two. They were first ordered to strip, and despatched to what were supposed to be bathing stations. They were the death chambers.

World's Greatest Cemetery

While they were being slaughtered the Nazis went through their effects. They were reported to have done this work as honestly as expeditiously, not stealing much themselves. The plunder was sent back to Berlin. The girls were shaved and it is said that tons of their hair were used for mattresses, saddles and other purposes. The mouths of the dead were examined for gold and platinum fillings and these too were shipped back to Germany. Here perished most of the Jews of Germany and Poland who had survived until 1942. In August, 1943, after a conspiracy which lasted over months those

Jews who had been kept as helpers in the extermination of their fellows revolted suddenly. They set fire to buildings, killed many of the SS guards and then fled into the surrounding forest. A few of them escaped. Then the Nazis set about completing the destruction of the camp, for the sound of Russian guns could be heard in the distance. As a finishing touch they set up a farm on the site of Treblinka, and a casual glance would fail to reveal that under the waving grain literally millions of Jews were buried, and then exhumed to be cremated.

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