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ASSASSINATION

During the first five years of their rule in Germany, the Nazis killed
scores of Jews; in the November pogrom of 1938 they murdered hundreds of
Jews; in the weeks of the German-Polish war, 1939, thousands of Jewish
civilians were tortured and slaughtered by the Germans; selective murder
of individual Jews was going on in all other occupied countries (hostages,
shootings). Yet the German war on USSR opened quite a new stage in the
extermination of Jews — their extermination by the tens of thousands.

A. The Successive Periods of the Process of Asssination

Paralleling the Movement of German Armies in Eastern Europe

The whole campaign of the mass extermination of Jews shows several
clearly distinctive periods: during the first six months (June-November 1941)
it spread exclusively over the newly occupied territories in Poland and
Bessarabia, with one single exception — the slaughter of 12,000 Jews in Iasi
(Romania) on June 29, 1941. In November 1941 the campaign of mass extermina-
tion begins to spread over those parts of Poland which had been occupied by
Germans since September 1939, and from there it spreads further all over
the German occupied countries of Europe. By February 1943 already, all these countries had been visited by this process and more than 3 million Jews annihilated. Then comes the defeat at Stalingrad; the pace of the German retreat is speeded up, and along with it, the extermination of the remnants of the Jewish population becomes even more thorough and intensive.

The first wave of the mass extermination of Jews followed exactly the movements of the German army in its campaign against the USSR. The Central Army Group, mixing at Moscow, overrun, on June 27, 1941, the first large Jewish community on its way, Bialystok. The same night the German soldiers surrounded several streets populated by needy Jews and put to the torch all the houses there. The Jews tried to escape in all directions, but the whole place was so closely and so efficiently guarded by the Germans that almost no one was able to make good his escape. Men, women, children, ran aimlessly among the burning houses, screaming and praying in anguish, while the Germans poured them down with machine-guns and rifles or threw them alive into the fire, shooting mockingly: "This is the thankfulness of the Bolsheviks for you!" More than 1,500 Jews were locked in the Great Synagogue and burned there.
The Ninth Army Group reached in Bestartpola, and already on June 25, 1941 the German soldiers started the first pogroms in the suburbs of this city. They broke into Jewish houses, looting and snatching with rifle butts the heads of all grown ups they could find, and stabbing with their bayonets children to death. Soon the pogrom spread all over the city; all Jews found in the streets were murdered on the spot. Jewish houses were attacked, their inmates assembled in courtyards and basements and put to death. Several hundred Jews were brought to the bank of the River Vilija (Dniepr). There they were forced to dig with bare hands their own graves and then shot. Another group consisting of hundreds of Jewish men were locked in the garage "Metkino" and for hours cruelly tortured there: the German soldiers tore out with vice the genitals of their victims, cut out their tongues, put out their eyes, chopped off their limbs; all this was done under uproarious laughter and to the tunes of merry music played on an accordion.

More than 50 Jews lost their lives in this ghastly butchery.

In Kiga and Drinok, in Hink and Imov, in hundreds of towns and villages, the same story repeated itself on and on. Yet, the regular German Army could not waste too much time and energy on the extermination of Jews; it found itself locked in a deadly fight with the Red Army, and its actions against
the Jews showed rather, for all their zeal and frequency, a superficial
calming. They killed ten, fifteen, in some cases even 25 percent of Jews,
and then they had to move on. In all such cases the Gestapo and the power-
ful formations of SS and SD (Sonderabteilung a Secret Field Police) took over
the unfinished job and followed it up methodically. Thus, in Rumbes, the
S.A. Oberführer Major became the custodian of the Jewish population,
with Jordan, a high official in the Gestapo, becoming the custodian of Jewish Affairs.

During the subsequent three months they organized four "actions", killing off at
least 15,000 Jews. Between these actions, which were nothing less than
wholesale extermination of Jews, the Germans continuously resorted to "selective"
murder: gangs of soldiers and Gestapo officials looted Jewish homes, tortured
and killed their inmates. And here again the same thing repeated itself in all
cities and towns conquered by the Germans.

Yet sometimes the German tactics differed: after taking a city they did
not start a massacre at once but waited a few days until a much more complete
and thorough job could be done. Thus, Kiel was entered by the German Army
on September 19, 1939. Nine days later all Jews were ordered to appear
on September 30 at a designated place and to bring along all money, valuables,
and were clothes they possessed. Next day the whole Jewish population appeared at the designated place. Old folks, sick and invalids, all who were unable to walk were brought there on stretchers, blankets or simply on hands. There they were set by Gestapo officials headed by Paul Haduschi and his assistant, Hiedor, who took away from them all their money, valuables and were clothing they were directed, under strong escort, toward the Babi Yar, a deep bleak ravine northeast of Kiev, where they were shot from tommy and machine guns. Children, as very frequently in such cases, were thrown alive into the graves. More than 50,000 Jews were slaughtered there by the Germans.

The case happened in Kharkov, where the whole Jewish population of 17,000 was annihilated with one single stroke a few weeks after the occupation, and in hundreds of other towns and villages.

Yet, this difference of tactics does not amount to very much, and the basic fact remains small, not one single village or hamlet where the Jews, as soon as they fall in German hands, were not made to suffer and to die, and the only factor which determined their fate was time, when was their town or village occupied by the Germans. Mariupol, for instance, was taken on
October 8, 1941, and on October 20, 1941, the whole Jewish population of 9,000
already perished; but Kulta was taken only on November 9, 1941, and that
is the only reason why its Jewish population had a few more weeks of grace
than the population of Mariupol.

Meanwhile the German Government saw itself confronted with a new problem:
prisoners of war who, during the first months, and especially during the
first weeks of the campaign, were taken by the tens of thousands. The question
how to feed and to transport these additional hundreds of thousands of prisoners
all right. But there were so many Communists and Jews among these prisoners,
and they had to be identified and murdered at once. On July 17, 1941,
Heydrich issued a special order concerning the "purge" of prisoners' camps; he
appointed the Major General von Hindenburg and Lieutenant General Hunsgeit,
together with several others, to direct the activities of special squads
entrusted with this task. A German soldier, guardian in a prisoners' camp at
Oles, wrote home: "Naturally we are not treating the prisoners too gently,...
Jewish prisoners are shot on the spot. They must first dig their own graves,
then five of them are bound together so that all fall into the pit at the same
time. About 300 to 400 of these executions take place daily." Another German
soldier testified: "When a new transport of our prisoners arrived, Heydrich, the
commander of the third battalion of the 31st Regiment of the 34th Infantry Division, issued an order to shoot all Jews among the prisoners. The first Lieutenant Weibert took over the execution of this order according to which 3,000 Jewish soldiers were shot in the Shlepsy-Prystrova district during February 1942. I saw with my own eyes how Weibert killed 30 Jews with his own hands in one single day."

November 1941 brought an important change in the whole military situation on the Eastern Front. The offensive against Moscow made no progress at all and seemed to be stopped for good. The whole German Army suffered terribly in the clutches of an unusually cold winter and, in addition to all that, the Russians went over to the offensive and have retaken Rzhev. For the first time the German leaders must have got the idea that it would not be so easy to obtain a final victory, so they tried at least to make the German victory over the Jewish people more decisive and general. Beginning with November 1941, the wave of mass extermination of Jews began to spread also in the opposite direction, toward the East, steadily surrounding all countries occupied by the Germans. "Marthacont" became the first victim: Jews from Volg, Dzh, Pazy, Izbica,
together with many thousand Jews from the Lodz Ghetto, 10,000 in all, were killed in the death camp Chełmno. 15,000 Jews were killed in Rzeszów in November 1941, and 12,000 more a few weeks later.

On Easter 1942 the Lublin Gestapo, headed by the notorious Geha, ordered the entire Jewish population of Lublin, about 60,000 people, to leave the town and to march toward Majdanek, the famous death camp. Geha did such a thorough job that already on April 16, 1942, the German newspaper "Deutscher Taschen" could publish an article entitled: "The Entire Jewish Population of Lublin Ripped Out." Not a trace of Jews was left in the whole district of Lublin, to be sure, with the exception of Majdanek, where so and so many Jews were still waiting for their turn to die. And the Gestapo man, Geha, who became famous now in Lublin, was sent to Grodno as head of the concentration camp there.

In Grodno the mass extermination campaign started in June 1942, when, under supervision of the Gestapo man, Geha, 15,000 were deported to the death camp Belzec - only 6,000 were allowed to remain in the city. A few months later, more had 5,000 Jews driven to a forest near Grodno; there the grown-ups were summarily machine-gunned, the children were thrown alive into the graves and all buried together. The rest, 3,000 people, were sent to the
concentration camp at the Jerusalemska street, where the Gestapo men, 50th, took care of them.

In March 1943, Heinrich Himmler, paid a visit to Poland. During his stay in Poland he learned an order to the effect that 50% of all Polish Jews had to be exterminated by the end of that year. In July 1942 Himmler came to Poland again, according to the Polish underground sources, he declared at a Nazi meeting in Warsaw that:

1) Hitler had personally told him that the Jews had commenced the war and should, for that reason, be punished.

2) The Jews are the scum of the earth and must be converted to dust.

3) All Jews must die, but not before going through suffering and agony.

A special "Vermischungskommission" was organised, with Oskar Fay as Chairman and a large office in Warsaw. This commission had to supervise the work of Jewish extermination in Poland; its members continuously visited different parts of the country and directed the mass slaughter of the Jewish population. Chairman Fay was directly responsible to Himmler.

Less than a week after Himmler spoke these portentous words, there began the extermination of the largest ghetto the world ever saw, the Warsaw Ghetto with its more than half-a-million population. Every day several thousand Jews were
deported toTreblinka or other death camps, and this was done so consistently,
even if with a few interruptions, that by the end of 1942 not more than
40,000 Jews remained in the Warsaw Ghetto. On April 19th, the Germans
entered the Ghetto in order to deport the remainder of its Jewish population.
Yet this time they were met with small arms fire and hand grenades. It took
the Germans 12 days to overcome the desperate resistance of the Jews who
gave up only after the Germans methodically destroyed and burned out the
whole Ghetto with their flamethrowers.

In September 1942 the Germans deported 30,000 Jews from the Lodz Ghetto
to different death factories, sent 15,000 Jews from Holmyn to their death
in Belzec. In Lvov between March 10, 1942 and June 2, 1943, seven formal
actions and numerous informal ones took place; not less than 100,000 Jews, and
probably several scores of thousands more, perished there during these
actions.

The winter 1942-3 brought the first decisive defeat of the German Army
at Stalingrad. The German retreat began, first at the Volga and in the
North Caucasus, then slowly spreading all over the Eastern front, back to
Poland and further back to Germany. This retreat revealed one fact with
absolute certainty: however ruthless the advancing German Army was, however
cruel and destructive the German occupational authorities were—the
nations governed over even themselves and reached such depths of
cruelty and destructive fury that they beggar any description and any im-
agination. The Jews should never be able to enjoy the defeat of their worst
enemies, or, as Hitler put it, the Jews should never celebrate another Purim
(feast of the Jewish nation in memory of their deliverance from destruction)
in his memory. Thus
the most complete destruction of all Jews they could get hold of became one
of the main concerns of the retreating Germans. In Jaslo they flooded
the coal mines and, besides, drowned so many Jews there that more than 20,000
corpses were found there afterwards. In the whole region of Donets, the Germans
did not leave behind one single Jew but a few in hiding. In Kharkov the Germans
took such great pains to kill off all Jews that on the eve of the evacuation
of this city they could bestow upon it the incomparable medal of honor—to be
“Judenrein” (free of Jews). In the whole territory of the Ukraine, in the
thousands of its towns and villages formerly densely populated by Jews, only
some of those Jews survived the German occupation who joined the German partisans.

In Vilna the final liquidation of the Ghettos began in the first days of
September 1941. The SS Feldwebel Wald and Ruggman Rittsel, a former movie actor,
surrounded the Ghetto with military units and let the Gestapo men enter the houses, only to find out that most of the houses were barricaded from within.

To do away with these obstacles, the Germans resorted to dynamite and blasted many houses, sometimes whole blocks away. The Jews tried to save themselves by crawling into the drainspipes, but the Germans filled those pipes with water. Thus, of the 21,000 inhabitants, 2,000 were drowned, blasted or shot, 16,000 were deported to death factories and only 2,000 remained to be liquidated in July 1944 when the Red Army threatened to encircle Vilna. When finally the Red Army entered the city, only a few Jews were found there in hiding; this resulted itself all over Europe and Poland, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that not one single Jew survived the German occupation "legally."

The near annihilation of deported Jews in so-called Transnistria, while perpetrated by Romanians, goes back to German initiative. This applies also to other satellites.

In Yugoslavia, the German Priimbags Division killed in the village of Tarki 16,000 Jews, most of them from near-by Belgrade; many thousands of Jews were sent to the concentration camps of Drava, Rodzno and Novovesan there to perish; many more thousands were sent to the death camps of Poland. In the
year 1944, only 500 Jews remained in Croatia — all in hiding, and not very many were in Serbia, also in hiding. “Legally” only 4,000 Jews lived in Yugoslavia — they all dragged as slave laborers in the far mines, and they all were killed by the retreating Germans, all with the exception of two men who succeeded in escaping and are now alive to tell the tale.

In Hungary, since the German “putsch” of October 15, 1944, several hundred thousand Jews perished as a result of deportations. Yet, there was at least one outright extermination of Jews in Budapest. It started on October 15, 1944, lasted for several days and took the lives of no less than 15,000 Jews.

In the rest of Europe under German rule, the mass extermination of Jews took on the form of deportations towards the East. Everywhere in Eastern Europe the Jews perished in batches of scores and hundreds; they were killed as hostages, tried and executed as saboteurs, starved and tortured to death in concentration and labor camps. Yet the bulk of the West European Jews was deported to the East and perished there in the death camps of Poland and the USSR.
The campaign of methodical mass extermination of Jews which started in
the summer of 1941, confronted the Germans with the problem of how to dispose
of those scores of thousands of bodies they piled up in the conquered territo-
ries. To continue with the practice of burying them everywhere in the
fields and forests would soon have emphasized the fact that the Germans
transformed Europe into a huge cemetery. Besides, in many places the local
population grew restless because of the stench from those poorly dug graves
which surrounded these towns and villages.

There was another idea, too, which haunted the German minds: could not
these bodies be put to some kind of commercial use? Thus the death factories
were built as an attempt to solve these problems. But it took the Germans
many months to strike upon the comparatively best solution, as it can be
sufficiently proved by the existence of such mass-slaughter camps as, for instance,
the forts Nos. 7 and 9 in Ermens or the extermination centre of Chebino. Three
gas-chambers who could escape from the latter camp, told that the killing was
done there with the help of self-propelled gas chambers: "Once the group of
Jews had been jammed inside..., the driver who also served as an executioner,
turned on the gas apparatus. As the gas sucked up from the vents in the
bottom of the body of the truck, anguished cries and groanings could be
heard from the interior of the vehicle. After about fifteen minutes usually,
the noise stopped... The truck was driven to the foot of the mass-grave* and
Jewish grave diggers would be forced to drag the bodies out of the gas chamber
and throw them into a pit.

Thus, Chełmno improved the technique of killing, but not the way how
to dispose of corpses. In Belzec the process of killing was a different one.
The Jews were cremated into special chambers with metal bars on the floor
and walls; then the chambers were filled with water and a powerful electric
current went through those bars. Besides, there was in Belzec a special
building with several gas chambers, and the German scientists seriously
experienced there on Jews with all kinds of poisoning gases they
invented or improved. The children, if healthy, were used as involuntary
blood donors for the German Army. Mostly these children were bleached to
such a degree that they died shortly afterwards. Special factories produced in
Belzec soap and candles, out of Jewish fat; yet, this business was never really
profitable, probably because of the Jews being in the third year of an acute
starvation period and there was not much fat left on their bodies.
The weak point of Belsen was the way the bodies were disposed of...

They, or their remains, were loaded on railway cars and transported to a spot where a group of Jews already prepared a grave, whereupon this whole group was instantly executed. After a few months of prompter operating in high gear, all the fields along the railway were filled with mass graves. Lines of gendarmes and decomposing remains of human bodies were spread everywhere around the graves, and the stench became so intensive, that the peasants of the nearby villages deserted their farms and land, and the whole population of Belsen left this sinister town.

In the death camp of Boliper the process of killing was still more perfected. A special brick building was constructed there, and as soon as about 300 people passed into this building, the heavy doors were locked and an electric engine in an adjoining wing pumped poison gas into it. As a rule, in fifteen minutes all the people were dead; then the floor in the building slid apart automatically and the bodies fell into the basement, from where they were taken in special carts to woods and buried there.

So it went on till the end of 1942, when the fear of eventual defeat or, at least, evacuation of all conquered territories gripped the German hearts. Now it became more urgent than ever to destroy all traces of committed crimes, and the Germans decided to burn the bodies, even those previously buried. Yet the problem of burning Jewish bodies proved to be a very tough one. The Germans kindled huge bonfires, but the bodies just did not want to burn. The reason lay again with the starvation, with the lack of fat in the Jewish bodies. Finally the Germans struck upon the right idea, huge holes were excavated and covered with grates made of rails, the bodies were laid on these grates and intense fires kindled underneath them. How it worked. A special dredge was brought, old graves dug up and many thousands of bodies burned every day. The ashes were collected in sacks and sent to Germany for use as
fertilizer.

Treblinka had a much greater "productive capacity" than Belzec or Sobibor. It had first three gas chambers, then two were added, and it was able to cope with as many as 20,000 people a day. Just as in Sobibor, the corpses were first buried, then burned on huge bonfires.

Majdanek was established in the summer of 1941 as a large concentration camp; in the spring of 1942 an extermination camp was added to it. In all haste, a gas chamber and crematorium were built. Yet, while the gas chamber could "accommodate" as many as 3,000 people a day, the crematorium was not able to burn more than a few hundred bodies a day. Thus, the Germans were forced to resort to extensive burying of corpses.

In the summer of 1942 the extermination business was so flourishing in Majdanek, that the productivity of the gas chamber, too, appeared simply laughable. Three new gas chambers, each of them almost twice as large as the old one, were installed, and a new crematorium built, with five furnaces instead of the former two; besides, these furnaces developed much stronger heat and could burn the bodies twice as fast. But even now the furnaces could not dispose of more than 2,000 bodies a day, while the gas chambers
could kill so many in one single gassing. To help the situation, the Germans killed now and then, huge pyres, burning in this way thousands of bodies.

On November 3rd, 1942, Majdanek had a great day: 18,400 people were killed in this single day. In the official report sent on this day to Berlin, the camp authorities wrote: "The difference between the number of prisoners confined in the camp in the morning and in the evening, is the result of a special annihilation of 18,000 persons."

Oswiecim was the oldest and largest concentration camp in Poland. There were about 200,000 prisoners in this camp, and the regime was so severe that seldom less than 2,000 — and very often more than 3,000 prisoners were killed there daily. Thus, already in the summer of 1941 a special gas-chamber and a crematorium were built there. The productive capacity of these installations was large enough to satisfy the needs of the camp itself. But when, in 1942, the campaign of Jews extermination was put in high gear, the possibilities of Oswiecim appeared to be ridiculously inadequate. In July 1942 Heinrich Himmler paid a visit to the camp and laid down plans how to make Oswiecim the largest death factory the Germans ever established. Four new large crematoriums, each connected with a gas-chamber, were built, able to cremate 500 people in an hour,
12,000 in a continuous work of 24 hours. And still, despite this amazing productivity, so many people were killed on some days in Oswecin, that huge pyres of corpses had to be kindled there.

Not less than 4,000,000 people perished in Oswecin, not less than 1,600,000 of them were Jews. Exhibits H, I, J, K.