

Germans Slaughter 1,500,000 In Gigantic Death Factory

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LUBLIN, Poland, Aug. 27 (Delayed).—I have just seen the most terrible place on the face of the earth—the German concentration camp at Maidanek, which was a veritable River Rouge for the production of death, in which it is estimated by Soviet and Polish authorities that as many as 1,500,000 persons from nearly every country in Europe were killed in the last three years.

I have been all through the camp, inspecting its hermetically sealed gas chambers, in which the victims were asphyxiated, and five furnaces in which the bodies were cremated, and I have talked with German officers attached to the camp, who admitted quite frankly that it was a highly systemized place for annihilation, although they, of course, denied any personal participation in the murders.

I have seen the skeletons of bodies the Germans did not have time to burn before the Red Army swept into Lublin on July 23, and I have seen such evidence as bone ash still in the furnaces and piled up beside them ready to be taken to near-by fields, on which it was scattered as fertilizer for cabbages.

Ten Mass Graves Opened

I have been to Krempitski, ten miles to the east, where I saw three of the ten opened mass graves and looked upon 368 partly decomposed bodies of men, women and children who had been executed individually in a variety of cruel and horrible means. In this forest alone, the authorities estimate, there are more than 300,000 bodies.

It is impossible for this correspondent to state with any certainty how many persons the Germans killed here. Many bodies unquestionably were burned and not nearly all the graves in this vicinity had been opened by the time I visited the scene.

But I have been in a wooden warehouse at the camp, approximately 150 feet long, in which I walked across literally tens of thousands of shoes spread across the floor like grain in a half-filled elevator. There I saw shoes of children as young as 1 year old. There were shoes of young and old men and women. Those I saw were all in bad shape—since the Germans used this camp not only to exterminate their victims, but also as a means of obtaining clothing for the German people—but some obviously had been quite expensive. At least one pair had come from America, for it bore a stamp, "Goodyear welt."

I have been through a warehouse in downtown Lublin in which I saw hundreds of suitcases and literally tens of thousands of pieces of clothing and personal effects of people who died here and I have had the opportunity of questioning a German officer, Herman Vogel, 42, of Millheim, who admitted that as head of the clothing barracks he had supervised the shipment of eighteen freightcar loads of clothing to Germany during a two-month period and that he knew it came from the bodies of persons who had been killed at Maidanek.

Evidence Found Convincing

This is a place that must be seen to be believed. I have been present at numerous atrocity investigations in the Soviet Union, but never have I been confronted with such complete evidence, clearly establishing every allegation made by those investigating German crimes.

After inspection of Maidanek, I am now prepared to believe any story of German atrocities, no matter how savage, cruel and depraved.

As one of a group of nearly thirty foreign correspondents brought to Poland on the invitation of the Polish Committee of National Liberation, I also had an opportunity to sit with the special mixed Soviet-Polish Atrocities Investigation Commission, headed by Vice Chairman Andrey Witos of the Polish Committee, and to question six witnesses, including three German officers—Vogel, Theodore Shoelen and Tanton Earness—who will probably face trial for their part in the administration of the death camp.

Responsible Germans Listed

For the correspondents, the commission's prosecutor, a Pole, summed up the evidence taken. He said it had been decided that these Germans bore the main responsibility for the crimes committed at Maidanek and in Krempitski Forest:

- General Globenik, Gestapo and SS chief of the Lublin district.
- Governor Wendler of the Lublin district, described as a distant relative of Heinrich Himmler.
- Former Governor Zoerner of the Lublin district.
- Lisske, who had charge of all the concentration camps in the Lublin district.
- General Weiss, who was in charge of the Maidanek camp.
- Company Commander Anton Tumann, who at one time had charge of Maidanek.
- Mussfeld, who was in charge of the crematorium.
- Klopmann, who was chief of the German political department in the Lublin district.

It is impossible in the space here available to relate details of all the evidence of crimes we saw and heard, but for the benefit of those who have not had the opportunity to see with their own eyes, here is the story as it came from the lips of a German who had been a prisoner in Maidanek and was left behind by the retreating Germans. He is Hans Staub, a 31-year-old, tall, husky man with close-cropped hair, who had been imprisoned for engaging in black market meat operations in Germany.

Despite German orders that prisoners were to keep out of the crematorium area, he managed to slip inside the brick fence one day and secrete himself about the time a truck loaded with about a dozen persons drove up. Among them was a Polish woman he estimated to have been 28 or 29 years old. The prisoners were guarded by tommy-gunners, who ordered them to alight from the

truck and undress. The woman refused and this enraged Mussfeld, who beat her. She screamed and Mussfeld lost his temper, shouting, "I'll burn you alive."

According to Staub, Mussfeld then directed two attendants to grab the woman and bind her arms and legs. They then threw her on an iron stretcher, still clothed, and pushed her body into the oven.

"I heard one loud scream, saw her hair aflame and then she disappeared into the furnace," Staub said.

According to several witnesses, the peak death production day for Maidanek was Nov. 3, 1943, when for some reason not made clear the Germans executed a total of 18,000 to 20,000 prisoners by a variety of means, including shooting, hanging and gassing.

Camp Covers 670 Acres

This is Maidanek as I saw it. It is situated about a mile and a half from the middle of Lublin on the highroad between Chelm and Cracow. As one approaches he gets a view of the concentration camp almost identical with those pictured in American motion pictures. The first sight is a twelve-foot-high double barbed-wire fence, which was charged with electricity.

Inside you see group after group of trim green buildings, not unlike the barracks in an Army camp in the United States. There were more than 200 such buildings. Outside the fence there were fourteen high machine-gun turrets and at one edge were kennels for more than 200 especially trained, savage man-tracking dogs used to pursue escaped prisoners. The whole camp covered an area of 670 acres.

As we entered the camp the first place at which we stopped obviously was the reception center and it was near here that one entered the bath house. Here Jews, Poles, Russians and in fact representatives of a total of twenty-two nationalities entered and removed their clothing, after which they bathed at seventy-two showers and disinfectants were applied.

Sometimes they went directly into the next room, which was hermetically sealed with apertures in the roof, down which the Germans threw opened cans of "Zyklon B," a poison gas consisting of prussic acid crystals, which were a light blue chalky substance. This produced death quickly. Other prisoners were kept for long periods; the average, we were told, was about six weeks.

Near the shower house were two other death chambers fitted for either Zyklon gas or carbon monoxide. One of them was seventeen meters square and there, we were told, the Germans executed 100 to 110 persons at once. Around the floor of the room ran a steel pipe with an opening for carbon monoxide to escape at every twenty-five centimeters.

Victims' Death Watched

We were told the victims always received

a bath in advance to execution because the hot water opened the pores and generally improved the speed with which the poison gas took effect. There were glass-covered openings in these death chambers so the Germans could watch the effect on their victims and determine when the time had come to remove their bodies. We saw opened and unopened cans of Zyklon gas that bore German labels.

About a mile from the gas chambers was the huge crematorium. Built of brick, it looked and was operated not unlike a small blast furnace for a steel mill, operating with coal as fuel fanned by an electrically operated blower. There were five openings on each side—on one side the bodies were loaded in and on the other ashes were removed and the fire built up. Each furnace held five bodies at a time.

We were told it took fifteen minutes to fill each furnace and about ten to twelve minutes for the bodies to burn. It was estimated that the battery of furnaces had a capacity of 1,900 bodies a day.

Near the furnaces we saw a large number of partial and complete skeletons. Behind a brick enclosure near by were more than a score of bodies of persons who, we were told, had been killed by the Germans on the day the Red Army captured Lublin, which they did not have time to burn before fleeing.

Not far from the furnaces were a large number of earthenware urns, which investigating authorities said witnesses told them were used by the Germans for ashes of some of their victims, which they sold to families for prices ranging up to 2,500 marks.

We saw a concrete table near the furnace and asked its purpose. We were told the Germans laid the bodies of victims there just before cremation and knocked out gold teeth, which were salvaged. We were told that no bodies were accepted for cremation unless the chest bore a stamp certifying that it had been searched for gold teeth.

It is the purpose of the Polish Committee of National Liberation to keep the main parts of Maidanek just as it now exists as an exhibition of German brutality and cruelty for all posterity to see.

M. Witos struck the universal feeling when he expressed regret that the section of American and British public opinion that favors a soft peace with the Germans will not have an opportunity in advance of the peace conference to look at this plain evidence of the brutality of the Germans practiced toward their victims.

Among the few Polish people whom we had an opportunity to talk there is a widespread sentiment for stronger means of vengeance against the Germans, and the belief that some of those directly responsible for Maidanek should be executed in the terrible death camp they themselves erected.

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