



Treblinka:

The Answer to the Advocates of a 'Soft Peace'

All Escape Holes Plugged; Revolt Suppressed With Gun, Club and Rope

by Yankel Vierneck

A transport once arrived from Germany and the new arrivals were put through the usual routine. When the people were ordered to undress, a woman stepped forward with her two children, both boys. She presented proofs of identity, evidencing the fact that she was of pure German stock. She had boarded that train by mistake.

Documents in Order

All her documents were found to be in order and her two sons were not circumcised. She was a handsome woman, but there was a look of fear about her. She clung to her children whom she tried to soothe by saying that their troubles would soon be cleared up and they would return home to their father. She had tears in her eyes while she was saying this, because she was haunted by a terrible foreboding. The Germans asked her to step forward. Thinking that this meant freedom for her and the children, she relaxed.

But, alas, it was decided that she was to perish together with the Jews, because she had seen too much and would be liable to spread information which perforce had to be kept a secret. Whoever crossed Tremblinka's threshold was doomed to die. And, that German woman, together with her children, went to her death with the others. Her children wept just as the Jewish children did, for in death there is no racial distinction, all are equal. Her husband probably fell in battle, while she perished in a camp. . .

Sick Killed

We were fed badly, transports ceased to arrive, hence there were no hapless purveyors of food and old supplies were only grudgingly issued. All we had to eat was mildewed bread which we washed down with water. Malnutrition caused an epidemic of typhoid. Anyone stricken with it was not given medication nor a bed. A bullet through the neck and all was over . . .

Experiments were started with the cremation of corpses. It turned out that women burned easier than men. Accordingly, corpses of women were used for kindling the fires . . . The sight was terrifying, the worst that human eyes have ever beheld. When corpses of pregnant women were cremated, the abdomen would burst open . . .

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At last an "Oberschaarfuehrer" with an "SS" badge pinned to his tunic came to the camp and what he introduced was a veritable hell . . . He put a machine for exhuming the corpses into operation. A fire grate made of railway ties from 100 to 150 meters long, and workmen had to pile the corpses on the grating and set them on fire. I am not a young man and I have seen a lot in my lifetime, but Lucifer himself couldn't possibly have devised a worse hell. Is it possible for anyone to imagine 3000 corpses of people, who but recently had been alive, burning all at once on such an immense pyre? The Germans stood around with satanic smiles on their faces, which radiated satisfaction over their foul deed. They drank toasts with whiskey and liquors, ate, caroused and enjoyed themselves near the hot fire. Thus, even after death, the Jew was of some use. The weather was bitter cold and the pyre threw off heat like that from a stove. And the heat came from the burning bodies of Jews.

Die Fighting

When day came we saw that the yard was littered with corpses. While we were working, the Ukrainian guards told us that the people who had come on that transport refused to be led into the chambers and had begun a dramatic resistance. They smashed all they could lay their hands on and broke open the chests with gold that stood in the corridor leading to the chambers. They wielded sticks and everything they could get hold of to defend themselves. The unequal struggle ended soon, what with bullets flying thick and fast.

By morning the yard was strewn with dead bodies and the improvised weapons the Jews had wielded in their last fight for life, which they lost. Those killed while fighting, as well as those who died from gas, were all horribly mutilated. Some of them had limbs torn off. At dawn it was all over and the rebels were cremated. To us it was one more warning that we could not hope to escape our fate. . . .

Seven Men in Plot

Seven men joined in a plot to dig a tunnel through to escape from the camp. Four of them were caught. They were fiendishly tortured for an entire day, which in itself was worse than death. In the evening, when all hands returned from work, an assembly was called and the four men were publicly hanged. One of them, Mechal, a Jew from Warsaw, yelled out before the noose was tightened on his throat: "Down with Hitler, long live the Jews" . . .

The cremation of the corpses proved a complete success. The Germans proceeded to build additional fire-grates and to augment the crews serving them so as to be able to cremate from 10,000 to 12,000 corpses at one time. The result was one huge inferno. . . .

Healthy looking Jews were not permitted to die easily. A small amount of gas was blown into the chambers with the result that their death agony lasted all night. They had to suffer long before death claimed them. They had to endure

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severe tortures before entering the gas-chambers. . . .

Time and again children were dragged out of their mothers' arms and tossed into the flames alive, while their tormenters laughed, urging the mothers to jump heroically into the fire after their children and mocked them because of their cowardice. I witnessed thousands of such revoltingly horrid incidents.

The younger inmates of our camp were losing patience and were anxious to rebel, but the time was not feasible. We had not as yet completed plans for attack and escape. Contact had not been established with Camp No. 1, but it did not take us long to communicate with the latter again.

Plan Revolt

The date for starting the revolt was fixed for June 15, but as opportunity was lacking, the zero hour was postponed several times and new dates were fixed. The committee on organization used to meet after we had been locked in the barracks for the night. When the rest of our fellow inmates, worn out by the day's toil and abuse, fell asleep, we gathered in a corner of our barrack, in one of the upper bunks, and proceeded with making our plans.

Franz would drag poor devils to the fire-grates, torture them brutally and after they had been beaten to a pulp, kill them and throw their corpses into the fire.

One poor wretch was the so-called "privy-pit boss" (scheissmeister). He was dressed like a cantor and even had to grow a pointed beard. He wore a large alarm clock on a string around his neck. As no one was permitted to remain in the privy-pit longer than three minutes, it was his duty to time everyone entering it. The name of this poor wretch was Julian. He came from Czenstochowa where he had been the owner of a metal products factory.

Once the gate flew open and about 100 gypsies (this was the third gypsy transport to arrive) were marched in. About 20 of them were men, the rest women and children. A few carts followed them carrying all their possessions, filthy tatters, torn bed clothes and sundry junk. They arrived almost unescorted except for two Ukrainians dressed in German uniforms.

Ashes Are Silent

The two guards who brought them in were not fully aware of what it all meant. They wanted to have the matter taken care of with all formality and demanded a receipt. They were not even admitted into the camp and their insistence on a receipt was met with sarcastic smiles. They were informed on the side by our Ukrainian guards that they had just delivered a batch of victims to a death-camp.

They paled visibly and again knocked on the gate demanding admittance, whereupon the "Stabs-schaarfuehrer" came outside and handed them a sealed envelope which they took and departed. The gypsies were gassed just like all the others and cremated. They had come from Bessarabia.

July was drawing to an end and the weather was blistering hot. The hardest work was on the graves.

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The men doing that work were barely able to stand on their feet because of the sickeningly foul odors. About 75 per cent of the corpses had been cremated. All that remained to be done was to grade down the soil and to straighten it out in such a way that not a trace could be found of the crimes committed on that spot. Ashes are silent. It was our job to fill in the empty graves with the ashes of the cremated victims. These ashes were mixed with earth so as to obliterate all traces. A parcel of ground was then gained which had to be utilized in one way or another. It was fenced in with barbed wire, after an additional plot from the other camp had been included, to form a space for planting.

Graves Emptied

When about 75 per cent of the graves had been emptied and the exhumed corpses cremated, the ground was graded, planted over and fenced in with a high fence of barbed wire, along which saplings were set. The Germans were full of pride over what they had accomplished. . . .

Once the Germans threw some burning object into an opened grave to see what would happen. Clouds of black smoke began to pour out at once and the fire that started glimmered all day long. It must be noted in this connection that into some of the graves corpses had been thrown directly upon gassing. The bodies had had no chance to cool off. They were so densely packed that, when the graves were opened on a scorchingly hot day, steam belched forth like from a boiler. . . .

At one time, when the corpses were placed on the fire-grate, an uplifted arm had been noticed. Four fingers were balled into a tight fist, except the index finger, which had stiffened and pointed rigidly skyward as if calling God's judgment down upon the hangmen.

Tormentors Turn Pale

It was a pure accident but, nevertheless, all present were unnerved. Even our fiendish tormentors turned pale and did not turn their eyes away from that ghastly sight. It was as if some higher power were at work. That arm remained pointed upwards for a long, long time. A portion of the pyre had long since turned to ashes but the uplifted arm still called to the heavens above for retributive justice. This small, meaningless incident, however, spoiled the high good humor of the hangmen for a while at least. . . .

Two transports of Poles arrived. I did not see them alive and therefore do not know how they were treated when they had to disrobe and enter the death-chambers. They were gassed just as the others had been. While working on their corpses, we saw that the men had not been circumcized and we also heard the Germans remarking that the accursed Poles would not rebel again.

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