

TREBLINKA
by Rabbi Fred Guttman

If Warsaw Ghetto was Hell on Earth, Treblinka was a different PLANET."

I. TREBLINKA

Small practically unknown town until WWII
Basically was a small RR station located 62 miles from Warsaw
No one would have ever heard of it had we not been taken there.
The site was located on a side spur some 2-1/2 miles from the
station.

TREBLINKA refers to two camps

Treblinka I

Jews & Poles
Concentration camp set up shortly after Germany occupied Poland -
December 1941
Penal & Slave labor camp
Poles there for political offenses mostly
Many survive the war

Jews (How did we get there?)

We were told that we were going to be resettled in the East
Most of us who were in Treblinka I die
We die of hunger, overwork, and brutal beatings or gassing
Treblinka I - operates until July 1944
10,000 people come to Treblinka I
7,000 die - 6,500 were Jews

What was life like in Treblinka I?

Hard work - very little food & clothing, often very cold

Commander Von Eupen

Favorite sport - Horseback riding
Loved to Jump Jewish children - place in rows - how far can the
horse jump

Another Commander - Hans Heinbuch

A teacher, university graduate - Educated and cultured man

What did this make us think?
That we would get them back.
From here the women would be led to the barber where their hair
would be cut - shaved to the skin
We stand there waiting for the barber to finish - without clothes,
cold (winter 20-30 degrees below) - Afraid
Children eyes wide with fear and wonder - seem to silently ask:
"What is all this? What is it for?"
One by one the women emerge
Then we meet two Ukrainian Guards Ivan & Nicholai
They are the "bath masters"
Ivan: beats us sadistically - joking & laughing all the time
Nicholai: looked as though he was spiritually possessed

After beating us - they handed out pieces of stone made to look
like soap - Music played by prisoners.

Why?
To deceive us
Then naked and barefoot we stood in a row, Ready for the "chase"
Before us a 150 yard path which the Germans referred to as
"The Himmelstrasse" - "Way to heaven."
Once we start walking - Guards yell, scream & beat as with whips &
pricked us with bayonets
Now we run.
Macht Schnell - Go quickly -
Big German shephard - "Barry" comes toward us
Excited by our cries, the dog would tear at our flesh (he had been
trained to go for the upper thigh)

And so we ran
Why?
Perhaps the Nazis figured that if we arrived there out of breath that
the effect of the gas would be hastened and the time of the agony
shortened.

And so we ran
To the building with the Jewish star

Why a star?

Perhaps to comfort us
But also
Ivan points to star and says

your state "Jews - you wanted a Jewish state, a Judenstaadt. Well here is
and there is your star."

5 The building - "Der Judenstaadt" - consisted of 10 gas chambers -
delousing chambers on each side.
showers Each chamber measured 25 meters square and about 6'2" high -
& tiles on inside
diesel On the outside of each chamber there was a Russian tank engine -
powered.

You see
Treblinka was a primitive camp.
Did not use Zyklon B
each The exhaust from the engines was hooked up to the air-intake of
chamber

Meanwhile
into Having run down "Himmelstrasse," We continued to run straight
the gas chamber itself
400-500 of us in each chamber
The motor was connected and switched on.
Within 25 minutes, all of us lay dead.
I way this with a euphemistically for:
We really did not die
We all died standing
Legs a& arms entangled
Mothers embracing children
no friend, no foe
No rich, no beautiful, no ugly
There we stood, pressing against each other.
Eyes bulging
noses and Bathed in perspiration and defecation. Blood oozes down our
mouths
All equal
All yellowed by the gas

And so it was
On a "good" day - 1,000's of us would be killed

But what about a "not good" day?
The tank engines were old and frequently functioned poorly or not
at all.
Of course, if they functioned poorly it would mean that we would
suffocate more slowly, with more pain.

As a matter of fact,
Ivan used to brag that sometimes he would merely idle the engine
in order to prolong our deaths.
If there were any of us still alive when it was over, we would be
quickly dispatched by means of a rifle butt, a bullet or a
vigorous kick to the head.

Sometimes
We were left in the chambers all night without the motor being
turned on.
Usually by morning most of us were dead, having died from the
pressure and confinement.
The only ones to survive this were usually our younger brothers
and sisters who seemed to have more endurance.
However, the German revolver soon took care of them.

Treblinka II - Staff
Consisted of 30 SS men, 200 Ukrainians, 700-1000 Jewish workers
- Sondercommando - 1/3 monthly turnover
After the "bath masters" open the doors, the Sondercommando -
Jewish slave prisoners - would pull out our bodies.
The first bodies had to be pulled with hooks but after that we fell in
heaps.
These Jews would take their brothers and sisters to a building
where SS guards acted as dentists and ripped out gold
fillings

After this,
Another group of specialists checks to see whether there are any
jewelry, diamonds hidden in our rectums or in the women's
vaginas.

Then:
The Jews in the Sonder Commando would carry us over to a big pit
They placed us into these pits, head to feet, feet to head
- the "sardine method," in order to put in the maximum number.
The Ukrainians would be beating the Sondercommando all of the
time. Firing shots.

If any of us protested at having to bury our brothers and sisters, having to stand in a pit of blood, pus and stench, we would be immediately taken to and there we would be shot in the back of the neck and our bodies would fall into the ditch.

Many of us got sick and were wounded from the blows.
Those of us in this category were taken to the "sick rooms" where
we were murdered separately.

The nighttime activity for the Ukrainians often consisted of forcibly
having sex with Jewish women

The Camp Commandant, Franz Stangl lived and worked in a
building close to the forest

Once in this area, the Commandant of Treblinka gave a banquet in honor
of the visiting commandant of Belzec, another extermination camp.

During the banquet Professor Doctor (a Prof. of Hygiene at a German
Univ) Fanneusteil made a speech.

During the speech he said,

"Your work is great work and a very useful and very necessary duty.
Treblinka is a kindness and humanitarian enterprise. When one sees the bodies
of the Jews, one understands the greatness of your work."

And so,

We ran to our deaths

Dehumanized

Yet some of us cried, "Down with Hitler!"

Why?

A last act of defiance

Spiritual resistance

Most stories of resistance are buried with the ashes of our brothers
and sisters who perished.

Yet, not only at Treblinka, but at every concentration camp, there
were acts of resistance.

What were some of these acts of resistance?

1. Train pulls in - a young man is prevented from saying good-
bye to his mother. Goes over to a Ukrainian and stabs him with a
pen-knife. As punishment, all the men who arrived on the transport
were shot.

- kills
2. Argentinean Jewish visitor in Warsaw when war breaks out an SS man with a knife.
- automatic
3. Group of men from Grodno refuse to undress. Shot by rifles.
4. Men refuse to leave transport. All taken to the pit and shot.
- bye.
5. A man told to separate from his wife. Wanted to say good-bye. Not allowed. Beats his fists against the guards.
- 17
6. Once - women were running naked on the Himmelstrasse. A year old girl grabs a machine gun and kills 12 Nazis.

Do you think that they did these things to save their own lives?

Answer: No! They were doing this for revenge

Eventually,
Jewish
Treblinka.

Encouraged by the heroism of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising - The prisoners organize and began to plan how to destroy

One of the prisoners, a Jewish locksmith repairs lock on the arsenal, takes
imprint of the key
4 months later another key and entry

Finally August 2, 1943 -
as
usual
The "Disinfector" (a Jewish prisoner) walks around spraying camp
Only this time, spray cans were filled with stolen gasoline.
"Disinfection" took place right under the Nazis noses.
One hour before the revolt one of the Nazis gets suspicious of a Jew
near his home.
A grenade is thrown and a shot is fired.
The other prisoners think that this is the signal to revolt.
Thus the revolt began one hour too early.
Other grenades thrown
The entire camp goes up in flames.
The only thing which did not burn was "Der Judenstaadt," the gas chambers; They could not get close enough to it.
Most everything else destroyed.
Prisoners randomly machined gunned.

200 escape, 12 survive.
Most were turned in by Polish peasants.

August 2, 1943

Was not the last day of Treblinka
As early as February 1943, on orders from Himmler
Jewish sondercommandos were taking bodies out of the burial pits
to be burned at another pit.
The remaining POWs continued to burn bodies.
2-1/2 months later: The Germans had had enough (also Sobibor).
All the remaining buildings including the bath house = Der
Judenstaadt" were blown up.
Probably many other unknown acts of resistance.
The entire area was plowed and sown with fodder, in order to
obliterate all traces of Treblinka.

The Bottom Line

750,000 Jews perish here
Late 1944 Poland liberated
Treblinka had been pillaged by Poles looking for gold teeth and
other treasures.

Of the 750,000 who went to Treblinka, 12 escape, 37 survive the
war

Why did we Jews resist?

- A. Human dignity -
- B. Pride -
- C. Nekamah = Revenge - taking lives with us is resistance

Is there any value to resistance if it fails?

But the revolt failed. 2-1/2 months later, Treblinka gas chambers
close.

So perhaps it was not a failure.

It is clear that the Treblinka revolt - considering the conditions under
which it was organized and carried through - belongs to one of the most heroic
feats of Jewish resistance to Nazism

Resistance = the story of the Jewish people

How we dreamed and hoped
Were martyred
But also resisted

The Resistance of Treblinka (and Warsaw) serve as budes to the future
Struggles for the State of Israel

Resistance People -
Serves as a bridge to our future - yours and mine

Question to you -
Are you resisting?