



Treblinka

Extermination Camp, in the northeastern part of the *Generalgouvernement*. Located 2.5 miles from the train station of Malkinia on the main line running from Warsaw to Bialystok. Treblinka was established in early summer 1942 as part of Aktion Reinhard - the Nazis' plan to exterminate the Jews in the *Generalgouvernement* area. In total, approximately 870,000 people were murdered at Treblinka.

The first transports reached Treblinka on July 23, 1942; including Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto. From that day until September 21, 1942, approximately 254,000 Jews from Warsaw and 112,000 Jews from other places in the Warsaw district were murdered at Treblinka. Hundreds of thousands of Jews from the Radom and Lublin districts of the *Generalgouvernement* were also executed there. In all, approximately 738,000 Jews from the *Generalgouvernement* perished at Treblinka, as well as 107,000 Jews from the Bialystok district. Thousands of Jews from outside Poland were also brought to Treblinka; these included Jews from Slovakia, Greece, Macedonia, Thrace, and some who had previously been interned at Theresienstadt. Altogether 29,000 Jews from outside Poland were murdered at Treblinka, as were 2,000 Gypsies. The mass extermination program was in operation at Treblinka until April 1943, after which only a handful of transports arrived.

From August 1942, Treblinka was run by camp commandant SS-*Obersturmfuehrer* Franz Stangl, who had previously served as commander of the Sobibor extermination camp. Stangl's deputy was Kurt Franz. They were assisted by 20-30 SS Officers (who had participated in the Euthanasia Program), and 90-120 Ukrainian soldiers working as camp guards.

Treblinka was situated in a sparsely populated area that was heavily wooded - this site was chosen in order to conceal the atrocities taking place there. Treblinka contained living, reception, and extermination areas. The extermination area included a brick building that housed three gas chambers. A diesel engine was housed in an adjoining shed - this engine produced the carbon monoxide, which fueled the chambers. The gas flowed through pipes



attached to the ceiling of the chambers, ending in what looked like showerheads. The Nazis arranged the gas chamber in this way in order to create the impression that the Jews were merely entering the building to take showers - not to be murdered. A hallway in the building led to each of the three gas chambers, and in each chamber was another door through which the corpses were removed. About 200 yards away lay the huge trenches where the corpses were buried.

The extermination process at Treblinka was based on experience gained by the Nazis in Belzec and Sobibor- the two other *Aktion Reinhard* camps. When a train made up of 50 - 60 cars, holding some 6,000 - 7,000 people, arrived at the nearby train station, 20 cars were brought into the camp, while the rest were made to wait in the station. The car doors were opened, and SS officers ordered the Jews to disembark. Next, a camp officer would announce to the new arrivals that they had reached a transit camp where they would take showers, have their clothes disinfected, and then travel on to various labor camps. After this announcement, the Jews were taken to "Deportation Square." Men and women were separated - children going with the women. The women and children were made to undress in a barrack, and the women's hair was cut. Naked, they were forced to leave the barrack and enter the "pipe"- a narrow, fenced-in, camouflaged path that led to the gas chambers. After the victims were locked into the chambers, the engine was started and poison gas poured in. Within half an hour, all inside were dead, and the next group of victims would prepare to enter. Meanwhile, the bodies were removed and taken for burial in the trenches. This last job was done by a team of Jewish prisoners, called *Sonderkommando*.

These prisoners were not immediately executed upon arrival at the camp - rather, they were selected carry out tasks such as cleaning the train cars, preparing the victims for their execution, dealing with the possessions and clothing of the victims and handling the dead. In the spring of 1943, the Nazis used the Sonderkommando to cremate the bodies. Most of these Jews were exterminated themselves after a few days or weeks of work, with newer arrivals taking their places.



After a while, the Nazis decided that the extermination process at Treblinka was not efficient enough. Thus, between August and October 1942 10 new gas chambers were constructed there. Furthermore, the Germans added another improvement to their extermination system - those new arrivals who were too weak to walk to the gas chambers unaided were told that they were being sent to the infirmary. They were taken to a closed-in area with a Red Cross flag adorning it; inside were SS officers and Ukrainian guards who murdered them on the spot.

Aktion 1005 - the campaign to destroy all evidence of the Nazis' murderous activities - was launched at Treblinka in March 1943, and lasted until July. After this operation was completed, Treblinka was shut down. Most of the camp structures were destroyed, the ground was plowed and planted over, and the site was turned into a farm that was given to a Ukrainian family.

Hundreds of Jews tried to escape the trains on their way to the camp, but most failed in their attempts. Others attempted to escape the camp itself, but almost all were caught and hanged. Jews from several transports offered resistance in which German and Ukrainian guards were wounded or killed. An uprising was planned when the prisoners found out that the Germans were planning to liquidate the camp, however, the uprising was suppressed and most of the 750 prisoners who tried to escape were caught.

After the war, many of the SS officers who worked at Treblinka were put on trial. Both commandant Franz Stangl and deputy commandant Kurt Franz were sentenced to life imprisonment.