

Austrian Jew, Refugee in Detroit, De

Vienna's Non-Aryans Subjected to Torture

Victim Recalls Many Beatings and Kicks as Large Numbers Were Herded Off to Concentration Camp

Editor's Note—What Austrian Jews suffered in the Nazi anti-Semitic disturbances in Greater Germany which reached their apex in the pogrom that began Nov. 9 and continued through Nov. 11, in 1938, is told in a series of three articles, of which this is the first. The author of the narrative is a native of Vienna who fought in the World War as an officer in the Austrian army and is now a refugee in Detroit. He was one of the 60,000 Austrian Jews who were arrested during the pogrom and one of the many who were sent to concentration camps. For obvious reasons his name must be withheld. The remaining articles will appear in The News Monday and Tuesday.

As Told to PHILIP A. ADLER

My story begins in Vienna. It is the city where I was born and where my family lived continually for many decades. But what happened to me in Vienna could have happened to any Jew anywhere in Greater Germany, for the so-called "Judenaktion," the official name applied to the pogrom of last November, was not an "expression of the soul of the German people," as Nazi officials would have it, but the application to practice, simultaneously at many points throughout Germany, of a diabolical plan carefully prepared long in advance by the Gestapo, or secret police.

On Nov. 10, at 9 o'clock in the morning, I was walking in the streets of Vienna when two civilians stopped me with the question: "Aryan or non-Aryan?"

On my reply, they told me I was under arrest and escorted me to the nearest police station.

There were many people at the station on my arrival. Some, like myself, had been picked up in the street. The majority, I learned, had been taken from their homes early in the morning by police officials equipped with long lists of names and addresses of the men they wanted. We all were crowded into a police cell.

TAKEN TO SYNAGOG

I, together with many young men, was taken to a half-demolished synagog nearby. There we were made to carry stones, brick and lumber, under the supervision of the Schutz Staffel or the S. S., as we call them in brief, the elite of the National Socialist Party.

After several hours of labor, with a Nazi mob raging all around us, we were taken inside this temple. There, with many insulting remarks, we were told that the temple was to be blown up with dynamite and we, "Jewish swine," were to meet our well-deserved end. A fuse was ignited before our very eyes.

The scene was well staged. As the fire crept along the fuse we could hear voices shouting outside: "Two more minutes!" "One more minute!" "Half a minute!" "Fire!"

There came a terrific explosion. I thought the world came to an end. But when the smoke and dust subsided I realized that it was only the distant portion of the building that collapsed. We prisoners were left unscathed. Did the explosion miscarry? Was the entire affair staged just to give us a taste of the horror of death? I am in no position to answer.

MINUTE EXAMINATION

After this brief intermission we were put back to work clearing up the debris. In the evening we were taken back to the police station. There an army of officials were holding an examination. In addition to the usual questions put at such examinations, we were asked whether we ever had relations with Aryan women, whether we were homosexuals, and whether we ever had abortions in our families.

The examination lasted till late in the night. Then the police officials and examiners disappeared and were replaced by the S. S. men. At their command, those of us who had been at work all day, as well as those who remained at the station, young and old, all without a bite of food all day, were put through a series of bending exercises carried out at a terrific speed.

Many of the older men, out of breath, gasped and coughed. They could not follow. These were dragged away to a nearby room and unmercifully beaten. This was my first introduction to the cries of the innocent which I so frequently heard in the following weeks.

BLOWS AND KICKS

We were taken to the police riding school at Pramergasse (Prammer street, Vienna). There were thousands of us. I shall skip all about the blows, kicks and the running-the-gauntlet on entering the school. These came at every point of embarkation and debarkation thereafter, and I have come to regard them as one of the S. S. travel regulations.

It is impossible to give all the details. Several thousand of us spent three days and two nights in this police school without a bite to eat. We were not allowed to lie down at night. If anyone stretched out, he immediately was forced to rise. It was evident to me that the Vienna police officials did not enjoy their job of keeping us awake and without food.

My general impression of my

imprisonment in Vienna was that the police were rather decent. This did not apply to the Gestapo and the S. S. of course, but to the officials of the old regime, not yet replaced by Nazis.

The following day, Saturday, we were on the move again. This time we were taken to a schoolhouse on Keyongasse. That night I shall never forget. We were ordered to keep awake. We were warned that should anyone fall asleep, his neighbors on both sides would be held responsible and be subject to punishment.

NIGHT OF HORROR

It was a night of horror. Throughout the night shots were heard in many portions of the building. From everywhere came cries and groans. Several among us became insane. They wept and yelled continually. Others were huddled together terror stricken. Several physicians among us wanted to give aid to the sufferers. They were ordered not to interfere. To all our complaints the S. S. guards had the same reply: "What difference does it make whether he dies today or a few days later. You are all heading that way."

Sunday afternoon we were taken to police headquarters on the Elisabeth promenade. There we were given our first meal in four days. It consisted of soup and bread. That evening we again were on the move. A friendly police official whispered to me to have a good look at the streets of Vienna, as I most likely would not see them for some time.

14-HOUR TRIP

We were unloaded at the West-side railway depot. A special train stood ready to receive us. For three days such trains had been continually carrying away Vienna prisoners, I learned later. We were driven into the compartments — 13 men to a compartment designed for eight, 10 in the seats and three on the floor. The trip lasted 14 hours. It was hell.

It is impossible for a civilized man to imagine the brutalities I had witnessed. It is incredible that young men between the ages of 18 and 20, who composed our train guard, could so behave. I, myself, would not have believed it if I had not gone through it.

From time to time the guards were changed; their behavior, however, remained the same. I presume it was all prescribed in their regulations. It is my impression that the atrocities those men could commit and the terror they could instill in their charges formed the criterion for their selection to their posts. I cannot speak of that trip without recalling some of the tortures that were inflicted on us.

They began with an order to sit straight, hands on the knees, and, without moving our heads, without winking an eyelid, to stare at the dazzling electric light in the ceiling. The least violation was punished.

PUNCHES IN FACE

Sitting in this position we had to answer many questions. The least hesitation brought punches in the face and slapping with the back of the wrist in the eyes.

Every man in my compartment was charged with having mistreated an Aryan woman. We were told we were now to bear punishment for our offenses. They never referred to our mothers without some insulting remark. We were hit over our fingers with leather belts and gunstraps. Several men suffered broken

fingers. One man in my compartment fainted. They poured water over him. The torture was resumed when he regained consciousness.

For a while I thought I was going to get away easy. I had my ears boxed on boarding the train. Then my guards seemed to have forgotten about my existence. They made up for it later. I was treated to a shower of punches and several jabs with a bayonet. I passed my examination with a broken nose and bleeding eyes. To this day I have not regained normal eyesight.

A guard, slightly more humane than the rest, escorted me to the washroom to wash my bleeding eyes, "so as not to smear up the compartment." I took advantage of the occasion to show him my discharge papers from the Austrian army, which I happened to have in my possession. I served as an officer throughout the World War and had an excellent record. Out of regard for this record my guard excused me from staring at the light.

ABUSE RESUMED

But the man who replaced him at the next change of guards wanted to know how it came that I alone was not staring at the electric light. I explained.

"So you are the dog who mistreated our men in the army!" came his retort. There followed a shower of blows and kicks. He made me stare at the light with my bleeding eyes as did the rest of us.

A man, all covered with blood, was dragged into our compartment and thrown on the floor. He was insane. He wept and shouted and delivered wild speeches. Whenever he would quiet down, the S. S. guards would jab him with their bayonets to make him yell and orate some more. They seemed to enjoy it.

A boy of about 18 was being slowly choked by two S. S. men. They bound a cord around his neck and slowly tightened it. When his throat began to rattle they released the cord. After a while they would tighten it up again.

IN CATTLE CARS

I do not recall the last hours of that trip. The train suddenly came to a stop. We were transferred from the passenger cars into cattle cars; about 200 men to a car. We were made to shout in a chorus, college-boy fashion, the slogan we had been taught on the train: "We, Jewish swine, are guilty of our crimes and deserve this punishment."

The cattle car in which I was riding seemed to be hermetically sealed. We were struggling for air. We thought we had been sentenced to a death from suffocation.

After a short ride we reached our destination. The car was opened and we alighted. Before us stood a group of armed S. S. men. There were the regulation blows and kicks. We passed through a tall gate over which in large characters was the inscription—"Labor Brings Joy!"

The heavy iron gate closed behind us. We were in the famous Dachau Concentration Camp.

Tomorrow—The story of the six weeks spent by this refugee in Dachau.