The Holocaust as History and Memory

David Harvey

Adesh Rambaran

12/8/2022

Final Paper

Invasion of the USSR and the beginning of mass murder

The Nazi ideal was to classify the races of the world into a hierarchy of superior and inferior. Adolf Hitler extended this belief to his supporters causing an extreme belief that the Aryan race would stand on top with the Jewish race at the very bottom. This hate stemmed from centuries prior and was made prominent after WWI. Hitler and many others blamed Germany's misfortune in WWI and believed that the Jewish people caused Germany's loss and the need to pay reparations back to the Allied Forces, as per the Treaty of Versailles. With this hate in mind, Hitler, leader of the Nazi party, acted by running for office in Germany, running for Chancellor of Germany in 1933 and shortly after in 1934, became the Fuhrer of Germany. From this high platform, Hitler was able to reach the entirety of Germany and spread his views on German nationalism, antisemitism, anti-capitalism, and anti-communism, creating the Nazi party and ideals known today.

During WWII, Hitler ordered his army to launch an attack on the Soviet Union. Germany, in August 1939, made the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, a non-aggression pact, with the Soviet Union's leader, Joseph Stalin, which would last for ten years. This pact was created between Hitler and the Soviet Union because Hitler wanted to make sure that Stalin would stand by as he took Poland, fearing that any intervention would break the agreement. Two days after Hitler invaded Poland, Great Britain and France declared war on Nazi Germany. Hitler quickly

swept West, invading, and defeating France, Luxembourg, and Belgium through blitzkrieg, the "lightning" fast attack plan, leaving Britain the only opposition against Germany. Germany decided that focusing their efforts East would be beneficial for the future living space, or Lebensraum, for the Aryan Germans. With this need for increasing territory and a belief that the Aryan Germans were much superior compared to the Slavic people of the Soviet Union, Germany decided to begin an invasion of the Soviet Union.

Operation Barbarossa, named after the nickname for Medieval Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I, was a plan to invade the Soviet Union. This invasion was carried out on June 22, 1941, when three million German soldiers, 80% of the total German forces, advanced into the country. Joseph Stalin refused to believe that this plan was a reality and took no action to prevent or reinforce the Soviet Union's borders. When Germany attacked, the military using its blitzkrieg method of attack, the Soviet Red Army was unprepared, leaving the country open to a three-sided attack on Leningrad, Moscow, and Ukraine. German tank and Luftwaffe units helped make an early and decisive hit that hindered the inadequately trained Red Army. As the German army moved across the Soviet Union, they took many Soviet soldiers prisoner and killed many Soviet Jews and its citizens.

Hitler believed and spread the idea that the Soviet Union was a regime with a Jewish conspiracy. When the German army entered the Soviet Union, there was a special unit called Einsatzgruppen, whose main purpose was to fight against political and ideological opponents. These Einsatzgruppen arrested communists and Jews in a position of power during the course of the war. The reason that these units were formed was to massacre the Jewish population in the Soviet Union. Hundreds of thousands of Jews fled during the beginning invasion, deep into the

Soviet Union, but as many as 1.5 million Jews stayed behind and were subjected to mistreatment, harsh labor, and murder.

First, the killings began with men only, then progressed to women and children after Hitler visited the frontlines and determined that Jewish women and children have no use for his plan to use the Soviet Union as living space. This formed the basis for the policy of killing all Jews indiscriminately. The largest mass killing the Einsatzgruppen made was the execution of 30 thousand Jews in Babi Yar, a large ravine in the Soviet Union. The bodies were then put into the ravine and covered with dirt, labored by Soviet POWs. The scale of the killing was so large that some Jews were buried alive, instead of being executed. These units would go on to kill around 1.25 million Jews over the course of the war.

Due to the invasion of the Soviet Union, Germany implemented a genocidal policy that called for all the Jews living under Nazi rule to be executed. This plan, although sounded easy, posed Heinrich Himmler's SS unit with two problems. The first problem was the location, and the method of how the mass killing should take place and the second problem was where to dispose of the bodies. To combat this problem, the Nazis began experimenting with different methods of murder. Methods of mass murder that would not take a heavy toll on the killer's mentality. The prototype of this anonymous killing method was the creation of mobile gas chambers, where the exhaust gas created from the vehicle was pipped into the back, killing its occupants. These mobile gas chambers were used in Chelmno, an extermination camp in Poland. Only 20 mobile gas chambers were ever produced.

In addition to the many labor camps that existed across the Nazi territory, the creation and updating of the labor camps into extermination camps brought about the most effective way to kill the Jewish population, mass extermination by gas. Using gas, especially the use of carbon

monoxide and the insecticide Zyklon B made into pellets, the German army devised a plan to gas the Jewish population into extinction. They would create chambers with showerheads and gather Jews inside, so tightly packed together they would need to raise their arms to fit. Under the pretense of receiving a shower to be disinfected, the Jews would be herded into the narrow gas chamber and gas would come out of the showerheads, drowning its Jewish occupants in the poisonous gas. The bodies would then be removed and buried into pits dug by the Jewish prisoners themselves. These methods of murder continued until Germany began to struggle in its war against the Soviet Union. A decision was made to keep the remaining Jewish prisoners alive to help build military infrastructure, like roads, building equipment, or clearing minefields. By the winter of 1943, half of the residential 2.5 million Jews in Ukraine and most of the Belorussia Jews survived until the spring of 1944, when the killings resumed in full.

Bibliography

(www.nux.cz), Nux s.r.o. The start of the mass murder. institut terezínské iniciativy, July 19,
    2011. https://www.holocaust.cz/en/history/final-solution/general-2/the-start-of-the-mass-
    murder/.

"The Early Years of the Nazi Party." What were Hitler's and the Nazi Party's ideas? – The
    Holocaust Explained: Designed for schools. The Weiner Holocaust Library. Accessed
    December 13, 2022. https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/the-nazi-rise-to-power/the-
    early-years-of-the-nazi-party/what-were-hitlers-ideas/.

"Gassing Operations | Holocaust Encyclopedia ." United States holocaust memorial museum.

    United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Accessed December 13, 2022.

    https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/gassing-operations.

History.com Editors. "Operation Barbarossa." History.com. A&E Television Networks, October

    29, 2009. https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/operation-barbarossa#german-

    soviet-nonaggression-pact.

Vashem, Yad. "The Invasion of the Soviet Union and the Beginnings of Mass Murder." Yad

    Vashem. The World Holocaust Remembrance Center. Yad Vashem. Accessed December

    13, 2022. https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about/final-solution-beginning/mass-

    murder-in-ussr.html.