

Here the Nazi Butchers Wasted Nothing

By **EDGAR SNOW**

From a Nazi murder factory in Poland, a Post editor gives you an audit on the war's most frightful crime.

MAIDANEK, POLAND. By Wireless.

ORDINARILY, a magazine writer ought to eschew subjects already fully reported in the daily press. But once in a while you run across a story so sublime in its witness to the divinity of man or so loathsome as to make the meanest beast seem clean and wholesome by comparison, that it renews itself through the continued interest or incredulity of the public, and through the subjective experience of the reporter.

Maidanek is such a story—in the second category. For a long time it will continue to be news in this part of the world. For Poland and Russia, at least, Maidanek and the ghosts that throng around it will be a living presence at the peace tables to harden man's heart to the inevitable dismemberment of Germany. Quite apart from its scientific interest, therefore, it is important for Americans to remember it, and I feel it urgent to contribute my part to the record of it.

When the history of this war is written, Maidanek may best epitomize the inner nature of Nazi philosophy and mark its most brilliant success in perverting the very virtues of a once great people into the service of a machinery of crimes almost too monstrous for the human mind to accept. Even after seeing the abundant evidence, hearing the statements of eyewitnesses and listening to the confessions of a few of the murderers themselves, there is something in the mind of a man taught to revere human life as sacred that continues to say all this could not happen.

Yet when I look at my notes, taken on two trips, and on a double check in the camp itself, when I review the accumulation of testimony, intelligence informs me, as it does every other observer I know who has had this unenviable opportunity, that the main story of this death factory, to which the Nazis themselves unofficially referred as the Camp for Extermination, has been truthfully reported.

How many people were destroyed at Maidanek? I have no way of knowing precisely. Two Germans who worked in the camp told us that on a single day, November third of last year, between 17,000 and 20,000 men, women and children were obliterated here. They agreed also that "hundreds" at a time had been taken out of the gas chambers on various days. Doctor Siengalwicz, a Polish toxicologist and professor of forensic medicine of Lublin University, told me that to date they had identified, by chemical analysis, a total of 1034 cubic meters of human ashes recovered from graves and from near-by fields—the remains of perhaps 1,000,000 corpses.

The Soviet-Polish Commission of Scientists and Laymen, of which Doctor Siengalwicz is a member, is headed by Andrezej Vitos, vice-president of the Polish Committee of National Liberation. It has already spent thousands of hours investigating the mountains of evidence, and has still to publish its final report.

In the meantime, yet more serious revelations may be uncovered in other places. Poles from Warsaw to whom I have talked say that the Treblinka camp near the capital was worse than Maidanek. Only Jews were sent there. The Poles assert that more than 4,000,000 lives were blotted out. Poland had three other large concentration camps whose stories are not yet fully known. The Germans may succeed in those, as they failed here, in destroying the evidence and witnesses of their crimes. But they cannot erase the negative which re-creates the picture of Maidanek. This crowning achievement of Nazi totalitarianism executed with German efficiency is in a way far more frightening in its ultimate implications for mankind than the record of any rival killers in history.

This is Why There Must be No Soft Peace

As individuals, we have our fights, get our black eyes and bloody noses, and then we usually shake hands and make up. As a people, we Americans are not given to bearing grudges. On the contrary, we have a certain spendthrift magnanimity toward beaten enemies. After the last war, we sat back, shut our eyes and permitted Germany to prepare for the next holocaust, and we now know the appalling price history asked when it presented its bill twenty-five years later. Today, we approach the eve of a new peace with Germany. It is not a peace to be made wearily, in wanton generosity, in

squeamishness or in ignorance. It behooves us to examine and weigh the evidence of what kind of nation Germany is. History has had its pages of horror, but history itself must have stood aghast at Lublin. We hope that every American will read the simple and profoundly moving report from Edgar Snow which begins on this page. It is a report to convince men of good will that there are times when sanely administered punishment, of a nation, as of a man, is the only effective quarantine to save a world in danger from a nation bent upon befouling itself and all that it can reach. **—The Editors.**

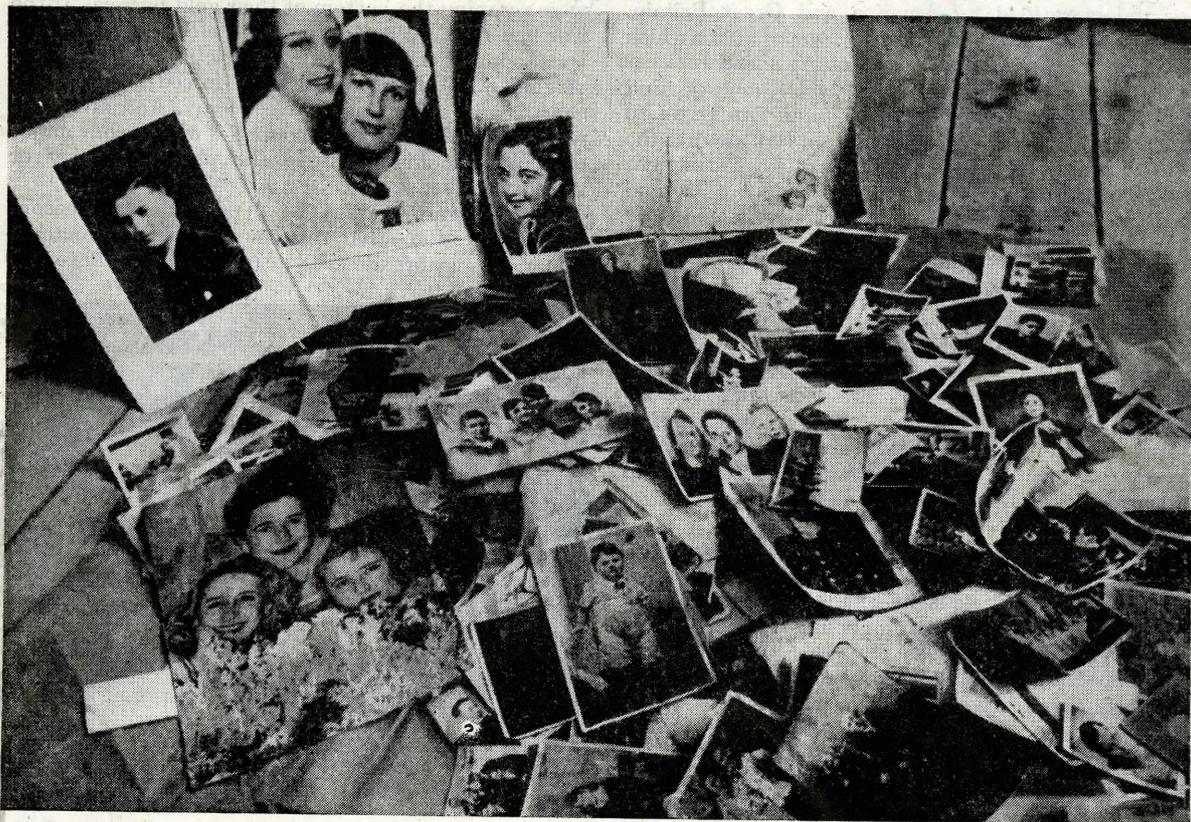


One battery of incinerators at the infamous Maidanek death factory, which the Nazis called the Camp for Extermination. Here an estimated 1,000,000 people were methodically slaughtered, then cremated.

SOVPHOTO PHOTOS



Part of the vast accumulation of shoes which Edgar Snow describes as "the most sickening display of all in this evidence of mass murder." Among them are hundreds of babies' shoes.



Each of the pictures above was dear to someone now dead. Told they were being moved to a "new settlement," most of the victims shipped to Lublin took with them everything they owned.

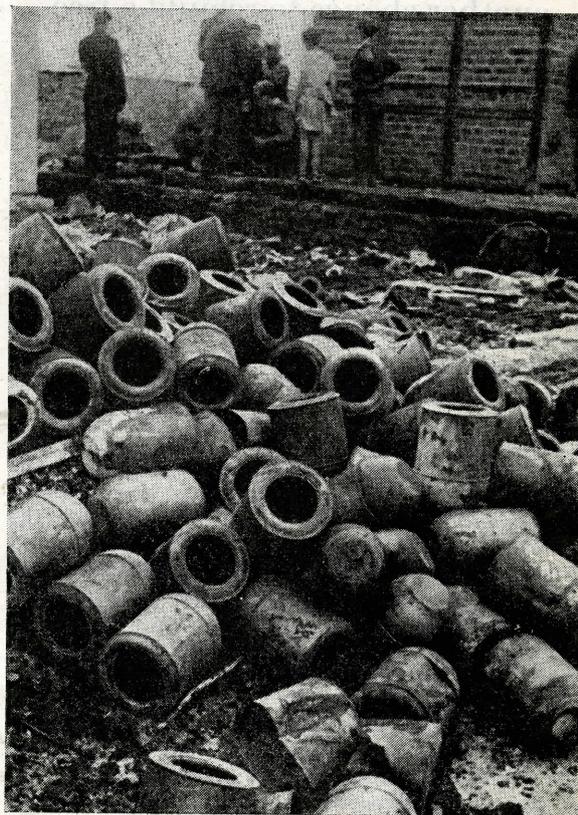
The whole abattoir is still there, as you have read about it. The vast camp, enclosed by electrically charged barbed wire, the 200-odd barracks and buildings which were pens where transient human cattle ripened for slaughter, the chamber where they were gassed—they are open to public scrutiny now, and the Russians and Poles lead their soldiers and recruits through the maze to indoctrinate them for battle. The open-air brick ovens fitted with electric blowers where corpses were cremated, the disinterred bodies of earlier victims—men, women and children killed by other means—and finally the tons of human ashes scattered about the fields in which the Nazis grew choice cabbages for their table. They have seen all this.

I thought I had become inured to atrocities. This aspect of human nature is all too sordidly real for me, and I prefer to leave the writing of it to others. But here at Maidanek is a point of new and clinical interest. It is the diabolical system and efficiency, the comprehensive, centrally directed planning, that for the first time made a totalitarian modern industry out of the reduction of the human being from an upright ambulatory animal to a kilogram of gray ashes. No slaughterhouse was ever better organized for its purpose. All by-products were utilized. Here nothing was wasted.

Everywhere in the chain of operations is seen the characteristic hand of the German master of order, efficiency and economy, his complete absorption in the mechanics of the tasks before him, his rigid adherence to the principle of thoroughness in all things. It happened that two of my own great-grandparents were Germans, and from that side of my family I heard in my youth a great deal about those German virtues. Indeed, no one can say that American society hasn't benefited by them either. But here at Lublin you got a complete distortion of the historic genius of a race, with method and means becoming everything, a action completely dominating imagination, and the end itself losing all significance for the automatons bringing it about.

That is the phenomenon that fascinates me about Maidanek—the fact that it is perfectly possible to co-ordinate the utmost scientific order and means with the utmost barbarism of ends. Here human conscience was absolved of all guilt by the magic words "Orders from Berlin." "Kill! Kill! Kill!" screamed Goering for the record of all time. "Not you shall answer for this, but I."

So Maidanek was neatly laid out by German engineers, an impressive collection of buildings in a spacious setting. It had its own shops, its many miles of motor roads winding between high watch towers, it even had its own fire department. No one must burn before his time. In front of the residence of the commandant was a garden. Outside the camp offices was another garden. In the middle (Continued on Page 96)



Cans for human ashes. Some were used for fertilizer, some sold to weeping relatives.

HERE THE NAZI BUTCHERS WASTED NOTHING

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of it stood a ten-foot-high replica of a medieval castle which served as a fountain. It was built by Jewish prisoners from Jewish gravestones, and in places you could still see the engraved Hebrew characters.

Prisoners sent to Lublin from all parts of Europe were instructed to bring everything they owned. They were to begin a new life in a "new settlement," some were told. Trustingly, they shipped their trunks of belongings, or relatives sent them, as instructed. Apparently none of these trunks ever saw the camp at all, but were unloaded in the Lublin warehouse—of which more later. In this way the last personal wealth was pried loose from the victims.

Many had already been worked and starved into emaciation before reaching Maidanek. Little labor power was lost through their removal here. Even after arriving in camp, however, the still relatively able-bodied were segregated for more work—new buildings were constantly being added after August, 1941, until by 1943 the camp had a capacity of 40,000. The sick and the lame, when they fell exhausted at their labor, were beaten and set aside for speedy extermination.

Witnesses testified that various means were adopted to liquidate prisoners. The gas chambers, which in five minutes could kill from 150 to 200 people, were the main execution cells. Sometimes prisoners were clubbed or hanged. Sometimes SS men casually kicked or beat to death selected victims. German political prisoners were always shot, I was told by captured Nazis, while the gas chambers were generally used for the rest.

But Jews, Germans and other Europeans were all robbed in common and were all fed to the same ovens. The principal crematorium consisted of ten large ovens, said to have a capacity of some 1400 bodies daily. Near the ovens still lie piles of tin urns. These were filled with ashes from the fires for such people as were foolish enough to believe that they were receiving the remains of their loved ones. Such filled urns netted the Nazis 5000 Polish zlotys each.

Nothing was wasted. The bulk of the ashes was strewn upon the Nazis' vegetable fields and the commandant's flower gardens. Gold fillings were removed from the teeth of the corpses, and sometimes from live prisoners. Serviceable clothing was sent to the large warehouse, converted from an unfinished theater owned by the Catholic church. Even rags were fumigated and preserved, for buttons and bits of cloth. Not far from the ovens you can still today see what is the most sickening display of all in this evidence of mass murder.

Doubtless you have read about the building, some fifty feet wide by one hundred feet long, which was devoted solely to old shoes. Hundreds of thousands of pairs of them lie there, closely packed down, footwear of every description, and each pair a tragic history of a vanished owner. There are babies' tiny shoes and children's boots, hundreds of them. There are little red slippers, gold evening shoes, the high lace boots of an elderly woman, the worn sandals of peasants, the frayed valenki of Russians and Poles, rubbers from Akron—footwear from Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Warsaw, Prague, Antwerp, Rotterdam, Madrid and Moscow. Here mute testimony corroborates the evidence of passports and other records I saw which indicates that people from infants to octogenarians were wiped out.

Most of all, I remember the shoe of a crippled woman, with a built-up sole six inches high. Near by were a truss and a knee-length brace. All these items were kept for shoemaker's spares. Nothing was wasted.

Downtown in Lublin, the warehouse of four floors is filled with the worn but fumigated intimate belongings of thousands of people. Everything was carefully inventoried. There was a section devoted to women's underclothing of all kinds—silk panties and brassières in one room, overcoats in another, corsets in one department, stockings in another. One room was crowded with children's garments, from swaddling clothes to woolen knickerbocker suits. There was a corner piled high with babies' cracked and chipped chamber pots.

I examined two trunks crammed with arch supporters, and there were even wooden arms, legs, crutches and canes in various stages of wear. In one department I saw assorted medicines, partly used tubes of toothpaste, old combs and vanity cases, nail files and scissors. One whole shelf was devoted to children's books and toys, smudged by small, loving hands.

"One day I saw one hundred and fifty-seven Polish children gassed to death," Hans Stalp, a German prisoner

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who had been a guard at Maidanek, told me. On another day, Nazi Officer Anton Thermos saw about 500 women and children gassed. On a second occasion, he saw the bodies of 300 children taken from the gas chambers, so he declared before us.

Ledgers and stacks of inventory sheets were found in offices of the warehouse. Down to the last spool of it, the Nazis knew how much used thread they had on a given day. "Mention a date and I'll tell you what was here," said the bespectacled Polish theological student who rummaged through these files. "Well? Let us take March thirty-first, 1944. Eighty thousand women's blouses; one hundred and sixty thousand and eighty-nine pieces of assorted cloth; three hundred and sixteen thousand pieces of ladies' underwear."

The file of Nazi correspondence produced interesting documentation from Berlin—the real pay-off in this novel factory-to-consumer industry. There were various orders for equipment for German settlers in the new empire conquered in Poland and the Ukraine. I saw a soiled letter from headquarters requesting garments for several thousand young supermen.

The books were expertly kept, with German thoroughness. At the end of any day, the commandant could advise Hitler just how many secondhand rompers

and ladies' chemises were in stock and how many had been shipped out. Who would have thought that supermen would stoop to rag picking? Well, you see, the motto was Nothing to be Wasted.

All was taken care of here—all but the last act. Incredibly, these industrialists of death, so systematic about everything else, neglected the one thing most important of all. At the last moment, they fled without demolishing the evidence, and thus nullified all their previous elaborate efforts. Camp Commandant Thuman suddenly disappeared, and the remaining SS murder technicians were left Führerless. Some kind of order must have finally come through from Berlin. Herr Moosveld, the crematorium Führer, managed to set fire to some of the abattoir buildings and to his own house, in which stood the bed where he slept peacefully not ten feet from the incineration ovens. Winters are cold in Lublin, but Moosveld found his quarters very snug. He took his bath in water heated by the fires that burned his victims.

Yet it was a disorderly retreat. Enough evidence was left behind to incriminate everyone from Hitler to the dark little Obersturmführer, Theodore Scholen, a Nazi Party member and an SS man, whom the Russians inconveniently interrupted outside Lublin on his way to Berlin.

This fellow Scholen, to whom I talked, tells of having frequently seen bodies carried through the camp. He recalls having heard that from 18,000 to 20,000 people were killed on November third—Belgians, Greeks, Italians and many others, besides a vast number of Jews, Poles and Russians. But it is only now, as he looks back on it all, that Herr Scholen realizes that the whole thing was actually an extermination camp.

But Scholen stoutly maintains that he himself never took part in the killings. He was kind to the prisoners, he says. The most he has admitted doing, in his official testimony to the commission, was the occasional removal of gold fillings from prisoners' teeth, in search of hidden diamonds—but his extractions were always done painlessly.

"Then who was actually responsible, Obersturmführer Scholen?" I asked him.

"Berlin," he answered, without batting an eye. Not the camp commandant, and certainly not Scholen, and probably none of the nineteen young idealists who once thought they were riding on the wave of the future and who worked with Scholen.

"We always acted on orders from Berlin," repeated Scholen.

"But has it occurred to you that you yourself will be tried for your share in these crimes?" I asked him.

The ferretlike eyes blinked in astonishment. "That's absurd. I only carried out orders. As for a trial, I've done nothing. I'm absolutely blameless," concluded Scholen.

A year ago, I was staying in a billet over in Scotland one night, listening to a young American flier just back from Italy, where he had been bombing the German lines. I heard him talk for some time with an RAF man who was with us, in this vein: that he didn't believe all that "propaganda" about Nazi brutality; it was probably all lies.

"Why, I met some of their fliers we had captured, and they were fellows just about like us. Under other circumstances, you wouldn't mind introducing them to your girl. They say they are fighting for an ideal and they are ready to die for it, and that's just what we're doing."

We have toughened up a lot since then. Probably that young captain has too. But I hope he reads this story. It's hard on a man to have to kill fellow idealists, and this news might help salve his conscience.