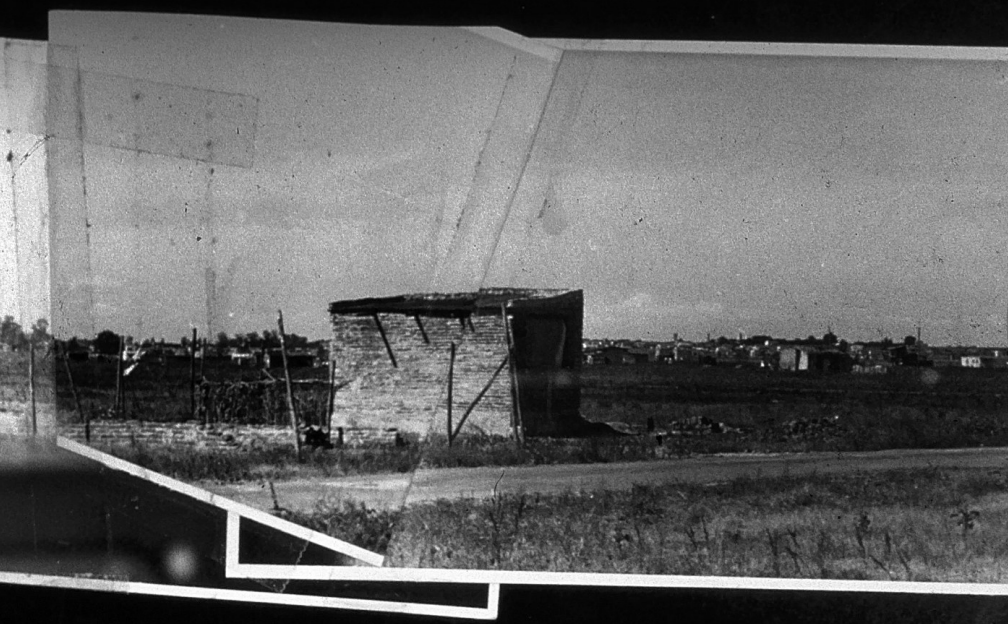




THE NAZI H

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UNTERS

HOW A TEAM OF SPIES AND SURVIVORS CAPTURED THE WORLD'S MOST NOTORIOUS NAZI

NEAL BASCOMB

To Justice Served

- N.B.

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CHAPTER 1



Lieutenant Colonel Adolf Eichmann stood at the head of the convoy of 140 military vehicles. It was noon on Sunday, March 19, 1944, his thirty-eighth birthday. He held his trim frame stiff, leaning slightly forward as he watched his men prepare to move out.

The engines rumbled to life, and black exhaust spewed across the road. Eichmann climbed into his Mercedes staff car and signaled for the motorcycle troops to lead the way.

More than five hundred members of the Schutzstaffel, the Nazi security service — better known as the SS — were in the convoy, leaving Mauthausen, a concentration camp in Austria, for Budapest, Hungary. Their mission was to comb Hungary from east to west and find all of the country's 750,000 Jews. Anyone who was physically fit was to be delivered to the labor camps for “destruction through work”; anyone who was not was to be immediately killed.

Eichmann had planned it all carefully. He had been in charge of Jewish affairs for the Nazis for eight years and was now chief of Department IVB₄, responsible for executing Hitler's policy to wipe out the Jews. He ran his office like it was a business, setting clear, ambitious targets, recruiting efficient staff members and delegating to them, and traveling frequently to monitor their progress. He measured his success not in battles won but in schedules met, quotas filled, and units moved. In Austria,



Adolf Eichmann in uniform during World War II.

Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Slovakia, Romania, and Poland, Eichmann had perfected his methods. Now it was Hungary's turn.

Stage one was to isolate the Jews. They would be ordered to wear Yellow Star emblems on their clothes, forbidden to travel or to use phones and radios, and banned from scores of professions. He would remove them from Hungarian society.

Stage two would secure Jewish wealth for the Third Reich. Factories and businesses would be taken over, bank accounts would be frozen, and the assets of every single individual would be seized, down to their ration cards.

Stage three: the ghettos. Jews would be uprooted from their homes and sent to live in concentrated, miserable neighborhoods until the fourth and final stage could be effected: the camps. As soon as the Jews arrived at those, another SS department would be responsible for their fate. They would no longer be Adolf Eichmann's concern. That was how he saw it.

To prevent escapes or uprisings, Eichmann planned to deceive the Jewish community leaders. He would meet them face to face and promise them that the restrictions were only temporary, the necessities of Germany's war with the Allies, which had been going on for four and a half years. As long as the leaders cooperated, he would reassure them, no harm would come to them or to their community. He might take a few bribes as well. Not only would the money add even more Jewish wealth to the German haul, he would also fool more Jews into thinking they might save themselves if they could pay up. Even when they were forced onto the trains to the camps, the Jews would be told either that they were being moved for their own safety or that they were going to supply labor for Germany.

Eichmann knew that these deceptions would buy time and acquiescence. Brute force would do the rest. He thought it best to initiate stages three and four in the more remote districts of Hungary first, and to leave the capital, Budapest, for last.



At dawn on April 15, the last day of Passover, gendarmes came to Zeev Sapir's door in the village of Dobradovo. They were from the Hungarian police, which was cooperating with the occupying German troops. Zeev was twenty years old and lived with his parents and five younger siblings. The gendarmes woke up the family and ordered them to pack. They could bring food, clothes, and bedding — no more than fifty kilograms per person. The few valuable family heirlooms they owned were confiscated.

The gendarmes bullied and whipped everyone in the community — 103 people — to the nearby town of Munkács. The very young and the very old were brought in horse-drawn hay carts. They reached Munkács in the evening, exhausted from carrying their baggage. Over the next several days, 14,000 Jews from the city and surrounding regions crammed into the old Munkács brick factory and its grounds. They were told that they had been removed from the “military operational zone” to protect them from the advancing Russians.

This news was no comfort to Zeev. His family now lived on the factory grounds, in a shelter with a roof but no walls, and with little food apart from spoonfuls of potato soup. There was hardly any water — only two faucets for the whole ghetto. The Hungarian gendarmes played cruel games with them, forcing work gangs to transfer piles of bricks from one end of the brickyard to the other for no reason other than to exercise their power.