

From the book:

“Voelkermord der Tito-Partisanen 1944-1948: Dokumentation”

By

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The systematic liquidation program of the Danube Swabian population in the Batschka closely followed the parameters of the governmental districts into which the Batschka was divided for administrative purposes.

1. North and Middle Batschka
2. South and South West Batschka
3. West and North Batschka

Each of these districts had a central Slave Labor Camp, countless “working stations”, and internment and concentration camps for those unfit for work. The

original internment and concentration camps were closed as the inmates were sent to the chief district internee camp.

North and Middle Batschka consisted of the communities in and around Kula and Subotica and the villages scattered in the remaining eastern Batschka.

South and South West Batschka covered the areas around Neusatz and Palanka.

West and North West Batschka consisted of the regions of Hodschag, Apatin and Sombor.

The South and South West Batschka

"...people were treated as if they were even worse than animals."

Neusatz

Neusatz was the capital of the Vojvodina. In October 1944 the Partisans arrested many of the Danube Swabians and forced them from their homes. For some time they were held at the navy barracks on the Danube and at night groups of them were led away and shot in the vicinity of the "Battle Bridge" over the Danube. The well-known engineer Wilhelm Weiss and the lawyer Leopold Veith died in this way. The rest of the Danube Swabian population was taken to a nearby concentration camp. Partisans and functionaries took possession of the homes and property of the expelled Swabians. Many died in the concentration camp and among the first victims was Peter Weinert, a Roman Catholic priest from Palanka.

The concentration camp was located in the swamps along the Danube. Although there were always two thousand Danube Swabians in the camp, there were only two barracks. One was for women and children and the other for the men. The conditions were unsanitary. When the Danube River rose, the areas around the barracks were under water. It was especially bad for the women. More than seven hundred of them were located in one room that was meant to accommodate one hundred. They slept on boards in two tiers above one another. They could not wash and were pressed together and could not stretch out. For many of them, this would last for three years. There were no windows. It was always dark and damp in the barrack. This became a breeding ground for tuberculosis. Pest and insects were everywhere and the lice viciously attacked the people. Many of the children bore open wounds caused by them and their own scratching.

Barbed wire fences surrounded the barracks. Heavily armed Partisans were on guard and threatened anyone with death if they got within two meters of the fence. There were only two brick buildings in the camp. One was a pigsty for the swine of the Minister of the Interior for the Vojvodina and the other was a "bunker" for camp inmates who were being punished. Up to twenty persons, men, women and children were locked up in this room that was three by one meters, with no windows or ventilation. The swine had the freedom of the camp and messed up and rooted up everything.

The camp in Neusatz operated like a central camp. Even though it consisted of only two barracks, a pigsty and bunker about half of the Danube Swabians living in the area passed through it. When the vast majority in another camp died, it was closed down and the survivors were sent to Neusatz. At one time, over one hundred Lower Steiermark Germans were sent here as well as many Austrian citizens who had fallen into the hands of the Partisans. Many others were brought here for punishment. One of the basic tenets of the liquidation operation was the separation of families and ordered that no contact be possible between family members. When mothers

were apprehended who had been forced to abandon their children, or older children who tried to reach a parent were caught, they were sent to Neusatz for punishment in the bunker, and were then forced to remain in the Neusatz camp.

All of those who had been deemed "dangerous" by the authorities were consigned to Neusatz. All the intellectuals who survived the mass shootings and executions were ordered to Neusatz from the camps where they had been imprisoned. The majority of the German Roman Catholic priests had been liquidated. The surviving priests were scattered in various camps. There were fourteen Roman Catholic priests and one Lutheran pastor kept in custody. All them were dragged off from their communities and brought to Neusatz. There was also a veterinarian and several university professors who were also brought here to the camp.

When the concentration camp at Betscherek was shut down on May 22, 1947 and its inmates were to go to St. Georgen, the authorities found an excuse a few days before to lock up five Danube Swabian teenage girls and three married women. They were brought to the main office during the night and were forced to strip naked in the presence of the camp functionaries and the police department. They butted out their cigarettes on their breasts, tore off their pubic hair and made fun of them. They forced the menstrual pad of one girl into her mouth. Following this night of mistreatment all eight of them were returned to the camp, but four of them managed to escape during the transfer of the camp inmates and somehow made it to Austria. Their fear of going through a nightmare like that again, was stronger than their fear of death. The other four women were brought to Neusatz. Here they were imprisoned in the bunker to make sure they would not escape like the others.

The inmates who were capable of working were sent from the camp to do forced labor. As a result almost nine hundred of the inmates were sent to the forced labor camp at Mitrowitz in Syrmien, where they had to work on railway construction for a long period. The women in the Mitrowitz camp had their hair shorn, the sick were marched out into the night, were shot and their bodies thrown into the Sava River. Only three hundred of them survived their stay in Mitrowitz and were returned to Neusatz.

At dawn all of the camp inmates had to leave the barracks and men and women were separated for roll call that could last for hours. After that, the slave "dealers" arrived and chose the men and women they wanted to "rent" for the day or a longer period. Eighty Dinar a day was the price and many of the young women and teenage girls were used for sexual purposes. Any who refused to co-operate were beaten and imprisoned in the bunker without food or water. Often the young women were sent to keep house for the Communist Party officials and local authorities. They too, could be used "for any purpose". This became one of the major reasons that young women took terrible risks in attempts to escape from the camps.

The food in the camp was terrible and never enough. It consisted basically of clear hot water passing as soup and a small piece of bread. When there was bread.

(The author spends a great deal of time dealing with this issue and lengths to which people went to get food.)

At the beginning of 1947 at the order of the Minister of the Interior of the Vojvodina all of the aged and all those unable to work were sent to the camp at Gakowa, close to the Hungarian border. For one thousand Dinar per person escape was possible by joining what was called "white transports" across the border to Hungary led by local guides who were actually in the pay of the camp authorities who received their "cut" and became rich in the process. There were nights when over four hundred Danube Swabian inmates made it across the frontier in this manner and then had to make their way through Hungary to sanctuary in Austria.

Meanwhile the brutality continued at the camp in Neusatz, especially in terms of the young women and teenage girls and it was simply looked upon as the order of the day. All of this took place with the full knowledge of the highest government officials and was encouraged.

One of the men from the camp somehow managed to escape and out of anger the camp commander threatened collective punishment for the remaining inmates. It was in the month of January in 1947 and it was a frigid winter day. An ice and snowstorm raged outside and the commander ordered the guards to drive the inmates out of their barracks and out into the storm and made them stand in one place on pain of beating if they moved. In the beginning of February in 1948 the inmates were all denied water for one full day. These tortures were not only visited upon the men in the camp at that time, but also the three hundred surviving women and one hundred children, as well as fifty-seven Austrians and Reich German citizens who had been brought to the camp.

Because of the ongoing brutality and mistreatment, Dr. Wilhlem Neuner one of the inmates in the camp sent a petition to the Yugoslavian Prime Minister in Belgrade. As a result a representative of the Ministry of the Interior in Belgrade came and carried out an investigation. In the presence of the representative Dr. Neuner complained that in spite of the end of the war, Danube Swabians were still being gruesomely dealt with and for no reason at all were still being shot or executed. The representative did not attempt to dispute Dr. Neuner's contention that over twenty thousand Danube Swabian civilians had been liquidated in Yugoslavia in the camps set up for that purpose. The doctor was informed he was in no position to place himself as the judge and jury over the policies of the Yugoslavian State and if he persisted in such charges the situation of himself and the other Danube Swabians would only become more gruesome and the government of Yugoslavia would not allow international opinion or action to keep them from their policies. On the next day, February 16, 1948 Dr. Neuner was thrown into the bunker but only after they had first tossed in the corpse of a pig that had died a few days before already in a state of decomposition.

After 1948 and the gradual closing down of the camps, the inmates at Neusatz could volunteer to work in the coal mines in Serbia or work on the newly created collective farms. Those who were unwilling to volunteer as ordered spent time in the bunker, until they were ready to go. In this way the camps were emptied and eventually closed. In the spring of 1948 with most of the men gone, it was time to close the Neusatz camp.

There were still four hundred inmates in the camp as they began to tear down the barracks over their heads and sell off the lumber, meanwhile resettling the prisoners to the nearby prisoner of war camp. There they joined the families of intellectuals and other professionals from the Lower Steiermark, some one hundred persons mostly women and children. The fourteen Roman Catholic priests and the one Lutheran pastor were also there. On March 29, 1948 all of these others were taken to the train station in Neusatz and loaded in two cattle cars and then securely locked before setting off without any water or nutrition until they arrived in Spielfeld in Austria. Those who remained behind were taken to the camp in Karlsdorf in the Banat shortly afterwards.

Futok

Futok was a mixed language community, and from the very first days the Partisans mistreated and beat the Danube Swabian population at will, especially the women. There were individuals who were singled out for torture and execution. On December 4th all of the Danube Swabians were driven out of their homes and force-marched to Jarek. They numbered about eight hundred persons. All of the able bodied were kept back in Futok in a labor camp set up in the local hemp factory and were taken to various places from there to work. Other slave laborers were brought

from other areas in the vicinity later. The slave labor camp in Futok was closed down in January of 1947, and the survivors were sent to the camp in Gakowa.

Batschki Jarek

“The First Hunger Mill”

The Lutheran Danube Swabian village of Jarek was almost totally evacuated by the retreating German army in September of 1944. On December 4th, the residents of Futok were the first arrivals in the camp and included women, children and the aged. In a very short period of time Danube Swabians from all areas of southern Batschka were interned here in Jarek. They came from: Palanka, Katsch, Temerin, Tschnrug, Gajdobra, Bukin, Novoselo, Schowe, Torschau, Plavna, Wekerledorf, Obrowatz, Batsch, and others including some of the evacuees who returned to Yugoslavia after the war to return “home” at Tito’s invitation.

Many of the people driven on foot to Jarek, never arrived there. Men, women and children who could not keep up with the marching columns were beaten and often killed. Groups that could not go on were told to wait for wagons to pick them up and after the others had moved on they were shot. Many of these victims were children. Many of them died in the vicinity of Gloschan and experienced the brutality and sadism of the Partisans. The cruel treatment and lack of food at Jarek led to the deaths of thousands. In the first eight days after the camp was opened there was no food at all. Corn bread and watery soup was the staple fare of the camp afterwards. The most terrible time for the inmates and countless children was the fall of 1945 and the spring of 1946 when there was no wood for heat or cooking, no salt was available. Soon large numbers of deaths began to occur. The greatest losses were from among the Danube Swabians from Bulkes another one of the Lutheran villages. When they first arrived they numbered nine hundred and two persons, and after a few months seven hundred and eighty-eight had perished.

In the summer the sick and those unable to work any longer who were inmates in the forced labor camps in the south Batschka, Syrmien and Slavonia, both men and women were brought to Jarek where most of them died in a very short period of time. Twelve men were occupied day and night burying the dead. Every day there were ten to twenty children among the dead. They went from house to house with a wagon collecting the dead who had perished overnight. The bodies were placed in mass graves. At first they erected primitive crosses and names were written on them. One day all of the crosses were collected and burned and it was forbidden to erect a cross in the future. Those who left the camp in search of food were shot if apprehended. One woman sought to visit a friend’s grave and begged the Partisan guarding the cemetery to do so. He shot her as she prayed at the graveside.

In the spring of 1945 there were almost seventeen thousand persons in the Jarek camp. In spite of the large number of deaths over the summer months of 1945, by August 16th there were eighteen thousand inmates. And although vast numbers of Danube Swabians were brought to Jarek after that by the time the camp was shut down in the spring of 1946, the remaining eight thousand were loaded into cattle cars during Holy Week and sent Gakowa and Kruschevilje. In all, almost fifteen thousands people died in Jarek. In one year alone, six thousand four hundred perished. Among the dead were three thousand seven hundred children under the age of eight years. Included among the dead were Pastor Franz Klein who served the Lutheran congregation in Katsch, Professor Dr. Jakob Mueller of Neusatz, the physician Dr. Michael Koepfer from Obrowatz, and leaders of the Swabian Cultural Union, Karl Mahler of Bulkes and Josef Bolz of Neu-Schowe.

The transport to Gakowa and Kruschevlje traveled for two days during which time the cattle cars remained locked and no one received any food or water and no one was able to escape.

Bulkes

Bulkes was an entirely Lutheran Danube Swabian community with a population of three thousand. When the Red Army arrived in October 1944, only sixty-five families had been evacuated by the retreating German and Hungarian troops. The first persons to be liquidated by the Partisans were the local intellectuals and leaders of the community. They were arrested in their homes and taken to Palanka and were murdered there by the Partisans. On November 17th 1944 the Partisans took all of the men from the ages of 16 to 60 years from their homes and force-marched them to Batschka Palanka. There were one hundred and fifty-six in total. Approximately two hundred men from Bukin, and just as many from the entirely Danube Swabian village of Gajdobra were brought with them. They were imprisoned in the local high school and on the 18th of November they were force marched to the forced labor camp in Neustaz. The Partisans, who accompanied them, killed all of those who could not keep up. Six men from Bulkes were such victims, fourteen from Bukin and five from Gajdobra.

From the Neusatz camp these men were later sent to Mitrowitz in Sarmien and worked on railway construction. The work there was difficult and hard. Of the thirty-six craftsmen from Bulkes only three would survive. A large number of other men from Bulkes, Gajdobra and Bukin were sent as slave labourer to the coal mines in Vrđnik, where almost all of them perished.

On December 4, 1944 the remaining men in Bulkes, there were only eighty-six, were driven on foot to the slave labor camp at Palanka. The older men from Bukin and Gajdobra joined them there, and most of these older men died.

The young women and teenage girls of Bulkes were deported to the Soviet Union in three groups. On December 18th there were one hundred and fifty. An additional eighty were taken on Christmas day, December 25th and finally one hundred and twenty began the way of sorrows on December 28th. Not one of them would return to their home community.

On April 15, 1945 all of the remaining Danube Swabian population in Bulkes were driven out of their homes. The community now consisted of old women, children and a few of the older men completely unfit for work. For two days and nights they were forced to camp out in the meadows. Then they were marched to the camp in Jarek. Their pastor, Karl Eichler was among them and he was constantly abused and mistreated, but he was one of the one hundred and fourteen survivors after a few months in Jarek of the nine hundred inhabitants of Bulkes who had arrived in the camp.

Palanka

In southern Batschka the Partisans quickly took over the administration and governance of the area after the entry and occupation by the Russian troops, and established a central forced labor camp in Neusatz and Palanka and established similar camps in those areas where there were concentrations of Danube Swabian populations. Both men and women were taken and put to work that winter doing some of the hardest and heaviest work. For only a portion of the Danube Swabian population had been evacuated. The percentages differ from district to district. In Bulkes only a small portion of the population fled, while in Jarek only a few families remained behind, in Towarisch only one family stayed. With the initiation of the Military Government by the Partisans in October the mass executions and deportations of the Danube Swabians began.

The most beautiful community in the southern Batschka was the large town of Palanka- (Batschka -Palanka) on the Danube. It consisted of three communities: Batschka Palanka, Neu Palanka and Alt Palanka (Old and New Palanka). Batcka Palanka and Neu Palanka were entirely Danube Swabian in terms of their population, while Alt Palanka counted Serbs, Hungarians, Slovaks and Danube Swabians among its inhabitants. The total population of the tri-town was over sixteen thousand. The Danube Swabians were the economic mainstay of the communities. It was the center of German culture, commercial and economic life for the overwhelmingly Danube Swabian population in the vicinity in: Gajdobra, Wekerledorf, Bulkes, Bukin, Novoselo, Obrawatz, Towarisch and Tscheb. In the whole area there were approximately thirty thousand Danube Swabians forming a very large minority among the other nationalities.

When the Partisans came to power in October 1944, the most influential Danube Swabians and some Hungarians were arrested, gruesomely tortured and killed. Later in October 1944, seventeen Danube Swabian youth aged from fourteen to nineteen were taken from their homes. They were chained together in the local high school and then driven on foot into the forests north of the town where they were forced to dig a huge hole. When the task was done they were shot. The Partisans then tossed their bodies into the pit. The shallow graves were later disturbed by pigs that unearthed some of the bodies.

On October 26, 1944 another one hundred men were arrested. They were taken to the local court building and were terribly abused. In order that the screams of the tortured men could not be heard outside, radio speakers were turned up to their highest volume. On October 27th the survivors of the day of terror were shot in the same forest as the young teenage boys. Among those shot was the Roman Catholic priest Karl Unterreiner.

On November 7th, 1944 there were one hundred and eighty-four Danube Swabian men taken from their homes. They were first imprisoned and beaten at the high school. At 2:00pm the next day they were driven on foot out of the community. They were to do forced labor in the coalmines in Vrdnik in Syrmien. As they proceeded on their march eastwards from Alt Palanka the Partisans led them to the Danube to be loaded on boats. The boats were then set adrift into the river current. The Partisans tossed men into the cold river and shot them like target practice. Others were stabbed and thrown into the river to drown. The survivors were then force-marched on the other side of the river. When they reached Neschtin the Partisans took away everything the men still had. Many had to take off their shoes and give them to the Partisans. They marched barefoot through the snow banks. The road was rocky and many cut and bruised their feet. But whoever could not keep up with the column was shot. In the night the sorrowful column arrived in Susek in Syrmien. Here again many of them were tortured and beaten. Three of them, including a young boy were delirious when they were finally killed. As the march continued, six more men were killed who could not continue barefoot through the snow. At Rakowatz, several men too weak from beatings to go on were shot. In the evening of the second day the survivors arrived at the coalmines in Vdrnik. Many of them would die there.

In mid-November all of the remaining Danube Swabian men from sixteen to sixty years of age were arrested. Most of the Danube Swabian men from the neighboring villages were also brought to Palanka. All of the assembled men were driven on foot to the slave labor camp at Neusatz. Many of those who could not keep up on the march were shot. The old Roman Catholic priest Peter Weinert was on the march and died at the Neusatz camp. The pastor of Neu Palanka, Stefan Mesarock-Mueller was led on foot towards the Hungarian border and was killed somewhere along the way.

One woman from Palanka reports: "I could not flee at the time of the great disturbances on November 14, 1944 because my mother was ill and my child was

very young. The local Serbian population assured us they would protect us from the Partisans in thankfulness for our help to them during the German occupation. With the arrival of the Partisans, law and order came to an end, as plundering and murder were the order of the day. Danube Swabians were being killed and beaten all over the town. No one knew if he or she would be next. The merchant Joseph Hauswirth was killed in front of his wife because he could not produce the amount of sugar the Partisans demanded. The watchmaker Ladislaus Pressl was killed because he could not produce enough gold watches to suit them. The wife of the land-owning noble, Lajos Reis was dragged through the streets by the hair and after gruesome torture she was slowly killed because she had sought to hide with a Serbian family.

The nobleman Wilhelm Wagner sought to work together with the local Serbs when the Hungarian officials were evacuated, and his efforts to maintain order were supported by the Serbian population. When the Partisans arrived he was arrested and day after day he was systematically tortured and finally killed.

Shortly afterwards all of the remaining Danube Swabian men were assembled and had to march to work in the slave labor camps in Serbia. Some of these who survived reported that many died on the way. Karl Csernvenyi was beaten during the crossing of the Danube, was stabbed and thrown off the bridge and drowned. His brother Julius had an even more gruesome death. His hands were both broken, his eyes were put out, his nostrils slit, many of his teeth were knocked out, strips of skin were cut from his body, his penis was cut off and stuck in his mouth...

But one day the entire population had to assemble in the streets of our beloved town. We stood in the rain all night and marched to Jarek in a march of death for the next sixty kilometers. We were forced to march quickly and we soon abandoned our baggage. Shut-ins, cripples and the sick stayed behind and were beaten or shot to death. Infants and toddlers lay with the bodies of their dead grandmothers on the roadways along with the grandfathers. The sixty kilometer stretch of road was the site of hundreds of corpses."

Novoselo

Novoselo was one of the oldest of the Danube Swabian settlements in the Batschka and they comprised its entire population of some three thousand. The actions against the Danube Swabians began in the fall of 1944.

The first action was the arrest and murder of the doctor, Joseph Fath. He had two sons, both of whom were taken to concentration camps and died there. The youngest was Erwin and he was fifteen years old and was brutally killed by the Partisans at the Palanka camp.

On November 19, 1944 all men from the ages of sixteen to sixty years were taken to Palanka. For several days they were imprisoned in the assembly hall of the high school. The men were from Wekerledorf and seventy men from Plavna accompanied them. In all they numbered about two hundred men. They were brutally tortured and some for no reason at all were shot. The survivors were driven to the camp at Neusatz on November 24th. They had to march the forty-two kilometers while their Partisan guards rode in wagons and tortured, maimed and beat them at will. They shot all of the men who could not keep up. Nine men from Novoselo died in this way. In a group of nine hundred assembled Danube Swabian men at the camp, only forty-five were alive when they were brought back to Neusatz. Many of them were then sent to Mitrowitz in Sirmien.

At Christmas the young women and teenage girls were deported to the Soviet Union, and then during Holy Week the rest of the residents of Novoselo were chased out of their homes and sent to one of the various forced labor camps or the concentration camp at Jarek.

Obrowatz

In the mixed language village of Obrowatz right after the take over by the Yugoslavian officials, thirty-four of the Danube Swabian villagers, including married and unmarried young women were shot for no apparent reason. Two of the leading Serbian villagers attempted to prevent the shootings. As a result of these attempts to protect their Danube Swabian villagers, the Partisans killed the two Serbs as well.

The village doctor, Michael Koepfer who was well known and loved by the Serbian villagers was brutally abused by "foreign" Partisans and sent to the concentration camp at Jarek where he later died.

The men of the village were dragged off to the labor camp at Neusatz or other camps in the vicinity. At the beginning of 1945, the young girls and women were deported to Russia, and the old women and children were taken to Jarek and the vast majority of them perished there.

A resident of Obrowatz writes, "A few days after the Russian and Bulgarian troops withdrew, a very difficult time was ahead for the Danube Swabian population as the Partisans undertook their brutal reign of terror that began with killings. Some of the Partisans were local Serbs. On November 21, 1944 the Partisans confiscated all Danube Swabian property and we lost all rights of citizenship. But by then the Partisans had already taken the lives of forty-two persons: thirty-four Danube Swabians, six Hungarians and two Serbs."

The shootings began on October 30, 1944. On that day three women were shot. What was their crime? The oldest was eighty-four years and crippled after a stroke, another was her daughter married to the merchant, Franz Reinhardt who had fled to Germany, and the third was their servant girl. Franz had hidden some food before he fled and the Partisans found that. That was the crime for which the three women were executed in the courtyard of the town hall. The next shootings took place on November 3rd and continued all month. The last known date for such "actions" was November 24th, involving mostly men but also some women.

Tscheb

This community was the birthplace of Dr. Jakob Bleyer the future leader of the Swabians in their attempts at preserving their Swabian identity in Hungary following the First World War.

On November 9, 1944 twenty Danube Swabian men were taken from their homes. They were to be taken to the coalmines in Vrdnik in Sirmien to do forced labor, to replace many of those who were killed on their way there from Batschka -Palanka. From the outset of the march from Tscheb the Partisans chose the two youngest men in the group and for no apparent reason shot them on the spot. The other eighteen were badly treated all of the way to Vrdnik. Like the men from Palanka their shoes were taken from them and most of their clothing in the bitter winter cold. After the two-day forced march they reached Vrdnik where two died soon after.

The survivors from Tscheb were sent to the camp at Neusatz in early December. Again some of them were shot on the way unable to keep up with the others. Most of the others died in the labor camps.

At New Year's the women and teenage girls were deported to Russia. On June 2, 1945 the remaining population, women, the elderly and children were chased out of their homes and force-marched to the concentration camp at Jarek.

Towarisch

In the village of Towarisch, Danube Swabians accounted for about one third of the population. They were farmers and Roman Catholics. The rest of the inhabitants were Serbs and Orthodox. In the fall of 1944, as the Russians were advancing across the Tisza River and the Hungarian army was leaving the Roman Catholic priest assembled the Swabians after mass and encouraged them to leave and join the German army that was evacuating to the west.

Most of the Danube Swabians followed the priest's advice and under his leadership left their homes. Only ten families remained. They did not believe they had anything to fear from the Partisans. Another family who had turned back when the evacuation column crossed the Danube later joined them. But by now the new Yugoslavian authorities were in power in Towarisch. Their first order of the day was the liquidation of the Danube Swabian population.

All ten families and the returnees were taken from their homes. They were forced to march to the limits of the village and dig a large pit. All the men, women, children and elderly were bound together and had to walk beside the pit and were shot. They thought that they had exterminated the total Swabian population and left the mass grave open. It was to be filled in the next morning by some other people. The returnee family was among the victims. As the shots had leveled rows of people bound together one woman was not hit but had fallen into the grave with the others. She was tied to her dead husband. For hours she remained under the corpses of others. As night came, she was able to free herself from her fetters and crawled out of the grave into the night. By dawn she reached Bukin where she had relations and sought a haven. Later she was apprehended for being a "German" and was carried off. She was sent to the Jarek concentration camp.

During Holy Week of 1945 all of the Danube Swabian communities in the region had been depopulated of their inhabitants with the children, the elderly and women in various concentration camps and the men and able bodied women in the forced labor camps. All of them camps in which large numbers of them would perish.

Plavna

The community lies close to the Danube and the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants were Serbo-Croatian and the Danube Swabians were a small minority. In the fall of 1944, some seventy men were taken into custody and removed to Palanka and from there to various slave labor camps. The other able bodied persons in Plavna were sent to slave labor in various places in the next weeks and months. In the summer of 1945 men were brought from the camp in Sombor on foot to work in the hemp factory as slave labor. Because of the lack of food, long and heavy work many died of disease. These men were mostly from Gakowa and Stanischtsch.

The experience of the Danube Swabians in Plavna is best expressed in the life story of one of the children, who at the age of seven arrived alone in Salzburg, Austria on Christmas Day in 1948. She tells the story of the five previous years in this way:

"My parents were both deported on Christmas' Eve in 1944. My grandmother told me that they had been taken to Russia. I remained at home alone with my grandmother. Then they also came for my grandmother. Later she told me that they had taken her to Kolut where she was forced to work. As my grandmother was being taken away she begged our neighbors to take me to Batsch where we had relatives. But soon the Danube Swabians in Batsch were on the agenda of the

Partisans and the relatives who had taken me in, took me along with them to Jarek and its concentration camp. But soon I was almost alone again as my aunt and uncle were taken from Jarek to do labor elsewhere and they would never return. Because so many had already died in Jarek, we were all brought to Gakowa.

My grandmother working in Kolut discovered somehow that I had survived through an old woman in Plavna and that I was in Gakowa. She came to Gakowa at night and was able to smuggle me out of the camp and took me back with her to Kolut. There she became very ill and since she was unable to work any longer, she had to go to Gakowa. But because so many of the people died of hunger there and were badly abused, she took me with her one night. We were able to sneak and crawl out of the camp and we entered Hungary that same night. We then walked a great distance until we reached the Steiermark in Austria. My grandmother worked as a servant for a farmer and also died there. Before she died she had given the farmer the address of some friends in Vienna to contact. After she died the farmer wrote to the people in Vienna. The woman in Vienna had been our neighbor in Plavna and came and took me to Vienna.

My parents had been released from Russia due to severe illness and were sent to Germany. At first, it was my mother who found out where I was. Later, my father did too. After my father wrote to us in Vienna, we sent his address to my mother. When she learned he was in Bremen she went to join him. At that time he was unable to stand or walk. We arranged for my father to meet us in Salzburg instead of getting me in Vienna. Our neighbor sent me along to Salzburg, but my father was not there. He had become ill again and could not move or travel. I was then taken by the Red Cross to my sick parents in Bremen."

North and Middle Batschka

"Where the bloodletting raged'

Werbass

In the central region of the Batschka there were numerous and large Danube Swabian communities that originated from the planned settlement under Joseph II. The vast majority of these communities were Lutheran and some Reformed. The twin towns of Alt and Neu Werbass (Old and New Werbass) were the cultural and economic center of the district, surrounded by the Lutheran communities of: Sekitsch, Feketisch, Alt Ker, Klein Ker, Tscherwenka and Torschau. Kula was also in the neighborhood but it was an ethnically mixed community and its Danube Swabians were Roman Catholic. This region would become a field of blood for its Swabian inhabitants. It was to be the scene of the most atrocious mass murders and shootings throughout the Batschka in the fall of 1944. In only a few weeks, some six hundred men from the twin towns of Werbass were victims of mass shootings.

In Neu Werbass the most important and influential leaders and intellectuals among the Danube Swabians were arrested and shot individually or in groups. Other Danube Swabian men had to watch the executions and bury the dead. The victims were brought to their graves and were shot in the back of the neck. One of the Partisans who had lived in Werbass was proud and boasted of the fact that he had personally shot eighty of the men himself. As a reward for his "heroism" he was made the District Commander at Kula and although he was totally illiterate he held that office for years afterwards.

The rest of the Danube Swabian population was packed into the old silk and velvet factory which now became a camp until the spring of 1945. Later all of them were sent to Gakowa and Kruschevlje.

There were also executions in Alt Werbass involving countless Danube Swabian men and women. Most took place in the courtyard of the notary's house and the local garbage dump. The total deaths in Alt Werbass due to shootings, beatings and hangings numbered three hundred and seventy men and women. All of the corpses were buried naked while the Partisans bargained or gambled for their clothes

Kula

The mass executions in Kula were hardly any less terrifying. In the fall of 1944 over two hundred Danube Swabians perished and the methods were even more brutal than in Werbass. Whole families were beaten to death. That was the case with Dr. Saur and his wife and two small children. Here again it was the intellectuals and leaders of the community who were on the liquidation lists.

Klein-Ker

Klein Ker had a population of four thousand Lutheran Danube Swabians when the Partisans arrived on November 9, 1944 and sealed off the community and barricaded the houses. Eighty-two of the leading citizens were arrested. Half of them consisted of married women and single girls. They were all driven on foot to the town hall. Here they were imprisoned and tortured. On November 10th they had to strip down to their underwear. Their hands were bound with wire. They were force-marched to the railway tracks where all of them were forced to lie down and each person was dispatched by gun or rifle. Two of the stronger men Dr. Leibmann the physician and a farmer were left to the last, because they threw all of the corpses into a large pit. Then Gypsies were recruited to cover over the mass grave.

On November 14th an additional seventy Danube Swabians were taken from their homes. The majority of these victims were women and single girls. They were assembled at the town hall and were terribly abused. The women and girls were molested. They were kept imprisoned in a very small room packed tightly together until the following night. The Partisans called them out one at a time to bind their hands as a prelude to taking them out for execution. When the farm laborer Ludwig Schwarz was called out, he suddenly lunged at an armed Partisan, threw him to the ground, jumped over him and in front of everyone made it to the courtyard. The other Partisans shot after him. He was only wounded in the hand and could jump over the wall and escaped into the darkness. For the next three months he was in hiding, until he could escape with his family and get out of the country. But the others were taken to the town limits where they were shot. Their bodies were thrown into water filled ditch and later filled with earth.

On November 17th another blockade was in effect and fifty Danube Swabians were assembled. Among them, more than half of them were women and teenage girls. Some children aged fourteen were also among them. These too were imprisoned in the town hall and were physically abused. During the night of November 18th they were loaded on trucks that took the road to Werbass, but all of them were shot at the Roman Wall along the way.

On November 19th the Partisans assembled seventeen men and women during the night and shot them at the local mill. They left the dead in the street. One of the women was only wounded. She lay there under the bodies of the others. One could hear her whimpering in pain until noon the next day, but no one was allowed to help her. She lay there until she died. On another day in November, three of the older men in the town were taken and shot in Werbass because the functionaries there knew them and they wanted "Swabian blood to flow".

In December of 1944 another fifteen men were taken out of the town. They were taken to Mitrowitz to work on the railway and none of them was ever heard from again.

In May of 1945 the remaining Danube Swabians after the deportations to Russia were driven out of their homes and taken to concentration camps. Many were taken to Jarek where almost all of them died.

Subotica

Subotica was one of the major cities of Yugoslavia and was primarily inhabited by Romanians and Hungarians. In the immediate vicinity of the city there were villages with a large German-speaking minority. The Military Government of the Partisans established two camps in the city in the fall of 1944. A transit camp was set up to handle the flow of the returnees from the evacuation and when it was ascertained that they were Danube Swabians they were sent to the camps in the north and central Batschka. Most of the women and children were sent to Sektisch, while the able bodied were consigned to the forced labor camp in Subotica or its environs.

The labor camp in Subotica had a large inmate population and the current number was always kept in the neighborhood of four thousand persons. They were assigned to various works in the vicinity. Conditions here for the internees was no different than it was in any of the other camps in the Batschka.

With regard to the extermination program in North and Middle Batschka we are well informed by the report from a woman from Erdevik in Syrmien who had been evacuated with her children in the fall of 1944, and later along with many others she returned to Yugoslavia in May of 1945. She reports the following:

"We arrived in Subotica on June 6, 1945 from eastern Germany from where we had been evacuated. Those of us who were Danube Swabians were immediately separated from the others and placed in work groups. Young mothers who refused to be separated from their children were beaten and imprisoned. Those who did not give up their money or valuables freely were shot. On the day of our arrival I witnessed twenty-five such shootings. All of them were women. Among the dead was Frau Nusspl from Palanka, the twenty-three year old Maria Kirschner from Hodschag, nineteen-year-old Katharina Beuschl from Wekerle, the twenty-seven year old Eva Beck from Ruma, eighteen-year-old Katharina Mueller from Ruma, seventeen-year-old Maria Fischer from Krndija and thirty-three year old Rosalia Berger from Pasua. The older women among us were consigned to the camp in Sekitsch and young women remained in the slave labor camp in Subotica. The men were led away. They had no idea of where they were going. We never heard from any of them again. For two months I worked at the Partisan hospital where I became unable to work any longer and as a result I too was sent to Sekitsch."

Several times typhus epidemics broke out in the labor camp in Subotica. Large labor parties from the camp lived out in the open for months, even in the winter. They often stayed overnight in haylofts or haystacks and at the crack of dawn they were driven to work. Like inmates in other camps they could never change their clothes and for weeks on end they could not stretch out and have a good night's sleep. Those no longer able to work were sent to Sekitsch and later to Gakowa and Kruschevlje. An excuse was found to close down the camp in Subotica: there were no longer any inmates left capable of working. In January 1948 the surviving inmates were all sick and fifty of them were in the final stages of dying from typhus.

Sekitsch-Feketitsch

These two Lutheran Danube Swabian communities were on the route of the international highway north of Werbass and were entered by Russian troops on October 12, 1944. Three days later the Partisans set up their Military Government. Countless numbers of Danube Swabian men were arrested and brutally beaten and tortured. At the same time others from the civilian population were being taken to forced labor camps. In the beginning they worked in the vicinity and were allowed to return home, but soon they were taken farther away and were not allowed to return to Sekitsch. In October all men from the ages of 18 to 60 years had to report to the Partisan authorities. They were never released. The younger men among them were sent to the camp in Subotica, while the older men were sent to Topola.

Sekitsch was officially declared a camp on November 20, 1944. Those who lived in the eastern portion of the village were driven from their homes into the western part of the community. The houses in the eastern part of the village were emptied of everything of value and in late November the old men and women, as well as the children from Bajmok were brought to Sekitsch and packed into them. In a very short period of time all of the Danube Swabians in the vicinity who were unable to work, including those from the Lutheran village of Feketitsch were brought and interned here in Sekitsch. Soon it became the dumping ground for the region, while those who were able bodied from Sekitsch, both the men and the women were assigned to Topola, Morawitza, Bajmok and Subotica. Women with small children and infants were not spared. They had to leave the children behind even if there was no one to care for them.

The death rate at the Sekitsch camp compared to other concentration camps was not among the highest. Everything had been confiscated in the fall of 1944. Very few of the Danube Swabians in Sekitsch had joined the evacuation and those who had remained had prepared and stored provisions for the future as they awaited the Russian occupation. As a result the people of Sekitsch were not dependent upon the camp food at all. They shared this with the arrivals from the vicinity. But this food supply would soon end. When they were transferred to the camps at Gakowa and Kruschevlje they died very quickly. They died like flies at Kruschevlje, as they were unprepared for what they had to endure there.

On October 1, 1945 the whole camp at Sekitsch was transferred to Kruschevlje. The death rate there and at Gakowa was so high that they could accommodate the seven thousand inmates at Sekitsch. The only Swabians who remained in Sekitsch were those who were still capable of providing labor of some kind.

Before being transferred, everything the inmates still had was taken away from them. Most had only the clothes they wore left to them, bedding and everything else was taken away from them. The Sekitsch inmates had nothing to trade unlike the others in Kruschevlje. The shipment of the Sekitsch Swabians was in open cattle cars and the trip lasted two days and it never stopped raining. In Sombor, Partisans pulled up to the train and beat the women and children. Many of them were gruesomely mistreated. A secret church report in 1946 indicated that of the six thousand inhabitants of Sekitsch only about one thousand were still alive. They were all in Germany or Austria, so that less than one hundred were still alive in Yugoslavia.

Two women from Sekitsch were shot at Kruschevlje. They had sneaked out of the camp to beg for food in a nearby Hungarian village. On their way back to the camp a sentry who spotted them shot both of them.

West and North West Batschka

“Death reaps a plentiful harvest”

Hodschag

In the district of Hodschag the Danube Swabians formed the greater portion of the population. It was in effect a totally Danube Swabian region. It consisted of the entirely Swabian communities of Hodschag, Filipovo, Karvukovo and communities with small Serbian populations like Parabutsch, Milititsch and Brestowatz. While still in other communities the numbers of Danube Swabians was high in Batsch, Deronje, Wajska and Plavna. A large part of the population had been evacuated in the fall of 1944 as the Russians advanced into Yugoslavia. But the percentage of those who fled differed greatly in the various communities of the district. While the vast majority of the Swabian population allowed themselves to be evacuated, almost all of the Swabians in Filipovo remained at home and the greater portion of the Swabians remained in Hodschag.

In the very first days of the arrival of the Partisans, key and influential Swabians in the district were arrested and brought to Hodschag. With their arrest many of them simply disappeared forever, while others were placed in camps and set to forced labor. In the fall, the Partisans rounded up one hundred and eighty-two Danube Swabian men from the age of 16 to 60 years and they have been missing ever since. They were led out of town in two groups, one in the direction of Karavukovo, and the other towards Filipovo. Along the way they were stripped naked and were shot. The bodies were buried in a mass grave. Only one man survived. Already stripped naked and ordered to the mass grave in the blink of an eye he made a dash for it. The Partisans fired and gave chase and even shot one of their own by mistake. He managed to escape and hide with strangers. In the spring and summer all of the Swabians in the area were rounded up and driven on foot into the camps and he was among them. He managed again to survive in the camp under a false name.

In the spring and summer, large numbers of women and single girls, as well as men from the various surrounding communities were brought to Hodschag. In the northeast section of Hodschag two rows of houses facing one another the length of one street were surrounded with a barbed wire fence. For years to follow, thousands of prisoners were imprisoned here and were sent to work in various camps and workstations. The most dangerous work places were in the marshes and bogs. The first large death toll in the marshes was among young women from Apatin. Most of them had nursing infants or were somewhat unhealthy in order to have escaped the deportation to slave labor in the Soviet Union and had been sent to Gakowa and Kruschevlje. There they were separated from their children and assigned to Hodschag. In the first few days in Hodschag and the marshes, twenty-seven of them perished. They died of fever and deep depression over their separation from their children. They suffered greatly from dysentery. Both in the marshes and the central camp, typhus broke out. In spite of vaccinations, all who entered the camp "hospital" died very quickly.

The commander of the camp, a Partisan from Deronje was a cruel and horrifying person. He punished anyone who broke the camp rules brutally. He imprisoned all "lawbreakers" by locking them in a cellar until he or one of his men saw fit to release the person. The victims were often in the cellar for days, without food or sanitary facilities. Some were to be used as "examples" and were beaten and tortured. Those especially punished were those who had tried to escape or pass information from one camp to another.

The rations the inmates received were barely enough to live and the labor they did was hard and done in the summer heat. In the mornings they received a ladle of tea made out of some boiled leaves of one kind or another. There was no sugar. At noon there was always bean soup without salt or lard. They received the same at night. In the summer of 1945 the inmates numbered over one thousand four hundred who continued to be fed meagerly and faced constant starvation.

There was a "hospital" in the camp in name only, and only those unable to stand up on their own were allowed in it. They were often simply skeletal from lack of food, brutal hard work, dysentery and diarrhea. It would have been the last stop before the cemetery if there had been one.

In the early summer of 1945 one after another of the Danube Swabian communities in the Hodschag district were depopulated. Those still able to work were sent to Hodschag and the others ended up in Filipovo at first and then later in Gakowa and Kruschevlje.

In the fall of 1945 all of the women and single girls at the work places throughout the entire district were assembled and brought to the central camp at Hodschag. They were convinced they were being deported to Russia. Many of the mothers who heard the rumors found themselves in the same camp as their daughters and they did not want to be separated from them and tried to sneak them into the Hodschag camp with them. Most of those who were caught experienced the brutal and sadistic mistreatment of the camp commander. He created a work brigade consisting of these young girls and women who had to break corn in the fields all winter, day after day. From sunrise to sundown they had to work and even in the worst winter snowstorms. After only a few days, many of them had frozen hands or feet. But work went on, day after day. In the spring, the "brigade" returned to Hodschag, and was broken up and the survivors were sent to new work places. A large group of them later came to Batsch.

In the spring and summer of 1946 "colonists" from the southern regions of the country resettled the unpopulated district. The colonists had to take over the fieldwork in the summer and as a result the Swabian slave laborers were sent back to the central camp in Hodschag. In the middle of September with no work any longer available in the area, all of the inmates were sent to Gakowa and Kruschevlje. By now, the number of inmates in the camp had dwindled to less than one thousand. In the fall of 1945 there had been over four thousand. In the meantime, about three thousand had perished or were sent to Gakowa and Kruschevlje to die.

Karavukovo

The population of the community was entirely Danube Swabian and numbered some five thousand persons. It was one of the wealthiest and most prosperous communities in the Batschka. The majority of the population left with the evacuation treks accompanied by units of German troops to ward off attacks by Partisans. Although the Partisans at first established the Military Government in the surrounding area nothing was done in Karavukovo. A delegation of Danube Swabians was sent to Hodschag to meet the Partisan functionaries there whom they believed would take over the rule of Karavukovo. To their great good fortune the Serbs who were sent to set up the local government of the town were upright men. But they were unable to prevent the orders for men and women to be sent to Hodschag for forced labor or to other places as ordered. Even so a large portion of the able bodied were able to remain at home longer even if they were called upon to provide slave labor. But still many of the Karavukovo Danube Swabian men were arrested and shot. Among them was the well-known Balthasar Broder a mason and builder.

In the summer of 1945 all of those who were unable to work were forced to go to nearby Filipovo and after a short period of time these elderly persons and the children were sent to Gakowa. The local priest, Alexander Thiel was among them. He was later released and for a short time he returned and served what remained of his parish, but was arrested and imprisoned for six months at Neusatz. Following his release from there he fled to Austria.

When harvest workers were needed they were brought from the camp in Sombor. A group of one hundred and sixty men and women were force-marched from Sombor on June 21, 1945. The men and women were placed in separate camps that in effect were the former houses of wealthy families. The nutrition they received here was somewhat better and there were very few deaths among them. The Partisan guards were accommodated in the house next to the women's camp. This resulted in constant disturbances and the mistreatment and abuse of the women. For weeks on end they were awakened every night and driven out into the courtyard and were forced to stand for hours in the rain and other bad weather, while the Partisans went into their quarters and searched through the clothing and took whatever caught their fancy. Women who had hidden anything were forced into the cellar and were beaten and locked in overnight. Some were so badly abused that they died when they were transferred to the camp at Hodschag.

The men had more peace from the Partisans than the women. But if they too were found to have hidden any valuables they were beaten so badly that few of them were able to recover.

In the summer of 1945 the labor station at Deronje was closed and the inmates were sent to Karavukovo. From the beginning of the Fall more and more of the Swabian forced laborers were returned to the central camp in Hodschag and from there they were assigned to other work stations. All of the women were resettled in Hodschag, and in the spring they were sent to work in the swamps along the Danube where there had been a massive death rate among women working there the previous summer.

In the spring of 1946 the brick factory was re-opened and a labor camp was established there. Former residents of Karavukovo provided the leadership in the factory and the camp and brought former residents in the Hodschag central camp back to work here. This proved to be heavy and difficult work for the undernourished and exhausted Swabian slave laborers. At that time there were already new "colonists" from the Pirot region well established in the community occupying the former homes and living off of the work of their former owners and their ancestors over the generations. They were simply not prepared to do such heavy work and left it to the Swabians.

In the spring of 1946 as well, the men's camp at Karavukovo was closed down. Large numbers of them were sent to Hodschag's central camp and from there they were later re-settled at Batsch and put to forced labor there.

Milititisch

The community was located north west of Hodschag and was a rich hemp-producing center. There were numerous Serbian families in the area and they had their own Orthodox parish and lived with the majority Danube Swabians on good terms over the centuries. A large portion of the Swabian population were evacuated by the retreating German army and to all intents and purposes left the area to the local Serbians. About one hundred families from among the Danube Swabian population trusted the word and promises of their Serbian neighbors and especially that of the Orthodox priest that they would protect them from the Partisans and decided to remain at home. In the first days of Partisan rule very few of the Swabian men or women were arrested and taken to the slave labor camps in Hodschag and Sombor, which in effect was a result of the local Serbian population and their promise of protection. But not even Milititisch would be spared some atrocities. One of the Swabian men was bound and tossed into a heated kettle in the hemp factory and was most cruelly scalded to death.

On March 11, 1945 a large number of men and women were taken to the camp in Sombor. They had to cover forty kilometers at night on foot to a work camp to serve the Russians in Baranya in Hungary. But, by the time they got into the area the

Russians already had fourteen thousand slave laborers, so that the Milititsch men and women remained in Sombor. Here they worked in the Partisan hospital. In the months of April and May numerous work parties were assigned to Semlin and Mitrowitz and included workers from Milititsch. They worked in the marshes and most of them perished there. All those who survived who were not sent to Mitrowitz in Syrmien on June 21st went from Sombor to Karavukovo on foot where they remained until the closing of the camp in the summer of 1946 and then were moved to Hodschag on their way to Gawkowa and Kruschevlje.

In the spring of 1945 all of the Danube Swabians were assembled in a central location and there they were divided into two groups. Those who were able to work, both men and women, and those unable to work, the elderly, children and the sick and infirm. It was heart rending scene to watch as the two groups were led away each heading in a different direction and destiny. The children sought to be with their mothers or grandmothers and cried after them, the mothers attempting to take their children with them or running after them. They were beaten back with punches and rifle butts. The elderly and the children were first driven on foot to Filipovo and like all of the other Swabians throughout the Batschka in camps for those unable to work were then assigned to the death camp at Gakowa. The able bodied were either kept in Milititsch for labor, while others were sent to Hodschag and then assigned to labor camps in the district.

Batsch

Batsch was a fortress town from ancient times lying between the Danube and Tisza Rivers and played an important role in Hungarian history and after the settlement of Danube Swabians in the village it was a mixed village ethnically. There were Slavs, Hungarians and Swabians. The Danube Swabians accounted for about twenty-five per cent of the population of four thousand. They were, however, the most prosperous and educationally and culturally advanced.

As early as the fall of 1944, large numbers of the Swabians were taken to Hodschag and used as slave labor in various districts in the region. Later in the spring of 1945 all of the Danube Swabians throughout the district were driven out of their home communities and brought to Hodschag. Only two men were left behind in Batsch where they continued to do slave labor. They were the butcher Pauschert and the locksmith Armbrust. In the fall the Partisans brought the Roman Catholic priest Novotny from Plavna and imprisoned him in the town hall. A few days later the Partisans claimed to be looking for the priest who had escaped and rummaged through the Franciscan monastery and searched the rectory but without any success they claimed. In actual fact he had been beaten and tortured to death in the basement of the town hall and was already buried. Two other well-known citizens of Batsch then also disappeared and were probably murdered because they were never seen again. The men belonged to the Kubesch and Gebauer families.

At the end of March in 1945 a large work party from the detainee camp in Sombor arrived in Batsch. A camp was set up for them in a former dance hall. Most of them came from Gakowa, Stanischtisch and Apatin.

In the summer of 1945 the Partisans led another work party from the slave labor camp in Sombor on foot to Batsch where they had to work in the hemp factory. There was another work party in the village consisting of women forty-five years of age and older. They had been brought from Hodschag to Batsch. Both of these labor camps were closed in the fall of that year and the inmates were transferred to work on the district collective farm.

In the spring of 1946 new slave labor battalions were brought to Batsch from the central forced labor camp in Hodschag. Most of them were young single and married women who had worked in the cornfields all winter. Another large group among

these new slave laborers were younger and older teenage boys and men from Filipovo.

In July 1946 the camp in Batsch was dismantled and the inmate survivors were taken back to Hodschag, and most of them were later sent to Gakowa and Kruschevlje in September of that year. Those who were kept back were "sold" as slave laborers to the inhabitants of the district up to 1948.

Filipovo

Filipovo lies north of Hodschag and was an entirely Danube Swabian community which was well known throughout the Roman Catholic world. The religious and church life of the community was mirrored in the fact that approximately forty of its sons became priests and about one hundred women took the veil as nuns in various orders. Of its four thousand inhabitants only a small portion left with the evacuation carried out by the German army. On the counsel of their priest, Peter Mueller most remained behind. The priest was later arrested by the Partisans and given a long prison sentence.

The Partisans were prepared to make Filipovo into a showcase of their liquidation program and carried out the biggest large-scale mass shootings here in the Batschka. One morning, all men from the age of sixteen to sixty years were forced to report to them. Among the men were the assistant priest Paul Pfuhl and the Filipovo born priest Anton Zollitsch home on leave from the Banat. The commander of the liquidation squad recognized Zollitsch as a former comrade in arms in his former regiment and he had the two priests leave the group and sent them home. All of the rest were marched out of the village on to the road to Hodschag and were shot. But first they had to dig their own graves. Then take off their clothes. Then they were shot in groups. Tossed into the graves. There were two hundred and forty-three victims in all. No survivors. Their clothes were taken by wagon to Hodschag a few days later and were sold at the "flea" market.

Men and women from Filipovo were taken to the central labor camp in Hodschag to do forced labor. In the spring of 1945 all of the Danube Swabians in the village were driven out of their homes. A portion of them had to do slave labor in Filipovo itself, others were taken to the central camp in Hodschag and from there scattered in labor camps throughout the area. The children and all those unable to work at first remained in Filipovo and were joined by the children and elderly from the surrounding communities. They were all later sent to Gakowa and Kruschevlje. In September 1946 the able bodied who had managed to survive in the Hodschag central camp were sent to the same destination and shared the same fate.

Apatin

The Danube Swabian town of Apatin on the Danube was not only the oldest such settlement in the Batschka, it was also the largest all Swabian community in Yugoslavia with a population of fourteen thousand. With its founding two hundred years earlier it marked the beginning of the Danube Swabian settlement of the Batschka. It played a key role in industry, commerce and culture and served as a river port on the Danube.

The Russian Army reached Apatin in October of 1944. For weeks battles raged in the streets of the town. The Russians were determined to cross the Danube here and as a result they suffered huge casualties. It is estimated that up to sixty thousand Russians fell or drowned in the crossing. While the battle raged to cross the Danube the Partisans arrived to set up their Military Government in the town and district. Their first act was the arrest of large numbers of the leading citizens. Almost daily men were taken from their homes and imprisoned in different parts of the town and beaten, tortured and killed. Others were put in a recently established

camp and were sent to slave labor from there. Many were sent to Sombor and then imprisoned at Zupanija and Kronik-Palais or remained in Sombor. None of these men were ever heard from again. There were at least sixty-four documented victims of this action and many of them died a rather painful gruesome death.

(The bestiality and sadism perpetrated against certain individuals is described but I decline to translate that out of consideration of the sensitivities of the reader and my own.)

Arrests were still taking place in the first months of 1945. Apatin had been the key center of Roman Catholicism in the Batschka and the most anti-Nazi region in the Batschka and yet the Partisans were determined to liquidate the Danube Swabian people en masse. The western Batschka would witness the greatest numbers of victims and the most gruesome deaths in the region. Apatin was the first of the Danube Swabian communities in western Batschka to be cleansed of its Danube Swabian population. Countless numbers of labor work parties were sent from Apatin to Syrmien by forced marches on foot. Men and women from Apatin were sent to various labor camps. These labor battalions had a high death rate. One forced labor unit of five hundred men, lost twenty-seven of their number on the way who died of exhaustion and beatings. Within a few weeks only forty-three survivors who were barely alive returned to Apatin.

Not much better was the destiny of the labor transports in the spring of 1945 which were sent to Semlin and Mitrowitz to work in the swamps, from where only a few from among every hundred managed to survive.

March 11, 1945 was a black day in the life of Apatin. On that day, the entire remaining Danube Swabian population of the town were driven from their homes and forced to walk to Gakowa and Kruschevlje as the first victims of those concentration camps. They were the first to feed the death mill. After only a few months seven hundred of them had died from hunger. On the march to the camps those who could not keep up, were forced on by beatings. Those who collapsed were simply left to die where they lay. No one was permitted to help them in any way regardless of their relationship to the unfortunate person.

Because of the long term presence of the Russian military and units of the Partisans led to the rape of countless women and young girls. The number that took place cannot even be estimated. The extent to which it occurred is reflected in the fact that not even a ninety-two year old grandmother was spared and was gang-raped. But along with rape they also perpetrated all kinds of torture including electrical shock treatments to the breasts and vaginas of their victims.

Shortly after the establishment of Military Government by the Partisans a census of the community was undertaken. A few hundred families with non-German sounding names registered as Hungarians or Slavs. Those whose registration was validated were not included in the expulsion of March 11th. Approximately two thousand people were excluded in this way. It was estimated that about two thousand had left with the retreating Hungarian Army when they abandoned the city. In the neighborhood of two thousand and four hundred single and married young women along with some men had been deported to the Soviet Union between Christmas 1944 and New Years 1945. As a result not quite eight thousand were sent to Gakowa and Kruschevlje.

Those who remained at home had no peace either. There were raids and arrests, and a pogrom on Easter Monday that was unleashed against many leading citizens of the town resulting in horrendous deaths for many of them.

When the first expellees from Apatin arrived at Sombor on their way to Gakowa there was not enough room for all of them in the barracks of the camp, and about four thousand women and children, including nursing infants had to spend the night

out in the open in the bitter cold, while others were allowed to huddle together in the streets. When Bulgarian troops who were stationed in Sombor heard the crying and whimpering of the children, they invited their Partisan "allies" into their barracks for a drink. They got them drunk and let the women and children into their own barracks. In the early morning hours of March 12th the expellees went on to Gakowa and Kruschevlje by foot. The group that had found refuge in the Sombor camp had everything they had taken away from them except the clothes they wore.

A few days after arriving, women who were able bodied were separated from their children, most of them were infants and toddlers and the mothers were taken to Baranya to dig trenches for the Russians. This work was completed on March 21st and the women were taken to Sombor and from there they were sent to various labor camps throughout western Batschka . Labor units of men were from time to time sent to Sirmien to work in the swamps and marshes. Most of them died or were killed there.

For a long time the inmates at Gakowa and Kruschevlje came from Apatin, Kernei and Sentiwan. All of those who could work were taken out of the two concentration camps and were taken to various labor camps in western Batschka . In a few weeks, only children and the elderly remained in the camps. There were only a few parents if any. A large number of younger married women were assigned to the Hodschag district, from among which months and years later were able to return to Gakowa and Kruschevlje in search of their children. Most of them perished working in the swamps in the Hodschag district. What the extermination camps in Semlin and Mitrowitz meant for hundreds of the men from Apatin, the Hodschag camp meant for the women which became the last station of their way of sorrows and the cross for both of them.

In later months as the former industries in Apatin went back into production many of the tradesmen and craftsmen from Apatin had the good fortune to return there as slave laborers in their trained field. This change in circumstances saved many of their lives.

Sonta

In the overwhelmingly Slavic community of Sonta the population was ordered to report to the town hall in the fall of 1944 and declare their nationality, which meant their ethnic origin. A short time later all of those who were classified as Danube Swabians and were able bodied had to return to the town hall and report again and were taken away to do forced labor. They were first taken to Apatin and then at Christmas and New Years they were deported to Russia along with the victims from Apatin.

At the end of January in 1945 all Danube Swabian men were taken from their homes and imprisoned in the former bakery and were used as slave labor. On March 12th all of the men were taken to Sombor and from there on to Baranya to dig trenches and build fortifications for the Russians. The seventy-kilometer distance was traversed on foot without a pause. After completing their work they were returned to Sombor and assigned as slave labor. The rest of the Danube Swabian population of Sonta was forced to go to Milititsch in the spring of 1945 and those unable to work were later sent to Filipovo and then on to the grinding death mill in Gakowa and Kruschevlje.

Sentiwan

The richest and most prosperous community in western Batschka was Sentiwan. The population was six thousand mostly consisting of Danube Swabians. It was the center of the hemp export industry known throughout the world. Hemp was "the white gold" of the Batschka.

Soon after the establishment of the Military Government many of the Danube Swabian men were arrested and taken to the camps in Apatin and Sombor. Others were imprisoned in government jails. The former mayor Mueller who had campaigned for the Serbian Nationalist Party, who always denied his German origins was taken to Sombor and imprisoned, while his wife was taken to the slave labor camp at Parabutsch.

A large number of the men were imprisoned in the local convent and sent out as slave laborers. On March 12th they were taken to Sombor and then brought to Baranya to build fortifications and accommodations for the Russian troops. After their return from Baranya they were divided up among various villages and districts to do slave labor. On March 15th the remaining population in Sentiwan was taken to Sombor and then on to Gakowa and Kruschevlje. But the able bodied remained behind, both men and women and were used as forced labor working the fields and the local industries.

Doroslo

Since the turn of the century, Doroslo had a large number of Danube Swabian inhabitants. In the last decade before the First World War a large number of the German families took Hungarian names and considered themselves to be Hungarian.

The few remaining Danube Swabians in the community were taken to various labor camps as early as the fall of 1944. Many of those families that had assimilated with the Hungarians, had retained their German names and now had to share in the lot of the Danube Swabians. It was only after years spent in the labor camps that they again spoke the language of their forebears. This was an example of the kind of basic racism that lay behind the liquidation program of the Tito Partisans.

Sombor

“Slave Market and End Station on the Way of Sorrows”

The city of Sombor had a very small Danube Swabian population. But it played a major role in the destruction of the Danube Swabians of western Batschka. In the barracks on the road to Bezdan the internment camp for the Jews that had been set up by the Hungarian officials just shortly prior to their retreat from the area, now instead received thousands upon thousands of Danube Swabian men and women who were packed together, mistreated, abused, terrified, and oppressed on their way to liquidation. It was the first large-scale slave labor camp in the Batschka. Every day new groups from every corner of the Batschka arrived in the camp at Sombor and for seven days a week they did hard labor with only a limited amount of nutrition.

In the fall of 1944, a labor battalion from Sombor was brought to Bezdan to bury the one hundred and twenty-seven persons who had been exterminated there in a variety of ways. The first victims were the intellectuals and businessmen. All of the men in the area had to report and show their hands to the Partisans, and whoever had “soft” hands was immediately shot.

The regional commander of the Partisans sent individual orders and commands to the local communities identifying the number of men or women they were to provide. These orders were always filled promptly. By the spring of 1945 the Sombor central camp was the largest show place of slave labor in Yugoslavia. New labor groups were constantly being selected and then marched off to all areas of the Batschka to do labor. When they were brought back from such a work detail, within the day or week individuals were assigned to another labor group and driven on foot to another work site. To enable the full functioning of this method the inmates were assigned numbers instead of names.

One of the hardest and heaviest work assignments was digging trenches for the Russian troops in Baranya. At 3:00am in the morning they were set to work. They were housed in abandoned damaged homes, barns, lofts and animal stalls where they were packed together lying on boards or bare floors, sleeping in their clothes and unable to get comfortable. As they left their "quarters" they had breakfast: soup without salt or lard but a handful of peas. The peas were always hard and not edible. Most often it was cold and had not even been heated and "become" soup.

Because all cups and utensils had been taken away from them the slave laborers had to eat and drink out of common dishes. There was also a fifteen-decagram of bread. This was to last the worker until night. At noon there was a short break in which the piece of bread could be eaten.

Each worker was assigned to dig his own trench/fox hole and the diameter was proscribed. Until every worker was done, none could leave. If a man was assigned a rocky piece of terrain he was unable to finish it. Because all of them had been weakened by hunger, no one ever finished before dark. But not even then was there any rest. They had to help those who were not done. In the late hours of the night around 10:00pm and even later, the laborers were marched into a new area to overnight in whatever they could find for themselves. Many did not receive an evening ration. These assignments lasted for nine days. In the first days they suffered so much from hunger that they ate whatever they found in the fields. Those who survived returned on foot to Sombor. The heat was intense. Already on their way to their work assignments the men and women were thrashed along the way. It was much worse on the way back when many were so weak that they could barely walk. The inhabitants of the area through which they passed were mostly Hungarians who often stood in front of their houses with food and containers of water to give to the wretches passing by. Whoever attempted to step out of line to gulp some water or snatch some food had to risk a beating or a battering with rifle butts from their guards. The return march lasted a full day and night with only a brief rest during the night, but without any food or water.

On March 23rd a large labor unit was assigned to work in the Partisan hospital. The men and women worked until 10:00pm and longer and then were awakened and set to work the next morning by 4:00 am. The hospital operated a fine kitchen, but with a threat of punishment to anyone who gave food to the slave laborers. Their fare was tea in the morning and bean soup at night and lunch and some bread, but not the bread that the Partisans got.

The Partisan commanders in Sombor saw as their mission in life to bring about as much suffering as possible to weaken and discourage their Danube Swabian prisoners and hasten their deaths and yet make use of them for their own purposes at will. When there was no other work available in order to wear down the inmates they would have to dismantle buildings in one part of town and then carry all of the heavy building materials to the opposite side of town and rebuild it there. There were always endless columns of men and women slave laborers hauling materials, stones and lumber through the streets of Sombor, a sight that no citizen of the city was spared from seeing.

Until the fall of 1945 there was not a day in which individuals or groups were not beaten or abused. In the camp courtyard there was the body of a truck or car whose windows were covered with tin. It was painted white. Whenever a sentry decided or wanted to punish someone, the person was put in the "white horse" for days. Those imprisoned in it received no food or water and were not let out. They had to meet the needs of their bodily functions inside of it, but then had to clean it up when they were released. It was terrible to spend cold winter nights in there because they were not allowed covers or heavy clothing. Most of those who endured the hunger, cold, stink, constant standing and thrashings never recovered their health. Many died shortly afterwards.

One of the favorite tortures of the Partisan guards was the ridiculing of God and prayer. When women were found praying together they were usually beaten. But the penalty for praying could also be to be forced the culprits on their knees facing a wall in a row with others and pray out loud in unison while the Partisans kicked them. Then, one at a time, they had to stand up in their place in line and step towards the Partisans and tell them if God had helped them and would free them from the camp. As soon as anyone answered they received a whack across the ears, followed by a myriad of curses. "What are you praying for?" they usually screamed and forced the person on their knees and told them to keep on praying. "Perhaps He will help you after all!" And then a while later they would begin the process all over again. These same methods were used on those who attempted to escape from the camp and flee out into the countryside.

On July 20, 1945 all of the inmates of the camp and the outside labor parties were assembled at the camp and put in the barracks. Because it was getting dark, groups of tens were formed and put in a barrack. Here they had to surrender everything they had. Only their necessary clothes were left to them. If anyone tried to hide any possession and he was discovered he or she would be shot. In the night shots rang out in the courtyard as executions were carried out. The Partisans carried out this same action on the labor details that could not return to the camp on time. The body searches that followed were most brutal and abusive when dealing with women and the younger girls.

In May of 1946 the Partisans in Sombor demonstrated against the decision of the Western Powers to place Trieste under United Nations supervision as a free city instead of annexing it to Yugoslavia. In the evening, when the commander of the camp returned after participating in the demonstration, he had two old Danube Swabian men taken out of the barracks and brought to his office where he and three other Partisans brutally attacked them. They cut off some of their body parts, battered and hit them, stabbed them with knives and finally slit their throats. This was the commander's personal protest against the Allies decision with regard to Trieste.

He still sought other ways to still his rage by shedding Danube Swabian blood. A second torture chamber for the Swabians in Sombor was the jail—Zupanija. Hundreds had endured this prison. The hostages did go through countless interrogations with no idea of why they were arrested nor the significance of the questions they were asked. They simply endured the thrashings and torture. Most of the questions were about persons they had never even heard of. Nor were they given any peace as they were told to condemn their Serbian or Hungarian neighbors or friends. A hostage who was imprisoned here for three months recalls:

"I was asked if I knew a well known lawyer in Sombor and if I was not also known to him. I told them I had never had anything to do with him. From time to time I had simply heard about him. I never ever saw him. I was questioned about him day and night and the questions were always accompanied by thrashings. Others who had to answer the same questions once confronted me. I had to watch them being beaten and abused, just like I had been. This went on for weeks. They always said we would come to remember what they wanted to know. One night I was again taken for questioning.

Pistols lay on the table. The Partisan picked them up and told me I was about to be shot. They asked if I had a wife and children and other things. Then they told me to stand by the wall and to open my mouth and one of them placed a loaded pistol in my mouth. I was afraid that my family would never know what had become of me. But I was returned to my cell where the same man came for me again the next day and wanted to shoot me if my memory had not improved. The next night I was taken by two armed Partisans, questioned briefly, if I knew anything now, and then taken to the courtyard. I was convinced I would now be shot. The Partisans said it would be a shame to shoot me right away when I could cut their firewood for

them first. They took me to the woodpile and I cut and chopped the wood. After several hours I was returned to my cell and a few days later I was moved out of the prison with others from the Sombor camp and sent elsewhere..."

More dangerous than Zupanija prison was Kronic-Palais. Only a very few of those who entered this prison ever saw the light of day again. The world will never know how many persons suffered terrible torture and death in there. The prisoners were moved from cell to cell and some were sent to Neusatz. Some detainees were brought back again, only to be sent to Neusatz once more. The prisoners were a means to an end to incriminate others. The torture here was the most brutal in the world. Every day there were countless dead in their cells who had died as a result of their torture. Officially, they had simply disappeared.

(I decided not to translate some of the grotesque things that were done to the prisoners.)

There is no record of a single Danube Swabian who was investigated because he was a Nazi or a war criminal. It was enough to simply be of German origin and you would be confined behind prison walls and never be heard from again. The so-called Committees of Investigation of War Crimes were only located in Hungarian communities and districts.

One of the Partisan's favorite methods of execution was to shoot a whole row of Danube Swabians with a single shot and bullet. They held contests to see how many people one bullet could kill if they stood behind one another in a row.

The vast majority of the Sombor district Danube Swabian communities provided the major portion of the inmates of the Sombor central labor camp by the all of 1946. There were several thousand and they came from: Kolut, Gakowa, Kurschevlje, Stanischtsch, Monoschtor, Siwatz, Tschнопol and Kernei.

Many others were also being held prisoner in their home communities and had to do slave labor there. In the spring and summer those unable to work were brought to Gakowa and Kruschevlje. The last community to experience this was Stanischtsch. It was also the last of the several hundred communities in which the Danube Swabians lived in order to be de-populated.

But Kernei would experience the ultimate act of barbarity. Here in the fall, countless Danube Swabian women were raped in the presence of their children and those who resisted and fought them refusing to submit were shot. On the same day some drunken Partisans forced fifteen of the Swabian men into the cellar of the school. Pushing them up against the wall in a corner of the cellar they began to shoot them with their submachine guns. One man's body had sixteen wounds.

Gakowa-Kruschevlje

In northwestern Batschka just below the Hungarian border the two entirely Danube Swabian villages of Gakowa (Gakovo) and Kruschevlje were located. The Partisans chose them as the last station of the Way of Sorrows of the Danube Swabians in their liquidation program in Yugoslavia.

A few weeks after the Partisans set up their Military Government in Gakowa in the fall of 1944 the whole population of Gakowa, with the exception of the able bodied men were brought to neighboring Kruschevlje. Meanwhile, the able bodied men from Kruschevlje were brought to Gakowa. From there, the men who numbered two hundred and fifty were taken to Bezdan to do slave labor there for a time. On the way to Bezdan, one man who could not keep up was beaten to death. In Kruschevlje a man, Karl Franzen and a woman Anna Depre were shot in front of the church because they had tried to enter their own homes. During this time the Partisans

plundered all of the homes and assembled all the foodstuffs to carry out their extermination project. From now on and later able bodied men and women from Gakowa and Kruschevlje were brought to the Sombor forced labor camp and were sent off to various labor groups to do some of the most difficult and heavy work that could be found for them to do.

On March 12th 1945 eight thousand persons arrived in Gakowa and Kruschevlje from Apatin who had come on foot all of the way. Both villages were hermetically sealed with the threat of death to all who tried to enter or leave the area. More and more new mass arrivals of women, children and the elderly streamed into the two villages. As soon as the liquidation program was set in motion in the communities of the western Batschka, all of those not able to work were driven to these two remote border villages. The Partisans called both camps extermination camps.

Exhausted groups arrived in the thousands on foot almost daily. Mothers with small children were mostly brought together to Kruschevlje. But seldom would they be allowed to remain together. Every day, able-bodied persons were chosen and taken away to work at the various labor camps in the western Batschka, so that every day more and more children were without a parent. At first, most children had a grandmother or relative to look after them. But after only a few weeks the death rate due to starvation rose greatly and hundreds and hundreds of children lost their relatives who could have cared for them and many a grandparent gave up the little food they had to the children and starved themselves so that the children might live.

There was no mail or contact possible with the people in the camp. Those who were separated had no way of hearing from or knowing about one another. The only news was what the rotating labor units in the labor camps would share when new workers arrived from Gakowa and Kruschevlje but often the news was weeks or months old. Most of the mothers would not know the fate of their children for years...if ever.

Now almost every Danube Swabian community in the Batschka was represented among the inmates of the two concentration camps in the once picturesque villages. By the summer of 1945 there were twenty-one thousand inmates in the two village camps. This number would remain fairly constant because there was a constant flow of people coming here from other internment camps. At times an entire camp would be emptied and sent here. They simply filled the empty spaces of the countless others who had perished.

In the summer of 1945 the camp from Filipovo was the first to arrive, followed by those from Sekitsch and in the spring of 1946 the survivors of the infamous camp in Jarek arrived. **(A note from the translator.** Ruth Brueckner of Cservenka was eleven years old at this time and arrived here in Gakowa from Jarek with her mother and grandparents. She alone would survive. Later, all on her own, as a thirteen year old she would escape into Hungary and would walk across the country following the railway tracks to Austria by night and hiding during the day. Through the Red Cross she was reunited with her father who had recently been released from a Russian prisoner of war camp. She now lives in Canada...just down the street.)

At the point that the Jarek inmates arrived there was a total of twenty-seven thousand Danube Swabians in the two camps. There were eighteen thousand four hundred in Gakowa and eight thousand six hundred in Kruschevlje. In the following years the total number of inmates was never less than twenty thousand. As slave laborers were unable to work or had become too sick to work and all of the internment camps were closed in the Batschka, all of their inmates were sent here. When the labor camps were finally closed Gakowa and Kruschevlje became their last holding camp. But now a new stream of Danube Swabians came in large transports coming from the Banat, especially the wretched children from the notorious Rudolfsgnad "starvation" camp.

In April of 1945 all of the inmates in both camps had to surrender all of their possessions and valuables. Death was threatened to those who hid anything. Two women in Kruschevlje were shot as a result of having hidden some money. All of the camp had to witness the execution. The others later had to pass by their bodies on their way to surrender what they possessed, including the children. This "action" lasted until early dawn next day and only then could the bodies be removed for burial.

Because of the gnawing hunger and mass starvation all around them, many of the mothers and older children took the risk to sneak out of the camps and beg for food in the vicinity as far as twenty kilometers, and return and attempt to sneak back into the camp. Often it was at this point that they were sighted or apprehended and shot, except some were held back for a public execution for the benefit of the other inmates.

Until the fall of 1946 it was only death or an attempt to escape to Hungary that usually resulted in costing the person's life that were the only ways out of the two camps. But now there was a new opportunity opening to them. In the spring of 1947 it became obvious to the Interior Ministry and other government offices that the time had come to end the attempt at exterminating the entire Danube Swabian population before world opinion was totally awakened against Yugoslavia over the mass executions and shootings not to mention the internment program and as a result it sought a new way to deal with the issue of getting rid of the Danube Swabians permanently in another way. In the fall of 1946 the camp commanders turned a blind eye to the mass flights out of the camps into nearby Hungary. Whoever was caught attempting to escape was brought back to the camp and all that the prisoner possessed was taken away from him or her. But this really had little effect upon other inmates attempting to escape. In response to that the camp commanders and other officials changed the "escape route into Hungary" into a lucrative business. They tolerated a group of middlemen who would organize mass escape groups called "transports" and personally guide and lead them across the frontier into Hungary. Anyone who wanted to join such a "transport" had to pay one thousand Dinar and of course the commanders received their cut. These "official transports" were never stopped or apprehended by the border guards. They were known as "white transports" compared to the "illegal" attempts by amateurs who went "black" across the border. That whole winter witnessed a flood of transports across the border and the business flourished. It would finally end in the fall of 1947.

The camp commanders secretly made millions. Transports left every night and often the numbers were up to several hundred. Everyone had to pay the one thousand Dinar even small children in the arms of an adult or older sibling. It has been estimated that the escapees paid in the neighborhood of ten to twenty million Dinar to the operators and commanders. But after having been robbed of everything they possessed where did the money come from? Above all this demonstrates the close relationships that many of the Danube Swabians had with the other nationalities, especially the Hungarians, Slovaks and Orthodox Serbs who were often middlemen as well for family members who had escaped to Germany and Austria and sent them the funds. But there were always those who had "no one" outside, whose only alternative was to go "black" or illegally. The number of those who were able to save themselves from the camps at Gakowa and Kruschevlje has been estimated at thirty thousand. But when the camp in Gakowa was closed down in the spring of 1948 there were still twenty thousand inmates.

At the beginning of the fall of 1946 there were able-bodied persons who were removed from the slave labor camps and were sent to Gakowa and Kruschevlje. In the summer of 1947 a new regulation was introduced where these able bodied inmates could accept work in coalmines or collective farms. They would be paid for their work and could live as free persons. They really had no other choice except to remain and die. Most of them could not raise the money to buy their way on a

"white transport" for themselves and their family members and were also afraid to take the "black" route and were not prepared to die of hunger if they remained. Faced with this only other alternative, many of the able bodied accepted and were scattered across the country working in mines and collective farms finding a life for themselves once more.

A majority of those who responded were parents of children who had been sent to Gakowa, Kruschevlje, Rudolfsgnad or some other internment camp. Because they did not know the whereabouts of their children and as inmates in the camps had no access to any information, there was only way for them to begin the search for their children and a hoped for reunion with them. Once they gained their freedom and could earn money they would be in a position to discover if there was any word of their children and if they had survived to be reunited with them. Was it a dream or a hope? They desperately clung to their hope.

But there were also others who were still in various central labor camps far removed from the possibility of a transport to Hungary, either white or black. In the spring of 1948 all of the labor camps were dismantled. Those able to find work and were still able to work found whatever livelihood they could. Those who were unable to work either found support from family members or friends. But the vast majority of them, who really had no one to take them in, were sent to Rudolfsgnad and then later resettled at Karlsdorf. There they lived in the old air force barracks that was called the "old folks home". They were not allowed to leave and lived much in the same way as they had in the labor camps except that they had money that they could use to bargain with the people in the neighborhood.

(Translator's note. And now the saddest page in the history of the Danube Swabian people is expressed in this one short paragraph. The ultimate crime of inhumanity.)

In the summer of 1946 all the children without a father or mother resident with them in Kruschevlje camp were taken away and brought to the camp at Gakowa. After a short period of time all these children and those in the Gakowa camp under the age of twelve were taken away from their grandparents or relatives and were removed to an unknown destination. It was only months after that it was disclosed that the children had been scattered throughout various state children homes and orphanages across Yugoslavia and were being raised as Serbo-Croatians assuming a new name and identity in order to be lost to their families and people forever.