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Mann, Klaus

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Model City Of Hate

**Nazi Cruelty Against
The Non-Aryan Was
Never More Sinister
Than In This Village**

By Cpl. KLAUS MANN
Staff Writer

PRAGUE

WORLD public opinion is by now fairly well informed about the atrocities committed by the Nazis. Yet there still are many horrible stories left untold, many ghastly secrets to be revealed. The Hitler gang was indeed ingenious when it came to devising ever new shades of horror. At times their cruelty assumed a subtle, indeed, almost artistic character. One of the more original manifestations of this inventiveness is a place called Theresienstadt, near the city of Prague.

Theresienstadt is an ancient little town formerly used by the Austrians as a fortress and garrison. To the Nazis the place seemed suitable for more sinister purposes. It was there that they decided to establish something like a model ghetto or "perfect" Jewish community.

AT ONE time this Jewish settlement had as many as 60,000 inhabitants. Needless to say, none of them lived there voluntarily; they all were prisoners within the town limits, completely cut off from the outside world. Allegedly they enjoyed self administration: They had their own mayor, their own courts, their religious services. Indeed the Nazis—uncannily systematic as only madmen and Germans can be—went so far as to print a special currency for their victims, neat handsome bills adorned with a portrait of Moses and with the signature of a man called Jakob Edelstein, "the oldest of the Jews in Theresienstadt."

In reality the place was ruled, not by any benign rabbi, but by a brutal SS Obersturmfuehrer, who occupied the most prominent building in town. Theresienstadt was in fact nothing but a glorified concentration camp with all the usual terroristic practices. Especially the so-called "Little Fortress," adjacent to the town itself, which witnessed most of the gruesome scenes. It was there that political prisoners and the more restive Jews were kept and "educated."

BUT WHAT made the whole setup unique, and in a sense singularly horrible, was its hypocritical front of respectability. It was a most elaborate bluff—a show place meant to impress



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foreign visitors. Certain neutral journalists and commissions—most of them Nazi sympathizers as we may presume, but still civilized enough to be mildly alarmed by rumors about Hitler's "racial policy"—were sent by Goebbels to Theresienstadt. And what did they see? They saw a peaceful little community—everybody happy, stores full of merchandise, no signs of terror or starvation.

What visitors did not know, and did not care to find out, was the fact that those inhabitants of "parade" ghetto who showed too conspicuous marks of maltreatment or malnutrition had to hide for the duration of the official tour. Some Jews whom foreign visitors saw purchasing coffee or shoes in prosperous-looking stores had to deliver the same goods at the back doors of the same establishments a few minutes afterwards.

Jewish children to whom distinguished travelers offered a piece of candy had been previously ordered to refuse the gift saying: "Thanks. I have been eating sweets all day long. I couldn't stand more of the stuff!"

Once a popular Berlin comedian, Kurt Gerron, who performed his stunts for the inspecting commission, had been blackmailed into doing so. The tenor of the Vienna Opera who entertained gentlemen of the press with his arias had a cogent reason for prostituting his musical talent—it was the only way to keep him out of the next "transport" scheduled to leave for an unknown, or rather only too well-known, destination.

It was the permanent nerve-racking fear of those terrible "transports" which haunted and tormented the people of Theresienstadt more than anything else. To board

such a "transport" was almost tantamount to a death sentence. For in most cases the goal was a gas chamber in Oswiecim or one of the other "annihilation" camps.

Nobody knew when it would be his turn; selection of the victims was arbitrary, unpredictable. Certain groups of the community were particularly endangered—mothers with little children, for instance. The less Jewish children the better!

Healthy young men, on the other hand, stood a comparatively good chance to be spared: They could be used as slave labor in the service of the German war machine. But none was safe.

One hundred sixty thousand Jews passed through Theresienstadt since 1940. Only about 3,000 survived. All the others died through starvation or diseases, or they disappeared in one of the deadly transports.

WHEN I visited Theresienstadt, a few days after its liberation, I found about 25,000 Jews of all nationalities living there. The majority of them were newcomers—mostly persons removed from concentration camps. About 2,000 had returned from Poland. They belonged to the small minority of those who had survived transports. There were only about 1,000 Theresienstadt "old-timers"; many of them only half-Jewish or "privileged" because of their half-Aryan children. They had lived through five years of constant hell.

I met some people whom I had known in pre-Hitler days. One of them was an aunt of mine—a former aunt, to be more precise, the divorced wife of my uncle, Heinrich Mann.

WHEN THE Nazis invaded Prague in 1939 Mrs. Mimi Mann, who is of Czech-Jewish origin, was put in jail and subsequently sent to Theresienstadt. Her only child first shared her imprisonment but was soon released. Being the daughter of purely "Aryan" Heinrich Mann, my cousin had the status of a *mischling* (a person of mixed race), under the Nazi law. Consequently she was spared the ghetto. Living in Prague just a few miles from Theresienstadt, she was not allowed to visit her unfortunate mother once during all these years.

I remembered my aunt as an attractive woman full of vitality and sparkling wit. What I saw now was a wreck—a pathetic shadow of the hearty matron I used to know. I could hardly

recognize her changed features. She had lost half of her weight, her hair had turned white, she was partially paralyzed. Her face too was affected by the nervous stroke: One half of it appeared twisted—frozen, as it were, in a grimace of constant agony.

I WAS profoundly shocked to find her in such a condition. "What have they done to you?" I asked.

"Nothing, not really," she said, and her voice had that typical Theresienstadt tone—a dead, broken accent, rather heartbreaking if you hear it from a human being whom you have known and liked. "Nothing unusual," she continued. "Just the kind of things they were doing to all of us."

"But when did you get paralyzed?" I insisted. "How did it happen? Where?" "Oh, that was years ago," she said. "Right after my arrest. They separated me from my child, you know. I didn't know where she was, so I asked my guard. He grinned and then he said to me, 'Why don't you hear her scream? They're just taking her away, on a transport: That's why she yells.' So I tried all night long to hear my daughter's voice. I couldn't hear—naturally not; she hadn't been screaming at all but was fast asleep in another cell."

"But could I know that the guard had lied to me—just for the fun of it? I kept listening to all the noises in corridors and neighboring rooms. I heard other people screaming and I wondered if it was her voice. It was a long night. And in the morning I couldn't move my right arm and my right leg anymore and my face was all twisted."

THERE was nothing I could say. What I thought was, among other things: Every German mother should be told this story. Every German must know about these things. If they all knew, the better ones among them might subscribe to those candid, repentant words I have seen written with chalk all over the front of one of Munich's most famous monuments.

The inscription I saw in Munich reads in English translation: "Concentration camps of Dachau, Velden, Buchenwald! I am ashamed that I am a German." The words were followed by a signature, P. Hoeppl—the name of a Catholic priest, I was informed, who enjoys great popularity all over Bavaria.

Father Hoeppl might well have added another name to his terrible list—Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia.

Many disappeared on the deadly transports.

