

Verbundkatalog Kalliope

Slava Lederer.

Mann, Erika

Lidice, Paris, u. o.D.

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The model of a Lidice memorial is about to be completed by the New York Sculptor Mario Korbelt. The monument - "Cathedral of the Heart" - will be built by Czech labor. Its center group of figures depicts a Czech family awaiting their fate at the hands of the Germans. In the foreground a small boy clings desperately to his weeping mother.

It is for children like him that the search is on today all over Eastern and Central Europe. Their story, that has never been told, has just been related to me by Slava Lederer, a Czech partisan and one of a very few eyewitnesses of the Lidice Massacre.

There is nothing particularly attractive about slim, middle-aged Slava. Yet the women of Krocchlavy-Kladno in the Republic of Czechoslovakia are attracted to him as to no other man on earth. No sooner is the cough of his decrepit little car heard in the streets of their town, than they rush to the windows, run down the stairs, flock around Slava and implore him to stop. The pictures which they press into his hands, are those of children - the lost children of Lidice.

"I shall find them," says Slava; "I shall surely bring them back to you."

For this is the task he has set for himself: to return to their widowed mothers the small ones, who, on the 13th of July 1942, were sold into German slavery. 8 he has found already. 102 are missing. Slava knows what they looked like - three years ago. He also knows that the auction took place in the Polish city of Lemberg. Prices varied. Blond, blue-eyes youngsters in their teens brought as much as 50 Marks a piece. Smaller and less "nordic" looking children rated between 15 and 30, while others - the smallest and darkest failed to attract any buyer and were left to their fates. The S.S. man in charge of the auction was one of those entrusted with the liquidation of Lidice.

Slava is not from Lidice. He neither has, nor has ever had any children. Yet for months now he has been searching for the missing ones none of whom he has ever seen.

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Reluctant though he was to tell me his fantastic tale, I dragged it out of him, as we drove to Krocchlavy - Kladno and Lidice.

Before the war Slava Lederer was a fairly successful businessman. But since he was also an ardent Czech patriot, he was bound to get himself into trouble. His career as a Nazi prisoner started late in 1939 in a Gestapo prison in Pilsen and ended on April 5th 1944 when he escaped from the "extermination camp" of Auschwitz. Following his unique flight, he founded a group of partisans and, after half a year spent in mountain fighting, participated in the liberation of Prague. But nothing that happened to him impressed him so deeply as the scene he witnessed one night in 1942 - the night from the ninth to the tenth of July.

That night he and 39 fellow prisoners were aroused from their sleep.

"Shovels!" they were told. And there was a truck waiting. They didn't know where they were going, yet some of them recognized Lidice. The village was afire. S.S. men were busy, burning its 89 houses and its little church.

"But the horrid noise" said Slava, "the terrible screaming and weeping, did not come from the flaming building. It came from the school-house which had so far been spared. All the women and children were locked in there. All the men were dead.

"When we saw their corpses, we didn't look at each other. The grave we were ordered to dig was to be 12 meters long, 8 meters wide and 2 meters deep. It would hold our dead bodies as well as those who laid here. There were 185 - among them one boy of 12; one boy of 5 and two dogs. When the grave was ready, we, too, were ready - to die."

He fell silent. Except for the interruption at Krocchlavy-Kladno we had been driving all day and both driver and car seemed thoroughly tired. Even so I had not expected either veteran to fold up in the midst of the landscape.

"What's this?" I asked, as we came to a sudden stop.

"This", said Slava, pointing out of the window at nothing in particular.

"Is Lidice."

The spot was empty. Not as much as the remnants of a house, not

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RECEIVED
JAN 10 1962

"Slava"

(Standard version
uncorrupted)

FROM ERIKA MANN PARIS
TO LIBERTY MAGAZINE NEW YORK CITY

Slava Lederer is not what you would call a handsome fellow. He is dark, slim, middle-aged, somewhat smaller than medium sized and there is nothing particularly attractive about his haggard and pensive face. Yet the women of Krocehlavy-Kladno in the Republic of Czechoslovakia are attracted ^{to} him as ^{to} no other man on ^{earth.} ~~earth.~~ No sooner is the cough of his decrepit little car heard in the streets of their town, than they rush to the windows, run down the stairs, flock around Slava and implore him to stop. Some weep at his sight. Others brandish sheets of paper, covered with notes. Snapshots (and hand drawn maps) ^{pictures of children} are pressed into his hands, while a storm of greetings, questions, blessings and passionate exhortations engulfs him. Slava listens, nods, shrugs his shoulders and finally parks his car in front of a neat looking house. He enters. The women follow. There are some 50 of them. At times there are more. And they all look at Slava, as if he were able to turn wretchedness into wealth and misery into bliss.

The pictures they have handed him are those of children - the lost children of Lidice.

"I shall find them;" says Slava; "I shall surely bring them back to you."

For this is the task he has set for himself: to return to ~~the~~ their widowed mothers the ^{small} ~~little~~ ones who, on the 13th of ~~August~~ July 1942, were sold into German slavery. Eight he has found already. One hundred and two are missing. Slava knows what they looked like - ^{more than} ~~more than~~ three years ago. He knows, too, that the auction took place in the ^{Polish} ~~German~~

city of Lemberg. Prices varied. Blond, blue eyed youngsters in their teens brought as much as 50 Marks a piece. Smaller and less "nordic" looking children rated between 20 and 30. Some who were old enough to work, but too dark to please, sold for a mere 15, while others - the smallest and darkest - failed to attract any buyer and were left to their fates.

The S.S. man in charge of the auction was one of those entrusted with the "liquidation" of Lidice.

"A tidy man," says Slava: "and a fairly good book-keeper. But most of the addresses we found on him are out of date. What with millions of Germans on the move ^{in every part of the world} all over Eastern and Central Europe, his customers are hard to locate. I shall find them, though; ^{Will} ~~I shall~~ find our children."

(Slava is not from Lidice. He neither has, nor ever had any children. Yet for months now he has been searching for the missing ones, none of whom he has ever seen. The car he drives is not his. It was finally lent to him, owing to his failing health and to the urgency of his mission. After great and nerve-wrecking difficulties he also obtained an official sticker which he glued to the ~~WINDSHIELD~~ windshield of the borrowed vehicle and which proclaims in Czech, Russian and English, that 40 years old Slava Lederer, citizen of Czechoslovakia and native of the city of Pilsen, is to pass freely for the purpose of recovering the lost children of Lidice.)

It was in a café house in his hometown ^{Pilsen} that I first talked to Slava.

"What's that?" I asked the thin little man at the neighbouring table.

"This?" he said, pointing at a tiny number ^{PLAQUE} ~~plate~~ fastened to

his suit.

"That's me: Partisan number 19."

He didn't look much like a partisan. (An urbanely reserved, rather than an aggressive type, he rarely overcomes a certain civilized shyness. Nor was he in the least eager to tell me his ~~phantastic~~ ^{FANTASTIC} story. I had to drag it out of him, bit by bit, that evening and throughout the following day, as we drove to Krocchlavy-Kladno and Lidice.

Before the war Slava Lederer was a fairly successful businessman. But since he was also an ardent Czech patriot he was bound to get himself into trouble. When the Gestapo came to get him late in 1939, he didn't know ~~who~~ ^{who} had denounced him for which of his "crimes". "You've been listeneing to the B.B.C.", they told him, before locking him up.

The Gestapo prison where he spent three months was ^{bad} ~~ad~~ enough. ~~But~~ Theresienstadt near Prague was a great deal worse. This "model ~~hhhhhhhh~~ concentration camp" was ~~indeed~~ one of the most infamous establishments ever set up by the Germans.

"Some of the barracks", I learned, "were clean and pleasant, with decent furniture and flowers in the window-sills. But nobody lived there. It was only when visitors came to inspect the camp, Red Cross people, ~~or~~ ^{or} foreign dignitaries, that some of us were driven into those neat little houses. Whoever dared to indicate that he didn't belong there, was doomed. So were those who either refused to "go shopping", or who failed to "shop" convincingly. We were quite rich at Theresienstadt. A lot of special money was printed for us. And there were quite a few lovely shops. As soon as an important visitor ~~had~~ arrived, "business" ^{picked} ~~was~~ up. Half crazy with fatigue, cold and starvation, we'd rush about, buying bread and meat; warm

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cloths and good shoes. I don't know what was more agonizing, + the short time during which we "possessed" the dream stuff, or the moment when it was taken away. For it always was - all of it."

Theresienstadt was ~~an~~ ^{not an} "extermination camp". Even so, 35 000 ~~men~~ died ~~there~~ while Slava was there.

One night in 1942 - the night from the ninth to the tenth of July - he and 39 others were aroused from their sleep.

"Shovels," They were told . And there was a truck waiting. They didn't know where they were going, yet some of them recognized Lidice. The village was afire. SS men were busy burning its 89 houses and its little church.

"But the horrid noise", said Slava, "the terrible screaming and weeping, didn't come from the flaming buildings; it came from the school house that had so far been spared. All the women and children were locked in there. All the men were dead.

"When we saw their corpses, we didn't look at each other. We had been through a lot. But now none of us cared to read his own thoughts in the other fellow's face. The grave we were ordered to dig was to be 12 meters long, 8 meters wide and 2 meters deep. It would hold our dead bodies as well as those who ^{LAI}~~lay~~ here. There were 185 - among them one boy of 12, one boy of 5 and two dogs. Although we were made to work fast, it took us 13 hours to dig the grave. When it was ready, we, too, were ready - to die."

There was no way of knowing why the men from Theresienstadt were spared at Lidice. Slava for one was marked ^{for} ~~no~~ extermination. After three years, spent at the "model camp", he was sent to Auschwitz and Auschwitz meant death.

"I didn't think, I cared", he said. "By the time I got there, all those I loved, my father, my brother and my two sisters, had been deported and killed at Warsaw."

He paused.

"But the children", he said finally; "they were still alive, though one of the S.S. wanted to kill them. The others said ^{that} they were as ~~good~~ good a value as the sheep and the goats and that they'd better be sold. So the bloodthirsty one was appointed chief auctioneer. I couldn't get those children out of my mind."

"Do you mean to tell me", I asked, "that you escaped -- from Auschwitz?"

Prior to its liberation by the Red Army, nobody, for all I knew, had ever left the extermination camp alive.

Slava rolled up his sleeve. The number burned into his skin was ~~duplicated~~ ^{Duplicated} in the Auschwitz records and identified Slava Lederer as prisoner number 170 521.

His unique escape was facilitated by a greedy guard.

Slava was neither a poor, nor a shortsighted man. Anticipating his arrest by the Gestapo, he had distributed his modest fortune among his friends at home. 250 000 ^{Crowns} ~~Krones~~ ~~hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh~~ (about 10 000 Dollars) was all he possessed. 245 000 he promised his torturer. A letter of instructions was dispatched and promptly delivered to his pals in Pilsen. The small treasure was re-assembled and surrendered to the guard at Maehrisch-Ostrau, the appointed meeting place.

"On April 5th, 1944" said Slava, "I left Auschwitz in the uniform of Hitler's S.S."

Up to the day of his departure, 3 500 466 prisoners of both sexes had been gassed at Auschwitz.

He went into hiding, a man without papers, a fugitive sought for immediate extermination. But during the two months that followed he paid no less than six desperate visits to his old "alma mater", the "model camp" of Theresienstadt near Prague. One radio receiver, nine brownings and two hundred letters were among the items he smuggled into the camp, which, incidentally, had meanwhile become a place of the highest importance.

"By then", I was told, "the Nazis had removed from their Berlin desks their most secret and incriminating papers. Theresienstadt was less exposed to allied bombings and inconspicuous enough to be made the Reich's Central Office of Espionage."

The papers were stored in a flight of mirror-paneled rooms and watched over by both guards and dogs. The guards were forbidden ever to touch the files. But the dead tell no tales and the prisoners were ~~hhhhhhhh~~ considered as good as dead. On two occasions Slava changed clothes with one of the inmates and, broom in hand, turned up in the mirror suite.

I spent 16 hours" he said, "wiping the floors, dusting the chests and reading the files."

There were hundreds of thousands of curricula vitae. Every Nazi agent abroad and every "suspect" in occupied Europe had his or her individual dossier. Jewish, Polish, Yugoslave and Czechoslovak suspects were ~~th~~rown together and flatteringly classified as "especially watchworthy".

He learned, who among his friends belonged into this endangered group and acted accordingly. Many had been arrested and he found out where they had been sent. Many had died. They, too, were listed. Along with the date of their arrest there appeared the date of their death. More often than not their families had not been informed. Wherever he could, Slava told them. The women of Lidice, he noticed, had all been interned. But now where did he detect any trace of the children.

Late in July 1944 revolutionary upheavals broke out in Slovakia.

"~~But~~ even in June", said Slava, "you could feel it in the air. The allied invasion of Normandy was a blow which German morale could not take. Though the ordinary citizen kept functioning perfectly, the Nazi terror machine was slowly but surely going to pieces. I, for one, thought, it was and events proved me right."

It did not, according to Slava, take any suicidal heroism to do what he did. Having made up his mind to found a group of partisans, he remembered a number of fellows with whom he had been in Auschwitz; ~~and whose dossiers he had read that they had~~ ^{in / IF THEIR DOSSIERS WERE CORRECT,} had not yet been gassed. They would, he felt, make magnificent fighters and ought to be freed at once. While he had no money left with which to bribe his greedy friend, he had a serviceable brain, ~~for~~ storm. "Look here", he told the guard, "dozens of people know about our old deal and are advised to talk, if I shouldn't return. If, on the other hand, you assist me this time, we shall be quiet now and talk later. Once victory is ours - and it will be, soon - I shall

testify in your favour and you'll be the only Auschwitz trooper who has nothing to fear."

The scheme worked. One of the men whom Slava had meant to liberate, was killed by another guard. The remaining nine escaped.

The Slovak revolution failed, but for the Germans life in Czechoslovakia was never the same thereafter. The partisans kept fighting. Number nineteen and his group specialized in sabotage. They had, as Slava puts it, "an exceedingly nice time". At night, in their woody hideouts in the Beskide mountains, they ~~were having~~ ^{HAD} their parties. Guided by small fires, the guests would fall from the skies - Russian parachutists, their pockets bulging with dynamite. While Slava and his outfit - by now 800 men strong - longed to join the Red Army, the Red Army insisted that they remain behind the German lines.

When Slava scorched the Roederstein factory in Sbraslav near Prague, Marshall Zhukov was on his way to Berlin and the Wehrmacht was running short of supplies; Machine parts, condensers and electrical equipment were needed badly and Roederstein produced just that sort of thing.

"I burned it all", says Slava. "Though the Russians had told me that time was of the essence, I didn't realize in how great a hurry we were. I got there at midnight. At one a.m. the place was on fire. At six in the morning the stuff would have left for Berlin."

His day's mission completed, partisan number 19 proceeded to Prague where he intended to hide. When he arrived, however, fighting was in full swing and Slava found himself in the thick of the

battle.

"Happily," he says; "to be in on the liberation of Prague, was no mean break."

He fell silent. Except for the interruption at Krocehlavy-Kladno we had been driving all day. The country road was narrow and bumpy and both driver and car seemed ^{thoroughly} tired. Even so I hadn't expected either veteran to fold up in the midst of the landscape.

"What's this?" I asked, as we came to a sudden stop.

"This", said Slava, pointing out of the window at nothing in particular, "is Lidice."

The spot was empty. Not as much as the remnants of a house, not the faintest sign of murdered life, were to be seen. Perhaps the grass ^{grew} a little more thinly here than elsewhere and the trees, ~~with~~ which the people of Lidice had lined their village, looked more forlorn. Behind and above them, a slim ~~hmm~~ wooden cross stretched its arms, a barren ~~salvary~~ ^{calvary}, bearing the crown of thorns, but embedded in ~~flowers~~ flowers.

"Here they lie", said Slava; "the cross is new. So, of course, is the stone. The Germans wouldn't let anyone go near the grave. But somehow there were always flowers."

The tomb-stone bore this inscription:

"To the men of Lidice, victims of fascism, from the soldiers and ~~hmm~~ officers of the Fifth Russian Army and from General Pankova, their commander."

It was getting dark. Slava "read" and translated the words for me, without looking at the stone.

~~I was looking at him, Slava, businessman, patriot, victim, fighter and rescuer of Lidice.~~

"Tomorrow", he said, "I'll be off for Upper Silesia. It was there - at Bad Kudova - that I found the first child. Her name is Eva Kubik. I was so/ eager to get her home to her mother that I left without ~~further~~ ^{FURTHER} searching the area. But tomorrow I'll be going back."

Upper Silesia was far away. Much time would have to pass, ~~hho~~ before his decrepit little car would once again ~~been~~ ^{BE} heard in the streets of Krocchlavy-Kladno and the women would rush to the windows, run down the stairs, flock around Slava and implore him to stop. The women of vanished Lidice - how had they come to settle in this new, unpronounceable place?

Germans had been living here - coal barons, mining experts; Nazi administrators; Gestapo. When they had been driven out, the Czech miners might have moved from their own wretched quarters into the handsome homes. Instead they sent for the ~~women~~ Lidice women.

"The miners", said Slava, "are paying for their livelihood and I've never known prouder and happier hosts. They'll take care of the children, too. I must go and find them."

He walked away from me, swiftly, and as if determined to walk straight to Upper Silesia.

In a minute or so, his slight figure would be swallowed up by the darkness.

"Coming?" he shouted.

I walked after him, blinded, on a sudden, by the strong head-lights of his car.

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