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ON LOAN FROM THE CZECH EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

LIDICE 1942

The following article contributed:

C. M. Truman

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In June 1942, Lidice, a village in Czechoslovakia, ceased to exist. Lidice had been implicated in the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, the Nazi controller of Bohemia and Moravia, and Hitler's order was given to "teach the Czechs a final lesson of subservience and humility". On May 27th, 1942, Heydrich was attacked by British-trained freedom fighters - one born in the current Czech Republic and the other, Jozef Gabcik, born in Slovakia. A grenade attack on his car left him fatally wounded and he died on June 4th. Hitler had always had a high opinion of Heydrich. Some believe that Hitler was grooming Heydrich to succeed him and the Fuehrer said that "he has a heart of iron". Energetic and efficient, Heydrich brought a reign of terror to Czechoslovakia and his death enraged Hitler. "Hitler was frantic with rage and, characteristically, what he called for was not justice but vengeance. He ordered the instant execution of 30,000 Czechs as a reprisal." Richard Livingstone.

The man appointed to take over from Heydrich, Karl Frank, pointed out that the loss of 30,000 would have a severe impact on the Czech labor force. Hitler took this on board and changed the figure to the arrest of 10,000. On the night of May 27th, Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, ordered Frank to shoot 100 "intellectuals" that night. Over the next few days, 3,188 Czechs were arrested of whom 1,357 were executed, while 657 died in police custody. However, none of this satisfied Hitler, though he had recognized the fact that 30,000 executions would have a negative impact on the labor force in Czechoslovakia.

On June 8th, a state funeral was held for Heydrich. On the next day, Frank received an order from Hitler which stated that a small community near an industrial center was to be selected and wiped out as punishment. Therefore, there would be no impact on the Czech labor force, but Hitler would have gained his desired for revenge.

But why was Lidice chosen? One of the men who assassinated Heydrich had links to Lidice (the assassins were all killed). Also the Gestapo had intercepted what they deemed to be a "suspicious" note that contained the name Lidice. In fact, it was another Lidice in

Czechoslovakia – but this only came to light afterwards, once the arrangements had been made to wipe out Frank’s chosen target - Lidice near Prague.

Lidice was about 10 miles from Prague. The village was off any main road so the sighting of any German troops in mass was rare. With 100,000 German troops in Czechoslovakia, German troops had been seen in Lidice but only in small numbers. On June 4th, the day of Heydrich’s death, German troops entered Lidice, the Gestapo questioned people and houses were ransacked. Then they suddenly left leaving the villagers confused as to why they had done this.

On June 9th, they returned in the evening. Most of the villagers had gone to bed. They were woken and made to gather in the village square. Women and children were put on one side and men and boys over 15 were put on the other side of the square. The men and boys were put in farm buildings while the women and children were locked into the local school.

After the villagers had been locked away, military police ransacked the homes once again and took anything of value. All farming tools were taken and cattle were herded up. Anything of the remotest value was taken.

At 05.00 the next day, the 198 women and 98 children were put onto lorries and driven away. They were transferred to Ravensbruck concentration camp. Those children who were considered suitable for ‘Germanisation’ were picked out and given to SS families. Those who were not considered suitable were scheduled to be sent to the camps. The men were brought out of the farm houses and lined up in front of mattresses laid against a wall. The execution squad brought them out in batches of ten. 173 were shot. Those men who lived in Lidice but who were on shift work at the local factories when the arrests were made, were rounded up later – a further 19 were shot. Those men who were in Lidice at the time visiting relatives and friends, but who were not from Lidice, were also shot.

The village was then destroyed – literally wiped off of the map. Houses were destroyed, orchards dug up and the graveyard desecrated. Even pet dogs were shot. When this was done, pioneer troops were sent in to plough the land flat. Seemingly nothing was left of the village, not even the outline. The whole episode was filmed by the SS.

Of the women, only 143 are known to have somehow survived Ravensbruck, the Nazi concentration camp for women. Of the 98 children (who, owing to “transport difficulties”, were separated from their mothers on June 12th), 17 are known to have survived by being selected for ‘Germanisation’. They returned to Czechoslovakia after the war. Those children not considered suitable were gassed at Chemnitz on the orders of Adolf Eichmann.

The Lidice pictorial and informative exhibit is on display through November 26 in the Melnar Library. Other featured exhibits include WWI and the 100th Anniversary of Czech Sovereignty in the Museum. TCHCC is open Monday – Friday from 10AM-4PM and Saturdays 10AM-3PM. Call 888-785-4500 or email info@czechtexas.org.