

## ATROCITY

General Erwin Rösener, the senior SS and police leader in the XVIII Military District, which covered the Slovenian territory, attended the funeral of Anton Dorfmeister. He determined the manner and scope of the reprisal measures. For every German life lost, 100 Slovenians had to die. On 12<sup>th</sup> February 1945, the Germans brought captured partisans and resistance collaborators from the Celje prison, known as *Stari Pisker*, to Stranice near Frankolovo, where an attack had been carried out, and hanged them on apple trees along the road. The massacre, named the *Frankolovo Crime* after the place of execution, was carried out in an exceptionally brutal manner, just over three months before the final defeat of the Germans. It was one of the last, but by no means the first, mass crimes committed by the occupiers in the Celje area.

In June 1941, as part of the "euthanasia" program (Action T4), the Nazis emptied the psychiatric hospital in Novo Celje, taking 357 patients to Hartheim Castle near Linz, where they were murdered in gas chambers. Almost simultaneously, a mass expulsion of nationalistically aware Slovenians, particularly intellectuals, and their family members to Serbia and Croatia began. Among them were over 1.200 people with permanent residence in Celje, whose property was confiscated by the occupiers.

The worst Nazi violence is closely linked to the emergence and development of the liberation movement. In retaliation for its activities, the occupiers conducted mass executions of captured partisans, resistance collaborators, and other patriots, primarily in the Maribor and Celje prisons. They also tried to intimidate the population by carrying out reprisals against the families of those executed, to force them into submission. During the war, in the occupied Slovenian Styria, 1.590 people were killed in 66 groups, with their names published by the Germans in public proclamations. Hundreds more were killed in unreported shootings. Between September 1941 and August 1942, a total of 374 men and women were executed in six shootings in the Celje prison, without any kind of trial or conviction.

*"The operation has all the elements necessary to neutralize the population that voluntarily supported and supplied the bands with recruits, weapons, and shelter. The men from these families, and in many cases also relatives, must be shot; the women should be imprisoned and sent to concentration camps; the children must be removed from their homeland and placed in the provinces of the old Reich. I expect a special report on the number of children and their racial value. All property of these families will be confiscated."*  
(Heinrich Himmler, Guidelines for the execution of the operation against partisans and other bandits in Upper Carniola and Lower Styria, 25<sup>th</sup> June 1942)

The relatives of those executed were, following direct orders from SS and police commander Heinrich Himmler, typically deported to concentration camps. More than six hundred children and adolescents (the so-called "stolen children") were separated from their parents, and after racial examination, they were taken to youth re-education camps across the Third Reich. The youngest among them were included in the Lebensborn organization's homes as part of the Nazi racial program, from where they were sent for foster care or adoption by German families.

*"The pro-German Celje residents used to go up there to watch the executions in the yard of the Stari pisker, and from the bell tower, one could see that yard. Every execution was announced on large red posters, with the names Germanized, not even allowed to die in their own way – their birthplace, age, and occupation: locksmith, auxiliary worker, financial clerk, worker, mechanic, miner."*  
(Miloš Mikeln, *City by the River {Mesto ob reki}, Celjska Mohorjeva družba, 2008, p. 53*)

The actions of the Nazi authorities are, in terms of their brutality, fully comparable to the mass crimes in other parts of occupied Europe and, given the relatively small size of the Slovenian nation, even surpass them in their scope.

*"From the stairs leading to the filthy and stinking courtyard, they were reading names. Anyone whose name was called had to go for their luggage and prepare to leave. I heard over three hundred names, but fortunately, not mine. Next to me stood a small teacher, very upset and trembling. She, too, wanted to stay as long as possible. To stay meant to hope. Dr. Mirko Hrašovec and his sister, whom I had sincerely come to love in those two short and yet so difficult days, stood with their belongings in the yard. The June sun was shining on them. Often, those waiting for transport had to stand like this for hours until the black vans (I still hate that car with curtains) came to pick them up and take them to the train. No one knew how long the journey would take. Some said seven days, others that it would only be three days and nights. The destination was mentioned to be a place one hundred kilometers south of Belgrade, where they would stay in barracks. A chill ran down my spine. The last handshake, a wave of goodbye, and the last vehicle drove off with its prey. Guards were stationed at the front and rear. My heart was full of bitterness."*

*(Alma M. Karlin, My Lost Poplars {Moji zgubljeni topoli}, MnZC, 2007, pp. 32–33)*