

Czech Embassy showed haunting film of little-known Holocaust tragedy

By [Marsha Dubrow](#), DC Art Travel Examiner

“Forgotten Transports: To Estonia”, a riveting documentary shown March 16 at the Czech Embassy, revealed that about 60 percent of European Jews, almost 137,000, were deported to virtually unknown Nazi camps in Europe.

Only about 2,500 survived, among the 136,846 Jews transported to little-known camps, not [Auschwitz](#) , [Dachau](#), [Theresienstadt/Terezin](#), or other most infamous ones.

In “Forgotten Transports”, a dozen survivors – one-sixth of the 74 survivors among the 2,051 Czech and German Jews transported to Raasiku, [Estonia](#) in September 1942 -- relate their horrifying, poignant experiences with enduring spirit.

The women’s personal narratives are illustrated and documented through photographs, historical film footage, and other visual material like meticulous lists of prisoners’ data, most never before seen, from official archives and even from garages of former SS men.

The most shocking are the final photographs documenting the murder of 800 women, who had been forced to strip naked, immediately upon arrival at Kalevi-Liiva Dunes, Estonia. The last photo shows one of the women, hands folded in a plea or a prayer, being led to slaughter.

“I stupidly thought Mother was alive,” says one of the survivors. “I wanted to die, and was more dead than alive, but mostly what kept me alive was the thought that I must be there for Mother after the war.”

One of the survivors tells of being beaten so badly, for stealing a bacon rind from the garbage, that “blood dripped through a cloth cot onto the floor.”

Another describes working “12-hour shifts at one machine, doing only three movements in sorting bullets – I threw most of them away.”

They relate going without food and water for five days during one of their many train journeys to a series of camps and prisons in Estonia, Poland, and Germany, including the notorious [Bergen-Belsen](#) where they saw “mountains of corpses”, even “green corpses”.

The Bergen-Belson shots are only a few of the numerous terrifying images – interspersed with group portraits of the perpetually smiling women prisoners, and individual portraits of the beautiful women before they were “pulled from our large families filled with love”.

Some of the women related a startling love story between a beautiful fellow prisoner Inge and an SS commandant, whom she transformed from “a cruel animal”. They ran away together, but were found and shot by SS guards.

Several of the eyewitnesses credited their survival to staying close together with the few other survivors. "We were willing to give up everything if someone else needed it more."

After the screening, survivor [Margit Meissner](#), who "lived this history" and wrote "[Margit's Story](#)" (Schreiber Publishing), told the standing-room-only audience, "The human spirit can be so strong. They stuck together and got solace from each other."

[Peter Black](#), Senior Historian at the [U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum](#), told the audience that "Forgotten Transports" is "one of the most accurate and interesting documentaries on the Holocaust that I've ever seen." Dr. Black has some 40 years' experience working in Holocaust studies.

The Estonia documentary is one of four 90-minute "Forgotten Transports": To Latvia, To Belarus, and To Poland. The Poland film won the Lion, the Czech equivalent of the Oscars, for best documentary.

They were researched, written, directed, and produced by [Lukas Pribyl](#), a Czech native who lost many family members in the Holocaust. Pribyl spent ten years on the project: recording 400 hours of interviews on five continents, researching KGB holdings and other formerly secret documents, and tracking down former SS men.

One, [Aleksander Laak](#), is shown in his smart Gestapo uniform, and later surrounded by family in Canada, where he had been living peacefully until 1960 when his Nazi past was revealed. He hanged himself.

In "Forgotten Transports", one of the eyewitnesses could have been speaking for everyone when she says of the horrors, "Even today I ask myself, how was it possible? I can't understand it."

"Forgotten Transports" helps viewers understand, and most important, helps them remember what must never be forgotten.

For more info: "Forgotten Transports", www.forgottentransports.com. Embassy of the Czech Republic, www.mzv.cz/washington, Jana Racova, Cultural Section, jana_racova@mzv.cz, 3900 Spring of Freedom Street, NW, Washington, DC. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, www.ushmm.org, 100 Raoul Wallenberg Place, SW, on the National Mall, Washington, DC, 202-488-0400.

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