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Estonian Holocaust Documentary, Forgotten Transports

Sep 21, 2010 Jennifer Ciotta

Forgotten Transports, a historical documentary series, explores the stories of Holocaust survivors in the Estonian concentration camp of Jagala.

The Holocaust crossed into the deepest parts of Eastern Europe. History typically discusses infamous concentration camps such as Dachau in Germany or Auschwitz in Poland, but the Holocaust extended nearly to the Russian border. One man, Lukas Pribyl, decided to explore these virtually unknown concentration camps, including one in Estonia.

World War II History of Estonia

I lived in Estonia for two years. Before moving there, I had not heard of the Holocaust in this small, Baltic nation. I had traveled to other concentration camps sites such as Auschwitz and Salaspils (Latvia). As I read and researched more, I began to find out there were camps in Estonia as well. But why couldn't I find any literature, museums or memorials?

The Estonians simply handle the Holocaust differently. They do not look at it as a time to remember, but as a time to forget. They struggle with a past that includes dual enemies invading their land at the same time: the Germans and the Soviets. Estonians had two means of death: a concentration camp or the gulag.

Story of Holocaust Victims

Lukas Pribyl, a Czech Jew and historical documentary filmmaker, decided to research his family, many of whom died in concentration camps. Pribyl put eight years of research into *Forgotten Transports*, a series of four, 90-minute films about the survival stories of Holocaust victims in Estonia, Latvia, eastern Poland and Belarus.

In *Forgotten Transports: To Estonia*, the Nazis deported Czech Jews to the Estonian village of Raasiku. Once there, the Nazis separated young women from their families, who were sent elsewhere. These women had no other choice than to rely on each other as they were transported to Jagala, a small, Estonian concentration camp that was only in existence for several months. Jagala was a labor education camp. Many Jews and other Holocaust victims who did not make it to Jagala, were separated from their families at Raasiku and brought to the nearby extermination site, Kalevi-Liiva, where they were shot to death.

This group of women did not see their families. Instead, they formed a tight-knit bond with one another. They were transported once again to the Central prison in Tallinn, the capital of Estonia. Their living conditions soon deteriorated drastically. They relied on humor, optimism and romances with men. There is a Romeo and Juliet story between a female prisoner and an SS officer. There is the overwhelming terror of being transported from Estonia to Poland and finally, to Germany.

These young women faced insurmountable obstacles together and survived the Holocaust. They give

remembrance to the Holocaust in Estonia. The execution site of Kalevi-Liiva has a memorial plaque in the midst of Jagala's sand dunes. It stands there as a lone memory.

This is common in Estonia. I have seen a plaque at various sites. The Estonians do not have museums. All concentration camp barracks and buildings were destroyed many years ago. I believe the Estonians remember in their own way, passing their stories onto their children and grandchildren. And *Forgotten Transports* serves as another way to remember the Holocaust in Estonia and honor its survivors.

Check out the Eastern European History blog on Suite 101.

Source:

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