

## Memorial on January 27th 2023 in Obermenzing

### Theresienstadt

On June 26 1942 Trina Kuttner was deported from Munich to Theresienstadt with the 10<sup>th</sup> of **24 transports** of that summer. Like all these transports it consisted of 50 Jews, who had to be older than 65 years, had earned military honors or were invalids. This measure was the result of decisions made at the “Wannseekonferenz” in spring 1942 to solve the “Final solution of the Jewish question”. To this group of Jews the “Abwanderung” (transfer) to Theresienstadt was presented as a privilege, because they were not deported directly to one of the concentration camps further east.

A few days before deportation Trina Kuttner had to sign a “Heimeinkaufsvertrag” (home acquisition contract). With this contract she was led to believe that by transferring all her belongings she would earn room and board, medical care and life long care in this “luxury” senior citizens’ home. The SS was the main profiteer of this pillage with a growing special account. Those who owned less than a 1000 Reichsmark were deported directly to the death camps.

In no way did the destination Theresienstadt comply with the fraudulent promises and the anticipations of the deported people. In contrary it was a run-down fortified city, erected around 1780 by Austria against Prussia in North-Bohemia, settled on the confluence of the river Elbe and Eger. This city was destined to play a leading role in the “Final solution of the Jewish question”. Already in the fall of 1941 this city became a central transit camp for Jewish inhabitants evacuated from the Bohemian and Moravian protectorates with destination east, because of its central location at the important railroad-line Dresden-Prague.

Also six family members of Martha Kahn née Fantl, the wife of Simon Kahn, who had fled from Furth im Wald to Czechoslovakia in 1933, were deported to Theresienstadt. From there they were deported to various camps in Poland, where they were murdered in April 1942. Arriving in Theresienstadt two month later Trina did not know of her relatives’ previous stay at T. or of the extinction of the whole Fantl family.

The fortified town guaranteed an “ideal” setting for its purpose: imprisoning people. Eleven camp buildings served as mass quarters for the endless streams of Jews deported from all over Europe. In the beginning, until the **end of** May 1942 it was only a collecting camp and transit stop for Jews of all ages from the protectorate, mostly of Czech nationality. After the summer of 1942 its function and combination of inhabitants changed. Now the newly arriving deportees were old people from the capitals of the “Altreich”, from Vienna, the capital of the “Ostmark” and German speaking Jews from Prague, destined to live here until death.

The arrival was already an unbelievable shock for the deportees. In no way were they prepared for the unexpected reality. The train ended in Bauschewitz, three kilometers away from Theresienstadt. This 3 km-distance had to be managed on foot until the fall of 1943, when a train connection was built directly into the ghetto. Registration took place in the “Schleuse” (lock). For identification purposes each person (now a prisoner) received a numbered cardboard label with string to be carried around the neck at all times. Luggage control resulted in the confiscation of all valuables and personal objects, but also things important for survival were taken away like blankets, underwear and hygienic utensils.

The camp quarters, so-called “Ubifications”, in which up to 600 people were cramped together, had no furniture, light, heating, water or toilettes. There even were no mattresses, so the old people had to sleep on the naked floor. Finally in the fall of 1942 straw sacks were distributed; later on bunk beds were installed. By the end of September 1942 due to the steady arrival of transports the number of ghetto-inhabitants had reached a peak of 53.000 – compared to the original number of 7.000 people including soldiers in 1930. To solve the problem of overcrowding the attic of the buildings was insulated and occupied. For aged people the access to these quarters via a steep flight of stairs was very strenuous. Many of them gave up and decided to stay in their sleep quarters until they would finally die.

Nutrition from the camp kitchen was also insufficient. Those who were able to walk had to get their ration of food with a tin bowl outside at the food distribution center in the courtyard. This could take hours because of long waiting queues. Food was brought to those who were ill or disabled, but often too late and cold.

For the thousands of aged inhabitants there was only a limited number of medical personnel. To cope with the rising number of diseases and epidemics people were forced to attend a disinfection-unit, where they were treated against lice and spotted fever.

Most severe however was the feeling of debilitation which reduced individuals to numbers in a neglected indifferent mass of humans. The majority of the aged ghetto-inhabitants originally came from European cities' middle class. They now experienced the complete loss of privacy and the plundering of their last private possessions. Essential for survival was the physical and psychological perseverance. Trina Kuttner, once a cosmopolitan, who had mastered many difficulties during her long life subsisted Theresienstadt for eight months, until she died in March 1943 at the age of 82 years, possible cause of death: Typhus. Some of the Memmelsdorf relatives mentioned in her letter, Klara and David Kaufmann as well as Clara Stein, had already died there in the fall of 1942.

Prevalent causes of death were malnutrition, infectious diseases, epidemics and suicide. A peak in the mortality rate of people occurred in September 1942 counting 3.941 people. The source for this dramatic increase were the continuously arriving transports, due to the Nazi-goal to make Germany "free of Jews" as fast as possible. It was not taken into account that the ghetto was already over occupied. Until early summer 1942 those who had died had still been treated with a ritual ceremony in a special room and put to rest in individual graves in the Jewish cemetery. But now because of lack of space they soon were interred in mass graves. After **construction of a crematory** in September 1942 the ashes of the diseased was saved in paper urns, which were then emptied into the river Eger. This must have happened also to the ashes of Trina Kuttner.

To manage the catastrophic overcrowding of the ghetto the SS ordered nine so called "Alterstransporte" (transports of the elderly) between the middle of September and the end of October 1942. 13.442 Jews were sent to the death camps during that short interval. Following this period the deportations to Theresienstadt were ceased until spring 1943. This resulted in a brief interlude with fewer inhabitants and less deaths. But the fear of deportation into death camps was **a constant companion**.

Nowadays Theresienstadt is a small Czech town. Only the **memorials** which were installed after reunification of Germany in 1990, the Ghetto Museum, Exhibition rooms in the camps and casemates, as well as the crematory at the Jewish cemetery give testimony of the incredible crimes Jews had to suffer in the past in this location.

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