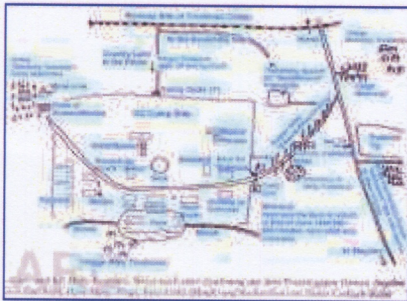
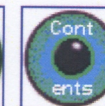


# Maly Trostinec

Last Update 28 May 2006



Camp Map

In

**November 1941**, the **Minsk** Security Police and the SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*) established a new camp at the former kolchos (collective farm, 200 hectares / 500 acres) "Karl Marx" in the village of Maly Trostinec, **12 km southeast of Minsk** and 1 km south of **Bolshoi Trostinec** village. The camp site had been selected in **September 1941**. It measured approximately 200 x 200 m / 4 hectares.

Initially the camp was intended to supply the local Nazi forces with food. In addition a mill, sawmill, locksmith's shop, joinery, tailoring, shoemakers, asphalt works and other workshops were built. Jews and Soviet POWs built barracks for around six hundred mainly Jewish slave labourers and their guards.

The prisoners, selected for work in the camp, were kept at first in a large barn and in 20 cellars, which were formerly used by the local farmers for cooling potatoes, vegetables and meat. Later they were housed in damp barracks, where bunks were constructed from thick unshaved wooden planks in three tiers. There was no bedding or mattresses; the people slept on straw.

From **March 1942**, the camp was surrounded by a threefold barbed wire fence (the middle one electrified), and wooden lookout towers were erected at the corners of the perimeter, which was guarded 24 hours a day. A guardroom was located close to the entrance to the camp, and a gallows was erected. In **mid-March 1942**, partisans attacked the camp and killed the guards; therefore the Germans increased the total number of guards on 250, encircled each barrack with a barbed wire fence, posted additional guards around the barracks, installed runways for dogs, and placed machine-gun nests around the entire site. A subterranean bunker was built, with a tank standing atop it. Those people who were to be liquidated the next day were held in the bunker.

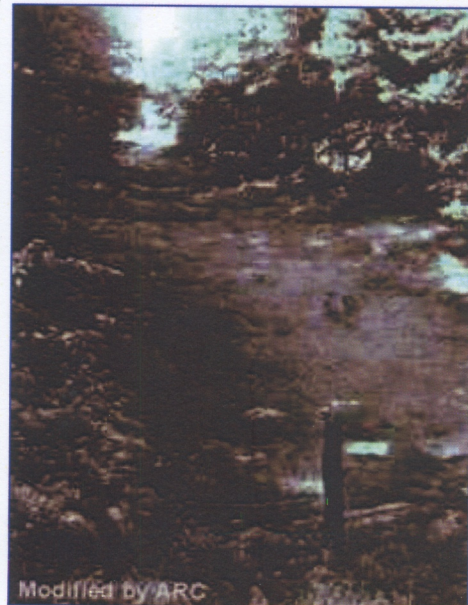
The 150 men of the camp staff were free to beat, shoot or hang any prisoner without any further authority.



Memorial Map\*

Like the camps of **Aktion Reinhard**, the buildings of Maly Trostinec were intended to be no more than temporary structures. The camp came to exist for the principal purpose of killing people and appropriating their few remaining possessions. However, unlike the **Aktion Reinhard** camps and **Auschwitz-**

**Birkenau**, there were no fixed killing facilities. In this respect, perhaps the killing site Maly Trostinec most closely resembled in character was **Chelmno**, although at Maly Trostinec murder was principally committed by shooting. **Mobile gas chambers** (gas vans) only played a subsidiary if significant role. Initially, victims were transported to **Minsk**, which had been intended by **Reinhardt Heydrich** to play a more prominent part in the "Final Solution". German reverses on the Eastern front prevented this, and transports



Execution Site Blagowshtchina \*



to the East from the *Reich* and the "Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia", announced for **January 1942**, were cancelled as a consequence.

Operating in a manner similar to that of the death camps of *Aktion Reinhard*, the SS men, responsible for the executions at Maly Trostinec, met the transports arriving at the goods-railway station in **Minsk**. The deported Jews were informed that they would be transferred to houses and estates around **Minsk**, but before this they had to leave their suitcases which would be forwarded by trucks. The Jews had to also leave their ID-cards, money and valuables for which they received receipts. The victims were completely unaware of their fate. A group about 20 - 80 specialists were selected from every transport and they were sent to the **Minsk Ghetto** or to the work camp at Maly Trostinec. **Between May 1942 and autumn 1943** the remainder were taken by trucks directly to the execution site in the **Blagowshtchina forest**. Before they were killed, they had to undress and hand over their valuables. Then they had to march in underwear to the 60 m long and 3 m deep pits where they were shot in the neck by squads of up to 100 *Sipo* and SD-men.

A special group of Russian forced labour workers had to dig out these pits (in winter the pits were created by detonating dynamite) and fill them up after the killings. Finally, using bulldozers or tractors, the pits were levelled.

During the unloading of the victims the SS men were very brutal. To cover the shots and screams while the Jews were killed, music was played from a gramophone, amplified by a loudspeaker. The population in the neighbouring villages could not hear the executions. Everything was well organised so that the victims had no time or opportunity for resistance. Each SS man knew his "duty" during the mass murder, describing the process in detail in post-war trials.

There had been mass executions of local Jews in **Minsk** since **August 1941**, which continued in and around the city until the ghetto there was liquidated on **21 October 1943**. Beginning on **10 November 1941** with the arrival of the first transport from the *Reich* (990 Jews from **Hamburg**), the **Minsk Ghetto** became, in effect, a transit camp for those earmarked for extermination. Most of the Jews from **Hamburg** were transported directly to Maly Trostinec (**Blagowschtschina**) to be killed there.

In **April 1942**, **Heydrich** ordered **Eduard Strauch**, the commander of the Security Police and Security Service in White Ruthenia, to kill the deportees immediately on arrival. After the first phase of deportations to **Minsk** had been concluded in **November 1941**, 16 trains with more than 15,000 people from cities in the *Reich*, the "Protectorate", Poland, Austria and France arrived at the **Minsk goods station between May and October 1942**.

Starting on **10 May 1942**, and continuing during the early morning hours (4 - 5 a.m.) on Tuesdays and Fridays thereafter, most of the deportees were brought to the primitive "railway station" at Maly Trostinec, which was sited at a dead-end railway track in the camp.

From **August 1942** onwards the trains were routed via a branch line much closer to the estate itself, and from that time on it was here that disembarkation and selection took place.

The few not chosen for immediate execution were formed into *Sonderkommandos*, (special detachments). They were kept in the camp under heavy guard, and forced to take the bodies of those killed to pits where they were buried or burned, to sort out the effects of those who had been murdered for shipment back to Germany, or on camp maintenance. From time to time these slave-labourers were subject to selection and murdered in their turn. In addition to the shooting squads, four gas vans were in operation in the **Minsk** area, some of which began operating at Maly Trostinec at the **beginning of June 1942**. Known locally as "Dushegubki" ("soul killer" in Russian), they accounted for many victims.



Original Sign: Shooting without Warning! \*

**1942 and 22 September 1942**, five transports, each containing about 1,000 people, arrived at Maly Trostinec from **Terezin**. One of these transports left on **4 August**. 40 deportees were removed from

Tens of thousands of Jews from Byelorussia, and other European countries were killed at Maly Trostinec. Trainloads of Jews from Austria, Germany and the Czech Republic arrived and were exterminated. Transports were organized in **Berlin, Hannover, Dortmund, Münster, Düsseldorf, Köln, Frankfurt am Main, Kassel, Stuttgart, Nürnberg, München, Breslau, Königsberg, Wien, Praha, Brno and Terezin (Theresienstadt)**.

After the first transport left **Wien** for Maly Trostinec on **6 May 1942**, a further 8 transports containing 7,500 Viennese Jews followed, along with several hundred Austrians taken from **Terezin**. Only 17 people are known to have survived among the almost 9,000 Austrian Jews deported to Maly Trostinec. **Between 14 July**



the train in **Minsk**. The remaining 960 Jews were ordered off the train, loaded into gas vans and driven into the forest. Of 1,000 Jews in a further transport which left **Terezin** on **25 August**, 22 younger men were taken to work on a farm; two of them escaped to join the partisans. One was killed in action. One survived the war; all others in the transport were gassed.

A report, prepared for **Himmler** on **23 March 1943** by **Richard Korherr** of the SS statistical department, summarised the number of Jews deported up to **31 December 1942** from the *Reich* and the "Protectorate" area: Germany 100,516, Austria 47,555, "Protectorate" 69,677; a total of 217,748. There were to be further transports from Germany in **1943**. Many of those transported in **1942 - 1943** from these countries were destined for Maly Trostinec, and death.

In **May 1943**, approximately 5,000 people were held at the camp site. 500 victims were liquidated every day, by use of gas vans, which went to and from **Minsk** and Maly Trostinec every day, carrying 75 people per journey

In **August 1944**, it was estimated that 40,000 foreign Jews had been killed in the **Minsk Ghetto** and its suburbs. More recent research suggests that in Byelorussia as a whole, the Nazis murdered at least 55,000 Jews from the *Reich* and the "Protectorate"

Maly Trostinec also served as a killing site for the Jews of **Minsk** and the surrounding area. Since Maly Trostinec was only one of several places where Jews were murdered in the **Minsk** region, it is difficult to arrive at an accurate figure for the number of Jews killed at the camp. There were about 400,000 Jews living in Eastern Byelorussia in **mid 1941**

Approximately 80%, or 320,000 Eastern Byelorussian Jews, were murdered during the occupation. Relatively few were transported to the Polish death camps; most were killed on the spot. In addition, the Jewish pre-war population of Eastern Byelorussia had been swollen by an influx of refugees from Poland, fleeing before the German invaders.

But Jews were by no means the only victims. Many thousands of Byelorussian civilians, Byelorussian partisans and, most of all, Soviet POWs were murdered at Maly Trostinec. Unlike the transports from the West, there were no lists to record the number and identities of those killed. For this reason, and because the Germans destroyed most of the records about the camp, as well as the obliteration by them of much of the physical evidence, the estimated death-toll of the Maly Trostinec complex has varied enormously. Estimates place the total number of victims at 206,000 (W Benz: "Dimension des Völkermords", "Mordfelder"). In **1995**, following further examination of archival material, the number of those killed was revised upwards to 546,000, although this figure may be taken to refer to the **Minsk** area as a whole. For example, **between September 1941 and October 1943**, mass shootings were carried out in the **Blagowshtchina forest**, 5 km from Maly Trostinec, where an estimated number of 150,000 people were killed, before the executions site was moved in **October 1943** to the **Shashkova forest**. Here more than 50,000 people were murdered.

It should be stressed that many of these estimates of the numbers of victims are based upon Soviet investigations organised in Minsk in **1944 - 1945**. It is probable that the actual number killed, either by shooting or in gas vans, was lower. The German historian, Christian Gerlach, has calculated the total number of victims of Maly Trostinec at 60,000. What is indisputable is that Byelorussia suffered the highest overall loss of life of any former Soviet Republic during WW2.

In **June 1942** **Heinrich Himmler** ordered **Paul Blobel** to erase all traces of the mass killings in the East. **Blobel** formed the **Sonderkommando 1005** for the purpose of exhuming and burning the corpses of those murdered. The first operations of **Sonderkommando 1005** in the Soviet Union began at the **end of September 1943** at **Babi Yar**, outside **Kiev**. Seven weeks were allotted for conducting the **Sonderkommando 1005** operations in Byelorussia, with disinterment and cremation beginning at Maly Trostinec on **27 October 1943**. The camp commander received police reinforcements as well as 100 Jews who were ordered to undertake the hideous task. The Jews refused to do so and were immediately killed in gas vans. In their place, a group from the **Minsk prison** was allocated, and promised freedom on completion of the work. Instead, they too were gassed.

Whilst working, and at night in the bunker in which they were housed, they had been chained together in order to prevent escape. This was common practice of **Sonderkommando 1005**, wherever it operated. The witnesses were to be destroyed along with the evidence. 34 mass graves (some up to 50 m long) in **Blagovshchina forest** were opened, a number of which contained as many as 5,000 corpses. After the cremation of around 100,000 corpses was completed, a team of Soviet POWs were made to sift the ashes in search of gold. The ashes were used as fertilizer for the camp fields.

A cremation facility was also built in **Shaskowa forest** (500 m away from the camp) in the **autumn of 1943**, where the bodies of those killed by shooting and gassing were incinerated. Here, from





A Soviet Commission  
inspects the pit in 1944 \*

inception, the Germans tried arranging an execution pit as a primitive crematorium. A 3 m high wooden fence was built around the site. 6 parallel rails (10 m long) were installed at the bottom of a 4 m deep pit, with an iron grate placed on them. The pit was supported on three sides with iron panels. The fourth side served as a



Shaskowa Lake, where the  
Gas Vans were cleaned \*

ramp where the gas vans unloaded the bodies of the victims, directed by deputy Camp Commander **Rieder**. The 30 workers who built the cremation facility, were then shot and burned in the pit. This cremation pit was visible until the 1960's. A nearby lake served for cleaning the gas vans before they returned to **Minsk**.



Kolchos Barn: Cremated Victims \*

On 28 June 1944, as the advancing Red Army approached Maly Trostinec, Russian airplanes attacked the camp. That day, the camp guards (Latvian, Ukrainian, White Russian, Hungarian and Rumanian SS auxiliaries) were replaced by a special SS detachment (Germans). This detachment locked all surviving prisoners in barracks. These prisoners were Russian civilians and Jews from **Minsk** and elsewhere. The barracks were set on fire. The SS shot at all those who fled the blazing buildings.

About 20 Jews managed to evade the fire and the bullets; they hid in the nearby forest until the arrival of the Red Army six days later. Amongst the few survivors of Maly Trostinec, they were taken to **Moscow** by their liberators and kept for two years in a

Siberian camp before being released in 1946.

On 28 or 29 June 1944, the chief of the *Sipo* and *SD* in **Minsk**, **Heinz Seetzen**, ordered the execution of the remaining 6,500 prisoners in the **Wolodarski Street Prison** and the **Schirokaja Street Camp** in **Minsk**. Between 28 and 30 June 1944 they were locked in the former kolchos barn in Maly Trostinec, then shot and burned: The first victims had to stand on a layer of firewood, then they were shot. Their bodies were covered with another layer of wood. Then the next victims had to climb on the pile and were shot. This went on until the last layer of bodies reached the top of the barn. Three other funeral pyres were erected beside the barn, then the whole apocalyptic arrangement was burned down. On 4 July 1944, 4 days after this action, Soviet troops arrived at the site. The burning pyres were still visible. On 30 June 1944, the Germans had burned the remainder of the camp to the ground.

Witnesses' testimonies of mass murder at Maly Trostinec became available soon after the Red Army liberated **Minsk**. A resident of **Bolshoi Trostinec** described how tractors had been used to level the bodies in the burial pits in order to enable further bodies to be buried at the same place. Another witness told how a group from **Minsk prison** had been brought to Maly Trostinec as part of the *Sonderkommando 1005* operation. A member of the SS described how 18,000 Jews from **Minsk** had been murdered at the end of July 1942. At that time, four gas vans operated 24 hours a day, whilst other trucks were used to transport the victims to Maly Trostinec for shooting.

In post-war trials, conducted in West Germany in connection with crimes committed at Maly Trostinec, **Otto Erich Drews**, **Otto Hugo Goldapp** and **Max Hermann Richard Krahner** were all sentenced to life imprisonment for their part in the killing of members of *Sonderkommando 1005*. Others were given varying sentences in connection with war crimes carried out in the **Minsk** area, including Maly Trostinec. A number of trials took place in the Soviet Union. Overall, the number tried represented a small minority of the perpetrators.

Of all of the extermination sites in Poland and the former Soviet Union, perhaps least is known in the West about Maly Trostinec. Unlike **Majdanek** and **Auschwitz-Birkenau**, little physical evidence remained of the camp and there were few survivors. There was no overall command structure, as existed in the *Aktion Reinhard* camps, and thus a less organised pattern of crime. Insufficient research has been conducted in the West into Maly Trostinec, yet those killed there may have been comparable in number to the victims of **Majdanek** or **Sobibor**, and may possibly have been greater. With increased access to previously classified Soviet and Eastern bloc documentation, it is to be hoped that this anomaly will eventually be rectified.

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