Transnistria

An artificial geographic term created during World War II, which refers to a region in the Ukraine. Before World War II, there were 300,000 Jews living in the area.

In June 1941 Germany attacked its former ally, the Soviet Union. Germany quickly conquered Transnistria and gave it to its ally, Romania. Many Jews managed to escape the area before German troops arrived. However, tens of thousands of Jews were massacred during the first few months of German occupation by *Einsatzgruppen* units, and by German and Romanian troops.

Ion ANTONESCU, the leader of Romania, soon decided that the Jews of the Bessarabia, Bukovina, and northern Moldavia regions of Romania were an "enemy population," and thus were to be deported to Transnistria, his newly-gained dumping ground. These deportations began on September 15, 1941 and lasted until October 1942. Most of the Jews who had survived mass killings in Bessarabia and Bukovina were expelled to Transnistria by the end of 1941, as were Romanian political prisoners (mostly Jewish), and Jews who had avoided the forced labor draft. Altogether, approximately 150,000 people were sent to Transnistria.

Many deportees died en route to Transnistria. Thousands were jammed into freight trains without food or water, causing many deaths. Others were marched to Transnistria by foot in the severe winter cold, many dying along the way. In both cases, the Romanian guards accompanying the prisoners randomly shot at them, as well.

Those Jews that reached Transnistria alive were packed into camps and ghettos, which were run by the Romanian authorities and police. They were made to do backbreaking forced labor. During the winter, tens of thousands of prisoners died from starvation or typhus, because none of their basic needs were provided for.

After Antonescu ordered a mass slaughter in Osessa (the capital of Transnistria), the survivors were brought to Transnistria and interned in three camps: Bogdanovka, Akhmetchetka and Domanevka. In Bogdanovka all the Jews were shot to death by Romanian and Ukrainian police and a

Sonderkommando unit made up of ethnic Germans. During January and February 1942, many thousands of Jews were murdered in Akhmetchetka and Domaneuka.. Another 28,000 were murdered by SS and German police in southern Transnistria. By March 1943, a total of 185,000 Ukrainian Jews had been murdered by Romanian and German soldiers in Transnistria.

In December 1941 Romanian Jewish leader Wilhelm Filderman managed to get permission from Antonescu to send aid packages to the Jews in Transnistria. Despite the fact that the Romanian authorities put all sorts of hurdles in Filderman's way, the first shipment reached the Jews in Transnistria by the beginning of winter 1942--1943, and it helped some of them survive. By that time, the Romanian government had begun shifting its policy away from Germany, and thus stopped the deportations to Transnistria. Representatives of the Autonomous Refugee Aid Committee were also allowed to visit the Jews in the area. By the end of 1943, the Jews of Transnistria began receiving assistance packages from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the Jewish Agency, the World Jewish Congress, and the Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants.

During 1943, Romanian Jewish groups concentrated their efforts on securing permission for the deportees to return home. Permission was finally granted when the Soviet army began closing in on Transnistria. Many of the survivors returned at that point, although others were only allowed to go home after the war ended. Of the 150,000 Jews who had been deported to Transnistria, a total of 90,000 perished there. In addition about 185,000 local Ukranian Jews also were murdered.