Yugoslavia

Country in southeastern Europe, established after World War I with the union of several territories housing many different ethnic groups. Yugoslavia's hub was Serbia, joined by Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, and other areas.

Before the outbreak of World War II, 15.5 million people lived in Yugoslavia. Of that number, 43 percent were Serbs, 34 percent were Croats, seven percent Slovenes, and seven percent Macedonians. The rest of the population consisted of Germans, Hungarians, Albanians, Gypsies, and approximately 80,000 Jews.

Before Hitler came to power in Germany, there was not much Antisemitism in Yugoslavia. However, as Nazi Germany began to systematically persecute German Jews, antisemitism in Yugoslavia also mounted. After the war broke out, the Yugoslav government wanted to appease the Germans, so it passed two anti-Jewish laws in October 1940. The first law fixed a quota for Jews entering secondary schools and universities; the second banned Jews from buying and selling certain food items. Intellectuals and the Serbian public strenuously objected to these laws, to no avail.

On April 13, 1941 Germany, along with Italy, Hungary, and Bulgaria, invaded Yugoslavia. By April 18 the Yugoslav army surrendered. Hitler decided to do away with the political entity of Yugoslavia, and divide it among his allies. Germany took Serbia; Bulgaria annexed Macedonia; and Hungary, the Backa region. Italy was given Montenegro and most of Yugoslavia's Adriatic coast. Croatia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina were united into the Independent State of Croatia, under the control of the Ustasa fascist nationalist movement.

Yugoslavia's population of 80,000 Jews consisted of 40,000 in Croatia, 16,000 in Serbia, 16,000 in the Backa region, and 8,000 in Macedonia. How they were treated after the Germans invaded in 1941 depended on the region.

In Serbia, the Germans dealt with the region's Jews thoroughly, quickly, and cruelly. Right after they took over Serbia, they ordered the Jews to register themselves, and enacted anti-Jewish laws. For the next few months, most male Jews were forced to work at hard labor. After a Serbian revolt broke out

in July 1941, all male Jews were put in Concentration Camps. Over the next year, all of the region's Jews were deported or murdered.

The Jews of Croatia were persecuted as part of a general Genocide of foreigners, including Serbs, Jews, and Gypsies. Jewish property and money were taken away, and by the end of 1941 about two-thirds of Croatia's Jews had been imprisoned. Many were killed by the *Ustasa* government. Most of the rest of Croatia's Jews were deported to Auschwitz or other concentration camps in the east. Some were able to escape to the Italian zone of Yugoslavia.

Macedonia was ruled by Bulgaria. In March 1943 Germany convinced Bulgaria to arrest the region's Jews and deport them to Treblinka. More than 7,000 Macedonian Jews were killed, and less than 1,000 survived.

Hungary had annexed the Backa region, and subjected it to its own anti-Jewish laws. In January 1942 the Hungarian army and police went on the "great raid," in which they murdered and plundered Backa's Jews. They then forced the young Jews to work at hard labor, and concentrated the rest of the Jews in three camps. In 1944 more than 10,000 Jews were deported to Auschwitz.

Those Jews who lived in Montenegro or on Yugoslavia's Adriatic coast were the lucky ones. The Italian government, army, and foreign ministry worked together to protect their Jews from the Germans. They did so on principle, because they realized that the Germans were losing the war, and because they wanted to preserve their admired status in Yugoslavia. About 5,000 Jews were saved by the Italians.

Altogether, about 66,000 Yugoslav Jews were killed in the Holocaust, and altogether about one million Yugoslavians died in World War II.