

Sajmiste

Fairground site located in the Yugoslav town of Zemun, near Belgrade, which was used as an internment camp for some 8,000 Jews from Serbia before they were killed by gas van in the spring of 1942.

During the fall of 1941, Wehrmacht firing squads murdered most of Serbia's male Jews and gypsies. However, they had refused to shoot women and children. Thus, in December 1941 the Germans imprisoned the surviving Jews and Gypsies in Sajmiste, mostly women and children but also some men, until such time when they could be deported to their deaths in extermination camps in Poland.

The former fairground of Sajmiste was quickly converted into a camp, its large, open buildings turned into barracks by adding wooden scaffolding. The camp did not have heat, and the prisoners had to crawl on their hands and knees through the scaffolding to reach their living quarters.

The Gypsy prisoners were released in the spring of 1942. Despite their plan, the Germans did not send the Jews to Poland. Instead, in early March, they brought in a gas van from Germany in order to finish the job of exterminating the rest of Serbia's Jews right then and there. Over the next nine weeks, groups of Jewish prisoners from Sajmiste were told that they were being relocated, and then loaded on to the gas van. As the van drove through Belgrade, the passengers were suffocated to death and then buried at Avala, south of the city. Altogether, 6,280 Jews from Sajmiste were killed in the gas van, while another 1,200 died from starvation or exposure to the cold.

After all the Jews had been done away with, the German authorities refilled Sajmiste with political prisoners. Despite complaints from the German plenipotentiary (representative) to the Balkan region that the camp was a political eyesore and caused discomfort among the inhabitants of Belgrade, Sajmiste was used until the Germans left Yugoslavia. In all, some 47,000 people perished there during the war.

