

Serbia

Region of Yugoslavia. Before Yugoslavia was established in 1919, Serbia was an independent country. On the eve of World War II, some 16,000 Jews lived there. Of that number, about 14,500 were exterminated during the war.

Germany invaded Yugoslavia in April 1941, and divided the country amongst its allies, keeping Serbia for itself. The Germans then set up a military administration to control the region. Very quickly, the new authorities began issuing anti-Jewish laws. First, they defined exactly who was to be considered a Jew. Next, the Jews of Serbia were made to wear the Jewish badge (see also Badge, Jewish), and were kicked out of certain professions. In addition, they were restricted to living in certain areas. By the summer of 1941, some 900 Jewish businesses had been taken away from their owners, Jewish bank accounts were blocked, and the Jewish community was forced to pay three large fines. In addition, all Jewish men from the ages of 16 to 60 were rounded up for forced labor.

In July 1941 a general revolt broke out in Serbia. In retaliation, the German military authorities came up with a policy whereby 100 Serbs would be executed for every German soldier killed during the revolt, and 50 would be executed for every German injured. However, instead of antagonizing the local population too much, the Germans filled their quotas with Jews. In this fashion, the Germans also did away with much of the "Jewish problem" in Serbia.

By early fall 1941, most of the Jewish men of Serbia had been imprisoned in local concentration camps, and the Germans began carrying out mass executions. By December, most of the Jewish males---about 5,000---had been killed, except for those needed for forced labor. That same month, about 8,000 Jewish women, children, and old people were sent to a fairground-turned-internment camp at Sajmiste, near Belgrade. From March to May 1942, more than 6,000 were killed by gas van, while another 1,200 died of exposure or starvation.

By the summer of 1942, only a few Jews remained in Serbia. These Jews had either been hidden or joined the Partisans.

