

HIDDEN FACTORIES KEPT REICH GOING

Invasion of 'National Redoubt' by 7th, 3d Armies Spoiled Foe's Plans to Resist

INDUSTRIES WERE 'BURIED'

Plants, Unearthed in Depths of Forested Regions, Were Operated by 'Slaves'

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By Wireless to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

LANDSBERG, Germany, May 18 (Delayed)—Slave labor and hidden factories kept the German Wehrmacht supplied with weapons even after Anglo-American air power had smashed the industrial centers of Germany and after the disastrous Russian campaigns had drained the Reich of manpower.

Furthermore, if the American Seventh and Third Armies had not swept into what was to have been Hitler's "national redoubt," high military authorities are convinced that Germany would have been able to continue her hopeless struggle against ultimate defeat two or three months longer.

In traveling about conquered Germany—a country that seems to be populated mostly by old men, women and children—one wonders at first who was left at home to till the fields and work in the factories. But the answer is provided by the seemingly endless streams of former "slaves" from all parts of Europe and by the huge cantonments of liberated victims of Nazism. More than six million of them have been liberated, and that is just about the number of her own men that it is estimated Hitler's "intuition" cost his nation in killed, wounded and captured.

Hidden Factories Uncovered

Looking upon the ruins of industrial cities in the Ruhr, the Rhineland and the Saar Basin, despite the fact that some large factories escaped all damage, one's first impression is that Germany had nothing left when she finally surrendered. But as our occupation forces uncover more and more hidden factories, it becomes apparent that one thing that was wrong with the calculations of Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur T. Harris and others, who believed that Germany could be knocked out of the war by air attacks on sixty key cities, was that they underestimated German industry's ability to go underground.

The farther one gets from the known industrial centers of Germany, the more numerous become those ugly clusters of wooden shacks surrounded by barbed wire. In this part of Germany they can be seen every few miles along the road. I counted twenty-three large slave labor camps, holding 1,000 or more, in an afternoon's drive. At Iging, a tiny farming community near here, I visited a fabulous hidden industrial city in a forest of tall cedars. It was only one of a half dozen similar installations within a radius of thirty miles.

Factories Invisible From Air

It was invisible from the road to anyone who did not know in advance that it was there, for the fence surrounding the hidden factory-city was set well back from the road. Yet, inside an area of little more than one and a half square miles, were 150 large factory buildings with flat roofs, from which sprouted grass and trees that had been planted in a foot and a half of top soil like penthouse gardens in New York, to prevent discovery from the air. Aerial photographs taken of the region by American units after the plant had been discovered gave no hint of what was hidden beneath the trees, although a network of some fifteen or twenty miles of concrete roads and railway spurs showed up mysteriously here and there in the forest.

Apparently it was not the Germans' intention to use these hidden forest factory towns, manned entirely by slaves, to produce finished weapons like tanks and heavy vehicles, but to manufacture vital parts, like radio instruments, lenses, ball bearings and other parts formerly made in factories on which the Allied air forces had been concentrating their attacks.

Yet, alongside the hidden industrial center, as a sort of annex, the Todt Organization was just completing a huge underground factory for the manufacture of jet-propelled planes when our troops overran the place. This was a semi-circular, reinforced-concrete structure perhaps half a mile long and wide enough for a double railroad track to run down the center and leave plenty of room for gigs and tools and conveyor belts on either side. The entrance looked like the mouth of the Holland Tunnel. The structure was more than 150 feet high from the subterranean foundation to the highest point of the curving roof. It was the obvious intention of the engineers to cover the whole thing with earth and foliage so that it would look from the air like just another hummock in this rolling countryside.

Factory Begun in 1939

Inside, the fences of the enclosure in the clearings were just big enough to give room for brick buildings of various sizes but of similar design. Running through the trees, on upright braces were networks of twelve- and six-inch pipe to carry steam from a central generating plant to all the buildings. Sewers and water systems were being laid, and the whole thing was like the realization of some comic strip-fantasy.

The German civilian electrician who was still there when I visited the place, which is now under control of the Seventh Army's Ordnance Section, said work was begun on the forest factory town in 1939, with some 800 laborers. Operations were suspended, he said, in the spring of 1942, when the Germans began taking men even

from essential work behind the lines and impressing them into the Wehrmacht for service on the Eastern Front. In the spring of 1944, when slaves began to be imported into the Reich on a larger scale than ever, he said work was resumed and had continued ever since.

Two "Slaves" Interviewed

The forest city was just coming into production when the Seventh Army captured it and liberated the vermin-ridden, undernourished and overworked slaves who had been dying in large numbers of typhus, tuberculosis, pneumonia and sheer exhaustion.

The factory site I visited was the property of the Dynamit-Actien Gesellschaft, according to the stationery in the main building, which stated that the company was successor to Alfred Nobel & Co. The German companies that held contracts for the construction job included Siemens and Allgemeine Elektrizitaet Gesellschaft.

On the road near the hidden city we came upon two men, one still wearing his pajama-like prison uniform, the other wearing shorts and shirt and limping on a walking stick. They were obviously inmates of the camp, so we halted by the roadside for a talk with them.

One was Fayvel Grossman, 43-year-old Jew from the ghetto in Lodz, Poland, who said his wife and two daughters had been burned to death in the Auschwitz crematorium before he was sent to Dachau and finally to the factory city in the woods, where conditions were not much better. The other was 19-year-old Israel Kros, a native of a little town in Lithuania, who was just recovering from typhus, and who said that his elder brother had been picked up by the Germans and had been "put in the oven" when he became ill.

"Two more weeks and I would have joined him," he added.

They did not know exactly how many slaves were employed in the hidden city where they were forced to labor, but they said that in the compounds where they lived there were always 2,000 or 3,000 slaves. They worked twelve hours a day on a starvation diet, they said, and at night slept on the floor of drafty cabins, packed in so tightly that it was "impossible to lie on one's back, and when one man turned everybody else had to do the same."

High Mortality Was Ignored

The two men said they had heard that there were twenty compounds or "lagers" just like theirs in the neighborhood of the secret factory where they worked, but the German electrician to whom we talked said he knew of only half a dozen. Grossman said that in his camp about 1,000 slaves had died or been killed by the Germans in the past three months. Kros said 2,000 had died in his camp in the nine months he had spent there. On one day, he said, he helped bury 200 bodies in one pit.

Both men talked as casually of the wholesale death and of their life as slaves as if they were describing the most commonplace experiences of life. Grossman said that originally there were 17,000 Jews in the ghetto at Lodz, but that by the time he was shipped to Dachau a little less than a year ago, there were only 1,200 left.

It was apparent that the Germans did not care how many of their victims died so long as there was a source of replacement. Troops of the 822d Tank Destroyer Battalion of the Sixty-third Division guarding the gates to the hidden city said they had found quite a number of unburied bodies when they arrived. Scattered among the factories and slave camps were strong concrete air raid shelters. These were not for the slaves, however, but for their guards and overseers. At the entrance to each one was a painted sign reading "Fuer Deutsche." There were no shelters for the "Auslanders."