

Tuesday, August 22, 1944

JTA*Daily News Bulletin*

PUBLISHED BY THE JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY

106 EAST 41st STREET, NEW YORK 17, N. Y.

HUNGARY RELAXES ANTI-JEWISH LAWS; JEWS PERMITTED TO LEAVE GHETTO DURING DAY HOURS

ZURICH, Aug. 21. (JTA) -- Some slight relaxation of anti-Jewish pressure in Hungary was reported here today following the recent visit of representatives of the International Red Cross to the Budapest ghetto.

Jews will now be permitted to leave the ghetto from 10 o'clock in the morning till 5 o'clock in the afternoon. They will be permitted to draw small sums from their bank accounts. Their milk rations have also been increased from one-third of the rations received by the non-Jewish population to one-half.

There are now about 240,000 Jews in the Budapest ghetto. No definite information can be obtained by the International Red Cross about the plight of the Jews in the Hungarian provincial towns. Most of these Jews have been deported. Information is also not available with regard to the fate of Jews who were deported from Hungary but were not sent to "extermination camps."

Representatives of the International Red Cross are not permitted to visit any of the labor camps in Germany or any occupied country, but they were permitted to visit the labor camps situated in Budapest. There are not many such camps in Hungary and the number of inmates is small.

International Red Cross Praised for its Efforts in Behalf of Hungarian Jews

LONDON, Aug. 21. (JTA) -- The Manchester Guardian, one of England's leading newspapers, in an article today pays high tribute to the International Red Cross for dealing effectively with the problem of rescuing Jews from Hungary. In contrast, it asks what the War Refugee Board and other official and unofficial rescue organizations are doing in the matter of rescue.

The article comments on the joint Anglo-American acceptance of Hungary's offer to permit the emigration of Jews to Palestine and to neutral countries, and urges in particular that Switzerland be given every assistance in accepting more refugees.

Hungarian Government Reports Large-Scale Confiscation of Jewish Agricultural Land

STOCKHOLM, Aug. 21. (JTA) -- Large-scale confiscation of Jewish-owned land in Hungary is reported here today from Budapest in a statement issued by the Hungarian Department of Agriculture.

The statement reveals that 715,000 yokes of land had been taken over by the state from Jews by the end of 1943. About three-quarters of this land is agricultural, while the remainder is woodland. About 360,000 yokes of the confiscated Jewish agricultural land was leased to non-Jews by the state which administers the Jewish property.

LATVIAN PARTISANS RESCUE 600 JEWS; 4,000 JEWS HELD IN BALTIC COASTAL TOWN

STOCKHOLM, Aug. 21. (JTA) -- Six hundred Jews who had been forced by the Germans in occupied Latvia to work on fortifications were recently liberated by Latvian partisans when transferred to Liepaja, it was reported here today by the newspaper Baltiska Nyheter.

No details of the liberation were given, but the report says the Jews who were rescued from the German hands are deportees from Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Holland. All joined the Latvian partisan units immediately upon their liberation.

The same paper estimates that only several hundred Jews have survived in Lithuania of the 170,000 who were there before Germany invaded the Baltic countries. Most of the surviving Jews are hiding in the woods, the paper says. In the early months of 1944 there were still nine thousand Jews in the Kaunas ghetto, all of whom were used for forced labor. But in March the Gestapo discovered a secret tunnel dug by Jews from the ghetto to the Neris River. For this "crime" about half of the Jews in the ghetto were shot. The last 3,000 Jews in the Vilna ghetto were likewise exterminated during the month of March, the paper states, adding that the victims fought against the Germans on the barricades before meeting their death.

About 4,000 Dutch and Belgian Jews are now still alive in a concentration camp which the Germans established in the coastal town of Krestinga some six weeks ago, the paper reveals. They are engaged in the heaviest manual labor. The worst is feared for them when the Germans are forced soon by the Russian Army to withdraw from that area, the paper declares.

ANGLO-AMERICAN-RUSSIAN SECURITY CONFERENCE WILL LEAD TO CHANGE IN PALESTINE STATUS

WASHINGTON, Aug. 21. (JTA) -- Re-orientation of the status of Palestine may be expected as a consequence of the British-American-Russian security conference which opened today at Dumbarton Oaks, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency learned today from a high authority.

It is predicted here that the entire mandate system of the League of Nations will be undone and replaced by a system of United Nations trusteeship, since it is generally felt that the result of the mandates has been unsatisfactory and that the system has proved itself all but unworkable.

It is expected that under the trusteeship of the United Nations, immigration into Palestine will be facilitated for Jews and the promise to establish a Jewish National Home in Palestine, contained in the Balfour Declaration but as yet unfulfilled, will be brought nearer to realization.

MIAMI THEATRES CANCEL SHOWING OF FILM PORTRAYING BIGOTRY IN THE UNITED STATES

MIAMI, Aug. 21. (JTA) -- The current March of Time film, "Americans All," which portrays the multiplying outbreaks of bigotry in the United States, including anti-Semitic vandalism in the East and the dangerous tide of Negro suppression in the South, has been cancelled here, after being scheduled for showing in three major first run theatres.

The "excuse" given for the cancellation by the management, according to the Miami Daily News, was that a "few irresponsible move-goers in nearby Hollywood, Fla. emitted some boos and catcalls when viewing the subject there recently." The film had previously been endorsed by the Young Men's Christian Association, the Federal Council of Churches, the Anti-Defamation League, the National Conference of Christians and Jews and a host of other national organizations.

WAR REFUGEE BOARD CONFIRMS REPORT THAT SINKING OF "MEFKURE" BY GERMANS WAS DELIBERATE

WASHINGTON, Aug. 21. (JTA) -- John W. Fehle, executive director of the War Refugee Board, today confirmed the original report of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that the Turkish vessel "Mefkure" which went down two weeks ago with more than 250 Jewish refugees while on the way from the Rumanian port of Constanza to Turkey, was sunk deliberately by German shell fire.

"If anyone had any doubts about the German attitude towards refugee rescue operations, or anticipated a lessening in the Nazi program of extermination, he now knows the ugly truth," Mr. Fehle said.

According to a cable received by Mr. Fehle from Ira Hirschmann, War Refugee Board representative in Turkey, the five survivors of the "Mefkure" stated that the ship was approached by three surface craft near midnight August 5. The boats were barges, about the length of two railroad cars, and armed with machine guns and cannons. The boats fired both cannons and machine guns at the "Mefkure." One of the first shots exploded the machinery in the machine room and the ship was set aflame by incendiary bullets.

The survivors said that many of their number were wounded by shell fire. Others were caught in the flames or injured by flying machinery. The machine guns continued to fire upon many of the passengers after they had donned life preservers and jumped into the water.

"The five "Mefkure" survivors and the 395 passengers from the S. S. "Bulbul," which made the trip a few hours behind the "Mefkure" are now en route to Palestine by rail, Fehle said. The "Bulbul" passengers reported that their ship was not on the scene during the attack on the "Mefkure." Later the armed boats approached the "Bulbul" and its engines were shut down. At daylight it picked up the only survivors that could be found. A storm was raging, otherwise it was thought that more than five might have been rescued. For some unknown reason, the armed boats did not fire upon the "Bulbul," which continued its voyage carrying its passengers to Ignaeda, Turkey.

Fehle stated that the emergency rescue operation which included the bringing of the "Mefkure" survivors and the "Bulbul" passengers by oxcart from Ignaeda to Vize, by truck to Cherkaskoy, and by train to Istanbul, was conducted under the supervision of the Turkish Red Crescent.

Jewish Woman Rescued from "Mefkure" Tells How Germans Shelled Ship

ISTANBUL, Aug. 21. (JTA) -- A miracle is about to occur at the American Hospital here. Eighteen-year-old Veronica Ladislaus, a Jewish refugee rescued from the "Mefkure" will have her baby, and the doctors predict that both mother and child will live. This is a wonder, for only two weeks ago Veronica survived one of the war's most wanton slaughters. She was saved when the Germans shelled and burned the Turkish refugee ship, the Mefkure, and then machine-gunned the swimmers.

This is Veronica's story. She and her husband lived in Budapest. He had a good job for a youth of 22. They were both champion swimmers. They were young, in love and happy. But they were Jews. So when Himmler's blackclad Schutzstaffel took over Hungary they were doomed. For him, because he was strong, the prospect was hard labor and death; for her, because she was young and lovely, enforced prostitution and death.

Veronica is not coherent on how she reached the port of Constanza, Rumania. She and her husband travelled like gypsies through the Balkan uplands and reached it

finally. There were three tiny ships there, the Bulbul, the Morino and the Mekkure, built like Dutch shoes and lacking passenger facilities. The refugees poured in until 1,100 were crammed into the three ships, which perhaps could have accommodated 100 in reasonable comfort for the last lap of the escape across the black Sea. They were warned. Rumanians whispered, "the Germans are watching you." Stevedores told them, "the Germans will never let you reach Turkey."

But they set out, perhaps the most pathetic little fleet that has ever floated on any sea. They set out at midnight, the 200-ton Mekkure first, the smaller ships following, loaded with Hungarian and German refugees. Dawn came and with it they saw three specks upon the sea behind, slowly approaching, tracking them like a wolf pack after its prey. By dusk it was plain that the trackers were 30-motor German patrol boats.

It came at midnight. First a flare burst over the refugee fleet, its bare, stark whiteness exposing each ship, each mast, each person. The patrol boats opened up. The Mekkure was closest, so they opened up against her. They lobbed cannon shells into her until she caught fire. They ripped her open with 20 mm bullets. The Turkish motor ship burned. Between 40 and 50 of her passengers dived overboard. They were fighting for a chance to live. The others had been incinerated.

Phillip and Veronica were in the water. It was only seven miles off the Turkish coast, but the Germans sought them out with searchlights and machine guns ripped the sea. Their friends died. Phillip cut the lifebelts from the dead bodies and gave them to his wife. Many times she missed death. A propeller churned inches from her head. Bullets cut a phosphorescent path alongside her. Still she survived and swam and floated. When dawn came, the "Bulbul" picked them and four others up. The Germans had gone. Veronica was landed at the little port of Igeanda, just barely on Turkish territory. From Igeanda, she travelled by oxcart. Today she is in the American hospital and her baby is due within a week.

Eighty Jewish Orphans Perished on the "Mekkure," Eye-Witness Reports

JERUSALEM, Aug. 21. (JTA) -- Eighty Jewish orphans who lost their parents in Transnistria were among the refugees sunk by the Germans on the Mekkure, it was stated today by a girl, a Miss Wurnbrand, who is one of the survivors.

Miss Wurnbrand said that the Germans, in addition to shelling the Mekkure and machine-gunning those who jumped from the burning ship, also let loose specially trained dogs to make sure of the drowning of the swimming victims. Miss Wurnbrand was one of the five survivors rescued by the Bulbul which followed the Mekkure.

THREE-DAY CONFERENCE OF JEWISH CHAPLAINS OPENED IN NEW YORK

NEW YORK, Aug. 21. (JTA) -- A three-day conference of Jewish chaplains of the Northeastern area, called by the Committee on Army and Navy Religious Activities of the National Jewish Welfare Board opened here today at the Henry Hudson Hotel.

Approximately 45 chaplains from the First, Third and Fourth Naval Districts and the First, Second and Third Army Service Command are attending the conference to discuss the work they are doing with the soldiers and sailors. Eight of the chaplains who have served overseas will present informal reports on their experiences.