

What we knew: coverage of the Holocaust in Canadian newspapers



newspapers

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Introduction

Millions of Jews and other "racially inferior" groups were systematically murdered by the Nazi regime in the span of months. In 1945, in the days before the term "genocide" had entered the average Canadian's lexicon, what did Canadians know about what we now refer to as the Holocaust, as it was happening? As the advancing Allied armies liberated concentration camps, making available information about what had happened, was this information reported in the press?

I sought to answer this question by examining the two most popular Canadian newspapers: the *Toronto Daily Star* and the *Montreal Gazette*. I selected the weeks that I believed would be most likely to contain coverage of the Holocaust, the weeks following the liberation of Auschwitz. The Auschwitz complex of camps has come to symbolize the Holocaust, and evil more broadly. I reviewed the pages of the *Toronto Daily Star* from January 24 – February 28 and from May 7 – May 18 and pages of the *Montreal Gazette* from January 24 – February 10.

General Findings

The *Toronto Daily Star* and the *Montreal Gazette* differ enormously in their coverage of the Holocaust. In the period examined, the *Star* ran 20 articles referencing systematic atrocities against European Jewry. These articles include detailed accounts of concentration camps. In contrast, in the weeks following the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, coverage in Canada's second largest newspaper was limited. The *Gazette* published three articles about the persecution of Jews in Europe: two about how Nazi criminals should be punished and one about the local Jewish organization receiving lists of survivors.

Accuracy

In the chaos of World War II, collecting credible information was a challenge because of factors including wartime censorship and a lack of war correspondents. Reports of concentration camps were generally accurate with significant exceptions. The February 2, 1945 (2nd edition) front-page of the *Toronto Daily Star* included an article on the Auschwitz camps with the headline "Conveyor Belt System Slew, Burned Hundreds" (pictured). The article falsely writes that Nazis killed inmates with an "electric conveyor belt", as was reported by the Soviet army. A February 19, 1945 (2nd edition) article in the *Star* inflates the number of killed at Auschwitz to 4,000,000. According to the United States Holocaust memorial museum, approximately 1 million Jews, Roma, Poles, Soviet prisoners of war and other prisoners died in the concentration camp.

Conclusion

In 1945, What Canadians knew about the Holocaust largely depended on their choice of newspaper. Attentive readers of the *Toronto Daily Star* in the early months of 1945 could have had fairly significant knowledge of the Nazi persecution of Jews. On the other hand, subscribers to *Montreal's* most popular newspaper could have read the paper every day and only possessed a faint knowledge that Jews, like many civilians, suffered under Nazi occupation. The *Gazette* never references concentration camps.

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Acknowledgements

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TORONTO DAILY STAR

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STAR WANT ADS
COST SO LITTLE
Give Such Good Results

SECOND SECTION

Bracken Troop Talk Partisan Dodge—McNaughton

BACK TO SCHOOL FOR AIR HEROES AT TORONTO'S R.C.A.F. TRAINING CENTRE



SWITCH-OVER from Spitfires to school isn't easy for Flt.-Lieut. Bob Middlemas, Montreal, who downed three Nazis



DESPITE REDUCED aircraft training, the R.C.A.F. carries on research as vigorously as ever. Here Sqdn. Ldr. "Brad" Walker, D.F.C., London, tries an exercising machine



HONOR ROLL at the training school represents more than 400 decorated graduates. Sqdn. Ldr. Walker inspects it

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By THE CANADIAN PRESS

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"The additional numbers were to go forward in December, January and the three succeeding months. I repeat again what I have said many times before, that this program covering the normal and additional provision has been adhered to."

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HIGHLY SPECIALIZED INDUSTRY

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DEATH MERCIFUL BESIDE TORTURE

"Liberated prisoners say death was most merciful compared to the ordeal of hunger, cold and bodily torture to which victims were subjected prior to execution," he added. "I saw leather-covered steel rods, made wholesale in the Krutz factories at Dresden, for beating prisoners. I saw zinc-lined benches with leather straps

NAZIS WITHDRAW TO BRENNER PASS IS BERNE REPORT

London, Feb. 2—Indications that the Germans were withdrawing from the peninsula area of northern Italy were reported in a London Daily Telegraph dispatch from Bern, Swiss capital, today. Long convoys were observed moving northward on roads leading to the Brenner pass, the dispatch said.

Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, German commander in Italy, probably intends to hold the approaches to the Brenner gateway into Germany, the report declared.

Vigorous patrolling is continuing along the Senio river front and in the sector south of Loko Casacchio, just inland from the Adriatic. Sharp clashes develop whenever Canadian patrols encounter those of the enemy, resulting in slightly additional to the prisoner totals.

The Germans continue to play symphonic recordings of Strauss waltzes in nightly serenade; the Canadians reply with martial fire.

Despite adverse weather, the tactical air force roamed over the Po valley and the Brenner Pass area, concentrating on German lines of communications and supply bases. Ammunition dumps southeast of Modona and at Cavallone were hit, railyards were damaged and bridges blocked. A number of railroad cars and motor vehicles were destroyed.

SOCIALISTS TO STAY EASES BELGIAN CRISIS

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GENUINE FAG BUTTS SET STYLE FOR EARS



Something Gay Heas, 18-year-old Washington, D.C. beauty, dreamed up are these "cigarette drop" earrings, with gold tips. The butts are real.

to the Aleutians and stayed there 10 months during invasions of Kiska and Attu. He took the same squad-up overseas in January, 1944, and returned to Canada in June of last year. He was "shot up by fighters over LeToquet and holed a number of times." He is also a graduate of the R.C.A.F. war staff college, Toronto.

DEATH FOR 9 YANKS

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When do articles appear?

The *Toronto Daily Star* printed several articles on liberated concentration camps a week after the events. The Soviet army liberated Auschwitz-Birkenau January 27, 1945, however it wasn't until February 2 that the front-page (2nd edition) featured an article on the discovery of a "murder factory" near Oswiecim, Poland (pictured). There was another in-depth article on the concentration camp on February 19 (2nd edition). The visit of the American Congressional committee and the release of the Soviet report on Auschwitz caused a series of articles to appear in mid-May 1945.

The press and the local Jewish community

The *Gazette* coverage of the persecution of Jews in Europe was sparse. However, there was extensive coverage of local Jewish community events. The newspaper's sports section mentioned local Jewish athletes and followed teams representing the Young Men's Hebrew Association. Both newspapers, but especially the *Gazette* reviewed Yiddish theatre productions and Jewish concerts, carried notices of lectures and covered important social events.

Graphic language and photos

Language used in the 1945 articles was graphic and sensationalist by today's standards. Articles detailed Nazi torture practices and killing methods. The May 11 front page of the *Toronto Daily Star* featured a photograph of a Nazi official among corpses in the Landsberg concentration camp.

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