I warned the world of Eichmann

WHEN Adolf Eichmann faces trial in Tel-Aviv in April, there can be no doubt about his guilt. Those six million graves cannot be denied.

The question of his sentence, too, will be of academic interest. Civilization has no yardstick to measure punishment for such a creature.

The trial, indeed, will be like an old film we all know off by heart. And Eichmann will be but a fading, flickering figure in the middle, already a fossil of history.

Yet I have still a special interest in him. After all, I was his guest in Auschwitz concentration camp for two years. In that time I saw 1,750,000 men, women and children gassed, shot, tortured or burned alive. I saw them vanish in clouds of black smoke from the crematoria chimneys.

For millions that was the only way out of Auschwitz.

I left the hard way — by escaping. And I am proud to have been the first man to reveal the extent of his crimes to the world at a time when he was still commanding his murder squads.

While I was Prisoner No. 44070 at Auschwitz — the number is still on my arm — I compiled careful statistics of the exterminations.

I calculated, in fact, that 2,000,000 people were murdered there in three years.

I took these terrible statistics with me when I left in 1944. And I was able to give Hungarian Zionist leaders three weeks' notice that Eichmann planned to send a million of their Jews to his gas chambers.

If only they had acted, 400,000 Hungarians would have been saved. But at least it is good to know that my action helped to save 600,000.

My journey to Auschwitz began in my Slovak home town, Topoleany, in eastern Czechoslovakia, in 1942. Because I was Jewish, I had known persecution since the German invasion of 1938.

ESCAPE

Like many others, I tried to escape to Britain to join the free Czechs. But I was captured in Budapest, flung unconscious across the border from Hungary into Slovakia, and handed over to the S.S. in Poland by the quisling Slovak police.

They sent me with 1,000 other Slovak Jews to their concentration camp at Majdolek, near Lublin — a crude blueprint of the efficient murder machine that was developed later at Auschwitz.

We were lined up before a selection committee who picked out 100 strong young men. The rest — mainly the old and the sick, the women and children — were killed and burned.

Then they took all our possessions and burned our documents. We no longer existed officially.

German scientists had calculated that our food was sufficient to keep us alive for three months. For once they were wrong.

It was hopelessly inadequate. The water was infected. In the first week, 20 of the 100 died, and this was the average death rate in the camp, which held about 20,000 prisoners.

We were beaten almost daily with clubs. Those who faltered
were shot. But I was lucky. I was strong.

In fact, when they called for volunteers to do agricultural work further north, I stepped forward.

About 1,000 of us—70 to a truck—travelled by rail for two and a half days without food or water. Then we were herded through a huge gate, over which was a huge sign which read: "Work Makes You Free."

This was Auschwitz. And my introduction to it was symbolic.

I saw expressionless Ukrainian prison guards, 抣ching skeleton-thin bodies, like scraggly slabs of beef, on to a sht. It grew away swaying under its load of death. And that was only an afterlife. A grisly main course followed that afternoon.

Two prisoners had been found guilty of planning an escape. We were forced to watch them being dragged and hung.

But I got an even greater shock when I learned the nature of my "agricultural work."

We had to dig up and burn the bodies of 20,000 Russian war prisoners who had been murdered. We had to remove the decomposing evidence.

LUCKY

Again I was lucky. I was re-drafted and told to unload food for the SS mess. Not one of the other agricultural workers survived, because they had seen too much.

I kept up my strength by stealing the SS food. Then I began to learn what the Germans called euphemistically the "administrative machinery."

There were about 360 of us. Half of us worked on the transports which were bringing Jews from all over Europe. We opened the crammed trucks under the surveillance of SS machine-guns and clubs and ushered the victims to the gas chamber.

The rest collected the bodies for burning.

The doomed cargoes, of course, had no idea of their fate. If any prisoner was seen talking to them, he was clubbed to death.

The Germans, in fact, tricked their victims into believing they were going to labour camps, for had they known the truth, they might have rebelled.

Quickly the new arrivals were told to strip and have a shower in a large wooden hut. As soon as the hut was full, the doors were locked and gassing began.

Survivors were shot. All bodies were flung into blazing trenches.

My job was collecting their belongings. It was only then that I learned the real reason for this vast extermination.

ROBBERS

It was not merely anti-Semitism, or even sadism. It was mainly cold, calculated robbery, designed to bolster the German generals' war machine and the home economy.

Furs coats were re-modelled, military fashion, for the Eastern Front. Gold teeth were melted down. In three years, in fact, Auschwitz sent six tons of gold to the Berlin State Bank.

Nothing was wasted. Women's hair was used for making torpedoes heads water-tight. Ashes from the crematorium fertilised the SS vegetable gardens.

I calculated that at least a quarter of a million primes and half a million pairs of spectacles alone were sent to German civilians.

And, the Russians found evidence that in the last six weeks of its life, Auschwitz sent 333,959 men's shirts and suits and 1,643,692 women's blouses to boost morale on the home front and bolster the crumbling German economy.

Working on the transports not only helped me to survive, but gave me first-hand knowledge of the numbers being exterminated. I double-checked my figures with other prisoners.

And what I learned made me determined to escape. It could reveal the secret of Auschwitz to the world, thousands might be saved.

But, even as I plotted, there was a new development. We learned that Himmler and Eichmann—the man Hitler had ordered to find the final solution to the Jewish problem—were to visit us. The people of the nearby town of Auschwitz were complaining about the stench of burning Jewish flesh in their Aryan nostrils.

And—even more important—the extermination was not being done quickly enough. We were about to step up our destruction rate to unprecedented levels.

Tomorrow: Himmler and Eichmann arrive. I learn of the plot to kill and rob a million Jews.