



“and to Remind the Living”

By Gus Mathieu
Guest Writer

Last Sunday more than ten thousand Berliners gathered in the Lustgarten to pay tribute in an impressive ceremony to the 15 million men and women who have died in Nazi concentration camps and on the “guillotine front”.

After a short opening address by Berlin's mayor, Dr. Werner, in which he expressed the hope that this day would become a permanent memorial day in Europe, hundreds of flower wreathes were placed besides a huge eternal flame burning under a replica of the concentration camp survivors' symbol — a red triangle





Mildred and Dr. Arvid Harnack, an American and her German husband who were executed by the Gestapo.



Representatives of the International Brigade, with the Spanish Republican flag, paraded at the exposition Sunday.

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Among the audience were many former inmates of the camps and relatives of victims who had died in them. They listened with reverence to Beethoven's "Eroica" played for the dead of the 22 nations whose flags, including Republican Spain, decorated the Lustgarten. A banner on the Neue Museum bore the motto "To Honor the Dead — and to Remind the Living".

City Counsellor Ottomar Geschke, who was a political prisoner for many years, and members of the seven foremost resistance groups in Berlin gave gripping accounts of the courageous deeds of their groups. The resistance groups are: the Seafkow, European-Union, 20th of July, Uhrig and Romer, Heinz Kapelle, Christian Resistance and Schulze-Boysen-Harnack Groups.

Mildred Harnack Only American Woman Executed by Gestapo

Among the dead of the resistance groups which were honored Sunday, was a woman from Milwaukee, Wis., Mildred Harnack, the only American-born woman executed by the Gestapo.

Mildred Harnack, nee Mildred Fish, was beheaded at six o'clock on the evening of February 16, 1943, at the Gestapo execution grounds at Ploetzensee, near Berlin, for having belonged to the militant anti-Nazi group "Red Orchestra" directed by her German-born husband, Arvid Harnack. The clandestine radio transmitters of the organization were referred to by a code of musical instruments, hence the covername "Red Orchestra". In all, 47 members in Berlin were sent to their death after a trial of four months during which two committed suicide. Mildred Harnack's husband was killed on Christmas Eve 1942 by hanging on a foot-long rope, a refined method of cruelty by which the Nazi henchmen prolonged the victim's agony.

Mildred Fish met Arvid Harnack when he was a student at Wisconsin University on a Rockefeller Fellowship in Economics. Arvid Harnack belonged to the honored family of Harnack savants, after which the Harnack House of OMGUS Headquarters is named. When Mildred Fish married Arvid Harnack and left the US for Germany in 1930, she never anticipated that one day she would die for freedom's cause at the hands of her adopted countrymen. When the couple last visited Mildred's relatives in Maryland in 1937, they were advised to emigrate from Germany. But the Harnacks replied that "some of us have to stay to work from the inside" and returned to the country of terror to fight against Hitler from the underground front.

Members of the Harnack-Schulze-Boysen Group

Heroic Mildred Harnack was not involved in the Harnack-Schulze-Boysen organization, as the resistance group is called in the Gestapo dossier, merely as the wife of its leader. She was a militant anti-fascist herself. The Harnack's political belief dated back to the time when he wrote his doctor's thesis on labor problems at Wisconsin University and became interested in Socialism. She typed and distributed anti-war leaflets, kept contact with other members and participated in secret meetings held at their home. Arvid Harnack succeeded in keeping his pre-1933 job as a high-placed official in the Ministry of Economics under the Nazis where he pretended to be a loyal German to better carry on his underground work. Mildred Harnack repeatedly used her position as literary advisor to a Berlin book publishing firm (she translated "Lust for Life", by Irving Stone and "Drums along the Mohawk") to travel in Europe and contact other agents.

Details of the activities of the resistance groups were so secret that members often did not know the others were anti-nazis until they met in prison. And even there spies were often placed among the accused. The



Former KZ members spoke from the speakers platform.



The Countess Marion von Wartenburg represented the 20 of July Group. Her husband was killed as a member of that group.



Former inmates wearing their concentration camp "uniforms."

Red Orchestra had over 600 members in Germany, one in the wireroom of Hitler's headquarters, and the other on the staff of the Luftwaffe.

From the day of their arrest in September 1942 while vacationing on the Baltic Sea, the Harnacks were separated and not allowed to see each other. Arvid was relieved when he heard that his wife had been given only a six months sentence at hard labor. He knew that the assassination attempt on Hitler was in the offing and stalled the trial proceedings in the hope that all accused would see that day. He died thinking that his wife would survive and live to see a Germany freed of Hitler and the gates of political prisons swung open. But Hitler, dissatisfied with the light punishment, personally ordered the trial of Mildred Harnack reopened. Manfred Roeder, the Nazi chief judge who a few weeks prior had decreed the prison sentence now changed it to the death penalty.

Brandenburger
gedenket stets dieser

Withstood Gestapo Third Degree

All trial members were sworn to secrecy by the Nazis but word leaked out and an informant telegraphed in code to a member of the Harnack family: "The book is completed, six pictures are on their way." The last man who saw Mildred Harnack was the humane prison chaplain of Plotzensee, Polchau, who despite strict orders, gave aide and comfort to the doomed men and women. He saw Mildred for one and a half hours on the execution day and relates that tortures had turned her blonde hair ashen white. She was unable to walk by herself and appeared tuberculosis-ridden. Solitary confinement in the Charlottenburg prison had made her look like an old woman at forty years. She was not allowed to write or receive letters during the whole time of her imprisonment. Despite the Gestapo third-degree methods she had stood up courageously without revealing anything which might be used as evidence against any Red Orchestra members. Chaplain Polchau reports that she went to her death courageously.

It was recently revealed by Professor Hermann Striever, director of the Anatomy School, Charity Hospital, to whom all the bodies of executees were turned over for autopsy, that he had secretly cremated her human remains. The urn with her ashes are now at the home of her sister-in-law in Berlin.



The henchman's keys to the guillotine at the Brandenburg jail.



The eternal flame and the masses of wreaths paid tribute to the 15,000,000 men and women of all nations who died in Nazi concentration camps. At right a representative group from the Jewish Hospital in Berlin holds their banner.



The Brandenburg guillotine which beheaded 3000 victims of Nazism.
Photos by Ries