

Hitler's Dogs

I read a book that talked about the Nazi concentration camps and how some prisoners who attempted to escape were ripped to shreds by the dogs.

I wondered what had happened to these animals that had provided the SS with such invaluable assistance, facilitating the extermination of prisoners. Why weren't the Nazis' German shepherds, Dobermans, bulldogs, and St. Bernards talked about? What had happened to these dogs that had been trained to kill, to bite the abdomens and the testicles of prisoners who tried to escape, to rip them to shreds when their trainers ordered them to do so?

I asked Clara, a filing clerk who worked with me, to help me in my research. She got to work looking for photographic evidence and statements from former SS officials who had made a career for themselves by using these dogs to efficiently and cruelly eliminate prisoners and prevent them from escaping.

Despite her research, Clara was unable to figure out what had happened to the dogs at the end of the war. Had the Russians taken them? Were they put to work in the Soviet gulags? Were they killed?

According to some accounts in Germany, it seemed possible that the Allies had killed them when they liberated the concentration camps, perhaps burying them in mass graves. Nevertheless, it would have been interesting to find out if the Nazis had saved some of the animals.

It was Hitler who had encouraged Himmler to have the dogs trained. Why dirty their hands if a German Shepherd or a Doberman could do the work for them? So a whole new profession was created in the Reich, a new way to get ahead, a new way to make a career for oneself – training dogs to turn them into ruthless assassins that would act as killers, barking in the most terrifying way. A horrifying howl that penetrated the eardrums, accompanied by the sounds of the sirens that went off every time prisoners were seen trying to escape.

Clara continued on in her research and learned of awful stories. Of officials who, for purely sadistic reasons, made a game of instigating the dogs to attack prisoners to then call them off after the first bite. Then as soon as the prisoner would go to escape, the SS would let the dogs go again, and this time they would rip the prisoner to shreds. It was a paradise for sadists – not only were they able to torture and kill while having a clean conscience in terms of the ideology they'd embraced, but then they were rewarded for doing away with an entire population considered unworthy of living because it wasn't of pure Aryan race. The trainers of those dogs were considered to be outstanding people, heroes, and patriots that helped the Reich to reach the objectives of the Final Solution as quickly as possible.

“What happened to those officials after the war?” I asked Clara.

“Some of them were condemned to death or killed, however, there were others that managed to get away. Many took refuge in the United States where they resurfaced in anonymous jobs while others went into dog breeding.”

“I wonder if they felt sorry for what they'd done?”

“No. You could tell by how they defended themselves with such arrogance when they were found out. They tried to justify themselves. They believed they had been in the right, using their talents as trainers to help the Führer and Germany.”

“Is it true that when they got to America that they worked for the police and intelligence services?”

“That is a state secret.”

“So it is possible that the United States of America gave them American passports and allowed them to carry out their work because they knew of their abilities in terms of training dogs, which could have potentially been used to defend the country?”

“Yes, it's possible. But the American Jewish lobby flew into a rage over those criminals and had them arrested and imprisoned.”

“I hope they got the death penalty.”

“Not in the case of the executioner of Dachau who was responsible for the deaths of three hundred thousand people. He had a ferocious Pit Bull trained to rip prisoners to shreds when they fell to the ground. But after the liberation of Dachau, he worked while out on bail for fourteen years. When he was arrested in 1959, he was convicted, but then he got out of jail and lived for five more years.”

I asked Clara to continue on with her research even though I knew it wouldn't amount to anything. Those dogs deserved to have someone who cared about what happened to them. Their trainers had never had a real interest in them, seeing them only as tools of torture.

Those truly at fault were the men and women who basked in that evil, an evil they didn't know how to resist. It took millions of people being massacred, gassed, tortured, humiliated, and burnt alive before good triumphed over evil. But those who were responsible continued to live in the memory of those years in which they were allowed to carry out all types of vile acts.

Hitler's dogs - built to be tools of his design - were the unwitting victims of a system that, unfortunately, still boasted nostalgic types who couldn't wait to start all over.