

Brooklyn Dingman

2/3/14

English 12A

4<sup>th</sup> Hour

Before starting this project, I had no idea what a death van was or that they even existed. I knew that the German Nazis used gas chambers during the Holocaust to kill the Jews, but I had never heard of them using a van. I found some information about the death vans when I was looking up the first concentration camp. I found death vans very intriguing. The Nazis would take the exhaust pipe and fix it up so that it would go inside the back of the van. My thoughts on how I wanted to make a van were not very clear at first. I looked up pictures of what the vans looked like back then to try to get a better idea. I knew that it would be really cool to have smoke coming out of the exhaust pipe into the back of the van, so I figured dry ice would work. That was all I really had.

I went to my grandparents to brainstorm. We spent a couple of hours debating what I should use. We finally decided that plastic totes would work the best because of the shape. I made a list of all of the things I would need to start the project. The list consisted of two totes, one big, one small, glue, newspaper, and spray paint. The next day I brought up the Holocaust project at my friend's house. Her and her parents got very into it and helped me out with more brainstorming. They told me that using totes would be very hard to cut. Because I was planning to paper mache the van anyway, we decided that cardboard boxes would be easier to work with. They gave me three boxes to use and also texted one of their friends who is an expert on World War II. He gave me some really good information and also told me a few movies, where they used death vans, to watch.

Then started the construction of my death van. I started on the front end by attaching the smallest box to the medium size box. I cut out an opening for the windshield, and cut out pieces for the fenders. I paper mached all of the pieces together. This process lasted days. Each day I would work on it for a few hours on different spots. If I were to work on a section for too long, it would be too heavy and when it dried it would be flat. Shaping the front end was by far the hardest part. I had to wait until each part dried to continue working on it, which was very hard for me because when I get started on something, I like to finish. I attempted to shape the front end to be wider closer to the cab. I also tried to make the top of the engine compartment rounded, but I didn't let it dry for long enough. I cut a piece of card board that was smaller than the engine compartment. The weight of the paste made the cardboard collapse.

The reason that the Nazis used the death vans was because it was a more efficient and less public way of killing people. They had been machine gunning entire towns and villages before the death vans, but it was far too public, too expensive, and word had begun to get out. Death by exhaust was more humane than the Zyclon-B that the Nazis used in the gas chambers.

When I finished the front end of the van, I started working on the back. To round off the top, I cut the box and taped a piece from another box in its place. As you can tell, it did not turn out how I wanted it to. I cut out small, thin pieces to create the wood beams. I wrapped the small pieces in newspaper and painted them to look like wood. I couldn't find our caulk gun, so I had to go to my grandparent's house to use theirs. I then took caulk and covered all of the creases and corners to flatten everything out. I had to wait until the caulk dried so that I could sand it down. After sanding it down the caulk, I got to start the fun part. I had to cover everything in the basement up, and hang up tarps and old bed sheets before I started painting. I spray painted the whole back end black. I waited for the black paint to dry before I covered it in green camouflage

spray paint. I also added a tint of silver to some areas of the van. Several layers of paint were needed.

The death van was originally invented and used by the Soviet secret police in the late 1930s during the Great Purge. The Great Purge involved the expulsion of the communist party and government officials. They had disguised the vans during the Purge as bread van from the outside.

When I was almost finished with painting the back of the van, I ran out of the green spray paint. I couldn't find the right color at ACE Hardware, so I had to go to Meijer, where I had bought it the first time. I caulked the edges of the box to make it smoother. I spray painted the front end black to cover up the text on the newspaper and the box. Doing the front grill was the most fun part. I had painted the grill black and had to figure out how I was going to keep it black. I cut out a piece of paper and covered the area I wanted to keep black. This was not the smartest way to do it, but it worked. After I painted the rest of the front end green, I could let go of the paper. I took out my acrylic paints and picked out grey and white to mix together. I painted the emblem this light grey color.

Now just the finishing touches were left. I attached the wooden pieces I had created to the inside of the back of the van. I attached the exhaust pipe hose to a food container that I had cleaned out to it, which would hold the dry ice and water. I had to test the dry ice to see if it would even work, which it somewhat worked. The dry ice didn't turn out exactly how I wanted it, but it was good enough. The headlights and wheels were not so easy. I had no idea what I could use for head lights. I could not figure out anything that would work. I found a glitter ball, which is a hollow ball with glitter and water. I cut it in half and glued them on each side of

fenders. I used pre workout containers to make the tires. I painted them black and used an old broom stick to make the axles. I used wires to hold the front and the back together. I also used wire to hold up the hose and to hold on the tires. All in all my death van turned out pretty cool.