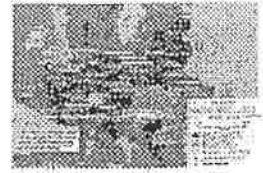
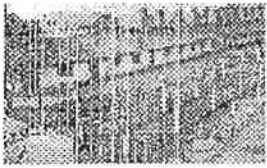


Nazi Camp System



The Nazi camp system began as a system of repression directed against political opponents of the Nazi state. In the early years of the Third Reich, the Nazis imprisoned primarily Communists and Socialists. In about 1935, the regime also began to imprison those whom it designated as racially or biologically inferior, especially Jews. During World War II, the organization and scale of the Nazi camp system expanded rapidly and the purpose of the camps evolved beyond imprisonment toward forced labor and outright murder.

Throughout German-occupied Europe, the Germans arrested those who resisted their domination and those they judged to be racially inferior or politically unacceptable. People arrested for resisting



German rule were mostly sent to forced-labor or concentration camps. The war brought unprecedented growth in both the number of camps and the number of prisoners. Within three years the number of prisoners quadrupled, from about 25,000 before the war to about 100,000 in March 1942. The camp population came to include prisoners from almost every European

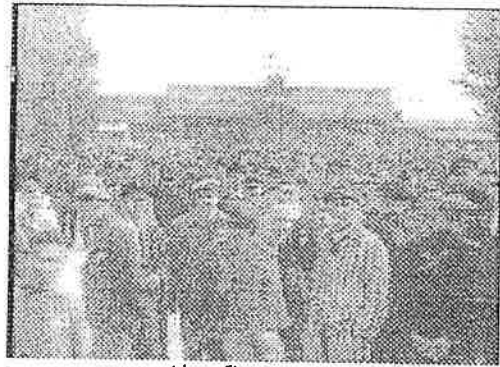


nation. Prisoners in all the concentration camps were literally worked to death. According to SS reports, there were more than 700,000 prisoners registered in the concentration camps in January 1945.

The Germans deported Jews from all over occupied Europe to extermination camps in Poland, where they were systematically killed, and also to concentration camps, where they were drafted for forced labor -- "extermination through work." Several hundred thousand Roma (Gypsies) and Soviet prisoners of war were also systematically murdered.



DACHAU

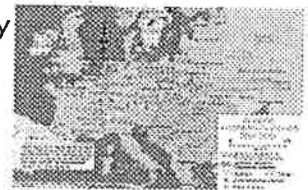


Established in March 1933, the Dachau concentration camp was the first regular concentration camp established by the Nazis. Heinrich Himmler, in his capacity as police president of Munich, officially described the camp as "the first concentration camp for political prisoners." It was located on the grounds of an abandoned munitions factory near the northeastern part of the town of Dachau, about 10 miles northwest of Munich in southern Germany.

During the first year, the camp held about 4,800 prisoners and by 1937 the number had risen to 13,260. Initially the internees consisted primarily of German Communists, Social Democrats, and other political opponents of the Nazi regime. Over time, other groups were also interned at Dachau such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Roma (Gypsies), homosexuals, as well as "asocials" and repeat criminals. During the early years relatively few Jews were interned in Dachau and then usually because they belonged to one of the above groups or had completed prison sentences after being convicted for violating the Nuremberg Laws of 1935.

In early 1937, the SS, using prisoner labor, initiated construction of a large complex of buildings on the grounds of the original camp. Prisoners were forced to do this work, starting with the destruction of the old munitions factory, under terrible conditions. The construction was officially completed in mid-August 1938 and the camp remained essentially unchanged until 1945. Dachau thus remained in operation for the entire period of the Third Reich.

The number of Jewish prisoners at Dachau rose with the increased persecution of Jews and on November 10-11, 1938, in the aftermath of Kristallnacht, more than 10,000 Jewish men were interned there. (Most of men in this group were released after incarceration of a few weeks to a few months.)



**Major Nazi camps
in Europe, January
1944**
See maps

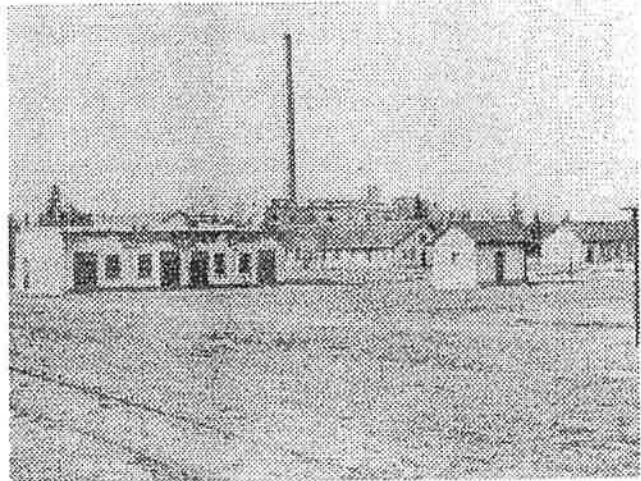
The Dachau camp was a training center for SS concentration camp guards, and the camp's organization and routine became the model for all Nazi concentration camps. The camp was divided into two sections--the camp area and the crematoria area. The camp area consisted of 32 barracks, including one for clergy imprisoned for opposing the Nazi regime and one reserved for medical experiments. The camp administration was located in the gatehouse at the main entrance. The camp area had a group of support buildings, containing the kitchen, laundry, showers, and workshops, as well as a prison block (Bunker). The courtyard between the prison and the central kitchen was used for the summary execution of prisoners. An electrified barbed-wire fence, a ditch, and a wall with seven guard towers surrounded the camp.

In 1942, the crematorium area was constructed next to the main camp. It included the old crematorium and the new crematorium (Barrack X) with a gas chamber. There is no credible evidence that the gas chamber in Barrack X was used to murder human beings. Instead, prisoners underwent "selection"; those who were judged too sick or weak to continue working were sent to the Hartheim "euthanasia" killing center near Linz, Austria. Several thousand Dachau prisoners were murdered at Hartheim. Further, the SS used the firing range and the

gallows in the crematoria area as killing sites for prisoners.

In Dachau, as in other Nazi camps, German physicians performed medical experiments on prisoners, including high-altitude experiments using a decompression chamber, malaria and tuberculosis experiments, hypothermia experiments, and experiments testing new medications. Prisoners were also forced to test methods of making seawater potable and of halting excessive bleeding. Hundreds of prisoners died or were permanently crippled as a result of these experiments.

Dachau prisoners were used as forced laborers. At first, they were employed in the operation of the camp, in various construction projects, and in small handicraft industries established in the camp. Prisoners built roads, worked in gravel pits, and drained marshes. During the war, forced labor utilizing concentration camp prisoners became increasingly important to German armaments production.



DACHAU SUBCAMPS

In the summer and fall of 1944, to increase war production, satellite camps under the administration of Dachau were established near armaments factories throughout southern Germany. Dachau alone had more than 30 large subcamps in which over 30,000 prisoners worked almost exclusively on armaments. Thousands of prisoners were worked to death.

THE LIBERATION OF DACHAU

As Allied forces advanced toward Germany, the Germans began to move prisoners from concentration camps near the front to prevent the liberation of large numbers of prisoners. Transports from the evacuated camps arrived continuously at Dachau, resulting in a dramatic deterioration of conditions. After days of travel, with little or no food or water, the prisoners arrived weak and exhausted, near death. Typhus epidemics became a serious problem due to overcrowding, poor sanitary conditions, and the weakened state of the prisoners.

On April 26, 1945, as American forces approached, there were 67,665 registered prisoners in Dachau and its subcamps. Of these, 43,350 were categorized as political prisoners, while 22,100 were Jews, with the remainder falling into various other categories. Starting that day, the Germans forced more than 7,000 prisoners, mostly Jews, on a death march from Dachau to Tegernsee far to the south. During the death march, the Germans shot anyone who could no longer continue; many also died of hunger, cold, or exhaustion. On April 29, 1945, American forces liberated Dachau. As they neared the camp, they found more than 30 railroad cars filled with bodies brought to Dachau, all in an advanced state of decomposition. In early May 1945, American forces liberated the prisoners who had been sent on the death march.

The number of prisoners incarcerated in Dachau between 1933 and 1945 exceeded 188,000. The number of prisoners who died in the camp and the subcamps between January 1940 and May 1945 was at least 28,000, to which must be added those who perished there between 1933 and the end of 1939. It is unlikely that the total number of victims who died in Dachau will ever be known.

Sandor (Shony) Alex Braun
Describes playing the violin for SS guards in Dachau. The
two prisoners before him had been killed. [1990 interview]

(Full transcript follows biography)

Born Cristuru-Secuiesc, Romania
1930

Shony was born to religious Jewish parents in a small Transylvanian city. He began to learn the violin at age 5. His town was occupied by Hungary in 1940 and by Germany in 1944. In May 1944, he was deported to the Auschwitz camp in Poland. He was transferred to the Natzweiler camp system in France and then to Dachau, where he was liberated by U.S. troops in April 1945. In 1950, he emigrated to the U.S., and became a composer and a professional violinist.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum - Collections

Full transcript

When I got out of the barrack, I figured when my turn comes to play, I'm gonna play which I feel comfortable. I'm gonna play either a sonatina by Dvorak, which I performed, in fact, later I performed in Radio Munich, but which...or I'm gonna play, uh, a Kreisler composition. But when, when I saw what I saw, and the violin in my hand, my mind went completely blank. Nothing came to me. And I said to myself, "God, how is it that sonatina starts? How is, how is, how is the, the Kreisler piece starts? My God, how, how does anything starts?" I couldn't think of anything. And now I noticed, from the corner of my eyes, that the murderer Kapo picked up his iron pipe again and was walking toward me. And I knew I'm gonna be killed. I knew it. So my right hand and my left hand all of a sudden started moving in perfect harmony. And the Strauss Blue Danube was heard coming out of my violin. Now, how? I never thought of the Blue Danube. Never. I heard it, in fact, I, I am even, hate to admit to you, I never even played it really. I heard it many times from the Gypsies, and my brother, who was a fantastic accordionist in his high school group. But playing, I was not even allowed to play anything else but classical. And the Kapo looked at, eagerly, to, to the SS, "When shall I whack him? When shall I hit him?" Instead, the SS guard was humming the melody, and was beating the rhythm with his fingers--like 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3. And he, he just smiled and, "Let him live."



David (Dudi) Bergman

Describes rescue by inmates before he could be taken to the Dachau crematorium [1990 interview]

(Full transcript follows biography)

Born Velikiye-Bychkov, Czechoslovakia

1931

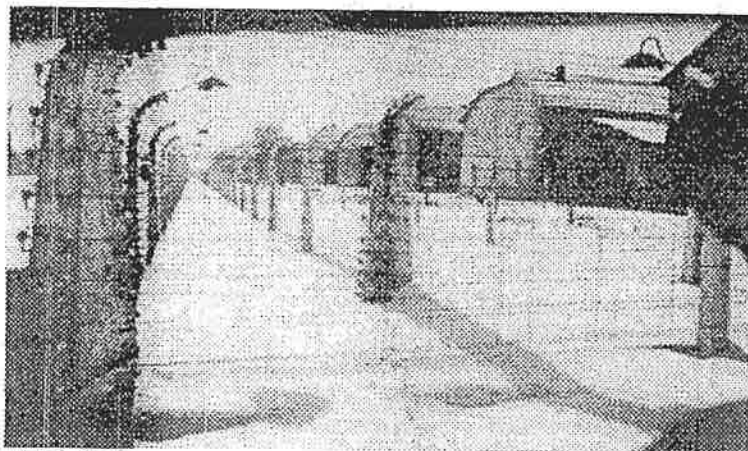
The Germans occupied David's town, previously annexed by Hungary, in 1944. David was deported to Auschwitz and, with his father, transported to Plaszow. David was sent to the Gross-Rosen camp and to Reichenbach (Langenbielau). He was then among three of 150 in a cattle car who survived transportation to Dachau. He was liberated after a death march from Innsbruck toward the front line of combat between U.S. and German troops.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum - Collections

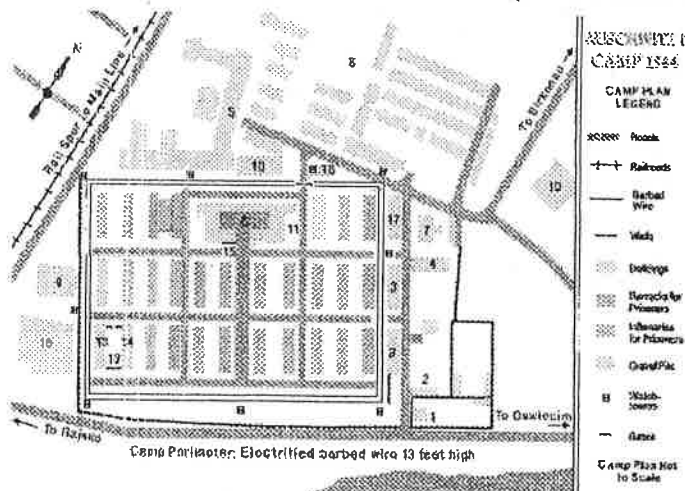
Full transcript

When we arrived, I had already passed out, virtually, I was...three out of the 150 there survived. They were all...the rest of them just lay dead. And what they did is, they picked me up from the...with the hands and somebody else with the legs and then they threw me in a stretcher...carr...getting ready to take me to the crematorium. That's where they took...that's where their objective was. And somehow, they...somebody who was carrying me noticed a hand moving, that I was still alive. So at a risk to his life, he took me into a barrack. It was actually like a shower room. And I was dazed at that time, virtually, I had no idea. I thought... And when I came to in the bathroom there, it was...I woke up, and I...I thought I was dead. It was like I was in another world. "What are these people doing here? Where am I?" And I thought, I...I...I was totally dazed. I couldn't figure out even where I am. And then somebody came over and told me what happened, explained to me that "You were just a few seconds away from being thrust into the crematorium, and they saw that you were still alive." They said, "You're the first youth that age who actually made it alive." And then they took me and they hid me, you know, secretly in their barracks. So I was not even supposed to have been there. And I became like, to them, like a hero. That here are these fathers who said, well, if I made it then maybe their children would have made it through. And they...since I didn't get any rations, because I was...The ration was there like a piece of bread--enough to keep them alive til they were actually being...were going to be taken to the crematorium. And each one would take a piece of bread they would got, break off a piece and make up a slice for me, so that I could survive. And they said, "David, you must survive and let the world know what happened."

AUSCHWITZ



Auschwitz was the largest camp established by the Germans. A complex of camps, Auschwitz included a concentration, extermination, and forced-labor camp. It was located 37 miles west of Krakow (Cracow), near the prewar German-Polish border in Eastern Upper Silesia, an area annexed to Germany in 1939. Three large camps established near the Polish town of Oswiecim constituted the Auschwitz camp complex: Auschwitz I, Auschwitz II (Birkenau), and Auschwitz III (Monowitz).



AUSCHWITZ I

Auschwitz I, the main camp, was the first camp established near Oswiecim. Construction began in May 1940 in a suburb of Oswiecim, in an artillery barracks formerly used by the Polish army. The SS continuously expanded the physical contours of the camp with forced labor. The first prisoners were German criminal prisoners deported from the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in Germany and Polish political prisoners from Tarnow.

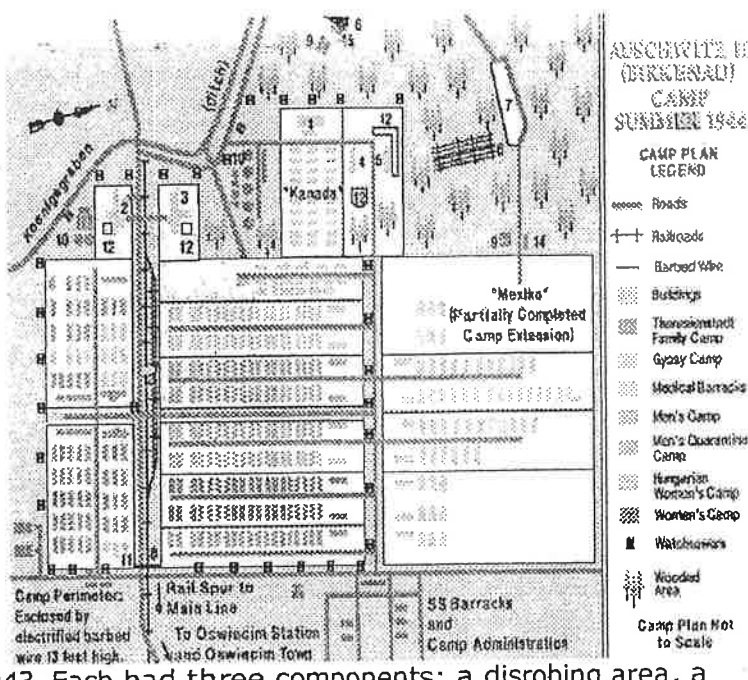
Although Auschwitz I was primarily a concentration camp, serving a penal function, it also had a gas chamber and crematorium. An improvised gas chamber was located in the basement of the prison, Block 11, and a larger, more permanent gas chamber was later constructed in the crematorium.

SS physicians carried out medical experiments in the hospital, Barrack (Block) 10. They conducted pseudoscientific research on infants, twins, and dwarfs, and performed forced sterilizations, castrations, and hypothermia experiments on adults. Between the crematorium and the medical-experiments barrack stood the "Black Wall," where SS guards executed thousands of prisoners.

AUSCHWITZ II

Construction of Auschwitz II, or Auschwitz-Birkenau, began in the vicinity of Brzezinka in October 1941. Of the three camps established near Oswiecim, the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp had the largest total prisoner population. It was divided into nine sections separated by electrified barbed-wire fences and, like Auschwitz I, was patrolled by SS guards and some dog handlers. The camp included sections for women, men, Roma (Gypsies), and families deported from the Theresienstadt ghetto.

Auschwitz-Birkenau played a central role in the German plan to exterminate the Jews of Europe. In September 1941, in Auschwitz I, the SS first tested Zyklon B gas as an instrument of mass murder. The "success" of these experiments led to the adoption of Zyklon B for all the gas chambers in Auschwitz. At first, the SS gassed prisoners at two farmhouses that were converted into gas chambers. Provisional gas chamber I went into operation in January 1942 and was later dismantled. Provisional gas chamber II operated from June 1942 through the fall of 1944. The SS judged these facilities to be inadequate for the scale of gassing they planned at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Four large crematorium buildings were constructed between March and June 1943. Each had three components: a disrobing area, a large gas chamber, and crematorium ovens. The SS continued gassing operations at Auschwitz-Birkenau until November 1944.



DEPORTATIONS TO AUSCHWITZ

Trains arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau almost daily with transports of Jews from virtually every country in Europe occupied by or allied to Germany. These transports arrived from 1942 to the end of summer 1944.

With the deportations from Hungary, the role of Auschwitz-Birkenau as an instrument in the German plan to murder the Jews of Europe achieved its highest effectiveness. In May 1944, deportations from Hungary began, the largest wave of deportations to Auschwitz. By July 1944, nearly 440,000 Hungarian Jews had been deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. The SS sent most of them directly to death in the gas chambers.

New arrivals at Auschwitz-Birkenau underwent selection. The SS staff determined the majority to be unfit for forced labor and sent them immediately to the gas chambers, which were disguised as shower installations to mislead the victims. The belongings of those gassed were confiscated and sorted in the "Kanada" (Canada) warehouse for shipment back to Germany. Canada symbolized wealth to the prisoners.

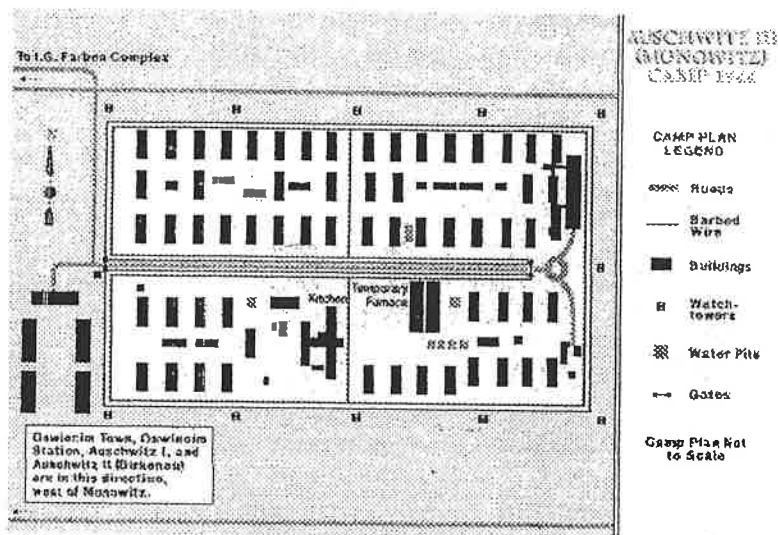
Approximately one million Jews were killed in Auschwitz. Other victims included approximately 75,000 Poles, 18,000 Roma, and 15,000 Soviet prisoners of war.

On October 7, 1944, several hundred prisoners assigned to Crematorium IV at Auschwitz-Birkenau rebelled after learning that they were going to be killed. During the uprising, the prisoners killed three guards and blew up the crematorium and adjacent gas chamber. The prisoners used explosives smuggled into the camp by Jewish women who had been assigned to forced labor in a nearby armaments factory. The Germans crushed the revolt and killed almost all of the prisoners involved in the rebellion. The Jewish women who had smuggled the explosives into the camp were publicly hanged.

Gassing operations continued, however, until November 1944, at which time the SS disabled the gas chambers that still functioned. The SS destroyed the remaining gassing installations as Soviet forces approached in January 1945.

AUSCHWITZ III

Auschwitz III, also called Buna or Monowitz, was established in nearby Monowice to provide forced laborers for the Buna synthetic rubber works. The German conglomerate I.G. Farben established a factory in order to take advantage of cheap concentration camp labor and the nearby Silesian coalfields. It invested more than 700 million Reichsmarks (about 1.4 million U.S. dollars in 1942 terms) in Auschwitz III.



Prisoners selected for forced labor were registered and tattooed with identification numbers on their left arms in Auschwitz I. They were then assigned to forced labor in Auschwitz or in one of the many subcamps attached to Auschwitz III.

AUSCHWITZ SUBCAMPS

The Germans forcibly expelled the entire local population from Oswiecim and from an area of 40 square miles around the camp. This area became known as the camp's "development zone" and was reserved for the camp's exclusive use. Most of the Auschwitz subcamps were established within this officially designated area, including Althammer, Blechhammer, Budy, Fuerstengrube, Gleiwitz, Rajsko, and Tschechowitz. Virtually all of the subcamps were attached to Auschwitz III.

Auschwitz inmates were employed on huge farms, including the experimental agricultural station at Rajsko. They were also forced to work in coal mines, in stone quarries, in fisheries, and especially in armaments industries such as the German Armament Works (established in 1941). Periodically, prisoners underwent selection. If the SS judged them too weak or sick to continue working, they were transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau and killed.

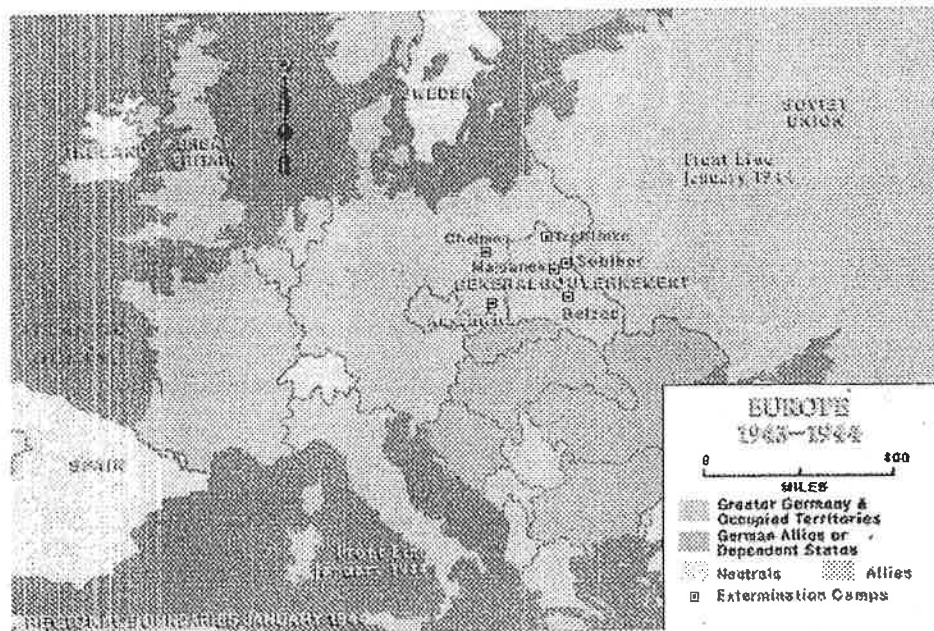
THE LIBERATION OF AUSCHWITZ

In mid-January 1945, as Soviet forces approached the Auschwitz camp complex, the SS began evacuating Auschwitz and its satellite camps. Nearly 60,000 prisoners were forced to march west from the Auschwitz camp system. Thousands had been killed in the camps in the days before these death marches began. Tens of thousands of prisoners, mostly Jews, were forced to march to the city of Wodzislaw in the western part of Upper Silesia. SS guards shot anyone who fell behind or could not continue. Prisoners also suffered from the cold weather, starvation, and exposure on these marches. More than 15,000 died during the death marches from Auschwitz.

Upon arrival in Wodzislaw, the prisoners were put on unheated freight trains and transported to concentration camps in Germany, particularly to Flossenbuerg, Sachsenhausen, Gross-Rosen, Buchenwald, and Dachau, and also to Mauthausen in Austria. The rail journey lasted for days. Without food, water, shelter, or blankets, many prisoners did not survive the transport.

In late January 1945, 4,000 prisoners were forced on a death march from Blechhammer, a subcamp of Auschwitz. About 1,000 prisoners died during the march to the Gross-Rosen concentration camp. After a brief delay, the remaining prisoners were moved to the Buchenwald camp in eastern Germany.

On January 27, 1945, the Soviet army entered Auschwitz and liberated more than 7,000 remaining prisoners, who were mostly ill and dying. It is estimated that at minimum 1.3 million people were deported to Auschwitz between 1940 and 1945; of these, at least 1.1 million were murdered.



Leo Schneiderman
Describes arrival at
Auschwitz,
selection, and
separation from
his family [1990
interview]
(Full transcript
follows biography)

Born Lodz, Poland
1921

The Germans invaded Poland in September 1939. Leo and his family were confined to a ghetto in Lodz. Leo was forced to

work as a tailor in a uniform factory. The Lodz ghetto was liquidated in 1944, and Leo was deported to Auschwitz. He was then sent to the Gross-Rosen camp system for forced labor. As the Soviet army advanced, the prisoners were transferred to the Ebensee camp in Austria. The Ebensee camp was liberated in 1945.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – Collections

Full transcript

was late at night that we arrived at Auschwitz. When we came in, the minute the gates opened up, we heard screams, barking dogs, blows from...from those Kapos, those officials working for them, over the head. And then we got out of the train. And everything went so fast: left, right, right, left. Men separated from women. Children torn from the arms of mothers. The elderly chased like cattle. The sick, the disabled were handled like packs of garbage. They were thrown in a side together with broken suitcases, with boxes. My mother ran over to me and grabbed me by the shoulders, and she told me "Leibele, I'm not going to see you no more. Take care of your brother."



It
of

Glossary

- ★ • **Auschwitz-Birkenau**
Largest Nazi camp, located 37 miles west of Cracow, Poland. Established in 1940 as a concentration camp, it included a killing center, at Birkenau, in 1942. Also part of the huge camp complex was I. G. Farben's slave labor camp, known as Buna-Monowitz.
- ★ • **Concentration Camps**
In German, Konzentrationslager. Prison camps constructed to hold Jews, Gypsies, political and religious opponents, resisters, homosexuals, and other Germans considered "enemies of the state." Before the end of World War II, more than 100 concentration camps had been created across German-occupied Europe.
- ★ • **Dachau**
First concentration camp, established in March 1933 near Munich, Germany. At first Dachau held only political opponents, but over time, more and more groups were imprisoned there. Thousands died at Dachau from starvation, maltreatment, and disease.
- **Death Camp**
Term widely used to describe both extermination camps, such as Auschwitz-Birkenau and Treblinka, where people were murdered in assembly-line style by gassing, and concentration camps such as Bergen-Belsen and Dachau, without gas chambers but where thousands were killed by starvation, disease, and maltreatment.
- ★ • **Extermination Camps**
In German, Vernichtungslager. Nazi camps, equipped with gassing facilities, for mass murder of Jews. Located in Poland at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek-Lublin, Sobibor, and Treblinka. Up to 2,700,000 Jews were murdered at these six camps, as were tens of thousands of Gypsies, Soviet prisoners of war, Poles, and others.
- **Genocide**
Deliberate, systematic destruction of a racial, cultural, or political group.
- **Gestapo**
In German, Geheime Staatspolizei. Secret State Police.
- **Jewish Council**
In German, Judenrat. Council of Jewish leaders established on Nazi orders in German-occupied towns and cities.
- **Killing Centers**
Camps equipped with facilities to kill with poisonous gas: Belzec, Chelmno, Sobibor, Treblinka, as well as killing sections of Auschwitz-Birkenau and Majdanek-Lublin concentration camps.
- ★ • **Persecution**
Act of causing others to suffer, especially those who differ in background or lifestyle or hold different political or religious beliefs.
- **Ravensbruck**
Concentration camp for women opened in May 1939, 56 miles north of Berlin. An estimated 120,000 prisoners were inmates there, including many political prisoners, Jews, Gypsies, and Jehovah's Witnesses.
- ★ • **Rhineland**
Demilitarized zone that Allies established after World War I as a buffer between Germany and western Europe.
- ★ • **Scapegoat**
Person or group of persons unfairly blamed for wrongs done by others.
- ★ • **SS**
In German, Schutzstaffel. Protection Squad. Units formed in 1925 as Hitler's personal bodyguard. The SS was later built into a giant organization by Heinrich Himmler. It provided staff for police, camp guards, and military units (Waffen-SS) serving with the German army.
- **Treblinka**
Nazi extermination camp about 50 miles northeast of Warsaw. Up to 750,000 Jews and at least 2,000 Gypsies were killed at Treblinka between July 1942 and November 1943.