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## Dachau

### The 1st Concentration Camp



View of the Dachau moat & fence

Dachau one of the first concentration camps established by the Nazis, was located in the small town of Dachau approximately 10 miles northwest of Munich. The location at Dachau was selected by the Nazis because it was the site of an empty munitions factory from World War One, which was ideal for the establishment of a camp.

The opening of the camp, with a capacity for 5,000 prisoners was announced by Heinrich Himmler, *Reichsführer SS* at a press conference held on 20 March 1933. The first group of so-called protective-custody, consisting mainly of Communists and Social Democrats was brought to the camp on 22 March 1933. They were guarded by Bavarian state police until the camp was taken over by the SS on 11 April 1933.

Theodor Eicke was appointed commandant and he was responsible for drawing up detailed regulations which covered all aspects of camp life, later on when Eicke was appointed Inspector General for all concentration camps these regulations were adopted, with local variations elsewhere.

With Dachau as his model, Eicke developed an institution that was intended, by its very existence, to spread fear among the population, an effective tool to silence every opponent of the Nazi regime

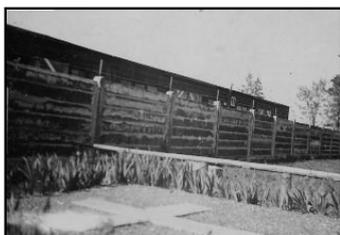
[[You can read more about Theodor Eicke HERE](#)]

The commandants at Dachau throughout its history were:

- 1 Hilmar Wackerle *SS Standartenführer*
- 1 Theodor Eicke *SS Obergruppenführer*
- 1 Heinrich Deubel *SS Oberführer*
- 1 Alex Piorkowski *SS Obersturmbannführer*
- 1 Wilhelm Weiter *SS - Sturmbannführer*
- 1 Hans Loritz *SS - Oberführer*
- 1 Martin Weiss *SS – Obersturmbannführer*



Theodor Eicke



The "Death Wall" where prisoners were shot at Dachau

Dachau became a useful training ground for the SS, at Dachau first learned to see those with different convictions as inferior and to deal with them accordingly, not hesitating to kill when the occasion arose, as the following will demonstrate:

On the 12 April 1933 in Dachau four Jews died as a result of deliberate sadism, an eyewitness account of their deaths was smuggled to Britain by a prisoner who was later released.

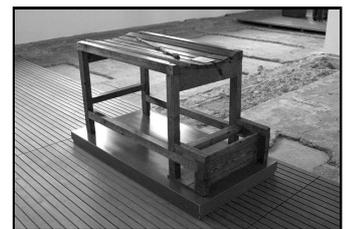
*"A few days ago we were going out as usual to work. All of a sudden the Jewish prisoners – Goldmann, a merchant, Benario, a lawyer from Nuremberg, and the merchants Artur and Erwin Kahn – were ordered to fall out of ranks. Without even a word, some Stormtroop men shot at them.*

*They had not made any attempt to escape- all were killed on the spot all had bullet wounds in their foreheads. The four Jews were buried secretly, no one being allowed to be present.*

*Then a meeting was called, and a Stormtroop leader made a speech in which he told us that it was a good thing these four Jewish sows were dead. They had been hostile elements who had no right to live in Germany – they had received their due punishment."*

This kind of "training" forged the path that led to the SS becoming the bloodthirsty mass murder force, in later years, machine-gunning innocent men, women and children, and staffing the concentration camps.

Among the notable graduates from Dachau was Aumeier, Baer, Fritsch, Hoess, Hoffmann, Rieck, Schwarzhuber, Stark, Tauber, Thumann, Dr Wirths who served in Auschwitz, Dolp who was commandant of Belzec labour camp, Koch who was commandant at Buchenwald and Majdanek, and Koegel who was also commandant at Majdanek, Ruppert and Schramm who served at Majdanek, Josef Kramer who was commandant at Birkenau and Bergen Belsen, and Egon Zill who served at Buchenwald and Ravensbruck among others.



Fllogging table where prisoners were beaten at Dachau

Adolf Eichmann, the RSHA expert on Jewish affairs spent some time in Dachau, and in 1939 when the Nazis occupied Czechoslovakia, and Eichmann in discussion with Dr Kafka, the President of the Prague Community Council demanded the emigration of 70,000 Jews within a year. Dr Kafka protested that the funds of the Council had been blocked. Eichmann threatened to take 300 Jews a day, street by street, and send them to Dachau and Mergelsgrun, "where they will become very keen on emigration."



Besides the members of the *SS Totenkopfverbände*, large numbers of SS military units were trained and instructed at Dachau, which was closed as a concentration camp from 27 September 1939 to 18

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- n Trawniki Staff

**Zabikowo (Poznan)**

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- n Dachau
- n Dora/Nordhausen
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- n Ravensbrucke
- n Sachsenhausen
- n Stuthoff
- n Thersienstadt
- The Show Camp*
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**Transit Camps**

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Work detail at Dachau in the early days of the camp

Gypsies, who like the Jews were classified as racially inferior, Clergymen who resisted the Nazi coercion of the churches and Homosexuals and many others who had been denounced for making critical remarks against the Nazi regime.

February 1940 during which time it was utilised by the Waffen-SS, during this period the prisoners were transferred to Mauthausen concentration camp.

From about 1935, it was usual for all persons who had been condemned in a court of law to be taken automatically to a concentration camp after they had served their prison sentences.

The first Jewish prisoners came as known political opponents of the Nazis. At Dachau, as elsewhere, they received even worse treatment than the other prisoners. Gradually, more and more groups were arrested and brought to Dachau, Jehovah's Witness, Gypsies, who like the Jews were classified as racially inferior, Clergymen who resisted the Nazi coercion of the churches and Homosexuals and many others who had been denounced for making critical remarks against the Nazi regime.



Gypsy prisoners at Dachau 1938

The number of Jewish prisoners increased as the Nazis stepped up their persecution of the Jews, after *Kristallnacht* on 9-10 November 1938, more than ten thousand Jewish citizens from all over Germany were interned in Dachau concentration camp.

Those who could prove their intention to leave Germany were released, and indeed most of them were released within a few months of their arrest. Non-Jews were also arrested for helping Jews, in Berlin on 23 October 1941 a German Catholic priest, Bernhard Lichtenberg, who had been a military chaplain in the First World War, was arrested for his protests against the deportations to the East.

Since the *Kristallnacht* in November 1938, Lichtenberg had closed each evening's service with a prayer for the Jews, and the poor prisoners in concentration camps."

Sentenced to two years imprisonment he was sent to Dachau but died on the way. When systematic extermination of the Jews began in 1942, the Jewish prisoners were transported from Dachau to the mass extermination camps in occupied Poland.



Forced labor constructing the satellite camp of Weingut I in Mühldorf

When during the summer and autumn of 1944 additional sub-camps were installed near armament factories to increase production there, thousands of Jewish prisoners, mostly from Hungary, but also from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Rumania and the Soviet Union were brought to the Dachau camp complex.

At the liberation of Dachau and its sub-camps in April 1945 about thirty percent of the camps inmates were Jewish. During its twelve-year existence Dachau was always a "political camp", the political prisoners who had been there first and knew the conditions best, held most of the key positions in the so-called prisoners' internal government, which had been established by the SS.

Since this body organised the daily life in the camp, it could prevent criminal prisoners from reaching positions that would give them power over the others – power that criminal prisoners in other camps often misused for their own



Dachau inmates labor at the SS munitions factory

advantage.

In 1937 and 1938, a new camp was built by the prisoners alongside the old buildings of the munitions factory – thirty-four barracks, the camp entrance building, containing the offices of the SS administration, the *Wirtschaftsgebäude* – farm buildings, containing the kitchen, workshops, showers and a camp prison. The camp was enclosed by a water filled ditch, fortified by an electric barbed-wire fence, and surrounded by a wall with seven guard towers.

The prisoner area was about 290 meters wide and 615 meters long, linked to the SS area by a wide road. Above the main gate stood the inscription – *Arbeit Macht Frei* (Work Will Make You Free). As one entered the camp, the huge administration building was on the right. Painted in large letters on the roof was the slogan:

*There is one road to freedom and its milestones are  
 Obedience, Diligence, Honesty, Order  
 Cleanliness, Temperance, Truth, Sacrifice  
 and love of one's country*

The prisoners slept in fifty-two doubled tiered bunks per barrack each prisoner had a small cupboard and a stool. Each barrack contained a day room with four tables, a large stove stood in the centre.

At first a single barrack accommodated only 180 persons, but later the overcrowding became intolerable, and bunks filled all available space. At the north end of Dachau stood the disinfection buildings and an Angora rabbit farm. The camp had a unique feature, the Dachau museum, containing plaster-images of prisoners marked by bodily defects or other strange characteristics.

The large SS area included spacious villas for officers and SS buildings with everything necessary for training and recreation. In 1943 Himmler ordered the creation of brothels for the SS men in the camp, and it became operational in late 1943.



The barracks and ammunition factory

During the summer of 1938 several thousand Austrian prisoners were brought to Dachau, their arrival marked the beginning of the deportations that would reflect the course of the war, transports were sent to Dachau from each country as it was invaded by the German army.

Prisoners included resistance fighters, Jews, clergymen and others who refused to collaborate with the occupation forces. At the liberation inmates from more than thirty countries were found in Dachau, with Germans forming only a minority.

All prisoners underwent the same fate when they entered the camp, they lost their legal status, their remaining possessions were confiscated, their hair was shaved off, and they were dressed in striped clothes. They were allocated a number as well as a coloured triangle, indicating what type of category they belonged to. The daily routine was filled with work, hunger, exhaustion, and fear of the brutality of the sadistic SS guards.

The SS ruthlessly exploited this cheap source of labour, the only costs to the SS were the miserable food rations, at first the Dachau inmates worked in handicraft industries and camp maintenance as well as in so-called branch detachments outside the camp.



They built roads, worked in gravel pits, and drained marshes, reclaiming them as arable land, initially, production in the camps was directly under the control of the individual camp commandant. But as the camps continued to grow, the range of production expanded, and the SS industries that were served by the camp labour were centralised under their main office in Berlin. In the first winter of the war the Dachau camp was used to set up the SS *Totenkopf* Division.

Also during this time the prisoners were sent to other concentration camps such as Buchenwald, Flossenburg and Mauthausen where they had to work in quarries under the harshest conditions.

During the course of the Second World War the work force incarcerated in the concentration camps became increasingly important for the Germans armament industry. The network of camps, which gradually extended over the whole of central Europe, took on gigantic proportions.



A former prisoner reenacts a torture method used by the SS at Dachau



SS Rabbit farm at Dachau

Dachau itself had thirty-six large sub-camps in which approximately thirty-seven thousand prisoners worked almost exclusively on armaments. Private firms had the opportunity to hire slave labourers from the camps.

For the prisoners, who worked under SS guards, the private firms they paid a daily rate to the SS *Wirtschafts- Verwaltungshauptamt* – WVHA - the prisoners however, received nothing, those who were ill were sent back to the main camp, usually to die. The firms received new, healthier labourers until these too could no longer meet the demands of their employers.

In Dachau there were no mass extermination facilities, but out of 206,206 prisoners registered there were 31,591 registered deaths, most of them during the war. Medical experiments were performed on helpless prisoners. Himmler provided the opportunity for SS physicians to use prisoners as guinea pigs.

Dr Sigmund Rascher played a key role in the “decompression” or “high –altitude” experiments, the alleged purpose was to examine the effect of a sudden loss of pressure or lack of oxygen, such as that experienced by army pilots who had to make parachutes jumps at great heights.

From mid-March to mid-May 1942, approximately 200 inmates were used for these experiments, according to eyewitness testimony of the prisoners’ nurse Walter Neff, out of this number at least 70 or 80 died.

Rascher was also responsible for the series of “freezing experiments,” which were carried out from the middle of August to October 1942. Their purpose was to determine how pilots shot down at sea who suffered from freezing could be quickly and effectively helped.



Freezing experiments conducted at Dachau



Survivors of Dachau demonstrate how corpses were dragged to the ovens

The air force expressed its readiness to conduct these experiments under the direction of Dr Ernst Holzlohner, who worked with a Dr Finke and Dr Rascher in Dachau. Holzlohner and Finke broke off their work after October 1942, and Rascher continued alone until March 1943.

According to the testimony of witnesses, from a total of 360 to 400 prisoners used in these experiments 80 to 90 died. Professor Dr Claus Schilling a well-known researcher in tropical medicine opened a malaria experimental station in the Dachau camp. He hoped to discover possible methods of immunization against malaria, and for this purpose had about 1,100 inmates infected with the disease.

The exact number of fatalities from these experiments cannot be determined, since the survivors returned to their previous work in the camp after the disease had subsided and many, physically weakened, then fell victim to other illnesses.

Besides these, a variety of other medical experiments were performed on Dachau prisoners, there was a tuberculosis experimental station, sepsis and phlegmon were artificially induced in a group of prisoners to test and compare the effects of biochemical and allopathic remedies.

In addition, there were attempts to make seawater drinkable and experiments with medications to stop bleeding. The systematic killing within the concentration camp of people who were sick and incapable of work began after the official termination of the euthanasia programme on 1 September 1941.

In the summer of 1941, the camp physician at Dachau was ordered to register those prisoners who were sick or unable to work. Some weeks later, a medical commission from Berlin arrived to pass judgement, and during the winter of 1941 -1942 “invalid transports” departed from Dachau in quick succession to the Hartheim castle, near Linz. Hartheim was one of the murder facilities included in the euthanasia programme. There 3166 inmates from Dachau were gassed.



Crematorium at Dachau

In 1942 a gas chamber was built in Dachau, but it was not put into use. It was located within the camp’s second crematorium, erected when the first crematorium, with only one incinerator proved inadequate.

From 1934 when the leaders of the SA (*Sturmabteilung*) were accused of plotting against Hitler, some were murdered at Dachau, later on the camp was used as an execution site for the mass shootings of Soviet Prisoners of War took place there from October 1941 to April 1942, on an SS shooting range located outside the camp grounds.

The precise number of these victims cannot be determined with any accuracy since they were not listed in the camps records. Later Soviet Prisoners of War were incorporated instead into the forced-labour system and set to work for the armaments industry.



Executions were carried out against individuals right up to the end of the war, including SOE agents such as Noor Inayat Khan, Yolande Beekman, Eliane Plewman and Madeline Damerment, who taken to Dachau in September 1944, and executed by SS – *Obersturmführer* Wilhelm Ruppert. Noor Inayat Khan’s last words were “Liberte.”

During the last months before the liberation, the prisoners at Dachau had to live under extremely inhuman conditions, which even they would not have been able to imagine. The gigantic transports continually arriving from other Nazi camps evacuated in the face of the advancing Allied forces, brought human beings who were, for the most part, reduced to skeletons and exhausted to the point of death.

Bodies piled up outside the crematorium at Dachau  
been raging in many of the camps since December 1944.

During this period up to 1,600 prisoners were crowded into barracks intended for 200. In early 1945 over 100 inmates daily and for a time over 200, fell victim to the typhus epidemic that had

An underground camp committee was organised to try to ensure the survival of the prisoners and if necessary, to organise resistance to SS plans of action. On 26 April 1945 there were 67,665 prisoners registered in Dachau, among them 22,100 Jews, on this day more than 7,000 of them were forced under SS guards to march south.

During this forced march anyone who could not keep up were shot, and many others died from hunger, cold, or exhaustion. At the beginning of May 1945, American troops overtook the remnants of these marching prisoners, left unguarded by SS who had fled. After the war, it was revealed that plans had existed to kill all the inmates by bombs and poison.

On 29 April 1945, the camp was liberated by the Seventh Army of the United States armed forces. A Turkish newspaper correspondent, Nerin E. Gun, who had been imprisoned in Dachau for his reports on the Warsaw Ghetto, described the liberation:



Corpses lying in an open rail car at Dachau



U.S 45th Division News article on Dachau

*"The detachment under the command of the American major had not come directly to the Jorhaus, it had made a detour by way of the marshalling yard, where the convoy of deportees normally arrived and departed.*

*There they found some fifty-odd cattle cars parked on the tracks- the cars were not empty. The train was full of corpses, piled one on the other, 2310 of them to be exact. The train had come from Birkenau and the dead were Hungarian and Polish Jews, children among them. Their journey had lasted perhaps thirty or forty days.*

*They had died of hunger, of thirst, of suffocation, of being crushed or of being beaten by the guards. There were even evidence of cannibalism. They were all practically dead when they arrived at Dachau station.*

*The SS did not take the trouble to unload them. They simply decided to stand guard and shoot down any with enough strength left to emerge from the cattle cars. The corpses were strewn everywhere – on the rails, the steps, the platforms."*

*"I never saw anything like it in my life," said Lieutenant Harold Mayer, "Every one of my men became raving mad."*

Some of the SS men on the watchtowers started shooting into the mass of prisoners in the camp, the American GI's threw caution to the wind opening fire on the watchtowers. The SS guards promptly came down the ladders their hands raised high in surrender.

An American soldier saw red and he shot the SS men down, then the hunt started for any other German in an SS uniform. "Within a quarter of an hour, there was not a single one of Hitler's henchmen alive," wrote Gun.

Forty former members of the camps SS staff were tried by an American court at Dachau, between 15 November and 14 December 1945. Of the forty accused, thirty-six were sentenced to death, including the Commandant Weiss and Dr Schilling.

Immediately after the war the Americans used Dachau for the imprisonment of Nazis and SS men, and a number of trials took place, including the controversial Malmedy trial, where SS men were tried for shooting American prisoners of war during the Ardennes offence, commonly known as the "Battle of the Bulge" in late 1944.



Prisoners liberated at Dachau

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