

Auschwitz concentration camp



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Located approximately 37 miles west of Krakow, Auschwitz was the largest concentration camp complex established by the Nazi regime in April of 1940. Containing three other subcamps within the camp which all used prisoners for forced labor, one doubling as a killing center. Nazi Germany gained this area of land after invading and conquering Poland in 1939. The three main camps of Auschwitz were called Auschwitz I, established in April 1940, Auschwitz-Birkenau (also known as Auschwitz II) established in October 1941, and Auschwitz-Monowitz (also called Auschwitz III), established in October 1942. “ The best estimates of the number of victims at the Auschwitz concentration camp complex, including the killing center at Auschwitz-Birkenau, between 1940 and 1945 are: Jews (1, 095, 000 deported to Auschwitz, of whom 960, 000 died); Poles (147, 000 deported, of whom 74, 000 died); Roma (23, 000 deported, of whom 21, 000 died); Soviet prisoners of war (15, 000 deported and died); and other nationalities (25, 000 deported, of whom 12, 000 died).” Reports claim that police and the SS deported at least 1. 3 million victims to the Auschwitz complex within the years of 1940 and 1945, of which approximately 1. 1 million were murdered by the camp authorities. In November 1943, the SS decided Auschwitz-Birkenau and Auschwitz-Monowitz would become independent concentration camps, but that only lasted until November of 1944 when Auschwitz II was reunited with Auschwitz I. Auschwitz III stayed independent and was renamed the Monowitz concentration camp. There were many commanders of the Auschwitz concentration camp complex including: SS Lieutenant Colonel Rudolf Hoess, from May 1940 until November 21943; SS Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Liebehenschel, from November 1943 until mid-May 1944; and SS Major Richard Baer, from mid-May 1944 until January 27, 1945. While

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Auschwitz-Birkenau (November 1943 until November 1944) the commanders of the camp were SS Lieutenant Colonel Friedrich Hartjenstein, from November 1943 until May 1944; and SS Captain Josef Kramer, from May to November 1944. Unlike Birkenau, Monowitz kept one commander with the name of Captain Heinrich Schwarz, who commanded the camp from November 1943 to January 1945.

Auschwitz I was constructed in April of 1940 near Oswiecim in an abandoned Polish army barrack. The SS Authorities used prisoners to expand the camp using forced labor, clearing about 40 square kilometers as a development zone to be reserved for exclusive use in the camp. Prisoners from the Sachsenhausen concentration camp were moved to Auschwitz to serve as the first prisoners of Auschwitz I, where they had been incarcerated for repeated criminal offenders. Polish political prisoners from Lodz via Dachau concentration camp and from Tarnow in Krakow District of the General government were also of the first to be introduced to the camp. Auschwitz was constructed for three main reasons, like most concentration camps; “ to incarcerate real and perceived enemies of the Nazi regime and the German occupation authorities in Poland for an indefinite period of time”, “ to provide a supply of forced laborers for deployment in SS-owned construction-related enterprises (and, later, armaments and other war-related production)”, and “ to serve as a site to kill small, targeted groups of the population whose death was determined by the SS and police authorities to be essential to the security of Nazi Germany.” Like other concentration camps, Auschwitz I had gas chambers and a Crematorium. At first, engineers developed an improvised gas chamber but after time they constructed a larger, permanent

gas chamber. SS physicians conducted medical experiments, such as forced sterilizations and castrations of adults. and pseudoscientific research on infants, twins, and dwarfs. SS Captain Dr. Josef Mengele is the best-known of these kinds of physicians. The “ Black Wall”, standing between the medical-experiments and the prison block, was where SS guards executed thousands of prisoners.

The construction of Auschwitz II, also known as Auschwitz-Birkenau, began in the area of Brzezinka in October of 1941. The Auschwitz-Birkenau camp had the largest total prisoner count of all three camps. Birkenau was divided into ten different sections separated by electrified barbed-wire fences. Just as Auschwitz I, Birkenau was patrolled by SS guards, including SS dog handlers-after 1942. The Camp had sections for women, men, a separate family camp for Gypsies deported from Germany and Austria, and a family camp for Jewish deported from the “ Theresienstadt ghetto”. Auschwitz-Birkenau played a central role in the German plan to exterminate the Jews of Europe. Zyklon B gas was introduced during the summer and fall of 1941 and used as an instrument of mass murder in the gas chambers at the Auschwitz complex. The SS initially converted two farmhouses near Birkenau to use as gas chambers until the SS judged these facilities to be inadequate for the scale of gassing they planned. In June of 1943 four large crematorium buildings were constructed. “ Each [building] had three components: a disrobing area, a large gas chamber, and crematorium ovens. The SS continued gassing operations at Auschwitz-Birkenau until November 1944.”

Auschwitz III, commonly known as Buna or Monowitz, was established in October of 1942. The prisoners it housed were assigned to work at the Buna
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synthetic rubber works, near the outskirts of Monowice. In 1941 German conglomerate I. G Farben built a factory in which the executives intended to deed concentration camp labor to fabricate synthetic rubber and fuels. I. G Farben devoted more than 700 million Reichsmarks (Approximately 2. 8 million US dollars, in 1941 terms) into Auschwitz III. The SS had transported prisoners from Auschwitz I to the “ Buna Detachment”, initially by foot but later by rail, from May 1941 to July 1942. The prisoners who were deployed at Buna lived in Auschwitz III. Monowitz also had a Labor Education Camp for non-Jewish prisoners who were believed to have violated any German-imposed labor discipline.

In late January 1945, SS and German police forced over 4, 000 prisoners to evacuate Blechhammer, a subcamp of Auschwitz-Monowitz, on foot. The SS was estimated to have murdered about 1, 000 people during the march to the Gross-Rosen concentration camp, due to have fallen behind, those who could no longer continue, illnesses, or even some Jews’ unsuccessful attempts to hide. After much delay, the SS conveyed around 3, 000 Blechhammer prisoners from Gross-Rosen to be at the Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany. On January 27, 1945, the Soviet army bombarded Auschwitz, Birkenau, and Monowitz, liberating more than 6, 000 prisoners, most of which were ill and or dying.