

# [Buchenwald (holocaust) essay](https://assignbuster.com/buchenwald-holocaust-essay/)

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page 16 (1) INTRODUCTION The Holocaust is the most

horrifying crime against humanity of all times. “ Hitler, in an

attempt to establish the pure Aryan race, decided that all

mentally ill, gypsies, non supporters of Nazism, and Jews

were to be eliminated from the German population. He

proceeded to reach his goal in a systematic scheme.” One of

his main methods of “ doing away” with these “ undesirables”

was through the use of concentration camps. “ In January

1941, in a meeting with his top officials, the ‘ final solution’

was decided”. The Jewish population was to be eliminated.

In this paper I will discuss concentration camps with a

detailed description of the worst one prior to World War II,

Buchenwald. (2) CONCENTRATION CAMPS The first

concentration camps were set up in 1933. In the early days

of Hitler’s regime, concentration camps were places that held

people in protective custody. Victims for protective custody

included those who were either physically or mentally ill,

gypsies, homosexuals, Jehovah Witnesses, Jews and anyone

against the Nazi regime. “ Gypsies were classified as people

with at least two gypsy great grandparents.” By the end of

1933 there were at least fifty concentration camps

throughout occupied Europe. “ At first, the camps were

controlled by the Gestapo (police), but by 1934 the SS,

Hitler’s personal security force, were ordered, by Hitler, to

control the camps.” Camps were set up for several different

purposes. Some for forced labor, others for medical

experiments and, later on, for death/extermination. Transition

camps were set up as holding places for death camps.

“ Henrick Himmler, chief of the German police, the Gestapo,

thought that the camps would provide an economic base for

the soldiers.” This did not happen. The work force was

poorly organized and working conditions were inhumane.

Therefore, productivity was minimal. Camps were set up

along railroad lines, so that the prisoners would be

conveniently close to their destination. As they were being

transported, the soldiers kept telling the Jews to have hope.

(3) When the camps were finally opened, most of the

families who were shipped out together ended up being

separated. Often, the transports mirrored what went on in

the camps; cruelty by the officers, near starvation of those

being transported, fetid and unsanitary conditions on the

trains. “ On the trains, Jews were starved of food and water

for days. Many people did not survive the ride to arrive at

the camp.” Jews were forced to obey the guards’ orders

from the moment they arrived at the camps. “ If they didn’t,

they would be beaten, put into solitary confinement or shot.”

Prisoners usually had marks on their clothes or numbers on

their arms to identify them. The sanitary conditions of the

camps were horrible. “ There was only one bathroom for four

hundred people. They had to stand for hours in snow, rain,

heat, or cold for roll call, which was twice a day.” Within the

first few days of being at the camps, thousands of people

died of hunger, starvation and disease. Other people died

from the cruel punishments of the guards; beatings and

torture. “ Typhus, a disease caused by germs carried by flies,

was the main disease that spread throughout the camps.

Even when people were sick, they still continued working

because they did not see that sickness meant death.” In

1937, 7, 000 Jews were in camps. By 1938, 10, 000 more

Jews were sent to camps. “ Jews were taken to camps if they

expressed negative feelings about the government, if they

married a non-Jew, if they were sick (mentally or physically),

or if they had a police record.” (4) When someone escaped

from the camp, all the prisoners in that group were shot.

Nazis, who claimed that they did not necessarily hate Jews,

but wanted to preserve the Aryan race, seemed to enjoy

making the Jews suffer. They rationalized that slavery was

better than killing their prisoners. “ Gold fillings, wedding

bands, jewelry, shoes and clothing were taken from the

prisoners when they first entered the camps and these items

were then sold.” Surrounding some of the camps in Poland

was a forest, that the Jews who planned to escape would

flee into. Before the escaped prisoners got very far, they

were usually killed. “ When the Germans caught a Jew

planning a rebellion, and the Jew refused to name his/her

associates, the Germans would bring everyone from his/her

barracks out and force him/her to watch the Germans

mutilate the others.” People who could not run away from

the camps were often able to survive because they dreamt

about revolt. Special areas of a camp were set aside for

medical experiments. Doctors in one medical unit performed

experiments in sterilization. “ He injected a substance into

women’s ovaries to sterilize them. The injection resulted in

temperature and inflammation of the ovaries.” Joseph

Mengels, one of the most notorious Nazi doctors, hummed

opera tunes when selecting, among the new arrivals, the

victims for the gas chambers or medical experiments. His

women victims for sterilization were usually 20-30 years of

age. “ Other experiments included putting inmates into high

pressure chambers to test the effects of altitude on pilots.

Some inmates were frozen in order (5) to determine the best

way to revive frozen German soldiers.” (6) DEATH

CAMPS “ The first death camp, Chelmno, was set up in

Poland on December 8, 1941. This was five weeks before

the Wannsee Conference at which time the ‘ final solution’

was planned out.” Usually, the death camps were part of

existing camps, but some new ones were just set up for the

purpose of extermination. When the prisoners first arrived at

the camps, those sent to the left were transferred to death

camps. When Jews entered the death camps, their suitcases,

baby bottles, shawls, and eyeglasses were taken and were

sold. Once in the death camps the prisoners were again

divided. Women were sent to one side to have their hair

shaven and the men to the other. “ They were all sent to the

showers, naked with a bar of soap, so as to deceive them

into believing that they were truly going into a shower. Most

people smelled the burning bodies and knew the truth. “

There were six true death camps; Chelmno, Treblinka,

Auschwitz (Birkenau), Sobibor, Maidanek, and Belzec.

These camps used gas from shower heads to murder their

victims. A seventh death camp, Mauthausen, used a method

called “ extermination through labor”. Most would not

consider Buchenwald as a death camp because it had no gas

chamber, but it did have special rooms for mass shootings in

which hundreds of prisoners died in every day. (7)

BUCHENWALD Buchenwald, located in Poland, was built

on the site of Mt. Ettersberg, near Weimar. The camp,

surrounded by walls and barbed wire, was encircled with

guard towers at spaced intervals. Buchenwald was actually a

series of internal subcamps with wooden and stone

barracks, old horse stables, and tent cities. The “ little camp”,

built beyond the roll call area, acquired the worst reputation.

In one part of it the SS set aside primitive barracks for

emergency needs, crowding 40, 000 inmates into them. In

another part, the SS forced the inmates to buy their food,

and if they couldn’t they would die. In July 1937, the Nazis

began building Buchenwald. It officially opened on July 19,

1937. The first commander of Buchenwald was Karl Koch.

He headed it until he was relocated in Majdanek. The first

inmates there were professional criminals. After the

criminals, political prisoners were sent there. These politicals

were favored over the rest of the prisoners. On arrival,

prisoners were asked their status. If they responded political,

they were supplied with better boots and warmer clothes.

These small items were essential for the prisoners’ physical

and mental shape. They also received the highest positions

available for prisoners. The first whole Jewish transport was

composed of politicals. They arrived in June 1938 because

of an action against “ asocial” Jews. In the summer of 1938,

2, 200 Austrian Jews were transferred (8) from Dachau.

Later that year, arrests after Kristallnacht more than doubled

the amount of Jewish prisoners in Buchenwald. The newly

arrived 10, 000 Jews lived in recently built huts, and suffered

far more than the non-Jews. Of the new-comers, 244 died in

their first month of imprisonment. By spring 1939, most of

the prisoners were released, deprived of their property and

compelled to leave Germany. The vast majority of the

thousands of prisoners died at Buchenwald each year died,

soon after their arrival. They usually died of exhaustion,

physical and psychological or due to their loss of desire to

live. Their lives before the camp didn’t prepare them for this

type of exhaustion. A survivor of Buchenwald said, “ It took

a long time for a mind, torn from the anchorages of the

outside world and thrust into life-and-death turmoil, to find a

new inward center of gravity.” The German soldiers were

always especially cruel, mentally and physically, to the

Jewish prisoners. At that time, the Germans considered

Jewish human life not equal the worth of an animal. Mentally,

they would try to depress the morale of the prisoners,

preventing the development of fellow-feeling or cooperation

among the victims. The “ politically backward” “ individualists”

knew nothing of organized action so they couldn’t survive

long in Buchenwald. If hunger so demoralized a person to

steal another man’s bread, he wasn’t reported to the SS. The

room attendants took care of him, and if he didn’t die from

beating, they injured him so brutally that he was only fit for

the crematorium. This was (9) done to maintain morale and

mutual trust. Some men used the typhus wards, which the

SS would not go near, to hide men whose names had come

up on the death lists. The Nazis physically abused the

prisoners in many ways. Next to the shooting chambers,

where hundreds died daily, there was a crematorium. Aside

from the huge ovens, there were 48 hooks for hanging pairs

of prisoners at a time. If they were not dead in the set five

minutes, they would be clubbed to dead and then thrown

into the incinerator. The bathrooms prisoners used were 20

feet long, 12 feet wide, 12 feet deep open pits with railings

along the side to squat. The soldiers would throw people in

the hole while they were doing their business. In October

1937 alone, ten people suffocated from excrement when

thrown into a hole. These overflowing pits were emptied at

night by prisoners with nothing but small pails. There were

about 30 men working on the slippery ground and often as

many as ten men fell in. Until the work was done and the pits

were empty, the workers weren’t allowed to remove the

corpses. In December 1942, the camp received German

criminals who had been handed over to the SS by the prison

authorities. Most of them became the victims of

pseudo-medical experiments performed in the camp

hospital. In Buchenwald, the winter Appels, or roll calls can

be considered a form of extermination. Some dropped dead,

during roll call, from the freezing cold while others caught

pneumonia and then died. With so many killings in

Buchenwald it might be asked why is it not considered a

death camp ? One suggested response is that (10) killings

constantly went on in a quick orderly fashion at the camps

officially known as “ death camps”, with victims not knowing

what hit them. At Buchenwald, though, realizing that death

itself is not necessarily terrifying, but it is years of daily

torture which is most frightening and very effective.

Therefore, Buchenwald is called the “ camp of the slow

death.” The outbreak of World War II brought a new group

of prisoners, mostly stateless people from Poland. More and

more prisoners arrived as Hitler’s armies conquered more

territory. Most Soviet POW’s (prisoners of war) were killed

upon arrival. After Koch left for Majdanek, his successor,

Hermann Pister, remained the commander until liberation. In

1942, Buchenwald became a forced labor camp for war

weaponry production. This brought in many more “ workers”.

On October 17, 1942 all Jewish prisoners except 200

building masons were transferred to Auschwitz. Until 1943,

prisoners were mostly Germans. Due to the changing

circumstances of the war, men of all nations were

imprisioned; politicals, communists, and Jews from these

varied countries outnumbered criminals. Even though many

people from many nations were imprisioned in Buchenwald,

the Nazis segregated the “ lows”, which were the Jews and

Homosexuals. On October 6, 1944 the number of prisoners

reached a peak of 89, 143. This increase of numbers

diminished the food supplies, further deteriorated the

unhygienic conditions, which in turn increased the death rate.

From the winter of 1944 until after January 1945, the camps

in the east were evacuated due to the approach of the Soviet

Army and thousands of prisoners were (11) transferred to

Buchenwald. Many of these died in great numbers in

Buchenwald. At the beginning of April 1944, the SS

evacuated several thousand Jews. On January 1945, tens of

thousands of ex- Auschwitz inmates were sent to

Buchenwald. Between May 1944 and March 1945, 20, 000

Jews were interned in Buchenwald. A survivor said that the

men in Buchenwald “ gradually realized that obedience meant

death. The only hope of survival lay in resistance.” In

Buchenwald, there was a firmly established underground

where, by the end of the war, the political prisoners ran

internal camp affairs completely. The underground made

contact with the Allies, resulting in a bombing raid which

severely damaged SS sectors of the camp. It was on this

raid on August 24, 1944 that the underground began to arm

itself. This was the foundation of the take-over of

Buchenwald. The mass evacuation planned for April 5, 1945

was foiled. The armed underground movement strengthened

themselves and when the American troops arrived on April

11, 1945, the underground was in control and handed the

camp over to the Americans. Of the 238, 380 (or 238, 980)

prisoners held in the camp since it opened, 56, 549 (or

56, 545) had died or been murdered. (12) CONCLUSION

The Nazis, under Hitler, organized the destruction of the

Jews. Why they did it is unknown. Perhaps it was because

of a history of tension between Christians and Jews, or

perhaps, because Hitler needed a scapegoat for Germany’s

problems. People throughout history have been murdered;

but never as many people as during the Holocaust, in such a

short period of time and under such well organized

circumstances. One third of all the Jews in the world were

eliminated. “ The estimated total is somewhere around six

million. This number included Jews from all over Europe.

There are estimates that over three million non-Jews were

murdered.” Hitler’s method of killing the Jews and other

undesirable people was first by torture and then by

methodical murder. In the early days of his administration, he

took away their rights as citizens and then as people. They

were treated like slaves and lived like animals. After 1942,

his goal was to exterminate all Jewish and “ unpure” people.

Many Jews were killed before that date, but they were a

small number compared to the mass murdering of the

Holocaust afterwards. “ We Must Never Forget” are words

which each Jew must remember. It is only through an

organized program of education that we can be sure that

people will not forget, and so we might, in this way, prevent

another holocaust from occurring. With ongoing programs

about the Holocaust and the establishment of Holocaust

departments (13) in schools and Holocaust museums we are

also letting the entire world know and remember that millions

of our loved ones were lost in the horrible tragic killing that

we call the holocaust. (16) BIBLIOGRAPHY Bauer,

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continue until months after liberation. . Never to Forget the

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