

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 death 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 imprisoned; politicals, communists, and Jews from these varied countries outnumbered criminals. Even though many people from many nations were imprisoned 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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-15 min drive from Weimar -barber wire and walls surround

it with guard towers at spaced intervals. around-valleys of

weimar. -crematorium next to shooting chamber. 48 hooks

for hanging pairs, if not dead in 5 min. would be clubbed then

thrown into the incinerator. -238, 980 people were sent

, between '37-'45 56, 545 died or were killed -july '37 nazis

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-considered the worst camp prior to WW II -first commander= Karl Koch until moved to Majdanek. -built to house prisoners from smaller camps that were disbanded; first inmates were professional criminals. -next came political prisoners, got highest positions available for prisoners. first

whole Jewish group were political on June 1938 because of an action against “ asocial” Jews. -In the summer of 1938, 2, 200 Austrian Jews were transferred from Dachau. Later that year, arrests after Kristallnacht more than doubled the amount of Jewish prisoners . The new 10, 000 Jews lived in new built huts, and suffered far more than the non-Jews.

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existence. When the American troops arrived on April 11, 1945, the underground was in control and handed the camp over to them. -of the 238, 380 prisoners held in the camp since it opened, 56, 549 had died or been murdered. " U. S. Congressmen at Death Camp" The Associated Press. April 22, 1945 -At that time, the Germans considered human life not to worth that of an animal. Survivor cont 142-if someone stole another'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 done to maintain morale and mutual trust. 189-all of the female prisoners ceased to menstruate at the beginning of their captivity, and didn't continue until months after liberation. . Never to Forget the Jew of the Holocaust. Meltzer page 3 . Meltzer, page 5 . A History of the Holocaust. Bauer page 205 . Meltzer, page 28 . Bauer, page 208 . The Holocaust. Rossel page 76 .

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