

WAR RETURNS TO EUROPE

DURING WORLD WAR II (1939-1945), NAZI GERMANY SIDED WITH FASCIST ITALY AND JAPAN. THEY WERE JOINED BY ROMANIA, HUNGARY, AND BULGARIA. TOGETHER THEY WERE KNOWN AS THE AXIS POWERS. AS GERMAN TANKS INVADED OTHER COUNTRIES THEY WERE OPPOSED BY NATIONAL ARMIES BUT MADE FAST GAINS.

The Allies who continued the fight against Germany and the Axis powers included the United Kingdom and its **Commonwealth** and empire nations (such as Canada, Australia, and India), and also China. The communist **Soviet Union**, or USSR, joined the conflict when it was invaded by the Germans in 1941. It fought an epic war against Hitler across Eastern Europe. Beginning in December 1941, the Allies were joined by the powerful forces of the USA.



German tanks and motorcycles roll into Poland during the invasion of September 1939.

EUROPE IS OVERRUN

Germany seized control of Czechoslovakia in 1938-39, and in 1939 invaded Poland. France, Belgium, and the Netherlands fell to the Germans in 1940, as did Denmark and Norway. In April 1941, the Germans marched south into the Balkans, invading Yugoslavia and Greece. In June 1941, the Germans broke a peace agreement with the Soviet Union and ordered their troops eastwards into the Baltic states. Their aim was to take over the fertile farmlands of the east for German settlement. They claimed that the "master race" deserved more "space to live," in one nation known as the German Reich.



This map shows Europe at the height of Nazi expansion in 1942.

	Allies		Neutral
	Germany or German occupied		Germany's allies or areas occupied by Germany's allies



French resistance fighters are rounded up by forces from the pro-Nazi Vichy government.

OCCUPIED PEOPLES

In the lands the Germans invaded they were often supported by local sympathizers or collaborators. In some occupied countries the Nazis set up governments that were prepared to cooperate with them, such as the "French State" government based at Vichy, in southern France. However, the Nazis were also attacked by bands of **resistance fighters**, or **partisans**. Many people who had escaped the Nazi invasion formed their own fighting forces based overseas, such as the Free French, based in London. Within Germany and the occupied countries, there were at least 16 plots to assassinate Adolf Hitler, but none succeeded.



Women, such as these Italian partisans, played a vital role in the resistance forces.

THE CENTER OF THE STORM

Before the Holocaust, Germany had a Jewish population of about 565,000. Poland had Europe's biggest Jewish population, at 3,000,000. In the European region of the Soviet Union, there were 2,525,000 Jews. Many Jews also lived in Greece, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands, and France. As the war raged across Europe, these communities were at the center of the storm.



GHETTOS AND CAMPS

THE WORD "TERRORIST" IS USED TO DESCRIBE NATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS WHO USE FEAR AND VIOLENCE TO TRY TO BRING ABOUT POLITICAL CHANGE. During World War II, the Nazis enforced terrorist rule in Germany and in occupied Europe by imprisonment, torture, forced labor, internment in ghettos and camps, and mass murder. The German Special Courts in Poland could pass the death sentence for almost any "offense."

THE GHETTOS

The Germans created over 1,000 ghettos in Central and Eastern Europe in order to control the Jewish population. These were restricted areas in cities where Jews were forced to live. Some Jews were recruited for the Jewish police force in the ghettos. Many of the ghettos in Poland were walled in and surrounded by barbed wire. People were packed into the overcrowded houses without enough food or proper **sanitation**. Many of the inhabitants of the ghettos were later transported to concentration camps, where a great number died.

Children on the streets of the Warsaw ghetto in Poland, 1941.



The gate of the Dachau forced labor camp displayed the sinister words "Arbeit Macht Frei"—"Work Brings Freedom."

THE CAMPS

The first Nazi concentration camp was Dachau, built in Germany in 1933. It was the model for many more. During World War II there may have been thousands of camps and subcamps in Germany and in the occupied countries. Some were internment or prison camps. Some were forced labor camps, or camps where people were placed after being deported from their homes. At all of these camps, starvation and death were common. In 1942, the Germans began to build **extermination camps** with one purpose only—mass murder. Most of these camps were in occupied Poland, and 90 percent of the victims were Jews.

DEATH SQUADS

During World War II the Nazis set up *Einsatzgruppen* ("task forces") to work alongside police units and the armed forces as death squads. By the end of the war they had murdered about 1.5 million people, over half of them Jews. In September 1941, they shot dead 33,711 Jews in just two days at the Babi Yar ravine, Kiev, the Ukraine. Tens of thousands of Roma, Soviet prisoners of war, and political opponents were also shot at this site during the occupation. Romanian and German troops also carried out massacres of over 100,000 Jews around Odessa, in the Ukraine, during the war.



The *Einsatzgruppen*, "death squads" killed thousands of people in the Ukraine.

The wild grasses rustle over Babi Yar.
The trees look ominous, like judges.
Here all things scream silently, and, baring my head,
Slowly I feel myself turning gray.

From the poem "Babi Yar" by
Yevgeny Yevtushenko, 1961

JEWISH RESISTANCE

ONCE THE NAZIS HAD TOTAL POWER IN GERMANY AND IN OCCUPIED EUROPE, IT WAS VERY HARD FOR ANY CIVILIANS TO RESIST THEM. THOSE WHO TRIED WERE IMMEDIATELY SENT TO PRISON OR CAMPS, WHERE THEY WERE TORTURED OR KILLED.

For Jews who had been stripped of their citizenship it was even harder. They were isolated and had nowhere to hide. The bravest were often the first to die. Nevertheless, some Jewish individuals and groups did take up arms against the Nazis.

Though rarely outnumbered by the Nazis, Jewish resistance fighters in the Warsaw ghetto might have been more successful.



Resistance fighters in the Warsaw ghetto are rounded up by the German military.

GHETTO UPRISINGS

There were about 100 uprisings by Jews trapped in the ghettos of Poland and Eastern Europe. When the Germans ordered **deportation** to extermination camps such as Treblinka, the younger and fitter Jews attacked the guards with weapons they had smuggled in. The fiercest uprising was in the Warsaw ghetto, in 1943. The Jewish resistance hid families and built defensive bunkers, fighting the Germans with pistols and explosives. The rebels put up a hard fight but were eventually overcome and forced to surrender.

BREAKING OUT

Even in the harshest camps, such as Treblinka, Auschwitz, and Sobibor, there was Jewish resistance. Desperate prisoners would steal pickaxes or guns and set fire to the camp or try to break through the wire. Some succeeded in joining up with local partisans, although some of these partisan groups in Poland and Eastern Europe were antisemitic themselves. Many of the rebels died in minefields outside the camps or were recaptured and shot.

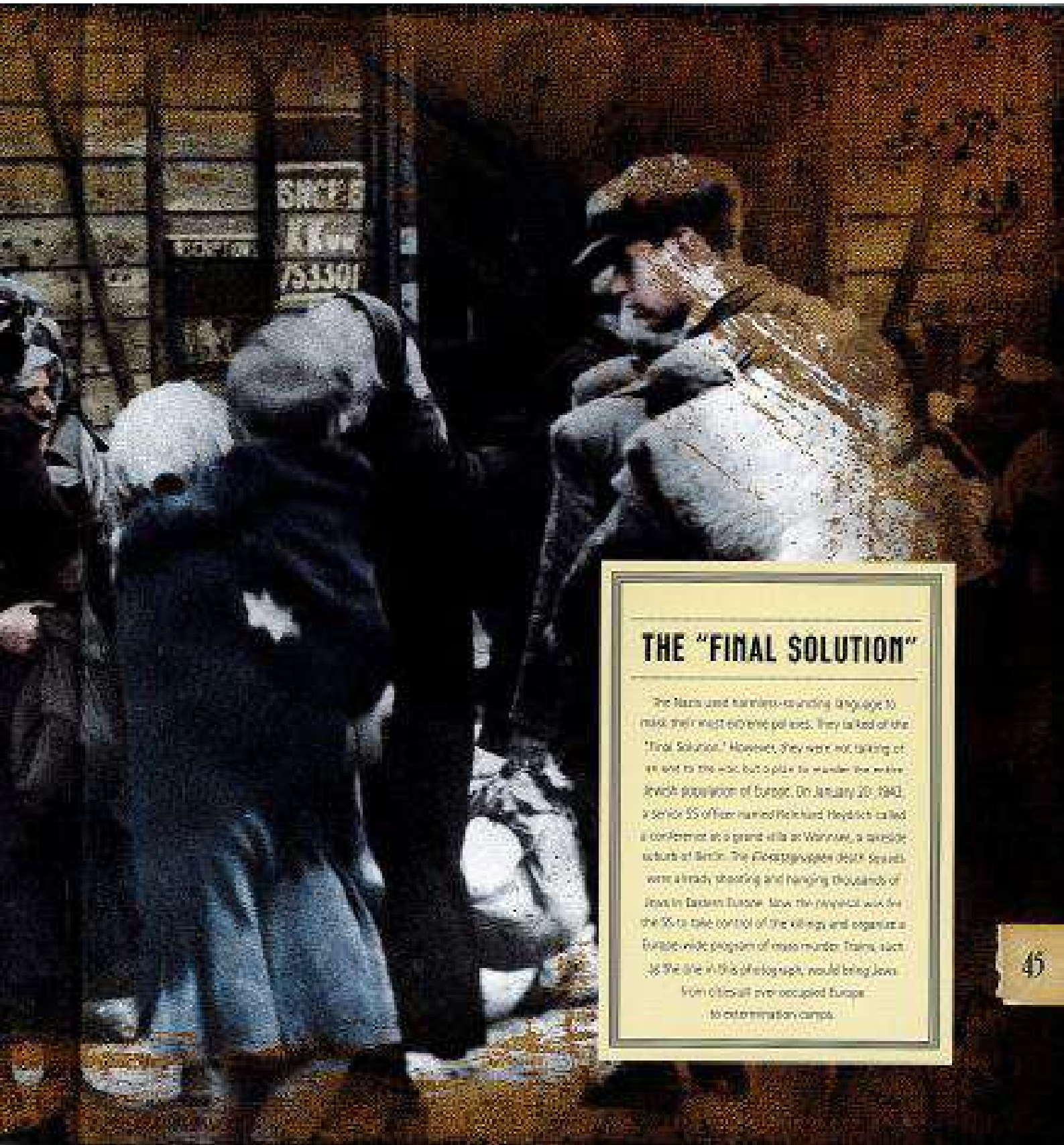
Resistance was also active during the prisoner transport to Treblinka in 1942.



Adine Broder was a member of the Jewish Army. She was killed by Nazi collaborators in 1944.

FIGHTING IN FRANCE

Jewish resistance groups also organized themselves in occupied France and in Vichy France. An Armée Juive (Jewish Army) was founded in France, to help Jews escape across the border to Spain (which was neutral during the war) and also to fight the Germans. Solidarité, a Jewish communist group, attacked the Germans in Paris. Many Jews also joined the wider French resistance movement. Jewish resistance groups lacked the weapons and resources to dent the Nazis' war machine, but their courage was a powerful symbol to others.



THE "FINAL SOLUTION"

The Nazis used hate-filled, dehumanizing language to mask their most evil and radical policies. They talked of the "Final Solution." However, they were not talking of an end to the war, but a plan to murder the entire Jewish population of Europe. On January 20, 1942, a senior SS officer named Reinhard Heydrich called a conference at a grand villa in Wannsee, a suburb of Berlin. The *Abfertigungslösung* (final solution) was already shooting and hanging thousands of Jews in Eastern Europe. Now the responsibility for the SS to take control of the killings and organize a Europe-wide program of mass murder. Trains, such as the one in this photograph, would bring Jews

from all over occupied Europe
to extermination camps.

DEPORTATION

THE REMOVAL OF PEOPLE FROM A COUNTRY IS CALLED "DEPORTATION." UNDER NAZI RULE IT OFTEN STARTED WITH A KNOCK ON THE DOOR, AN ARREST AT THE POLICE STATION, AND THEN A JOURNEY TO A TRANSIT CAMP.

Trains then took prisoners onward across Europe, to labor and extermination camps. The "Final Solution" was organized with cold-hearted efficiency and no regard for humanity.

This map shows the locations of major Nazi concentration and extermination camps in Europe.

-  Transit Camp
-  Concentration camp
-  Extermination camp
-  Allied territory
-  German occupied territory
-  Neutral territory
-  Territory occupied by Germany's allies



Thousands of Jews and other prisoners were packed up in the Winter Stadium before being transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

THE WINTER STADIUM, PARIS

In the summer of 1942, the Nazis ordered French police—aided by French fascists—to round up any Jews in the region who were from Germany, Central, or Eastern Europe. In Paris, about 8,000 of those arrested were packed into the city's indoor cycling track, the Winter Stadium. The prisoners had no sanitation, and little food or water. Anyone who tried to escape was shot. They suffered there for five days before being taken to camps in France and then on to be murdered in Poland. Within three months of the stadium roundup, 38,000 Jews had been deported from France to Auschwitz.



Hungary's poor Jews are forced to line up as they shove boxes into the backs of cattle trucks.

CATTLE TRUCKS

The train journeys to the camps were terrifying. Men, women, and small children were pushed by guards into overcrowded cattle trucks, which were then locked. They had very little to eat or drink and no sanitation. They were bitterly cold in winter and overcome with heat in summer. There were no windows, just wooden slats. The journeys often took several days, as the trains stopped to take on more prisoners.

RAILWAY COMPANIES

Many national rail companies collaborated with the Nazis to bring about the "Final Solution." The Germans took over Polish National Railways when they invaded, and imprisoned or shot the management. Polish rail workers who tried to stop the trains by **sabotage** were hanged alongside the tracks as a grim warning to others.

END OF THE LINE

Several camps were set up at Auschwitz during World War II. Auschwitz II—Birkenau was a concentration camp and an extermination camp. The first trains arrived there in March 1942. From spring 1944, the railway track went right into the camp itself. As the doors of the wagons were opened, the prisoners were exposed by the first light they had seen in days. They stumbled or were pulled out, men and women were divided. Their belongings were taken from them, and they were made to line up for examination. Most were selected for instant death. About one in five were selected for forced labor. Most of these would also later die, from starvation, exhaustion, or disease.

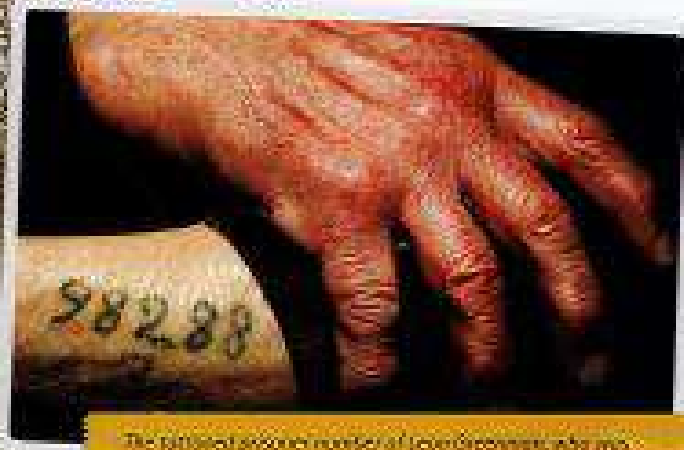
PRISONERS AND SYMBOLS

THE NAZIS USED A COLOR-CODING SYSTEM TO ORGANIZE INMATES IN CONCENTRATION CAMPS. JEWS HAD TO WEAR YELLOW STARS. ROMA AND SINTI VICTIMS WORE A BROWN TRIANGLE. CRIMINALS WORE A GREEN TRIANGLE.

Political prisoners were identified by a red triangle, and homosexual prisoners by a pink one. The Nazis also targeted many Christian and non-Christian groups. **Jehovah's Witnesses**, who refused to fight, and some **pacifists**, were identified by a purple or black triangle.

This table shows some of the identification badges that the Nazis had sewn onto the clothes of their prisoners.

Political enemy 	Criminal 	Foreign laborer 	Member of Soviet resistance 
Homosexual 	Asocial elements in prisoner groups 	Roma (or Sinti) 	Jew 
Escape suspect 	Polish 	Catholic 	Member of many-named faith 



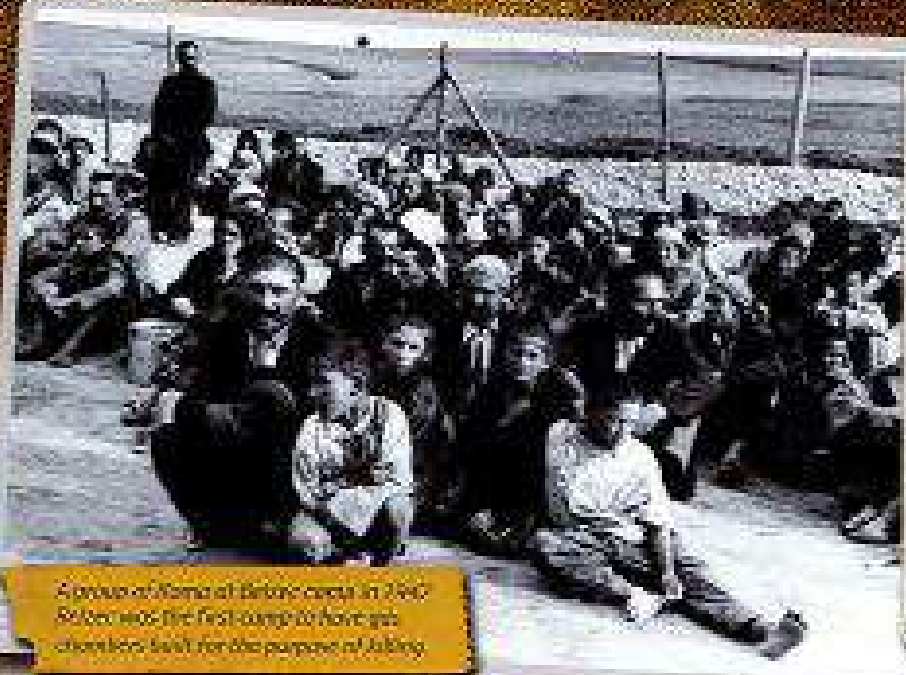
The tattooed prisoner number of Louis Grechinski, who was imprisoned in Auschwitz concentration camp during the war.

TATTOOS AND NUMBERS

In many camps, prisoners were also identified by serial numbers printed on their jackets. At Auschwitz from 1941 on, numbers were tattooed onto the skin of prisoners, to help record their death or to identify them if they tried to escape. To those who survived the camps, these tattoos remained a lifetime reminder of their ordeal and their courage.

SLAVS AND POWs

The Nazis murdered many millions of Slavs, whom they believed to be of an inferior race. These included Poles, Czechs, Ukrainians, and Serbs. Over three million Soviet prisoners of war (POWs) were killed in the death camps, even though the Geneva Convention of 1929 (an international agreement) was supposed to protect all POWs. Some Soviet soldiers were the first camp victims to be killed with a deadly gas called Zyklon B. Communists and other political opponents of the Nazis were murdered, too.



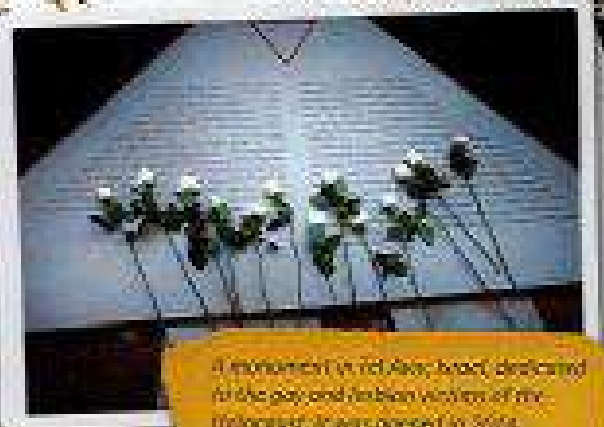
A group of Roma at Birkenau camp in 1942. Sobibor was the first camp to have gas chambers built for the purpose of killing.

ROMA AND SINTI

These peoples were often known in English as "Gypsies" (from "Egyptians"). In fact they had originally come from northern India, migrating westward in the early medieval era. Because they were traveling peoples who kept their own customs, they were often persecuted. The Nazis decided they were a "criminal" race—even when they had committed no crime. They were deported, forced into slave labor, shot in mass killings by death squads, or murdered in camps such as Auschwitz and Treblinka. Between 200,000 and 600,000 may have been killed.



Soviet soldiers being raised up by the Nazis. Over 2 million Soviet POWs were murdered in Nazi camps.



A memorial in Tel Aviv, Israel, dedicated to the gay and lesbian victims of the Holocaust. It was opened in 2014.

GAY VICTIMS OF THE NAZIS

During the 1920s, gay and lesbian cafés, bars, and meeting places had been popular in Berlin and in many other German cities. But under Nazi rule, homosexual men were sent to mental hospitals, prisons, or concentration camps. They were experimented on by doctors and brutally bullied by the guards. Many were killed through starvation and hard labor.

LIFE IN THE CAMPS

THE SS GUARDS AND COMMANDANTS WHO RAN THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS DID THEIR BEST TO "DEHUMANIZE" AND STAMP OUT THE INDIVIDUALITY OF EVERY PRISONER. To the Nazi regime the prisoners were not people, they were just a mass of bodies that needed to be contained and kept apart from the "acceptable" communities of Germans. The daily routines in the camps were rigid and unbending, carefully designed to break the human spirit and wear down any last traces of resistance.

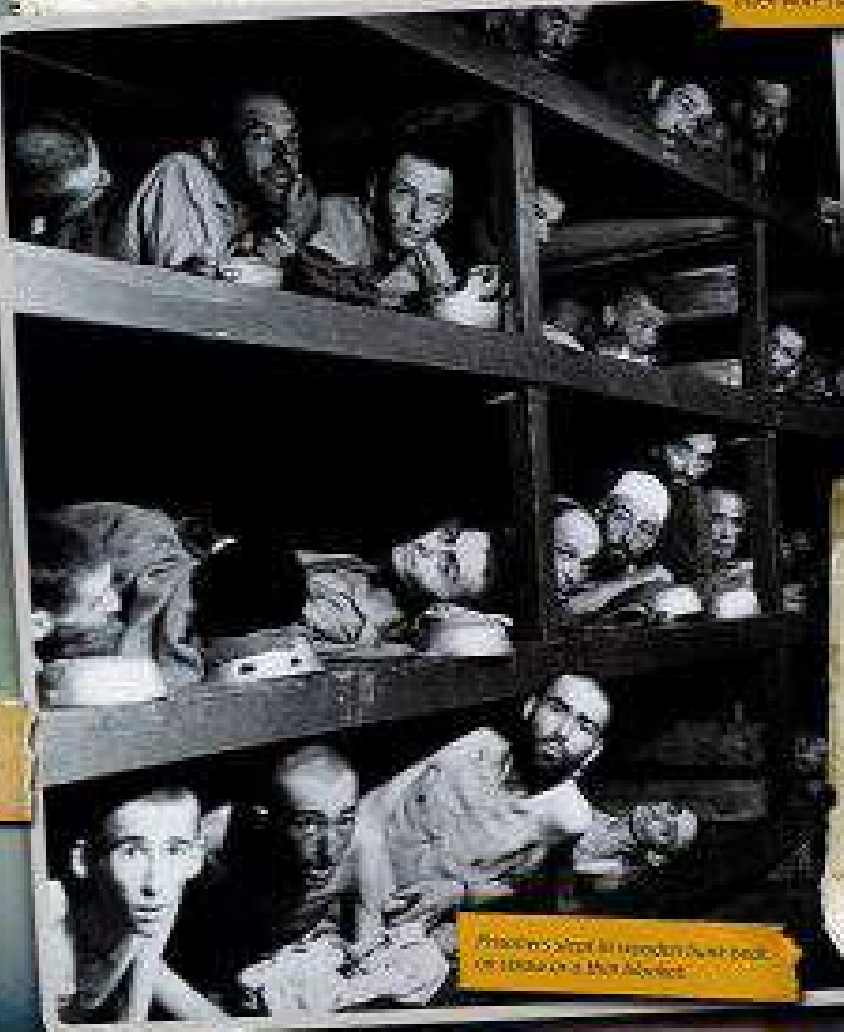
Prisoners had their clothes taken away and (SS) were given uniforms like these.



WAKING AND WASHING

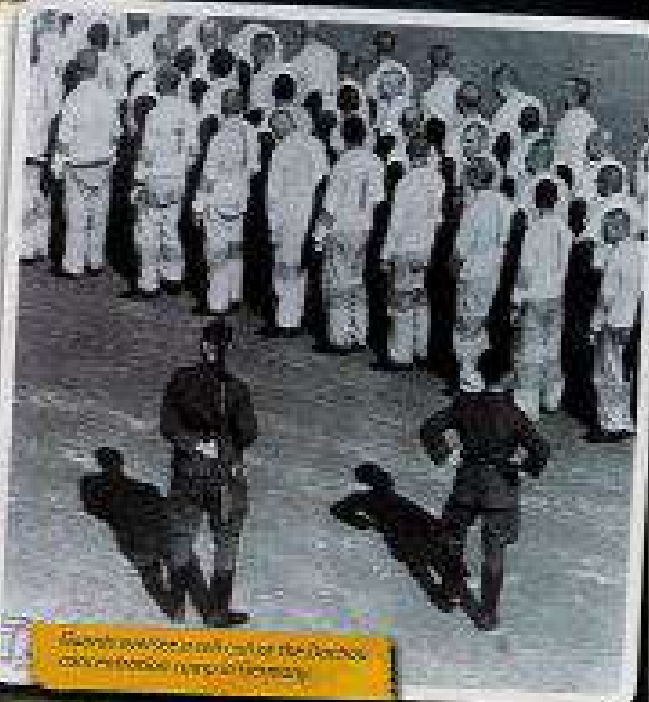
A camp prisoner's day began with an early-morning wake-up call, followed by a wash in dirty water. The toilets in the barracks were filthy and crowded. Often, 2,000 or so inmates would have to share a wooden board that had just 100 holes in it. There was no soap, no privacy and very few chances for the prisoners to change out of filthy or torn clothing. Weeks or months would go by before any new garments were offered.

Prisoners slept in wooden bunk beds or barracks like these.



THE ROLL CALL

Washing was followed by the Appel, the daily roll call. The prisoners were forced to stand completely still, in rows. This sometimes lasted for hours and hours, even if the weather was extremely bad. The guards used this time to count the prisoners and read out long lists of instructions for the day or orders for individual inmates. They also taunted the prisoners, shouting into their faces or suddenly beating one of them to the ground, making the others freeze with fear. Sometimes the guards would decide to torture them further—by doing the count all over again.



Prisoners and guards with roll call at the Dachau concentration camp (top left)



No more food of the day and a night sleep under the sky

"We had only one blanket, but we covered ourselves with our coats. We were together and it was a great help."

Heiga Weiss, a Holocaust survivor from Prague

MEAL TIMES

Food in a concentration camp was deliberately scarce. The meals were designed to keep the prisoners alive, but they didn't provide enough energy for the hard labor that some of the inmates had to do. For breakfast or lunch, all they got was some watery soup, a piece of bread, and a hot drink. In the evenings, the inmates were lucky if they got some extra bread, plus some marmalade, sausage, or cheese. It is no surprise, then, that so many thousands starved or died from illnesses brought on by the lack of food.