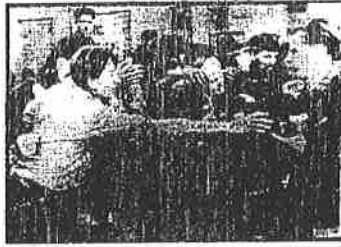

Jewish Ghettos

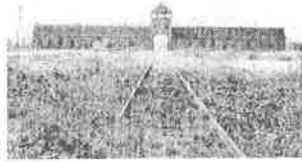


As early as 1938 the Nazis discussed the possibility of segregating the Jewish population in Europe from the non-Jewish population. According to their plan, all Jews were to be forced from their homes and required to live in ghettos. *Ghettos* were small areas within a city that were sealed off with barbed-wire or high walls. In many ghettos, inhabitants were prohibited from leaving the compound, and no one could enter from the outside. The main reason given by the Nazis for isolating the Jews was the danger that a typhus epidemic would spread through the city. In truth, the Nazis regarded the ghettos as a temporary way to concentrate the Jews until it proved possible to achieve the Nazi party's stated goal of eliminating, or killing, all of them.

Beginning in 1939, ghettos were established in occupied eastern Europe (regions that Nazi Germany had conquered), which meant that **Jews** from all over northern and western Europe were transported to eastern European ghettos. The Jews often arrived with only the clothes on their backs because they were only given a few minutes to gather their belongings before being ejected from their homes. The rest of their property was left to looters. German authorities set up special warehouses for collecting the goods that had been confiscated from Jewish businesses and homes once the Jews were removed.

Jews lived in a state of chaos and immense anxiety in the ghettos. People had very few resources, they were sick and malnourished, and they lived in very crowded conditions. Unable to earn money by working, some Jews displayed incredible initiative and resourcefulness in turning junk into useful products that the Germans were willing to trade for food and other goods. Established in November 1940, the Warsaw ghetto in Poland contained nearly 500,000 Jews, many of whom were from outside of Poland. About 45,000 Jews died there in 1941 alone as a result of overcrowding, hard labor, lack of sanitation, starvation, and disease. Those Jews who did not die in the ghettos were ultimately transported to concentration camps to be murdered at the hands of the Nazis. All ghettos were eventually destroyed.

Auschwitz



The Auschwitz concentration camp complex was the largest of its kind established by the Nazi regime. It included three main camps, all of which deployed incarcerated prisoners at forced labor. One of them also functioned for an extended period as a killing center.

Similar to most German concentration camps, Auschwitz I was constructed to serve three purposes: 1) to incarcerate real and perceived enemies of the Nazi regime and the German occupation authorities in Poland for an indefinite period of time; 2) to have available a supply of forced laborers for deployment in SS-owned, construction-related enterprises (and, later, armaments and other war-related production); and 3) to serve as a site to physically eliminate 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 most other concentration camps, Auschwitz I had a gas chamber and crematorium. Initially, SS engineers constructed an improvised gas chamber in the basement of the prison block, Block 11. Later a larger, permanent gas chamber was constructed as part of the original crematorium in a separate building outside the prisoner compound.

At Auschwitz I, SS physicians carried out medical experiments in the hospital, Barrack (Block) 10. They conducted pseudoscientific research on infants, twins, and dwarfs, and performed forced sterilizations, castrations, and hypothermia experiments on adults. The best-known of these physicians was SS Captain Dr. Josef Mengele.

Between the crematorium and the medical-experiments barrack stood the "Black Wall," where SS guards executed thousands of prisoners.

Auschwitz-Birkenau (Auschwitz II) also contained the facilities for a killing center. It played a central role in the German plan to kill the Jews of Europe. During the summer and autumn of 1941, Zyklon B gas was introduced into the German concentration camp system as a means for murder. At Auschwitz I, in September, the SS first tested Zyklon B as an instrument of mass murder. The "success" of these experiments led to the adoption of Zyklon B for all the gas chambers at the Auschwitz complex. Near Birkenau, the SS initially converted two farmhouses for use as gas chambers. "Provisional" gas chamber I went into operation in January 1942 and was later dismantled. Provisional gas chamber II operated from June 1942 through the fall of 1944. The SS judged these facilities to be inadequate for the scale of gassing they planned at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Four large crematorium buildings were constructed between March and June 1943. Each had three components: a disrobing area, a large gas chamber, and crematorium ovens. The SS continued gassing operations at Auschwitz-Birkenau until November 1944.

Einsatzgruppen (Mobile Killing Units)



Einsatzgruppen (in this context, mobile killing units) were squads composed primarily of German SS and police personnel. Under the command of the German Security Police (Sicherheitspolizei; Sipo) and Security Service (Sicherheitsdienst; SD) officers, the Einsatzgruppen had among their tasks the murder of those perceived to be racial or political enemies found behind German combat lines in the occupied Soviet Union.

These victims included Jews, Roma (Gypsies), and officials of the Soviet state and the Soviet Communist party. The Einsatzgruppen also murdered thousands of residents of institutions for the mentally and physically disabled. Many scholars believe that the systematic killing of Jews in the occupied Soviet Union by Einsatzgruppen and Order Police (Ordnungspolizei) battalions was the first step of the "Final Solution," the Nazi program to murder all European Jews.

During the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Einsatzgruppen followed the German army as it advanced deep into Soviet territory. The Einsatzgruppen, often drawing on local civilian and police support, carried out mass-murder operations. In contrast to the methods later instituted of deporting Jews from their own towns and cities or from ghetto settings to killing centers, Einsatzgruppen came directly to the home communities of Jews and massacred them.

Shooting was the most common form of killing used by the Einsatzgruppen. Yet in the late summer of 1941, Heinrich Himmler, noting the psychological burden that mass shootings produced on his men, requested that a more convenient mode of killing be developed. The result was the gas van, a mobile gas chamber surmounted on the chassis of a cargo truck which employed carbon monoxide from the truck's exhaust to kill its victims. Gas vans made their first appearance on the eastern front in late fall 1941, and were eventually utilized, along with shooting, to murder Jews and other victims in most areas where the Einsatzgruppen operated.

The Einsatzgruppen received much assistance from German and Axis soldiers, local collaborators, and other SS units. Einsatzgruppen members were drawn from the SS, Waffen SS (military formations of the SS), SD, Sipo, Order Police, and other police units.

By the spring of 1943, the Einsatzgruppen and Order Police battalions had killed over a million Soviet Jews and tens of thousands of Soviet political commissars, partisans, Roma, and institutionalized disabled persons. The mobile killing methods, particularly shooting, proved to be inefficient and psychologically burdensome to the killers. Even as Einsatzgruppen units carried out their operations, the German authorities planned and began construction of special stationary gassing facilities at centralized killing centers in order to murder vast numbers of Jews.

The Final Solution



"This war will not end as the Jew imagines, namely in the liquidation of all European and Aryan Peoples; the outcome of this War will be the extermination of all Jewish People." —Adolph Hitler, January 30, 1939.

Adolph Hitler often referred to finding a "final solution" to the "Jewish problem." With the beginning of World War II, the Germans realized that *Kristallnacht* and the terror that followed would not be enough to drive the Jews out of Germany. By 1940 the Nazis began to devise plans for a mass expulsion of all Jews to the island of Madagascar off the African coast or to reservations in Poland. However, these plans were found to be unworkable.

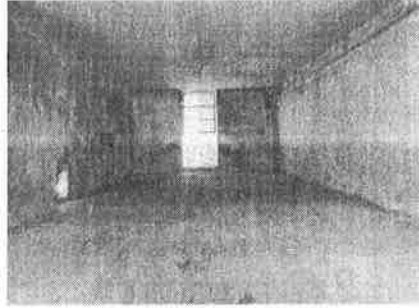
In 1941 the *Einsatzgruppen*, special units of the security police and SS Security Service, followed German armies into Russia and set out to kill all Jews as well as Soviet officials, the handicapped, and Gypsies. Victims were executed by mass shootings and buried in mass unmarked graves. Close to one and a half million Jews were killed by the *Einsatzgruppen* in the Baltics and the Soviet Union.

Nazis began to realize that mass shootings were not an efficient method for killing millions of people. By early 1942, the Nazi leadership committed to move forward with the mass execution of Jews from all over Europe. Death camps were constructed in Poland, where gas was to be the primary means of execution, and the Germans had begun mass deportations of Jews from Germany and Western Europe to the ghettos in Eastern Europe.

Satisfied that the machinery was in place to implement the "final solution," Nazi leaders met in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee in January 1942. The purpose of the Wannsee Conference was to officially coordinate the "final solution." Participants at the conference openly discussed the various methods of killing Jews, planned how the death camps would be organized, and scheduled the transportation of Jews from all over Europe to Poland*

From 1942 to 1945, the Jews were plunged into a hell of planned murder that neither the Jews nor the majority of modern humanity could have conceived. What made the Holocaust different from other human tragedies was that for the first time the technology and administration of the modern industrial world was organized to murder defenseless people. In the end, Nazi efforts at a "final solution" to the "Jewish problem" resulted in the death of more than 6,000,000 Jews and millions of others.

Gas Chambers



The Nazis began experimenting with poison gas for the purpose of mass murder in late 1939 with the killing of mental patients ("euthanasia"). A Nazi euphemism, "euthanasia" referred to the systematic killing of those Germans whom the Nazis deemed "unworthy of life" because of mental illness or physical disability. Six gassing installations were established as part of the Euthanasia Program: Bernburg, Brandenburg, Grafeneck, Hadamar, Hartheim, and Sonnenstein. These killing centers used pure, chemically manufactured carbon monoxide gas.

After the June 1941 German invasion of the Soviet Union and Einsatzgruppe (mobile killing unit) mass shootings of civilians, the Nazis experimented with gas vans for mass killing. Gas vans were hermetically sealed trucks with engine exhaust diverted to the interior compartment. Use of gas vans began after Einsatzgruppe members complained of battle fatigue and mental anguish caused by shooting large numbers of women and children. Gassing also proved to be less costly. Einsatzgruppen (mobile killing units) gassed hundreds of thousands of people, mostly Jews, Roma (Gypsies), and mentally ill people. In 1941, the SS concluded that the deportation of Jews to extermination camps (to be gassed) was the most efficient way of achieving the "Final Solution". That same year, the Nazis opened the Chelmno camp in Poland. Jews from the Lodz area of Poland and Roma were killed there in mobile gas vans.

In 1942, systematic mass killing in stationary gas chambers (with carbon monoxide gas generated by diesel engines) began at Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka, all in Poland. As victims were "unloaded" from cattle cars, they were told that they had to be disinfected in "showers." The Nazi and Ukrainian guards sometimes shouted at and beat the victims, who were ordered to enter the "showers" with raised arms to allow as many people as possible to fit into the gas chambers. The tighter the gas chambers were packed, the faster the victims suffocated.

The Nazis constantly searched for more efficient means of extermination. At the Auschwitz camp in Poland, they conducted experiments with Zyklon B (previously used for fumigation) by gassing some 600 Soviet prisoners of war and 250 ill prisoners in September 1941. Zyklon B pellets, converted to lethal gas when exposed to air. They proved the quickest gassing method and were chosen as the means of mass murder at Auschwitz. At the height of the deportations, up to 6,000 Jews were gassed each day at Auschwitz.

Concentration camps like Stutthof, Mauthausen, Sachsenhausen, and Ravensbrueck, although not designed specifically as extermination camps, also had gas chambers. The gas chambers were relatively small, constructed to kill those prisoners the Nazis deemed "unfit" to work. Most of these camps used Zyklon B as the killing agent in their gas chambers

Medical Experiments



During World War II, a number of German physicians conducted painful and often deadly experiments on thousands of concentration camp prisoners without their consent.

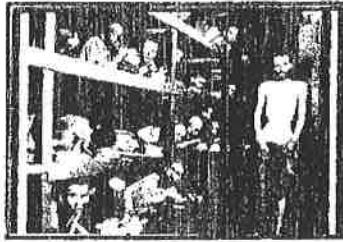
Unethical medical experimentation carried out during the Third Reich may be divided into three categories. The first category consists of experiments aimed at facilitating the survival of Axis military personnel. In Dachau, physicians from the German air force and from the German Experimental Institution for Aviation conducted high-altitude experiments, using a low-pressure chamber, to determine the maximum altitude from which crews of damaged aircraft could parachute to safety. Scientists there carried out so-called freezing experiments using prisoners to find an effective treatment for hypothermia. They also used prisoners to test various methods of making seawater potable.

The second category of experimentation aimed at developing and testing pharmaceuticals and treatment methods for injuries and illnesses which German military and occupation personnel encountered in the field. At the German concentration camps of Sachsenhausen, Dachau, Natzweiler, Buchenwald, and Neuengamme, scientists tested immunization compounds and sera for the prevention and treatment of contagious diseases, including malaria, typhus, tuberculosis, typhoid fever, yellow fever, and infectious hepatitis. The Ravensbrueck camp was the site of bone-grafting experiments and experiments to test the efficacy of newly developed sulfa (sulfanilamide) drugs. At Natzweiler and Sachsenhausen, prisoners were subjected to phosgene and mustard gas in order to test possible antidotes.

The third category of medical experimentation sought to advance the racial and ideological tenets of the Nazi worldview. The most infamous were the experiments of Josef Mengele at Auschwitz. Mengele conducted medical experiments on twins. He also directed serological experiments on Roma (Gypsies), as did Werner Fischer at Sachsenhausen, in order to determine how different "races" withstood various contagious diseases. The research of August Hirt at Strasbourg University also intended to establish "Jewish racial inferiority."

Other gruesome experiments meant to further Nazi racial goals were a series of sterilization experiments, undertaken primarily at Auschwitz and Ravensbrueck. There, scientists tested a number of methods in their effort to develop an efficient and inexpensive procedure for the mass sterilization of Jews, Roma, and other groups Nazi leaders considered to be racially or genetically undesirable.

Camps



Prisoner-of-war camps, forced-labor camps, concentration camps, and mass-extermiation camps were an integral part of Hitler's efforts to control and terrorize the population of Europe, first in Germany and later in every territory controlled by the Nazi regime. During World War n, the Nazis set up several thousand camps in which prisoners were starved, tortured, worked to death, and in most cases murdered. Conditions varied widely in different types of Nazi camps, but killing occurred in all camps to some degree. Initially, death was a by-product of forced labor and concentration camps; by 1942 death camps whose sole purpose was to exterminate Jews were established. Anyone considered an enemy of the Nazi regime was detained in the Nazi camps: socialists, clergy of various faiths, Jews, and the physically and mentally handicapped* After 1938, the Nazis also imprisoned criminals in the camps as well as such "asocial" elements as homosexuals, Gypsies, prostitutes, and beggars.

Camps were built in accessible places to allow for huge transports of people to be shipped in daily. Although near railroads and major cities, camps were isolated from the outside world. Each one had a complicated systems of fences and barriers that cut it off from the surrounding area and divided it into distinct sections. The staff areas and living quarters for the commanders and SS were clean and well tended. The prisoner's living quarters consisted of crowded wooden barracks with beds made of wood boards attached to the walls and stacked one on top of another. The guarded watchtowers, which were built close to one another, and the strong lighting ensured that prisoners could be monitored 24 hours a day.

Prisoners in Nazi camps were subjected to unimaginable terrors from the moment they exited the railway cars. Upon arrival, they had to walk in front of SS doctors who would quickly examine them and, with a wave of a hand, determine whether they would be put to death or to hard labor. At the time, the prisoners often did not know the significance of this division, although many had a sense of impending doom. Many families were broken up at this point, as young children were often sent to death right away because they could not work. While in the camps, the prisoners had no legal rights and no means of defense. Their fate was completely in the hands of the camp's command and staff. All prisoners were susceptible to suffer torture or the worst possible death for any offense. Chronic hunger, disease, and unsanitary living conditions led to complete physical exhaustion, while the breakup of families and the loss of home and livelihood served to demoralize the prisoners.
