

Glossary of Terms

AFFIDAVIT OF SUPPORT

Official paperwork from a U.S. citizen vowing to take financial responsibility for a person wishing to immigrate to the United States.

AKTION (German)

Operation involving the mass assembly, deportation, and murder of Jews by the Nazis during the Holocaust.

ALLIES

The nations fighting Nazi Germany, Italy, and Japan during World War II; primarily the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union.

ANSCHLUSS (German)

Annexation of Austria by Germany on March 13, 1938.

APPELL (German)

Roll call in concentration and death camps. Prisoners were forced to stand at attention while being counted. These roll calls often lasted hours at a time.

“ARYAN” RACE

"Aryan" was originally applied to people who spoke any Indo-European language. The Nazis, however, primarily applied the term to people of Northern European racial background. Their aim was to avoid what they considered the "bastardization of the German race" and to preserve the purity of European blood. (See NUREMBERG LAWS.)

AUSCHWITZ (or AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU)

Concentration and death camp complex in Upper Silesia, Poland, 37 miles west of Krakow. Established in 1940 as a concentration camp at Auschwitz I the camp was expanded in 1942 to include Auschwitz-Birkenau, a death camp for Jews. Eventually, it consisted of three sections: Auschwitz I, the main camp; Auschwitz II (Birkenau), a death camp; Auschwitz III (Monowitz), the I.G. Farben labor camp, also known as Buna. In addition, Auschwitz had 51 sub-camps. Between 1.2 and 1.5 million people were killed in the Auschwitz complex. Approximately 1 million of them were Jews.

BABUSHKAS

A kerchief worn over the hair.

BELŻEC

One of the six death camps in Poland. Originally established in 1940 as a camp for Jewish forced labor, the Germans began construction of an extermination camp at Belżec on November 1, 1941, as part of Operation Reinhard. By the time the camp ceased operations in December 1942, at least 434,508 persons had been murdered there.

CHELMNO

A death camp established in late 1941 in the Warthegau region of Western Poland, 47 miles west of Łódź. It was the first camp where mass executions were carried out by means of gas. Prisoners were placed in gas vans and slowly asphyxiated from carbon monoxide. Between 150,000 and 300,000 Jews were murdered here.

CONCENTRATION CAMPS

Immediately upon their assumption of power on January 30, 1933, the Nazis established concentration camps for the imprisonment of all "enemies" of their regime: actual and potential political opponents (e.g. communists, socialists, monarchists), Jehovah's Witnesses, gypsies, homosexuals, and other "asocials." Jews did not make up a significant segment of the camp population until 1945 when the Nazis began moving Jews out of the death camps in the East and pulling them into Germany.

DEATH CAMPS

Nazi camps established and designed for the mass murder of Jews. These camps were: Auschwitz-Birkenau, Bełżec, Chełmno, Majdanek, Sobibór, and Treblinka. All were located in occupied Poland.

DEPORTATION

Process of moving Jewish prisoners to one of the six death camps. Deportation could be from a home town, a ghetto, or a transit camp such as Westerbork in the Netherlands.

EICHMANN, ADOLF (1906-1962)

SS Lieutenant-colonel and head of the "Jewish Section" of the Gestapo. Eichmann participated in the Wannsee Conference (January 20, 1942). He was instrumental in implementing the "Final Solution" by organizing the transportation of Jews to death camps from all over Europe. He was arrested at the end of World War II in the American zone, but escaped, went underground, and disappeared. On May 11, 1960, members of the Israeli Secret Service uncovered his whereabouts and smuggled him from Argentina to Israel. Eichmann was tried in Jerusalem (April-December 1961), convicted, and sentenced to death. He was executed on May 31, 1962.

FINAL SOLUTION

The name for the plan to destroy the Jews of Europe - the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question." The program of deportation to killing centers in the East was deceptively disguised as "resettlement in the East."

GENOCIDE

The deliberate and systematic destruction of a religious, racial, national, or cultural group.

GHETTO

The Nazis revived the medieval ghetto in creating their compulsory "Jewish Quarter". The ghetto was a section of a city where all Jews from the surrounding areas were forced to reside. Surrounded by barbed wire or walls, the ghettos were often sealed so that people were prevented from leaving or entering. Established mostly in Eastern Europe (e.g. Łódź, Warsaw, Krakow, Vilna, Riga, Minsk), the ghettos were characterized by overcrowding, starvation and forced labor. All were eventually destroyed as the Jews were deported to death camps.

GREATER GERMAN REICH

Designation of an expanded Germany that was intended to include all German speaking peoples. It was one of Hitler's most important aims. After the conquest of most of Western Europe during World War II, it became a reality for a short time.

HEYDRICH, REINHARD (1904-1942)

Former naval officer who joined the SS in 1932, after his dismissal from the Navy. He headed the SS Security Service (SD), a Nazi party intelligence agency. In 1933-1934, he became head of the political police (Gestapo) and later of the criminal police (Kripo). He combined Gestapo and Kripo into the Security Police (SIPO). In 1939, Heydrich combined the SD and SIPO into the Reich Security Main Office. He organized the *Einsatzgruppen* which systematically murdered Jews in occupied Russia during 1941-1942. In 1941, he was asked by Göring to implement a "Final Solution to the Jewish Question." During the same year he was appointed protector of Bohemia and Moravia. In January 1942, he presided over the Wannsee Conference, an meeting to coordinate the "Final Solution." On May 29, 1942, he was assassinated by Czech partisans who parachuted in from England. (For consequences of this assassination, see LIDICE).

HITLER, ADOLF (1889-1945)

Führer und Reichskanzler (Leader and Reich Chancellor). Although born in Austria, he settled in Germany in 1913. At the outbreak of World War I, Hitler enlisted in the Bavarian Army, became a corporal and received the Iron Cross First Class for bravery. Returning to Munich after the war, he joined the newly formed German Workers Party which was soon reorganized, under his leadership, as the National Socialist German Workers Party (*NSDAP*). In November 1923, he unsuccessfully attempted to forcibly bring Germany under nationalist control. When his coup, known as the "Beer-Hall Putsch," failed, Hitler was arrested and sentenced to 5 years in prison. It was during this time that he wrote *Mein Kampf*. Serving only 9 months of his sentence, Hitler quickly reentered German politics and soon outpolled his political rivals in national elections. In January 1933, Hindenburg appointed Hitler chancellor of a coalition cabinet. Hitler took office on January 30, 1933. In 1934, the chancellorship and presidency were united in the person of the *Führer*. Soon, all other parties were outlawed and opposition was brutally suppressed. By 1938, Hitler implemented his dream of a "Greater Germany," first annexing Austria; then, (with the acquiescence of the western democracies), the Sudetenland (Czech province with ethnic German concentration); and, finally, Czechoslovakia itself. On September 1, 1939, Hitler's armies invaded Poland. By this time the western democracies realized that no agreement with Hitler could be honored and World War II had begun. Although the war was obviously lost by early 1945, Hitler insisted that Germany fight to the death. On April 30, 1945, Hitler committed suicide rather than be captured alive.

HOLOCAUST

The state-sponsored systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims – six million were murdered; Roma and Sinti (Gypsies), people with mental and physical disabilities, and Poles were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, and political dissidents, also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi Germany.

JEWISH BADGE

A distinctive sign which Jews were compelled to wear in Nazi Germany and in Nazi-occupied countries. It usually took the form of a yellow Star of David worn on the clothing, or of a white armband with a blue Star of David.

JUDENRAT (PLURAL: JUDENRÄTE)

Council of Jewish representatives in communities and ghettos set up by the Nazis to carry out their instructions.

KAPO

Prisoner in charge of a group of inmates in Nazi concentration camps. Kapos usually had green (professional criminals) or red (political prisoners) triangles.

KREMATORIUM (plural Krematoria)

Unique to Auschwitz-Birkenau, these buildings featured gas chambers and cremation ovens in one building. Four such combination crematoria were built at Birkenau numbered Krema II-V.

KRISTALLNACHT (German)

Night of the Broken Glass: pogrom unleashed by the Nazis on November 9-10, 1938. Throughout Germany and Austria, synagogues and other Jewish institutions were burned, Jewish stores were destroyed, and their contents looted. At the same time, approximately 35,000 Jewish men were sent to concentration camps. The "excuse" for this action was the assassination of Ernst vom Rath in Paris by a Jewish teenager whose parents had been rounded up by the Nazis.

ŁÓDŹ

City in western Poland (renamed Litzmannstadt by the Nazis), where the first major ghetto was created in April 1940. By September 1941, the population of the ghetto was 144,000 in an area of 1.6 square miles (statistically, 5.8 people per room). In October 1941, 20,000 Jews from Germany, Austria and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia were sent to the Łódź Ghetto. Those deported from Łódź during 1942 and June-July 1944 were sent to the Chełmno death camp. In August-September 1944, the ghetto was liquidated and the remaining 60,000 Jews were sent to Auschwitz.

MAJDANEK

Death camp in eastern Poland. At first a labor camp for Poles and a POW camp for Soviets, it was later turned into a gassing center for Jews. Majdanek was liberated by the Red Army in July 1944, but not before 78,000 people, among them 60,000 Jews were murdered.

MAUTHAUSEN

A camp for men, opened in August 1938, near Linz in northern Austria, Mauthausen was classified by the SS as a camp of utmost severity. Conditions there were brutal, even by concentration camp standards. Nearly 100,000 prisoners of various nationalities were either worked or tortured to death at the camp before liberating American troops arrived in May 1945.

MENGELE, JOSEF (1911-1978?)

SS physician at Auschwitz, notorious for pseudo-medical experiments, especially on twins and Gypsies. He "selected" new arrivals by simply pointing to the right or the left, thus separating those considered able to work from those who were not. Those too weak or too old to work were sent straight to the gas chambers, after all their possessions, including their clothes, were taken for resale in Germany. After the war, he spent some time in a British internment hospital but disappeared, went underground, escaped to Argentina, and later to Paraguay, where he became a citizen in 1959. He was hunted by Interpol, Israeli agents, and Simon Wiesenthal. In 1986, his body was found in Embu, Brazil.

MUSSELMANN (German)

Concentration camp slang word for a prisoner who had given up fighting for life.

NUREMBERG LAWS

Three anti-Jewish statutes enacted September 1935 during the Nazi party's national convention in Nuremberg. The first, the Reich Citizenship Law, deprived German Jews of their citizenship and all pertinent, related rights. The second, the Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor, outlawed marriages of Jews and non-Jews, forbade Jews from employing German females of childbearing age, and prohibited Jews from displaying the German flag. Many additional regulations were attached to the two main statutes, which provided the basis for removing Jews from all spheres of German political, social, and economic life. The Nuremberg Laws carefully established definitions of Jewishness based on bloodlines. Thus, many Germans of mixed ancestry, called "*Mischlinge*," faced antisemitic discrimination if they had a Jewish grandparent.

PARTISANS

Irregular troops engaged in guerrilla warfare, often behind enemy lines. During World War II, this term was applied to resistance fighters in Nazi-occupied countries.

SA (abbreviation: *Sturmabteilung*)

The storm troops of the early Nazi party; organized in 1921.

SELECTION

Euphemism for the process of choosing victims for the gas chambers in the Nazi camps by separating them from those considered fit to work.

SOBIBOR

Death camp in the Lublin district in Eastern Poland. Sobibor opened in May 1942 and closed one day after a rebellion of the Jewish prisoners on October 14, 1943. Between 150,000 and 250,000 Jews were killed there.

SONDERKOMMANDO (German)

Jewish death camp prisoners forced to dispose of the bodies of murdered Jews.

SS

Abbreviation usually written with two lightning symbols for *Schutzstaffel* (Defense Protective Units). Originally organized as Hitler's personal bodyguard, the SS was transformed into a giant organization by Heinrich Himmler. Although various SS units were assigned to the battlefield, the organization is best known for carrying out the destruction of European Jewry.

TREBLINKA

Death camp in northeast Poland. Established in May 1942 along with the Warsaw- Bialystok railway line, approximately 700,000 people were murdered there. The camp operated until the fall of 1943 when the Nazis destroyed the entire camp in an attempt to conceal all traces of their crimes.

UKRAINIANS

Concentration and death camp guards of Ukrainian nationality.

VOLKSDEUTSCHE (German)

Ethnic Germans who were living outside of Germany, primarily in Poland.