

# Dachau concentration camp ( 30 March 1933-29 April 1945)

Official website <http://www.kz-gedenkstaette-dachau.de>

## 1. Introduction



*Aerial photo Dachau main camp*

It is located on the ground of the abandoned military factory at the time of WW1, in the southeast of Dachau, about 16 km (10mi) northwest of Munich in southern Germany. This was the first of the Nazi concentration camp - and has the longest history in use - intended to hold political enemies such as communists or socialists, clergy who were against the Nazi policy. Opened in 1933 by Heinrich Himmler, its initial purpose was soon enlarged to include forced labor, and After the Krystallnacht (Cristal night)\* the imprisonment of Jews increased. There were also ordinary German and Austrian criminals, homosexuals, Roma & Sinti, Jehovah's Witnesses, and POWs (especially soldiers from Soviet Union). It was also used as a training center for SS guards.

**\*Crystal Night:** on the night of 9-10 November in 1938 there was a series of coordinated deadly attacks against Jews throughout Nazi Germany and Austria. Suspected having carried out by SA paramilitary forces and non-Jewish civilians.

About Dachau camp in summary on video (4 min) <http://goo.gl/fSiHUR>

## 2. The camp history

The first buildings consisted of the remnants of an old WWI munitions factory. These buildings, with a capacity of about 5,000 prisoners, served as the main camp structures until 1937.

From the spring of 1937 the camp knew a big expansion; main grounds with 32 barracks for about 6,000 prisoners. In addition, over 30 sub-camps, which employed more than 30,000 prisoners, were created as satellites of the Dachau main camp. Overall the total system grew to include 140 sub-camps and kommando's, which were mostly work camps located in all southern Germany area and also in Austria.

During its existence from '33 to '45 over 200.000 persons from all over Europe were imprisoned and living under the extremely bad conditions. 41.500 people were murdered or died by hunger or by sickness until American troops liberated the survivors on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1945. (These numbers are based on the information of the official website of the camp, for it differs from sites). One third of the were Jewish.



*main entrance*

The camp's whole system were developed by SS Commandant Theodor Eicke; layout, building plans, the strict penalty rules and the control system of prisoners. Eicke became later the chief inspector for all concentration camps, so this camp served as a model for all later concentration camps and as a "school of violence" by SS men under the Third Reich.

Eicke hated the Jews and its treatments were very severe from the beginning. Prisoners lived in constant fear of brutal treatment and terror detention including standing cells, floggings, the so-called tree or pole hanging, and standing at attention for extremely long periods. There were 32,000 documented deaths at the camp, and thousands that are undocumented.

Overview of the camp <http://goo.gl/XO1VZq>

### 3. Life in the camp: Arbeit Macht frei (Work sets you free)

This is a famous phrase which was also on the main gate of Dachau concentration camp. The truth was contrary; they were forced to work to death under the extremely severe conditions and their living condition were also beyond the imagination. Dachau was not <extermination camp> but a work camp. Although the Gas-room was not in use, there were so many prisoners lose their lives because of these unhuman conditions and starvation.

Their work was consisted in maintain the camp, working at the herb garden which located nearby, in the diverse factories and places for military purpose, manufacturing weapons and other materials for Germany's efforts in World War II.

#### Hunger and Typhus

The facility had been designed to house some 6,000 detainees, but the population continued to rise and by 1944 approximately 30,000 prisoners were packed into the camp.

As the war went further the importance of the forced labor increased and they were put more difficult working conditions. Towards the end of the war the situation got even worse. As the opposition began to advance on Nazi Germany, uncountable number of prisoners from other camps at the front were sent to Dachau. Lots of them did not survived the transporting journey in the containers by train, or the disastrous living condition in Dachau. In a barrack for about 250 people 6,000 people were sleeping. The hygienic conditions and the supplies of food rations became disastrous. In November 1944 Typhus epidemic broke out and thousands of prisoners were died.

**Dr. Viktor Frankl**, a Viennese Psychiatrist, arriving in 1944 from Auschwitz to here where Typhus was raging, describes his experience and liberation of Dachau in his famous book **Man's Search for Meaning (1959)**

### 4. Medical experiments

The Nazis also used Dachau prisoners as subjects in brutal medical experiments, aiming at improving military survival rates and bettering medical technology for German civilians. These experiments were usually exceptionally painful and unneeded.

**High altitude experiments:** Presided by Sigmund Rascher at this experiments to aid German pilots who had to eject at high altitudes. A low-pressure chamber containing these prisoners was used to simulate conditions at altitudes of up to 20,000 m (66,000 ft). Of the 200 subjects, 80 died immediately, the others were executed.

**Sea water experiments:** This is to study various methods of making sea water drinkable. At one point, a group of roughly 90 Gipsy were deprived of food and given nothing but sea water to drink by Dr. Hans Eppinger, leaving them gravely injured. They were so dehydrated that others observed them licking freshly mopped floors in an attempt to get drinkable water.

**Malaria experiments:** Its purpose was in order to investigate immunization for treatment of malaria. After contracting the disease, the selected prisoners were treated with various drugs to test their relative efficiency. Over 1,000 people were used in these experiments and more than half died as a result.

**Freezing experiments:** A cold water immersion experiment was presided by Professor Ernst Holzlöhner and Dr. Sigmund Rascher. In 1941, the German air force conducted experiments with the intent of discovering means to prevent and treat hypothermia. There were 360 to 400 experiments and 280 to 300 victims. One study forced subjects to endure a tank of ice water for up to five hours.

## 5. Death Marches and Liberation

**Death marches April 1945:** just before to the liberation by the Allied forces, the SS ordered approximately 7,000 prisoners to embark on a six-day-long death march to Austrian border towards the Tegernsee, located to the south. Those who could not maintain a steady marching pace were shot by SS guards, other marchers died from starvation or physical exhaustion. More than 1,000 people could not survive this march. The survivors were freed by the Americans on May 2.



*Death marche from Dachau*



*Prisoners cheer US troops by liberation*

**Liberation:** On April 29 1945, the US troop finally liberated Dachau. They found approx. 32,000 of mostly emaciated and sick prisoners. In the a barrack for 250 people there were 1600(!) packed up. They also discovered 30 train cars filled with decomposed bodies, as well as laying unburied around the camp. American troops forced local citizens to the camp to see for themselves the conditions there and to help clean the facilities. Many local residents were shocked about the experience and claimed no knowledge of the activities at the camp.

**Dachau's Liberations reprisals:** this is a series of incidents after the surrender of German military force at Dachau concentration camp in which German POW were killed by American soldiers on April 29, 1945. According to the states Brigadier General Felix L. Sparks, the Colonel in command of a battalion that captured the camp in 1945 : "The total number of German guards killed at Dachau during that day most certainly does not exceed fifty, with thirty probably being a more accurate figure."

**Moment of liberation** (Caution, it contains very shocking images!)

Dailymotion.com <http://goo.gl/qxs2oW> (at the end you see also the first Easter)

Edited photo's on you tube: <http://goo.gl/FVuw9>

## 6. First Easter after the liberation

May 6, 23th April on the Orthodox calendar, was the day of Orthodox Easter. Catholic priests celebrated a normal sunday Mass. Several Greek, Serbian and Russian priests and one Serbian deacon, gathered with several hundred Greek, Serbian and Russian prisoners to celebrate the Paschal Vigil. The pristers were wearing makeshift vestments made from towels of the SS guard, A prisoner by name Rahr described the scene: (from Wikipedia)

"In the entire history of the Orthodox Church there has probably never been an Easter service like the one at Dachau in 1945. Greek and Serbian priests together with a Serbian deacon adorned the makeshift 'vestments' over their blue and gray-striped prisoners' uniforms. Then they began to chant, changing from Greek to Slavic, and then back again to Greek. The Easter Canon, the Easter Sticheras—everything was recited from memory. The Gospel—*In the beginning was the Word*—also from memory. And finally, the Homily of Saint John—also from memory. A young Greek monk from the Holy Mountain stood up in front of us and recited it with such infectious enthusiasm that we shall never forget him as long as we live. Saint John Chrysostomos himself seemed to speak through him to us and to the rest of the world as well!" At the end of the video you see this Miss.

## 7. After the liberation and now as a Museum

In 1948 the Bavarian government established housing for refugees on the site, and this remained for many years. In 1965 the memorial museum with two reconstructed barracks opened the door thanks to the effort by the ex-prisoners to preserve memories and history of this place. The 30 barracks are indicated with the concrete founding. There four chapels of the religion by which ex-prisoners were believed.

**Virtual tour of the camp:** [http://www.kz-gedenkstaette-dachau.de/virtual\\_tour.html](http://www.kz-gedenkstaette-dachau.de/virtual_tour.html)

### Source and links

Official website of the camp Dachau <http://www.kz-gedenkstaette-dachau.de/>

USHMM - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum <http://www.ushmm.org>

Wikipedia- Dachau concentration camp <http://goo.gl/MtAYA3>

<http://history1900s.about.com/od/1930s/a/Dachau.htm>

<http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/dachau>