

**I** was one year old the day the horror began.

It still seems like something out of the Dark Ages. March 29, 1933, just 11 days after becoming police chief in Munich, Germany, Heinrich Himmler announced the establishing of a concentration camp in the suburb of Dachau. It was the first of a series of concentration camps which would soon spread throughout Germany—camps where all those who opposed the new Nazi regime would be tortured and killed without mercy.

How could such a thing happen? Especially in this generation.

It was eerie still the morning I walked through the camp in southern Germany. A heavy fog had swept in from the Bavar-

ian moors as I made my way slowly through the deserted barracks section.

Now preserved as a memorial to the horror of "man's inhumanity to man," the camp remains bleak on the 48th anniversary of its opening. The high walls and rolls of cruel barbed wire are still in place.

Most of the barracks have been demolished; but the crematorium, the hanging poles, the torture blocks, and the guard towers remain.

The Kommandant's office is now a museum, filled with glass exhibition cases containing scraps of letters, striped uniforms, implements of torture, and life-sized photographs of mounds of hair, mounds of teeth, mounds of bodies being

pushed into graves by bulldozers—mute evidence of unspeakable horror in an era which is only one generation removed from present-day Germany.

The only sound was the crunch of my feet on the gravel walkway. The fog swirled thickly against my face, freezing into tiny droplets on my eyebrows and lashes. In front of me, looming out of the gray mist, was a machine gun tower. Only a tiny sign marks the place where the blood of thousands soaked the ground:

"All who stepped on this grass strip, on purpose or accidentally, were shot immediately."

Beyond the tower, barely visible, was the building where the horrible medical experiments were carried out. Here the

# DACHAU

*Only as long as men remain  
free, can the horror of the  
holocaust be prevented  
from happening once more*

**BY JAMIE BUCKINGHAM**





Polish clergymen were the prime target as they were infected with various deadly disease germs, immersed in freezing salt water to study its effects on the human body, or disemboweled without anesthesia to study the effects of pain on the nervous system.

No one was spared, women and children alike were subjected to the most cruel torture ever devised by man—all in the name of medical experimentation.

I stood silently, my heart beating in my throat, and thought I could hear from across the fog-swept moor the shrieks and moans of the masses whose spirits somehow still seem to haunt that dismal place.

No wonder the citizens in the little vil-

lage of Dachau had been reluctant to give me information on how to reach the concentration camp. It was a page in their proud history that no one wishes to remember—yet all fear they might forget.

How could such a thing happen in a civilized world? Even more devastating is the question: Could it happen again?

The 12 years from 1933 to 1945 bracket one of the darkest periods in human history. Under the fiendish leadership of Adolph Hitler and carried out by such madmen as Himmler and Theodor Eicke, (commander of Dachau and later inspector general for all Nazi concentration camps), prisoners from more than 40 nations were tortured, used in satanic med-

ical experiments, and murdered at the whim of the SS guards.

The Nazi party, with Hitler rapidly rising as the "new messiah," had seized power of the nation on January 30, 1933. First to be arrested were the Jehovah's Witnesses, followed by journalists, clergymen, resistance fighters and—finally—the Jews. With the exception of the Jews, all prisoners were labeled "political."

For the Children of Israel, however, was reserved the cruelest of all persecutions ever devised by man. The intended result was so gruesome and unique the writers of dictionaries had to coin a new word to describe it: genocide—the annihilation of an entire race of people.

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Prisoners at Dachau, the most infamous Nazi concentration camp of all, cheer the arrival of American troops who liberated the camp.

WIDE WORLD PHOTOS



# Dachau

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In November 1938 came the infamous "Crystal Night" when, with government approval, and egged on by a public propaganda crusade, citizens of Germany and Bavaria went to the streets to break the windows of Jewish shops and residences.

Immediately Jews were arrested. More than 10,000 from all over Bavaria were brought to Dachau—where they were systematically exterminated. Some 30,000 human beings, starved and tortured, almost beyond recognition, were packed into a confine meant to hold 5,000 at maximum.

Surrounded by high walls, barbed wire, and deep moats guarded by high towers, these former citizens of Germany were starved, shot, tortured to death, and burned in the ovens. As the war drew to a climax in the mid-1940s, the Nazis worked feverishly trying to eradicate all Jews from the face of the earth.

The huge chimneys at Dachau and other concentration camps belched smoke

After the bombing raids on Munich, groups of Dachau prisoners labeled as "death squads" were sent to search for unexploded bombs and to do initial cleaning. Those who survived this impossible mission were herded back to Dachau where up to 1,600 people were crowded into freezing barracks originally intended to hold 200.

In early 1942, a well-known German physician and researcher, Dr. Claus Schilling, was invited to Dachau to carry out experiments using human guinea pigs.

In the last weeks before the liberation, the concentration camp became a living nightmare. Gigantic transports were continually arriving from the camps evacuated in the face of the advancing Allies, bringing human beings who were—for the most part—reduced to skeletons and exhausted unto death. From each railway box car it was necessary to remove scores of corpses of those who had died en route.

On April 14, 1945, Himmler telegraphed the following command to the camp commanders of Dachau and Flos-



Some 30,000 prisoners were packed in Dachau barracks designed to hold 5,000 at maximum.

24 hours a day as bodies were cremated.

The American soldiers who liberated Dachau on April 29, 1945, found even before they reached the camp itself, a freight train filled with dead. In the confusion of the war's last days, the train had never been unloaded. It was a terrifying spectacle, powerfully displaying the methods of a government based on religion, but devoid of God.

Every means of murder imaginable was involved. Soviet prisoners-of-war were tied to posts outside the concentration camp walls where the SS guards used them as target practice with pistols and rifles.

senburg: "There is to be no question of surrender. The camp must be evacuated immediately. Not a single living prisoner must fall into the hands of the enemy."

On April 26, a secret committee of prisoners authorized two prisoners to escape from the camp and find their way to the American troops whose approach could be heard by the roar of the guns. They were to ask them to come to Dachau as quickly as possible to save the camp from the mass extermination which had already begun. The prisoners were successful and two days later, the Americans,

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# Dachau

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who had originally planned to capture Munich first, arrived in Dachau.

Sadly, the day before, 7,000 prisoners were forced under SS guard to march southward. Hundreds were shot and left to die along the roads. Hundreds others perished from hunger, cold, and exhaustion as they marched through the rain and snow until overtaken by the pursuing American troops. Only then, just before the Americans arrived, did the accompanying SS guards take flight—leaving the remaining prisoners behind.

Today's German citizens swear they knew nothing of what was going on behind the walls of almost 100 concentration camps spread across Germany and Poland. Yet the records show that many of the prisoners were used as slave laborers in nearby industrial plants. That no citizen or government leader dared object is mute testimony to the spirit of fear which gripped an entire nation. Yet it is incredible to believe that no one but a few SS guards knew what was happening.

Many knew. None dared question.

I stood for a long time that morning, looking at the granite marker near the gate in the roll-call square. Chiseled in four languages are the words which cry: "NEVER AGAIN."

How could a nation that produced a Goethe and a Schiller, a Beethoven and a Mozart, a Schopenhauer and a Kant have fallen to such indescribable insanity?

Yet, when a people grant absolute authority to a government, allowing it to become totalitarian, there is always the possibility—and more accurately the probability—that such a spectacle will repeat itself.

History records the deaths of more than six million Jews. But it was not just the Jews who were murdered. *There were twice as many Christians.* The ovens and gas chambers of the Nazi concentration camps received the mentally retarded, the cripples, the free thinkers, the college professors, the clergy, the newspaper publishers and writers, in fact, anyone who questioned the right of a totalitarian government to decide what was best for the people.

It is the Jews we remember. The word "holocaust" now has a special meaning—reserved for those years of horror to the sons of Abraham. To them it became the climax of generations of pogroms and killings by the Egyptians, the Babylonians,

the Persians, the Syrians, the Romans, the Turks, the Christians . . . all part of an incredible history of a people who are not only God's chosen, but the world's persecuted.

The Jews never forget. Nor will they let the world forget. Not this time. In Jerusalem the Yad Vashem, the holocaust memorial, is visited by every Jew in the Middle East. It stands as a sad symbol of the Hebrew spirit, and a promise for those who do not understand this nation's unwillingness ever again to base the future of a people on the promises of others.

To the Jews it is a lesson learned. To the rest of us, a lesson yet to be taught.

In Russia there are such slave camps in existence today. A few have escaped to tell us—but like the citizens of Germany we choose to close our ears. The same picture is repeated, in even more vivid horror, in North Korea, Vietnam, and Cambodia.

And what about Africa, where countless thousands of Christians have been martyred for their faith and where those who dare cry out for freedom are tortured and killed?

The ghosts of Hitler, Himmler, Eichman, Schilling and Eicke still roam the world seeking a habitation in the souls of men.

Let it be to the lasting tribute of Americans that we have maintained a government "of the people, by the people and for the people . . ." Yet even our nation, it seems, is always on the brink of becoming totalitarian.

Fundamentalist church groups would push their brand of Christianity upon us all. Arrogant politicians are returned to office even after they have been convicted of crimes, because their constituents are on the receiving end of their pipeline of government money.

And, who dares raise a voice against the highhanded methods of the Internal Revenue Service or any other government agency which operates as a law unto themselves?

Never again? Yet . . .

As Germany moved from its semi-democratic state to the totalitarian government under the control of the Nazi party, very few objected when Hitler imprisoned the Jehovah's Witnesses. They were "pests" anyway. Besides, they were enemies of the state since they wouldn't salute the flag or say "Heil Hitler." Those who did protest, a few journalists and free clergymen, were also arrested. They were classified as "enemy sympathizers."

The ball was now rolling and it was easy to jail more newspapermen and clergymen who actively protested. Next came those who opposed the Nazi party—political enemies—and finally the party was



strong enough to show their true colors and move in on the Jews.

By now the entire nation was clutched in fear. Power had moved from the governed to the government, manifesting its fury by lashing out at the insipid bourgeois which threatened it.

It seems that religious persecution is always tied in somehow with political totalitarianism. As long as people remain free, they will somehow find a way to exist together, to worship without killing one another. But once they relinquish that freedom to others, once they submit their wills and freedom to the will of someone else, what invariably follows is religious persecution.

Yet the answer does not lie in democracy, either. For democracy without God will eventually devour itself. In fact, it is doomed to devour itself, for it demands equal rights for criminals as well as victims.

It just takes a bit longer than under a dictator, that's all.

Brazil. Argentina. Cuba. Russia. Cambodia. China. Any nation that allows the power of the governed to rest in the hands of the government will soon open their own Dachaus. And history will repeat itself with incredible horror and bestial cruelty.

That is the reason the Jews still nod wisely when the story is told of the rabbi who took his little son, put him on a stepladder, and said "Jump, son. Daddy will catch you."

The little boy obediently jumped. The father stepped back and the child crashed to the ground. As the little boy was getting up and brushing himself off, the father said, "Let that be a lesson to you. A Jew can't trust anyone."

The Jew knows. It is not apocryphal. It is reality.

The walls and fences at Dachau no longer keep prisoners in, but like the millions of others who have walked through these gates, there is a stark picture of a government gone berserk etched on my soul. For still, on this fog-shrouded moor, there remains the memory of listless phantoms who forever inhale the acrid smoke of burnt flesh.

Inside the memorial building, at the end of a long row of huge photographs, depicting the atrocities, is a quote from the poet Santayana, a grim reminder to the citizens of the world.

*"Die sich des Vergangenen nicht erinnern sind dazu verurteilt, es noch einmal zu erleben."* Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

Never again?

Only as long as men remain free. ↪