

# The Concentration Camp Memorial Site Dachau

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Part 1: The concentration camp in Dachau

Part 2: The concentration camp memorial site

Part 3: My work at the memorial site

# 1) The Concentration Camp Dachau

# The Concentration Camp Dachau

- March 22nd 1933 until April 29th 1945
- First official camp the Nazis established
- Located in Dachau, Bavaria (South Germany), near Munich
- Set up in an abandoned munitions factory
- The SS as watch guards from April 1933

- Dachau as a **model camp** for all the concentration camps established by the Nazis
- Also as a **propaganda camp**: constantly presented to visitors and photographers; propaganda reports published in newspapers and magazines (from 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1933 until 1941)
- Next to the prisoner's camp: the headquarters of the SS and a **training camp for SS units** (six times larger than the prisoner's camp) – not part of the Memorial Site

# 1933-1939

- First prisoners: political opponents such as communists, social democrats, other intellectuals, trade unionists
- Later prisoners also included Jehovah's witnesses, homosexuals, emigrants, criminal offenders (as a “preventive action”), Sinti and Roma, other social minorities
- Only German prisoners until 1938 (including Austrians, Sudeten Germans)

- Only male prisoners (until 1944)
- Demolition of the old buildings of the munitions factory (on the site of the prisoner's camp)
- Construction of a new camp by the prisoners (1937 – 1938)
- 1938: Deportation of more than 11,000 German Jews to the camp
- 1939: Training of the “Waffen-SS” in the prisoner's camp

# 1939 - 1942

- Terror in the camp intensified
- Prisoners from Poland and other occupied countries are deported to Dachau
- 1941 mass shooting of more than 4000 prisoners from the Soviet Union
- "Invalid Transports" – more than 2,500 ill prisoners murdered with poison gas at Hartheim Castle near Linz
- Start of medical experiments on prisoners



# 1942 -1945

- Living conditions worsened dramatically
- Start of the installation of more than 150 subsidiary camps in which the prisoners were subjected to forced labor for the armaments industry
- First female prisoners are deported to Dachau
- 10,000 Jewish prisoners are killed "through work" in subsidiary camps

- Thousands die of typhus in the course of evacuation marches or as a result of malnutrition
- Founding of an International Prisoner Committee (CID)
- More than 206,000 prisoners from over 30 nations registered
- Approximately 41,000 prisoners died

# The Liberation

- On April 29th, 1945 by two divisions of the American Army
- Ca. 32,000 survivors
- Extremely starved and ill
- Horrible living conditions in the camp
- Arrests of German perpetrators (SS and others)

## 2) The Concentration Camp Memorial Site

# The Establishment of the Memorial Site

- First small exhibition set up in the crematorium in 1945 by survivors
- Refugee camp 1948 – 1964
- 1962: The Bavarian state government and the CID agree on the creation of a memorial.
- Work begins with outlining the former barracks and repairing of the walls and watch towers
- 1965: Opening of the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site with a new exhibition

# The Memorial Site today

- Almost 1 million visitors every year:
  - German students (age 14/15)
  - Visitors from all over the world
- Current conditions:
  - Original buildings
  - Replicas
  - New Buildings (built after 1945)



# Original Buildings:

- Entrance Building (Jourhaus)
- Maintenance Building
- Camp Prison (Bunker)
- Crematorium
- Seven Watchtowers
- The roll call square



# The Entrance Building April 1945



- Originally one entrance and one exit with an office for the camp staff
- The building separated the SS camp from the concentration camp
- The sentence “Arbeit macht frei” used here for the first time

# Entrance building today





- Today it is the main entrance for visitors to the memorial site
- Presently the building is not accessible

# The Maintenance Building

- Built by the prisoners 1937-1938 as part of the new camp containing
- The kitchen
- The laundry
- The prisoner's bathroom
- The registration room
- Several work-units

# Maintenance Building 1939



- „Es gibt einen Weg zur Freiheit. Seine Meilensteine heißen: Gehorsam, Fleiß, Ehrlichkeit, Ordnung, Sauberkeit, Nüchternheit, Wahrhaftigkeit, Opfersinn und Liebe zum Vaterland.“
- “There is one path of freedom. Its milestones are: obedience, honesty, cleanliness, sobriety, diligence, orderliness, self-sacrifice, truthfulness, love of thy fatherland“.



# Its function today

- Museum
- Exhibition (2003)
- Administration and Archive of the Memorial Site (ca. 50 employees)
- Seminar rooms
- Room for special exhibitions
- Film room (documentary film 1969)

# Museum and Archive



# The Camp Prison

- Built by the prisoners 1937-1938 (as part of the new camp)
- The center of terror
- Executions and torture
- 136 cells: solitary confinement and darkened cells
- Special prisoners

# The Camp Prison



# The Camp Prison Today

- Used by the American army for German prisoner until 1948
- Open for visitors since 2000
- Small exhibition covering the life and the suffering of the prisoners in the camp prison

# The camp prison today



# Crematorium

- First crematorium built in summer 1940
- Second crematorium built May 1942 until April 1943
- Includes a gas chamber
- The gas chamber was not used for mass murder
- It was presumably used for a medical experiment









# The Crematorium today

- A Cemetery
- Ash graves behind the crematorium
- Short path through a little forest
- Various memorials for the victims

# The Unknown Prisoner (1950)



# Replicas of original barracks

- Two Barracks
- Original 34 barracks demolished in 1962
- Reason: Refugee camp 1948 - 1964
- Foundations built as reminder
- One replica includes a small exhibition and reconstructions of the interior of the prisoner's barracks

# Barracks in First Camp (1933-1937)



# Barracks 1938-1945



# Reconstructed barracks





# Interior (Reconstructed)



# New Buildings

- International Memorial (1968)
- Visitor Center (2009)

# The Visitor Center (2009)



- Religious Memorials:

- Catholic Chapel (1960)

- Carmelite Convent (1964)

- Jewish Memorial (1967)

- Lutheran Church (1967)

- Russian Orthodox Chapel (1995)



# The Memorial Site – what is involved?

- Administration of the memorial site
- Maintaining the site and the exhibitions
- Historical research (archive)
- Commemorations and ceremonies throughout the year
- Invitations to eye witnesses and arrange their talks and presentations
- Educational department

# Guided Tours for Visitors

- Memorial Site open all year every day 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Every day: Open tours for visitors in German and English (3 times a day)
- Booked tours for groups in German, English and other languages
- Audio guides available in 10 different languages

- Variety regarding the duration, the structure, the topic of the tours
- A regular tour lasts 2 ½ - 3 hours
- They are offered by the Educational Department of the Memorial Site and by other organizations in Dachau
- Alongside these tours there is a long tradition of political and educational activities by citizens and organizations (starting in the 1980s) in Dachau



# The Challenges

- The site itself: big and bleak, at times very crowded; only few quiet and sheltered places
- The maintenance of the site all year round
- The museum: often busy, not suitable for everyone
- The subject matter: the sheer amount of information (1933-1945) and the emotional reactions of the visitors

- Individual needs of the visitors (e.g. people with special needs)
- Weather conditions
- Coordination with colleagues

# Groups and single visitors

- Previous knowledge
- Various kinds of preparation
- Individual emotional situation (apprehension, fear, insecurity, personal burdens)
- Tensions within the group
- Circumstances of the visit (exchange program, curriculum at school, other reasons)

### 3) My work at the memorial site

- Educational background: Lawyer and Musician (Organist in Dachau), Degree in Literature
- Legal Custodian for handicapped and elderly people
- Free lance tour guide at the memorial site since 1998 after training and exam
- Tours in German and English for any kind of groups

- Specialization:
- tours for students with learning disabilities and other particular needs
- tours in English for college and university students

# My tasks as a tour guide/guardian

- To adapt the tour to the individuals/ group
- This includes:
  - Devising a suitable tour
  - Level of language
  - Content
  - Duration

- To include the comments and questions from the participants
- To serve as an “ambassador” of Germany and Dachau (with non-German groups)
- To offer an orientation on the site
- To offer the information they might need or want on their way to understand history
- by telling the stories of the camp and of the prisoners



- To very gently break the bad news:
- “It happened, therefore it can happen again: this is the core of what we have to say. It can happen, and it can happen everywhere.”

Primo Levi

# My Guidelines

- To meet each visitor and each group with an open mind
- To show respect for everyone in the group
- To feel empathy for everyone
- To take care of their well-being as far as possible
- To try to meet their expectations
- To take each question seriously

# Annual International Youth Meeting in Dachau (since 1983)

- Ca 90-100 young adults from all over the world
- 12 days of workshops and discussions about the Holocaust and the danger of fascism, totalitarianism and discrimination
- My responsibility for the meeting of the eyewitnesses (survivors) from the Nazi concentration camps

- My experience of the eye-witnesses:
- They want us to listen not to judge
- They want us to show respect not pity
- They want us to acknowledge them as individuals not as victims and not as books either
- They want us to carry their message on to the world