

DID YOU KNOW?

Soon after Adolf Hitler became president and chancellor of Germany in 1934, the Nazi party began enacting laws to restrict Jews from mainstream society. The **Nuremberg Laws of 1935** were the first to label Jews as a race and not a religion. Anyone with at least one Jewish grandparent was considered a Jew and had to submit to restrictions and wearing the **yellow star**. The first **concentration camps** were established in 1933 in Germany.

These camps began as detention centers for Communists, homosexuals, and political dissidents. At this time there were 10 camps and over 25,000 prisoners. Jews were first sent to concentration camps after **Kristallnacht** ("Night of Broken Glass") a state sponsored massacre of Jewish synagogues, businesses, and property on November 9 and 10, 1938. Nazis rounded up 30,000 Jewish men to be sent to concentration camps.

With the onset of World War II in 1939 and the Nazi invasion of Poland, the need for labor resulted in the creation of forced labor camps. Hitler also ordered that all Jews be removed from "the old and new Reich area" to make room for "pure Germans." Jews were forced out of their homes and forced to live in overcrowded, impoverished **ghettos** where many died of starvation and disease.

Nazis began deporting Jews to concentration camps in 1942.

The Nazis invaded Russia in 1941. Special mobile killing squads, the "**Einsatzgruppen**" went into action to execute Jews. In 1941, the Nazis adopted "The Final Solution" which referred to the Nazi plan to murder all European Jews. The first death camp, Chelmno, was established in 1941. In the next two years, 4 other camps were **established** with the sole purpose of killing Jews. These camps were Belzec, Majdanek, Treblinka, and Auschwitz. All death camps were in Poland.

All camps were not operated the same way. There were work camps, prison camps,

detention camps, concentration camps, death camps and camps which **combined** methods of detention.

READING PASSAGE: CONCENTRATION CAMPS

AN EXPLOSION OF HATRED

Once in power, Hitler began to change Germany's government. It had been democratic; now, Hitler gave many extra powers as ruler, claiming that Germany was in a state of emergency. His title was *Führer*—

leader. He even had power over the German president, Paul von Hindenburg. Soon after becoming chancellor, January 1933, Hitler convinced Hindenburg to give the police the authority to prohibit public gatherings and to censor publications. Now Hitler could control the police and the press. himself r in

When Hindenburg died in August 1934, Hitler became president and chancellor. He was on his way to total control of the country. The Nazis began to enact laws that curtailed the rights of Jewish citizens. Little by little, Jews were forced to give up their jobs, property, and businesses. Jewish students were taken out of public schools and forced into special Jewish schools.

The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 took persecution a step farther, giving an official, pseudoscientific definition of the so-called "Jewish race." Anyone with at least one Jewish grandparent was considered to be Jewish and had to submit to the laws restricting Jews.

By mid-1939, about 300,000 Jews had managed to emigrate from Germany. Tragically, many fled to parts of Europe that soon came under German occupation. Many would later become victims of the Holocaust.

HISTORY OF THE CAMPS

The Nazis developed their concentration camps and death camps gradually, starting in 1933. One of Hitler's first goals was to silence his enemies before they had a chance to speak. Many Germans who were seen as threats to the Nazi government would be sent to the German detention centers in Dachau, Buchenwald, and Sachsenhausen, for hard labor and other punishment. By the summer of 1933, there were ten Nazi prison camps with more than



25,000 prisoners.

In the beginning, such prisoners might have had hopes of coming home. Later these camps turned into slave-labor camps where prisoners were forced to work to help Germany win the war. On a starvation diet, with little clothing, and performing heavy labor, most prisoners became deathly ill, emaciated, and weak. Those unable to work usually would be removed and killed or left to die. Then more prisoners would arrive to take their places.

WAR BEGINS

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. This was part of a larger military plan to seize control of much of Europe in order to establish *Lebensraum*, or living space for Germans. Hitler ordered that Jews, Poles, and other non-Germans be removed from the “old and new Reich area” to make room for so-called pure Germans.

The German army invaded country after country. Jews in the newly occupied lands were removed from their homes, under threat or by force, and placed in heavily guarded ghettos across occupied Europe.

Before being forced to leave their homes, Jews had to give up most of their belongings. Many had lived simply, in rural villages. Others had valuable possessions, such as jewelry and paintings. The Germans put stolen valuables in banks or hid them elsewhere for the use of the Reich. They sold the rest—including beds and tablecloths—for profit.

Confined in overcrowded ghettos, the Jews lived in impoverished conditions, with insufficient food, heat, medicine, and clothing. Many died as a result of disease, starvation, and lack of protection from the elements. Bringing the Jews together in ghettos made it easier for the Nazis to deport them in large groups to concentration camps later.

Two years later, following Germany’s invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, the Nazis adopted a brutal policy toward Jews living in lands invaded by the Nazis: after the German army occupied a new territory, special mobile killing squads known as *Einsatzgruppen* went into action. They rounded up Jews and other “enemies” of the Nazis—often with the assistance of local collaborators—and executed them.

The Nazis devised a system to murder all of European Jewry through mass executions. In 1941, several concentration camps were built for the specific purpose of killing. The first to be completed was Chelmno, in Poland.

By the summer of 1942, camps for gassing had also been built in Belzec, Majdanek, and Treblinka, all in Poland. The Nazis began to send the Jews from the ghettos to the death camps.

When they arrived at the death camps, Jews faced a *Selektion*, or Nazi selection of prisoners. Some 10 percent might be spared immediate death and be sent to work. Those marked for death—usually, the unfit, the very young, the elderly, and mothers with children—would be sent to gas chambers. Sometimes, the Nazis tried to disguise what was happening by telling the new arrivals they were about to have showers. At other times, new arrivals would be whipped or beaten on their way to their death.

Those who survived the initial selection usually underwent a humiliating process: Their heads were shaved in order to remove or prevent lice; they had to discard their clothes and belongings and were issued prison uniforms and wooden shoes, or clogs; and at Auschwitz, they would receive an identification tattoo. Sometimes they would receive a cup or bowl, without which they could not receive nourishment. A metal soup bowl could mean the difference between life and death.

Then began months, even years of labor, some of it excruciatingly exhausting. Food and water were scarce. Camp guards were often cruel. Regular selections by the Nazi guards led to the removal of the weak or sick. Those “selected” would never be seen again. While struggling to survive against these odds, most inmates had to contend with the fact that their families and friends were probably dead. Sometimes the pain was too great, and prisoners took their own lives.

NOT THE GERMANS ALONE

Meanwhile, Hitler’s paranoid claim that Jews wanted to control the world was actually a fitting description of his own goals.

By the end of the war, Germany had occupied most of Europe and parts of Scandinavia and the former Soviet Union. With the exception of Denmark, occupied countries assisted in the German policy against Jews.

Italy, which was Germany’s ally, also introduced restrictions against Jews. In addition, several countries allied themselves to Germany and its wartime allies: Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and parts of Yugoslavia.

Ultimately, of some 9 million Jews who lived in those later-occupied areas before the war, some 6 million were killed by the Nazis in mass executions or in the death camps.

1999 Axelrod, T. “In the Camps” Teen Witnesses to the Holocaust.

Reprinted with permission by The Rosen Publishing Group, Inc.

Concentration and Death Camps

In an effort to deal with groups of people whom the Nazis considered to be “subhuman,” a variety of concentration camps were established throughout Europe from 1933 until the end of World War II. The early camps began as detention centers in the mid-1930s for Communists, homosexuals, and political dissidents. With the onset of the war in 1939, the need for laborers resulted in the creation of forced labor camps in which prisoners became virtual slaves. Here, Jews and others were subjected to the most inhuman treatment, often resulting in death through illness, starvation, beatings, or execution.

In 1942, with the adoption of the “Final Solution,” the Nazi plan to murder all European Jews, the emphasis shifted from concentration camps to death camps. The sole purpose of those camps was to murder millions of Jews by gassing them and burning their remains.

In December 1941, Chelmno, the first death camp, was established. The camp consisted of little more than a garage and several trucks in which carbon monoxide was the killing tool for about one thousand Jews a day. By July 1942, the camps at Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka were created. By the fall of 1943, these camps in northern Poland had already accomplished their tasks and ceased to function.

The locations of the hundreds of concentration camps and death camps reveal much about the Nazi mentality and raise some significant questions for discussion.

Austria Ebensee, Gusen, Mauthausen

Belgium Breendonk, Malines

Bulgaria Somovit

Czechoslovakia Novaky, Patronka, Petrzalka, Terezin, Zilina

Estonia Aigali, Ereda, Goldfield, Kalevi, Klooga, Lagedi, Liiva, Vaivara

France Agde, Argeles-ser-mer, Barcares, Beaune la Rodande, Camp du Richard, Compiègne, Drancy, Fort-Barraux, Gurs, Les Milles, Natzweiler-Struthof, Nexon, Pithiviers, Saint-Cyprien

Galicia Borislav, Buchach, Lvov, Plaszow

Germany Arbeitsdorf, Bergen-Belsen, Bochum, Brunswick, Buchenwald, Cottbus, Dachau, Dora, Esterwegen, -Flossenburg, Grossrosen, Lichtenburg, Nevenhamme, Niederhagen, Oranienburg, Ravensbruck, Sachsenhausen, Wells

Greece Haidon

Hungary Kistarsa

Italy Boizano, Fossoli, Mantua, Raab

Lativa Kaiserwald, Salaspils

Libia Giado, Horns

Lichtenburg Lichtenburg

Lithuania Kaunas, Ponary

Netherlands Amersfoort, Vught, Westerbork

Poland Auschwitz, Belzec,* Beizyce, Birkenau,* Bogusze, Bronna Gora, Budzyn, Burggraben, Chelmno,* Chodosy, Chryzanow, Ciezanow, Elbing, Gerdaven, Heiligenbeil, Jaktorow, Jesau, Karczew, Kelbasin, Kielce, Kosaki, Lackie, Wielkie, Majdanek,* Miedzyrzec Podaiski, Mielec, Mlyniewo, Nisko, Peikinia, Plew, Pomiechówek, Praust, Radomsko, Sasov, Schippenbeil, Seerapen, Skarzysk-Kamjenna, Sobibor,* Stolp, Stutthof, Thorn, Treblinka,* Tyszowce, Zaglebia, Zapрудy, Zaslav, Zawarnice, Zbaszyn

Rumania Caracal, Markulesci

Russia Akmechetka, Bogdanovka, Bratslav, Domanevka, Golta, Kamenka-Bugskaia, Koldychevo, Maly Trostinek, Odessa, Paczara,

Sekiryani, Targu-Jiu, Tiraspol, Vapnyarka, Volkoysk, Yedintsy, Zborov
Yugoslavia Ada, Djakovo, Jadovna, Jasenovac, Loborgrad, Saymishte
*Death Camps

CONCENTRATION CAMPS MAP



Used with permission of The United States Holocaust
Memorial Museum

CONCENTRATION CAMPS

“THE FINAL SOLUTION”

Methods of Extermination

- **Einsatzgruppen** – After the June 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union, these mobile killing squads began executing entire Jewish communities and others hated by Hitler by shooting them into mass graves or in gas vans. Himmler wanted his troops to feel like they “factory” jobs. In one year, the Einsatzgruppen murdered over one million Jews in this manner. Ultimately though, it was thought to be too costly and a psychological burden on the troops. Later, the Nazis would turn to the use of Zyklon B and gas chambers as the primary source of extermination.
- **Euthanasia** – A secret euthanasia program, T4, was started in 1939 for the systematic killing of the institutionalized mentally and physically handicapped. An estimated 275,000 people were murdered in this program. They were the 1st victims of Hitler. This idea would develop Hitler’s primary source of extermination in the future.
- **Gas Chambers** – This method was developed after the “Final Solution” was implemented in 1942. Carbon Monoxide was used as the killing agent in the gas chambers at the death camps, Belzec, Treblinka, and Sobibor. The gas chambers at Auschwitz and Majdanek used the gas Zyklon B where they killed over 1,000 people a day. Over a million people were murdered in the gas chambers at Auschwitz alone.

CONCENTRATION CAMPS

GENERAL INFORMATION

- **Deportations** – This was the method of transporting Jews to concentration camps. The Jews and others were packed in cattle cars. Over 100 people were forced to stand in each car. They were not fed and there were no sanitation facilities. The trip often took days or even weeks and many died before arrival to the camps.
- **Selections** – Upon arrival to the death camps, prisoners were lined up and evaluated by a physician. People were generally forced to be naked for selections. Those who appeared to be healthy were sent to the camp to be used for slave labor. The elderly, the unfit, the very young, and mothers with small children were selected to go directly to the gas chambers. Some women and children were specifically selected for medical experiments. 1,500,000 children were murdered during the Holocaust.
- **Tattoo** – Jews and other prisoners in Auschwitz concentration camps and several other camps were given a number which was tattooed on their forearm for identification purpose. This was used to help the Nazis with their own documentation and record keeping. It was just

one of the methods used to “dehumanize” the Jews.

CONCENTRATION CAMPS

VICTIMS

- **JEWS** – Jews were the only group targeted by the Nazis for mass extinction.
- **HOMOSEXUALS** – According to Nazi legislation (Paragraph 175) homosexuality is punishable by law; 50,000 were arrested and incarcerated. Of these, 5,000 – 15,000 were sent to concentration camps. It is unknown how many of these victims were killed but it is reported that homosexuals received very harsh treatment from the guards at the camps. They were identified with a pink triangle and a black dot with the number 175.
- **HANDICAPPED** – Over 200,000 handicapped citizens were killed in concentration camps and euthanasia centers. They were thought of as “useless lives” and “incurably ill.” These were the first victims to be cremated. This method was later expanded in the death camps.

- **JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES** – This was the only victim group that was given the opportunity to escape persecution by swearing allegiance to the Reich and renouncing their religious beliefs. Of the 10,000 Jehovah's Witnesses in concentration camps, almost none left. They upheld their beliefs and stayed in the camps by choice. Approximately 5,000 Jehovah Witnesses were killed in the camps. They wore a purple triangle on their uniform.
- **SINTI & ROMA** – (Gypsies) They were identified by a black triangle on their camp uniforms. An estimated 220,000–500,000 Gypsies were killed by the Nazis.
- **POLES** - It is believed that 1.8 to 1.9 million Polish civilians were victims of the Nazis. This figure includes civilians who were executed, those who died in prisons, those who were forced into labor, and those detained in concentration camps. To destroy the Polish resistance, the Germans killed the nation's, religious, political, and intellectual leaders. Many Polish children were kidnapped for adoption by Germans.

SS REICHSFURER HEINRICH HIMMLER

OCTOBER 4, 1943

ADDRESS TO SS MAJOR-GENERALS

Our basic principle must be the absolute rule for the SS man; we must be honest, decent, loyal, and comradely to members of our own blood and to nobody else. What happens to a Russian, to a Czech does not interest me in the slightest. What the nations can offer in the way of good blood of our type, we will take, if necessary by kidnapping their children and raising them here with us. Whether 10,000 Russian females fall down from exhaustion while digging an anti-tank ditch interests me only in so far as the anti-tank ditch for Germany is finished. We shall never be rough and heartless when it is not necessary, that is clear. We Germans, who are the only people in the world who have a decent attitude towards animals, will also assume a decent attitude towards these human animals.

I also want to talk to you, quite frankly, on a very grave matter. Among ourselves it should be mentioned quite frankly, and yet we will never speak of it publicly.

I mean the clearing out of the Jews, the extermination of the Jewish race. It's one of those things it is easy to talk about – 'The Jewish race is being exterminated,' says one party member, that's quite clear, its in our program -- elimination of the Jews, and we're doing it, exterminating them.' And then they come, 80 million worthy Germans, and each one has his decent Jew. Of course the others are vermin, but this one is an A-1 Jew. Not one of all those who must know what it means when 100 corpses are lying side by side, or 500 or 1,000. To have stuck it out and at the same time -- apart from exceptions caused by human weakness -- to have remained decent fellows, that is what has made us hard. This is a page of glory in our history which has never been written and is never to be written.

International Military Tribunal.

COOPERATIVE ACTIVITY

GUIDE QUESTIONS

Read the testimony with your group. Choose a reporter and a recorder. Use the questions below to guide your discussion and reporting of information to the class.

1. Describe the **conditions** in the camp. What descriptors were given by the author? Be as specific as possible. Do not simplify your answer with words like “dirty” but use specific references to the text. You might choose to quote specific references from the testimony.
2. What **relationships** did the author have in the camp? Were they separated from their families? Did they maintain some family relationships in the camp? Did they have friends? What relationships were lost or changed as a result of their experience in the camps?
3. What factors contributed to the author’s survival in the camp? What happened to help them escape “selection”? What was unique about their experience?
4. What were their daily routines in the camp?
5. What touched you the most about their story?

CONCENTRATION CAMPS – QUIZ

Name _____ Date _____

Directions: Read each question carefully. Select the correct answer for each question.

1. What is Zyklon B?
 - A. A military unit of mobile killing squads.
 - B. Medicine given in the concentration camps to treat Typhus.
 - C. The gas, originally used to poison rats, used to kill Jews in the gas chambers.
 - D. Cattle cars used in deportation of Jews to the camps.
 2. What is the **primary** reason that concentration camps were first created in 1933?
 - A. They were used as detention centers for political dissidents.
 - B. They were created to murder Jews.
 - C. They were used for housing for misplaced citizens of the war.
 - D. They were used as military bases.
 3. One of the following groups were targeted victims of concentration camps
 - A. Roma & Sinti (Gypsies).
 - B. students.
 - C. business owners.
 - D. Aryans.
 4. One of the following countries housed concentration camps
 - A. England
 - B. Poland
 - C. Switzerland
 - D. Spain
 5. Which of the following statements is false?
 - A. All death camps were located in Poland.
 - B. Adolf Hitler established the “Final Solution” to murder all Jews.
 - C. Small children and elderly were “selected” to be gassed upon arrival at the camps.
 - D. Jews were given the option to convert and pledge allegiance to the Reich to avoid persecution.
 6. List four steps in which Jews were slowly denied of their rights and then eventually placed in concentration camps: _____
-

STUDENT READING #1 Page 1 of 7**A YEAR IN TREBLINKA HORROR CAMP**

Translated from the Yiddish by Moshe Spiegel By YANKEL WIERNIK

The Treblinka camp was divided into two sections. In Camp One there was a railroad spur and a debarkation platform for unloading human cargo. Next was a large area where the belongings of the newcomers would be laid out. The foreign Jews brought the most luggage. Nearby was an infirmary (measuring 30 x 1 x 2 meters). Two men worked there, wearing white smocks and Red-Cross brassards, and passing as physicians. From the arrivals they chose the aged and ill, and seated them on a long bench facing a trench. Behind them stood Germans and Ukrainians. They killed the victims by shooting them in the back, so the bodies fell at once into the mass grave. When they had assembled a large number of cadavers, they gathered them together and set them on fire. They were consumed by the bright flames.

Nearby stood barracks occupied by Germans and Ukrainians. There was an office building, barracks for Jewish workers, workshops, stables, pigsties, food depots and ammunition magazines. Trucks were parked in the courtyard. To the unsuspecting observer the place looked like a genuine labor camp.

Camp Two was altogether different. The workers' barracks was 30 x 10 meters. Here was a laundry, a small laboratory, a special domicile for seventeen women, a sentry house and a well. There were also thirteen chambers in which the victims were asphyxiated by gas. The buildings were surrounded by barbed wire. Both wire barricades were three meters high. Between the fences there were tangles of steel wire. Ukrainian sentries stood all around. The entire camp was fenced with barbed wire four meters high. The fence was adorned with small shrubs. There were four observation towers, each four stories high, and six one-story towers, fifty meters high. Beyond the last barrier anti-tank guns were stationed.

When I arrived at the camp, three gas chambers were functioning. The remaining ten were added during my stay. Each chamber measured about twenty-five square meters and was two meters high. The roof opening was hermetically sealed, and the terra-cotta floor sloped toward the debarkation platform.

The brick building was separated from Camp One by a wooden wall. Both walls, of wood and of masonry, formed a corridor rising eighty centimeters above the roof. The gas chambers were connected with the corridor. Hermetically closed steel doors provided entry into

each chamber. A platform, raised above the ground, connected the three chambers. The doors of every room on the side of Camp Two opened only from the outside, swinging upward and out with the help of iron supports, and were shut by bolts fixed in sash frames. The victims were ushered through the doors from the corridor, and their bodies were dragged through the doors facing Camp Two. Along the gas chambers stood an electric station, about as large as the chambers but somewhat higher. This station provided light for both Camps. A motor from a Soviet tank pumped in the gas, which reached the chambers through influx valves. The speediness of the execution depended upon the quantity of the gas intake.

Two Ukrainians operated the death machines. One was called Ivan, a tall man with pleasant eyes, nevertheless a sadist. He found much enjoyment in the tortures and agonies of the victims. More than once he ran to us and nailed our ears to the walls, or ordered us to lie down and beat us savagely. In his sadistic frenzy he joked and laughed uproariously. He murdered his victims in various ways, according to his whims. The other, Nicholai, was shorter, pale and looked as if spiritually possessed.

The day I first saw men, women and children being led to their doom, I nearly went mad. I tore my hair and wept unrestrainedly. I suffered most when I looked at the little ones walking beside their mothers, or at the others walking alone, who had no thought of the quick and cruel death impending. Their eyes were wide with fear and wonder. "What is all this? What is it for?" seemed to be congealed on their lips. When they saw the stony faces of their parents, however, they kept silent and prepared for whatever might come. They remained stock still or nestled against one another or cuddled up to their parents, awaiting the ghastly end. Suddenly the entrance doors would swing open. Ivan would appear with a thick gas pipe, a meter long. Nicholai was with him, swinging a sword. At a signal the victims would be driven in, clubbed and lashed without mercy. To this day the fearful screams of the women and the crying of the children ring in my ears. There was despair and agony in the screams, a plea for mercy, a cry to God for vengeance. I shall never forget the horrible sights there.

Into the chamber of twenty-five square meters 450 to 500 people were jammed. The congestion was unbelievable. The victims carried in the children somehow hoping thus to save them from death. On their way to die they were beaten and driven by truncheons and gas pipes. Dogs were set upon them; barking, they threw themselves upon the victims. Everyone, eager to escape the blows and the dogs, rushed screaming into the lethal chamber. The stronger pushed the weaker. But the tumult did not long endure. The doors closed with a clang on the packed

chamber. The motor was connected with the inflow apparatus and switched on. In twenty-five minutes, at the most, all lay dead. But they did not really lie, for they had no room to fall. They died standing, their legs and arms entangled. There were no more screams. Mothers and children were clasped in death's embrace. There was no friend or foe, no envy. No one was more beautiful or ugly-all were suffocated, yellowed by gas. No rich, no poor - all were alike before the Lord.

Why all this? I found it most difficult to stay alive, but I had to live, to give the world the story of this depravity, this bestial depravity.

Their fiendish operation over, Ivan and Nicholai looked around to see that all was in order. They went around to the other side, where the doors faced the loading station. They opened the doors and tossed out the bodies. The task of carrying the corpses to the mass grave devolved on us, though we were very weary after a day's labor at the building. But protest would merely bring us beatings, and the same death, or an even more terrible one. So we did as we were told. A *Hauptmann*, of medium stature and with pince-nez, whose name I did not know, stood over us. All he did was yell and beat us. I turned a pleading glance toward him; he halted for a moment. "If you weren't a carpenter you'd be killed!" said he. I looked about me. The other laborers were getting the same treatment. A whole pack of dogs was attacking us, helping the Germans and Ukrainians who were lashing us. One quarter of the workers were felled. We hurled the newly dead into the mass grave indiscriminately. Numbers had been reduced when we returned. Luck was with me, for after the *Hauptmann* had gone the *Unterscharfuhrer* had let me off further work.

Every day 10,000 to 12,000 people were asphyxiated. We built a narrow-gauge railway, and transported the bodies directly to the graves on a flatcar. After a day of hard work we were conducted not to Camp One but Two. There we saw an entirely different sight. My blood congealed at it. Going by the loading platform I saw thousands of corpses, sprawled all over the camp grounds. They were fresh victims. The Ukrainians and Germans were shouting commands. They screamed wildly, inhumanly beating with truncheons and cudgels the workers with bloody faces and gouged-out eyes and clothes torn by the dogs. They put their heads between the lower rungs of ladders to the two one-story observation towers at the camp entrance. The victims could not move in this position while the group leader expended his murderous savagery against these poor wretches without mercy. The least punishment consisted of twenty-five lashes. I saw this for the first time that night, while the moon and the floodlights

illuminated the practically massacred, half-dead sufferers, and the dead lying near them. The groans of the smitten men mingled with the sharp crack of the whips swinging down upon their backs.

When I arrived, Camp Two had but one barrack, the other structures still being incomplete, and the field kitchen stood in the court. I met many of my old Warsaw acquaintances. They had changed almost beyond recognition. They looked desolate, bloated, and battered. But I spent little time in joyous reunion. New faces, new acquaintances, without end. Always new - always death. I learned to look upon every living person as one soon destined for oblivion. I scrutinized the potential victim, pondering his weight and the person likely to bear him to the grave and to be beaten himself in the bargain. Can one believe that in such circumstances one can occasionally raise a smile and jest? A man can accustom himself to anything.

The German governmental system is among the most thorough-a complete bureaucracy, swarming with all manner of functionaries, departments and sub-departments. More significantly, every man is in his proper and appointed place. Where unyielding determination is required, or annihilation of "evil and subversive elements," patriots are always to be found to carry out the edicts. It is remarkable how in these offices there is no lack of men to destroy and kill those near to them, employing the most rigorous forms of repression. I never noticed any commiseration or remorse in their makeup. They never bemoaned the lot of the innocent. They were automatons, who on the slightest provocation would rush headlong to execute any assignment, no matter how heinous. Such jackals enjoy the best opportunities in time of revolution or war. The road to evil is the readiest and the pleasantest. A resolute, just system can, however, overcome inherent evil through education, example, and proper order. Shady types conceal themselves in their dens, and carry on their reprehensible activities from there. All that is moral and equitable has now become superfluous. The more vile and base one is, the higher the position one is given. It all depends upon the extent of one's destructiveness and murderousness. The hands, dripping with the blood of defenseless people, are something to bow down before. Do not wash them *off*. Hold them high, that they may be hosanna'd. The filthier the hands and conscience, the greater the praise accorded.

The next and most remarkable characteristic of the Germans is the readiness with which they can recruit perverted assailants from among other peoples, who display their own

lack of morality. The Jewish camps were also in need of Jewish hangmen, spies and stool pigeons. They found them. These reprehensible souls included Moshka of Lower Sochotshev; Itzik Kobilá of Warsaw; Chaskel, the Thief of Warsaw; and Kuba, a brigand and a pimp, another Warsaw character.

The sound structure on which I worked, located between Camp One and Two, was erected in great haste. It consisted of ten gas chambers, all larger than the previous ones, measuring about 50 square meters. After they were completed, 1,000 to 1,200 persons could be packed into each chamber. They were built along a corridor, five on each side. Each had two doors. The first, on the corridor, admitted the victims, and from the other the corpses were taken into the court. The general construction was like the other chambers. The new structure, seen from Camp One, revealed five terraces, on both sides of which hedges and flowers were prettily set out. The corridor was very long. On the roof, on the camp side, was a Shield of David. The structure resembled an old-fashioned temple. When it was completed the *Hauptsturmführer* remarked to his underlings, "At last, the Jew-town is ready!"

The work on the chambers lasted five weeks. For us it was an eternity. We labored from dawn to dusk, under lashings and beatings. One of the overseers, Woronkoff, beat and tortured us without mercy. Each day he murdered several of the laborers. Our physical sufferings transcended the most fantastic imaginings. But we suffered still more greatly in morale. Every day new parties arrived. The people were immediately ordered to disrobe and taken to the three old chambers, to be asphyxiated. The way to the chambers passed through the area where we worked. More than one worker recognized his children, his wife, his kin in the stream of victims. Whenever one could restrain himself no longer and ran to his kin, he was murdered forthwith. Under such conditions we built the death rooms for ourselves and our brethren. After the five weeks' labor, I was recalled to Camp One, where I set up a barbering establishment. Before execution they cut off the women's hair, which was carefully preserved, though I do not know for what purpose.

Now I was living in Camp Two, whence I was taken each day to Camp One, due to a shortage of skilled workers. *Unterscharführer* Hermann would come to see us. He was about fifty, tall and amiable. He understood and sympathized with us. When he first crossed Camp Two and saw the heaps of corpses he turned pale and showed fright and compassion. He hurried me along with him, so that I need not look further. He treated the workers well. Often he smuggled food to us from the German kitchens. His glance was so kindly that one felt like

pouring out his troubles to him. He actually feared his colleagues. He never spoke with them, but every act of his bespoke his good heart.

While working in Camp One I saw our brethren being conducted into gas chambers, and the fearful agonies they were forced to suffer. New trainloads arrived. As soon as the train departed, the women and children were driven into the barracks. The men were left in the court. Then the women and children were ordered to disrobe. The more naive women took out towels and soap, thinking they were about to bathe. The murderers came to demand order and quiet. They began their beatings and tortures. The children cried. Grown-ups sobbed and shrieked. But nothing availed. The lashing became more powerful. It weakened many, gave strength to others. Then the girls and women entered the barber's room for haircutting. Now they felt sure they were going to the baths. Through the other exit they were conducted to Camp Two, where they stood naked, *awaiting* their turn, in the bitterest frost. Tiny tots stood barefoot and naked in the open. For a long period they awaited their turn in the gas chambers. The children's feet froze to earth. They wept and shuddered. The Germans and Ukrainians paced up and down the ranks beating them. Ivan's favorite victims were the little ones. When he assailed women who begged him to desist because they held children in their arms, he would tear the child from the woman's grasp, tear it in two, or, holding its feet or hand, smash its head against a wall. These were not rare instances - they were repeated at every few steps.

The men suffered a hundredfold more terribly. They undressed in the court, and were compelled to carry their clothes and place them in an orderly fashion among other heaps of garments; then they were sent into the women's barracks and bidden to carry clothes from there to the same piles. When they again resumed their places in the rows, the guard picked out the strong, healthy and well-built men and started torturing them. They were beat into a bloody pulp, in the most savage ways. Then, massed together women and men, old people and children, they started off at a signal. They were to go from Camp One to Camp Two, to the chambers. When they came to a certain small building, an official seated therein ordered them to surrender all articles of value. Some still under the illusion that they would be permitted to live, took the trouble to conceal everything possible. But the hangmen found everything - if not before death, then after. Everyone passing through this building had to raise his or her hands. Thus, with arms raised, the entire sorry procession went to the chambers of death. There a Jew, chosen by the Germans, was stationed as a so called "bath master." He ordered everyone to enter the room at once since the water was becoming cold; and thus they were forced in, amid shrieks and blows.

As already related, the space very narrow. Men suffocated in the close quarters. Since the motor for the new chambers was functioning poorly, the unfortunates there, unable to move, suffered interminably. Not even Satan could have thought of more fearful torment. When the chambers were reopened some few might be found half alive, and they were dispatched by a rifle butt, a bullet, or vigorous kick. Sometimes the victims were left in the chambers all night, without using the motor. The confinement and pressure were able to kill most of them, but many remained alive, particularly the children, who had greater endurance and were removed still breathing. A German revolver, however, soon remedied this. Perhaps the worst part was the standing stark naked in the frost, awaiting the horrible death. But the chambers themselves were no less horrible.

The hangmen greeted each new contingent with wild joy. To allay suspicion of their ultimate disposition, the deportees had been sent in passenger coaches and permitted to take along everything they considered needful. They arrived well clad, bearing much food and clothing. Some had large amounts of fats, coffee, tea and various foods in their luggage. But upon arrival they were dragged from the cars and realized the horrible truth quickly enough. On the second day, after laborious hours of burying them, there was not a sign left of them save their clothes and food.

The number of trainloads grew from day to day - now there were thirteen gas chambers operating. There were days when 20,000 were asphyxiated. The screams and sobs and groans never left our ears. The corpse-removal crew, still kept alive, fasted and wept on the days when the trains came in. The more weak and emotional ones broke down and committed suicide. These were generally the more intelligent. When they returned to the barracks after their ghastly work, still hearing the screams of the doomed, they would hang themselves during the night. Fifteen or twenty each night. They could no longer endure the torture of the German officers, or the suffering of the doomed.

Glatstein, J. *Anthology of Holocaust Literature*

Reprinted with permission Jewish Publication Society, 1969

STUDENT READING #2 Page 1 of 3

From Deportations, Testimonies of Maud Bloch and Ida Haim Solomon

After the major roundup of Jews in January 1943, the remaining Jews in Marseille ran a high risk of being arrested, interned, and deported. It was also the time of denunciations, and the Milicien and the Gestapo had replaced the regular French gendarmes. Among those arrested were Maud Bloch and Ida Haim Solomon, whose testimonies follow.

Maud Bloch was arrested with her father and mother on 15 April 1944 by two armed French Miliciens. She and her family were first sent to Drancy and subsequently transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in May 1944.

Ida Haim Solomon was arrested with her family on 9 May 1944 by four young Miliciens. The Haim Solomon family had been hiding in Camoins. Initially transferred to Drancy, they were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau later in the month.

Excerpted from Oppetit, Christian. Ed. Marseille, Vichy et les Nazis: Le Temps des reflex, la deportation des juifs (Marseille: Amicale des Deportes d'Auschwitz et des camps de Haute Silesie, Section Marseille-Provence, 1993) 151-155 and 162-65 Translation by Anne Mouneu.

Testimony of Maud Bloch, Auschwitz-Birkenau Number A 5446

Forty-seven years have gone by since the liberation of Auschwitz in January 1945. One often describes the life of a deportee in a camp, but each of us survived in her own unique way.

I crossed the gates of Auschwitz with all six members of my family on a day in May 1944. The infernal gates of that nightmare prison which the Nazis had given the name of concentration camp, but which in reality was an extermination camp for Jews and Gypsies. This horrible journey had begun with the departure from Drancy, in sealed railway cars, with hunger, thirst, promiscuity for days and days, and for nights and nights: staying sometimes several hours on rail sidings because of bombed-out tracks, closed in, squeezed against one another, standing up, without air; men, women, young children and the elderly who sometimes died alone in a corner of the car. One tried to reason, to believe, but lost all hope. The train of death was following its route toward the unknown, the journey not yet finished. Then we were in a strange and sinister station constructed for human cattle. Terminus of the end of the world! When the doors of the railway car opened, we are violently thrown onto the platform. Everywhere SS officers in uniforms, yelling, screaming, hitting us with their whips, accompanied by enormous dogs, barking, menacing, showing their fangs. Two lines are rapidly forming following the orders of the SS, one to the right, one to the left. Immediately, we are separated from one another. Panic, the awful cries, the distress. I am brutally ripped

from the arms of my mother, who is crying. I do not even have time to give her one last embrace. I see my parents leave in the line to the left with thousands of other people. Some trucks are waiting for them. Nothing to fear - the words of an SS assail me - you will rejoin each other soon. As for me, I find myself in the line for young women, although I do not understand why. I am totally ignorant of the fate of my parents, but I want to know where they are; and it isn't until the end of the third day that I learn they have been driven directly into the gas chamber and the crematorium with all the others. My sister, age thirty, and her little boy of five years suffered the same fate. I am destroyed, I want to die as well. Another deportee tells me, "You see, your parents are in the process of burning in the chimney."

Soon we are led into a wooden barracks, without windows, through which a glacial cold penetrates. We are stripped naked of all our clothes and shoes, sheared, tattooed on the left forearm (I am number A 5446), and dressed in dirty rags. I inherit a pair of shoes, one with a high heel and the other, a low heel. Of course, that makes me limp....

For me the biggest torture was the time of roll call. The roll calls, which last for hours and hours, standing at attention, in ranks of five, leaning against each other in order not to fall, feet sunken up to the ankles in a swampy mud under the frozen rain of autumn, in the snow and the blizzards of winter, with those who fell, exhausted, and died in total silence, where no one even took note of the last breath of the thousands who were dying. The *kapo*, to be sadistic, liked to see us suffer. She called our numbers but never determined the exact count, one less or one more; she began again and again, one time, two times, three times, and so on until the break of day. One other method to destroy us.

It is finally time to depart for work. I labor in an outside commando, which requires traveling several kilometers to arrive at the place of work. We leave the camp to the sound of a female orchestra which is playing an American march. How ridiculous! We do the same work as the men. We have to carry on our shoulders piles of bricks, fifty-kilogram sacks of cement on a terrain where we have to cross an immense trench, laden with shovels and picks.

The next day the trench that we dug the day before has to be filled in again.... I worked thus in the outside commandos until November. One day, by pure chance, I was selected to work at the *Weberei*, a cloth mill, which was located in a large wooden barracks. Finally, I was a little sheltered. The work consisted of cutting with enormous scissors that hurt my fingers, piles of coarse scraps into strips that we had to braid (it appears that they were used to clean the gun carriages of cannons). The required measurement for those wads was set

at seventeen meters, but since I was not good at the task, I was able to manage with great difficulty only two or three meters each day. In the evening the male *kapos*, who most of the time were Poles or Ukrainians, passed through the ranks in order to check the measurements; they were accompanied by huge dogs that they commanded to jump upon the table in order to make an impression on us. Of course, I often received blows on the nape of the neck or on the head for not having met the desired quota.

Each day was a day won in life. Very often selections took place: they became a part of our weekly life. This consisted of presenting ourselves nude in front of our barracks. SS doctors passed through the ranks and indicated, at random according to whim, those who were destined to go to the gas chamber. I was very scared because I was covered by scabies, and the least pimple or the littlest scratch was a pretext for extermination. How many times did I pass muster? Often our unfortunate friends left in this way and never returned.

One morning there was a distribution of bed sheets and blankets. or proper dresses. What was going on? We were very astonished and did not understand the changes. At the end of the morning's work, we were put in ranks and given a soup containing morsels of meat. But what was the mystery here? Finally, we understood. The gentlemen of the International Red Cross were visiting the camp. The SS officers accompanied them and explained to them that Birkenau was simply a labor camp, properly kept: the detainees were well-fed, dressed properly, were sleeping in clean beds with sheets and blankets. How could they not see our thinness, our pale coloring, our shaved heads, the chimneys spitting flames? How could they let themselves be deluded like that? Or, perhaps they did not want to see anything or know anything?

The comforting news circulates in the camp for several days. The Russians are approaching the camp: the front is only a few kilometers away. A gleam of hope gives us a little bit of courage, although we are very scared because the SS in retreat would be quite capable of blowing up the camp and killing us so that the witnesses of this horrible tragedy would disappear forever.

Thousands of deportees were led away by the SS as they departed and were slaughtered on a Death March or transferred to other camps. As for me, since I had a gangrenous wound on my leg. it was impossible for me to walk. Thus. I stayed in the camp without food for several days awaiting the arrival of Soviet troops who came to liberate us on 27 January 1945.

STUDENT READING #3 page 1 of 3

Testimony of Ida Haim Solomon, Auschwitz-Birkenau Number A 5520

After three or four days and nights of traveling, the train stopped in the camp of Birkenau, very early on a morning in May 1944. The door of the railway car was opened. And we saw men dressed in striped clothing, who were screaming, and SS with their whips and their dogs. A man dressed in stripes approached us and recommended that we hand over the children to the elderly. That is what my cousin Estelle did, giving my mother her little boy only twenty days old and her daughter of two-and-a-half years. Then there was the separation: to one side, the women with the young children, and the elderly: to the other side, the young adults. We believed that our mothers and children were going into a family camp.

Then we were led into a building and ordered to undress, to remove our jewelry if we had any, and to take a shower: next they shaved and tattooed us. My number was A 5520 and Estelle's was A 5521. They gave each of us a dress and shoes, but nothing else to wear. My dress was very thin, and the shoes were a men's size 44. They took us by foot to block 31, where we were put in quarantine. We surveyed our surroundings, horrified. My friend Renee Marcos and I did not recognize each other during our stay. We were no longer individuals.

A woman approached the window of the block and asked if anyone was from Lyon, Nice, or Avignon. It was at this time that Sarah, who had already been there for a month, found her sister Estelle. Estelle began to recount to Sarah that her two children had been left with my mother in the family camp and that perhaps she would be able to see them that evening. Sarah replied curtly that all that talk was only nonsense and that they were in the process of burning. Estelle began to scream. It was awful to watch her: her breasts swelled, and she lost her milk, soiling her dress. Everyone in the block was hostile toward Sarah, who had just announced such an abominable thing. After a month this scenario became natural for her, for the crematory ovens never stopped burning...

I could see the ovens working nonstop. It was not smoke that came out, it was flames, it was flesh that was burning. The odor enveloped us. I could see these things that could not be seen otherwise, and I watched even if I was tired: I was unable to stop myself from watching.

The convoys continued to arrive! Then, there was the required roll call at 4:00am. It was hell. Women were falling. We kept them upright by squeezing them between us. We were cold. And we could not speak German. If we did not respond at roll call, we received blows, and it was then necessary to start over. This would last for hours. It took me a long time to learn my number in German. Estelle could not do it, so I answered for her. To avoid selection, it was necessary not to appear too thin nor too pale. Therefore, I had been able to obtain a raw beet. I moistened it with my saliva and made myself up with "pretty pink cheeks." I kept the beet for months. I would not give it up even though it had become dry...

I also saw the guard towers. It was impossible to escape because one Lager was followed by another Lager and so on as far as one could see. All this was a nightmare. The *kapos* continually humiliated us, in all aspects of our daily life. Such wanton degradations - and among the cruelest were the scenes at the WC. We could see there the buttocks of women with pimples and pustules. The *kapo* demanded that we sit on them; she hit us until we obeyed her. The contaminations thus multiplied.

Finally, one day, after a shower and a new selection, I was chosen to take part in a work commando. I worked nights for two weeks at "Canada," in the warehouses where the Germans gathered everything that the deportees had brought with them to the camp. Their belongings were brought here on the carts that were also used to transport the corpses of those who had been gassed.

There I saw mountains of hair, shoes, and wedding gowns, and appliances for the physically disabled arranged with care. One night while I was working, a train arrived full of Hungarians. Men emptied the train of all the belongings and provisions brought along. They unloaded the suitcases, bundles, and tons of raisins. It was crazy work at Canada! During that time the ovens never stopped burning.

My work was to make bundles of ten men's suits so that they could be sent off to Germany. We had to search the shoulder straps for hidden cash, check that the buttons were not gold (of those that had arrived, the buttons had sometimes been replaced by gold pieces). The old deportees who had already been in camp for some time asked us not to hand over all the valuable items but to hide them. Thus, we made holes wherever we could, and we buried the costliest objects in order not to give them to the Germans. But we were risking a lot. We were searched at the exit, and we could not hide anything on ourselves

that might be used to improve our usual fare. Thus, Sarah who had kept a brooch with diamonds was unable to obtain bread in exchange. The risk was too high to get only bread. We never did any more of that.

Since we worked during the night, we stayed in the block during the day. That permitted us to see what was happening all around. We were able to see the Hungarian women. They were wearing a special dress - simple gray with short sleeves. One morning we saw them leave in a convoy, pieces of bread in their hands. That same day twelve of us were chosen for a ditch-digging commando. I was to take part in it. The camp was empty. As we passed in front of the crematory ovens, the column stopped, paralyzed with fright. We were thinking that this time it was our turn. In front of the entrance door to the gas chamber there was a mountain of gray dresses, and farther along, a pile of pieces of bread.

At our return from work, everything had disappeared. Since then, I have not stopped believing that the gassing of the Hungarians slowed that of ourselves. We had already been there for a long time. From time to time, Allied airplanes flew above the camp. Extermination had to be done quickly. And we prayed that the planes would bomb the crematory ovens-in vain.

Reprinted with permission of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum