

Buchenwald: 'Death Too Good for Anti-Nazis'

Text of official report of the Prisoner of War and Displaced Persons Division, U. S. Group Control Council, forwarded from Supreme Headquarters Allied Expedition Forces to the War Dept.: (Its contents were made available to correspondents in Paris, Apr. 28, 1945.)

Inspection of German concentration camp for political prisoners located at Buchenwald on the north edge of Weimar made by: Brig. Gen. Eric F. Wood, Lt. Col. Charles H. Ott, on the morning of 16 April, 1945.

The morning of 16 April, 1945.

1. In addition to an American officer guide, the party was also accompanied by Commandant Rene L'Hopital (former aide de camp to Marshal Foch, DSM, officer of the Legion of Honor, MVO, etc.; a personal friend of many Americans including Brig. Gen. Hanford McNider, the late Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., Maj. Gen. Frank Parker, Franklin D'Olier, Adm. Byrd), who had been a prisoner in the camp during the two months prior to its capture. He weighed 95 pounds as against a normal weight of 175 pounds; but was in far better physical condition than the average of his fellow prisoners (due to his having been in this camp only two months).

Founded in 1933

2. **History of the camp:** It was founded when the Nazi Party first came into power in 1933, and has been in continuous operation ever since although its largest populations date from the beginning of the present war. U. S. armor overran the general area in which the camp is located on 12 April. Its SS guards had decamped by the evening of 11 April. Some U. S. administration personnel and supplies reached the camp on "Friday the 13th" of April—a red-letter day for the surviving inmates.

3. **Surviving population:** Numerically, by nationality, as of 16 April 1945:

French 2900; Polish 3800; Hungarians 1240; Jugoslavs 570; Russians 4380; Dutch 324; Belgians 622; Austrians 550; Italians 242; Czechs 2105; Germans 1800; Dutch 2600; anti-Franco Spanish and miscellaneous 1207. Total, 20,000.

4. **Character of surviving populations:** Males only, including 1000 boys under 14 years old. Intelligentia and "leadership" personnel from all of Europe; anyone and everyone of outstanding intellectual or moral qualifications, or of "democratic" or anti-Nazi inclinations or their relatives.

For instance, as to the French inmates, they included four anti-Vichy members of Parliament; professors of Pasteur Institute, University of Paris, University of Caen, etc.; eight high-ranking anti-Vichy French generals (including Gen. Vermeau who was at one time C. of S.), and the son of one of them; and French engineers, lawyers, editors and other professional men of the higher brackets.

A particular inclination for incarcerating prominent Jews was manifest, there being 4000 of them among the 20,000 survivors (these are inclusive in the nationalities listed in the preceding paragraph). Jews were given even worse treatment than the others. For instance, no Jew was ever "promoted" from the "Little Camp" (*see below*).

A few inmates were from time to time ransomed by their families by personal payments to SS officers and liberated to spread the word; among other leadership or intellectual anti-Nazi personnel throughout Europe, as to the penalties (internment in this camp and similar ones) for anti-Nazism.

Mission Is Death

5. **Mission of the Camp:** An extermination factory. Mere death was not bad enough for anti-Nazis. Means of extermination: starvation; complicated by hard work, abuse, beatings and tortures, incredibly crowded sleeping conditions (*see below*), and sickness (for instance, typhus rampant in the camp; and many inmates tubercular).

By these means many tens of thousands of the best leadership personnel of Europe (including German democrats and anti-Nazis) have been exterminated. For instance, six of the eight French generals originally committed to the camp, and the son of one of them had died there.

The recent death rate was about 200 a day. 5700 had died or been killed in February; 5900 in March, and about 2000 in the first 10 days of April.

The main elements of the installation included the "Little Camp" the "Regular Barracks," "The Hospital," the medical experimentation building, the body disposal plant, and an ammunition factory immediately adjacent to this camp and separated from it only by a wire fence.

6. **The "Little Camp."** Prisoners here slept on triple-decked shelves, each shelf about 12 feet by 12 feet, 16 prisoners to a shelf, the clearance height between shelves being a little over 2 feet. Cubage figures out to about 35 cubic ft. per man, as against the minimum for health of 600 cubic feet prescribed by U. S. Army regulations.

Forty Per Cent Weight Loss

All arriving new prisoners were initiated by spending at least six weeks here before being "graduated to the 'Regular Barracks.'" During this initiation, prisoners were expected to lose about 40 per cent in weight.

Jews, however, seldom if ever graduated to the "Regular Barracks." Camp disciplinary measures included transferring recalcitrant prisoners back to the "Little Camp." As persons became too feeble to work, they were also sent back to this camp, or to the "Hospital."

Rations were less than at regular camps, and the death rate was very high here; recently 2 per cent to 4 per cent, per day.

7. The "Regular Barracks": The dormitory rooms were approximately 42 feet by 23 feet, about 10 feet high; or a content of less than 9500 cubic feet. In such a room there were installed, triple-deck, 38 stacks of three cots each; or a total of 114 cots, each cot 30 inches by 72 inches outside measurement. Most of these cots were double (that is, two parallel cots occupying a space 60 inches by 72 inches. Aisles were too narrow (less than 24 inches) to permit movement except with body edgewise.

114 cots into 9500 makes less than 85 cubic feet per person. But since the war, 250 persons have been made to sleep in each such room (five persons on each 60-inch by 72-inch double cot, and two persons on each 30-inch by 72-inch single cot); or less than 40 cubic feet per person. There was less than one blanket per prisoner. Blankets were thin and shoddy, and undersize. There was no heat in these dormitories.

8. The "Hospital." A building where moribund persons were sent to die. No medicines being available, hence no therapy was possible. Typhus and tuberculosis rampant in the camp. About half the wards in the "hospital" were about 15 feet deep, with one window at the outside end, by 5½ feet wide. "Patients" occupied such a ward, lying cross-wise on the floor, shoulder to shoulder. Room too narrow for most of them to extend their legs. Death rate in the "hospital" 5 per cent to 20 per cent a day.

9. Medical experiment building: Block 41 was used for medical experiments and vivisections, with prisoners as "guinea pigs." Medical scientists came from Berlin periodically to reinforce the experimental staff. In particular, new toxins and anti-toxins were tried out on prisoners. Few prisoners who entered this experimental building ever emerged alive.

10. The body disposal plant: The design of this installation was a striking example of "German industrial efficiency." It had a maximum disposal capacity of about 400 bodies per 10-hour day. All bodies were reduced to bone-ash, thus destroying all "evidence." All gold or gold-filled teeth were extracted from bodies before incineration.

This plant was entirely enclosed within a high board fence. No one except the small operating force of SS personnel was allowed even to look inside this fence, and no prisoner who passed within it (as a member of a fatigue party or for any other reason) ever came out alive.

Inside the Fence

Inside this fence was: (a) a large front yard on the left; (b) a small back yard on the right; (c) the incinerator building centrally located between the two yards. This building was of substantial brick construction with cement floors, one story, with a full-size 12 foot high basement beneath. The main floor contained an administration office at the front end, a locker and washroom for SS personnel at the far end, and the incinerator room in the center. The latter contained, in line, two batteries of three fire-brick incinerators each, each incinerator having a capacity of three bodies or a total charge of 18 bodies.

Fifteen to 20 minutes were required for the incineration of a charge. The floor of each incinerator consisted of a coarse grate through which the days' accumulation of bone-ash was extracted at the end of operation. The fire came from a furnace room occupying the rear two-thirds of the basement, the flames being deflected downwards onto the bodies by baffleplates in the roofs of the furnace. The front end of the basement was occupied by the strangulation room.

The method of collecting bodies was as follows: Roll call was held every evening, outdoors outside the dormitory buildings. Internees were required to strip, and bring to roll call, the naked bodies of all comrades who had died during the previous 24 hours.

Picked Up by Truck

After roll call a motor truck drove around the camp, picked up the bodies, and was driven into the front yard of the incinerator plant to await the next day's operation. But this was not the only source of bodies. Emaciated prisoners who "had been around long enough" or who committed infractions of discipline, or who "knew too much," or who refused to be broken in mind, were arbitrarily condemned to death.

For instance, in the "Little Camp," where prisoners slept 16 on a shelf, an infraction of discipline (and particularly an attempt to escape) not infrequently resulted in all 16 being condemned. Such persons were immediately marched on foot to a small door into the fence of the backyard, at a point immediately adjacent to the right-hand front corner of the incinerator building. This door opened inwards until it hit a doorstep which held it in a position paralleled to the build-

Buchenwald

ings wall—thus creating a corridor about 4 feet wide and 3 feet deep. At the far end was an opening about 4 feet x 4 feet flush with the ground, the head of a concrete shaft about 13 feet deep, the bottom floor of which was a continuation of the concrete floor of the room at the front end of the basement.

The condemned prisoners, on being hurried and pushed through the door in the fence, inevitably fell into this shaft and crashed 13 feet down to the cement cellar floor. This room on the floor at one end of which they now found themselves, was the strangling room. As they hit the floor they were garroted, with a short double-ended noose, by big SS guards; and hung on hooks along the side wall, about 6½ feet above the floor, the row of hooks being 45 in number.

Stunned With Mallet

When a consignment had been all hung up, any who were still struggling were stunned with a wooden mallet (the mallet and a noose are being held by Commandant L'Hospital). The bodies were left on the hooks until called for by the incinerator crew. An electric elevator, with an estimated capacity of 18 bodies, ran up to the incinerator room which was directly above the strangling room.

The day's quota of approximately 200 bodies was made up of from 120 to 140 prisoners who had died (mostly in "The Hospital," the "Medical Experiment Building" or the "Little Camp"), and of from 60 to 80 supplied by the strangling room.

PM

MONDAY, APRIL 30, 1945

OldMagazineArticles.com