

# Collier's

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Industrially and morally, Germany has been destroyed, but here is a vivid reminder by an actual eyewitness that we will have to be forever on guard



Wreckage of Nuremberg, once a shrine of Nazism, illustrates the material disintegration of Germany and poses the problem of what to do with an unrepentant Reich

**C**AMILLE HUYSMANS, the veteran burgomaster of Antwerp, when asked, "What should be done to German industry?" replied crisply: "The tense is wrong. Already it has been done. German industry no longer exists."

For the moment, that is an accurate statement. It may continue to be true unless American dollars rebuild it. We are not in the mood to do that now. Until it is done or permitted, the fear of Germany need not disturb the minds of the peace-loving peoples of the world.

We will not be in the mood to rebuild German industry for a long time to come if we remember what it has been possible to see in Germany since the conquering Allied armies pushed back the Nazis.

You remember pictures of the German concentration camps for political prisoners. Many have seen them. And a very good thing, too, to see and to remember. What you saw in the news illustration or the movie theater was not exaggerated. I have visited these camps and I have seen the prisoners and the conditions under which they existed or died. It would be hard, with a mere camera, to overstate the essential horror of these camps. What can the civilized men of the victorious powers do to prevent a repetition of these horrors? If we want to get a practical answer, we had best get a clear picture of what occurred and of why it came to pass. Regard first the simple facts.

General Dwight Eisenhower is a strong man and a soldier. He is familiar with the grim realities and the bloody sacrifice of war. Yet he could hardly believe the reports brought to him by his own officers when the first of the concentration camps was captured by his American troops. So he looked for himself. What he saw persuaded him to ask General George Marshall to invite a delegation from Congress and a group of American editors and publishers to come and see for themselves. General Eisenhower thought it important both now and in the future to have firsthand testimony of detached witnesses who were in no way involved in propaganda.

So journalists and congressmen alike had the opportunity to observe and to question

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prisoners and all others available in the concentration camps. As one of the journalists, I saw the dead men and the dying and, more pitiful still, the literal thousands of broken men doomed by their experiences to incomplete recovery, if they survive at all.

We saw the prisoners and we observed the barracks and the yards in which these captives were crowded, starved and beaten. Cruelties, unmatched perhaps in hundreds of years, were inflicted upon many. Some of the imprisoned men represented the best ideas and the most generous ideals of Europe.

I remember a Dutch Jesuit priest, Father Peter van Gestel, who said he had been imprisoned at Dachau since 1942. A magnificent figure, Father van Gestel was arrested in Holland in 1941 because he denounced Nazi principles in sermons. Two thousand four hundred other priests and Protestant clergymen were imprisoned in the same camp.

Some of them were German, Pastor Niemöller among them. All were charged with an unwillingness to accept and preach Nazi doctrines which were a denial of the teachings of Christ.

For this they were subjected to punishments and humiliation almost beyond the comprehension of modern men. Father van Gestel survived because of his unusual vigor, but he looks fifteen years older than the 47 years he actually has lived. The tall, gray Jesuit is still a noble figure, and his mind discriminates between what the Nazis did to their victims and what was not done.

"No, the German priests did not have to work until after Easter, 1942," he said. "Then they were compelled to work in the fields. They arose at 4 A.M. and worked until 7 P.M. The Polish priests were used as test animals in medical experimentation. One hundred and seventy of them were infected with malaria to test the efficacy of certain antimalarial drugs. . . . Yes, many of them died. Others had recurrent high fevers. Altogether more than a thousand priests and clergymen died of undernourishment and disease. . . . Yes, the Nazis put German Communists in charge of the priests. That was one of their tricks, using prisoners to make other prisoners miserable. Doctor Schacht was here. So was Leon Blum. So was Chancellor Schuschnigg. They were taken away last week. Himmler's order was: 'There must be no question of a prisoner falling into the hands of the enemy.' So all records were destroyed in the last three weeks."

### Deaths by "Natural" Causes

Colonel George J. Hathaway, the United States Army medical officer in charge of Dachau, said that he was able to get records only from the prison physicians who were themselves prisoners. "But," said Colonel Hathaway, "the prisoner physicians are men of high caliber. As I have seen it, their records are accurate."

Doctor Franta Mis, a distinguished Hungarian physician, spokesman of the captive doctors, also imprisoned for their opinions, was obviously a man of ability and character. Despite the difficulty and danger, he and his associates kept records. From their records Colonel Hathaway was able to inform us that from 1933 through 1942 there were 34,000 natural deaths at Dachau out of a total prison population during those years of 125,000. That was roughly 27 per cent, although when they came to the concentration camp, these prisoners were vigorous enough to be regarded as dangerous enemies by the Nazis. During 1943 there were 1,596 deaths. During 1944 a total of 4,805 died. From January this year until the camp was captured by the Americans at the end of April, 13,159 men



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died. The day before, we arrived on May 3d, 146 men died in the camp hospital and 44 in the barracks.

This rise in deaths was due to starvation and typhus. Remember this was a camp for interned political prisoners. Hitler's own finance minister, Doctor Schacht, as well as Marshal Stalin's stepson and the last Austrian chancellor Doctor Schuschnigg and others of similar character were there. Most of these eminent men survived but nowhere since the Dark Ages has death been a more frequent visitor than at Dachau during the twelve years of Nazi rule.



*The shoes of the victims*

At the end, while the Russian armies were marching in from the east and the Americans were rushing from the west, trainloads of political and racial prisoners from other camps were sent toward Dachau. When the trains arrived, most of these prisoners were dead from exposure and starvation. The dead were still there when we arrived.

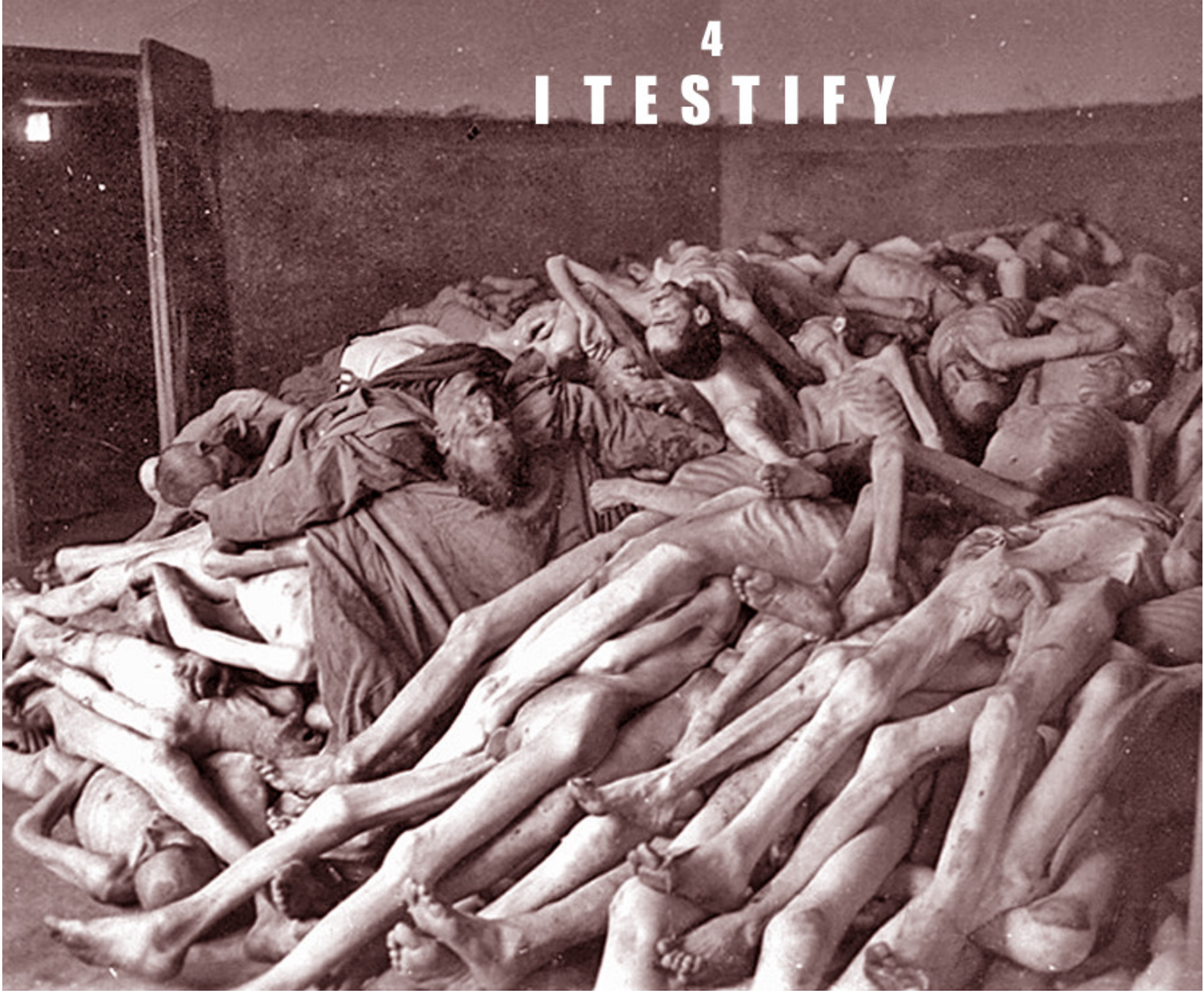
It is not a pretty sight to see—as I did—a long line of freight cars, gondolas and box-cars filled with dead men. Freight cars and third-class passenger coaches stood on the curving railroad track further than I could see. Only after I looked steadily could I comprehend the reality that these piles of white flesh gleaming in the sunlight were actually dead men, or that the objects scattered along the track were all that was left of men who once had hope and ambition and a sense of right even as we who were called to look upon them after their agony had passed. I fancy no other generation was ever required to witness horror in this particular shape. All this and many other terrors occurred in beautiful country not a dozen miles from Munich which was, until the Nazis came, one of the most gracious cities in the world.

Life within these prison camps, as it is possible now to reconstruct from the testimony of survivors, seems to have been designed to hurt, to humiliate and to destroy. Men able and willing to work in munitions factories or in the fields were fed enough to keep them alive but no more. All lost weight. Bread, potatoes, a watery vegetable soup and once a week a dab of margarine or a thin slice of sausage were the chief items of diet. For the nonworkers at Dachau, Colonel Hathaway calculated that only about 500 calories a day were provided. I saw thousands of men who seemed literally to consist of only skin and skeleton. They had the look of beaten and starved animals. Routine deprivation bowed their spirits and drained their minds.

Apparently the program was designed to kill Jews, Poles and Russians. Polish Jews seemed to have been worst treated. In fact, according to testimony both at Buchenwald and at Dachau, Polish Jews especially were forced to sleep in three-tiered bunks five men to each bed no more than five feet wide. I saw these bunks while men awaiting removal from the camp still occupied them. It was intended by the Nazis that these men should sicken and die. Many did. Few Polish Jews survived the dreadful ordeal.

Other Poles who would or could work were employed. The roll was called in the yard at 4 A.M. If any failed to respond, the





whole group was held until the missing man was located. Sometimes the answer would be "Present but dead." The prisoner uniform was a thin suit of awninglike material with broad vertical stripes of blue and a dirty white. Conversation was not permitted in the barracks. There was no reading, no music, no radio, no stimulation of any kind for the mind. Many became insane. Few seemed wholly normal even after the Germans were driven out of the camps. We were followed by great crowds of broken men. When a half-smoked cigarette was dropped to the ground, one or more prisoners instantly jumped for it.

The tortures, the mass murders in the gas chambers, the hangings, the shooting of the more important prisoners whom it had been decided to kill, naturally followed. No inspection was ever allowed. The International Red Cross could not enter. Even when Heinrich Himmler, the killer, visited Dachau, he was said to have entered only the cleaner and better barracks. Such was the treatment given political prisoners in the concentration camps.

### A Whole Nation Brought to Ruin

But the disintegration of Germany is not limited by prison walls. War has also destroyed the proud industrial cities of Germany—something that was not to be avoided unless free men were to surrender to the Nazis and admit the German claim to rule the world.

Munich, hard by Dachau, now is a stricken city, and this is another kind of fact to remember and to consider: Once the home of 800,000 people, only about 475,000 remained when the Americans arrived. The heart of the city was blasted to sterility. Within a circle a mile and more in radius, almost everything was hit or destroyed. The Rathaus, the city hall first built seven hundred years ago, was a wreck. The destruction of the industrial cities outstrips imagination. In Cologne, in the Ruhr, in most of the manufacturing cities east and west, bombs have blasted the factories, plants and warehouses into nothingness. We and our allies destroyed the railroad shops and many of the locomotives and cars. The retreating Germans blew up most of the bridges.

The destruction has to be seen to be realized. Few factories remain undamaged. Most are utterly demolished. The vast Krupp plants at Essen look like something that might remain after Judgment Day or after a fiery comet had collided with the earth.

In a word, Germany has already lost its industry and the essentials of its transportation system. Germany inflicted the most horrible punishment upon men with whom Hitler differed politically or religiously. For this, Germany has already suffered destruction unmatched in modern times, and the penalties of the peace treaty are still to come. Yet the German attitude today is a curious one.

The people of Munich profess to know nothing of the bestial cruelties and the scientific murders practiced during twelve years at Dachau. The people of Weimar, the lovely



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city that is honored by the memory of Goethe, Germany's greatest poet, say they did not know what was happening at Buchenwald. In all probability they did not know the details. Visitors were not allowed.

When we questioned the Germans of the vicinity of the camps and also those in the Ruhr, they denied both knowledge and responsibility. Most seemed curiously detached. Obviously, they must have seen the emaciated men who were sent out as slave laborers to work in their fields or munitions factories. It is unconceivable that they learned nothing of what was going on from the men who were sent out daily. The Germans we saw outside the prison camps, and excepting those in the Ruhr industrial areas, were themselves fat, well fed and well clothed.

The detached attitude of the Germans toward the crimes committed in the concentration camps was remarkable. On the table of the reception room in the gas execution chamber at Dachau was a vase of withered flowers. In front of the crematory there were flowering shrubs and beds of freshly tended strawberries. The vegetable garden extended close to the edges of the little enclosures within which men were bound and shot to death.

Hard by the crematory and gas chamber was a brick barn in which stout German horses were stabled. Each horse had a spacious box stall in contrast to the murderous crowding of the prisoners' barracks. On the stall posts were painted the names of the farm horses. On the walls were colorful landscapes of the Bavarian countryside.

On the desk of the commandant of the entire camp there were withered flowers. In his desk drawer was a broken blue Easter egg, doubtless a reminder of a little child. Yet the same men who enjoyed the flowers, pampered the horses and treasured the memento of a child were responsible for the operation of this dreadful camp. Nazism does queer things to the human spirit.

That the civilian population could have done anything to improve the condition or the treatment of the men in the concentration camps may, however, be doubted. For the concentration camps were first built to imprison Germans feared or distrusted by the Nazis. In truth, the Nazis appeared to have destroyed or intimidated into silence any possible political opposition in Germany. That is why they did not surrender after they had lost the war. That is why German cities had to be bombed to rubble.

What, practically, can the United States, Great Britain, France and Russia do to prevent a repetition of these horrors? By the surrender terms, we and our allies will occupy Germany for an indefinite number of years. Many suggestions have been made. The worst perhaps is that we do to the Germans what they have done to the people upon whom they sought to impose their will. Of course, that will not be done.



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The question of how to avoid a recurrence of these cruelties and of even greater barbarities, should a third World War come, obsesses all who witnessed what has actually happened: our own Army leaders, members of the Congressional delegation, members of the French and Belgian governments and others.

American soldiers who have seen what the Germans did are grim and determined. Some of them would execute all the guilty. Of course, they will hold to the rule of individual and personal responsibility, and the men already executed have been proved guilty. But all agree that promiscuous killing is not an enduring answer.

The question is how to make the surviving Germans peaceful. The French might take that part of the Saar in which at least half of the population is already French. The Belgians want to see Germany divided. Both want Germany to be occupied and divided until Germany is peaceful and democratic and not a threat to other peoples and nations.

## An Object Lesson to Mankind

Obviously, the journalists who witnessed the horrors, the insanities and the mass killings of the concentration camps for political prisoners, would not be expected to say how to make the Germans peaceful, democratic and safe neighbors. But I am certain that what we saw in the horror camps showed us how *not* to re-educate the Germans. Hitler explored to the bitter and horrible end his own method of changing man's beliefs and principles. He and his gang thought of all the cruelties and practiced them. Whatever we do won't be in his footsteps. For if we did, we, too, would have lost the war.

The great hope implied by the French and the Belgians is that during the years of occupation by Americans, British, French and Russians, the Germans will themselves acquire new ideals.

Many Germans will have to die before Germany is willing sincerely to renounce conquest as the way to national prosperity and glory. If we keep control long enough, a different and better Germany may emerge. The Germany of Goethe and Beethoven was no threat to civilized men.

Certain it is that German science and German industry will design and produce no V-2 bombs, no multipurpose long-range guns and no other tool of catastrophe while the Allied powers control all of German industry and German science. We have the time and the authority to create a new environment in Germany during the years of occupation. Large-scale German industry and industrial science may not be restored unless we finance it. Doctor Edward Houdremont, the Nazi from Luxembourg who was the managing director of the Krupp works at Essen, told us that the Krupp family could finance the rebuilding of the Krupp works. That seemed foolishly sanguine to our group. Great Britain, France, Russia and the United States can decide that question, and we don't have to give the Germans of the next generation the weapons with which to assault our children and our grandchildren.

**by Wm. L. Chenery**

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