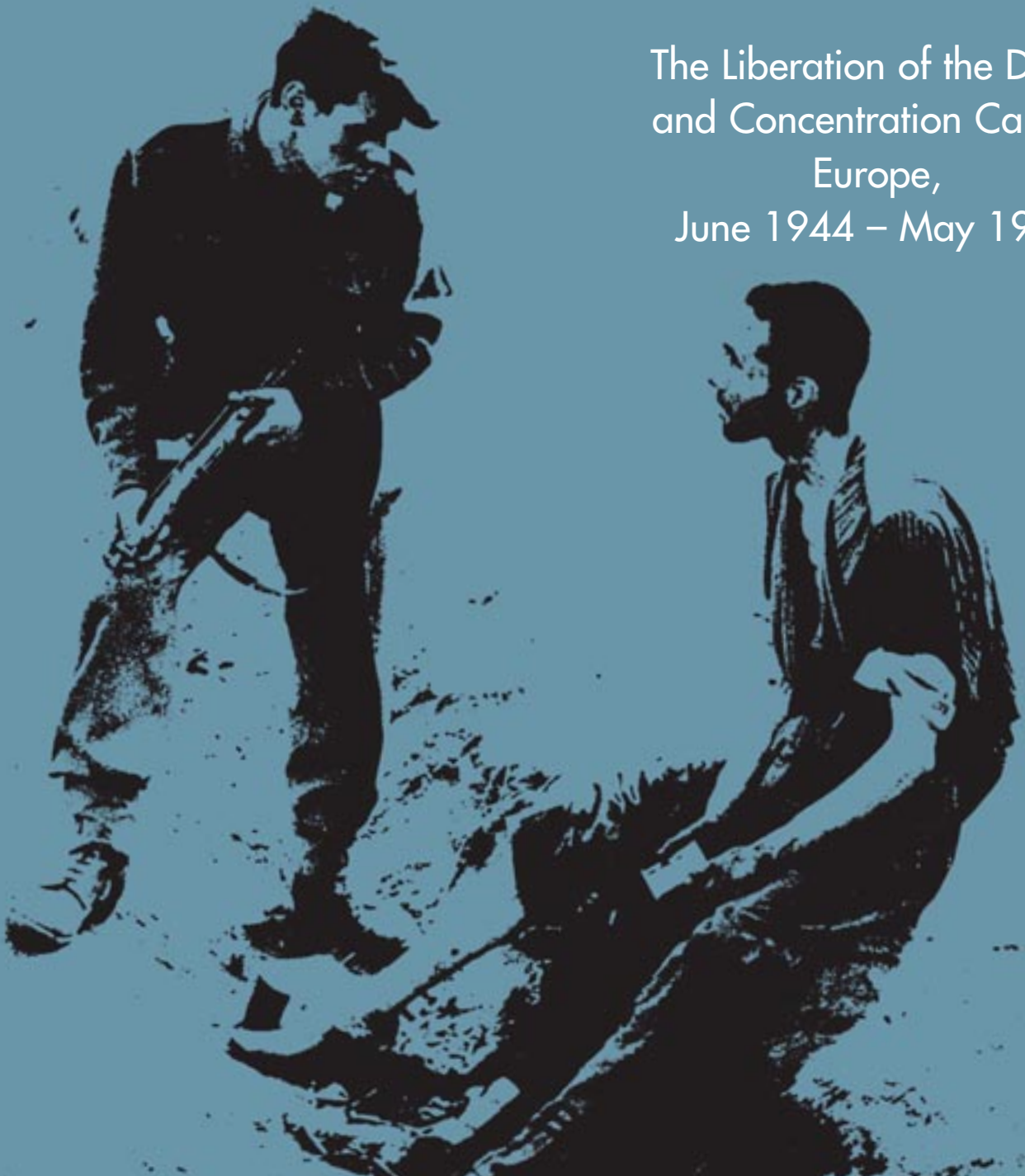


SECOND WORLD WAR

60TH

ANNIVERSARY

The Liberation of the Death
and Concentration Camps,
Europe,
June 1944 – May 1945



'Allied troops witness the horror of genocide'

No.9

The liberation of the death and concentration camps

DEATH AND CONCENTRATION CAMPS, EUROPE



Cover image: British soldier meets an Englishman, Louis Bonerguer, born in London. He was dropped by parachute in 1941 to work in the interior of Germany, but was caught and interned in Bergen-Belsen. 17 April 1945



Foreword by the Under Secretary of State for Defence and Minister for Veterans, Ivor Caplin MP

The act of commemoration serves not only as a way of respecting those who fought and died, but also as a way of educating younger generations about the debt of gratitude we all owe those who endured the effects of war. The Second World War saw civilian struggle and devastation on a scale without precedent in human history.

This series of booklets sets out to give a detailed and lucid account of some of the key battles, operations and tragic episodes in the Second World War. This ninth booklet, however, has a more poignant focus as it commemorates the liberation of the Nazis' death and concentration camps which once stretched across the whole of Europe, from the Channel Islands to modern-day Ukraine. It recognises and respects those Service men and women and relief volunteers who went into those camps to try and help the few who had survived. But most of all, it commemorates the terrible suffering of the millions of people who were victims of Nazi persecution and genocide.

Some British prisoners of war (POWs), who were incarcerated in the same camps, were forced to work in the factories of Auschwitz. They saw at first hand the terrible treatment of those forced into slave labour and did what they could to help them. On 27 January 2005, I will have the honour of unveiling a plaque in memory of the 38 British POWs who were killed at Auschwitz during air raids on the IG Farben factory. Later that day, I will join the British delegation attending the ceremony to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. At the same time, thousands of our citizens, young and old, will be taking part in the United Kingdom's fifth National Holocaust Memorial Day and remembering all the victims of Nazi persecution.

The Holocaust has provided us all with a terrible warning of what can happen when ideologies of hate and prejudice take precedence over respect for our fellow human beings.

The systems that were constructed to carry it out are chilling and those who were murdered, those who survived the ordeal, and those who carried the burden of liberating them must and will always be remembered.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Ivor Caplin'.

The background to the death and concentration camps

Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party's leadership of Germany resulted in a number of tragic outcomes, the most serious of which were: the destruction of a democratic state and the establishment of a dictatorship; the instigation of the Second World War, leading to the devastation of Europe, and many other parts of the world; genocide and the ruthless persecution of peoples and groups for political and unscientific racial ideals, the most serious aspect being the almost total destruction of 2000 years of European Jewish life.

Hitler's obsession with 'race' was indicated from the start of his political career and his violent anti-Semitism was developed even earlier. In his 1925 book *Mein Kampf* ('*My Struggle*'), written while he was in prison for attempting a political putsch, Hitler set out his political ideology, and at its very heart was the belief in German superiority over others and the need to achieve that by the use of force.

The Nazis became obsessed with the idea of racial superiority and that the most important factor in the make-up of a nation was the blood of its people. In accordance with their racial theories, the Nazis established an idealised racial scale, whereby all groups in society could be categorised according to their race, which is carried on through blood.

The Germans and other Europeans were placed at the top of the racial scale. Some Europeans, such as those from Eastern Europe, were put in the middle of the scale, and were to be used as slaves. Others, specifically the Jews, the Roma and black people, were at the bottom of the scale – these groups were to be destroyed. Also to be destroyed, all by the harshest means possible, were any groups that threatened the Nazi ideal and way of life, which included some groups of Germans, and any political or moral opposition.

In order to achieve their aims, the Nazis believed that all of society must be ordered and that all actions considered necessary could be used.

The result was the virtual destruction of Europe and the murder of millions of civilians. The genocide of the Jews, now known as the Holocaust, was one of the most disturbing and far-reaching elements of the Nazi ideal. The presence of anti-Semitism in Europe was not new in the 1930s, but the systematic, state-organised, industrial killing of the Jews of Europe and the attempt to eradicate any sign of their presence is an act unprecedented in history.

In order to achieve their aims, the Nazis believed that all of society must be ordered and that all actions considered necessary could be used.

The Nazi ideology and the road to genocide

USHMM 86838



Germans pass by the broken shop window of a Jewish-owned business, 9 November 1938

At the centre of Hitler's racial ideology was his hatred of the Jews, who had lived in Germany for over 1 500 years and who numbered less than 1 per cent of the total German population. Hitler, without any basis, accused the Jews across the world of inventing both capitalism and communism, and blame them for the First World War and the Russian Revolution.

The Nazis immediately introduced a variety of laws restricting the rights of German Jews. These restrictions included being barred from certain professions, having their movements restricted and being prevented from having relationships with non-Jews (including in professional circumstances). The most infamous of the laws were the 'Nuremberg Laws' of 1935.

The legal persecution developed over the years and many Jews tried without success to leave Germany. On the night of 9–10 November 1938, the Nazis carried out what is now generally known as the Kristallnacht pogrom, the 'night of broken glass'. It was a state-organised campaign of destruction against the Jews across the whole of Germany and

Austria. 91 Jews were murdered and 30,000 sent to concentration camps. Jewish property was destroyed and hundreds of synagogues were burnt to the ground. After Hitler's invasion of the Sudetenland in 1938, and the Czech Republic in 1939, and then his conquest of western Poland later that year, over 3 million more Jews came under Nazi control.

In Poland from 1939, Jews were persecuted and forced into ghettos. These places were intentionally overcrowded, poorly sanitised and removed from the populations of non-Jews. Hundreds of thousands died as a result of the conditions there. It was from the ghettos of Poland, and other areas of Eastern Europe, that Jews were transported by rail to the death and concentration camps.

In Germany, Jews were segregated from their neighbours and stripped of their belongings and human rights. In 1940, Germany occupied Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Denmark and Norway. Jews in all these countries save Denmark were also subject to severe restrictions. They were forced to wear the Star of David, and as their property and possessions were taken

away they were taken to transit camps. From there they too were taken to the camps in the east.

Other groups who were persecuted from the start because of the 'racial theory' were the Roma and Sinti groups (Gypsies), who had first arrived in Europe in the 13th century. Throughout their history in Europe, the Roma and Sinti had been persecuted, with legal discrimination existing in many countries, including Germany. The Roma and Sinti were used by the Nazis for racial experiments and were also designated as 'asocial'. Thousands of Roma and Sinti were forcibly sterilised and then later others were shot or sent to the concentration and death camps.

Another group persecuted on racial grounds was black people or those of mixed race. Although the black population of Europe was relatively small at the time, those who did live there were treated harshly. In 1937, 500 children of mixed race from the Alsace-Lorraine region were taken away and forcibly sterilised without their parents' knowledge.

Slavs were also designated as inferior and their lives were deemed to be dispensable. The Nazis intended to take control of their countries and turn them into slave nations.

The Nazis also believed that there were German citizens who threatened German racial superiority. Consequently, in June 1933, the Nazis passed a law for the 'Prevention of Hereditary Diseased Offspring' and 300,000 men, women and children were forcibly sterilised. When war started, Hitler ordered the 'euthanasia programme'. Children and adults who were in institutions and were deemed to be 'incurable' were sent to one of six German hospitals, and between 1940 and 1941 over 200,000 Germans were killed. The programme was officially stopped in 1941, after an outcry from the churches and the German public.

Other persecuted groups who were sent to camps were homosexual men, Jehovah's Witnesses, and political opponents.

USHMM



The camp system

IWM D825



Himmler inspects Mauthausen camp, January 1941

In 1932, Adolf Hitler's National Socialist German Workers' or Nazi Party became the largest party elected to the German Parliament. On 30 January 1933, Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany (a position comparable to that of the Prime Minister of the UK).

Immediately on reaching power, the Nazis introduced a series of laws and measures that established their permanency and removed political opposition. Human rights were restricted and, within months, the previously democratic society showed the signs of becoming a police state.

The backbone of the state system of control and oppression was the developing SS (Schutzstaffel, a protection squad made up of elite police and military units) and the camp system. In March 1933, Dachau concentration camp was opened

– it was a purpose-built camp and its first inmates were political opponents of the Nazi regime. Over the next 12 years, hundreds more camps would be created.

The camp system was a complex web of sites, each with specific purposes. The network of camps, that by 1945 would cover the whole of Nazi Europe, was developed and supervised by the SS, under the direct control of Heinrich Himmler. The camps ranged from the smallest of forced labour camps to the huge 'death camps' in the east.

The Nazi camps used for oppression and murder are not the same as the prisoner of war camps (POW camps) created after the start of the Second World War. In POW camps, captured Allied military personnel were to be removed from the war but treated under the provisions of the Geneva Convention.

These places were harsh and restrictive, and many Allied service personnel suffered in them. However, they are not to be compared with the concentration camps – although in some cases Allied, especially British, POWs did see and experience some of the conditions of the concentration camps. For the Allied Soviet troops captured by the Nazis, the position was tragic. Their only experience after capture was the concentration and forced labour camps. As Slavs, the Nazis refused to treat Soviet captives under the terms of the Geneva Convention.

Camp types:

Concentration camps – Originally built as prison camps, these quickly became centres for holding anyone not wanted by the Nazi regime. Those sent there included political and religious opponents, anyone engaged in resistance, Jews, Roma and Sinti (Gypsies), homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet POWs and others.

Death (extermination) camps – Camps built with the specific intention of murdering large groups of civilians, primarily Jews.

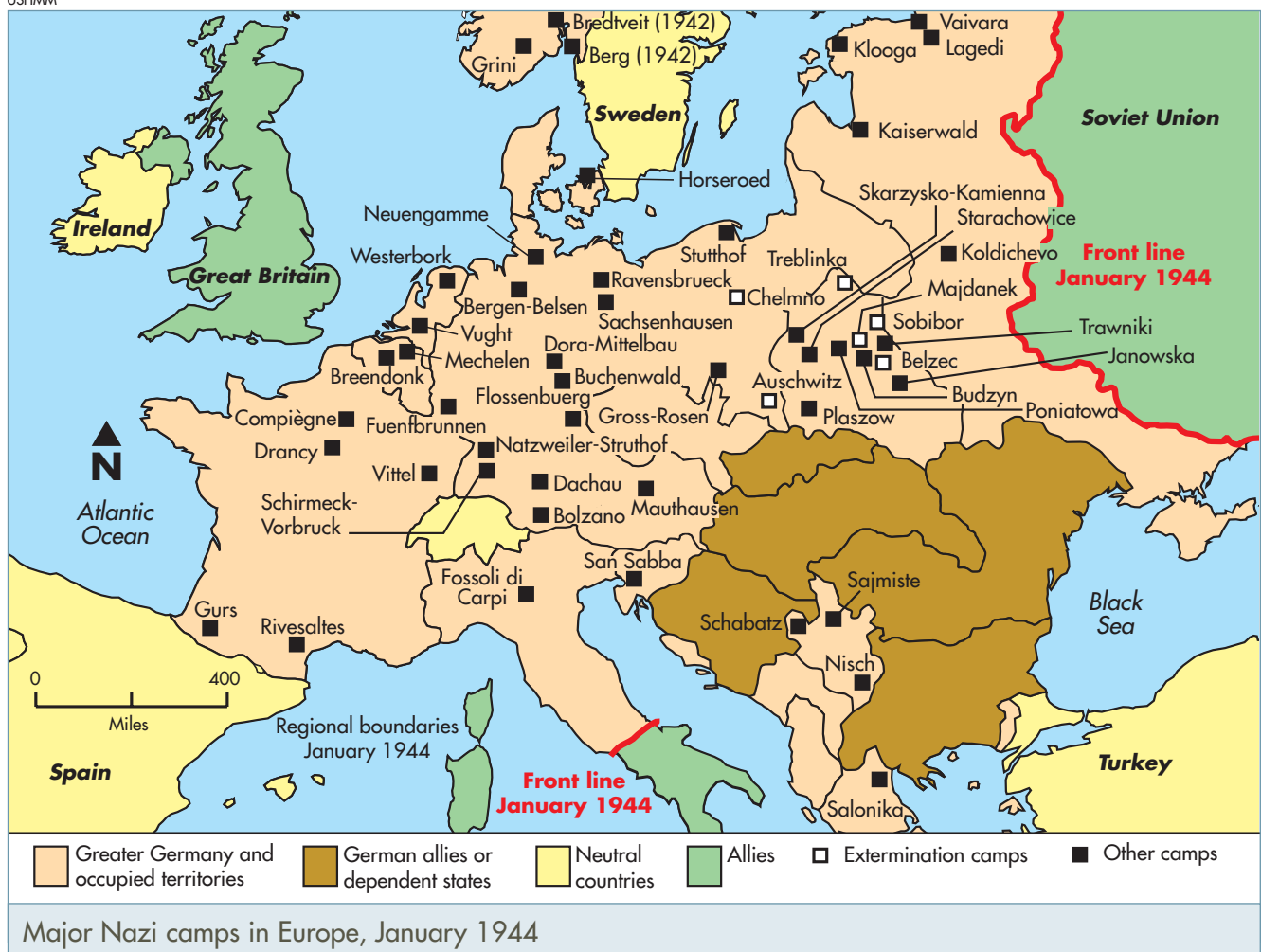
Slave labour camps – Camps built to hold slave workers. These were usually built next to the factories but could be part of a much bigger camp.

Special camps – Camps built originally to hold people and groups that might be useful for exchange.

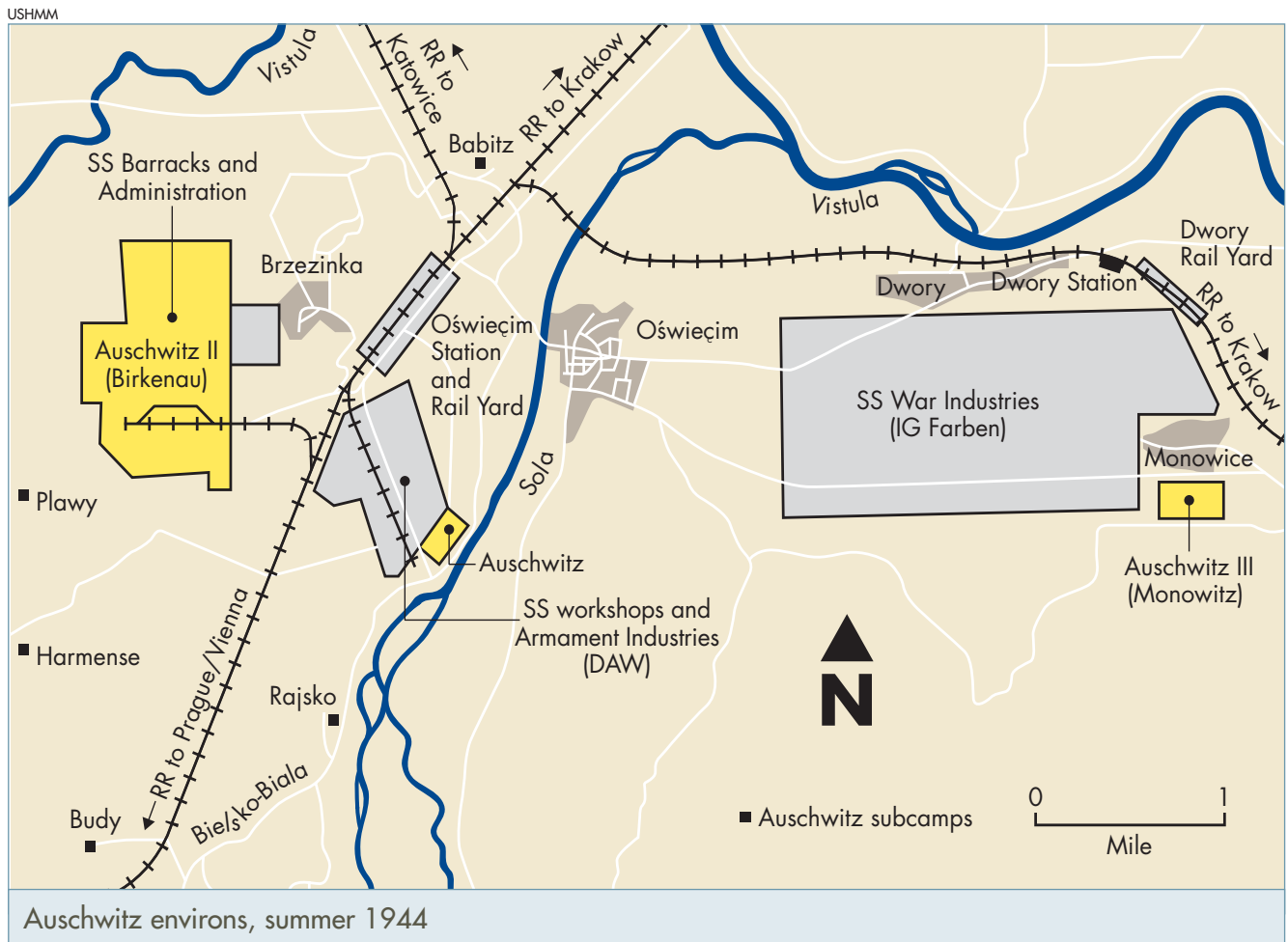
Transit camps – Holding centres where people were gathered before being transported east to the death camps. These were usually in Western Europe.

All the camps were sites of torture, persecution and terror. Anyone sent to a camp could be beaten or killed without reference to justice. Hundreds of thousands were killed in these places because of the appalling treatment and conditions.

USHMM



The Final Solution and the death camps



Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, and each German army group was accompanied by an Einsatzgruppe ('special action group') provided by the SS. The four Einsatzgruppen rounded up and massacred Jews, Communist officials and Gypsies. In one weekend, at Babi Yar in the Ukraine, 33,771 Jewish men, women and children were shot and thrown into a ravine. This method of killing, however, was time-consuming, a drain on resources and deemed to be unacceptable if the same thing was to occur in Western Europe. Despite this, over 1 million Jews were murdered by the Einsatzgruppen and their collaborators.

On 20 January 1942, top Nazi bureaucrats met to discuss how to solve the 'Jewish problem'. The meeting was held at Wannsee in Berlin and lasted 90 minutes. It produced a document that was the plan for annihilation of European Jewry.

It was decided that the SS would be in charge of a 'Final Solution'. Those Jews unfit for hard labour would be murdered. Those fit for labour would be worked to death, with men and women separated. Any of those fit who survived the slavery would then be murdered. No Jews in Europe were to be spared.

The SS plan for the Final Solution was a structured one, with slave labourers being transported to where they were needed, and purpose-built annihilation camps or death camps. The death camps were all to be located in occupied Poland, near main railway lines. Staff at these camps would be able to kill large numbers in comparative privacy, while removed from the actual process of death.

The first death camp was established in 1941 at Chelmno, and the second at the town of

Belzec near the ghettos of Lublin and Lvov. Dummy showers were built that would be Belzec's gas chambers.

A third death camp was established at Sobibor, also near Lublin, in early 1942. A fourth death camp was built at Treblinka, near a railway line from Warsaw. All four camps used a petrol engine to generate carbon monoxide gas for the gas chambers.

The Jews taken to these camps would be rushed through a process of undressing and depositing valuables; and would then be moved into the gas chamber. Initially the corpses were buried in trenches outside, but from late 1942 they were incinerated in open fires and the ashes buried.

By the middle of 1943, these four death camps were closed, their work done. It is estimated that 1.7 million people were killed in the four camps in under two years.

Two other death camps continued the work: Majdanek and the most notorious – Auschwitz-Birkenau. Auschwitz was originally built as a concentration camp for Polish political prisoners. It was later expanded to include some POWs. Factories were also built as part of the camp complex, to be operated by slave labour.

The Birkenau section was a huge death camp. Zyklon-B gas was used as the killing agent. It was already available from chemical factories as an insecticide, and could be easily transported. It meant that thousands of people could be killed at once.

At Birkenau, murder was industrialised. The victims' belongings were recycled for use in Germany. Even their dead bodies were searched and gold teeth were extracted for melting down. At least 1.1 million Jews were murdered there. At its most terribly efficient, Auschwitz-Birkenau could kill over 10,000 people a day.

In the slave labour camps of Auschwitz was a section meant to produce synthetic fuels, but mainly a sort of synthetic rubber called 'buna'. The buna plant was built with slave labour drawn from the concentration camp, as well as British POWs sent from Stalag (POW camp) VIII B.

Using British POWs to work in the German chemical industry was, the Germans said, not a violation of the laws of war since chemicals could be used for peaceful as well as military purposes. At Auschwitz, the British POWs discovered that the German armed forces allowed some of their fellow POWs who were Jewish to be moved from POW camps to the concentration camps. Royal Navy surgeon Karel Sperber, they discovered, was in the grey-striped uniform of the concentration camp inmates while working in the slave labour camp's hospital.

British POWs who worked at the buna factory were able to witness the horror the Jewish victims experienced. They also tried to help them in small ways. When possible, they subsisted on their Red Cross parcels, leaving their German rations for the prisoners on the other side of the electrified fence, and passing cigarettes from their Red Cross parcels across the wire, where they became currency the Jews could use to buy food.

'I myself have two scars on my face, i.e. chin and left eyebrow, for giving a young Jewish [inmate], 13 years old, a hand to get to his feet after falling down through weakness. The SS guard shot him and rifle-butted me in the face.'

– British ex-POW Frank Harris

British POWs tried to complain to the Red Cross about the treatment of the concentration camp inmates.

The deportation of people to Auschwitz and other concentration camps was a significant load on Germany's railway system. Yet at a time when Germany's armed forces were fighting on three fronts, and its troops were desperate for supplies, Auschwitz received its largest number of victims. The desire to kill Jews was more important than winning the war in Europe.

The Western Allies bombed the buna factory at Auschwitz, and briefly considered bombing

the death camp as well. The explosions killed many, including 38 British POWs. The discussion as to whether the bombing should or should not have happened remains contentious, and will continue to be so.

The Soviet Army liberated Auschwitz on 27 January 1945. An attempt had been made to destroy all the camp's records, and about 60,000 prisoners able to walk were forcibly marched westwards by the Nazis, away from the advancing Soviet troops. Many of those who survived the 'death marches' were interned in a former transit camp, the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in northern Germany.

'After Auschwitz, I was in a Buchenwald concentration camp sub-camp, in Leipzig. On April 12, we were put onto the road for our death march which lasted for 11 days. We had to move the wooden trucks onto which the German guards put their belongings. We had no food at all during the past ten days. It was still snowing. I was barefoot, had a sleeveless flannel shirt on covered with a threadbare striped jacket. We slept on the frozen ground. On April 22, a horse was slaughtered in front of us and

we were thrown pieces of raw horsemeat. We also had to queue up for a handful of uncooked rice. As I had dysentery again and my teeth were falling out as my gums couldn't hold them, the rice just went through me.

The next morning I collapsed. I knew it was the end for me but I did not mind any more. Two guards came and shouted at me to get up, I couldn't. They butted me with their guns and then one of them said: "Oh, leave her, she is not worth a bullet any more", and they left me.'

– Trude Levi

Bergen-Belsen and liberation

IWM BU 3764



A general view of Bergen-Belsen camp after liberation by the British Army, April 1945

Bergen-Belsen was not intended to be a death camp. It had been used as a special concentration camp for Jews whom the SS felt might be used as hostages and exchanged for German prisoners, money or equipment.

From the summer of 1944, conditions in Bergen-Belsen rapidly deteriorated as Jews from the outlying eastern camps began to be transported there. Early in 1945, the survivors of the 'death marches' from other concentration camps were also packed into Bergen-Belsen. By February 1945, there were 22,000. By April, there were 60,000. At least one soldier of the British Special Air Service was imprisoned in the camp.

Bergen-Belsen's commandant, SS-Hauptsturmfuehrer (Captain) Josef Kramer, knew his camp was filled to overflowing, but

made no effort to draw on nearby German military bakery facilities for additional food. Washing facilities were non-existent, and typhus, a virulent lice-borne disease, was rampant. Days before liberation, the water was turned off.

As the Allies moved across Europe, they had each agreed to cover certain areas for liberation. But those Allied troops in the west were not aware of what they would find.

On 7 April 1945, as British forces neared Bergen-Belsen, the head of the Reich Security Main Office, the Gestapo's parent organisation, ordered all inmates of Bergen-Belsen to be murdered. The following day, after pressure from Sweden, Himmler rescinded the order. From 10 April, the inmates were given neither food nor water.

'It was about 5pm on 15 April when the miracle actually happened: the first British tank rolled into the camp. We were liberated! No one who was in Belsen will ever forget that day. We did not greet our liberators with shouts of joy. We were silent. Silent with incredulity and maybe just a little suspicion that we might be dreaming.'

– Anita Lasker-Wallfisch

On 12 April 1945, the German commander in the district surrendered. Over the next days most of the camp's SS guards crept away.

On 15 April, Intelligence Corps and Royal Artillery soldiers entered the camp. Ten thousand unburied corpses lay there. Because no new latrines had been dug, human excrement was everywhere. Every day 500 more victims would die of typhus. More died when their digestive systems failed to cope with the food they were given.

Three weeks later another large camp, at Neuengamme near Hamburg, was liberated by the British. Feeding the liberated prisoners was difficult in the ensuing weeks. The British Liberation Army drew on local resources, and relief agencies sent food from Great Britain; but caring for the prisoners continued to be difficult. The British Army initially sent a Casualty Clearing Station, a Light Field Ambulance and a Field Hygiene Section. Then the Army set up a hospital at Bergen-Belsen which rapidly became the largest hospital in Europe. Medical students were sent from Great Britain to help care for the sick. Teams from the British Red Cross and the Medical Research Council, and both Jewish and Quaker relief teams, arrived to assist. However, 9000 inmates died by the end of April, and 4000 more in May.

IWM BU 4242



British soldiers supervise the distribution of food to inmates of Bergen-Belsen camp, April 1945

'As soon as possible, we were transferred to the tank training school six kilometres away for delousing and then to makeshift hospitals, where German doctors and nurses were made to look after us. I was unconscious for 10 days after we were liberated. Two days after I regained consciousness, on 27 April, my mother died aged 42 and was buried in a mass grave, together with the thousands of others who died from starvation and disease after the liberation.'

– Renée Salt

The remaining SS staff were made to collect bodies for burial. Germans living locally were brought to the camp to watch the burials, forced to view the horror that had taken place on their own doorstep, designed by their own countrymen.

The soldiers of British Second Army who liberated Bergen-Belsen had seen the horrors of war. Some had been fighting almost continuously since 1942. They had heard of some Nazi atrocities, yet the task of bulldozing thousands of bodies into mass graves and watching liberated women and children die of the food they had provided caused psychological casualties amongst the liberators.

'As we walked down the main roadway of the camp we were cheered by the internees, and for the first time we saw their condition. A great many of them were little more than living skeletons with haggard yellowish faces... There were men and women lying in heaps on both sides of the track. Others were walking slowly and aimlessly – a vacant expression on their starved faces.'

– Report by Brigadier Taylor-Balfour, Chief of Staff, British VIII Corps, Bergen-Belsen

IWM BU 4093



A British Army bulldozer is used to push bodies into a mass grave at Bergen-Belsen camp, April 1945

The camp itself was so infested with disease-carrying lice that it posed a public health hazard. The inmates were evacuated to nearby barracks and villages. Between 19 and 21 May, the empty camp was burned to the ground by Royal Engineers equipped with flame-throwers.

The camp was later established as a Displaced Persons' Camp.

Bergen-Belsen was not a designated death camp. Yet as at so many of the hundreds of Nazi concentration camps and thousands of sub-camps, thousands of people died there. In fighting to liberate Bergen-Belsen, and going on to liberate the rest of Germany, the Allies were fighting a war which brought the horror of the camps to light.

'It was then that [Senior Jewish Chaplain to British Second Army Leslie] Hardman appeared. I stretched out my hand to greet him and he fell on my neck and wept like a babe. The people round me saw it and joined in the weeping and I had to take him aside and make him pull himself together. He is not hysterical, he is tired and should go away for a while but he refuses to move. He feels that he must stay and bring a word of comfort to these people. He talks of the horrors that they have suffered and I can see that each word is spelt in blood.'

– Isaac Levy, Senior Jewish Chaplain,
British Liberation Army

'Typhus cases... numbers difficult to assess. ADMS 11 Armd Div states that he was told there were 300 cases in hutted camp but believes there to be more. 54 cases are in the local hospital... recent death rate was very high... as high as 300–400 per day.'

– Report by Capt J W Gray, GHQ Liaison
Regt, Bergen-Belsen, 15 April 1945

IWM BU 6674



The burning down of the last hut at Bergen-Belsen camp, 21 May 1945

KEY FACTS

Camp liberation**Death camps:**

Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka were all closed by the Nazis in 1943

Auschwitz-Birkenau,
27 January 1945 – Soviet forces

Majdanek,
July 1944 – Soviet forces

Chelmno,
17 January 1945 – Nazis abandon the camp and Soviet forces arrive days later

Concentration camps:

Lager Sylt Alderney (Channel Islands, UK),
closed by the Nazis in June 1944

Natzweiler-Struthof (France),
closed by the Nazis in August 1944

Bergen-Belsen (Germany),
15 April 1945 – British forces

Buchenwald (Germany),
11 April 1945 – American forces

Dachau (Germany),
April 1945 – American forces

Mauthausen (Austria),
6 May 1945 – American forces

Sachsenhausen (Germany),
April 1945 – Soviet forces

Ravensbrueck (Germany),
April 1945 – Soviet forces

Stutthof (Germany),
May 1945 – Soviet forces

Theresienstadt (Czech Republic),
8 May 1945

Never shall I forget

Never shall I forget that night,
The first night in camp
Which has turned my life into one long night,
Seven times cursed and seven times sealed.

Never shall I forget that smoke.
Never shall I forget the little faces of the children
Whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke
Beneath a silent blue sky

Never shall I forget those flames
Which consumed my faith forever.
Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence
Which deprived me for all eternity of the
desire to live.

Never shall I forget those moments
Which murdered my God and my soul
And turned my dreams to dust.

Never shall I forget these things,
Even if I am condemned to live
As long as God Himself.

Never

– Elie Wiesel

Elie Wiesel was born in Hungary in 1928.
All his family were killed in the Holocaust.
After liberation he moved to France and then
the USA. He has written a number of books
and poems and received the Nobel Prize
for Literature in 1986.

IWM EA 65160



Prisoners at Dachau celebrate their liberation by US troops, 30 April 1945

In total, 6 million Jews were murdered in the Holocaust. At least one and a half million were children.

Over 300,000 Roma and Sinti were also murdered as a result of Nazi race policy, and millions of other people, including religious groups, ethnic minorities and homosexuals became the victims of Nazi persecution.

War crimes trials

IWM EA 62817



A liberated Russian slave labourer points out a Nazi guard who had beaten prisoners, summer 1945

SS-Hauptsturmfuehrer Kramer and 44 other Nazi SS guards who had been in charge of Bergen-Belsen camp were tried by a British military court at Lueneburg. The trial lasted from 17 September to 17 November 1945. The prosecution case was based on the grounds that Allied nationals who had been 'captured by surrender or extradition or otherwise,' had been killed there.

The prosecution council established that the actions constituted war crimes. Thirty of those on trial were found guilty. Those sentenced to death appealed to the convening officer, Field Marshal Montgomery. All the appeals for clemency were rejected. Ten, including Kramer, the camp doctor and female SS leaders, were hanged on 13 December 1945. The other 20 found guilty were sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment.

Many of the leading Nazis and their collaborators managed to escape the Allies. Rudolf Hoess, commandant of Auschwitz camp, was captured by the British and extradited to Poland, where he was sentenced to death and hanged in 1947. Others, such as Hitler and Himmler, committed suicide to avoid capture.

In October 1943, the Allied leaders had agreed that major war criminals would be tried in a joint trial by all the Allied nations. The International Military Tribunal (IMT) opened in October 1945 in Nuremberg.

The IMT tried 22 'major' war criminals on charges of conspiracy, crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. Twelve of those convicted were sentenced to death, seven were given prison terms and three were acquitted.

A further 12 trials were conducted under the IMT, including those of doctors who had carried out experiments, and the SS and German industrialists who had benefited from slave labour.

The IMT created the precedent for the establishment of international tribunals and was the forerunner of the recently created International Criminal Court.

In 1948, the United Nations passed a Convention on Genocide, citing it as a crime that must be acted on by the international community.

The process of bringing war criminals to justice continues to the present day.

HU 62379



Bergen-Belsen camp officials face British justice, 18 September 1945

KEY FACTS

The Bergen-Belsen trial

The British Military Court sat at 30 Lindenstrasse, Lueneburg, Germany.

President

Major-General H P M Berney-Ficklin

Members

Brigadier A de L Cazenove

Colonel G W J Richards

Lieutenant-Colonel R B Morrish

Lieutenant-Colonel R McLay

Deputy Judge Advocate General

C L Stirling

Council for the Prosecution

Colonel T M Backhouse

Lieutenant-Colonel L J Genn

KEY FACTS

Council for the Prosecution (continued)

Major H G Murton-Neale

Captain S M Stewart

Council for the Defence

Major T C M Winwood

Major A S Munro

Major L S W Cranfield

Major C Brown

Captain D F Roberts

Captain J H Fielden

Captain E W Corbally

Captain A H Neave

Captain J R Phillips

Captain J M Boyd

Captain D E Munro

Lieutenant A Jedrzejowicz

George Cross citations

The George Cross is the British realm's highest award for acts of the greatest heroism not under enemy fire and of the most conspicuous courage in circumstances of extreme danger. The George Cross is worn before all other decorations except the Victoria Cross.

The George Cross was instituted by a Royal Warrant dated 24 September 1940. The decoration consists of a plain silver cross, with the Royal cipher 'GVI' in the angle of each limb. In the centre is a circular medallion showing St George and the dragon, surrounded by the inscription 'For Gallantry'. The reverse is plain and bears the name of the recipient and the date of the award.

Since its inception, the George Cross has been awarded 156 times. In addition to the direct awards there have been 245 exchanges from pre-existing gallantry awards. The 108 living recipients and the next of kin of a further four posthumous recipients of the Empire Gallantry Medal exchanged their decoration for the George Cross. In 1971, surviving holders of the Albert Medal and Edward Medal were also invited to exchange their decoration for the George Cross.

Including exchanges, the total number of George Crosses awarded to date is 401. The youngest direct recipient was 15 years old and the oldest was 61 years old. As well as individuals, Malta and the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) have been awarded the George Cross.

113 members of the British and Commonwealth forces were awarded the George Cross during the Second World War.



**ASSISTANT SECTION OFFICER
NOOR-UN-NISA INAYAT-KHAN**
Women's Auxiliary Air Force, seconded
to the Women's Transport Service (First
Aid Nursing Yeomanry) and Special
Operations Executive

Extract from the George Cross citation:

Assistant Section Officer Inayat-Khan was the first woman operator to be infiltrated into enemy-occupied France, and landed on 16 June 1943. During the weeks immediately following her arrival, the Gestapo made mass arrests in the Paris Resistance groups to which she had been detailed. After three months, she was betrayed and imprisoned in the Gestapo HQ, and she remained there for several weeks. Assistant Section Officer Inayat-Khan was sent to Karlsruhe in November 1943, and then to Pforzheim. She was interrogated but refused to give any information whatsoever, either on her work or on her colleagues. She was taken to Dachau camp on 12 September 1944. On arrival, she was taken to the crematorium and shot.

**LIEUTENANT COMMANDER PATRICK
O'LEARY (REAL NAME: ALBERT GUERISSE)**
Royal Navy and Special Operations Executive
Extract from the George Cross citation:

Lieutenant Commander O'Leary was captured in April 1941. He escaped and set up an organisation to help evaders. Through his skill and his sustained personal bravery, the organisation succeeded. In March 1943, he was arrested and put to many forms of torture, in an attempt to make him reveal the names, whereabouts and duties of the other members. The Germans sent him to Mauthausen, Natzweiler, Neubremm and finally Dachau. Throughout his time in prison, Lieutenant Commander O'Leary's courage never faltered. From the time of inception

until the end of the war, Lieutenant Commander O'Leary's group was responsible for the rescue and successful return of over 600 British and American officers and men.

MRS ODETTE SANSOM

Women's Transport Service (First Aid Nursing Yeomanry) and Special Operations Executive

Extract from the George Cross citation:

Mrs Sansom was infiltrated into enemy-occupied France and worked with great courage and distinction until April 1943, when she was arrested with her Commanding Officer. On the way to the prison at Fresnes, she succeeded in speaking to her Commanding Officer and for mutual protection they agreed to maintain that they were married. She adhered to this story and succeeded in convincing her captors. By this action she caused the Gestapo to cease paying attention to her Commanding Officer. In addition, the Gestapo were determined to discover the whereabouts of a wireless operator and another British officer. Mrs Sansom refused to speak and not only saved the lives of the two officers but also enabled them to carry on their valuable work.

ENSIGN VIOLETTE SZABO

Women's Transport Service (First Aid Nursing Yeomanry) and Special Operations Executive
Extract from the George Cross citation:

Madame Szabo was parachuted into France in April 1944, and was twice arrested by the German security authorities, but each time managed to get away. Eventually, with other members of her group, she was surrounded by the Gestapo in a house in the south-west of France. Resistance appeared hopeless, but Madame Szabo, seizing a Sten gun and as much ammunition as she could carry,

barricaded herself in part of the house, and, exchanging shot for shot with the enemy, killed or wounded several of them. By constant movement she avoided being cornered and fought until she dropped exhausted. She was arrested and continuously and atrociously tortured, but never by word or deed gave away any of her acquaintances, or told the enemy anything of value. She was ultimately executed.

ACTING WING COMMANDER FOREST YEO-THOMAS

Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve and Special Operations Executive

Extract from the George Cross citation:

Acting Wing Commander Yeo-Thomas parachuted into France on 25 February 1943. He enabled a French officer who was being followed to reach safety and took charge of a US officer who had been shot down. This officer returned to England on 15 April 1943 in the aircraft that also picked up Wing Commander Yeo-Thomas. He undertook a second mission on 17 September 1943 and returned to England on 15 November, bringing British intelligence archives with him. He parachuted into France again in February 1944, was betrayed on 21 March, and was confined in Fresnes prison for four months. On 17 July, he was sent to Compiègne prison and was then transferred to Buchenwald. In attempting to escape, he was picked up and transferred to a camp near Marienburg. On 16 April 1945, he led an escape. He continued alone for a week and was recaptured. A few days later he escaped to the American lines. He endured brutal treatment and torture and showed fortitude and devotion to duty throughout his service abroad.

The camps today

There were thousands of camps across Europe, many of which are now untraceable. In some of the key sites, however, aspects of the camps have been preserved and museums and education centres operate. This is the case at Auschwitz, Dachau, Mauthausen, Theresienstadt and a few others. These places receive thousands of visitors a year.

In many places – such as Sobibor and Treblinka – the camps were destroyed by the retreating Nazis to hide their crimes. In places such as Bergen-Belsen, the Allies burnt camps to the ground because of health risks.

At the sites that were destroyed, monuments stand now to those who were murdered. At Bergen-Belsen, huge monuments stand over each of the mass graves, with the individual

victims' names unknown. In the last 20 years, there has been a greater effort to mark sites where victims of the Nazis were murdered. Some of the larger sites, such as Belzec, are currently being excavated to learn more and to preserve the memory of those who perished.

New memorials are being erected in towns and countryside right across Europe in memory of the millions who were killed – for no reason but existing. But the culture that was lost, and the way of life that was destroyed for millions, will never be recovered.

The Holocaust is a terrible warning of what can happen when ideologies of hate and prejudice take precedence over respect for fellow human beings.

GB-B



Bergen-Belsen memorial

Bergen-Belsen – List of British units known to have been involved in liberating the camp and in the provision of subsequent humanitarian assistance (15 April to 8 June 1945)

HQ 10 Garrison (subsequently relieved by 2 Control Section (later 102 Control Section))

63 Anti-Tank Regiment (Oxfordshire Yeomanry)

113 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Royal Artillery

1575 Artillery Platoon Royal Army Service

Corps att. 113 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

35 Pioneer Group

32 Casualty Clearing Station

35 Casualty Clearing Station

30 Field Hygiene Section

76 Field Hygiene Section

11 Light Field Ambulance

163 Field Ambulance

9 (British) General Hospital

29 (British) General Hospital

81 (British) General Hospital

30 Field Transfusion Unit

7 Field Transfusion Unit

22 Field Transfusion Unit

7 Mobile Bacteriological Laboratory

104 Mobile Laundry and Bath Unit

314 Mobile Laundry and Bath Unit

Bath Unit Section 8 Corps

Bath Unit Section 11 Armoured Division

Bath Unit Section 6 Airborne Division

Bath Unit Section 15 (Scottish) Division

10 Displaced Persons Camp Staff

3 Military Government Inland Depot

224 Military Government Detachment

618 Military Government Detachment

904 Military Government Detachment

908 Military Government Detachment

Six British Red Cross teams, medical students from the London hospitals, Medical Research Council nutritional teams, and both Jewish and Quaker relief teams arrived later to assist.

UK National Holocaust Memorial Day

Harrison Photography



Fourth National Holocaust Memorial Day, Belfast, 27 January 2004

The UK National Holocaust Memorial Day is commemorated on 27 January, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Holocaust Memorial Day helps to ensure that the horrendous crimes against humanity committed during the Holocaust and subsequent genocides are never forgotten. Its purpose is to teach each new generation the lessons of rights and responsibilities in a just and tolerant society.

The first national event in the UK was held in 2001 at Westminster Central Hall; addresses

were given by the Prime Minister and the Chief Rabbi, and HRH The Prince of Wales lit the first memorial candle on behalf of the nation. Subsequent national events have been held in Manchester, Edinburgh and Belfast. The fifth UK National Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration in 2005 will be held in Westminster Hall in the Palace of Westminster. The event will be attended by HM The Queen and HRH The Duke of Edinburgh. Earlier The Queen will host a reception at St James's Palace for survivors of Nazi death camps.

Glossary

Allies	Twenty-six nations, led by Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union, that joined in war against Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Japan (known as the Axis powers).
Auschwitz-Birkenau	Largest Nazi camp, located 37 miles west of Kraków, Poland. Established in 1940 as a concentration camp, it included a killing centre at Birkenau, built in 1942, and IG Farben's slave labour camp, known as Buna-Monowitz.
Belzec	Extermination camp in eastern Poland. Established in 1942. Earlier functioned as a slave labour camp.
Bergen-Belsen	Camp in northern Germany. Transformed from a prisoner-exchange camp into a concentration camp in March 1944.
Buchenwald	Concentration camp in north-central Germany. Established in July 1937. One of the largest concentration camps with more than 130 satellite slave labour camps.
Chancellor	Chief (prime) minister of Germany and head of the government.
Dachau	First concentration camp, established in March 1933 near Munich, Germany.
Drancy	Located near Paris. The largest transit camp for the deportation of Jews from France.
Einsatzgruppen	Mobile units of SS and SD (Security Service) that followed German armies into the Soviet Union in June 1941.
Final Solution	Refers to the 'final solution to the Jewish question in Europe'. Nazi code for the physical destruction of European Jews.
Genocide	Deliberate, systematic destruction of a racial, cultural or political group.
Gestapo	In German, Geheime Staatspolizei (the secret state police).
Himmler, Heinrich	Reich leader of the SS from 1929 to 1945. During the Second World War, he was responsible for carrying out the 'Final Solution'. Himmler committed suicide before he could be brought to trial.

Hitler, Adolf	Leader of the Nazi Party, Chancellor of Germany from January 1933 to April 1945. He annexed Austria in 1938 and invaded Poland in September 1939, forcing France and Britain to declare war on Nazi Germany. Hitler committed suicide in Berlin in April 1945.
Jehovah's Witnesses	Religious sect that originated in the United States and had members in Germany in 1933 who were persecuted as 'enemies of the state'.
Majdanek-Lublin	Camp near Lublin in eastern Poland. At first a labour camp for Poles and POW camp for Soviets, it was a concentration camp from April 1943 to July 1944.
Mauthausen	Concentration camp for men opened in August 1938 near Linz in Upper Austria.
Nazi	Short term for the National Socialist German Workers Party, a right-wing and nationalistic political party formed in 1919 and headed by Adolf Hitler from 1921 to 1945.
Persecution	Act of causing others to suffer, especially those who differ in background or lifestyle or hold different political or religious beliefs.
Ravensbrueck	Concentration camp for women opened in May 1939, 56 miles north of Berlin. Inmates included political prisoners, Jews, Gypsies, and Jehovah's Witnesses.
SS	In German, Schutzstaffel. Protection squad units formed in 1925 as Hitler's personal bodyguard. The SS was later organised by Heinrich Himmler and provided staff for police, camp guards and military units (Waffen-SS) serving with the German army.
Theresienstadt	German name for the Czech town of Terezin, located about 40 miles from Prague. Nazis used the Theresienstadt ghetto, established in November 1941, as a 'model Jewish settlement' to show Red Cross investigators how well Jews were being treated, but, in fact, thousands died there.
Treblinka	Extermination camp about 50 miles north-east of Warsaw. Up to 750,000 Jews and at least 2,000 Gypsies were killed at Treblinka between July 1942 and November 1943.



Bergen-Belsen camp, May 1945

Acknowledgements

Dr Aryeh Nusbacher, Department of War Studies, Royal Military Academy Sandhurst
Ms Paula Kitching, Senior Consultant, Department for Education and Skills
Commonwealth War Graves Commission
Confederation of British Service and Ex-Service Organisations (COBSEO)
Imperial War Museum
The Victoria Cross and George Cross Association
US Holocaust Memorial Museum
Veterans Agency
The National Archives
Poetry in the text taken from *Holocaust Poetry*, compiled and introduced by Hilda Schiff, Quill Press, 2002

Photography and maps

Photography reproduced with the permission of the Imperial War Museum, US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Getty Images, Gedenkstätte Bergen-Belsen, Harrison Photography and Holocaust Memorial Day Team Belfast.

'A nation that forgets its past has no future.'
These words by Winston Churchill could not be more apt
to describe the purpose of this series of booklets,
of which this is the ninth.

These booklets commemorate various Second World War actions,
and aim not only to remember and commemorate those who
suffered, fought and died, but also to remind future generations
of the debt they owe to their forebears, and the inspiration that
can be derived from their stories.

They will help those growing up now to be aware
of how these events have affected the way of life we
enjoy today, and in the future.



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

