

5-1981

The Prisoners in German Concentration Camps

Debbie Jo Smith
Ouachita Baptist University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses



Part of the [European History Commons](#), and the [Military History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Smith, Debbie Jo, "The Prisoners in German Concentration Camps" (1981). *Honors Theses*. 597.
https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses/597

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Carl Goodson Honors Program at Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. For more information, please contact mortensona@obu.edu.

H943.08
SMI

THE PRISONERS
IN
GERMAN CONCENTRATION CAMPS

DEBBIE JO SMITH

Honors Program
Independent Study

Ouachita Baptist University
May 12, 1981

THE PRISONERS IN GERMAN CONCENTRATION CAMPS

The term Holocaust comes from the Hebrew word olah, meaning burnt sacrifice. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, this word became holokauston. Today, the word Holocaust is used to denote the Nazi persecution of the Jews, resulting in the extermination of some six million men, women, and children in concentration and extermination camps. The term should bring to mind horrible images of torture, death, and destruction. Yet, in most cases, this does not happen. Although many people are familiar with The Diary of Anne Frank, The Hiding Place, and The Holocaust, even in today's highly educated society, there is an appalling lack of knowledge concerning this tragic event.

Some people claim that the Holocaust never existed. Arthur Butz, in his book The Hoax of the Twentieth Century, said that there were no records of the Holocaust, therefore it could never have occurred.¹ Dozens and dozens of pamphlets were circulated after the television showing of Gerald Green's book, The Holocaust, warning people against this Jewish "propaganda." They say that the Holocaust was and is a fraud perpetrated by the Jews.

How should one react to such statements? Elie Wiesel answers this in an article written for Social Education magazine. He says,

We may ask: Where have all the people disappeared? Where are the three million Polish Jews? What happened to the Jews of

Germany? What happened to the Jews of my town and the other towns in Hungary, Estonia, Lithuania, Greece, Holland, and the Ukraine? Where are the more than a million Jewish children hiding? If there was no Holocaust, where have they all vanished?

Think about these questions teachers. For you are the ones who must answer them. I believe this attempt to deprive the victims of their past is obscene, an outrage. But it is not new. The Diary of Anne Frank was only recently termed a forgery by an ambassador to the United Nations. And there was no one there, to my shame as a human being, to go and spit in his face.

. . . I confess I do not know how to handle this situation. Are we really to debate these charges? Is it not beneath our dignity and the dignity of the dead to refute these lies? But then, is silence the answer? Since silence has never been the answer, the survivors chose to teach; and what is their writing, their testimony, if not teaching?²

Wiesel goes on to day in the article that anyone not involved in keeping those memories alive is "an accomplice to the killers,"³ and, in this writer's opinion, he is correct.

Experts now realize that studies are necessary because,

if one accepts the premise that a basic purpose of education is to help young people become effective adults, one must also agree that honest and even painful examination of human behavior must also be included . . . and what more compelling case of human potential for extremes of⁴ both good and evil than in the study of the Holocaust?

Studying such an event forces one to try and understand how human beings could allow such a tragedy to transpire. This paper is designed to be informative: to answer questions about what led to the event we call the Holocaust, to give the facts about what happened in the camps themselves, to explain how life in the camps affected the

prisoners psychologically, and to tell some of what has happened to them since the Holocaust ended.

Many studies have pointed the finger of blame to one particular group, usually the German people. One author summarizes this fact by writing,

Some have portrayed the Germans as inherently and eternally bad; they seek to find the same qualities of barbarism as were to be found in the old Germanic tribes who fought out their fierce and treacherous struggles in the primitive forests. Others regard the German people as naturally good- but misled and imposed upon by wicked leaders. Some again, look for a psychological link, or see the Germans as good individually, but bad in the mass. Others, yet again, have favored the theory of the two Germanies- the one Prussia, from which has come autocracy and militarism, the other, the south and west of Germany, where the older culture flourished.

Each of these theories has many supporters, yet no single theory appears to answer all of the questions. Many factors combined to cause the Holocaust, and it was not necessarily the fault of the German people alone. Two of the factors involved were the historic religious prejudice toward the Jews, and the economic conditions of Europe prior the World War I.

Religious anti-Semitism can be traced much further back in history. Its basis in the Christian world was the accusation that the Jews were to blame for the crucifixion of Jesus. 'Christ-killer' was synonymous for Jew. As the Christian church grew in strength, its persecution of the Jews increased. In many countries, they were in the same position as slaves.

Then, in Bismarkian Germany, the Jews were emancipated by the law of 1869. They then endeavored to achieve a double goal of complete integration into the society while at the same time, maintaining their identity. They quickly became involved in the sciences, literature, and the press. Had it not been for an economic crisis, there is a slight chance that they could have succeeded, however, a rapid urbanization of Europe was taking place and the Jews gained new positions in the economies of central European countries, especially in Germany. They worked their way up from positions as small village shopkeepers and peddlers to more prestigious positions such as department store owners and merchants.

It was at this time that the racial form of anti-Semitism began to grow and gain strength. The racial anti-Semites had no religious prejudice toward the Jews, but had developed a systematic ideology that began with envy and jealousy toward those Jews who were economically superior and quickly turned into hatred of an entire 'race'.

These racial anti-Semites were at this time, however, a small group of primarily middle class workers who had come from rural backgrounds into the urban areas. They had become politically significant as early as 1893, yet their racial theory might never have gained a foothold in German life had it not been for the First World War.

As even more non-Jewish workers came to the cities, considerable irritation arose and developed as the more highly skilled Jewish workers got the better- and sometimes only- jobs. The racial Anti-Semites has exactly what they were looking for - a scapegoat - the Jew.

They began to use new forms of propaganda* - promoting the idea that the Jews were to blame for all of Germany's problems, and that - as opposed to religious anti-Semitism- even baptism could not solve the problems and cleanse the Jewish people. Though these racial anti-Semites were opposed to Christianity and its ideals, they took advantage of the peoples' resentment and combined it with some basic Christian doctrines, thereby making it acceptable to the masses. With this advance in popularity, the chief obstacle to the rise of Nazism was removed.

Due to the shock of Germany's defeat in World War I, the inflation and the propagandist activities combined to produce "an atmosphere of unreality made to order for revivalists, quacks, and confidence men."⁶

"Miracle men" were everywhere, finding followers not only among the lower middle class workers, but also among the military, the industrialists, and former royalty. All claimed to have but one goal- the restoration of German power and prosperity to even greater levels of glory.

*"Political propaganda had been used before in the twentieth century, by the British in the First World War, but on a limited scale. It was left to Nazi Germany to employ it on such a scale, and with such effect, that by 1939, the German masses seemed completely indoctrinated. To the very end, most of them still believed that Adolf Hitler was a disinterested ruler, even a messiah, concerned above all with their welfare and, ultimately, that of the human race." - Antony Rhodes, Propaganda: The Art of Persuasion: World War II (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1976), p. 11.

It was one of these 'miracle men', Adolph Hitler, that rose to power in Germany during the 1920's. Although he was physically unimpressive, his oratorical ability was tremendous. He had a charisma about him that enabled him to attract people and sway masses. Within a few years, he had become the leader and sole master of the Nationalist Socialist Workers' Party - more commonly referred to as the Nazi Party.

While imprisoned, after his famous "beer-hall putsch" - an attempt to overthrow the government, he wrote Mein Kampf (My Struggle).

In this partially fictitious autobiography, Hitler stated what he considered to be the conditions necessary in developing a successful Germany. In several statements, such as the following, he clearly showed his attitude toward the Jews.

He implied that Jews were not human when he wrote,

In the course of the centuries their outward appearance had become Europeanized and had taken on a human look. . . . Wherever I went, I began to see Jews, and the more I saw, the more sharply they became distinguished in my eyes from the rest of humanity. . . . The cleanliness of this people, both moral and otherwise, is a point in itself. By their very exterior, you could tell that they were no lovers of water, and to your distress, you often knew it with your eyes closed.

He went on to say that, "I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator: by defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord."⁸

Like the other racial anti-Semites, he apparently had no qualms about using Christianity to his own ends.

Had the world heeded his rhetoric, perhaps countless lives could

have been spared, the Holocaust averted. Instead, people ignored this warning, and Hitler came to power in 1933. Soon afterwards, the Reichstag (the German law making body) empowered him to act on its behalf. A series of Anti Jewish decrees went forth soon after Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor on January 30, 1933. Sections of the laws are quoted below.

TABLE 1

ANTI-JEWISH LAWS⁹

Date	Law
April 7, 1933	LAW FOR THE RESTORATION OF THE PROFESSIONAL CIVIL SERVICE- "Civil servants who are not of Aryan (non-Jewish) descent are to be retired."
April 7, 1933	LAW REGARDING ADMISSION TO THE BAR- "Persons who, according to the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service of April 7, 1933, are of non-Aryan descent may be denied admission to the bar."
April 25, 1933	LAW AGAINST THE CROWDING OF GERMAN SCHOOLS AND INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING- "In new admissions, care is to be taken that the number of Reich Germans who, according to the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service of April 7, 1933, are of non-Aryan descent, out of the total attending each school and each facility, does not exceed the proportion of non-Aryans within the Reich German population."

Gradually, Hitler allowed more crimes to be committed against the Jews. He announced that kosher butchering was forbidden by law, that German nationality could be revoked at any time, and that there would be a one-day boycott of all Jewish shops. It seemed that no area of life was beyond his reach.

Then, in August of 1934, after Hindenberg's death, Hitler declared himself the President as well as the Chancellor of the Third Reich. Compulsory military service was again required - in open defiance of the Versailles Treaty. Then, less than one year later, the Nuremburg Laws were passed. (See Table 2). Jews were again reduced to the status of subjects or slaves. Gradually, more and more of their rights and privileges had been denied.

Finally, on November 7, 1938, the Nazis found exactly what they needed. On that date, Vom Rath, the German Attache in Paris, was killed by Herschal Grynszpan, a Jew. "Spontaneous demonstrations," or "pogroms," were organized throughout Germany. On what was known as Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass), stores were looted, Jewish women and girls were raped, Jews were brutally beaten and often killed, and synagogues were left in shambles. The Nazis had seen the propaganda values in this and had ordered that the demonstrations be executed in retaliation toward the Jews. The pogrom continued through November 10. Following this, on November 12, "reparations" of one billion Reichmarks were imposed upon the German Jews. Furthermore, they were to repair all damages at their own expense. They could no longer bear arms, no longer head businesses, and no longer attend plays, movies, concerts, or exhibitions. 26,000 Jews were

TABLE 2

NUREMBURG LAWS¹⁰

With the passage of the Nuremburg Laws by the Reichstag on September 15, 1935, the first direct attack on all individual Jews was launched. These laws mark a sharp progression toward an irreversible anti-Semitic policy. In the future, no Jew would be able to escape intensified persecution.

Date	Law
September 15, 1935	LAW FOR THE PROTECTION OF GERMAN BLOOD AND GERMAN HONOR - "Marriages between Jews and subjects of German or kindred blood are forbidden . . . Extra-marital intercourse between Jews and the subjects of German blood is forbidden . . . Jews are forbidden to fly the Reich and national flag and to display Reich colors . . . They are, on the other hand, allowed to display the Jewish colors . . . Whoever violates the prohibition . . . will be punished by penal servitude."
September 15, 1935	REICH CITIZENSHIP LAW - "A Reich citizen is only that subject of German or kindred blood who proves by his conduct that he is willing and suited loyally to serve the German people and the Reich."
November 14, 1935	FIRST DECREE TO THE REICH CITIZENSHIP LAW - "A Jew cannot be a Reich citizen. He is not entitled to the right to vote on political matters; he cannot hold public office . . . A Jew is anyone descended from at least three grandparents who are fully Jewish as regards race . . . Also deemed a Jew is a Jewish <u>Mischlung</u> subject who is descended from two fully Jewish grandparents and . . . who belonged to the Jewish religious community . . . who was married

Table 2 continued

August 17, 1938	<p>to a Jew . . . who is the offspring of extramarital intercourse with a Jew . . . "</p> <p>SECOND DECREE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LAW REGARDING CHANGES OF FAMILY NAMES - "Jews may be given only such names as are listed in the Guidelines on the Use of Given Names issued by the Reich Minister of the Interior . . . Insofar as Jews have other given names than those which may be given to Jews . . . they are obligated, beginning January 1, 1939, to assume an additional given name, namely the given name Isreal in the case of males and the given name Sarah in the case of females."</p>
-----------------	--

then arrested and sent to concentration camps.

Within the year, Germany occupied Czechoslovakia and had invaded Poland. World War II had begun. By October 1, 1939, the Nazis had begun to deport the Austrian and Moravian Jews to Poland. By November, it was mandatory for all Jews in occupied Poland to wear the Judenstern (the six-pointed star of David).

It was at this time, from 1939 to 1945, that the Nazis established some 4 extermination camps, over 110 penitentiary labor camps, and over 110 labor camps for Jews, in Poland alone.

As Sereny says in his book, Into That Darkness, "There are two main reasons for the persistent confusion between these two kinds of Nazi installations (extermination camps and concentration camps); the first is that appallingly few people survived the extermination

camps, and those who did are neither particularly articulate, nor anxious to relive their horrifying experiences. The second reason - far more subtle - is a universal reluctance to face the fact that these places really existed." 11

The concentration camp was set up to deal with those that opposed the Nazi government and plans. Those who refused to change their views were often eliminated as traitors or spies. Even though the conditions were that of a slave labor camp or worse, the inmates had some chance of survival. Auschwitz, the largest center of Nazi genocide, was originally set up as one of these camps. At first, it was a camp for men, but in 1942, its character changed to fit the "Final Solution" plans of the Third Reich, and it became a camp for men and women. It was then changed to an extermination camp. The extermination camp offered no chance of survival, except for those few (82) Jews, the Sonderkommando, who were forced to labor there.

The remainder of this paper deals with the people in the concentration camps and how they reacted mentally to the conditions in them, in order to survive. Many of the examples are taken from the author's experiences in the concentration/extermination camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau. As it is impossible to mention all of the details and their psychological explanations, only those deemed most important are included here.

Concentration camps affected the minds of the prisoners interned there. None could survive without changing. No one left the same person as he entered.

There were three stages in the concentration camp life, however, that were fairly characteristic of the prisoners while confined. They were designated as follows:

- I. THE STAGE OF INITIAL REACTION;
- II. THE STAGE OF ADAPTATION;
- III. THE STAGE OF RESIGNATION. ¹²

I. THE STAGE OF INITIAL REACTION

"the nature of the initial reaction was determined by the psychological condition of the victim, which means that the conception he had formed as to what would happen to him was the determining factor."¹³ If his expectations coincided with reality, then his reaction was not as violent. Because few, if any, prisoners were prepared for this experience, shock was often the result.¹⁴

To understand, one must realize the degradation and humiliation that each prisoner went through. Conditions were horrible. Roads brought four, forty-five car trains of approximately 3,000 people each to the camp daily. (The railroads, as a special service, charged only half-price fares if the Nazis had at least 400 passengers. This encouraged them, so they crowded even further). During the two to three day trip, the victims were pressed together, standing in closed freight cars with no food, water, or sanitary facilities. Many died on the way. Those that did survive, however, were met at the gate by the SS (the military unit in charge of executing the Jews),

who deprived them of their possessions and separated them from their families.

Next, each person passed in front of an SS doctor who indicated with his finger the fate of each - depending on age and whether or not they were fit for work. These people who passed the first selection were spared only to suffer through the hellish agony of working in the Sonderkommando.

The other newcomers were told that they had to take a shower and be disinfected before entering the camp. Unknowingly, they allowed themselves to be taken to the showers where their clothes were taken and they suffered the embarrassment of having their heads and entire bodies shaved. 2,000 people were then crowded into one large room. There would be a slight pause for the room temperature to rise, and then the SS men would throw a cyanide powder into the room. When this powder was exposed to the correct temperature, it would turn into a gas. In a short three minutes, the 2,000 people would be dead. When the Sonderkommando entered the room, they would find the dead in a pyramid - the weakest, including children, would be on the bottom and the strongest on top. The Sonderkommando would then carry the bodies to the crematoriums to be burned.

Gas was not always used, however. For a long time, before the full scope of the "Final Solution" was realized and instigated, the camps did not have ovens. Instead, the Jews were shot and then buried. (Eye-witnesses reported that, in one case, 3,000 to 5,000 Jews had been shot in ten days. Some of these Jews were not dead when they were buried and for weeks, the ground was reported to have

remained shaky).¹⁵ Soon, this method became impractical and crematoriums were built.

Those few that did survive were given old clothes with an identification number sewn on them. This number was then tattooed on their left arm. Only afterwards, later that night, did they finally come into contact with the older prisoners of the camp.

These first experiences and how they affected him determined the prisoner's destiny because, "on entering the camp, a change took place in the minds of the men. With the end of uncertainty came the uncertainty of the end."¹⁶ The prisoner either went into an irresistible mental decline, or he adapted, depending on his reaction to this first day.¹⁷

One of the most common reactions to this day was what is known as "delusion of reprieve" - the condemned man, immediately before his execution, gets the illusion that he might be reprieved at the very last minute."¹⁸ This existed even in those who, in fact, were never really condemned to immediate execution.

As a result of the shock characteristic of this period, Cohen concludes that many prisoners experienced "acute depersonalization - an estrangement from the surrounding world."¹⁹ There was a detached feeling, as if watching everything, not participating in anything but the actual physical pain. The body used this as a defense mechanism in a sort of personality split, because the impact of the reality could not be grasped at this stage.²⁰

Later in the evening, as was mentioned before, the newcomers met some of the concentrationaries - the older members of the camp, and

were informed that approximately eighty percent of the transport had been exterminated.²¹ In the dark sky, the flames of the crematoriums were seen and the facts forced them to "admit into the conscious ego everything they had heard before about the concentration camps and the gassings."²² They became aware of the death threat and experienced an "acute fright reaction."²³ Some prisoners even exhibited somatic signs of vomiting, diarrhea, paling, fainting, or inability to walk.²⁴ Vroom states, "It was not the suddenness and unexpectedness of events that caused us fright, but the realization that they implied the presence of a death threat."²⁵

Another survivor said, "Because the forcible termination of repression caused us to become suddenly aware that in the camp death was very dominant, a narrowing of consciousness resulted 'which focused attention exclusively on one aim: self-preservation. Although a person might have been outwardly calm and collected, the instinct of self-preservation was very strong.'"²⁶ The thought of suicide was considered briefly in most cases, but the need for self-preservation usually dominated. There was not much point in the termination of one's life when death was a normal part of the concentration camp experience.²⁷

Some of the new prisoners still did not adapt, however. These people "might abandon all hope, seeing nothing to make life seem worth living. Even if remnants of will power survived the smashing of the old familiar world with its values, the mind, deep in the shadows, would cast off the burdens of a body that had lost all impetus to rise above the misery of the day."²⁸

II. THE STAGE OF ADAPTATION

"During this stage the individual (those who survived the previous stage), would prove whether or not he could adapt himself to the concentration camp system."²⁹ The camp was a dynamic community, ever changing. Nothing was certain, and to exist, one was forced to regress to a more primitive stage and "unleash forces that had been kept under control. Then the newcomer, step by step, or in a twinkling, might adapt himself to the numerous strains of the camp world."³⁰

These strains included being forced to work every day, regardless of the weather conditions. Roll was called every morning. The SS men would sit in a booth while the prisoners stood, perfectly still, from as early as 2:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m. Afterwards, the inmates left for various work units and toiled until late at night. There was a very short noon break, yet the hours depended much on the seasons and on the Nazi enforcement of the rules and regulations. Many worked in outside labor camps, guarded by the SS. New arrivals were almost always placed in these groups. It was physically exhausting, with no protection from the weather or from the enemy. They could do nothing about the former, but had to learn to deal with the latter - the SS, the foremen, and the Kapos*, as well as learning the tempo of work and the tools to use. Finding the easier labor groups took some time

^x
* prisoners who were foremen, usually criminals

and gave the newcomers experience.

Another constant strain was the lack of food. What was offered consisted of one cup of weak coffee in the morning, one liter of thin soup in the afternoon, and 300 grams of poor bread at night.

The only clothes were ragged, filthy uniforms and wooden shoes. On the few days when showers were given, the prisoners were forced to stand at roll call with only the wooden shoes.

Living conditions were unreal. There was no running water or sewage and 700 to 1,000 people were crowded into barracks meant for 400 people. Each night, more people died. Continuous selections also reduced the ranks. Among those that still remained, epidemics were common.

Sick prisoners were either not cared for or used in experiments in the hospital ward. In any case, prisoners did not readily admit illnesses for fear of death. All disabled persons, cripples, and the mentally handicapped were transmitted to the Euthanasia ward, where they were often killed with phenol injections. Races felt to be of little worth were also executed in this manner as experiments. Experiments were also made on twins, dwarfs, the physically underdeveloped, and women (sterilization experiments). Frequently, these experiments were conducted by SS men that had little or no surgical experience. They would even dissect live patients occasionally in order to gain this needed experience.

Still another strain was the lack of sleep. As many as ten prisoners were often forced to share the same bed - a hard bunk of only about two square yards. There was never enough room or

adequate covering and they always suffered from the cold. Sleep was almost impossible during the first few days of adaptation, due to overcrowding, diseases, stuffiness, noises, and smells within the block. Soon, however, the body made up for these conditions and gave the needed sleep, if only for a few hours. This welcomed sleep was often not enough though. Many died from sheer exhaustion during this phase.³¹

Another factor, although intangible, that determined the adaptation was the prisoner's former social position in the outside world. There was a great contrast in the various prisoners in the camp, ranging from criminals, to asocials, to political and ideological prisoners.³²

Of these, the criminal changed the least. They had been lower on the social scale in the free world, and were usually of limited education. Prison was a way of life for them. In fact, most of the criminals were promoted to a higher position in the camps. The SS could use them as Kapos, in a position of authority over the other prisoners, because the criminals were predominately guided by instinct and lacked convictions in many matters. They acted with no sense of loyalty or comradeship, and would harm anyone if given an opportunity to better their own positions.³³

The asocials, too, lacked clan spirit. They consisted primarily of "vagrants, drunkards, pickpockets, and persons that were unwilling to work."³⁴ They lacked the type of initiative that might have enabled them to better help themselves. They remained aloof and did not associate with others. It was especially hard on these prisoners

because they usually had no important social position in the outside world. Fellow prisoners used this as something with which to taunt them, giving them no peace.³⁵

The last of the three categories of people did have social or political status in the free world. They were hurt more by this, the thing that brought them to the camp in the first place, than other prisoners. They had to erase their former social standards and ideas from their minds so they could survive. The social order inside the camp was just not the same as that outside, and, if a pride in a social group on the outside was all they had, they "could be written off at once."³⁶

On the other hand, these prisoners often shared a party or group loyalty as well as pride in the fact that they were suffering unjustly. They claimed superiority in this fact and were the only ones who attained any significant proportions in psychological involvement.³⁷

Every prisoner depended on others to some extent, but he was also at their mercy. Although, occasionally they remained loyal until death in circumstances in which they would probably be killed regardless, as in the case of some political prisoners, "the predominant influences that governed their lives were selfishness and common sense, sharpened by feelings of aversion."³⁸ When the prisoner had any possibility of staying alive while someone died in his place, "the prisoner's worst enemy was the prisoner."³⁹

Another intangible factor affecting the adaptation was that, "one did not know how long one was to be imprisoned,"⁴⁰ and that nothing one did could shorten this term.

"Ignorance of the duration of imprisonment led to an existence which, as to concentration camps, has been formulated by Frankl: 'The life of a concentration camp prisoner can be defined as a provisional detention without time limits.' He goes on to say: 'Now any human being who cannot see the end of a (provisional) form of existence, is unable to live toward an aim. He can no longer, like a human being in normal life, make plans for the future.'"⁴¹

This was true of prisoners who had no family, no contact with the outside world. It unnerved most men, yet was easier for non-Jews, Jews ~~who~~ had married non-Jews, and Jews whose families were still alive.⁴² This gave them hope, something to plan toward.

While each camp was similar in the lack of personal freedom, the impossibility of privacy, and ignorance of the length of duration,⁴³ each camp was different in the area of hunger. At camps in which the prisoners were placed in quarantine before working, hunger did not manifest itself until later. This hunger was felt immediately, though, in camps like Auschwitz, that put the prisoner to work at once.⁴⁴

The drive for food is one of the primary drives of the human body.⁴⁵ The lack of food played a dominant role in the life of every prisoner. Everything centered around the thought of food. Conversation invariably turned to discussions of it. This was "bitterly resented by some men."⁴⁶ as it tormented them to an even greater degree.

Just as food was of great importance in the thoughts and conversations, it was also predominant in their dreams. Not even sex

played so important a role. "In the grims pangs of hunger, the relative importance of other motives, such as sex, tends to fade."⁴⁷

"The psychological incompatibility between hunger and sexuality has been pointed out by De Sauvage Noltings: ' . . . the erotic drive only really manifests itself if hunger is absent, just as the hunger drive declines if there is a strong desire to love.'"⁴⁸

The sex drive did not make itself apparant in new arrivals. In the other prisoners, approximately ninety percent had no sex drive because hunger was too great. The only prisoners for which sex has any meaning were the prominants - prisoners who, for a number of various reasons, were in a good state of health. This drive could be satisfied through masturbation or homosexuality.⁴⁹ Only in a few cases was there an opportunity for sexual intercourse, because men and women were usually kept in separate camps. In 1943, however, the SS actually established brothels for the Aryan prisoners, the prominants who could pay for these services with extra bread rations, in hopes that they would be distracted from political activity. This plan failed, though, because the prisoners received instructions from members of their parties not to patronize them.⁵⁰

As was mentioned before, there was a general lack of compassion in the camp. This grew as "the suffering, illnesses, dying, and death of human beings had become such a sight after a few weeks of life in the concentration camp that it no longer had the power to move."⁵¹ They adapted to the degradati n of others, and of themselves.

An aspect of this degradation that the prisoner had to adapt to

was the loss of his name. His name, business, place of abode, and age no longer counted for anything, and it was long after release from the camp that he became a real person again.

"The stage of adaptation was the most important phase in the life of the prisoner. When he had succeeded in adapting himself to the concentration camp life, he was an ex-greenhorn, he had settled down. Roughly, this would take him about a year; but only a small percentage of the prisoners survived this stage, which is not surprising, as abnormally heavy demands were made of them."⁵²

III. THE STAGE OF RESIGNATION

"The longer a prisoner had been in the camp, the greater was his chance of survival."⁵³ Anyone who had reached this stage of "old numbers"⁵⁴ was given sufficient food, wore better clothes, was in a tolerable work group, and had contacts in the camp. He had resigned himself to concentration camp life and was concerned with how to live as well as possible.⁵⁵

"The meager pleasures of camp life provided a kind of negative happiness - 'freedom from suffering.'⁵⁶ Real pleasures did not come as often, yet there were small things, such as the orchestra in some camps, the rare cabaret in which rewards were given to the performers, and occasionally, a screen play.⁵⁷ The most important of the small pleasures, however, was a little bit more leisure for conversation.⁵⁸

Humor played a considerable role in this. "Great significance has been attributed to humor by Kautsky, who even went so far as to

call it 'the most infallible means to keep up moral . . . not so much the bitter witticism, . . . but the laughter at some harmless joke or comic situation, the laughter that is a relief. Incredible as it may seem, . . . laughter was often heard in the camps.'"⁵⁹

They often joked about how they might take some of the learned habits with them to the outside world when they were freed. This humor, Frankl said, "Is a weapon of the mind in the struggle for its preservation. For it is well known that humor is better suited than almost anything else in human life to attain aloofness, to rise superior to the occasion, albeit, as has been stated, merely for a few seconds."⁶⁰

"In some cases the tension between regressive emotional primitivism and growing sensitivity of conscience found its only possible release in a heightened religious faith. Provided man had any trace of moral sense and true religious devotion, these qualities were promoted by the powerful appeal emanating from the humanity and inhumanity of the camp."⁶¹

Some, though, instead of becoming stronger in their faith, grew hard. In this way they seemed better able to help themselves and others by organizing* and other methods of procuring better conditions.

In this final stage, the criminal regarded life as real life, as definitive life. He had never enjoyed so much freedom and there was nothing he would rather do.⁶²

Other prisoners, too, regarded concentration camp life as real life, but not as definitive life. They knew that some day they would

* Arranging to get extra rations of food, clothing, etc.

get out, either by liberation, or by death. Afterwards, they would enjoy definitive life.⁶³

Meanwhile, these prisoners were jealous of those outside the camp who enjoyed life. This was even manifest to the newcomer because he had lived longer in freedom, not worrying about or experiencing concentration camp life.⁶⁴

Part of this jealousy was normal. It arose from self-criticism because he had not been wise enough to go into hiding, to escape the camp. This type of jealousy, combined with a feeling of inferiority, brought about what Anna Freud has called, "identification with the aggressor."⁶⁵ This remarkable aspect of the resignation stage was evidenced by an "absence of hatred"⁶⁶ toward the SS. They hated and did not understand the behavior of the SS, yet they pitied them. "Hate, like love, is a binding effect. Few ties are so strong as those of hate. The object of our hate haunts us, it is always present in our thoughts, and without realizing it ourselves, we begin to identify with the person whom we hate."⁶⁷

"Vrijhof says, 'Hate also has this fundamental feature: the positive relationship with another person, the presence of congeniality. A man is hated because of his human qualities, not his inhuman ones.'"⁶⁸

Many prisoners were filled with a desire for vengeance - the psychological escape mechanism of helplessness.⁶⁹ This was directed toward the entire Nazi regime, yet in the cases of this strange friend-enemy assimilation,⁷⁰ a gratitude conflict developed.⁷¹ "The SS member continued to be hated. The inmate knew that a world separated the two partners, yet did not desire that his opposite num-

ber should be personally included in the revenge plan."⁷²

Most never reached this stage. Many had been exterminated along the way. (For estimates of numbers killed see Table 3). A very few had been liberated by members of underground resistance groups. Others had to wait until finally, in 1945, the camps were discovered and liberated by the Allies. Some were not as lucky as others. At Auschwitz, for instance, in fear of discovery, the SS took all able-bodied prisoners and left the camp on foot. Most that for various reasons could not leave the camp in this manner, or that for some reason would not co-operate, were shot.

IV. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE LIBERATED PRISONER

The prisoners were liberated following a period of tremendous tension in the camp, yet upon the actual liberation, they did not go mad with joy, just total relaxation.⁷³

"With tired steps we prisoners dragged ourselves to the camp gates. Timidly, we looked around and glanced at each other questioningly. Then we ventured a few steps out of camp. This time no orders were shouted at us, nor was there any need to duck quickly to avoid a blow of a kick. Oh no! This time the guards offered us cigarettes. We hardly recognized them at first; they had hurriedly changed into civilian clothes."⁷⁴

Some of the prisoners walked away and upon seeing some flowers only a spark of joy was shown. When they got back, they realized that they had lost the ability to feel pleased and had to relearn it

slowly."⁷⁵

Some prisoners could not escape the influences of camp life. They thought their stay in the camp entitled them to behave licentiously and ruthlessly.⁷⁶ They became the oppressors by justifying their behavior and only slowly could they be guided back to realize that no one had the right to hurt others.

In some of the newer research on the survivors of the concentration camps, a pattern emerged. "They married on short acquaintance . . . eager to make sure that life continued, since they were the only members of their families still alive."⁷⁷ Doctors were surprised that the women usually became pregnant soon afterward, surprised because menstruation usually ceased due to starvation in the camps. Psychiatrists were dumbfounded. "These men and women had gone through hell, so why were they willing to bring children into a world that had permitted such horrors? Yet survivors speedily founded new families, and often the children were especially healthy and beautiful."⁷⁸

Another pattern that emerged was the fact that most prisoners went from absolute poverty to middle class in a very short time.⁷⁹ "Survivors had to be intellectually and emotionally very strong to stay alive, and they used this same resourcefulness to establish successful new lives . . . often they chose work that had to do with the preparation of food or the building of homes, two elements of life that represented security to them."⁸⁰

Many want to talk of their experiences. They often feel as if no one believes them, no one can comprehend the suffering they en-

dured. No one seems to care. This often brings bitterness on the part of the survivors. They found that, while they believed they had suffered all they could, they were still suffering.⁸¹ Because of this, some have again resorted to silence.' This is one of the many problems being found today with the survivors and their families. Psychologists now question such silences and encourage their participation in support groups in which they and their new families can share mutual experiences.

But, even though advance are being made, even though the survivors are being helped in groups such as these, is this the answer? It is this writer's opinion that this is not enough. If our society is to effectively deal with this problem and the problems of the survivors, we must do more than this. If we are to learn from our past, from our mistakes, we must take the responsibility of teaching. If we are to avoid repetition of similar episodes in the future, we must begin teaching the facts of the Holocaust in a formal educational curricula.

To conclude, what better words than the words of a survivor, the words of Elie Wiesel:

I can only tell you that should the teachers fail, . . . should these desecrators (those who say the Holocaust is a fraud) succeed in erasing the memories of the victims, only then will we feel and experience something worse than what we experienced then. We shall feel shame because we have betrayed the victims for the last time, we will have completed the killers' work. Their task was to destroy the living Jews and burn the dead Jews, and only now will they have succeeded."⁸²

TABLE 3

ESTIMATES OF JEWISH LOSSES 1939-1945⁸³

Country	Estimated Pre-Final Solution - Population	Estimated Jewish Population Annihilated	
		Number	Percent
Poland	3,300,000	3,000,000	90
Baltic countries	253,000	228,000	90
Germany/Austria	240,000	210,000	90
Bohemia/Moravia	90,000	80,000	89
Slovakia	90,000	75,000	83
Greece	70,000	54,000	77
Netherlands	140,000	105,000	75
Hungary	650,000	450,000	70
SSR White Russia	375,000	245,000	65
SSR Ukraine*	1,500,000	900,000	60
Belgium	65,000	40,000	60
Yugoslavia	43,000	26,000	60
Rumania	600,000	300,000	50
Norway	1,800	900	50
France	350,000	90,000	26
Bulgaria	64,000	14,000	22
Italy	40,000	8,000	20
Luxembourg	5,000	1,000	20
Russia (RSFSR)*	975,000	107,000	11
Denmark	8,000	---	--
Finland	2,000	---	-
TOTAL	8,861,800	5,933,900	67

* The Germans did not occupy all the territory of this republic.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bezwinsha, Jadwiga, ed. Amidst a Nightmare of Crime. Publications of State Muzeum at Oswiecim, 1973.
- Bezwinsha, Jadwiga, ed. KL-Auschwitz as Seen by the SS. Publications of State Muzeum at Oswiecim, 1972.
- Chartock, Roselle, and Jack Spencer, ed., The Holocaust Years: Society on Trial. Bantam Books, Inc., N.Y., 1978.
- Cohen, Dr. Elie A., Human Behavior in the Concentration Camps. The Universal Library, Grosset & Dunlap, N.Y., 1953.
- Dawidowicz, Lucy S. The War Against the Jews. Holt, Rhinehart, & Wilson, N.Y., 1975.
- Distel, Barbara, and Ruth Jakusch, ed. Concentration Camp Dachau. Comite International de Dachau, Munich, 1972.
- Fiderkiewicz, et.al., From the History of KL-Auschwitz. Vol. II. Publications of State Muzeum at Oswiecim, 1976.
- Frankl, Viktor E. Man's Search for Meaning. Pocket Books, N.Y., 1973.
- Garlinski, Jozef. Fighting Auschwitz. Fawcett Publications, Inc., Greenwich, Conn., 1975.
- Guerlain, Robert. Those Who Wait. Thomas Y. Crowell Co., N.Y., 1943.
- Gun, Nerin E. The Day of the Americans. Fleet Publishing Corp., N.Y., 1966.
- Hitler, Adolf. Mein Kampf. Reynal & Hitchcock, N.Y., 1940
- Jarman, T.L. The Rise and Fall of Nazi Germany. New American Library Inc., N.Y., 1961.
- Kogon, Eugene. The Theory and Practice of Hell. Octagon Books, N.Y., 1973.
- Meltzer, Milton. Never to Forget-The Jews of the Holocaust. Harper and Row, N.Y., 1976.
- Morris, Charles G. Psychology: an Introduction. Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1976.

- Nyiszli, Dr. Miklos. Auschwitz - A Doctor's Eyewitness Account.
Fawcett Publications, Inc., Greenwich, Conn., 1960.
- Rabinowitz, Dorothy. New Lives: Survivors of the Holocaust Living in America. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977.
- Romilly, Giles and Michael Alexander. The Privileged Nightmare.
Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1954.
- Schnabel, Ernst. The Footsteps of Anne Frank. Pan Books Ltd.,
London, 1976.
- Sereny, Gitta. Into That Darkness - From Mercy Killing to Mass Murder.
McGraw-Hill Book Co., N.Y., 1974.
- Simmons, Kenneth W. Kriegle. Thomas Nelson & sons, N.Y., 1960.
- Snell, John A., ed. Hitler's Dictatorship and the German Nation.
D.C. Heath & Co., Lexington, Mass., 1973.
- Steiner, Jean-Francois. Treblinka. New American Library, Inc.,
N.Y., 1979.
- Switzer, Ellen. "The Miracle of Survival," Family Circle. Dec. 15,
1978, pp. 36-50.
- Szmaglewska, Seweryna. Smoke Over Birkenau. Henry Holt & Co.,
N.Y., 1947.
- Social Education. April 1978.
- Delmer, Sefton. Weimar Germany: Democracy on Trial. American Heritage,
N.Y., 1972.

NOTES

- ¹Elie Wiesel, "Then and Now: The Experiences of a Teacher," Social Education, April , 1978. p. 267.
- ²Ibid., p.267.
- ³Ibid., p.269.
- ⁴Theodore Freedman, "Introduction: Why Teach About the Holocaust?" Social Education, April 1978. p.263.
- ⁵T.L. Jarman, The Rise and Fall of Nazi Germany (New York: New American Library, Inc., 1961), p. 12.
- ⁶Sefton Delmer, Weimar Germany: Democracy on Trial (New York: Merican Heritage, 1972), p.95
- ⁷Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1940) p. 57.
- ⁸Ibid., p.65.
- ⁹Social Education, April 1978, p. 264.
- ¹⁰Ibid., p. 264.
- ¹¹Gitta Sereny, Into That Darkness: From Mercy Killing to Mass Murder (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1974), p. 98.
- ¹²Dr. Elie A. Cohen, Human Behavior in the Concentration Camps (The Universal Library, Grosset & Dunlap, N.Y., 1953), p. 115.
- ¹³Ibid.
- ¹⁴Viktor E. Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning (Pocket Books, N.Y., 1973), p.6.

¹⁵Social Education, p.271.

¹⁶Frankl, p. 70.

¹⁷Cohen, p. 115.

¹⁸Frankl, p. 8.

¹⁹Cohen, p. 116.

²⁰Bettelheim, "Individual and Mass Murder in Extreme Situations,"

used by Dr. Elie A. Cohen, Human Behavior in the Concentration Camps

(The Universal Library, Grosset & Dunlap, N.Y., 1953), p. 117.

²¹Cohen, p.121.

²²Ibid., p.124.

²³Ibid., p. 120.

²⁴Ibid., p. 121f.

²⁵Vroom, Schrik angst en vrees, quoted by Cohen, p. 122.

²⁶Ibid., p. 123.

²⁷Frankl, p.17.

²⁸Kogon, p.274.

²⁹Cohen, p.125.

³⁰Kogon, p.274.

³¹Cohen, p. 129.

³²Kogon, p.273.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Cohen, p.26f.

³⁵Kogon, p.279f.

³⁶Ibid., p.274.

³⁷Ibid., p.273.

- ³⁸Ibid., p.278.
- ³⁹Ibid., p.279.
- ⁴⁰Cohen, p.128.
- ⁴¹Frankl, Ein Psychologerlebtt das K.Z., quoted by Cohen, p. 129.
- ⁴²Ibid., p.129.
- ⁴³Ibid., p.131.
- ⁴⁴Ibid.
- ⁴⁵Charles G. Morris, Psychology: An Introduction (Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1976), p.359.
- ⁴⁶Cohen, p.132.
- ⁴⁷Ibid., p.134.
- ⁴⁸Ibid.
- ⁴⁹Ibid., p.141.
- ⁵⁰Ibid., p.142.
- ⁵¹Ibid., p.145.
- ⁵²Ibid., p.179.
- ⁵³Frankl, p. 29.
- ⁵⁴Cohen, p. 179.
- ⁵⁵Ibid.
- ⁵⁶Frankl, p.46.
- ⁵⁷Kogon, Der SS-Staat, quoted by Cohen, p. 181.
- ⁵⁸Ibid., p.180.
- ⁵⁹Pfister-Ammende, M., et.al. Die Psychohygiene, In P. Federn and H. Meng, Bucher des Werdenden, quoted by Cohen, p. 181.
- ⁶⁰Frankl, as quoted by Cohen, p.181.
- ⁶¹Kogon, p.277,

⁶²Cohen, p.200.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid., p.174.

⁶⁵Ibid., p.186.

⁶⁶Ibid., p.197.

⁶⁷Ibid., p.199.

⁶⁸P.H. Vrijhof, *Psychologische beshouwingen over concentratie-*
kampen, as quoted by Cohen, p.199.

⁶⁹Kogon, p.283.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid., p.184.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid., p.87f.

⁷⁵Ibid., p.88.

⁷⁶Ibid., p.90.

⁷⁷Ellen Switzer, "The Miracle of Survival," Family Circle
(Dec. 15, 1978), p.38.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Frankl, p. 91.

⁸²Social Education, p. 269.

⁸³Roselle Chartock and Jack Spenser, ed., Holocaust Years;
Society on Trial ((Bantam Books Inc., N.Y., 1978),p.45.