

Illustrated Holocaust Glossary



Sharon Artley

How to use the glossary

Hyperlinks – indicated by [underlined blue text](#), take the reader directly to another reference.

Clicking on [Letter Index](#) at the bottom of any page returns the reader to the alphabet index on the first page.

Clicking on [Special Feature](#) at the bottom of any page takes the reader to the story of Holocaust survivor Zdenka Fantlová.

M indicates a link to Holocaust memorial or museum website.

Illustrations and captions are intended to give the reader additional information, raise questions for further research, discussion, debate or reflection.

The reflective questions in the Special Feature ask some of those “big questions” about the nature of humanity.

Questionnaire

You are invited to contribute to a questionnaire about the glossary.

- [Teacher questionnaire](#)
- [Student questionnaire](#)

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Special feature

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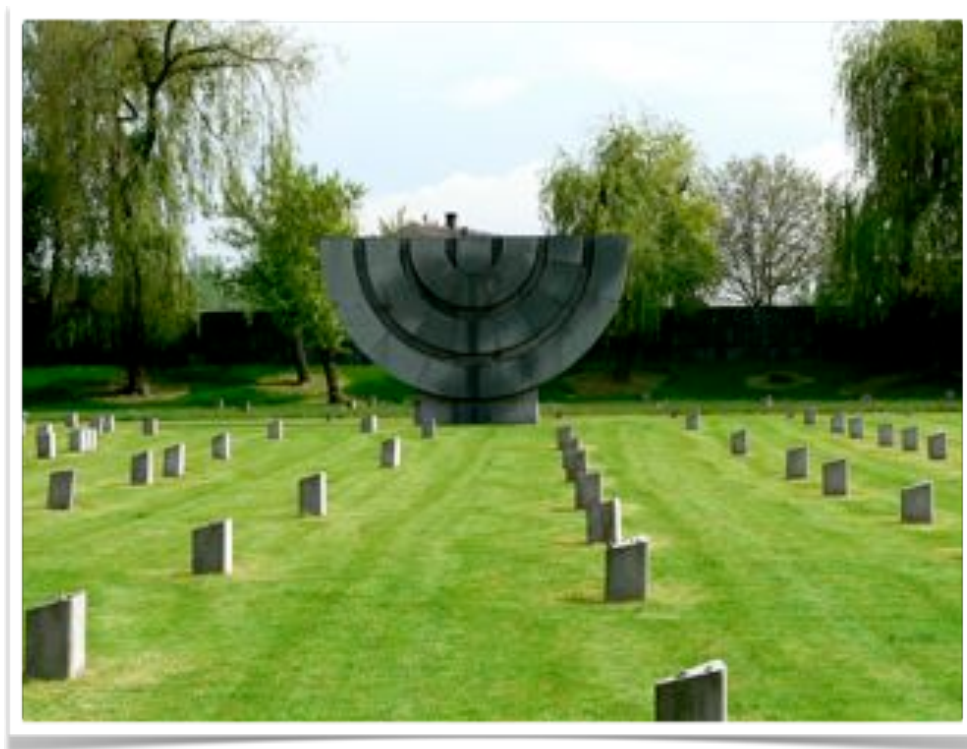
Letter Index

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[M](#) indicates a link to Holocaust memorial or museum websites

Click on the [interactive maps](#) link to take you to a series of Holocaust memorials.
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At the bottom of each page you will find a link to the Letter Index and also to a Special Feature which appears at the end of the glossary.



The Jewish cemetery at [Theresienstadt](#)

A

Aktion

A term used for any non-military campaign to further [Nazi](#) ideals of race. This term was mostly used to refer to the assembly and deportation of Jews to [concentration](#) or death camps. The word means “action” and is also used in the names of specific operations such as [Aktion Reinhard](#), [Aktion T-4](#) and Aktion Erntefest (Harvest Festival) which was the code name for the operation in November 1943 to kill all the remaining Jews in the Lublin district of Poland controlled by the [Generalgouvernement](#).

Aktionen (round-ups for deportations) usually happened at night. I remember the hiding place we had behind the wardrobe and how we would sit together through the night. They would come into the room shouting and shooting, there would be flames all around. I cannot describe to you Imagine, winter nights, suddenly you hear noises, voices, you hear shooting, the fear is *indescribable* and the running, everyone scrambling. The human behaviour in such a situation is to preserve your own life, so you don't look at what you're doing, you *run*, maybe you're running over other people, but you don't care. And this is the terrible thing – you lose all human dignity, that was terrible.

Adam Adams *Polish Jewish youth, Lublin Ghetto [18275]*

Aktion Reinhard (or Operation Reinhard)

The code name for the destruction of European Jews within the area controlled by the [Generalgouvernement](#). It began in March 1942 with the deportation of Jews from ghettos to extermination camps and concluded in November 1943. The name *Aktion Reinhard* was adopted after the assassination of Reinhard [Heydrich](#) in May 1942. The three extermination camps established under Aktion Reinhard were [Belzec](#), [Sobibór](#), and [Treblinka](#). 1.7 million Jews were murdered as a result of this operation.

Aktion T-4 (Tiergarten Strasse 4)

A code name for the [Euthanasia](#) programme. Between 1939 and 1941, this resulted in the killing of between 200,000 and 250,000 people who suffered from intellectual or physical impairment. It was named T4 as an abbreviation of the address of number 4 Tiergarten Strasse which was the headquarters of the General Foundation for Welfare and Institutional Care.

Allies

The group of nations including the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union, which joined together against the [Axis](#) countries. Different countries joined the Allies at different times, for example, Denmark and Norway which joined in 1940 and the United States and USSR in 1941.

Anielewicz, Mordecai (1919 - May 8 1943)

Major leader of the Jewish resistance in the [Warsaw Ghetto](#) uprising.

Anschluss (translation – *link up* or connection)

The annexation or union of Austria by [Nazi](#) Germany. This took place on March 13 1938. As part of Greater Germany, between 1938 and 1942, Austria was known as Ostmark.



German troops cross the Austro-German border.

Antisemitism

Opposition to, [prejudice](#) of, or [discrimination](#) against Jews. The word Semitic refers to the family of languages that included Hebrew and Arabic. Therefore because Jews used Hebrew, they were Semites. There is no such a term as "semitism". Antisemitism was a term coined in the late 19th century and referred to all types of racially based hatred of Jews.

A banner hung in village of [Goering's](#) birth proclaiming "Jews not wanted"



When the Hungarians came in after they annexed our part of Czechoslovakia in late 1938, they immediately got rid of our teachers and put in German trained antisemitic Hungarian teachers. The first day we went to school. After that, they told the Christian children not to associate with us any more; even they couldn't understand why one moment we were playing together and friendly, and all of a sudden, we were different. I didn't realise how easy it was to turn somebody's mind, because within days, a friend I used to play with, kick balls with, eat with in each other's houses, all of a sudden called me 'Dirty Jew'. My pony was confiscated when the Hungarians came in and one day I was walking home from school and saw there were lots of soldiers resting in the gutter. As a religious Jewish child I used to have ringlets hanging down over my shoulders, and one of the soldiers got up, came over to me, took out his bayonet and cut off my ringlets. I came home, I was shaking; I felt that I had lost part of my body. I refused to go to school after that – under the age of nine years, my education stopped, finished.

Josef Perl Czech Jewish schoolboy, Veliky Bochkov [17883]

Appell (translation - roll call)

Counting of inmates in the camps. At *appell* inmates were forced to stand to attention, at least twice a day, irrespective of the weather. Roll calls could last for hours and were frequently accompanied by beatings and punishments.

Arbeit macht frei (translation - work makes one free, or work brings freedom)

A sign placed at the entrances to a number of [Nazi concentration](#) camps including [Auschwitz](#), [Dachau](#) and [Theresienstadt](#).

Sign at the entrance to a section of the small fortress at [Theresienstadt](#)



Arrow Cross

The Fascist Party in Hungary. Amongst other atrocities, they were responsible for the brutal treatment and murder of hundreds of Jews in Budapest, of sending thousands of Jews on [death marches](#) and the deportation of hundreds of thousands to death camps.

Aryan

People who in prehistoric times, lived in Iran and northern India. The name comes from a Sanskrit word meaning "noble" or "superior". Today, it is used to refer to the languages of Europe and India which stem from those spoken by this group of people. This term was misused in [Nazi](#) racial theory to describe a person of pure German "blood" who could be distinguished from [Semitic](#) people. To the [Nazis](#), the typical "Aryan" was tall, blond and blue-eyed.

I remember one curious incident was in a biology class; we had learned about the 'Aryan' head form, and the teacher picked me as an example. I think he may have done this on purpose; it was the only time I remember being singled out like this. I was very, very conscious of being part Jewish, and I looked at myself in the mirror to see if I had a 'Jewish profile'. You know, the typical comic appearance that was constantly in the papers. I was very concerned.

Peter Kronberg *Austrian youth part-Jewish, Berlin* [19946]

M

Auschwitz – Birkenau

Located in Upper Silesia 37 miles west of Krakow, the largest [Nazi concentration camp](#). Operated by the [SS](#), its first commandant was Rudolf [Hoess](#) ([Höss](#)). Auschwitz was a complex consisting of [concentration](#), extermination, and [labour](#) camps. It comprised three large camps housing gas chambers and [crematoria](#) and around forty sub camps. Auschwitz I was the main camp and administrative centre. Auschwitz II was known as Birkenau and construction began in October 1941. It was divided into sections separated by electrified barbed wire. After a series of trial [gas chambers](#), four [crematorium](#) buildings, each comprising an undressing area, a [gas chamber](#) and [crematorium](#) oven were constructed between March and June 1943. In April 1944,



Barrack blocks at Birkenau. Built to stable 52 horses each, a block housed more than 400 prisoners.

two Slovak prisoners - Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler escaped from Auschwitz. They reported to Hungarian church officials and Jewish leaders that Auschwitz was a death camp. This report was taken to Switzerland, but nothing happened. Later that year, members of the [Sonderkommando](#) staged an uprising in Crematorium IV. To give an example of the scale of extermination at this camp, between late April and early July 1944, 426,000 Hungarian Jews were deported to Auschwitz. 320,000 were sent directly to the [gas chambers](#) of Birkenau.

Auschwitz III (Monowitz) was the [I.G. Farben labour](#) camp and also known as Buna. 1.3 million people were deported to the Auschwitz complex. An estimated 1.1 million were killed including almost a million Jews, nearly 75,000 Poles, more than 20,000 [Roma](#) and [Sinti](#), 15,000 Russian [PoWs](#) and more than 10,000 people of other nationalities.

The next part was getting my number tattooed. Two young slaves – I would describe them that way – came along; one of them had a book, a typical German book, nineteenth century type, nothing in it but numbers. And the other one took a pen and a bottle of ink and with this, very quickly and adroitly, tattooed us. In Terezin nobody asked you your name but the boys and other people knew who I was. But in Auschwitz you became a number, you didn't know anybody. The only person I knew was my brother, we stuck together.

Jan Hartman *Czech Jewish youth, Auschwitz-Birkenau* [18557]

Axis

Germany, Italy (until the armistice with the [Allies](#) in 1943), and Japan - countries opposed to the [Allies](#) and signatories to a pact signed in Berlin on September 27, 1940. These signatories recognised the political dominance (hegemony) of the others: German hegemony over most of continental Europe, Italian hegemony – Mediterranean Europe and Japan in the Far East. Later, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia became additional signatories.

B

Babi Yar

A ravine in Kiev (the capital of Ukraine) where mass murders took place. The destruction of a headquarters building in Kiev was used as a pretext to murder half the Jewish population of the city – some 33,771 people during two days 29-30 September 1941. Taken to the ravine, [Einsatzgruppen](#) detachments shot them in small groups. In the months that followed, thousands more Jews were killed here as well as many [Roma](#), [Communists](#) and Soviet prisoners of war. Overall, it is estimated that over 100,000 victims were murdered at Babi Yar.

Badges

To make inmates easily identifiable according to the reason for their imprisonment, the [Nazis](#) developed a system of markings to be worn on clothing. Not all camps used exactly the same marking system. The badges were usually triangular and of different colours. The [yellow star](#), worn by Jews was made up of two yellow triangles sewn together to form a Star of David. Criminals were marked with inverted green triangles, political prisoners with red; “asocials”, for example, [Roma](#), non-conformists and other groups – black (sometimes brown); [Jehovah's Witnesses](#) wore purple and homosexuals pink.

Beer Hall Putsch

On November 9 1923, the failed attempt by [Hitler](#) and his associates to gain power by overthrowing the German [Weimar](#) government.

Belzec

M

Nazi extermination camp in south-eastern Poland. Formerly a [labour camp](#), it was transformed into an extermination camp as part of [Aktion Reinhard](#). When it ceased operations in December 1942, up to 600,000 Jews and an undetermined number of [Roma](#) and Poles had been murdered there. In an attempt to cover up the scale of the extermination, between late 1942 and the spring of 1943, the mass graves were opened and bodies exhumed and cremated.

Bergen-Belsen

M

[Nazi concentration camp](#) in north-western Germany. A [PoW](#) camp, it was expanded to include eight sections. This included an Exchange Camp, where Jewish prisoners who were thought could be useful to the [Nazis](#) in prisoner escape were kept. Paul and Rudi Oppenheimer German Jews living in Holland, were in this camp. They survived the war and settled in the UK. Between 1944 and 1945, it became a collection camp for Jewish prisoners evacuated from camps nearer the front as [Allied](#) troops advanced. Thousands arrived as the result of the [death marches](#). Overcrowding and unsanitary conditions led to the deaths of thousands who died due to starvation, exposure and disease. (50,000 Jews; 20,000 Russian [PoWs](#)). [Anne Frank](#) died there in March 1945 and it was liberated by British troops on 15th April 1945.



The liberation of Bergen-Belsen, May 1945

In autumn 1945, 48 members of the Bergen-Belsen staff were tried by a British Military Tribunal held at Lüneburg. Many were sentenced to death. Amongst them, the camp commandant Josef Kramer and Irma Grese renowned for her cruelty towards prisoners.

Bermuda Conference

The second international conference held in 1943 to discuss the issue of Jews in [Nazi](#) occupied Europe and those who had fled and were [refugees](#). It led to no changes in policy, either in respect of America not changing its immigration quotas or the British policy permitting Jews to enter Palestine. (The first such conference was held in [Evian](#) in 1938.)

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich

A Lutheran pastor and founding member of the [Confessing Church](#). He was arrested in 1943 after the discovery of his connections with anti-[Nazi](#) conspirators and their attempt to assassinate [Hitler](#). He eventually ended up in [Flossenbürg concentration camp](#) where he was hanged on Easter Sunday 1945.

British White Paper of 1939

The British policy of restricting immigration of Jews from all countries to Palestine to 15,000 per year.

Buchenwald**M**

Established in 1937 in east-central Germany, Buchenwald was one of the largest [concentration camps](#). Medical experiments were carried out here and it was an important source of forced labour. Approximately 43,000 prisoners died from ill treatment, disease, malnutrition and medical experimentation.

Bystander

A spectator or onlooker who does not participate, speak out or act in any way.

C**Camp orchestra**

Accomplished musicians who were prisoners at various camps and forced to play music while other prisoners were leaving for or returning from work, or being led to their death. They also had to entertain the [SS](#).

We were put in front of the main gate at Auschwitz with the famous *Arbeit Macht Frei* (work brings freedom) and in front of that the orchestra was playing the very well-known music of Strauss – all of the SS were watching us. We were standing there for quite a long time listening to the music, and suddenly humanity came back to us listening to the music which we knew from normal days of life. And we all started to cry, not because we thought we were going to the gas chambers, but the emotion of listening to normal music. I shall never forget that feeling; it wasn't the fear of going to death – that was something expected – it was rather the last moment of ... oh, there used to be a life before all this! This music brought it back to us.

© Edith Baneth Young Czech woman, Auschwitz-Birkenau [17474]

Chamberlain, Neville (1869-1940)

British Prime Minister from 1937 to 1940. Along with the leaders of France, Italy and Germany, Chamberlain signed the Munich Agreement on behalf of Great Britain, mistakenly believing it would bring "peace in our time."



Neville Chamberlain

Chelmno (in German, Kulmhof)**M**

[Nazi](#) extermination camp in western Poland about 30 miles north-west of [Lodz](#). The first of the [Nazi](#) extermination camps and established in 1941, it utilised personnel from the [Euthanasia](#) programme. The main method employed in killing was mobile gas vans using carbon monoxide. At least 150,000 people were murdered here between December 1941 and March 1943, mostly Jews, but also many of the 5,000 [Roma](#) who had been deported from Austria to the [Lodz](#) ghetto. Operations were restarted briefly in June/July 1944.

Collaboration

Co-operation with enemy forces which occupy one's country.

Communism

A socio-economic structure where the whole society shares ownership of resources and their means of production. The goal of such societies is to break down the barriers which result from inequalities and provide fair shares for all according to ability and need. In 1848, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, published the Communist Manifesto. Communists were regarded as enemies of the [Reich](#).

Concentration camp (*Konzentrationslager*, KZ)

Established at the beginning of the [Nazi](#) regime, these camps were for the imprisonment and forced-labour of "enemies" of the [Reich](#), including those expressing different political views, Jews and those regarded as asocial. Disease, maltreatment and starvation led to many deaths, as did direct executions. These prisons were an essential part of [Nazi](#) systematic oppression. Initially (1933-36), they were used mainly for political prisoners. Later (1936-42), the camps were expanded and non-political prisoners including Jews, [Roma](#) and [Sinti](#) people, homosexuals, and Poles were also imprisoned. In the last period of the [Nazi](#) regime (1942-45), prisoners of concentration camps were forced to work in the armament industry, as more and more Germans were fighting in the war.

Camps were set for a range of purposes. This included internment camps, forced [labour camps](#), [transit camps](#), which served as temporary holding stations from which prisoners would be sent on to other destinations and extermination camps built specifically for mass murder.



Striped uniforms (sometimes referred to as pyjamas) worn in concentration camps

When we arrived at Auschwitz, we were seasoned, experienced concentration camp people, already in our striped uniform, I was a *big* child, I looked about nineteen or twenty, and I decided in order to stay alive, I would volunteer for everything. If they wanted volunteers, I was there: whether to fetch food, carry bodies, whatever, I was there. The thing was that you couldn't show yourself for long; if you were too exposed, you didn't last. Just imagine: you are walking along and you're sticking in the mud, then you lose your shoes! If you lose your shoes, you lose your *life*. I can't begin to explain the *fear*, the heart-beating, the gauntlet we had to run.

Josef Perl Czech Jewish youth, Auschwitz-Birkenau [17883]

Confessing Church

Protestant church founded by Martin [Niemöller](#), Dietrich [Bonhoeffer](#), Karl Barth, and Eberhard Bethge to confront the [Nazi](#)-organised "German Christian" movement.

Crematorium (plural *crematoria*)

The ovens and furnaces where dead bodies of prisoners were burned.



A crematorium oven at [Bergen-Belsen](#)

Crimes against humanity

'Crimes against humanity' were defined in 1946 as a separate category from [war crimes](#). They cover acts committed in armed conflict, but directed against the civilian population. These include murder, enslavement, deportation and other inhumane acts against any civilian.

Czerniakow, Adam (188-1942)

Head of the [Warsaw ghetto Judenrat](#). Czerniakow had the opportunity to leave the country, which some other members of the [Judenrat](#) took, but he refused, believing it was his duty to stay. He was criticised by some for what was thought of as collaboration, but was in his eyes an attempt to work the system in favour of the [ghetto](#) inhabitants. When in July 1942, he was ordered by the [Nazis](#) to surrender Jews for “[resettlement](#)” to the east, rather than accede to this demand, he took his own life. Leaving a note for his wife, he explained, “They are demanding that I kill the children of my people with my own hands. There is nothing for me to do but to die.”

D**Dachau**

The first [Nazi concentration camp](#) erected in 1933 near Munich in southern Germany. It was used until late 1938 mainly to incarcerate German political prisoners. After this time other supposed enemies of the state and those regarded as anti-social, together with large numbers of Jews, [Roma](#) and [Sinti](#) people, [Jehovah's Witnesses](#) and homosexuals were also sent here. [Nazi](#) doctors and scientists used many of the prisoners at Dachau for experiments. The camp was liberated by American troops in April 1945.

The liberation of Dachau.
Prisoners greet American soldiers.

**Death camp (*Vernichtungslager*)**

[Nazi](#) extermination centres where Jews and other victims were brought to be killed as part of the [Final Solution](#). There were six main death camps: [Auschwitz-Birkenau](#), [Belzec](#), [Chelmno](#), [Majdanek](#), [Sobibor](#) and [Treblinka](#).

Death marches

After the Soviet offensive of 1944, [Himmler](#) ordered the evacuation of all [concentration camps](#) and sub camps. Prisoners were heavily guarded and forced to march over long distances under very brutal and intolerable conditions. Along the way, many were shot because they could not keep up, or died from mistreatment. There were three main reasons for these marches: first, to avoid prisoners living to tell their stories to the liberators; second, the [SS](#) still needed to maintain the production of armaments and prisoners were required for this; third, some [SS](#) leaders believed that the prisoners could be used to bargain with when negotiating a peace settlement.

One day we came back from our hard labour in the forests at this place called Kurzbach and instead of going back to the barrack the *Kommandant* said, 'We have to clear out of here, tonight we start a march.' That was 21 January 1945. About half an hour out of the camp we heard a strong explosion and the news was that the sick bay had been destroyed, so anybody in there was killed. We marched a fortnight, day and night, along the flat, windy and cold countryside. One night it must have been thirty-five degrees below zero. I have never seen it before but we all had completely white noses like pieces of ice, completely frozen. And we learned something I didn't know was possible - you could walk and sleep at the same time. So we devised a way that the five of us were supporting the girl in the middle who was hanging on asleep and the feet and the legs were still moving. And that way you could actually relax and get some kind of relief, and we changed so that everybody could have a go and sleep while walking - a different kind of sleepwalking.

© Zdenka Fantlová Young Czech Jewish woman, Kurzbach to Bergen-Belsen [8942]

This march was something *unforgettable*: the Polish countryside was under snow, freezing cold, January, the temperature must have gone down to thirty below zero or more very cold. One of the things which would have meant death was if you had picked up paper cement bags to put under your pyjamas – they hit you with wooden sticks just to feel if you had them under your clothes, and if you did, it didn't end up very well. My brother dared several times, but I didn't. We were driven along by the SS, and along the way there were little heaps, mounds that were full of the dead of the preceding transports, and behind us occasional shots – those who couldn't walk any more. That took a full day and at night we got to a barn. It was a formidable temptation to try to get away because the hay was a huge mountain. My brother and I were hesitating: if they catch us, we are executed. We both decided not to escape.

So it went on, another full day until we got to Bielsko which was a huge junction, enormous. You know I had seen so many dead before, but you see just *one* and it hits you, and there was a person between the railways with all this blood, he had just been killed and it struck me – almost like a joke – it's becoming *serious*. But then we got into the open wagons on our way to Buchenwald. I don't know how long it took: three days or it may have been six, I just don't know. But we were on those open wagons. It was freezing. And I remember at one moment someone near to me tried to kill me. It was a man I knew called Fischel. He was a very nice man, father of a boy I knew, and he took my nose and literally tried to tear it off and strangle me. People were already crazy, losing their minds.

At one moment, along the railroad there were little houses approaching a town, and in front of the houses the Germans saw us coming by and were throwing cigarettes at us. People were dying of *hunger*, but it was a good action. Then there is a complete void, I just remember suddenly waking up on a layer of dead people, frozen like stone – many layers of them, three, four, five layers high, and just under me was Fischel, dead. But, 'Raus! Raus!, Schnell! Schnell!' – 'Out! Out! Quick! Quick!' and somehow I got into this *Grosslager* (big camp) as it was called, the new part of Buchenwald, where I was separated from my brother George because somehow he was in the *Kleinelager*- the small, political camp.

Jan Hartman Czech Jewish youth, Czechowice to Buchenwald [18557]

Degenerate art (*Entartete Kunst*)

Art banned by the [Nazis](#) because it did not fit in with their ideas. Examples of banned art included modern or innovative art, for example, abstract painting and cubism, or anything regarded as un-German.

Dehumanisation

The process of making one group of people inferior to another. This may be directed against groups who are regarded by some as racially, religiously or ethnically inferior to themselves. Such people are thought not to deserve the same rights and are victimised by having them removed. This enables the [perpetrators](#) to distance themselves. Such distance allows crimes or atrocities to become acceptable and for the [perpetrators](#) not to have a sense of guilt. For the Jews, the [Nazi](#) policy of dehumanisation resulted in their being denied basic human rights for example, not being allowed to practise their religion, have access to adequate housing or education.

Die Juden sind unser Unglück!

"The Jews are our misfortune!" a phrase coined in 1879. It appeared at the bottom of the front page of each issue of the [Nazi](#) weekly newspaper, [Der Stürmer](#).

The slogan which appeared at the bottom of the front page of every edition of [Der Stürmer](#).

When Hitler came to power things changed. We had teachers at school who were pro-Nazi – they went to the Nuremberg rally each year – and I was the only Jewish girl in this high school. One particular teacher made my life a misery; she told girls not to talk to me, and the girls with whom I used to go to school in the mornings and met afterwards suddenly ignored me because of the fear of this one teacher. And she arranged that I would sit right at the back of the class, two rows were left vacant and I sat against the wall. Then there came a law – more or less at the same time as the Nuremberg Laws came out – that all Jewish children had to leave German schools and universities.

At one time there was a boycott when the SA put big slogans, 'Deutsche, kauft nicht von Juden, die Juden sind unser Unglück!' – 'Germans, don't buy from Jews. Jews are our misfortune.' This was quite soon after Hitler came to power. They smashed the windows and they looted the shops. The farmers didn't dare deal with Jewish people any more, even though they were quite sympathetic, and so it became very hard. My mother had quite a bit of jewellery which she had to sell in order to raise money and times were, well ... tough.

Ruth Foster Jewish schoolgirl, Lingen [19782]

Displacement

People being forced against their will to move away from their homes or their home region. This may be as a result of war or government policies and can be used as a way of clearing an area of a group of people who are unwanted. Displacement can be used as a form of persecution.

DP (*Displaced Person*)

As a result of the upheavals of war, millions of civilians had been forced to move from their homes. Some DPs had been used as slave labour by the [Nazis](#) in eastern Europe. Many of the Jewish survivors of [Nazi](#) camps either could not or did not want to return to their former homes in Germany or eastern Europe and many lived in special displaced person camps whilst awaiting resettlement.



Polish nationals boarding army lorries to take them from a displaced persons' centre in Hamburg to a Polish repatriation camp.

Discrimination

The consequence or action resulting from [prejudice](#).

Drancy (*French only*)

M

A multi-storey U-shaped building – originally a police barracks in the north eastern suburb of Paris. It was established by the [Nazis](#), first as an internment camp to hold foreign Jews in France and later as the major [transit](#) camp for the deportation of Jews to extermination camps in Poland.

E

Eichmann, Adolph (1906 - 1962)

[SS](#) Lieutenant Colonel (*Obersturmbanführer*) and head of the [Gestapo](#) department which dealt with Jewish affairs. He was instrumental in the organisation and implementation of the deportation and extermination of the Jews from Europe. He was asked by [Heydrich](#) to prepare the protocols discussed at the [Wannsee Conference](#) about the implementation of the [Final Solution](#). At the end of the war he managed to escape to South America, but in 1960, the Israeli Secret Service finally discovered his whereabouts in Argentina. He was smuggled back to Israel, tried, convicted and finally executed on May 31, 1962.

Einsatzgruppen

Mobile killing units comprised of police and [SS](#) personnel. Their victims included Jews, Soviet officials and members of the [Communist](#) party, the mentally and physically disabled, [Roma](#), and many others considered undesirable by the [Nazi](#) state. They were supported by units of the uniformed German Order Police and often used Ukrainian, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian volunteer auxiliaries. There were four units A, B, C and D each operating in a specific geographical area. Victims were executed by mass shootings and buried in unmarked mass graves. However, following concerns about the psychological problems that these mass shootings were having on his men, [Himmler](#) requested an alternative method of mass killing be sought. This was a contributory factor in the development of mobile gas chamber vehicles which used carbon monoxide from the van's exhaust system.



A [Nazi](#) murder squad in southern Ukraine

Eugenics

Literally meaning “good birth”, eugenics refers to the practice of selective breeding amongst human beings to improve a particular characteristic. During the early part of the 20th century, it was practised by various governments around the world. Following its defeat in the First World War, Germany also developed a eugenics policy. Coming from ideas based on Darwin’s concepts of natural selection and the survival of the fittest, proponents of eugenics believed that sterilisation to prevent “inferior” people reproducing, would result in the creation of a “superior” race. This was used by the [Nazis](#) to promote racial purity and to develop *übermenschen*, superhumans or a [Master Race](#) with [Aryan](#) characteristics. The mixing of races was regarded as biological “degeneration” and sexual relationships or marriage between Germans and Jews were banned under the [Nuremberg Laws](#).

Euphemism

A term used to describe something in a way which would be less offensive to the listener. Many such terms were used by the [Nazis](#), for example [Euthanasia](#) programme, [Final Solution](#) and [resettlement](#).

Euthanasia

Literally meaning “good death”, this was a [Nazi euphemism](#) for the deliberate killing of physically and mentally handicapped people, including children, who were living in homes and institutions. This programme was carried out without either the consent of the patient or the family. The euthanasia programme began in 1939 and was code named [T4](#). As a result of public protest, it was stopped for a short while in 1941, but resumed again (unofficially) in 1942. Some sources suggest that this programme claimed the lives of about 70,000 people, whereas others place the number as high as 275,000. Many of those involved in [Aktion T-4](#) were involved in important roles in [Aktion Reinhard](#). It was used on concentration camp prisoners as late as 1944.



A page from the medical register of Hadamar 'sanatorium' in Austria where those with physical and mental impairments were murdered as part of the [Nazi](#) euthanasia policy. The page gives details of the victims' names, ages, nationalities and the 'official' causes of death.

Evian Conference

A conference arranged by President F.D. Roosevelt in July 1938. The focus was to discuss the [refugee](#) problem resulting from the [Nazi](#) goal of making Germany [Judenrein](#). Delegates from 32 western countries attended and many expressed sympathy for the plight of the [refugees](#), but most offered excuses for not increasing [refugee](#) quotas.

F

Fascism

A right wing political belief where the key principle is that nationalism and the importance of the nation has the highest priority. The importance of the individual or personal freedoms or interests are secondary. The Third [Reich](#) is thought by some to be a form of Fascism.

Final Solution *Die Endlösung der Judenfrage*

A [Nazi euphemism](#) for the plan to eliminate the Jewish people. The decision to implement this process had already been taken by the time of the [Wannsee Conference](#). After June 1941, [Einsatzgruppen](#), mobile killing units, began mass killing operations. On 31st July 1941, [Goering](#) authorised [Heydrich](#) to make preparations to implement a “complete solution to the Jewish question”. By autumn of that year, Jews living in the area of the [Generalgouvernement](#) were rounded up as part of [Aktion Reinhard](#) to be “[resettled](#)” in the east.

Flossenbürg*(Opens pdf file in English)* **M**

A [concentration camp](#) in Bavaria established in 1938. At certain periods during the war it housed criminals, political prisoners, members of the Polish resistance and Soviet prisoners – more than 1,000 of whom were executed. There were 100 sub camps as part of the Flossenbürg system and prisoners were used as forced labour in the quarry and in production related to armaments. Conditions at this camp were particularly harsh. It is estimated that 30,000 prisoners died at this camp, including Dietrich [Bonhoeffer](#).

Foley, Frank (1884 -1958)

During the 1930's, Head of the British Passport Control Office in Germany and Britain's most senior spy in Berlin. His role in the Passport Office was a cover for his intelligence work. He reported to the British government on the changes which were happening in Germany, including the [antisemitic](#) measures which were put in place. It is also through his work in the Passport Office, that Foley is believed to have saved an estimated 10,000 German Jews by bending the rules when stamping passports and issuing visas. Despite not having diplomatic immunity, he broke many [Nazi](#) laws including hiding Jews in his home, providing false identity papers, passports and visas. He also entered [concentration camps](#), for example [Sachsenhausen](#), where he presented documents such as visas to the camp authorities which would mean that Jews were freed to travel. Foley has been described as a "British Schindler". He received no recognition for these selfless acts during his lifetime. In 1999, he was accorded the status of [Righteous Among the Nations](#) by [Yad Vashem](#). In 2004, a plaque was unveiled in his honour at the British Embassy in Berlin and in recognition of his work, a plaque and statue now stand in the town of his birth.

Frank, Anne (1929-1945)**M**

A Jewish teenager who wrote a diary whilst in hiding in Amsterdam. After the family were discovered and arrested by the [Gestapo](#) in 1944, they were sent to [Westerbork transit](#) camp. From there, they were deported to [Auschwitz-Birkenau](#). Anne and her sister Margot were transferred to [Bergen-Belsen](#) in October 1944, where both died of [typhus](#) in March 1945, about a month before the camp was liberated.

Frank, Hans

Personal legal adviser to [Hitler](#), he was made governor-general of occupied Poland. He was responsible for the exploitation and murder of tens of thousands of Polish citizens and the deportation and murder of Polish Jews. Frank was tried at [Nuremberg](#) and convicted of [war crimes](#) and [crimes against humanity](#). He was hanged in 1946.



Hans Frank

Führer

German for leader and the title which [Hitler](#) granted to himself.

G**Gas chamber**

A large sealed room in which many people could be killed at one time by inhaling poisonous gas. Most camps used carbon monoxide, but [Auschwitz](#) used [Zyklon B](#). These originated out of the gas vans used in the [Euthanasia](#) programme and the mobile gas vans used by the [Einsatzgruppen](#). In addition to gas chambers at each of the death camps, some other camps also had gas chambers, for example [Ravensbrück](#) and [Mauthausen](#).

von Galen, Clemens August, Count

Bishop of Münster who preached a sermon in 1941 protesting about the [Aktion T-4](#) killings. Thousands of copies of this sermon were printed and circulated. In many other sermons, he was also critical of the [Nazi](#) regime, in particular its racial policy.

Gauleiter

A leader of a regional branch of the [Nazi](#) party.

Generalgouvernement (General Government)

The part of Poland which had not been incorporated into the [Third Reich](#). It included the districts of Warsaw, Krakow, Radom, Lublin, and Lvov. Hans [Frank](#) was appointed as Governor-General. The intention was, within 20 years, to turn this into a purely German area. Poles from other areas of Poland were expelled to the Generalgouvernement and used as slave labourers.

Genocide

A term to describe the systematic and planned destruction of an entire national, ethnic, religious or racial group. The term was developed in 1944 by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish-Jewish lawyer to describe the [Nazi](#) policy of systematic murder to annihilate particular groups. The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defines genocide as: "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life, calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; [and] forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."

Gentile

A term (usually used by Jews) to refer to a person who is not Jewish.

Gerstein, Kurt (1905-1945)

Head of a department in the [SS](#) Institute of Hygiene in Berlin. In 1933 he joined the [Nazi](#) Party and at that time was also a member of the [Confessing Church](#). As a result, he was sent to a [concentration camp](#) and was thrown out of the [Nazi](#) Party in 1938. He studied medicine. Gerstein's sister-in-law was killed as part of the [Euthanasia](#) programme and Gerstein volunteered to join the [SS](#) in order to try to uncover the truth about the murder of mental patients in institutions. He was sent to work at Institute of Hygiene. He helped to develop decontamination and vermin control techniques and worked with [Zyklon B](#) gas used at [Auschwitz](#). He visited the death camps of [Belzec](#), [Sobibor](#) and [Treblinka](#) ostensibly as part of his work, but in fact to gather evidence to tell the world what was happening. Gerstein passed on information about the killings to diplomats and Vatican officials. At the end of the war he was arrested as a suspected war criminal. It is thought that he committed suicide in a French jail in July 1945.

Gestapo

Established in 1933, an acronym for *Geheime Staatspolizei* - Secret State Police. The Gestapo used brutal physical and psychological torture methods to investigate and suppress resistance to [Nazi](#) rule within Germany.

Ghetto

Ghetto was the name used to describe the area in medieval Venice where the Jews were forced to live. This concept was revived by the [Nazis](#) and refers to the compulsory concentration of Jews into certain areas of towns and cities. Usually situated in poorer neighbourhoods, Jews were forced to move from their homes into these overcrowded areas. Some ghettos were enclosed by barbed wire or walls. Major ghettos were established in places such as [Lodz](#), [Warsaw](#), [Vilna](#), Kovno, Lublin, Lvov, Minsk, [Theresienstadt](#) and Bialystok. In many of these ghettos, Jews staged violent uprisings. The ghettoisation of the Jews was a key part of the [Nazi](#) process of [dehumanising](#) and controlling the Jews of eastern Europe.



A commemorative plaque showing a remnant of the wall which surrounded the ghetto in Krakow.

The situation in the Warsaw Ghetto was truly horrendous – food, water and sanitary conditions were non-existent. You couldn't wash, people were hungry and very susceptible to disease because of their weakened condition. It's amazing what happens to people when they're deprived of basic needs. For my brother and me there was no school and the only entertainment was taking a walk. It was unbelievable the number of dead people you saw in the streets. When we came home after a walk it was mandatory that we took off our clothing to search for lice, because they were the ones carrying typhus and typhoid fever. The only way you could survive was by supplementing your diet with things bought on the black market. But you can imagine that if the sellers were risking their lives to obtain these things, then the price is going to be extremely high. So it was no secret in the family that eventually our financial resources would run out and we would face the same situation as others.

Jerry Koenig *Polish Jewish child, Warsaw Ghetto* [22577]

Goebbels, Joseph (1897-1945)

German politician and Reich Minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. He was also Reich Propaganda Director of the [NSDAP](#) and was responsible for ordering such events as the burning of books of anti-[Nazi](#) books. Goebbels was the instigator of the [November pogrom](#) and in 1943 he delivered his "Total War" speech. He committed suicide during the last week of the war.

Goering, Hermann (1893-1946)

A leading member of the [Nazi](#) party, Goering was promoted to Reichsmarshal in 1940 and designated by [Hitler](#) as his second in command and eventual successor. He was a World War 1 fighter ace, a member of Richthofen's Flying Circus and the injuries he sustained during the 1923 [Beer Hall Putsch](#) left him a morphine addict. He was commander of the *Luftwaffe* and in charge of Germany's re-armament programme. It was Goering who ordered [Heydrich](#) to organise the [Final Solution](#). Goering was convicted of [war crimes](#) at the [Nuremberg](#) trials and committed suicide on the day he was to be hanged.



Hermann Goering

Grynspan, Herschel (1921-1943?)

Born in Hanover into a Polish Jewish family, Grynspan escaped to France in 1936. His concern for the fate of his parents back home in Poland, led to his shooting the diplomat Ernst [vom Rath](#) in the German Embassy in Paris in November 1938. This event provided an excuse for the staging of the [Kristallnacht pogrom](#). After the invasion of France, the authorities surrendered Grynspan to the Germans. There were plans for a show trial, but it never took place and his fate is unknown.

Gypsies

A popular term which can be considered to be uncomplimentary and insulting, to [Romani](#) (Roma) and [Sinti](#) peoples. A nomadic people believed to have come originally from north-west India, they were regarded as racially inferior and considered "asocial" by the [Nazis](#). As such, they were enemies of the state and persecuted relentlessly. [Roma](#) and [Sinti](#) people perished in [concentration camps](#), killing centres, and in [Einsatzgruppen](#) and other shootings. Estimates put the numbers killed between 220,000 and 500,000 – between 25%-50% of the entire European population. They refer to the Holocaust as [Porajmos](#). [Prejudice](#) towards [Roma](#) and [Sinti](#) people continues to be widespread.

H

Hess, Rudolf Walter Richard

A personal aide to [Hitler](#). Until 1941, Hess was also deputy leader of the [Nazi](#) party. In May of that year, he flew to Scotland in an attempt to negotiate peace between Britain and Germany, but was immediately arrested. He was tried at [Nuremberg](#) and sentenced to life imprisonment. After 1996, he was the sole inmate of Spandau prison where he died in 1987 at the age of 93.



Rudolf Hess at a meal break during his trial at [Nuremberg](#).

Heydrich, Reinhard (1904 – 1942)

SS General. Head of the RSHA (the Reich Security Main office which linked together the **SD** and Security Police). Heydrich was tasked by **Goering** to develop and organise the **Final Solution**. He convened the **Wannsee Conference** to confirm a plan for the extermination of the Jews. As acting Reichsprotektor of Bohemia, Heydrich was responsible for establishing the Jewish **ghetto** at **Theresienstadt**. He died as the result of injuries following an assassination attempt. In retaliation for this event, **SS** forces murdered all the men, 7 women and 81 children in the Czech village of Lidice. **M** The remaining women were sent to **Ravensbrück** and the village itself was completely destroyed.



The funeral of Reinhard Heydrich May 1942

Himmler, Heinrich (1900-1945)

"Reichsführer" (commander-in-chief) of the **Gestapo** and **SS**, Himmler was responsible for co-ordinating **Hitler's** orders to exterminate the Jews and responsible for implementing population policies as part of the **Final Solution**. His deputy was **Heydrich**. In the closing stages of the war, he advised negotiating a peace with the **Allies**. On hearing of this, **Hitler** stripped him from all the offices he held. He disguised himself to evade capture but was arrested in May 1945. After his identity was discovered, he swallowed a hidden cyanide pill and died before he could be interrogated.



Heinrich Himmler

von Hindenburg, Paul (1847-1934)

A General Field Marshal during World War 1, von Hindenburg was President of Germany from 1925 - 1934.

Hitler, Adolf (1889-1945)

Leader of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (**NSDAP**) from 1920. In November 1923, he was unsuccessful in his attempt to forcibly bring Germany under Nationalist control, in what is referred to as the **Beer Hall Putsch**. Hitler was put in jail and released after nine months. It was during this time that he began to write **Mein Kampf**. This book expressed **antisemitic** views and called for the Jews to be removed from Germany society. After his release, he re-entered politics and in 1933 was appointed Chancellor by **von Hindenburg**. He pursued an aggressive foreign policy, the aim of which was the acquisition of **Lebensraum**. After annexing Austria (**Anschluss**), the Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia, in September 1939 he invaded Poland. This resulted in the outbreak of World War II. In addition to attempting to gain territory, a key **Nazi** social policy was that of racial hygiene. This resulted in the **Eugenics** programme, **Aktion T-4** and ultimately in the **Final Solution**. Once he realised the war was obviously lost in April 1945, Hitler committed suicide rather than be captured alive.



Adolf Hitler

I remember at the beginning of the school day we had to stand up and raise our arms in the Hitler salute; and instead of a prayer, we had to thank the *Führer* for giving us such a nice day. Loyalty was expected, loyalty was instilled, there was nothing *other* than loyalty. I remember the schoolbooks; because the Nazi designers were so good at their job, the indoctrination didn't strike one as aggressive, or abrasive, or alien. You opened your first alphabet book, or school book and the very first picture would be of the *Führer*, kindly, in civilian clothes. I think he could have been in *Alpenhosen* standing on a flower-strewn mountainside holding two children, a boy and a girl, by the hand. And the inscription in the frontispiece, as I remember it was, 'Two things the *Führer* loves best: children and flowers.' At the same time it seemed a very pleasant thing for the *Führer* to be busy with, so that put one at ease.

On their part my parents kept quiet, a sort of *dull* silence. When I brought home cheerful reverberations of Nazism they didn't say, 'Nonsense, don't you ever talk like that in this home of ours,' but nor did they say, 'Lovely that you learnt all these marvellous things at school.' There was some sort of in-between, neutral position which they had adopted for fear of repercussions; and repercussions could have been severe.

© **Sergei Hackel** German Jewish schoolboy, Berlin [4644]

Hoess, (Höss) Rudolf Franz Ferdinand

The first commandant at [Auschwitz](#), responsible for refining methods of mass killing. He was tried at [Nuremberg](#), sentenced to death and executed by hanging at [Auschwitz](#).



The gallows at [Auschwitz](#) where Höss was hanged.

Holocaust

Derived from the Greek *holokauston* meaning a sacrifice completely burned by fire. Under cover of the Second World War, for the purpose of establishing their “new order”, the [Nazis](#) sought to destroy all the Jews of Europe. For the first time in history, industrial methods were used for the mass extermination of a whole people. Six million Jews were murdered, including 1,500,000 children. This event is called the Holocaust. It is also known by the Hebrew words Ha-[Shoah](#) or *Churban* which mean destruction.

The [Nazis](#) enslaved and murdered millions of others as well. [Roma](#) and [Sinti](#) people, [Jehovah's Witnesses](#), people with physical and mental disabilities, Poles, Soviet prisoners of war, trade unionists, political opponents, prisoners of conscience, homosexuals and others were also killed in vast numbers.

I**IG Farben**

A shortened form of *Interessen-Gemeinschaft Farbenindustrie*, I G Farben was founded in 1925 as the result of a merger of various companies including Agfa, BASF and Bayer. It initially produced dyes and paints and then expanded into other chemical production, including a pesticide – [Zyklon B](#) which was used at [Auschwitz](#) and [Majdanek](#) as an agent of mass murder. I G Farben was a major backer of the [Nazi](#) Party in its rise to power. In the new areas annexed by Germany, I G Farben took over the management and running of chemical plants and sometimes set up new factories, for example the Buna-Monowitz plant at [Auschwitz](#) III. During 1947-48, as part of the trials at [Nuremberg](#), the directors of I G Farben were tried on a number of charges including waging war, [war crimes](#), and [crimes against humanity](#).

J**Jehovah's Witnesses**

A religious group with about 20,000 active members in Germany in the 1930s. Their religious beliefs did not allow them to swear allegiance to any worldly power or to bear arms as soldiers. To the [Nazis](#), this made them enemies of the state. Jehovah's Witnesses experienced persecution from the earliest days of the [Nazi](#) regime. By 1939, 7,000 had been detained in concentration camps. They refused to perform the *Heil Hitler* salute, participate in [Nazi](#) rallies, vote in elections or serve in the army. As a result they were persecuted and detained in prisons and [concentration camps](#), where they were marked by having to wear a purple triangular [badge](#). Of about 10,000 Jehovah's Witnesses imprisoned, about a quarter died in [concentration camps](#).

One day, in 1940, the *Gestapo* came and picked me up. All my family were in prison and I was really happy because I was left alone, always with the *Gestapo* behind me. I was about two months in Bielefeld; my father, my mother and my sister Hildegard were in that prison. My two older brothers had been killed. The younger children were put in a reform home with criminal children. In the prison, we were all in different cells and didn't see each other.

After two months they condemned us: my father to five years in prison and five years concentration camp, my mother three years, and my sister about two years in juvenile prison. I got six months as a juvenile. I was alone in a cell until the end of the six months. When my time was over, the overseer of the prison said, 'Look, I have a letter from the *Gestapo*, you must sign that you won't continue as a Jehovah's Witness, then I'll let you go free.' I explained to her that I couldn't; she said she was very sad, she was nearly crying. She said, 'Ah, it's a shame; I'm so sorry.' They brought me to the *Gestapo*. They asked me to sign. I said, 'No, I believe in the Bible and I will continue' – the death of my brothers Wilhelm and Wolfgang gave me strength. I had to stay four months more until I was eighteen. Then they took me to a concentration camp.

Magdalena Kusserow Reuter *German Jehovah's Witness young woman, Bad Lippspringe [19793]*

Judenfrei

German for free of Jews – an area free of all Jews.

Jewish people all over German had to work. My father had to work on the railroad, my mother had to work in a factory and my sister was working as a tailoress. We knew people were being sent away in the beginning of 1941. People were picked up, especially the older people, and nobody knew what happened to them. We heard that they were being sent to the 'east'. In those days we didn't know much about foreign countries or even where the 'east' was. We didn't know that they were going to Riga or Lublin into ghettos. In 1943, Goebbels wanted to give Hitler a birthday present: he wanted to tell him that Berlin was *Judenfrei* – cleansed of Jews. I was sent away from Berlin on 12 March 1943, one of the last transports.

John Fink *German Jewish electrician, Berlin [16594]*

Judenjagd

German for Jew hunt and described the search for Jews who had hidden or fled. This usually took place after a [pogrom](#) or massacre.

Judenrat (plural *Judenräte*)

A Jewish administrative council established in each [ghetto](#). The council had the responsibility for ensuring that [Nazi](#) orders were implemented. This sometimes included compiling lists of names of Jews for deportation. Some council chairmen refused to comply with this order, but others believed by that doing so it would ensure that at least some Jews would survive.

Judenrein

German for cleansed of Jews. A term used to describe an area which has been "cleansed" or "purified" of all Jews either by deportation or murder.

K

Kapo

A [concentration camp](#) prisoner selected by the [SS](#) to oversee other prisoners.

Karski, Jan

A Polish non-Jew, a member of the underground and who worked as a courier for the Polish government in exile. He brought news of the [Holocaust](#) to the West. In order to give an accurate picture, he met with Jewish leaders visited the [Warsaw ghetto](#), a [transit](#) camp for [Treblinka](#). In the West, he delivered his report to the exiled government. He also met with other international politicians including Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Kindertransport

German for children's transport. A scheme whereby Britain agreed to admit children from countries in [Nazi](#) occupied Europe. About 10,000 unaccompanied children were sent by train to England. Sir Nicholas [Winton](#) was involved in this operation.

My parents were trying to paint a wonderful picture for me of England: I'm going to a big city, I'm going to school. 'You'll be learning a new language, you'll make new friends, and we'll all be together again soon, if not in England, then in the United States. This is just temporary.' I wanted to believe this but I had all these mixed feelings about it and then I got a notion into my head that my parents wanted to get rid of me. I told them that, and it must have been very painful for them because, although they never showed their pain, they must have felt it. Plus, there were also Jewish people telling them: at times like this you don't separate the family, the family stays together.

As they put me on the train, they were still smiling about this wonderful thing I'm going to. The window was open and we chit-chatted, last minute admonitions: always be polite, always say please and thank you – two words of my very limited vocabulary. Then someone called '*Alles einstagen!*' 'All aboard!'. Then the tug and groan of the train, then a whistle and it started to move very slowly. And my parents, who had this most artificial smile on their faces, started to move with the train as it moved out of the station, and it moved faster and faster, they ran faster and faster, tears streaming down their faces, waving goodbye with their handkerchiefs.

Then I knew: that they really *did* love me, this was a great act of love. I watched and saw them getting smaller and smaller until they were two dots and then they were gone. I didn't know at that point that I would never see them again. But I immediately sat down and wrote a letter apologising and telling them I knew they loved me very much and that's why they sent me away. Later they mailed me that they had got that letter.

Hedy Epstein *German Jewish schoolgirl, Kippenheim [12397]*

Koch, Karl (1897-1945)

Karl Koch, senior [SS](#) officer and commandant of [Buchenwald](#). His wife Ilse was an overseer. The couple were known for their extreme cruelty and brutal treatment of prisoners. In 1941 Koch was transferred to [Majdanek](#), but removed after a prisoner break-out in July 1942. Having been arrested the following year on a series of charges ranging from fraud to embezzlement, he was executed by the [SS](#) in April 1945.

Korczak, Dr. Janusz (1878-1942)

The pen name of Henryk Goldszmit, a Polish Jewish doctor and educator. Korczak dedicated his life to the care of children. He wrote many books and broadcast a radio programme which was listened to by thousands. He became the director of a Jewish orphanage and when it was forced to move into the [Warsaw ghetto](#), moved with his children. Despite offers of help from non-Jewish friends to hide him, when the children from the orphanage were selected for deportation, in August 1942 he accompanied them to their deaths in the [gas chambers](#) of [Treblinka](#).



"Janusz Korczak and the children". The only memorial stone at [Treblinka](#) to bear a person's name.



The memorial to Janusz Korczak at [Yad Vashem](#). The small stones have been placed by visitors as a mark of respect and remembrance.

At this time I was hidden in a cellar on a street leading into the *Umschlagplatz* – the concentration place from which deportations were sent to Treblinka. It was a hot summer day and Korczak was leading a group of children – maybe a hundred or two hundred – and he was leading them to the *Umschlagplatz*. Korczak was a doctor by profession but he did not want to go into normal medical service, treating those who could pay. He wanted to give society what he felt society needed. He became head of a Jewish orphanage, then a mixed orphanage of Jewish and non-Jewish children. In the ghetto, he found it very difficult to maintain the orphanage because there were no funds for it, but he used to go around with a sack to collect food for the orphans. He was prominent in science and educational circles, he wrote many articles about child rearing and child care. I was told that he was approached by a German before entering the *Umschlagplatz*, telling him he could save his life, but the children would have to go. He refused, he said, 'Where my children are going, I must go as well.' And of course he perished in Treblinka.

Danny Falkner *Polish Jewish inmate, Warsaw Ghetto* [19783]

Kristallnacht ([November Pogrom](#))

German for Crystal Night or Night of Broken Glass. The pretext for the violence was the assassination by Herschel [Grynspan](#) of a German diplomat Ernst [vom Rath](#). Kristallnacht was a mass [pogrom](#) which took place on the nights of November 9th and 10th, 1938. Hundreds of synagogues in Germany and Austria were destroyed and over 8,000 Jewish shops were looted. At least 91 Jews were killed and tens of thousands more were arrested and transported to the [concentration camps](#) of [Buchenwald](#), [Dachau](#) and [Sachsenhausen](#). The [Nazis](#) then claimed that the Jews themselves were to blame for this and imposed a fine on the community of one billion [Reichsmarks](#). They confiscated all insurance payments and made the Jews responsible for paying for all repairs.

The remains of a Berlin synagogue after the pogrom of Kristallnacht.



They burned our synagogue *with* the people inside. Opposite the synagogue was a church, and about two o'clock in the morning the priest heard that the synagogue was burning and he ran to the church, opened the door in case somebody ran out of the inferno, and quite a few people did; he saved their lives. I was moved about nine or ten times in Bedzin as they were making streets *Judenrein* – cleansed of Jews.

Helen Stone *Young Polish Jewish woman, Bedzin* [19675]

The German name *Kristallnacht* – the night of broken glass – was so clean and nice, but it was an inaccurate description of what happened. Actually it was a *pogrom* because so many people got arrested and killed, and synagogues and shops were set on fire all over German (and Austria). It was well planned destruction of Jewish property. After that things got very, very serious.

John Fink *German Jewish electrician, Berlin* [16594]

L

Labour camp (*Arbeitslager*)

A camp where Jews and other prisoners were subjected to forced labour either for military or government purposes.

Lebensraum

German for living space. A principle of [Nazi](#) foreign policy aimed at conquering countries of eastern Europe in order to acquire more space for the growth of the German population. The indigenous population (for example Poles or Russians), would be deported, enslaved or killed.

Lodz

A city in central Poland which was occupied one week after the invasion of Poland in September 1939. It was renamed Litzmannstadt by the [Nazis](#). A [ghetto](#) was established here in February 1940 and about 160,000 Jews – approximately one-third of the whole city's population were forced to live in this small area. It was enclosed with barbed wire and guarded by police. Streetcars which crossed the city went through the [ghetto](#), but were not allowed to stop. Factories were established in the [ghetto](#) and the Jews were used as forced labour. The head of the [Judenrat](#) was Chaim [Rumkowski](#). The harsh living conditions - overcrowding, little food, lack of running water or a proper system of sewerage - resulted in the deaths of a great many residents. In addition to the Jews of Lodz, almost 40,000 others from Germany and Austria were also deported to the [ghetto](#). In January 1942, the German authorities began to deport Jews from Lodz to [Chelmno](#). By September over 70,000 Jews and about 5,000 [Roma](#) had been deported. By the spring of 1944, Lodz was the last remaining [ghetto](#) in Poland and deportations began again with some to [Chelmno](#) and the remainder to [Auschwitz-Birkenau](#).



A sewing machine from the Lodz ghetto

Some resented Rumkowski's role in the ghetto, but many did not. Had he survived he would have been murdered after the war; as it was he was killed in Auschwitz. But indirectly, because of him, more people survived in the Lodz ghetto (for longer) than in any other; not those he meant to survive – himself, his family and friends – but people like myself. He did collaborate, but would you accuse the British soldiers who were building the bridge over the River Kwai of collaboration? Those he put on the deportation list, because they were not working, hated and resented him; but the people who because of him survived, were very grateful to him. Czerniakow in the Warsaw Ghetto was in the same position, and when the curfew for mass deportations took place there, more or less at the same time as the Warsaw Ghetto was being liquidated, he committed suicide, took poison and killed himself. What do you think of a captain who, when the ship is about to sink, takes poison or jumps overboard? It is *impossible* to judge.

Michael Etkind *Polish Jewish youth, Lodz Ghetto* [10406]

M

Madagascar Plan

A [Nazi](#) plan to expel all Jews living within the German Empire and resettle them on the island of Madagascar situated off the south-east coast of Africa. It would have been impossible for Madagascar to support an additional population of 4 million European Jews. This plan is believed by some historians to have [genocidal](#) intent. It was abandoned in 1940, when it was realised that such a plan was unworkable.

Majdanek

Located in a suburb on the outskirts of Lublin in south eastern Poland, Majdanek was opened as a [Nazi concentration camp](#) and killing centre in late 1941. It began as a [labour camp](#) for Poles and a [PoW](#) camp for Soviet prisoners. Living, working and weather conditions were extremely harsh. On November 3rd 1943, the operation Aktion Erntefest (Harvest Festival) took place. This was the code name for the killing of all remaining Jews in the Lublin district of the [Generalgouvernement](#). This happened at three labour camps in the area including Majdanek. Because of the proximity of this operation to centres of population, blaring music was played to try to drown out the noise of the shooting. Altogether between 42-43,000 Jews were killed that day, about 18,000 at Majdanek. This camp was the first major [concentration camp](#) to be liberated by the Soviet Army in July 1944. Only a few hundred prisoners were found alive. During the three years of its operation, approximately 360,000 prisoners died or were killed at Majdanek. Canisters of [Zyklon B](#) were found here after the liberation.



Canisters of [Zyklon B](#) found after the liberation of Majdanek

Master Race

The [Nazi](#) ideal to create a *Herrenvolk* – a superior or master race of *übermenschen*, superhumans – a unified race of people of [Aryan](#) descent who were superior. This would be done by eliminating those regarded as *untermenschen* - subhumans, such as Jews, [Roma](#) and [Sinti](#) people, enemies of the state, those with mental or physical impairment, or unproductive people.

I was ashamed to have that Star. You see it was one thing that the Germans managed very successfully to do, somehow to impress people with the idea that they were the master race. Race is a strange term, but when people speak of race today, I shiver when I hear it used in the German sense. There is one reaction which is cerebral, reasonable, rational and normal; but the other is under the skin, which has nothing to do with the rational. I reject the idea of a master race, but having lived with them and with the way they behaved, it actually gets under your skin. You get a very strange reaction where you detest them because they are bad and yet you admire them a little bit

Jan Hartman *Czech Jewish schoolboy, Prague* [18557]

Mauthausen

(Select English at bottom of home page) [M](#)

A [concentration camp](#) situated in upper Austria established in August 1938 originally for political opponents and criminals. Expansion of the camp led to it having three main sections and it then also housed those regarded as asocial, [Jehovah's Witnesses](#) and others. From mid 1944, Jews from Hungary, and from [Auschwitz](#) and other camps were sent here. Working and living conditions at Mauthausen were some of the most brutal and cruel that could be experienced within the [Nazi](#) camp system. The 186 steps leading from the quarry, up which prisoners on punishment were forced to carry very heavy stones, became known as the "Stairway of Death". Mauthausen also had a [gas chamber](#) capable of killing 120 people at a time. Between 1938 and 1945, nearly 200,000 prisoners passed through the camp. Of these about 119,000 were killed, almost one-fifth of whom were Jews. Simon [Wiesenthal](#) was liberated from this camp.

We were taken to the *Appellplatz* and were told which *Kommandos* (labour battalions) we would be working in. I was horrified that I was taken to the granite quarry – that was the worst kind of work in that particular camp. There was only one thing worse and that was the so-called *Strafkompanie* (punishment company). The *Strafkompanie* had a red circle under their number and that meant they were special prisoners, most of them were annihilated after several days. In the morning we had to run and form up under the number of our barrack. We were counted, and when it was established that there was nobody missing, we had to form *Kommandos* under certain *Kapos* and we were taken to the granite quarry.

We were the first outside the camp, through the big gate, and we were passing groups of SS because they were stationed on either side of the road to the quarry. While we were passing, we were hit with rifles. When we came down the road we suddenly saw the granite quarry underneath us. We had to run so fast that most of us lost our clogs and had to run barefoot on the awfully sharp granite stones which were so painful that we screamed with pain. Our feet were bleeding and many of us got infections from the dirt and very soon died. When we came to the top of the hundred and eighty steps, down at intervals were the SS and as we passed they were hitting us. We were coming down eight abreast; nobody wanted to be on the sides of course. While we were running down, being chased, many prisoners fell on the irregular steps. When they fell, they knocked over some prisoners in front like cards or dominoes. Prisoners were falling downstairs, hitting themselves while the SS were standing there laughing.

Premysl Dobias *Sudeten Czech inmate, Mauthausen* [10623]

Mein Kampf (translation *My Struggle*)

[Hitler's](#) autobiography which he began to write whilst in prison after the [Beer Hall Putsch](#). It was published in 1925. In it, [Hitler](#) put forward his plans for the future of Germany, his beliefs about racial purity, the need to create [lebensraum](#) and his belief that [Communism](#) and Judaism were twin evils.

Mengele, Josef (1911-1979)

[SS](#) captain and doctor, Mengele was the garrison physician at [Auschwitz-Birkenau](#) from 1943-44. He carried out [selections](#) on prisoners on their arrival at the camp, deciding who was fit for work and who would be sent directly to the [gas chambers](#). He carried out many experiments on Jews, [Roma](#) and [Sinti](#) people and twins.

...Then, three men in uniform; the uniforms were spotless, the boots were gleaming like mirrors. I'll never forget the impression of the man in the middle, Dr Mengele, I just glanced at him; he was very good looking. Not a menacing face at all, rather ... not benevolent, but not menacing. I remember his boots were so shiny, he was absolutely immaculate. He had white gloves on, not exactly like a policeman, but a sign of distinction and importance. He lifted his hand as he looked at everybody who marched past him and just made a very slow gesture, a very light gesture and said, 'right, left, left, left, right, left right...'

© Zdenka Fantlová Young Czech Jewish woman, Auschwitz-Birkenau [8942]

N

NS-Frauenschaft (National-Social Women's League)

The women's organisation within the [Nazi party](#). This organisation used [propaganda](#) to encourage German women to fulfil their role within the state of marrying and having racially pure children.

Nazi Party (National Socialist German Workers) (NSDAP)

Originally called the German Workers' Party, (*Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, DAP) it was founded as a political party in Germany in 1919. It changed its name in 1920 to the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* or NSDAP. After the two elections of 1932, it was the largest in Germany. On Jan 30 1933, after some political intrigue, President [Hindenburg](#) appointed [Hitler](#) as Chancellor. The party was authoritarian in structure and pursued militaristic, racial, [antisemitic](#) and nationalistic policies. The NSDAP went on to secure victory in the elections of March 1933 before which the Enabling Act had been passed which allowed the Nazis to sideline potential opposition.



[Nazi](#) Party membership book

Neuengamme

M

Established as a [concentration camp](#) in 1938, it was a sub-camp of [Sachsenhausen](#) and situated near Hamburg in northern Germany. It was primarily a camp for prisoners from Germany and the occupied territories. About 13,000 Jews were imprisoned here. It had to be quarantined from December 1941 to March 1942 due to an outbreak of [typhus](#). "Medical" experiments were carried out on prisoners, including children. About half of the 100,000 prisoners who were held at this camp died there. The camp was liberated by British troops in April 1945.

Niemöller, Martin

A World War I U-boat commander who became a Lutheran pastor. Niemöller was an active member in the [Confessing Church](#) and spoke out in protest at [Nazi](#) policies. Pastor Niemöller spent the duration of the war in various [concentration camps](#) including [Sachsenhausen](#) and [Dachau](#), much of this time in solitary confinement. On being liberated at the end of the war, although acclaimed internationally for his views, he was criticised in Germany for calling on the German people to acknowledge their guilt. He also attacked the [Allies](#) for their handling of denazification. By the 1950s he was a declared pacifist and worked with the World Council of Churches for International Peace. He is best remembered for a poem which begins with the words, "First they came for the Socialists" and ends, "Then they came for me - and there was no one left to speak for me".

Night of the Long Knives

On [Hitler's](#) orders, a purge which took place between June 30th and July 2nd 1934 in which more than 80 of the [SA](#) leadership were executed without trial. The killings were declared legal and necessary by the [Nazi](#) party in order for it to be able to achieve its aims.

November pogrom

The [pogrom](#) which took place on the nights of 9th and 10th November 1938 in retaliation for the assassination of Ernest [vom Rath](#). It is also referred to as [Kristallnacht](#).

Nur für Deutsche

For Germans only.

Nuremberg Race Laws

Announced at the September 1935 [Nazi party](#) national convention in Nuremberg, a series of laws and regulations which would deprive anyone defined as a Jew of their rights as citizens. A Jew was defined as a person with three or four Jewish grandparents, not as someone holding a particular set of beliefs. The "Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour" made marriages and extra-marital sexual relationships between Jews and Germans punishable by imprisonment. Other anti-Jewish legislation followed including having to register property, Jewish doctors being forbidden to treat non-Jews or Jewish lawyers being able practise law. Identity cards carried a "J" stamp and those whose names were not identifiable as Jewish, had to add Israel or Sara as new middle names. Jewish businesses were taken over by non-Jews and Jewish workers were dismissed. After [Kristallnacht](#), Jews were banned from attending theatres, cinemas and sports facilities, children could no longer attend school and all Jews were banned from certain areas which were designated as [Aryan](#). Over the 8 years between 1935 and 1943, 13 decrees were added. Their purpose was to legitimise [Nazi](#) actions which would mean that the persecution of Jews could be regarded as legal.

Nuremberg Trials

[War crimes](#) trials that took place in Nuremberg between October 1945 and October 1946. The International Military Tribunal tried 21 high ranking [Nazi](#) officials on charges of crimes against peace, [crimes against humanity](#), [war crimes](#) and conspiracy to commit such crimes. Twelve of those convicted were sentenced to death, including Hans [Frank](#), Hermann [Goering](#) and Julius [Streicher](#), others were sentenced to life imprisonment and three were acquitted. [Goering](#) committed suicide before the sentence of the court could be carried out

The trials remain controversial for various reasons. First and foremost their legality, as there was no precedent. Another consideration is the issue of whether the trials just represented 'Victor's Justice'. The trials did establish the precedent that the defence of 'I was only following orders' was not acceptable in law.



High ranking [Nazi](#) officials standing in the dock at the Nuremberg trials

O

Oneg Shabbat

Literally translating as "joy of the Sabbath", because the secret meetings of the group were held after Sabbath celebrations, Oneg Shabbat was the code name for an archive of documents which recorded life and events in the [Warsaw ghetto](#) and occupied Poland. The collection was organised and run by a group under the leadership of historian Emanuel [Ringelblum](#). Documents include letters, newspapers, personal testimony and eye witness accounts, diaries and other items which were thought to be of historical value. Collecting such material was a way of expressing spiritual [resistance](#). At various points in 1942 and 1943, the group began to seal the contents of the archive in metal milk churns. These were hidden in various places in the [ghetto](#). Some of the containers were discovered in 1946 and a second group in 1950. The third group has not yet been found. This archive provides an extremely valuable historical source of information about life about Jewish people in occupied Poland.

Operation 14f13

A codename for the [Aktion T-4](#) programme where prisoners were transferred to special [euthanasia](#) centres to be killed.

Ostmark

A term used between 1938 and 1942 as the name given to Austria after the [Anschluss](#) and its incorporation into the German empire.

Oswiecim

A city in southern Poland near Krakow. The largest [Nazi concentration camp](#) complex known as [Auschwitz](#) was situated near here. Before the Second World War, half the population of this town were Jews. They were moved out and the bricks and stones of their homes were used to build Auschwitz I.

Gravestones in the Jewish cemetery in Oswiecim. These stones were used in the Nazi era as paving slabs and for other uses and the cemetery was reconstructed after the war. It is unlikely that many of the gravestones are in their correct positions. There are no Jews living in Oswiecim today.



My mother's family lived in Oswiecim for well over three hundred years. They had a very large estate and when pictures were first shown on television I saw my family name – Jakob Gross & Sons – crossed out in black paint, at the railway sidings. Almost the whole of that estate was used for the concentration camp as well as Birkenau and all the others that were attached. Oswiecim was a lovely town, a beautiful little place with a river running through it. Every year around Christmas time we used to go there. My uncle was a very generous man and he always fitted us out with a sleigh and Shetland ponies. The last year we were there was December 1937. He said, 'Look at the house, it's so big, why don't you come. Hitler is going to march into Austria any day now, come and live here.' Thank God we didn't. My uncle was mayor of Auschwitz and although a secular Jew, the leader of the Jewish community there. He went to the gas chamber – almost the last man to go in; he refused to give hiding places away, so they took him.

John Lawrence *Austrian Jewish schoolboy, Vienna [20998]*

P

Partisans

An irregular force of [resistance](#) fighters which works behind enemy lines and uses guerrilla tactics to try to sabotage enemy plans. During the [Holocaust](#), partisans operated secretly in their efforts to assist Jews and others persecuted by the [Nazis](#). Some Jews who managed to escape from [ghettos](#) joined partisan groups. Others like Hannah [Szene](#)s, returned to their native land to add their support to these resistance fighters.

Perpetrator

A person who does something that is morally wrong or criminal.

Pius XII

Pope Pius XII was head of the Roman Catholic Church during the Second World War. There is much debate and criticism as to why he did not speak out against the [Nazi](#) treatment of the Jews and others. As a papal nuncio in 1933, Cardinal Pacelli (as Pius was before becoming Pope) was the negotiator of the Concordat (treaty) with [Hitler](#). This removed some of the Catholic church's privileges, but retained others such as the right to maintain Catholic schools and appoint clergy. After concerns that the terms of the Concordat were not being upheld, in 1937, Pope Pius XI (predecessor to Pius XII) issued the encyclical (a letter circulated to all churches) *Mit brennender Sorge* (with Burning Concern) against the [Nazi](#) regime. In this encyclical, Pius XI criticised [Nazi](#) philosophy and warned the German government to fulfil the terms of the Concordat. The [Nazis](#) responded with a wave of priest trials - prosecutions of the clergy for various alleged infractions.

Plaszow

Plaszow on the outskirts of Krakow in Poland was situated on the site of two Jewish cemeteries. It was a forced [labour camp](#) opened in 1942, divided into several sections and was designated a [concentration camp](#) in 1944. Before moving his production to the Sudetenland, Oskar Schindler established an enamelware factory about 2 miles from Plaszow. He got permission to create a camp for 900 inside the factory. Schindler's Jews were relocated to Plaszow in 1944 after the liquidation of the Krakow [ghetto](#) and before he arranged for their move to Brunnitz.

Pogrom

A Russian word, meaning to "wreak havoc" or "demolish violently". It has come to describe spontaneous, pre-arranged or organised attacks on Jews, Jewish settlements or property by non-Jews. Its use began in the nineteenth century and is only used about attacks against Jews. The events of [Kristallnacht](#) are an example of a pogrom.

Ponary

Situated about 6 miles from [Vilna](#) in Lithuania, the site of a mass extermination of Jews by the [Nazis](#). It is estimated that between early summer of 1941 and July 1944, between 70,000 and 100,000 Jews were murdered here. Thousands of Soviet [PoWs](#) were also murdered at Ponary.

Originally dug during the Soviet occupation of Lithuania as fuel stores, pits such as this example were used to bury the victims of the mass shootings which took place at Ponary. In September 1943, the Nazis began to dig up and burn the bodies in an attempt to hide the evidence of these massacres.



Porajmos

A [Romani](#) term which means "the devouring." During the [Nazi](#) regime, [Roma](#) and [Sinti](#) people were placed in [ghettos](#) before being deported to [concentration](#) and death camps. Porajmos refers to the murder of [Roma](#) and [Sinti](#) people. Estimates of the numbers murdered vary, but it is believed to be at least 200,000.

PoW

Prisoner of War.

Prejudice

Pre-judging - a judgement or opinion formed before the facts are known. Such opinions are often founded on suspicion, intolerance, or the irrational hatred of other religions or creeds, nationalities, ethnic groups, homosexuals, the poor, immigrants, etc.

Propaganda

Messages, information or advertising, sometimes misleading or false, and used by a group to influence the behaviour, views and opinions of large sections of the population. The [Nazi](#) weekly newspaper [Der Stürmer](#) was an example of propaganda.

Examples of [Nazi propaganda](#) which show Jews in unfavourable or threatening ways.



R

Racism

Racism is the belief that physical or inherited characteristics, for example skin or eye colour, the size or shape of the head, hair texture or facial features can determine a person's behaviour. During the [Nazi](#) regime, charts and measuring devices were used to ascertain these characteristics and divide people into so-called "racial" groups. In this view, a human being's value is not determined by his or her individuality or behaviour. [Nazi](#) racial theory led to the belief that some people were superior to others and resulted in policies such as the [euthanasia](#) and [Aktion T-4](#) programmes and ultimately to [genocide](#).

Rath, Ernst vom (1909-1938)

Third Secretary at the German Embassy in Paris, who was assassinated by Herschel [Grynspan](#) on November 7, 1938. His murder was used as the excuse for [Kristallnacht](#).

Ravensbrück



The largest [Nazi concentration camp](#) for women in Germany. It was situated north of Berlin and opened in 1939. Women were used for forced labour and in the camp brothels. They were also used for medical experiments. British SOE agents like Violette Szabo were imprisoned and murdered there. By the time of its liberation in April 1945, over 100,000 women had been incarcerated here, including Poles, Russians, Germans and Jews. Between 1942 and 1944, under [Operation 14f13](#), women from Ravensbrück were transferred to special [euthanasia](#) centres to be killed. In 1945, gas chambers were constructed in the camp itself and before the liberation by the Soviet Army in April that year, some 5-6,000 women were gassed.

Refugee

A person who is forced to live outside his place of domicile or birth due to natural disaster or fear of persecution for his/her ethnicity, political or religious beliefs.

Reich

German word for "empire".

Reichsmark

German monetary unit from 1924 until 1948.

Reichstag

The German parliament.

Resettlement

A [Nazi euphemism](#) used to describe the deportation of prisoners to death camps in eastern Europe.

Resistance

Acts of defiance or opposition to an enemy force. These may be violent or non-violent in form. During the [Holocaust](#), there were many acts of resistance against the [Nazi](#) regime by Jews and others. This included non-Jews who hid or protected Jews or assisted their escape, resistance from Jews themselves in the [ghettos](#), Jews joining [partisan](#) groups and acts of resistance in the camps. There were a number of ways in which Jews put up spiritual, cultural or moral resistance. This included praying or practising religious observance secretly. Underground schools were established, archives of documents were hidden, for example, [Oneg Shabbat](#) and newspapers were printed and distributed. Music, poetry and works of art were produced and through unrewarded acts of kindness and at personal risk, people were supported with such things as friendship or gifts of food.

Righteous Among the Nations (Righteous Gentiles)



An award bestowed by [Yad Vashem](#) and made to non-Jewish people who risked their lives to save Jewish people from [Nazi](#) persecution. Individuals or groups who have been awarded this honour can be seen on a virtual wall on the [Yad Vashem](#) website.

Ringelblum, Emanuel (1900-1944)

Jewish historian and founder and director of [Oneg Shabbat](#). He and his family managed to escape from the [Warsaw Ghetto](#) in March 1943 and hid in a non-Jewish area of the city. Returning to the [ghetto](#) during the uprising, he was deported to a [labour camp](#), escaped again and once more went into hiding with his family. In 1944, their hiding place was discovered and the whole family was taken back to the [ghetto](#) now in ruins, and shot to death.

Roma

Along with the [Sinti](#), a group of people regarded by the [Nazis](#) as racially inferior. Known as [Gypsies](#) during the war years, it is unclear how many perished during the time of the [Holocaust](#). Estimates range from 200,000 to 500,000.

Rumkowski, Mordechai Chaim (1877-1944)

Head of the [Lodz ghetto Judenrat](#). He is regarded as a controversial figure because of some of his actions in particular, a speech where he asked people in the [ghetto](#) to give up their children under 10 years of age, along with their elderly or sick relatives in the hope that others could survive. Rumkowski and his family were deported to [Auschwitz](#) on 30 August 1944 and were killed there.

S**SA (Sturmabteilung - Storm Troopers)**

A group known as "Brown Shirts" who were used in the early days of the [Nazi](#) party to undermine democracy by engaging in street fights with their political enemies. The SA also played a major role in ensuring [Hitler's](#) rise to power. However, when in 1934 Ernst Rohm, the SA Supreme Commander allegedly plotted a coup against [Hitler](#). [Hitler](#) then ordered the [SS](#) that Rohm and many others of the leadership should be killed. This event is known as [The Night of the Long Knives](#). They continued to exist throughout the [Third Reich](#), but were of lesser political significance after this date.

A full-length depiction of a German stormtrooper about to throw a stick grenade. The inscription means 'All for the Homeland'

**M****Sachsenhausen**

The main [concentration camp](#) situated outside of Berlin and opened in 1936. After [Kristallnacht](#), this was one of the three camps to which the 30,000 Jews who were arrested were incarcerated. Some prominent prisoners were interned in Sachsenhausen including Martin [Niemöller](#), Herschel [Grynspan](#), and Joseph Stalin's son, Iakov Dzhugashvili. In mid-January 1945, the camp held 65,000 prisoners of whom 13,000 were women. Its main role was as a forced [labour camp](#). There were victims of medical experimentation and of the [Operation 14f13](#) programme. The camp was liberated by the Red Army in late April 1945. Prior to this, some 33,000 prisoners were sent on [death marches](#) through Germany. It is estimated that between 30,000 and 50,000 died at Sachsenhausen.

It was no picnic in Sachsenhausen. This was the third time I was in the hands of the *Gestapo* since 1934 and I wasn't totally surprised by what was happening. We were made to stand for twenty-four hours if not more, and gradually we were kitted out: our clothing was taken and carefully marked with names; then you were given a striped uniform and marched off to a block. This had straw on the floor, tables to eat from and a washroom. When we slept on the floor, each with a blanket, we couldn't lie on our backs, only sideways because there wasn't enough room. It was all organised. Each block had a block leader, in our case it was a political prisoner – a very powerful personality, he helped to keep morale up tremendously by his sheer presence. We were marched out to work, such as it was; it wasn't very constructive work, we were digging. Then to occupy us, they made us run between two points in relays. There was one man, older than us, he was terribly upset by it and kept shouting. 'I was an officer in the last war!' – it was an affront to his dignity, as well as being exhausting for him. There were two roll calls a day and in that cold weather you had to stand for ages. The guards also had inmates take over certain duties. Jews had yellow triangles on our jackets; politicals, red; criminals, green; and homosexuals, pink. The foremen were either criminals or politicals, so within the camp there was a grading or degrading of inmates – extraordinary! That was the end of 1938. I think they were concerned with organising and learning lessons for future reference.

Steven Dale *German Jewish seaman, Hamburg [14582]*

Scapegoat

A person or group of people blamed for crimes committed by others.

SD (Sicherheitsdienst - Security Service)

The [SS](#) security and political intelligence service of the [Nazi](#) party which played a crucial role in the planning and implementation of the [Final Solution](#) and the [Holocaust](#).

Selection (German - *Selektion*)

The term describing the process of separating out those fit for hard labour from the remainder, who would then be sent to their deaths. This usually took place either at a [ghetto](#) roundup or at the entrance of the death camp. Josef [Mengele](#), an [SS](#) doctor at [Auschwitz](#), was one known to carry out this process.

Shoah

A Hebrew word meaning catastrophe. It describes the catastrophic destruction of European Jews during World War II. Shoah is the term used in Israel. The Israeli Parliament – the *Knesset* has designated an official day, called *Yom ha-Shoah*, Holocaust Remembrance Day, as a day of commemorating the Shoah or [Holocaust](#).

Shtetl

A [Yiddish](#) word which describes a small Jewish town or rural village in eastern Europe.

Sinti

Along with the [Roma](#), a group of people regarded by the [Nazis](#) as racially inferior. Known as [Gypsies](#) during the war years, it is unclear how many perished during the time of the [Holocaust](#). Estimates range from 200,000 to 500,000.

Sobibór

An extermination camp situated in the Lublin district of eastern Poland, where between 200,000 and 250,00 Jews were killed from its opening in May 1942 until it was closed in October 1943 - one day after there was an uprising of 400 by prisoners who broke out of the camp. Half were subsequently tracked down and killed. 100 reached freedom; but only 35 survived the war.

Sonderkommando (Special squad)

This can refer to an [SS](#) or [Einsatzgruppe](#) detachment or to the Jewish slave labour units in extermination camps who were forced to work in the [gas chambers](#) and [crematoria](#) of the death camps.

SS (Schutzstaffel or Protection Squad)

A squad originally formed to be a bodyguard to [Hitler](#) and other [Nazi](#) leaders. It became the elite guard of the [Nazi](#) state. Led by [Himmler](#), this force was instrumental in the mass shootings conducted by the [Einsatzgruppen](#) and in the extermination of European Jews. This is the organisation which rose to prominence after [The Night of the Long Knives](#).

German SS troops lined up at gunpoint after the liberation of [Bergen-Belsen](#).

**Stangl, Franz**

A senior [SS](#) officer who was involved in the [euthanasia](#) programme. He was also commandant of [Sobibór](#) and [Treblinka](#) extermination camps. At the end of the war, he was briefly detained by the Americans, but escaped and remained undiscovered in Brazil until 1967. He was tried in Germany for his co-responsibility in the deaths of 900,000 prisoners and sentenced to life imprisonment. At his trial he admitted his guilt, but said, "My conscience is clear. I was simply [doing my duty](#)." He died in prison in 1971.

Star of David/Yellow Star

The six-pointed star and symbol of Judaism. During the [Holocaust](#), Jews in various parts of occupied Europe were required to wear a star of David on their clothing. Often, the letter "J" or the word for Jew was written in the language of the occupied country.

Later on we had to wear the Star. I am an obstinate and proud person and to me wearing the Star of David was a challenge, so rather than wear it and lower my head, I wore it proudly. I didn't feel there was anything wrong with being Jewish. I didn't particularly want to be Jewish because I didn't know the meaning of it because I am not a religious person, but I was born Jewish, I may as well be one. So I wasn't affected by that Star, and probably I didn't realise the danger – that the Star was the only way of getting us where they wanted us.

Janine Ingram *Jewish woman, Thessaloniki [18671]*



Yellow stars worn in countries of [Nazi](#) occupied Europe



Polish Jew wearing a white armband with a blue star of David.

Stereotype

An idea, image or belief which is applied to all members of a particular group of people. A stereotype is often based on limited, inaccurate or second-hand information which has not been checked or tested and has very limited or no foundation. It can lead to predictions or assumptions being made about strangers on the basis for example of their age, culture, gender, or religion.

St. Louis

A [refugee](#) steamship which left departed from Hamburg for Cuba in the spring of 1939. Over 900 passengers were on board, almost all were Jewish and fleeing from persecution. However, on arrival in Cuba, only 28 passengers were allowed to disembark. The remainder were not given permission to land in the United States and the ship had to return to Europe. Following negotiations with various European governments some passengers were given permission to be admitted to Great Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, and France. However, 528 remained trapped in Europe of whom 278 survived the [Holocaust](#).

Streicher, Julius

A strong supporter of [Hitler](#) and the [Nazi](#) movement and founder of the [antisemitic](#) weekly newspaper [Der Stürmer](#). In 1945 he was captured by U.S. forces, tried in [Nuremberg](#) and hanged for [crimes against humanity](#).

Adolf Hitler and senior members of the German Nazi Party wearing SA uniform for a parade to mark the 15th anniversary of the failed 1923 Munich Beer Hall Putsch.

Front row left to right: Hermann Goering, Adolf Hitler, unknown, Julius Streicher.



Stroop, Jurgen (1895-1951)

A major general in the [SS](#), Stroop was responsible for the destruction of the [Warsaw ghetto](#) in May 1943. On his orders, Stroop ordered the documentation of this action. It included an album of photographs. The so-called "Stroop Report" was used as evidence in the [Nuremberg](#) trials. Later in 1943, as Higher [SS](#) and Police Leader in Greece, he supervised the deportation of thousands of Jews from Salonika. He was sentenced to death and executed in Poland in 1951.

Struma

An unsafe and overcrowded boat with 769 Jewish [refugees](#) on board which left Rumania in December 1941 headed for Palestine. The intention was to travel to Istanbul, apply for visas to Palestine and then sail on there. On arrival at Istanbul they were informed they would not be permitted visas nor could they land in Turkey. The boat remained in quarantine in Istanbul harbour for more than two months. On February 23 1942, the Struma was towed out to sea and abandoned. The following day it sank after being torpedoed by a Soviet submarine that mistook it for an enemy vessel. Only one passenger, David Stoliar, survived.

Der Stürmer

German for The Stormer or The Attacker, Der Stürmer was a weekly newspaper founded by Julius [Streicher](#) whose purpose was to transmit [antisemitic propaganda](#).

One saw these displays of the newspaper, *Der Stürmer*, full of antisemitic things and they were always done in display cabinets – you had no excuse for not seeing them. We used to stand there and read all these things and look at the pictures (caricatures of Jews). That was really quite extraordinary too because we didn't know anyone who looked like that, or had a nose, or ears, or lips like that. I remember reading that Jews also smelled of onions and garlic – I mean, we didn't know people like that.

Gisela Eisner German Jewish schoolgirl, Berlin [14763]



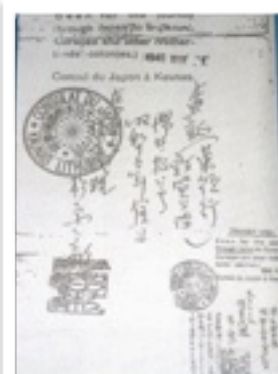
Der Stürmer – weekly [antisemitic Nazi](#) newspaper

Sugihara, Chiune (Sempo) (1900-1986)

Sugihara became Japanese consul in Kovno, Lithuania in autumn 1939. After the outbreak of war, thousands of Jews were desperate to escape the Soviet occupation. In 1940, despite knowing that many visa applications were bogus, he granted the requests. He was reminded by the Japanese government that visas should only be granted if all the correct documentation had been submitted. He responded by



Chiune Sugihara and his wife



A copy of a travel visa signed by Chiune Sugihara

explaining the extremely difficult circumstances in which the refugees found themselves and that Japan was the only transit country for those who wished to go to America. Sugihara continued to issue visas on his own initiative, spending as much as 18 to 20 hours each day writing these by hand. In one day, he was able to produce a month's worth of visas. He was forced to leave Lithuania in early September 1940. The exact number of visas he was able to issue is unclear, but it is believed to be in excess of 2,000. A year before his death, he was honoured by [Yad Vashem](#) as being [Righteous Among the Nations](#).

Szenes, (Senesh) Hannah (1921-1944)

A Hungarian Jewish girl who emigrated to Palestine in the 1930's and later volunteered to work behind enemy lines in Europe. She was captured and executed without achieving her goal. Hannah was a poet and playwright. Before crossing into Hungary to warn the Jews about the extermination camps, she handed a poem to one of her companions:

Blessed is the match consumed in kindling flame

Blessed is the flame that burns in the secret fastness of the heart

Blessed is the heart with strength to stop its beating for honour's sake.

Blessed is the match consumed in kindling flame.



The grave of Hannah Szenes on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem

T

M

Theresienstadt /Terezín

In November 1941 a “model” Jewish [ghetto](#) was established in the town Terezin. It was designed as a means of disinformation – a way of giving misleading information about the treatment of the Jews. Situated near Prague in the Czech Republic, it was known as Theresienstadt throughout the [Nazi](#) occupation and housed Jews from Denmark, Holland, Germany and Czechoslovakia. In addition to its role as an area for enclosing Jews, this [ghetto](#) also had a function in the



Detail of wall painting in small hidden synagogue at Theresienstadt

[Nazi propaganda](#) machine. In order to deceive the outside world, the Jews living there were allowed to pursue some cultural interests, such as theatre, music and art. Following the deportation of some Danish Jews, international pressure led to a visit to Theresienstadt by officials from the International Red Cross. Living conditions in Theresienstadt were similar to those of [Lodz](#) and [Warsaw](#). For the occasion of the visit, the [ghetto](#) was “beautified” and various cultural events were staged. Officials did not see through the hoax. In 1942, the [Nazis](#) began to deport Jews to other [ghettos](#) or to the extermination camps of [Auschwitz](#), [Majdanek](#) or [Treblinka](#). In all, approximately 140,000 were deported to Theresienstadt. Of these around 90,000 were transported further east and about 33,000 died in Theresienstadt itself. Of the 15,000 children deported from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz, only 100 survived and none under the age of fourteen. It was handed over to the International Red Cross on 3rd May and liberated by Soviet troops on 8th May.

Then the German headquarters started to present Theresienstadt as a model ghetto and one day Eichmann came with some members of the Red Cross. It was highly organised of course. Before the visit everybody was engaged in town cleaning. The streets were virtually washed on the knees with brushes and soap and were spotless. People who lived in shop windows – shop windows were also the living quarters – they were evacuated. Things were arranged in the windows as though these were shop windows. Children were rehearsed on what to say when the *Lager Kommandant* (camp commandant) arrived: they would crowd around him and he would give them each a box of sardines.

We, the young ones, were put into a group of young athletes. We were allowed to swim across the river and back of course, to show the freedom! Normally we were not allowed to swim in the river. Music was played in the square, people were walking around like in a spa, everything was arranged. Sure enough, an open car with Eichmann standing there in the middle as they drove through. And that of course was used for the German propaganda. After that transports went every single day. The hysteria was growing in momentum and more and more people came in and out. On the way out we knew only the words ‘Going east’.

© Zdenka Fantlová *Young Czech Jewish woman, Theresienstadt Ghetto* [8942]

Third Reich

The First Reich was the medieval Holy Roman Empire. The Second Reich included the German Empire from 1871-1918, during which time Otto Von Bismark was Chancellor.

The Third Reich of Germany describes the period of [Nazi](#) regime from 1933-1945.

Transit camp (*Durchgangslager*)

A camp, such as [Drancy](#) or [Westerbork](#), where prisoners were held before deportation to camps in eastern Europe.

Treaty of Versailles (June 1919)

The treaty signed by the [Allies](#) and Germany at the end of World War I. Its main objective was to prevent Germany from being a military threat in the future. The treaty resulted in the loss of certain German territories; it restricted the size of the German army and required the payment of war reparations. Once in power, [Hitler](#) began to break all aspects of the treaty.

Treblinka

Two camps existed at Treblinka – Treblinka I, a forced [labour camp](#) and Treblinka II an extermination camp. They were situated on the Bug River in north east Poland. Treblinka II began operations in July 1942, and was part of [Aktion Reinhard](#) programme. Approximately 870,000 people were killed there. A revolt by about 750 prisoners on August 2, 1943, resulted in the camp being dismantled and closed.

Some of the 17,000 stones at Treblinka. Each one represents a Jewish community which was exterminated at this camp.



Typhus

An infectious disease carried by lice or fleas that resulted in many deaths in the [labour camps](#).

U

Umschlagplatz

In German, literally collecting or transshipment point, the assembly point in the [Warsaw ghetto](#) where Jews were loaded onto cattle cars for deportation to [Treblinka](#).



Plaque at the *Umschlagplatz*. The place from which over 300,000 Jews including Janusz [Korczak](#) and the Jewish orphans were deported to [Treblinka](#).



An example of a cattle car used to transport people from the [ghettos](#) to the death camps. A wagon such as this would hold between 80 and 100 people.

V

Vilna (Vilnius)

The capital of Lithuania. Vilna is the name by which it was known to the Jews and was described as the “Jerusalem of the north” because of its status as a centre of Jewish study and learning. It is estimated that at the beginning of the Second World War, a quarter of the population of Vilna was Jewish – about 57,000 people. Shortly after Vilna was occupied in June 1941, various measures were imposed on the Jewish population including a curfew, living in a [ghetto](#) area and wearing the [Star of David](#). Life in the ghetto was very harsh. Despite this, there was a spiritual [resistance](#) where departments were established to look after health and other welfare systems. There was a theatre, choir and newspaper as well as other cultural and religious institutions.



Little of Jewish Vilna remains standing today. This building was a synagogue.

The Jewish community of Lithuania was the first on whom the [Final Solution](#) was enacted. Deportations and the murder of Jews began almost immediately and by the end of 1941, 80% of the Lithuanian Jewish population had been murdered. By the end of the war this figure reached 96%. Only 2,000-3,000 of the Vilna's original Jewish population survived the war.

Vught

M

[Concentration](#) and [transit](#) camp in the Netherlands opened at the end of 1942. It was the only official [SS concentration camp](#) in occupied north-west Europe. Many were sent from here to another Dutch transit camp – [Westerbork](#) – and transported from there to death camps in eastern Europe. It also provided slave labour for workshops at the electrical company, Philips. There is some suggestion that Philips tried to protect its Jewish workers, but was not successful in saving them from deportation. More than 30,000 people passed through this camp before it was liberated in October 1944.



The crematorium oven at Vught [concentration camp](#). In the foreground is a pile of the ashes of human bodies.

W

Waffen-SS

Militarized units of the SS.

Wallenberg, Raoul (1912 - ??)

M

A Swedish diplomat who saved the lives of at least 30,000 Hungarian Jews by distributing Swedish papers, passports and visas. After the liberation of Hungary, he was taken into custody by the Russians and the exact circumstances and date of his death remain unknown. Wallenberg is recognised and commemorated among the [Righteous Among the Nations](#).

Today, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) can be found on a street named Raoul Wallenberg Place in his honour.

Wannsee Conference

A conference held on January 20, 1942 in a villa at a lake near Berlin and attended by high ranking [Nazis](#). Chaired by Reinhard [Heydrich](#), its purpose was to co-ordinate the implementation of the [Final Solution](#) between various German ministries.

War crimes

Violations of basic standards of treatment of Prisoners of War and civilians during times of war and codified in a series of Geneva conventions. It also includes [genocide](#), [crimes against humanity](#), and the mistreatment of civilians or combatants.

Warsaw ghetto

Established in October 1940, by November the [ghetto](#) was surrounded by a 3.5 metre high wall. The Jewish population of Warsaw was 30%. They were forced to live in 2.4% of the city's area. 73 of Warsaw's 1,800 streets formed the [ghetto](#). Thousands died each month as the result of starvation, disease, unsanitary conditions, overcrowding, shootings and hard labour. In 1941 alone, 45,000 died in this way. The head of the [Judenrat](#) was Adam [Czerniakow](#). In July 1942, mass deportations to [Treblinka](#) began. Their journey began at the [Umschlagplatz](#). Later that month, a Jewish resistance movement was formed. The Warsaw [ghetto](#) uprising began on April 19th 1943 when German forces commanded by General Jürgen [Stroop](#), attempted to raze the [ghetto](#) to the ground and deport the remaining inhabitants to [Treblinka](#). The Jewish Fighting Organisation commander Mordecai [Anielewicz](#) led [resistance](#) forces in bitter fighting which lasted twenty-eight days and ended with the destruction of the [ghetto](#). On May 16th 1943, the last survivors were killed or deported. This was the first resident uprising in occupied Europe. Out of a Jewish population in the city of approximately 375,000, only 300 survived the war by hiding in a Polish part of the city.

When the Germans came to the block of flats where I lived and started taking Jewish families out, we realised what was going on. We knew about the ghetto, it wasn't far from where I lived. We noticed them walking out of the ghetto every day for work, guarded by Germans. People couldn't walk near the Jewish column but we tried to throw some parcels of food to them. I felt very sorry for them. Looking from my flat I could see the entrance onto the ghetto and one day I recognised some Jewish people who used to live in our block, others noticed them as well, and everyone went downstairs and tried to talk to them. They looked very bad, very thin. We all tried to give them some food or clothes.

Daniella Hausman *Young Polish woman Warsaw [18488]*



A section of the wall which enclosed the Warsaw ghetto

Wehrmacht

The combined armed forces of Germany from 1935-1945.

Weimar Republic

The German republic established in 1919 after World War I and lasted until 1933.

Westerbork

M

A [transit](#) camp in north-east Holland from where nearly 100,000 Jews were deported between 1942 and 1944 to [Auschwitz-Birkenau](#), [Sobibór](#), [Theresienstadt](#), and [Bergen-Belsen](#). [Anne Frank](#) and her family were held there between August 8 and September 3, 1944. They were put on the very last transport to leave there for [Auschwitz-Birkenau](#).

Wiesel, Elie (1928 -)

A [Holocaust](#) survivor and world renowned writer whose books stress the importance of remembering this event. His book "Night" recounts his personal story of deportation, his time in [Auschwitz](#) and [death marches](#) which ended in [Buchenwald](#). In 1986 he was awarded Nobel Peace Prize.

Wiesenthal, Simon (1908 – 2005)

M

A [Holocaust](#) survivor who amongst other camps, was interned in [Buchenwald](#) and [Mauthausen](#). After the war, he dedicated the remainder of his life to gathering evidence in order to prosecute [Nazi](#) as well as other war criminals, including [Eichmann](#) and [Stangl](#). In his honour, the Simon Wiesenthal Centre for Holocaust Studies was set up in 1977.

Winton, Sir Nicholas

Nicholas Winton was born to German Jewish parents, but grew up in England. He worked as a stockbroker. Shortly before Christmas of 1938, he was urged to change his plans to have a skiing holiday in Switzerland and go instead to help a friend involved in working with Jewish refugees in Prague. He soon realised that the situation for Jews in Czechoslovakia was very difficult. In a short space of time, he recruited a team to organise [Kindertransport](#) trains which would bring Jewish children to safety in Britain. Between March and August of 1939, 669 children were transported to the UK. The final train with 250 children on board, which left Prague on 3rd September was sent back following the invasion of Poland by the [Nazis](#) two days earlier. On 1st September 2009, a steam train left Prague to retrace this journey. A statue of Sir Nicholas was unveiled at Prague railway station. The Winton train made this commemorative journey with some of the survivors and their families. On Friday 4th September 2009 Sir Nicholas, aged 100, was at Liverpool Street Station to greet the passengers making this journey of remembrance.

X

Xenophobia

An unreasonable fear or hatred of foreigners or strangers.

Y

Yad Vashem

The [Holocaust](#) Martyrs' and Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem which documents the history of the Jewish people during the [Holocaust](#). The site comprises museums, exhibits, archives, monuments, sculptures, and memorials. The name Yad Vashem is taken from Isaiah 56:5 "I will build for them a name and a memorial".



Yiddish

A language spoken in the main by Jews from eastern Europe. It is a language which combines German and Hebrew and is now increasingly used by Jews who wish to preserve a remnant of the culture of the [shtetl](#) and eastern European Jewish life.

Z

Zionism

A political and cultural movement calling for the return of the Jewish people to their Biblical home.

Zyklon B

A pesticide produced by the German company [I G Farben](#). Originally it was used as an insecticide, but later as a poison. Pellets were dropped in crystal form, through a small hole in the ceiling of the gas chambers of [Auschwitz-Birkenau](#) and [Majdanek](#).

A canister of Zyklon B with pellets



Special Feature

Zdenka Fantlová

IN SEPTEMBER 2009 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the beginning of the Second World War, the Guardian newspaper produced a series of Word War 2 booklets. One of these was on the Holocaust.

Whilst doing research for this glossary, survivors whose testimony appears in the glossary were contacted. One was Zdenka Fantlová. You can read some of her experiences during the Holocaust on pages 10, 24 and 34.



Zdenka Fantlová (left) with her mother and younger sister, Lidá (Lydia)

Looking through the Guardian Holocaust booklet, there was a full page photo of suitcases from Auschwitz. On one suitcase, part of a name could be seen.

ENKA

FANTL

and part of the number 6.

I contacted Zdenka and told her about the photograph. She said the suitcase was hers and that she had a black and white photo of it which showed the whole case, with her name and transport number S716.

Zdenka Fantlová was born in 1922. She was a hard-working and clever student. In the year before she was due to complete her high school education,

"One fine day, Father was sent this letter from my grammar school:

By regulation No. 99761/40-J/1 of 7 Aug. 1940, the Ministry of Schools and National Enlightenment, in agreement with the Reichsprotektor, has decreed that with effect from the beginning of the school year no Jewish pupils will be admitted to Czech schools of any kind, and where Jewish pupils have been attending such schools they will be excluded from instruction from the start of the school year 1940/41.

I have to inform you accordingly that your daughter, Zdenka Fantlová, will no longer be a pupil at this institution.

[signed] Jan Hora, Headmaster."

Having heard a record of Fred Astaire singing the song "You Are My Lucky Star", Zdenka became enchanted with the English language and was determined to learn it. She finally persuaded her father to allow her to go and live with relatives in Prague and attend the English Institute where the race laws which prevented Jewish children attending school, did not apply.

When, as part of the [Final Solution](#), Jews were forced to leave their homes to be transported to [ghettos](#) or camps, Zdenka and her family had to leave their home town of Rokycany in the Sudetenland area of Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic). They were sent to [Theresienstadt](#) or Terezín as it is known in Czech. Zdenka's mother, brother and sister had received the transport numbers S204-206, but Zdenka's was S716. Her boyfriend Arno was in transport letter R and left for an unknown destination on 16th January 1942.



Zdenka (aged 18)
and Arno, 1940

"Our S transport was due to go four days later, on 20 January. There was no time for lamentation now. We were leaving home and we had to get everything ready. Each person was allowed to take one suitcase and a bedroll: a pillow, a sheet and if possible a blanket. All this was rolled up in a canvas bag with the transport number sewn onto it. The suitcase also had to be carefully labelled, with the transport number painted indelibly in large white letters across the front.

The next question was what to put in the case. Clothes? Food? For how long?"

Zdenka Fantlová's suitcase, printed as Fantl, the German spelling of her surname



*What would you pack a journey to an unknown destination for an unknown time period?
How would you reach your decisions?*

Zdenka and her family and Arno were all transported to Terezín or [Theresienstadt](#). From the earliest days of their friendship, Arno would whistle a few bars from Dvorák's *New World Symphony* to let Zdenka know he was there. It became their "signature tune".



"Although I had found out that Arno was quartered in a building just around the corner, he was as far away from me as if he were living on another planet. I started to fret. I had been here a week and still there was no contact. Supposing they sent him off somewhere else, "further east", as the phrase went, and we never saw each other again? Life began to seem absurd. Yet the thought that he was living, breathing and sleeping only a short distance away, and thinking about me as I was about him, warmed my heart. I was sure he would find some opportunity to get out of his barracks. I didn't have to wait long.

The rumour spread through our galleries one day that a new supply of potatoes had reached the barracks, destined for the communal kitchen. As I ran out of our billet I could hear our signature tune being whistled, loud and clear. It had to be Arno! I ran over to the low gallery wall with such a rush that I almost toppled down into the courtyard from the third floor. There he was, as large as life, standing with six other men next to a cartload of potatoes. He had his belted winter coat on and was looking around to find me. I ran down the staircase as if it were a playground slide and our eyes met immediately."

It was very dangerous for Zdenka and Arno to meet and so this could only happen infrequently. More transports of people arrived at the camp and other transports left, carrying people to an unknown destination in the "east". Meticulous records were kept of everyone arriving or leaving Terezín. If you received a pink slip with your name and transport number on it, within twenty-four hours you had to present yourself at the train which would be standing at the railway siding. Those being transported would get into the cattle trucks which would be locked and sealed. There were between 80 and 130 people crammed into each truck.

"This was the fate that befell Arno and his family one day in June 1942. He came to tell me outside the hours his job permitted, flouting the risk of being caught. He felt he had nothing more to lose now. All he could say was, "We've been put on a penal transport. It's a reprisal for the killing of [Heydrich](#)." We all knew the senior German official in Prague, Reichsprotektor Reinhard Heydrich, had been assassinated.

I was dumbstruck.

His transport of two thousand people was to leave the following day. I woke at four that morning. Arno was standing on a pair of steps over my bunk, wearing his grey belted coat and all ready to go. I have no idea how he had managed to get into our barracks at that time of night. He was breathless with excitement. He took my hand, slipped a little tin ring over my finger and said, "That's for our engagement. And to keep you safe. If we're both alive when the war ends, I'll find you." He embraced me and kissed me, and jumped down. Closing the door quietly behind him, he was gone. At five o'clock he left with the rest of his transport.

On the inside of his homemade tin ring he had engraved Arno 13.6.1942."

The ring became Zdenka's most treasured possession, a symbol of her bond of love with Arno. There was an occasion when Zdenka too received a pink slip, but with the help of friends she managed to avoid being transported. In addition to her work, Zdenka joined the theatre group at Terezín, taking part in various plays. Some were satirical and, containing anti-[Nazi](#) messages, were very dangerous to perform. On some occasions, the Council of Elders cut the play runs short for fear of reprisals.

In autumn 1944, Terezín was wound up. Each day, the remaining inhabitants were transported "east" in cattle trucks. This was Zdenka's fate which began early in the morning of October 17th. Twenty-nine hours later, she arrived at [Auschwitz-Birkenau](#). All she had were her few possessions in a suitcase - and the tin ring. On arrival at [Auschwitz](#), everyone had to leave their suitcases, but Zdenka kept her ring. Once inside the camp itself, the order came for everyone to undress and remove all jewellery.

"I took everything off except the tin ring Arno had given me before he went. That, I was resolved never to be parted from. It would remain my source of strength, my hope of reunion, my torch of love. It would keep my heart warm.

We now had to go through a narrow opening in single file to be further inspected by a uniformed SS man, to make sure we had all obeyed orders and were not trying to hide or smuggle anything.

It was nearly my turn when we heard cries and entreaties, blows and confusion. What was going on? One of the girls, it turned out, had tried to conceal an engagement ring under her tongue and the SS man had found it. She was beaten up and taken away. We had no idea where to, or what would become of her. The girl in front of me noticed I still had my ring on. "Take that thing off. You must be mad! He'll kill you. And just for a piece of tin that's not worth a cracker. You saw what he did to the girl in front of us!"

Only a piece of tin, as she put it. But it was all I had and I wasn't going to throw it away. It would be like betraying Arno and saying I didn't care what became of him. The ring was our bond.

I started moving backwards in the queue to give myself time to think. Was the other girl right, or was I? Should I throw it away or keep it? If I throw it away, I thought, I will have deserted Arno in my own eyes and lost the moral ground under my own feet. If I keep it, the SS man may find it, or may not. It was like Russian roulette. Perhaps my life was now at stake. My mind was made up. I decided I must keep the ring, since all my love and hope rested with it. For better or worse, I slipped it under my tongue, just like the other girl.

I stepped in front of the SS man, knowing full well what I was doing and what risk I ran, but prepared to pay any price. I put my life on the line. He started ruffling through my hair to see what he could find. I was expecting him next to tell me to open my mouth wide.

At that moment, an order rang out from his superior to speed the inspection up. With a push he sent me on my way. "Next one! Hurry up!"

The ring stayed with me."

What is worth fighting or dying for?

Is betraying a person different to betraying a principle?

Now within the camp system, Zdenka was given some clothes. People were given anything to wear. It might be too large, or too small. Zdenka was given an olive green evening gown with pearls all over, a blue and red striped jacket to fit a twelve-year-old, a pair of socks, one short and green, the other longer and purple and a large pair of men's black patent leather shoes. Wanting to keep Arno's precious ring safe, Zdenka found a way of tying it to the inside of her dress.

Zdenka experienced very harsh, cruel and difficult times in [Auschwitz](#) and various other camps including Gross-Rosen and [Mauthausen](#). In freezing conditions in January 1945, still only wearing the clothes she had been given in [Auschwitz](#), she took part in a 450 kilometre [death march](#). Zdenka realised the importance of friendship and working together to survive. With her sister and three friends, they devised a way to sleep while continuing to march. With arms all linked and supported by the others, the girl in the middle was able to sleep for two hours. When they were in very cramped conditions in some of the camps, the five friends devised a way to be able to sleep by sharing out the time, so some stretched out while others curled up.

Finally, in late February, Zdenka arrived at [Bergen-Belsen](#). By now, she was very thin and weak. Conditions in [Bergen-Belsen](#) were dreadful. The camp was very overcrowded and during her time there, there was a [typhus](#) epidemic. Each day prisoners were sent out to "work", which for the most part meant doing meaningless tasks before returning to the camp. On one occasion, she spotted something shining in the mud.

"After picking it up and cleaning it a little I saw that it was a heavy silver dinner knife. The broadest part of the handle was engraved with a swastika. Evidently it had belonged to the SS officers' mess. They ate off silver. That'll come in handy, I thought, and hid it down my violet-coloured sock. It was longer than the green one, which only covered my ankle.



And did it get used! Not just for grubbing up roots in the fields, or cutting up the odd discarded raw potato; all sorts of things were to be found in the bins outside the SS mess that could be cleaned, sliced and eaten. I claimed that piece of cutlery for myself and took great care of it. The knife and Arno's tin ring, which hung around my waist and sustained my hopes of reunion, were the two things that kept me going.

One day, however, we had an unscheduled body check as we came back to camp. It was conducted by Irma Grese, the blonde commander of the women's section of the camp and the most sadistic of our guards. She immediately found the knife on me, pulled it out of my sock and started screaming:

"Du jüdisches Dieb! Du Sau! Du elendes Schwein!" "You Jewish thief! You dirty pig!" Still carrying on like a madwoman, she bashed me with the handle until I thought she would crack my skull. Then she gave me a kick and threw the knife away furiously into the mud. The fivesome following us moved up, but I knew I was not going to leave the knife behind. I had to get it back at any price. In the confusion around me I crawled against the stream to get nearer to it. Blanka [another prisoner] grabbed me by the arm.

"You're mad," she said. "If Grese catches you with that knife again she'll have you shot on the spot! Let it be, for God's sake. Forget the knife! It isn't worth it."

She was no doubt right, but I wasn't listening. I edged back through the crush, stretched an arm out into the mud. . .and the knife was mine. Grese didn't see me and I had what I wanted.

Determination, courage, and good luck. Those are life's main essentials."



Would your "life's main essentials" be the same as Zdenka's?

By the time of the liberation of the camp by the British on 15th April 1945, Zdenka was very close to death. The block in which she was living was at the farthest end of the camp and she had had no water for some days. With some supernatural inner strength, Zdenka realised that if she did not move out of her block she would die.

"Where had this burst of strength come from? This superhuman power I never knew existed? How did I summon up this mysterious force to help achieve the impossible? Whence did it emanate? Does everyone possess it when life is in mortal danger? Or only some of us? Was it the Holy Spirit that religion speaks of? Or God himself?

I'll never know how, but I pulled myself together, climbed over all the bodies strewn on the floor alive and dead, and stumbled out from the block."

What gives a person inner strength?

By now it was dark. Zdenka crawled to a Red-Cross post and went inside. After a while the door was locked and the lights were turned out. Despite not having received any help, Zdenka felt safe. She was woken by a key turning in the lock. A British officer came in and told her that she couldn't remain there. He asked her to leave.

"I could not at any cost do as he asked.

I looked him straight in the face and spoke to him in a quiet but determined tone.

"I understand what you say," I said. "You have your instructions and your job is not easy. You have been here a few days and seen what you have seen. The value of human life here is nil. Myself, I just can't take any more. I know with absolute certainty that if I go back to my own block I shall be dead by morning. Please let me stay here in this corner. I assure you I will live and you will have saved at least one human being. But if it is against your instructions, I will not stand in your way. I would then ask you to shoot me now."

He stood looking at me and said nothing.

Then suddenly his features moved, as if in a film, the military mask dropped and beneath it showed a human face, full of compassion and understanding."

What is compassion? Does everyone have it? Is acting with compassion different to offering someone help? Do you have to be religious to be compassionate?

Despite it being against the rules, the officer agreed Zdenka could stay. He brought her some clean water - the first she had drunk for a long time and he promised to return in the morning. The promise was kept and the officer returned. He arrived in a military ambulance which already contained four occupied stretchers. There seemed to be no room for Zdenka. He had brought a spare stretcher and very tenderly, undressed her, removing the olive green evening gown she had been wearing since [Auschwitz](#), wrapped her in a clean white sheet, lifted her onto the stretcher and placed it crossways between the others.

"Here I was, my naked life wrapped in a sheet with only my tin ring hanging on a string around my neck, the symbol of my love and hope that helped me to cheat death."

"What had been in my mind that time, five years earlier, when I first heard Fred Astaire singing "You Are My Lucky Star"? Why had I felt such an intense desire to learn English, almost knowing I would need it one day?

Was it Fred Astaire who showed me the way? It was certainly his song that had brought me this far. My fate was almost sealed when, in what seemed the final moment of my life, I managed to communicate in English with my English saviour. May God bless the country that sent him.

When I was on the very brink, already slipping down into the dark depths forever, this Englishman suddenly appeared, stretched out his helping hand over the abyss, and pulled me back into life.

So, that was him, then: my lucky star.

Some British officer whose name I do not even know.

My Unknown Warrior.

I cannot even thank him in person.

And he will never know how grateful I shall always be for the rest of my days for his act of humanity. He saved my life."

Is hope important? What is humanity? What sorts of factors cause people to act in human or inhuman ways? In what ways are humanity and compassion the same or different?

The Tin Ring tells the complete story of Zdenka's early life, her ordeal and survival during the [Holocaust](#).

Her book is dedicated to:

*"To an unknown member of the British Army,
who, through his humanity, saved my life in
Bergen-Belsen in April 1945"*



Zdenka Fantlová in 1948 working at the Czech Embassy in Sweden



The Tin Ring

Further details about *The Tin Ring* can be found at the beginning of the glossary.