

Glossary of the Holocaust

Aktion (German) Operation involving the mass assembly, deportation, and murder of Jews by the Nazis during the Holocaust.

Allies The nations fighting Nazi Germany, Italy and Japan during WWII; primarily the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union.

Anielewicz, Mordecai (1919-1943) Major leader of the Jewish resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto; killed 8 May 1943.

Anschluss (German) Annexation of Austria by Germany on 13 March 1938.

Aryan Race "Aryan" was originally applied to people who spoke any Indo-European language. The Nazis, however, primarily applied the term to people of Northern European racial background.

Auschwitz Concentration and extermination camp in Upper Silesia, Poland, 37 miles west of Krakow. Established in 1940 as a concentration camp, it became an extermination camp in early 1942. Eventually it consisted of three sections: Auschwitz I, the main camp; Auschwitz II (Birkenau) an extermination camp; Auschwitz III (Monowitz) the I.G. Farben labour camp, also known as Buna. In addition, Auschwitz had numerous sub-camps.

Axis The Axis powers originally included Nazi Germany, Italy, and Japan who signed a pact in Berlin on 27 September 1940. They were later joined by Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary and Slovakia.

Babi Yar A ravine in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev and the site of the massacres carried out by German forces and local collaborators during the campaign against the Soviet Union.

Baeck, Leo (1873-1956) Rabbi, philosopher, and community leader in Berlin. In 1933 he became president of the Reich Representation of German Jews, an organisation responsible to the Nazi regime concerning Jewish matters. Despite opportunities to emigrate, Baeck refused to leave Germany. In 1943, he was deported to the ghetto of Terezin (Theresienstadt), where he became a member of the Council of Elders and spiritual leader of the Jews imprisoned there. After the liberation of the ghetto he emigrated to England.

Belzec One of the six extermination camps in Poland. Originally established in 1940 as a camp for Jewish forced labour, the Germans began construction of an extermination camp at Belzec in November 1941, as part of Aktion Reinhard. By the time the camp ceased operations in January 1943, more than 600,000 people had been murdered there.

Bergen-Belsen Concentration camp established in 1940 holding Jews, POWs, political prisoners, Roma, "asocials", criminals, Jehovah's Witnesses and homosexuals. During its existence approximately 50,000 people died there.

Bolshevism The communist form of government adopted in Russia following the Bolshevik revolution of 1917.

Chamberlain, Neville (1869-1940) British Prime Minister, 1937-1940. He concluded the Munich Agreement in 1938 with Adolf Hitler, which he mistakenly believed would bring "peace in our time".

Chelmno An extermination camp established in late 1941 in the Warthegau region of Western Poland, 47 miles west of Lodz. It was the first camp where mass executions were carried out by means of gas. A total of 320,000 people were exterminated at Chelmno.

Churchill, Winston (1875-1965) British Prime Minister, 1940-1945. He succeeded Chamberlain on 10 May 1940, at the height of Hitler's conquest of Western Europe. Churchill was one of the very few Western politicians who recognised the threat that Hitler posed to Europe. He strongly opposed Chamberlain's appeasement policies.

Concentration Camps Immediately upon their assumption of power on 30 January 1933, the Nazis established concentration camps for the imprisonment of all "enemies" of their regime: actual and potential political opponents (e.g. communists, socialists, monarchists), Jehovah's Witnesses, Roma, homosexuals, and other "asocials." Beginning in 1938, Jews were targeted for internment solely because they were Jews. Beforehand, only Jews who fit one of the earlier categories were interned in camps. The first three concentration camps established were Dachau (near Munich), Buchenwald (near Weimar) and Sachsenhausen (near Berlin).

Dachau The first concentration camp, established near Munich in southern Germany in March 1933.

Death March Transfer of concentration camp inmates, in which they were forced to march to new locations, in order to prevent their liberation by the invading Allied armies. At least one third of the prisoners died or were killed along the way.

Der Stürmer Meaning "The Attacker" – an anti-Semitic propaganda weekly founded and edited by Julius Streicher, published in Nuremberg between 1923 and 1945.

Displaced Person A survivor remaining when the war ended on 8 May 1945, and who had no home to which they could immediately return.

D.P. camp Special camps set up to house, treat and revive displaced persons

Eichmann, Adolf (1906-1962) SS Lieutenant-Colonel and head of the Jewish Section of the Gestapo. Instrumental in organising the "Final Solution," planning the extermination of 11,000,000 European Jews. The Israeli Secret Service finally discovered his presence in Argentina, and he was smuggled to Israel, tried, convicted and executed on 31 May 1962.

Einsatzgruppen (German) Battalion-sized, mobile killing units of the Security Police and SS Security Service that followed the German armies into the Soviet Union in June 1941. These units were supported by units of the uniformed German Order Police and auxiliaries of volunteers (Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Ukrainian). Their victims, primarily Jews, were executed by shooting and were buried in mass graves from which they were later exhumed and burned. At least a million Jews were killed in this manner. There were four Einsatzgruppen (A,B,C,D) which were subdivided into company-sized Einsatzkommandos.

Euthanasia The original meaning of this term was an easy and painless death for the terminally ill. However, the Nazi euthanasia programme took on quite a different meaning: the taking of eugenic measures to improve the quality of the German "race." This programme culminated in enforced "mercy" deaths for the incurably insane, permanently disabled, deformed and "superfluous." Three major classifications were developed: 1) euthanasia for incurables; 2) direct extermination by "special treatment"; and 3) experiments in mass sterilisation.

Evian Conference (6 July 1938) Conference convened by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in July 1938 to discuss the problem of refugees. 32 countries met at Evian-les-Bains, France where not much was accomplished, since most western countries were reluctant to accept Jewish refugees.

Extermination Camps Nazi camps for the mass killing of Jews and others (e.g. Roma, Russian prisoners-of-war, ill prisoners). Known as "death camps," these included: Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek, Sobibor and Treblinka. All were located in occupied Poland.

Final Solution The name for the plan to eliminate 11,000,000 Jews in Europe to solve the “Jewish Question.” Beginning in October 1941, Jews were rounded up in occupied German territories and deceptively sent to be “resettled” in the east; ultimately, most of the deportees were shot or gassed.

Frank, Hans (1900-1946) Governor-General of occupied Poland from 1939 to 1945, under whose auspices millions of Polish Jews were murdered. Also represented Hitler as his personal lawyer. He was tried and executed in Nuremberg in 1946.

Frick, Wilhelm (1877-1946) A dedicated Nazi bureaucrat appointed Minister of the Interior in 1933 where he was responsible for enacting Nazi racial laws. In 1946, he was tried at Nuremberg, convicted and executed.

Genocide The deliberate and systematic destruction of a religious, racial, national or cultural group.

Gerstein, Kurt (1905-1945) Head of the Waffen SS Institute of Hygiene in Berlin. While maintaining ties with the resistance, Gerstein purchased the gas needed in Auschwitz, officially for fumigation purposes, but actually used for the killing of Jews. He passed on information about the killings to Swedish representatives and Vatican papal nuncios. Overwhelmed with remorse he hanged himself in a French jail after the war. He is the author of a widely quoted description of a gassing procedure in Belzec, protagonist of Rolf Hochhuth's *The Deputy*, and the subject of Saul Friedlander's biography, “The Ambiguity of Good”.

Gestapo The official secret police of Nazi Germany and German-occupied Europe. The force was created by Hermann Goring in 1933 by combining the various security police agencies of Prussia into one organisation.

Ghetto The Nazis revived the medieval ghetto in creating their compulsory “Jewish Quarter” (Wohnbezirk). The ghetto was a section of a city where all Jews from the surrounding areas were forced to reside. Surrounded by barbed wire or walls, the ghettos were often sealed so that people were prevented from leaving or entering. Established mostly in Eastern Europe (e.g. Lodz, Warsaw, Vilna, Riga, Minsk), the ghettos were characterised by overcrowding, starvation and forced labour. All were eventually destroyed as the Jews were deported to death camps.

Göring, Hermann (1893-1946) Appointed by Hitler as his second in command and eventual successor. He was in charge of Germany's re-armament program and in particular the establishment of the German air force. He initiated the “Final Solution” and gave the order to Heydrich to carry it out. Also convicted at Nuremberg in 1946 but committed suicide before his scheduled execution.

Greater German Reich Designation of an expanded Germany that was intended to include all German speaking peoples. It was one of Hitler's most important aims. After the conquest of most of Western Europe during WWII, it became a reality for a short time.

Grynszpan, Herschel (1921-1943?) A Polish Jewish youth who had emigrated to Paris. He agonised over the fate of his parents who, in the course of a pre-war roundup of Polish Jews living in Germany, were deported to the Polish frontier. On 7 November 1938, he went to the German Embassy where he shot and mortally wounded Third Secretary Ernst vom Rath. The Nazis used this incident as an excuse for the *Kristallnacht* (Night of the Broken Glass) pogrom.

Hess, Rudolf (1894-1987) A long-time, close associate of Hitler, he flew from Augsburg in Germany and landed in Scotland on 10 May 1941, where he was arrested. He was tried at Nuremberg and sentenced to life imprisonment but committed suicide in 1987.

Heydrich, Reinhard (1904-1942) Head of SS Nazi intelligence, he became head of the Reich Security Main Office (Reichssicherheitshauptamt – RSHA). Organized the Einsatzgruppen, which, together with their auxiliaries, systematically murdered over a million Jews, principally in occupied Russia during 1941-42. Presided over the Wannsee Conference to implement and coordinate the “Final Solution”. On 29 May 1942 he was assassinated by Czech partisans. (See Lidice for consequences)

Himmler, Heinrich Reichsführer-SS, head of the Gestapo and the Waffen-SS, Nazi Minister of the Interior from 1943 to 1945 and organiser of the mass murder of Jews in the Third Reich.

Hitler, Adolf (1889-1945) Leader of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei: NSDAP – Nazi Party) after World War I. He was unsuccessful in his November 1923 attempt to forcibly bring Germany under Nazi control, in the “Beer Hall Putsch.” Arrested and jailed for a five-year term, he wrote “Mein Kampf”, describing his plan to create a greater Germany. Released after eight months, he re-entered politics and, by intimidating his enemies, eventually was allotted the chancellorship. He set up a dictatorship, brutally eliminating all his rivals, enemies and opposition. In September 1939, after annexing Austria, the Sudetenland and finally the remnant of what is today the Czech Republic, he invaded Poland. After an initial series of stunning victories, Hitler had overtaken much of Europe. However, following the defeat of the Sixth Army at Stalingrad in February 1943, the Germans began suffering defeats on all fronts. Although the war was obviously lost, he encouraged Germans to fight to their deaths – but committed suicide on 30th April 1945 rather than be captured alive.

Holocaust The destruction of some 6 million Jews by the Nazis and their followers in Europe between the years 1933-1945. Other individuals and groups were persecuted and suffered grievously during this period, but only the Jews were marked for complete and utter annihilation. The term “Holocaust” – literally meaning “a completely burned sacrifice” – tends to suggest a sacrificial connotation to what occurred. The word Shoah, originally a Biblical term meaning widespread disaster, is the modern Hebrew equivalent.

Jedwabne Massacre/Pogrom (10 July 1941) 340 Polish Jews of all ages were locked in a barn and set on fire. It was perpetrated by a group of Poles under the supervision of a German para-military group.

Jehovah’s Witnesses A religious sect, originating in the United States, organised by Charles Taze Russell. They base their beliefs on the Bible and have no official ministers. Recognising only the kingdom of God, the Witnesses refuse to salute the flag, to bear arms in war and to participate in the affairs of government. This doctrine brought them into conflict with National Socialism. They were considered enemies of the state and were relentlessly persecuted.

Jewish Badge A distinctive sign which Jews were compelled to wear in Nazi Germany and in Nazi-occupied countries. It often took the form of a yellow star of David.

Judenrat (Plural: Judenräte) Council of Jewish representatives in communities and ghettos set up by the Nazis to carry out their instructions.

Judenrein “Cleansed of Jews,” denoting areas where all Jews had been either murdered or deported.

Kapo Prisoner in charge of a group of inmates in Nazi concentration camps.

Kielce Pogrom A violent massacre of Jews in the south eastern Polish town of Kielce. The mass violence of the Kielce pogrom drew on an entrenched local history of antisemitism – especially false allegations accusing Jews of using the blood of Christian children for ritual purposes (a charge known as a “blood libel”)—with the intent of discouraging the return of Jewish Holocaust survivors to Poland. While the pogrom was not an isolated instance of anti-Jewish violence in post-war Poland, the Kielce massacre convinced many Polish Jews that they had no future in Poland after the Holocaust and spurred them to flee the country. Coming just one year after the end of World War II, the massacre shocked people around the world.

Kristallnacht (German) Night of the Broken Glass: pogrom unleashed by the Nazis on 9-10 November 1938. Throughout Germany and Austria, synagogues and other Jewish institutions were burned, Jewish stores were destroyed, and their contents looted. At the same time, approximately 35,000 Jewish men were sent to concentration camps. The “excuse” for this action was the assassination of Ernst vom Rath in Paris by a Jewish teenager Herschel Grynszpan whose parents had been rounded up by the Nazis.

Lidice Czech mining village (pop. 700). In reprisal for the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, the Nazis “liquidated” the village in 1942. They shot the men, deported the women and children to concentration camps, razed the village to the ground and struck its name from the maps. After WWII, a new village was built near the site of the old Lidice, which is now a national park and memorial.

Lodz City in western Poland (renamed Litzmannstadt by the Nazis), where the first major ghetto was created in April 1940. By September 1941, the population of the ghetto was 144,000 in an area of 1.6 square miles (statistically, 5.8 people per room). In October 1941, 20,000 Jews from Germany, Austria and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia were sent to the Lodz Ghetto. Those deported from Lodz during 1942 and June-July 1944 were sent to the Chelmno extermination camp. In August-September 1944, the ghetto was liquidated and the remaining 72,000 Jews were sent to Auschwitz.

Majdanek Mass murder camp in eastern Poland. At first a labour camp for Poles and a POW camp for Russians, it was turned into a gassing centre for Jews. Majdanek was liberated by the Red Army in July 1944, but not before 250,000 men, women and children had lost their lives there.

Mauthausen A camp for men, opened in August 1938 near Linz in northern Austria, Mauthausen was classified by the SS as a camp of utmost severity. Conditions there were brutal, even by concentration camp standards. Nearly 100,000 prisoners of various nationalities were either worked or tortured to death at the camp before liberating American troops arrived in May 1945.

Mein Kampf (German) This autobiographical book (My Struggle) by Hitler was written while he was imprisoned in the Landsberg fortress after the “Beer-Hall Putsch” in 1923. In this book, Hitler propounds his ideas, beliefs and plans for the future of Germany. Everything, including his foreign policy, is permeated by his “racial ideology”. The Germans, belonging to the “superior” Aryan race, have a right to “living space” (Lebensraum) in the East, which is inhabited by the “inferior” Slavs. Throughout, he accuses Jews of being the source of all evil, equating them with Bolshevism and, at the same time, with international capitalism. Unfortunately, those people who read the book (except for his admirers) did not take it seriously but considered it the ravings of a maniac.

Mengele, Josef (1911-1979) SS officer at Auschwitz in charge of “selections” of the new deportees. His pointing to the right or the left would determine either immediate gassing and death or being sent to forced labour. Known as the “Angel of Death,” he was notorious for his “medical” experiments, especially on twins and Roma. Escaped after the war from a British Internment hospital and was hunted until his body was found in Brazil in 1986. In 1992 DNA tests on the exhumed corpse confirmed his identity.

Musselmann (German) Concentration camp slang word for a prisoner who had given up fighting for life.

Night And Fog Decree Secret order issued by Hitler on 7 December 1941, to seize "persons endangering German security" who were to vanish without a trace into night and fog.

Nuremberg Laws Two anti-Jewish statutes enacted in September in 1935 during the Nazi party's national convention in Nuremberg. The first, the Reich Citizenship Law, deprived German Jews of their citizenship and all pertinent related rights. The second, the Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honour, outlawed marriages of Jews and non-Jews, forbade Jews from employing German females of childbearing age and prohibited Jews from displaying the German flag. Many additional regulations were attached to the two main statutes, which provided the basis for removing Jews from all spheres of German political, social and economic life. The Nuremberg Laws carefully established definitions of Jewishness based on bloodlines. Thus, many Germans of mixed ancestry, called "Mischlinge", faced anti-Semitic discrimination if they had a Jewish grandparent.

Operation Reinhard In the autumn of 1941, Nazi Germany implemented a plan to systematically murder the Jews in the General Government. This plan was codenamed "Operation Reinhard". Three killing centres were established as part of this action: Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka. Operation Reinhard marked the deadliest phase of Nazi Germany's intention to commit genocide against the Jewish people.

Partisans Irregular troops engaged in guerrilla warfare, often behind enemy lines. During WWII, this term was applied to resistance fighters in Nazi-occupied countries.

Protocols Of The Elders Of Zion A major piece of anti-Semitic propaganda, compiled in a book at the turn of the century by members of the Russian Secret Police. Essentially adapted from a 19th century French polemical satire directed against Emperor Napoleon III, substituting Jewish leaders, the Protocols maintained that Jews were plotting world dominion by setting Christian against Christian, corrupting Christian morals and attempting to destroy the economic and political viability of the West. It gained great popularity after WWI and was translated into many languages, encouraging antisemitism in France, Germany, Great Britain and the United States. Henry Ford funded the printing of 500,000 copies that were distributed throughout the United States in the 1920s. Long repudiated as an absurd and hateful lie, the book has been reprinted and is widely distributed by Neo-Nazis and others who are committed to the destruction of the State of Israel.

Rath, Ernst vom (1909-1938) Third secretary at the German Embassy in Paris who was assassinated on 7 November 1938 by Herschel Grynszpan, a Polish Jewish teenager.

Ravensbrück A women's concentrationcamp located in northern Germany.

Righteous Among The Nations Term established by Yad Vashem, and applied to those non-Jews who, at the risk of their own lives, saved Jews from their Nazi persecutors.

Roma (Gypsies) A nomadic people, believed to have come originally from northwest India, from where they immigrated to Persia by the fourteenth century. Roma first appeared in Western Europe in the 15th century. By the 16th century they had spread throughout Europe, where they were persecuted almost as relentlessly as the Jews. The Roma occupied a special place in Nazi racist theories. It is believed that approximately 500,000 perished during the Holocaust. The Sinti and Lalleri were sub groups of Roma.

SA(abbreviation: Sturmabteilung) The storm troops of the early Nazi party; organised in 1921.

Sachsenhausen Nazi concentration camp in Oranienburg. Germanv.

Selection Euphemism for the process of choosing victims for the gas chambers in the Nazi camps by separating them from those considered fit to work.

SIPO The Security Police of Nazi Germany.

Sobibor Extermination camp in the Lublin district in Eastern Poland (see Belzec). Sobibor opened in May 1942 and closed one day after a rebellion of the Jewish prisoners on 14 October 1943. At least 250,000 Jews were killed there.

Sonderkommandos Work units of Nazi death camp prisoners, composed almost entirely of Jews, who were forced, on threat of their own deaths, to aid with the disposal of gas chamber victims.

SS Abbreviation usually written with two lightning symbols for Schutzstaffel (Defence Protective Units). Originally organised as Hitler's personal bodyguard, the SS was transformed into a giant organisation by Heinrich Himmler. Although various SS units were assigned to the battlefield, the organisation is best known for carrying out the destruction of European Jewry.

Stalag German term used for prisoner-of-war camps.

St. Louis The steamship St. Louis was a refugee ship that left Hamburg in the spring of 1939, bound for Cuba. When the ship arrived, only 22 of the 1128 refugees were allowed to disembark. Initially no country, including the United States, was willing to accept the others. The ship finally returned to Europe where most of the refugees were finally granted entry into England, Holland, France and Belgium.

Struma Name of a boat carrying 769 Jewish refugees which left Romania late in 1941. It was refused entry to Palestine or Turkey, and was tugged out to the Black Sea where it sank in February 1942, with the loss of all on board except one.

Der Stürmer (The Attacker) An anti-Semitic German weekly, founded and edited by Julius Streicher, which was published in Nuremberg between 1923 and 1945.

Szmalcownik Pejorative Polish slang word used during World War II that meant a person blackmailing Jews who were hiding, or blackmailing Poles who protected Jews during the Nazi occupation.

Terezin (Czech), Theresienstadt (German) Established in early 1942 outside Prague as a "model" ghetto, Terezin was not a sealed section of town, but rather an 18th century Austrian garrison. It became a Jewish town, governed and guarded by the SS. When the deportations from central Europe to the extermination camps began in the spring of 1942, certain groups were initially excluded: invalids, partners in a mixed marriage and their children and prominent Jews with special connections. They were sent to the ghetto in Terezin. They were joined by old and young Jews from the Protectorate and later, by small numbers of prominent Jews from Denmark and Holland. Its large barracks served as dormitories for communal living; they also contained offices, workshops, infirmaries, and communal kitchens. The Nazis used Terezin to deceive public opinion. They tolerated a lively cultural life of theatre, music, lectures and art. Thus, it could be shown to officials of the International Red Cross. Terezin, however, was only a station on the road to the extermination camps; about 88,000 were deported to their deaths in the East. In April 1945 only 17,000 Jews remained in Terezin where they were joined by 14,000 Jewish concentration camp prisoners evacuated from camps threatened by the Allied armies. On 8 May 1945, Terezin was liberated by the Red Army.

Treblinka Extermination camp in northeast Poland. Established in May 1942 along with the Warsaw- Bialystok railway line, 870,000 people were murdered there. The camp operated until the autumn of 1943 when the Nazis destroyed the entire camp in an attempt to conceal all traces of their crimes.

Typhus An infectious disease, characterised by a purple rash, headaches, fever, and usually delirium. There are several forms, transmitted by vectors such as lice, ticks, mites, and rat fleas. Typhus killed millions of prisoners in Nazi concentration camps during World War II.

Umschlagplatz (German) Collection point. It was a square in the Warsaw Ghetto where Jews were rounded up for deportation to Treblinka.

Wannsee Conference (20 January 1942) Lake near Berlin where the Wannsee Conference was held to discuss and coordinate the “Final Solution”. It was attended by many high-ranking Nazis, including Reinhard Heydrich and Adolf Eichmann.

Wallenberg, Raoul (1912-19??) Swedish diplomat who, in 1944, went to Hungary on a mission to save as many Jews as possible by handing out Swedish papers, passports and visas. He is credited with saving the lives of at least 30,000 people. After the liberation of Budapest, he was mysteriously taken into custody by the Russians and his fate remains unknown.

Warsaw Ghetto Established in November 1940, the ghetto, surrounded by a wall, confined nearly 500,000 Jews. Almost 45,000 Jews died there in 1941 alone, due to overcrowding, forced labour, lack of sanitation, starvation and disease. From 19 April to 16 May 1943, a revolt took place in the ghetto when the Germans, commanded by General Jürgen Stroop, attempted to raze the ghetto and deport the remaining inhabitants to Treblinka. The uprising, led by Mordecai Anielewicz, was the first instance in occupied Europe of an uprising by an urban population.

Wehrmacht The unified armed forces of Nazi Germany from 1935 to 1945. It consisted of the Heer (army), the Kriegsmarine (navy) and the Luftwaffe (air force).

Wiesenthal, Simon (1908-2005) Famed Holocaust survivor who dedicated his life since the war to gathering evidence for the prosecution of Nazi war criminals.

YIVO YIVO is an organisation that preserves, studies, and teaches the cultural history of Jewish life throughout Eastern Europe, Germany and Russia, as well as orthography, lexicography, and other studies related to Yiddish. It was founded at a Berlin conference in 1925, but headquartered in Wilno, a city with a large Jewish population that had been annexed to Eastern Poland in 1922. The early YIVO also had branches in Berlin, Warsaw and New York City. During the war, Jews were put to sorting books and other documents in the YIVO building in Warsaw, where the Nazis established a sorting centre for Jewish cultural treasures. Members of this sorting team risked their lives to smuggle out and hide materials, some of which were recovered after the war.

Zegota Also known as the “Konrad Zegota Committee” was a codename for the Polish Council to Aid Jews, an underground organisation of Polish resistance in German-occupied Poland active from 1942 to 1945.

Zyklon B The trade name of a cyanide-based pesticide used by the Nazis as an agent of mass annihilation in the gas chambers of extermination camps.