

# EXTERMINATION CAMP

As part of the “Final Solution,” six concentration camps were chosen as killing sites because of their proximity to rail lines and resources, as well as their location in semi-rural areas. These camps, which would come to be known as death camps or extermination camps, included Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, Chelmno, Majdanek and Auschwitz-Birkenau. They were all located in Nazi-occupied Poland.

Chelmno was the first camp where mass executions were carried out by poison gas, which was piped into mobile vans. The other five death camps housed gas chambers in which the Nazis orchestrated murder on a much larger scale.

The procedure for all of the extermination camps was the same. Victims arrived on freight and passenger trains from camps and ghettos throughout occupied Europe. Upon arrival, men were separated from women and children. Of these, a small fraction was selected for forced labour. Prisoners were required to undress and hand over all valuables, after which their hair was shorn and used for industrial purposes. Those selected for extermination were forced into gas chambers disguised as shower rooms. Either carbon monoxide or the pesticide “Zyklon B” was used to asphyxiate them.

Very few individuals survived internment at the extermination camps. Between July 1942 and November 1943, at least 750,000 people were killed at Treblinka. Almost all of the victims at Chelmno, Treblinka, Sobibor and Belzec were Jews. Some of the victims were Roma (Gypsies). From 1942 onwards, Auschwitz-Birkenau became the killing centre where the largest numbers of European Jews and Roma were killed. Between May 14 and July 8, 1944, over 400,000 Hungarian Jews were deported to Auschwitz, which was most likely the largest single mass deportation during the Holocaust.

The extermination camps were considered to be top secret by the SS, and extreme measures were taken to ensure complete secrecy. Before the camps were abandoned, all the bodies were burned in the crematoria and almost all documentation of Nazi crimes was destroyed.