

# DACHAU

Opening in March 1933, Dachau was the first Nazi concentration camp. Located in the town of Dachau, 16 kilometres northwest of Munich, it was established on the site of an abandoned munitions factory. Initially, the prison population consisted of German Communists and other political opponents of the Nazi regime. However, it soon included Jehovah's Witnesses, Roma and Sinti ("Gypsies"), homosexuals, and criminals, with an initially small population of Jewish prisoners. After *Kristallnacht*<sup>1</sup>, in November 1938, over 10,000 German Jews were imprisoned at Dachau. Throughout its 12 years of operation, over 188,000 prisoners were incarcerated there.

Dachau also functioned as a training centre for concentration camp guards, and the organizational structure of the camp itself — the barracks, gas chamber and crematorium — became the prototype for later concentration camps. In 1944, 36 sub-camps were established near Dachau to accommodate the 37,000 prisoners working as forced labourers in nearby armaments factories.

Prisoners at Dachau were required to perform intense physical labour, and were forced to build roads, work in quarries, drain marshes and eventually produce weapons as the war progressed. Working conditions were harsh and most prisoners suffered from malnutrition and exhaustion. Prisoners also became subject to inhumane experiments, including those on the effects of high altitudes and hypothermia.

As Allied troops advanced further into Germany, prisoners from many other camps were brought to Dachau. Overcrowding worsened the already poor conditions in the camp, leading to a typhus epidemic that killed hundreds of prisoners daily. In an effort to liquidate the camp, over 7,000 prisoners were sent on a death march<sup>2</sup> south to Tegernsee, with many dying on the journey.

On April 29, 1945, American forces liberated 31,432 prisoners from Dachau. Throughout its 12 years of operation, the camp detained over 200,000 men.

<sup>1</sup> Kristallnacht took place on November 9-10, 1938. Also known as the "Night of Broken Glass," it involved a series of violent anti-Jewish pogroms throughout Germany, Austria and areas of the Sudeten in Czechoslovakia.

<sup>2</sup> Death marches were forced marches of concentration camp inmates. In response to the Soviet and Allied forces drawing further west in late 1944 and 1945, the SS soldiers marched the inmates west into Germany.