

DACHAU, CONCENTRATION CAMP AND TOWN

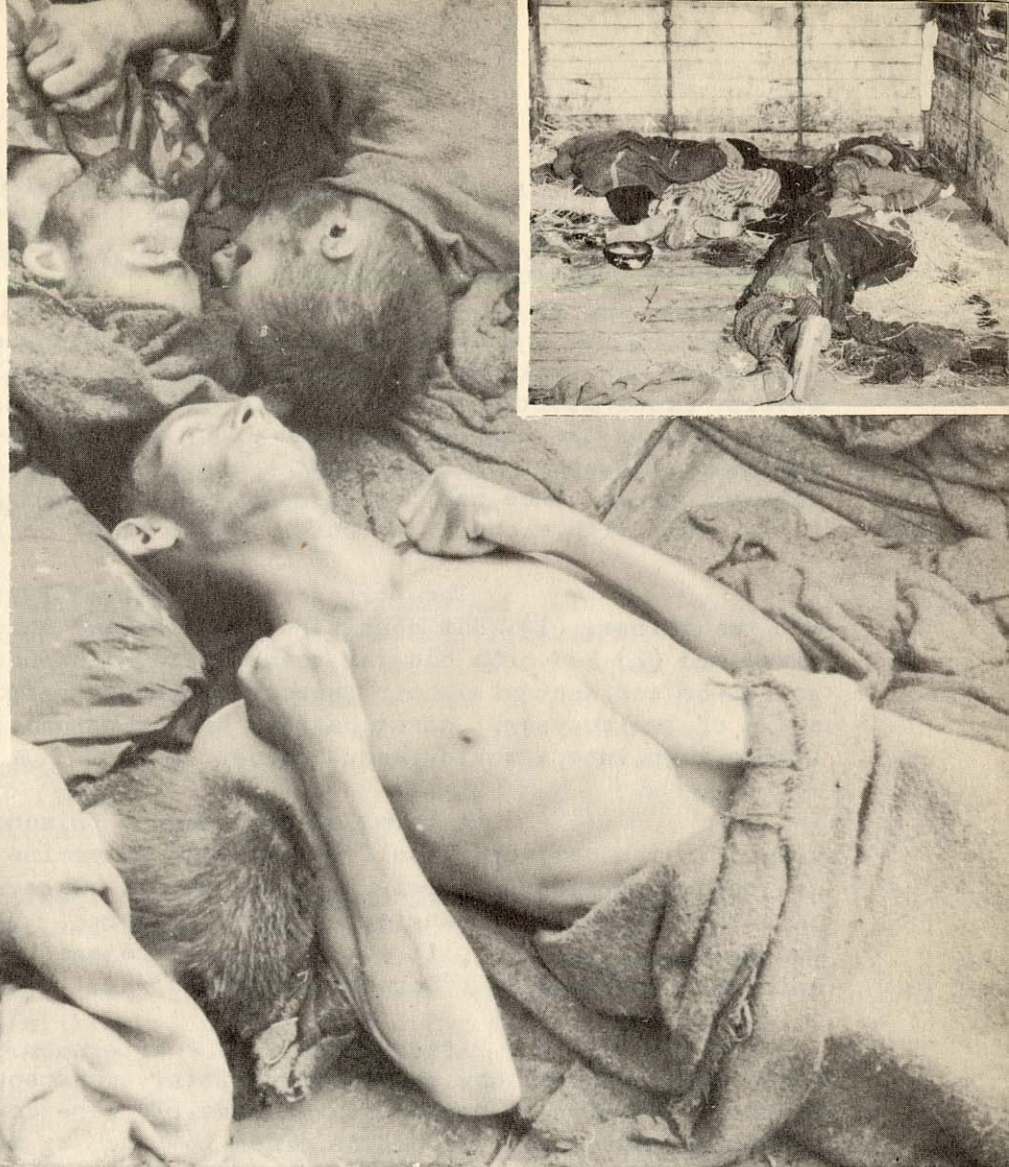
FWB Section, Seventh Army

INTRODUCTION

There are no words in English which can adequately describe the Konzentrations-Lager at Dachau.

In spite of the fact that one had known of its existence for years, has even spoken to people who had spent some time there, the first impression comes as a complete, a stunning shock.





One had always had - in the back of one's mind - the reservation
"But surely it is impossible for human beings to do this to other
people."

The first thing that was seen outside of the
Camp was a train of some forty railway cars of all types - mostly
flat cars, a few box cars and two or three ancient third class rail-
way carriages. In each of the cars horribly thin corpses were
lying in all postures, each clad in the pyjama-like uniform of the
concentration camps. They lay in their own refuse. Some corpses
lay on the gravel road-bed, exactly where they fell when they were
ordered out of the cars. There were two or three by almost every
car door or gate. These were the few who were left alive when this
weird train with its ghastly cargo arrived outside the gate to the
camp in the afternoon of the 28 April; for these unfortunates were
alive when they were loaded on. They were expected to be dead by
the time they reached Dachau, so that their corpses could be done
away with in the famous crematory.

On the spur going directly into the Camp was another train that had recently been unloaded. Human refuse was still caked on the floors of the boxcars that had been the death chambers of unknown human beings.

American troops had arrived before the unloading of the train on the main line had been completed. At this writing proof positive of one of the greatest crimes against humanity still lies in the rickety cars and along the road bed leading into the Camp at Dachau. It lies in the shape of the broken, starved-out corpses of what once had been strong men. Men consigned to a horrible death with a cynicism brutal beyond words or belief.

The purpose of this investigation was to find out two things: (1) What conditions in the Camp actually had been like, and (2) How much did the townspeople of Dachau know of the goings-on and what was their present attitude toward this monumental crime of twelve years' duration that had transformed their sleepy little town into a world-famous place.

A total of some twenty prisoners were interviewed in the compound itself in order to determine what conditions had been like in the judgement of these men. Care was used to pick only those with red triangles on their uniforms. (This designates the political prisoner, it was found. There are also hardened criminals in the Camp /"Schwehrverbrecher"/).

After spending the afternoon interviewing these men, the next day was spent visiting townspeople. As many parts of the town of Dachau as was possible were covered, and all possible leads were followed in order to reach as many different types of people as could be found.

While it would be fatuous to claim too much for the results of a sampling technique such as was used in trying to get at the townspeople of Dachau, it is felt that the major types were reached, and that the dominant attitudes were discovered.

THE CAMP

It is extremely doubtful if one could, in any other given spot on this continent, find in two minutes' time fifteen to twenty men who would be prepared to converse with one in any of the following languages: English, French, German. Perhaps in another concentration camp.

The objectivity of these men in discussing problems was nothing short of amazing. After eight, ten and twelve

years of being subjected to organized brutality, one still finds men explaining "Ja, sehen Sie; Das ist was man muss unter einemfaschistischen Staat erwarten" (Yes, but you see; That is what one must expect under a Fascist state" - Richard Titze). It can be said that among the political prisoners in Dachau there is nothing that could be called a hatred of the German people as such. Their respect for anyone wearing an American uniform is deep.

These, then, are the men who gave the facts detailed below, which give a picture of what life was like in the unearthly place called Konzentrations-Lager Dachau.

Es gibt einen Weg zur Freiheit: Thus begins the arrogant slogan that faced these unfortunates every morning as they stood roll-call. Roll call? They were counted. From all over the compound the large white letters painted on one of the buildings can be seen. They seem to follow one around. "Es gibt einen Weg zur Freiheit. Seine Meilensteine heissen: Gehorsam, Sauberkeit, Nuschternheit, Fleiss" (There is a road to freedom. Its milestones are: Obedience, Cleanliness, Sobriety, Industry).

Within sight of this slogan between 13,000 and 15,000 men died in the last three months alone. They died mainly of starvation and of an epidemic of typhus fever. No one was concerned about the dead as far as name, family and origin were concerned. "It was merely an administrative problem involving so many corpses on such and such a morning and for which a certain number of men had to be detailed. A report was always made - stating how many carts had been used and how many corpses delivered to the crematory" (Robert Rollin). During the epidemic the crematory became overtaxed (the corpses are still piled eight feet high, stacked neatly) so that the prisoners were set to digging huge pits for mass graves. This had been done once before according to the older inhabitants. While digging the pits in which their comrades - perhaps they themselves - were to be buried, the prisoners may have thought of another ironic slogan which they saw on the grilled gate as they came in: "Arbeit Macht Frei." (Work Makes one Free).

The medical care at Dachau was scarcely of the best. The director and chief surgeon of the hospital was a carpenter by trade. He performed operations personally.

"The SS rarely murdered anyone": This statement was made by Albert Kervyn, who had been an instructor in Economics at the University of Louvain. It is a bitter commentary, but it must be said to his honor and credit that he is still serving the academic ideals of objectivity and truth. He went on to explain the manner in which the Camp had been run.

The SS men, it seems, had little actual contact with the inmates. The dirty work was done by hardened criminals ("Schwerverbrecher") - men who were safe-crackers by profession or who, for a small consideration would murder a person or torture him in a pre-determined manner and think nothing of it.

This high type of human was quite often put in charge of a room, a block or group of blocks. The last "Lagereltester" (Camp Leader), was an Armenian who was a murderer by profession. He was responsible directly to the SS Verwaltungstab. His men were in turn responsible to him in a well-organized hierarchy.

These were the creatures, then, who had power of life and death over teachers, lawyers, university professors, doctors, clergymen (all creeds) and assorted patriots representing practically every country in Europe. Ministers of state have spent time at Dachau.



"The SS rarely murdered anyone". But scenes in which an SS guard figured in a detached sort of way were not uncommon. According to Friedrich Mellwig, a guard might appear in a block at night, the thug in charge would yell attention (if one weren't quick about it one might be beaten on the spot). In the hearing of all the inmates a little conversation might take place: "Wie viel Personen haben Sie hier Heute?" "Achtzig, Herr Unterscharffuhrer!" "Schon gut!" (Looks at wristwatch) "Also - Morgenfruh ich mechte hier nur sechzig sehen." "Jawohl, Herr Unterscharffuhrer!" ("How many persons have you got here today?" "Eighty, Sir!" "Very well! Now then, tomorrow morning I should like to see only sixty here." "Very well Sir!"). That night a detail of twenty men would be told off.

"The SS rarely murdered anyone, but you can bully a man to death, you know - particularly if he is old, was once proud, and you have cut down his rations to three potatoes a day," to conclude Kervyn's statement.

The manner of dying at Dachau was as varied as it was unpleasantly gruesome. It is sickening to detail them.

A detail might be told off to disappear into the crematory, never to be seen again. It was most unwise to ask questions.

A man's rations - or those of a whole block - might be systematically cut down. The most horrible sight at Dachau is the corpses who are still actually alive.

A detail might be told off on a cold winter's night, marched off into an unfrequented place in the huge compound, told to strip until naked and then have a hydrant turned on them. In the morning a cart (manned by another detail) would collect the corpses.

A man might become "insubordinate" - i.e., he might cry "Stop!" while being beaten. In such a case he was taken to the room where other "dangerous" characters were trussed up, wrists behind back, feet just above the floor, was tied in a similar manner - and left there.

Over the long and infamous history of this place, the most common way of dying was "on transport." Hence the crematory. Random examples: From a transport of 200 Belgians in last July, 70 dead; transport of French civilians arrived last October consisting of eight flat cars in which there were 484 dead on arrival. The few who could walk away were beaten to death on the spot by the guards. Asked by the interviewer whether this were not an unusual instance, Adolf Weber laughed and said: "Hier hatten Sie beinahe jeden Tag so ein Bild sehch kennen!" (You could have seen such a spectacle here almost every day!).

THE TOWNSPEOPLE

It seems possible to define three broad groups among the Dachau populace with respect to their attitudes toward the grisly death camp on the edge of their town. The worst of course have left (the SS officials and their families). This is a fact that was confirmed both by inmates of the Camp and the townspeople. An interesting side-light on the preparations for evacuation made long in advance by these characters is furnished by the incident reported by a Fraulein Scherrer. Some time ago she was walking down a street behind the wife of an SS Hauptsturmfuhrer. As a work-detail of inmates passed by in the striped uniforms, the little child of the SS man tattled "Mama, Papa has a striped suit just like those at home too!" The woman glanced around and said to the child "Don't you ever say such a thing again!"

"Wir sind aberall belogen worden": These words crop up again and again. It is the rationalization of the man who admits, like Franz Egger, that he was a member of the Nazi Party. They generally add a hasty "I was forced to by business reasons." This type invariably claims that "We were lied to in every respect." They admit that they knew the Camp existed, that they saw work-details of inmates passing through the streets under guard, that "in some instances" (particularly in the years of '34 and '35) the SS behaved brutally - toward the townspeople.

When asked whether they realize that in the last three months a minimum of 13,000 men have lost their lives within a stone's throw of where they live, they claim shocked surprise.

When asked whether they ever saw transports of dead and dying pass through the streets along the railway, they refer only to the last one. They insist that most of the trains came in at night, and that they were sealed cars. Did they never ask what was in the endless procession of cars that came in full and always went out empty? "Es ist uns erzahlt worden, dass das wur Wehrmachtsmaterial und Beutomaterial aus Frankreich." (We were told that it was all Army material and booty from France) Egger. It can definitely be stated that anyone in Dachau who now claims to have seen only one train of prospective inmates come in in the day time is telling a flat lie. There are quite a few such people in Dachau.

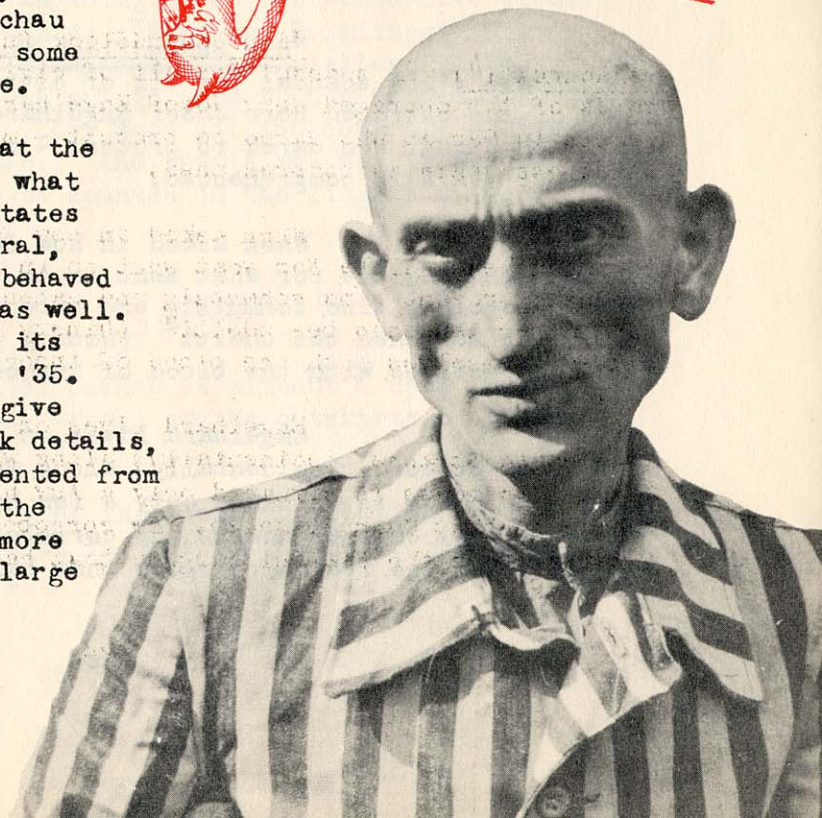
"Was konnten wir tun?": This statement would seem to represent the most popular attitude in the town of Dachau at present. Josef Scherrer is a typical example of this attitude. Here is a man who was without doubt an anti-Nazi. He had come into conflict with the authorities on numerous occasions because of his



anti-Nazi attitude, and the Landrat had already issued a warrant for his arrest by the SS. He was saved in the last minute by his physician who was a good friend of the Landrat - also he might very well have been one of the people on the inside of the compound.

The picture given by this man of what life was like in Dachau for people of human decency and some conscience is not a pleasant one.

Scherrer insists that the people of Dachau knew very well what was going on in the Camp. He states that resentment was fairly general, particularly because the SS misbehaved toward the civilian population as well. He says that this aspect was at its worst in the years '33, '34 and '35. Civilians quite often tried to give food to inmates who were on work details, but were almost invariably prevented from so doing by the SS guards. In the last year the SS guards became more lenient in this respect, since large



numbers of them had been drafted into the SS against their will. (This is a well-known fact which was discovered some time ago in P/W interrogations. Several inmates also told the story of how, in last October, a whole SS Regiment was recruited - from of all sources, the inmates of Dachau Concentration Camp. These men were all Reichsdeutsche and under 40 years old. They were given no choice. "Das war reiner Zwang" (That was pure force - Weber). Inmates of all nationalities also admitted that recently the townspeople had been better toward them in the matter of giving them food when they were out on work details).

Although the population as a whole realized the utter bestiality of the SS and the nauseating occurrences beyond the barred gates of the Camp, they were afraid even to say anything - much less do something - because the shadow of the Camp hung over them as well. Several persons claimed that such cases had actually happened, and that people were even afraid to watch prisoner transports being brought in for fear that they themselves might be interned for the mere knowledge of the crimes. The whole system was obviously based on the barbaric theory that "Dead men tell no tales."

These people admit that the town as a whole did a thriving business as a result of the presence of the Camp and its attendant SS "Bonzen" ("Big Shots") - and it is perhaps not without significance that the most outspoken anti-Nazis were people who, so to speak, could afford to be so by reason of the fact that their business did not bring them into daily contact with the SS.

"Es war alles sehr entzetzlich, aber was konnten wir tun?" (It was all very horrible, but what could we do? - Martin Wittmann).

"Ein Schandfleck fur die ganze zivilisierte Menachheit!"; "A scandal for all of civilized humanity!" With these words of the outraged Herr Josef Engelhard the attitude of those few people in Dachau who dared to protest - more or less openly - for all these years is comprehended.

When asked in how far he considered his fellow-townsmen responsible for what went on in the Camp, he replied: "Neunzig prozent sind schmutzig und haben sich mit dem Blut unschuldiger Menschen besudelt!" (Ninety per cent are dirty and have daubed themselves with the blood of innocent human beings!)

Engelhard lives on the street (called the Nibelungen Strasse, incidentally) along which the cars rolled to the Camp. His house is situated only a few hundred yards from the entrance to that Charnel-house. He corroborated the stories of the inmates about the fearful cargoes that had been brought in through

the years. They began to be really horrible after 1938. The huge transports of Jews at that time were "too horrible to describe." Shortly after the invasion "thousands upon thousands of Frenchmen" were brought in. One such transport of French stopped directly in front of his house. When the doors of the boxcars were opened, most of the dead were beginning to decay. After the collapse of the Warsaw uprising, transports of Poles began to arrive in great numbers and in indescribable states. The few who were alive in one such load scrambled out of the cars and - it was evident from his expression that Herr Engelhard still had difficulty in believing what his own eyes had seen - "Die haben Gras gefressen und aus Pfatzen getrunken!" (They ate grass and drank out of puddles!).

The old Social-Democrat and president of his trade union who had never once raised his hand in a Nazi salute (this was confirmed by other people) said he was very much against executing Nazis. "Das ist zu gut far dies Bande" (That is too good for this gang). He suggests sending them to Siberia in transports "exactly like those that have been arriving daily in Dachau for years." He added that he had no doubt that "Herr Stalin has much room for them and much for them to do." He concluded by saying "Endlich muss die ganze Nazi-Brut ausgerotten werden!" (Finally the entire Nazi-Spawn must be exterminated!).

In the opinion of this minority the people are to blame for their cowardice. Old, gracious and intelligent Eduard Grasal feels very strongly on this point. He has a right to talk. He was one of three men in the entire town who stood up in open meeting and said he would not join the Storm Troops "Because, my dear Major, I won't!" - and with this he walked out of the meeting. Weeks later dozens of people came to him and said "But if we had only known that they wouldn't do anything to us, we would have stood up too!" He cites this as an example: "Feig und Feiglinge! Die waren alle zu feig - Die wollten überhaupt nichts riskieren. Und es war so in ganz Deutschland. Die mutige sind en den Handen abzuzahlen." (Cowardly and cowards! They were all too cowardly - They really didn't want to risk anything. And that's the way it was in all Germany. The courageous can be counted on the fingers of your hands).

CONCLUSION

No citizen of Dachau is without a deep sense that something was wrong, terribly wrong, on the outskirts of their town.

The majority of them take the position described above. That they are honest in this attitude for the most part allows of no doubt whatever.

Those who didn't give a tinker's damn what happened to the poor souls whom they saw pass through their streets for years - so long as business was good and the SS Hauptsturmfuhrer paid his handsome rent - were really few. Today they are the ones who plead "Ja - wir wussten uberhaupt nichts was passiert da draussen!" (But we really didn't know what was going on out there!). "Da draussen" - as if it were on another planet! They are liars, and guilty as sin - everyone.

The very few who dared show some opposition ran great risk and should be honored as the courageous men and women they are. It should be pointed out, however, in justice to the others, that they were (so far as this investigation could determine) people who could seclude themselves from the community without harming their source of income. Herr Engelhard, for example, worked for a firm which sent him travelling over all Southern Europe. Herr Grasal had a small importing business from Italy. They could both afford to isolate themselves (as they did) in their houses for years. Herr Grasal - who is obviously the type who likes his Gemutlichkeit - said that he had never gone into a tavern for years for fear he "might talk too freely." He gave up all entertaining at his home seven years ago. By contrast Herr Scherrer, who was not so extreme in his remarks, emerges as a man who has suffered far more and who had every bit as much courage. He made his living by running a restaurant. For a known anti-Nazi in a town which was a Nazi "Hochburg" and a cradle of the SS this is no small achievement. "Meine Nerven sind vollkommen zur Grunde gegangen" he says. Small wonder. (My nerves are thoroughly shot).

If one is to attempt the tremendous task and accept the terrific responsibility of judging a whole town, assessing it en masse as to the collective guilt or innocence of all its inhabitants for this most hideous of crimes, one would do well to remember the fearsome shadow that hangs over everyone in a state in which crime has been incorporated and called the government.

