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HOLOCAUST AND THE CONCENTRATION CAMP TRIALS: PROSECUTION OF NAZI WAR CRIMES



This collection provides unique documents on the investigation and prosecution of war crimes committed by Nazi concentration camp commandants and camp personnel. Documents include: correspondence; trial records and transcripts; investigatory material, such as interrogation reports and trial exhibits; clemency petitions and reviews; photographs of atrocities; newspaper clippings; and pamphlets. Many concentration (and later extermination) camps and sub-camps are represented in this collection, including Mauthausen, Dachau, Belsen-Bergen, Buchenwald, Treblinka, Sobibor, sub-camp Gros-Raming, sub-camp Gusen I, sub-camp Ebensee, and others.

Date Range: 1944-1949

Content: 27,781 images

Source Library: National Archives (U.S.)

Detailed Description:

Source: RG153, *Records of the Office of the Judge Advocate General (Army), War Crimes Branch, Entry 149: Records of Concentration Camp Trials, National Archives, College Park, MD.*

N.B.: This collection comprises the entire contents of the Primary Source Media microfilm product entitled "The Holocaust and the Concentration Camp Trials."

Rumors of horrors about concentration camps leaked out from Germany before the end of the war. Few people believed the stories at the time. But then the ghastly facts of Nazi brutality were revealed by Allied liberating forces. Battle-hardened veterans, inured to the sight and smell of death, were sickened by what they saw. Staggering out to meet them were walking skeletons; their bodies stripped of flesh and their minds crippled by disease and starvation. General Dwight D. Eisenhower recorded that he had "never at any other time experienced an equal sense of shock." He urged Washington and London to send observers to see the indisputable evidence.

Adolf Hitler became chancellor in 1933, and began building a system of concentration camps soon after. Hitler regarded concentration camps as a primary necessity for the survival of Nazism. He told the German public that society needed to be purged of "...softness and sentimental philistinism...We have no time for fine sentiments. I don't want the concentration camps transferred into penitentiary institutions. Terror is the most effective instrument." The first inmates were communists and Jews, followed shortly by democrats, Catholic and Protestant clergy and nuns, criminals, trade union members, pacifists, gypsies, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

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Documents on several concentration (and later extermination) camps and sub-camps are represented in this new collection, including Mauthausen, Dachau, Belsen-Bergen, Buchenwald, Treblinka, Sobibor, etc. Mauthausen documents are well represented and include: 33 lists of Mauthausen victims arranged by nationality and compiled by the U.S. 3rd Army from death certificates, notifications of next of kin, death books, and hospital records found at the camp at the time of liberation; and trial transcripts—U.S. v. Friedrich Kurbel, et al., regarding sub-camp Gros-Raming; U.S. v. Wlasislaus Dopierala, regarding sub-camp Gusen I; and U.S. v. Heinrich Schmitz, et al., regarding sub-camp Ebensee (also includes information on the Fingerleiden detail at Ebensee and the Melk transport from Gross-Rosen and Wolfsberg, sub-camps Brettstein, Wiener-Neustadt, and the SS special sub-camp Hintzen).

U.S. Army Courts

From 1945 to 1948, U.S. Army Courts (military commissions and special or general military courts) tried 1672 individuals in 489 proceedings. Specific authority for these proceedings is found in Joint Chiefs of Staff Directive 1023/10 of July 8, 1945, which placed responsibility for certain war crimes trials in Germany on the Commander, USFET (United States Forces, European Theater). The Commander, in turn, empowered the commanding general of the Western Military District (territory occupied by the U.S. 3d Army (Bavaria)) to appoint military courts, predominantly at the site of the former concentration camp Dachau, for the trial of war criminals not heard at Nuernberg. This was done in a letter on the subject of "Trial of War Crimes and Related Cases" of July 16, 1945. The commanding general of the Eastern Military District (territory occupied by the U.S. 7th Army (Hesse, Baden-Wuerttemberg and Bremen)) was similarly authorized to commence war crimes trials, mainly at Ludwigsburg. In order to streamline operations, the Commander, USFET, revoked this division of authority in a letter of October 14, 1946, and assigned responsibility to prosecute war criminals to the Deputy Judge Advocate for War Crimes, USFET. Henceforth, all cases were tried at the site of the former concentration camp Dachau because centralization of war crimes appeared necessary in view of the large body of cases and investigations.

Records Description

Trial proceedings consists of a review and recommendation containing paragraphs for the following subjects: trial data and charges, summaries of evidence, personal information regarding the accused, evidence presented by prosecution and defense counsel, and petitions for clemency; the conclusions of the reviewer and the recommendation, either of an Army staff judge advocate or the Deputy Judge Advocate for War Crimes, complete the record.

The case files to which the reviews and recommendations pertain were filed and arranged by a two-number mail and records system employed by the European and Washington Offices of the War Crimes Branch, Office of the Judge Advocate General. The same system was used for the reviews and recommendations. The first number designates a country, and the second number identifies the case within the country. In Case 5-37, for example, the first number represents Austria, the country in which the crime was alleged to have been committed; and the second number identifies the case among the other Austrian cases tried or investigated between 1945 and 1948. All of the case files in this publication arranged by the WTO-number system have one of the following five country designations: 5 - Austria, 6 - Belgium, 8 - Czechoslovakia, 11 - France, or 12 - Germany.

Additional reviews and recommendations are arranged by one of two modified mail and records systems. One system consists of a sequence of numbers beginning with a triple zero, 000, followed by the number 50, 000-50. These two-number sequences indicate concentration camp cases. A third number in this sequence stands for a main camp case. Thus 000-50-2 is for the Dachau Concentration Camp Case, 000-50-5 is for the Mauthausen Case, 000-50-9 is for the Buchenwald Case, 000-50-37 is for the Nordhausen Case, 000-50-16 is for the Flossenbürg Case, and 000-50-136 is for the Muehldorf Concentration Camp Case.

The subsequent proceedings to these main cases were designated either by adding a fourth number to the sequence such as 000-50-2-1, indicating the first subsequent proceeding to the Dachau main concentration camp case; or using a triple zero followed by the name of the main camp and the number of the subsequent proceeding, 000-Buchenwald-1. The apparent difference between these two methods of identifying subsequent concentration camp cases is that the charges under the first method were substantially the same as in the main case; whereas in the second method the accused were tried under additional charges.