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Liberation of concentration camps by the Soviet army



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Before the war, German concentration camps (KZ, the only type of Nazi camps until 1939) were a tool for isolating and exterminating the German anti-Nazi opposition, and during the war - an instrument of terror, exploitation of the workforce and the implementation of the genocide programme of the conquered nations of Europe, and a place of criminal medical experiments. German concentration camps were

established on the initiative of Hermann Göring and Heinrich Himmler. The formal basis for their existence was provided by two ordinances of the President of the Reich of February 28, 1933 (issued after the fire of the Reichstag): "On the protection of the nation and the state" (RGBl I 1933, p. 83) and "On the betrayal of the German nation and the preparation of the main treason" (RGBl I 1933, p. 85), which "temporarily" - in fact until the end of the Third Reich - suspended constitutional civil liberties and enabled the exercise of the so-called preventive detention. The first German concentration camp was established on March 3, 1933, KZ Nohra, on March 13, 1933 there was created KZ Dachau, and on March 21, 1933 - KZ Oranienburg. Originally, the concentration camps were supervised by the German police or *Sturmabteilungen der NSDAP (SA)*, and in June 1934 the sole supervision over them was taken over by *Schutzstaffel der NSDAP (SS)*. After the outbreak of the war, the existing camps in Germany were constantly expanded and new ones were organized in the occupied areas. Numerous German KZs in the occupied areas of Central and Eastern Europe (mainly in Poland) were to serve, in the first place, the Nazi plans to liquidate the elites of the conquered countries, suppress the resistance movement, and then destroy the Jewish and Slavic populations in accordance with the plans of the German colonization of these lands (the so-called General Eastern Plan). When locating a KZ camp, the convenient location was taken into account (conducive to the destruction of prisoners and facilitating and shortening transport).

In total, during World War II, there were 19 KZs (not counting sub-camps, labour commandos, etc.) in the territory of the German Reich

(according to the occupation borders imposed by Germany): Arbeitsdorf-Fallersleben, Auschwitz, Birkenau, Monowitz, Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, Dachau, Flossenbürg, Gross-Rosen, Hinzert, Mauthausen, Mittelbau, Moringen, Natzweiler/Struthof-Guttenbach/Neckaretz, Neuengamme, Niederhagen, Ravensbrücken, Ravensbrücken, Stutthof); in the General Government - three: Lublin-Majdanek, Plaszow and Warschau; in the East Reich Commissariat - three: Kaiserwald, Kauen and Vaivara, and in the occupied Netherlands - Herzogenbusch-Vught. According to today's borders - in addition to the above-mentioned ones - in Poland there were the following KZs: Auschwitz, Birkenau, Monowitz, Gross-Rosen and Stutthof. The exact number of prisoners and victims of the German KZs is impossible to establish because the Nazis managed to largely erase the traces of the crime. It is assumed that out of approximately 8.9 million prisoners of the KZs and extermination centres, at least 7.2 million, i.e. 81%, died (out of about 5 million imprisoned Polish citizens - about 3.5 million died).

German KZs were gradually liberated as the Allied forces advanced, although this did not always apply to prisoners previously evacuated by the guard personnel. The Red Army liberated twelve KZs. They were chronologically the following ones:

June 28, 1944 - KZ **Vaivara** (existed in 1943-1944, the first liberated German KZ), a small number of prisoners who escaped the German "evacuation" was liberated in the camp;

July 23, 1944 - KZ **Majdanek** (existed in 1941-1944), about 1,000

prisoners were liberated in the camp, after the camp was occupied by the Soviets, they immediately established a NKVD filtration camp for soldiers of the Home Army and the National Armed Forces;

August 1, 1944 - KZ **Kauen** (existed in 1943-1944), about 2,000 prisoners were liberated in the camp, after the camp was occupied by the Soviets, they restored the NKVD prison existing there in 1940-1941, which operated until 1948;

October 13, 1944 - KZ **Kaiserwald** (existed in 1943-1944), there were no more prisoners in the camp;

January 20, 1945 - KZ **Plaszow** (existed in the years 1943-1944), there were no more prisoners in the camp;

January 27, 1945 - KZ **Auschwitz** (existed in 1940-1945), **Birkenau** (existed in 1941-1945) and **Monowitz** (existed in 1942-1945), about 7-9 thousand prisoners (including around 500 children) were liberated in the camps; after the camps were occupied, the Soviets established two NKVD transit camps for German war prisoners (the camp in KL Auschwitz operated until the autumn of 1945, in KL Birkenau - until the spring of 1946), moreover, a camp for the Public Security Office was established in KL Auschwitz;

February 13, 1945 - KZ **Groß-Rosen** (existed in 1940-1945), there

were no more prisoners in the camp, after the camp was occupied, the Soviets established a secret NKVD, prison, which existed until 1947;

April 22, 1945 - KZ **Sachsenhausen** (existed in 1936-1945), there were no more prisoners in the camp, after the camp was occupied by the Soviets, they established a camp for German war prisoners (existed in 1945-1949) and Special Camp No.7 (since 1948 - Special Camp No. 1) intended for political prisoners of the NKVD (all Germans suspected of resistance against the Soviet occupation, deserters from the Red Army or Soviet soldiers suspected of having too close contacts with Germany, existed in the years of 1945-1950); in addition, a hospital for Red Army soldiers infected with venereal diseases was established on the premises of KZ Sachsenhausen;

April 30, 1945 - KZ **Ravensbrück** (existed in 1939-1945), 2,000-3,000 women and several hundred men were liberated in the camp;

May 9, 1945 - KZ **Stutthof** (existed in 1939-1945), about 100 prisoners were liberated in the camp.

In conclusion, it is worth adding that in the Soviet Special Camps intended for NKVD political prisoners in occupied Germany, newly liberated prisoners of Nazi concentration camps were often detained. Two of them (out of 10 existing ones) used the infrastructure of the former KZs. In addition to the already mentioned Special Camp No. 7/No. 1 located on the premises of KZ Sachsenhausen, it was Special

Camp No. 2 located on the territory of KZ **Buchenwald** liberated by the Americans on April 11, 1945 (approx. 21,000 prisoners were liberated then), which existed in 1945 -1950.

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