

Civilians Forced to Confront the Realities of Genocide at Buchenwald (April 1945)

Abstract

Buchenwald concentration camp was established in 1937 on the outskirts of the central German town of Weimar. It grew to be one of the largest camps on German soil, imprisoning Jews, political opponents, POWs, Roma and Sinti, homosexuals, and many others from across Europe. Prisoners were forced to perform labor in munitions factories in the area, until they were too weak to do so. In its nine years of operation, about 250,000 men and women were imprisoned behind its gates. Estimates of deaths by starvation, disease, and execution reach over 50,000. The SS began to evacuate the camp in early April 1945. Remaining SS guards were overpowered by prisoners shortly before the American military arrived on April 11. It was the first concentration camp the Americans entered.

In the days following liberation, American occupation forces compelled German civilians to tour the camp. As seen in this film, inhabitants of the region displayed a range of emotions as they were forced to witness camp remains, including corpses, items such as lampshades covered in human skin, crematoria, and mass graves. The American military believed that such direct confrontation by civilians with the crimes of the war years were an important step in the denazification process.

Source

/Art galleries were not the only sources for Nazi spoils. At Buchenwald concentration camp, huge stocks of valuables, looted from the inmates, were found by American troops. They included clocks and watches, rings, silverware, and every kind of jewelry. Even gold stoppings from teeth were kept by the Germans.

/German men, women, and children file past the coffins in which lie the tortured remains of some dozens of the victims of Nazi brutality. It is the Allied policy to show the German people through their own very eyes the vile bestiality of the regime they have supported.

Source: Imperial War Museums

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