Death March from the Dachau Concentration Camp (April 28, 1945)

Abstract

From the vantage point of a balcony in Wolfratshausen, a village on Lake Starnberg in southern Bavaria, a German civilian took this photo. Captured on April 28, 1945, this image depicts the march of prisoners through the town on their way from Dachau. As the Allied Powers advanced into Germany from both the East and the West, the SS transferred able-bodied concentration camp prisoners to locations out of the reach of the advancing armies. The evacuation of concentration camps across German occupied territories and the Reich was conducted both by train and by foot. The latter, known now as Death Marches, reflected an act of desperation on the part of the collapsing regime. These marches were both an attempt to preserve their source of forced labor and an effort to finish the Nazis' racial project and the extermination of European Jewry before the ultimate collapse of their army and government. Prisoners marched through horrible winter conditions with improper clothing. Those who fell behind were shot while others died of hypothermia and starvation. Elie Wiesel recounts the death marches that claimed his father's life in his postwar memoir, Night. In some cases, the marches lasted for days, with the SS guards supervising them having no concrete instructions on where to lead their prisoners. As prisoners died, some were left in the road and others were buried in poorly dug graves on the side of the road. It is estimated 200,000 to 350,000 concentration camp inmates died during the death marches. This constitutes approximately 50% of the estimated remaining population of the camps across Europe in January 1945.

Source

Source: Photograph, April 28, 1945. Photo: Benno Gantner. akg-images.

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