

Oswald Pohl's Report to Heinrich Himmler on the Expansion of the Concentration Camps (April 30, 1942)

Abstract

After the outbreak of war, camp inmates were increasingly deployed in armaments production and mercilessly exploited in the process. With the integration of prisoners into wartime production, the camps assumed far greater economic importance than ever before. On March 3, 1942, the camps were placed under the control of the SS Economic and Administrative Main Office [*SS-Wirtschafts- und Verwaltungshauptamt* or *WVHA*], which was led by SS-Obergruppenführer Oswald Pohl. The following report from April 30, 1942, already reflects the shift from a penal-camp structure to a work-camp model—a move that introduced certain improvements in camp conditions, at least on a short-term basis, since prisoners were regarded as an important labor source in the war effort. On the whole, however, the massive, long-term deployment of forced laborers from the camps also entailed the ruthless exploitation of human life.

Source

RE: Attachment of the Inspectorate of the Concentration Camps to SS Economic and Administrative Main Office.

Secret

Reichsführer!

Today I report on the current situation of the concentration camps and on measures I have taken in order to implement your order of March 3, 1942.

I. 1. At the outbreak of war, the following concentration camps existed:

| (a) Dachau | 1939 | 4,000 prisoners, | today | 8,000 prisoners |
|-------------------|-------------|-------------------------|--------------|------------------------|
| (b) Sachsenhausen | 1939 | 6,500 prisoners, | today | 10,000 prisoners |
| (c) Buchenwald | 1939 | 5,300 prisoners, | today | 9,000 prisoners |
| (d) Mauthausen | 1939 | 1,500 prisoners, | today | 5,500 prisoners |
| (e) Flossenbürg | 1939 | 1,600 prisoners, | today | 4,700 prisoners |
| (f) Ravensbrück | 1939 | 2,500 prisoners, | today | 7,500 prisoners |

2. In the years 1940 to 1942 nine additional camps were erected, namely:

| | | |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| (a) Auschwitz | (d) Natzweiler | (g) Niederhagen |
| (b) Neuengamme | (e) Gross-Rosen | (h) Stutthof |
| (c) Güsen | (f) Lublin | (i) Arbeitsdorf |

3. These 15 camps conformed to the organization of the old concentration camps with respect to their function and operation, the composition of their commanding staffs, and their role as protective custody camps. Apart from these camps, special tasks have been assigned to the following:

(a) to SS-Special Camp Hinzert: Commanding staff and guards are under my orders. The camp for protective custody is subordinate to the Reich Security Main Office. No factories, no opportunity for work.

(b) Camp for the protection of youth—Moringen: No factories.

(c) Camp for the protection of youth—Uckermark: Is being erected.

(d) Camp for the protection of youth— – Litzmannstadt: Is planned.

4. In the past weeks the Reich Security Main Office and the Command Authority of the Waffen SS have requested SS-Commanders for the camps planned by these authorities in Riga, Kiev, and Bobriusk.

I think it right to submit such plans to the SS Economic and Administrative Main Office, so that they may be planned and implemented uniformly by one authority for the SS and the Police. Otherwise, there could easily be a lack of coordination and ensuing confusion.

II 1. The war has brought about a marked change in the structure of the concentration camps and has changed their duties with regard to the employment of prisoners.

The custody of prisoners for the sole purposes of security, education, or prevention is no longer the main consideration. The main emphasis has shifted to the economic side. The mobilization of all prisoners who are fit for work, initially for wartime purposes (to increase armaments production), and later for peacetime tasks, is becoming more and more important.

2. This necessitates measures to ensure the gradual transformation of the concentration camps from their previously one-sided political form into organizations more suitable for economic tasks.

3. For this reason, I assembled all the leaders of the former Inspectorate of Concentration Camps, all camp commandants, and all managers and supervisors of work on the 23rd and 24th of April 1942. I explained this new development to them personally. In the enclosed directive, I have compiled the essential things that need to be implemented with the utmost urgency if the commencement of work for the purposes of the armaments industry is not to be delayed.

4. The transfer of the Inspectorate of Concentration Camps to the Main Office of Economics and Administration has been carried out with the full agreement of all the main offices concerned. The cooperation of all agencies is continuing smoothly; the elimination of uncoordinated operations in the concentration camps is hailed everywhere as the shedding of fetters that were hindering progress.

Heil Hitler!

Signed: Pohl

SS-Obergruppenführer and General of the Waffen-SS

Source of English translation: Report by SS-Obergruppenführer and General of the Waffen-SS, Oswald Pohl, Head of the SS Main Office of Economics and Administration, to Heinrich Himmler on the Expansion of Concentration Camps (April 30, 1942). In United States Chief Counsel for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality, *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*. Volume VIII. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1946, Document R-129, pp. 198–99. English translation credited to Nuremberg staff; edited by GHI staff.

Source of original German document: Bericht von Oswald Pohl an Heinrich Himmler über den Ausbau der Konzentrationslager (30. April 1942). International Militärgerichtshof Nürnberg, *Der Nürnberger Prozess gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher vom 14. November 1945 bis 1. Oktober 1946: Urkunden und anderes Beweismaterial*. Published in Nuremberg 1949. Munich: Delphin Verlag, 1989. Volume XXXVIII: Amtlicher Text – Deutsche Ausgabe, Nummer 185-L bis Nummer 1216-RF, Document 129-R [Bericht des Chefs des SS-Wirtschafts- und Verwaltungshauptamtes Pohl an Himmler vom 30. April 1942: stärkere Belegung und Vermehrung der Konzentrationslager (Beweisstück US-217)], pp. 362–65.

Recommended Citation: Oswald Pohl's Report to Heinrich Himmler on the Expansion of the Concentration Camps (April 30, 1942), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/nazi-germany-1933-1945/ghdi:document-1511>> [May 14, 2025].