

# Institute of National Remembrance

<https://ipn.gov.pl/en/digital-resources/articles/7163,Liberation-of-concentration-camps-by-the-Soviet-army.html>

17.05.2024, 08:52

04.03.2021

---

## Liberation of concentration camps by the Soviet army



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-1085-0417-15  
Foto: o. Ang. | 1939/1945 ca.

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.

## References

### **General works**

Marek T. Frankowski, *Socjologiczne aspekty funkcjonowania hitlerowskich obozów koncentracyjnych 1939-1945*, Warsaw 1996.

Jan Kosiński, *Niemieckie obozy koncentracyjne i ich filie*, ed. Waldemar Sobczyk, Stephanskirchen 1999.

*Obozy hitlerowskie na ziemiach polskich 1939-1945. Informator encyklopedyczny*, Warsaw 1979.

Nikolaus Wachsmann, *KL - Historia nazistowskich obozów koncentracyjnych*, Warsaw 2016 and *Historia nazistowskich obozów koncentracyjnych*, Warsaw 2020.

*Sowjetische Speziallager in Deutschland 1945-1950*, Band 1: *Studien und Berichte*, Hrsg. von Sergej Mironenko, Lutz Niethammer, Alexander von Plato mit Volkhard Knigge und Guenter Morsch, Band 2: *Sowjetische Dokumente zur Lagerpolitik*, Eing. und bearb. von Ralf Possekel, Berlin 1998.

## **Vaivara**

Ruth Bettina Birn, *Viavara-Stammlager/Außenlager*, [in:] *Der Ort des Terrors. Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager*, Band 8: *Riga, Warschau, Vaivara, Kaunas, Płaszów, Kulmhof/Chełmno, Bełżec, Sobibór, Treblinka*, Hrsg. von Wolfgang Benz, Barbara Distel, München 2008, pp. 131-183.

## **Majdanek**

*Majdanek 1941-1944*, ed. Tadeusz Mencel, Lublin 1991.

*Majdanek. Obóz koncentracyjny w relacjach więźniów i świadków*, ed. Marta Grudzińska, Lublin 2011.

Józef Marszałek, *Majdanek obóz koncentracyjny w Lublinie*, Warsaw 1987.

Beata Siwek-Ciupak, *Majdanek. Zarys historii*, Lublin 2013.

## **Kauen**

Christoph Dieckmann, *Das Ghetto und das Konzentrationslager in Kaunas, 1941-1944*, [in:] *Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager - Entwicklung und Struktur*, Band I, Hrsg. von Ulrich Herbert, Karin Orth, Christoph Dieckmann, Göttingen 1998, pp. 439-471.

## **Kaiserwald**

Andrej Angrick, Peter Klein, *Die „Endlösung“ in Riga. Ausbeutung und Vernichtung 1941-1944. (Gesamtdarstellung)*, Darmstadt 2006.

Franziska Jahn, *Riga-Kaiserwald – Stammlager*, [in:] *Der Ort des Terrors. Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager*, Band 8: *Riga, Warschau, Vaivara, Kaunas, Płaszów, Kulmhof/Chełmno, Bełżec, Sobibór, Treblinka*, Hrsg. von Wolfgang Benz, Barbara Distel, München 2008, pp. 17-64.

## **Płaszow**

Angelina Awtuszevska-Ettrich: *Płaszow – Stammlager*, [in:] *Der Ort des Terrors. Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager*, Band 8: *Riga, Warschau, Vaivara, Kaunas, Płaszów, Kulmhof/Chełmno, Bełżec, Sobibór, Treblinka*, Hrsg. von Wolfgang Benz, Barbara Distel, München 2008, pp. 235-287.

Tadeusz Wroński, *Obóz w Płaszowie – miejsce masowej eksterminacji ludności żydowskiej, polskiej i innych narodowości w latach 1942-1945*, Warsaw 1981.

## **Auschwitz, Birkenau and Monowitz**

*Auschwitz 1940-1945. Węzłowe zagadnienia z dziejów obozu*, Volumes I-V, ed. Wacław Długoborski, Franciszek Piper, Oświęcim-Brzezinka 1995.

Czech Danuta, *Kalendarz wydarzeń w KL Auschwitz*, Oświęcim-Brzezinka 1992.



Franciszek Piper, *Ilu ludzi zginęło w KL Auschwitz. Liczba ofiar w świetle źródeł i badań 1945-1990*, Oświęcim 1992.

Piotr Setkiewicz, *Z dziejów obozów IG Farben Werk Auschwitz 1941-1945*, Oświęcim 2006

## **Groß-Rosen**

Józef Gielo, *Gross-Rosen*, Warsaw 1970.

*Księga zmarłych więźniów KL Gross-Rosen*, Parts I-II, ed. Grażyna Choptiany, Wałbrzych 1992-2002.

Aneta Małek, *Praca w systemie KL Gross-Rosen*, Wałbrzych 2003.

Mieczysław Mołdawa, *Gross-Rosen - obóz koncentracyjny na Śląsku*, Warsaw 1967.

*Narody Europy w KL Gross-Rosen*, Wałbrzych 2004.

## **Sachsenhausen**

Stephanie Bohra, *Tatort Sachsenhausen. Strafverfolgung von KZ-Verbrechen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Berlin 2019.

Gerhard Finn, *Sachsenhausen 1936-1950. Geschichte eines Lagers*, Berlin/Bonn 1988.

Hermann Kaienburg, *Der Militär- und Wirtschaftskomplex der SS im KZ-Standort Sachsenhausen-Oranienburg*, Berlin 2006.

*Mord und Massenmord im Konzentrationslager Sachsenhausen*, Hrsg. von Günter Morsch, Berlin 2005.

*Befreiung des KZ Sachsenhausen 1945*, Hrsg. von Günter Morsch, Alfred Reckendrees, Berlin 1996,

## **Ravensbrück**

Sarah Helm, *Kobiety z Ravensbrück. Życie i śmierć w hitlerowskim obozie koncentracyjnym dla kobiet*, Warsaw 2017.

Wanda Kiedrzyńska, *Ravensbrück – kobiecy obóz koncentracyjny*, Warsaw 1961.

Jack G. Morrison, *Ravensbrück. Das Leben in einem Konzentrationslager für Frauen 1939–1945*, Zürich/München 2000.

Bernhard Strebel, *Das KZ Ravensbrück. Geschichte eines Lagerkomplexes*, Paderborn/München/Wien/Zürich 2003.

Germaine Tillion, *Frauenkonzentrationslager Ravensbrück*, Lüneburg 1998.

## **Stutthof**

Konrad Ciechanowski [et al.], *Stutthof, hitlerowski obóz koncentracyjny*. Warsaw 1988.

Krzysztof Dunin-Wąsowicz, *Obóz koncentracyjny Stutthof*, Gdańsk 1970.

Janina Grabowska, *Stutthof - Ein Konzentrationslager vor den Toren Danzigs*, Bremen 1995.

Janina Grabowska-Chałka, *Stutthof. Informator turystyczny*.  
*Przewodnik*, Gdańsk 2004.

---

## Opcje strony

- [Print this page](#)
- [Generate PDF of this page](#)
- [Notify about this page](#)

• Share this article

[Share on Facebook](#)

[Share on Twitter](#)