

FOREIGN NEWS

GERMANY

Horror

As the U.S. armies penetrated the dark heart of Germany last week, they discovered and revealed to the world some examples of the most highly organized horror of all time—a series of concentration camps for political prisoners from most of the nations the Nazis had conquered, including the German nation. For 12 years the enemies of totalitarianism had told the world of these horrors. They were past belief. But the evidence of the camps at Buchenwald, Belsen, Erla and Nordhausen was as irrefutable as death, as monstrous as human degradation. From three camps, *TIME & LIFE* correspondents described these horrors.

Erla

At the Erla Camp, the SS guards prepared to massacre the prisoners as the U.S. Army approached. The prisoners knew what was coming, but most of them were too weak to try to escape, though a Czech prisoner had short-circuited the electric fence. From Erla, TIME Corre-

spondent Bill Walton reported the atrocity as pieced together from the stories of the few survivors:

All day Tuesday the SS guards made their preparations. All day the prisoners moved weakly around their barracks or stretched restlessly in the hot April sunshine in the narrow gravel yard around their barracks. Among themselves they discussed all the possible fates the brutal Germans might be planning for them, talked of escape and what to do, but none of them did anything. Years of imprisonment had taken too heavy a toll of their capacity for action.

Song for the Doomed. Shortly before noon the guards herded the few remaining able-bodied prisoners into the barracks of the weak and ill, saying that a noon meal would be served there. Two hundred and ninety-five men were crowded into that barracks—40 ft. by 120 ft.—jammed in and the doors locked after big tubs of soup had been brought in.

Once the doors were locked the SS men began to work with furious speed. First they nailed army blankets over every window. Then they hauled up huge cans

of highly inflammable acetate. The 13 guards were all ready, armed with every weapon in their bursting arsenals. At a signal all sprang into action.

The low murmur of worried conversation turned to cries of fright when the guards unlocked the two doors and hurled in acetate, dousing the tinder-dry buildings and splashing over the prisoners crowding close to the only routes of escape. In one split second the acetate ignited and burst into a roaring inferno. Cries of fright changed to screams of terror and of mortal agony that were soon drowned by the leaping flames and the bursting of hand grenades tossed into the open doorways.

At least 100 flaming men clawed their way through the exits, packed with crazed, dying men. Through spattering gunfire from SS machine pistols and bazookas, most of the men staggered blindly for the nearby latrine even though it too was aflame. In a last gasp of agony they threw themselves into the excrement-filled trench where SS guards shot them and clubbed them to death, their bodies sinking slowly into the filth.

Ribbons of Flesh. A few others got as far as the low, 3-ft.-thick band of barbed wire beside the electric fence before they were shot or died of burns. So awful was their agony that they paid scant attention to the angry prongs of barbed wire and wiggled under even though it ripped their flesh to ribbons. A handful, protected by the mad confusion, succeeded in getting over the fence, hastily stripped off their burning clothes, and started running eastward across the flat plowed field. On the other side of the field was a tank also retreating eastward. Hitler Youths, manning that tank, turned their guns toward the blazing barracks and mowed down the naked prisoners running and falling and rising to run again across the open field. Only four made it to safety. Only four out of 295 survived the hell carefully planned and executed by the Germans, in a fury because they couldn't carry their prisoners with them when Leipzig fell.

Belsen

From the Belsen camp LIFE Correspondent George Rodger reported:

As Winston Churchill addressed the British troops on the banks of the Rhine on March 26, I heard him say: "We are now entering the dire sink of iniquity." These seemed strange words and I did not understand the full meaning of them until today, when at Belsen I witnessed the ultimate in human degradation. There the six-square-mile, barbed-wire enclosure in the heart of a rich agricultural center has been a hell on earth for 60,000 men, women & children of a dozen different nationalities who were being gradually starved to death by SS guards under a brutish, pig-

TIME, APRIL 30, 1945



MASS BURIAL (NORDHAUSEN)
As irrefutable as death.

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Associated Press
COMMANDANT KRÄMER
He loved flowers.

eyed leader, Captain Krämer. During the month of March, 17,000 people died of starvation, and they still die at the rate of 300 to 350 every 24 hours, far beyond the help of the British authorities, who are doing all possible to save as many as still have strength to react to treatment.

Children & Corpses. The magnitude of suffering and horror at Belsen cannot be expressed in words and even I, as an actual witness, found it impossible to compre-

hend fully—there was too much of it: it was too contrary to all principles of humanity—and I was coldly stunned. Under the pine trees the scattered dead were lying, not in twos or threes or dozens, but in thousands. The living tore ragged clothing from the corpses to build fires over which they boiled pine needles and roots for soup. Little children rested their heads against the stinking corpses of their mothers, too nearly dead themselves to cry. A man hobbled up to me and spoke to me in German. I couldn't understand what he said and I shall never know, for he fell dead at my feet in the middle of his sentence.

The living lay side by side with the dead, their shriveled limbs and shrunken features making them almost indistinguishable. Women tore away their clothing and scratched the hordes of lice which fed on their emaciated bodies; rotten with dysentery, they relieved themselves where they lay and the stench was appalling. Naked bodies with gaping wounds in their backs and chests showed where those who still had the strength to use a knife had cut out the kidneys, livers and hearts of their fellow men and eaten them that they themselves might live.

Fat, Fleshy, Inhuman. Over all this the SS guards—both girls and men—had watched coldly and unmoved. I saw them too—fat, fleshy and inhuman. Now they have a different role in the camp. Under British guard they are made to collect the dead and drag them to a mass grave. From dawn to dusk the SS girls and men alike hold in their arms the bodies of the men, women & children whom they killed, and



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CHARRED BODY (ERLA)
After soup, flaming acetate.

British Tommies, roused for once to a burning fury, allow them no respite. It is their just reward. Perhaps it can all be summed up in the few croaking words that came from a pitiful pile of rags and bones that lay at my feet: "Look, Englishman, this is German culture."

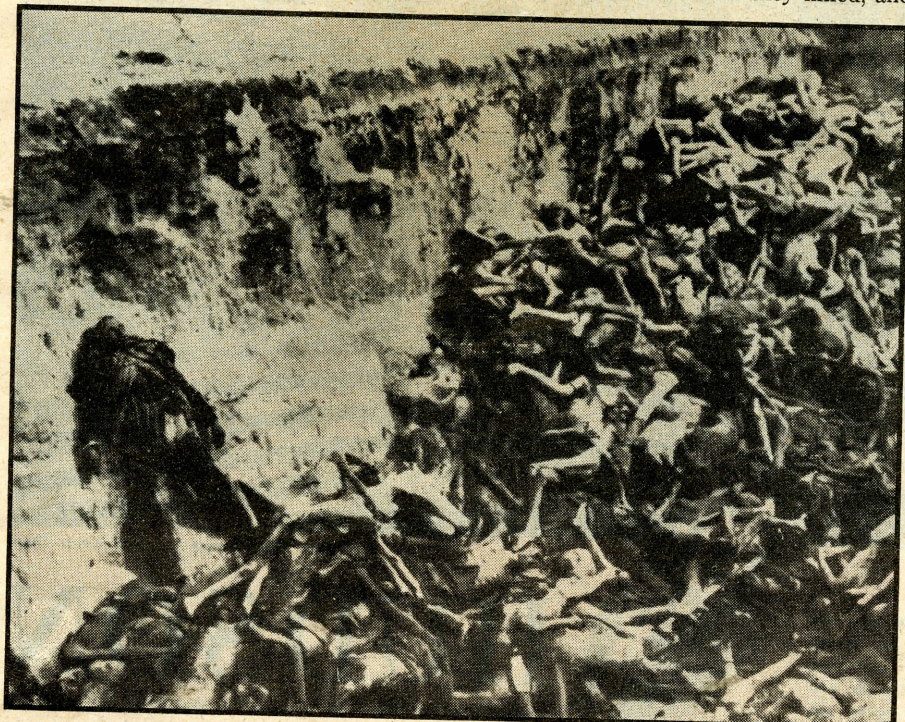
Buchenwald

From the camp at Buchenwald TIME Correspondent Percy Knauth reported:

In Buchenwald today I saw death reduced to such a state of ordinariness that it just left me numb and feeling nothing, not even sickness at my stomach.

Propaganda is propaganda and in this war we have had more than our share of atrocity stories, but Buchenwald is not a story. It is acres of bare ground on a hillside in Thuringia where woods and fields are green under warm spring sun. It is miles and miles of barbed wire once charged with electricity and guarded by machine-gun towers built of creosoted pine logs. It is barracks after barracks crowded with 21,000 living, breathing human beings who stink like nothing else on earth and many of whom have lost the power of coherent speech. It is gallows standing in desolate courtyards, ropes still swinging from the hooks, pillories standing in the great parade ground just beneath the main gate, where men were tied down and beaten until they blubbered.

It is a place where prisoners, on seeing an SS man approaching from a distance, ducked for cover anywhere they could, because the young man in the clean black uniform might shoot them if he happened to feel like pulling out his gun. Buchenwald is a fact which has existed, on a small scale at first, for eleven years, and it is a



British Official-Associated Press
COMMON GRAVE (BELSEN)
More than 300 still die every 24 hours.

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fact which will stink through the years of history as long as generations of mankind have memories.

Half-Melted Skeletons. Buchenwald is something of a showplace now, nine days after it was liberated, and there are certain things you have to see. There were two ovens there, each with six openings. It was a clean room with no smell. At one end was a wash basin with soap still in the dish and a door leading to the Büro or office. At the other was a plaque hung high on the wall, black with a symbolic flame painted on it and a quotation from some German poet: "Let not disgusting worms consume my body . . . give me the clean bright flame," etc.

The ovens were not clean. In some of them there were still charred remains, a grinning, blackened skull, a chest from which the flesh was still not fully burned away, skeletons half melted down. The ovens were cold now but in recent weeks before the Americans came their clean bright flame consumed between 150 and 200 people daily.

I went out to the little courtyard where the gallows stood, a stout wooden frame with several hooks and a stool on which men stood before an SS kick deprived them of their last grip on life.

Death in the Cellar. Down in a cellar on a clean, whitewashed wall were many hooks jutting out near the low ceiling. For the benefit of visitors a dummy had been strung up there, its stuffed toes just touching the floor. Before we came men were strung up similarly, pulled up till they choked. It took them a long time before they gave up the instinctive fight for breath, and there are scratches on the walls where they clawed vainly for support. Before they left the SS men had tried to eradicate these marks with paint and had also pulled out several of the hooks, but they left too quickly to do a thorough job.

Bodies Like Firewood. With other G.I. sightseers we came up from the cellar and passed into another yard fenced in by a high wooden wall. There was a pile of bodies there, stacked more or less the way I stack my firewood back home, not too carefully. There were men and some of them were naked. They looked strange. Their mouths were open as though in pain and little streaks of blood flowed from their noses. "Some kind of hemorrhage," said a medical corpsman. "Hell, those guys died of starvation," said another G.I. He stared and stared and couldn't get that thought out of his mind, repeating it over and over: "Those guys just starved to death. They just starved."

It was easy to see that they were starved. There was just nothing on them, nothing but yellowish or brownish skin stretched tightly over bones and cavities and all their members hung down loosely, as they lie on men who throw themselves down exhausted to the ground. Some men

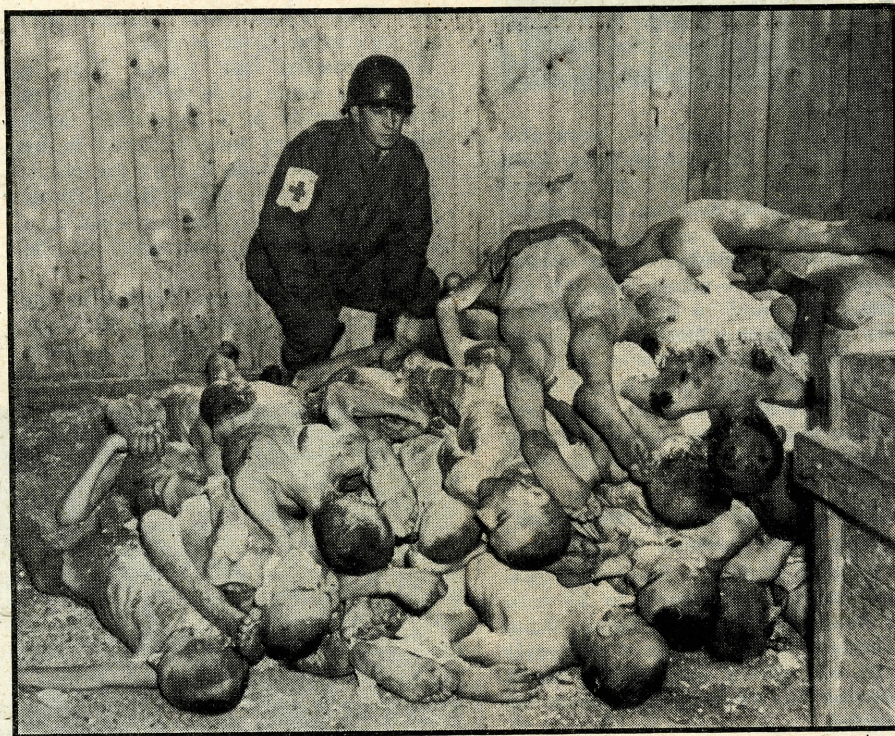
who were not dead sat idly on a bench nearby. A Frenchman who had drifted up just smiled and smiled in that curious, almost hysterical way that you sometimes smile at overwhelming horror.

The Living Dead. We stopped in front of one barracks and looked inside while a Czech surgeon who had been there explained that 1,500 people lived and slept there.

It was a long dim room full of murmurs and movements of figures in all kinds of clothes, from the striped uniform of Buchenwald to just a sack draped over bony shoulders. The walls were lined with bunks built right up to the ceiling. The 1,500 slept four, six or eight or any number to a bunk. When it was really crowded,

many) who were as starved as the corpses in the crematorium yard. You cannot adequately describe starved men; they just look awful and unnatural. There was nothing but their bones beneath the tightly stretched skin, none of the roundedness, the curving and the flat places, the swelling muscles which men usually have. They walk or creep or lie around and seem about as animate as the barracks and fence posts and the stones on Buchenwald's bare, hard-packed earth, and when they are dead they are corpses and then gone.

It was only as we walked through and out of this barracks that I realized it was a hospital, or rather a place where inmates themselves did what they could to keep alive those who were too far gone to live.



HUMAN CORDWOOD (BUCHENWALD)
Once they had minds and lives and destinies.

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men slept on top of each other and the ones on the bottom, like as not, were dead of suffocation in the morning.

Awful and Unnatural. What it all boiled down to was that human life was here as nothing. Nobody gave a damn for it. Nobody gave a damn whether an inmate in Buchenwald lived or died. The SS men, if they felt like it—if they just felt like it—would kill men as they wouldn't kill an animal, they would snuff out his life as they might that of an insect which they happened to see on the road.

Buchenwald did not have a diet, really. There was a form of soup once a day and some bread. The amount doesn't matter; it was not enough to sustain life. I saw hundreds of Buchenwald's 21,000 (there had been 48,000 but more than half had been evacuated to the interior of Ger-

At the far end it smelled a little of chlorine for a change, and there were white enamel bowls and a small kitchen. Since the Americans arrived, these people's chances to survive have increased slightly. On that day 200 died of malnutrition and disease. The day that I was there, 70 died.

Buchenwald is beyond all comprehension. You just can't understand it, even when you've seen it. It is terrible and beyond understanding to see human beings with brain and skillful hands and lives and destinies and thoughts reduced to a state where only blind instinct tries to keep them alive. It is beyond human anger or disgust to see in such a place the remnants of a sign put up by those who ran the place: "Honesty, Diligence, Pride, Ability . . . these are the milestones of your way through here."

"How Awful!"

The stench of Buchenwald would reek in history. But how much of it was known to German civilians even in nearby Weimar? Sick with disgust, tough General George S. Patton ordered the burghers of the town to be taken through Buchenwald and shown its obscenities. Twelve hundred men & women of Weimar walked unwillingly through the camp and wept, retched, fainted. A young Hitler Mädchen sobbed: "How awful!"

General Dwight D. Eisenhower was so stirred that he forthwith invited Prime Minister Winston Churchill to send a British Parliamentary delegation to see Buchenwald. With them came a group of American Congressmen touring Britain. The visitors froze with horror. Said Sir Henry Morris-Jones: "It beggars description." Said Representative Gordon Canfield: "This is barbarism." Others would soon be coming to see as well.

The remedial idea spread fast. In Gardelegen, where 1,100 political captives were incinerated in a straw-filled death chamber, civilians were marched in by U.S. troops and made to bury the blackened bodies. At Belsen where British forces found cadavers piled like cordwood in a ditch, SS men were compelled at rifle point to bury bodies.

Roms in the Garden. Taken alive was the Belsen commandant, powerful, thug-like Josef Krämer, expert in the methods of mass murder. To a British reporter

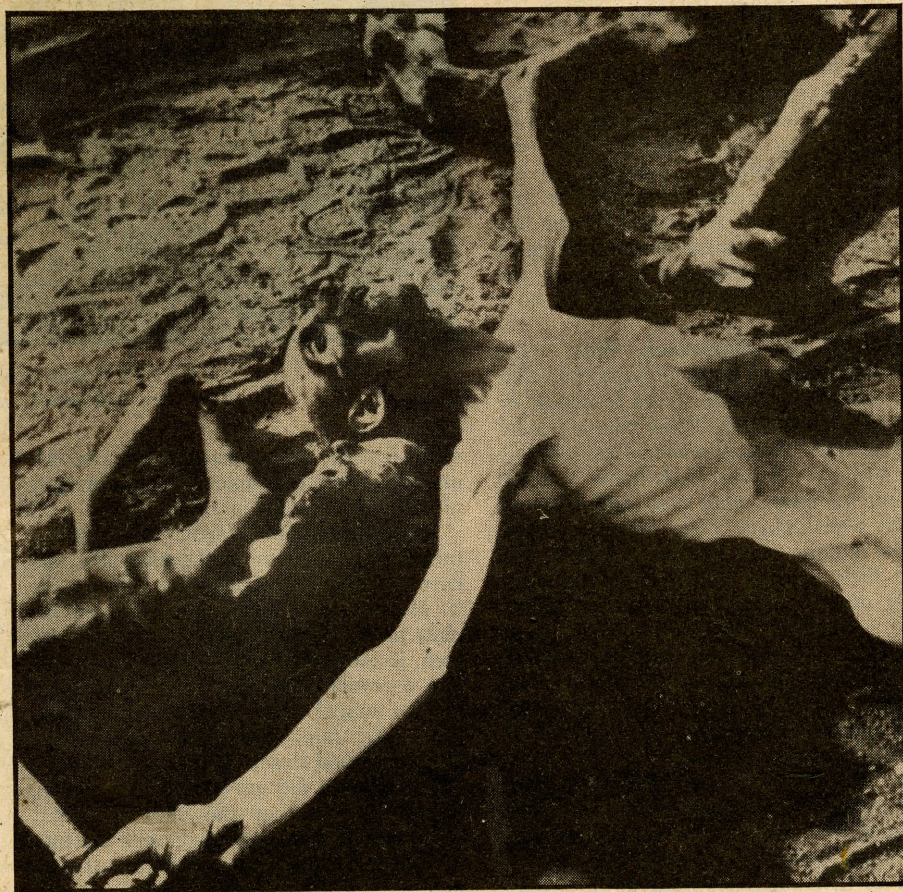
Krämer brooded on his past, said sadly that he missed his wife and children, with whom he used to romp in the garden of his Belsen home (he loved flowers, especially roses). Mused Krämer: "I love my wife and children. I love all children. I believe in God." He became a Nazi in 1933 because he had to choose between National Socialism and Communism. His conscience, he added, was not bad. "The death rate here is quite small, only about one thousand a month." Later Krämer was reported executed.

Like the G.I.s, the battle-hardened Tommies were numbed by their glimpse of Nazi savagery. The shattering experience was one that must be shared not only with German civilians, who must measure their own guilt, but with Allied civilians, who must measure the Nazi crime. In London, queasy moviegoers, unable to stomach atrocity newsreels, started to leave the theater but were turned back by Allied soldiers in the audience.

Not all of the Nazi pit had yet been plumbed. Still ahead, near Munich, lay Dachau the unspeakable, on whose walls an inmate had once scribbled: "This is the camp where you enter by the door and leave by the chimney."

The Enemy

As details about the Nazi horror camps piled up, hatred for the German people, as well as the Nazis, swept the U.S. and Britain. Calmly the Moscow radio, quoting *Pravda*, pointed out that



STARVED PRISONER (BELSEN)

Not all the Nazi pit had yet been plumbed.

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it was about time that the Western Allies realized what they were up against:

"Allied troops see not only smooth German landscapes and clean little town houses. They also see concentration camps.

"What is Buchenwald? It is Maidanek, but in miniature.

"Our Allies had not seen what we had.

"Now that they too have seen, now that they share what we know, they will understand us better. . . .

"Fascism is not compatible with human dignity. The world must be freed from it. German soil, too, must be cleared of it."

The Suicides

For the killers the time had come to kill themselves. Nazi officials and bigwig Germans began to practice the act for which their language has an expressive word—*Selbstmord*, self-murder.

Near the Swiss border, Frau Gertrud Heissmeyer Scholtz-Klink, *Reichsfrauenführerin* of all the Nazi women's organizations, was reported to have taken her life.

In Weimar, after viewing the horrors of Buchenwald, the Mayor and his wife died by slashing their wrists.

In Nürnberg, Nazi Boss Karl Holz shot Mayor Willi Liebel and then himself.

In Leipzig Herr Dr. Bundin chose to die by a method in keeping with his professional interests (he was owner of a big bazooka factory). To a caviar-and-champagne banquet he invited 100 of his cronies. When the last course was eaten, the fat cigars smoked and the fine cognac gone, Herr Bundin pressed a button. He had mined the banquet hall. He and his guests were atomized into dust.

In Leipzig G.I.s scouted the deserted *Rathaus* (City Hall), reported: "There's some civilian stiffs upstairs."

In his solid mayoral chair sat *Oberbürgermeister* Alfred Freiberg, his sightless eyes fixed on the carved ceiling. In armchairs beside him, waxen-faced in death, sat his matronly wife and bespectacled daughter. In an adjoining room *Stadtkämmerer* (City Treasurer) Kurt Lisso, his wife and daughter also sat in poisoned death. The rigid bodies of four *Volkstürmers* sprawled in other offices. Two, it was plain, had sat across a table, sipping brandy until one had drunk enough to pick up a machine pistol, shoot his comrade and then himself.

The Perverted

What judgment shall be passed on the generations of Germans who were children when the Nazis came to power, who have never known anything but the Naziism which patiently perverted them?

In the vast Nürnberg stadium, G.I.s caught up last week with one such German—now a young, blond Storm Trooper. He was dirty-faced, disheveled, despairing. Above the little group, captors and captives, towered the marble-and-gold podium, where at Nazi festivals Hitler had once screeched and barked. "*Alles Kaputt!*" The young Storm Trooper sobbed over & over again. "*Alles Kaputt!* It's all over. All we have been taught all our lives will be useless now. *Alles Kaputt!*"