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World War II: The Holocaust

- **ALAN TAYLOR**
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- **OCTOBER 16, 2011**
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One of the most horrific terms in history was used by Nazi Germany to designate human beings whose lives were unimportant, or those who should be killed outright: Lebensunwertes Leben, or "life unworthy of life". The phrase was applied to the mentally impaired and later to the "racially inferior," or "sexually deviant," as well as to "enemies of the state" both internal and external. From very early in the war, part of Nazi policy was to murder civilians en masse, especially targeting Jews. Later in the war, this policy grew into Hitler's "final solution", the complete extermination of the Jews. It began with Einsatzgruppen death squads in the East, which killed some 1,000,000

people in numerous massacres, and continued in concentration camps where prisoners were actively denied proper food and health care. It culminated in the construction of extermination camps -- government facilities whose entire purpose was the systematic murder and disposal of massive numbers of people. In 1945, as advancing Allied troops began discovering these camps, they found the results of these policies: hundreds of thousands of starving and sick prisoners locked in with thousands of dead bodies. They encountered evidence of gas chambers and high-volume crematoriums, as well as thousands of mass graves, documentation of awful medical experimentation, and much more. The Nazis killed more than 10 million people in this manner, including 6 million Jews. (This entry is **Part 18** of a weekly [20-part retrospective of World War II](#))

Warning: All images in this entry are shown in full, not screened out for graphic content. There are many dead bodies. The photographs are graphic and stark. This is the reality of genocide, and of an important part of World War II and human history.

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An emaciated 18-year-old Russian girl looks into the camera lens during the liberation of Dachau concentration camp in 1945. Dachau was the first German concentration camp, opened in 1933. More than 200,000 people were detained between 1933 and 1945, and 31,591 deaths were declared, most from disease, malnutrition and suicide. Unlike Auschwitz, Dachau was not explicitly an extermination camp, but conditions were so horrific that hundreds died every week. #

Eric Schwab/AFP/Getty Images



This photo provided by Paris' Holocaust Memorial shows a German soldier shooting a Ukrainian Jew during a mass execution in Vinnytsia, Ukraine, sometime between 1941 and 1943. This image is titled "The last Jew in Vinnitsa", the text that was written on the back of the photograph, which was found in a photo album belonging to a German soldier. #

AP Photo/USHMM/LOC



German soldiers question Jews after the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943. In October 1940, the Germans began to concentrate Poland's population of over 3 million Jews into overcrowded ghettos. In the largest of these, the Warsaw Ghetto, thousands of Jews died due to rampant disease and starvation, even before the Nazis began their massive deportations from the ghetto to the Treblinka extermination camp. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising -- the first urban mass rebellion against the Nazi occupation of Europe -- took place from April 19 until May 16 1943, and began after German troops and police entered the ghetto to deport its surviving inhabitants. It ended when the poorly-armed and supplied resistance was crushed by German troops. #

OFF/AFP/Getty Images



A man carries away the bodies of dead Jews in the Ghetto of Warsaw in 1943, where people died of hunger in the streets. Every morning, about 4-5 A.M., funeral carts collected a dozen or more corpses from the streets. The bodies of the dead Jews were cremated in deep pits. #

AFP/Getty Images



A group of Jews, including a small boy, is escorted from the Warsaw Ghetto by German soldiers in this April 19, 1943 photo. The picture formed part of a report from

SS Gen. Stroop to his Commanding Officer, and was introduced as evidence to the War Crimes trials in Nuremberg in 1945. #

AP Photo



After the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the Ghetto was completely destroyed. Of the more than 56,000 Jews captured, about 7,000 were shot, and the remainder were deported to killing centers or concentration camps. This is a view of the remains of the ghetto, which the German SS dynamited to the ground. The Warsaw Ghetto only existed for a few years, and in that time, some 300,000 Polish Jews lost their lives there. #

AP Photo



A German in a military uniform shoots at a Jewish woman after a mass execution in Mizocz, Ukraine. In October of 1942, the 1,700 people in the Mizocz ghetto fought with Ukrainian auxiliaries and German policemen who had intended to liquidate the population. About half the residents were able to flee or hide during the confusion before the uprising was finally put down. The captured survivors were taken to a ravine and shot. Photo provided by Paris' Holocaust Memorial. #

AP Photo/USHMM



Jewish deportees in the Drancy transit camp near Paris, France, in 1942, on their last stop before the German concentration camps. Some 13,152 Jews (including 4,115 children) were rounded up by French police forces, taken from their homes to the "Vel d'Hiv", or winter cycling stadium in southwestern Paris, in July of 1942. They were later taken to a rail terminal at Drancy, northeast of the French capital, and then deported to the east. Only a handful ever returned. #

AFP/Getty Images



Anne Frank poses in 1941 in this photo made available by Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, Netherlands. In August of 1944, Anne, her family and others who were hiding from the occupying German Security forces, were all captured and shipped off to a series of prisons and concentration camps. Anne died from typhus at age 15 in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, but her posthumously published diary has made her a symbol of all Jews killed in World War II. #

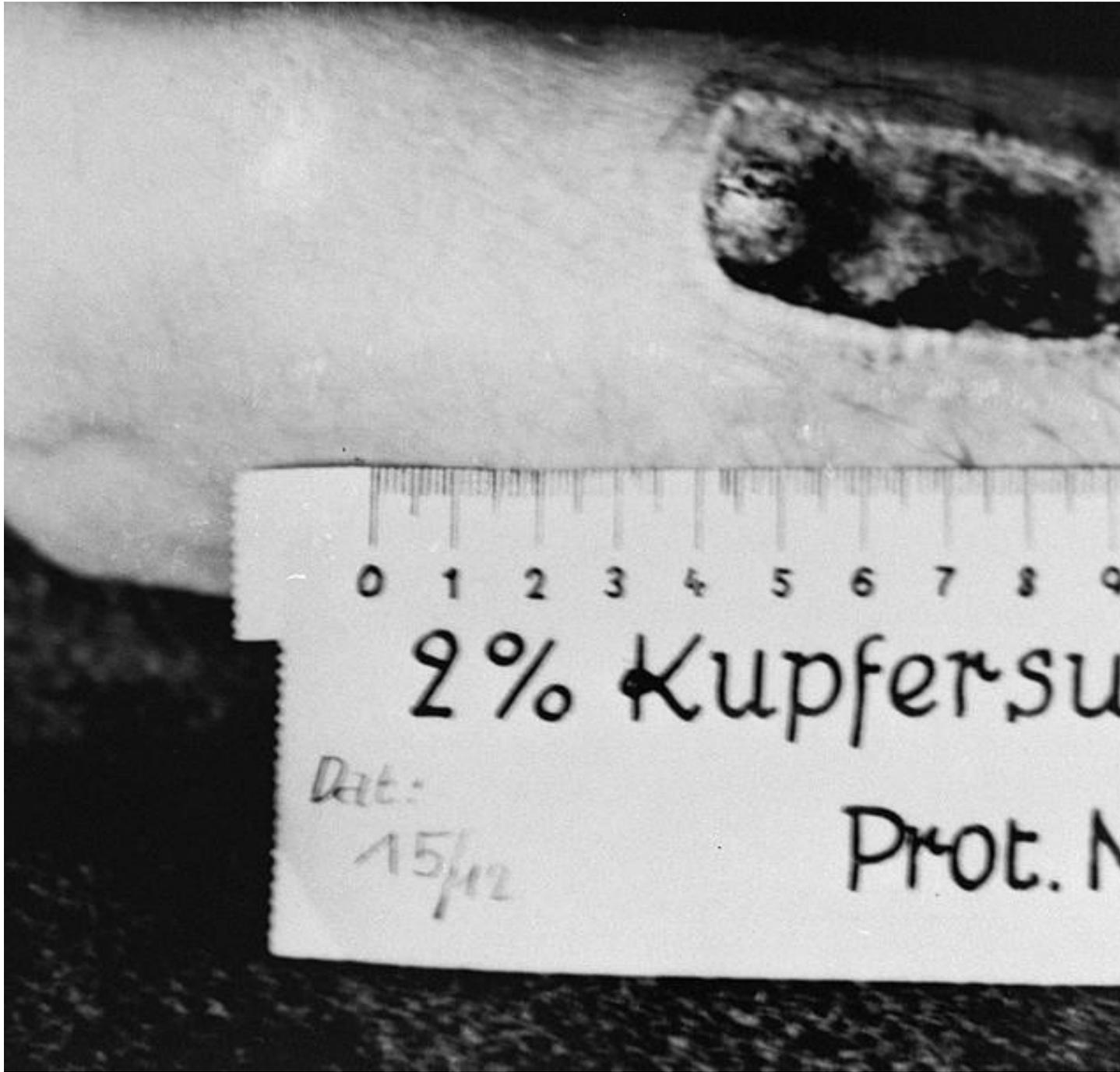
AP Photo/Anne Frank House/Frans Dupont



The arrival and processing of an entire transport of Jews from Carpatho-Ruthenia, a region annexed in 1939 to Hungary from Czechoslovakia, at Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp in Poland, in May of 1944. The picture was donated to Yad Vashem in 1980 by Lili Jacob. #



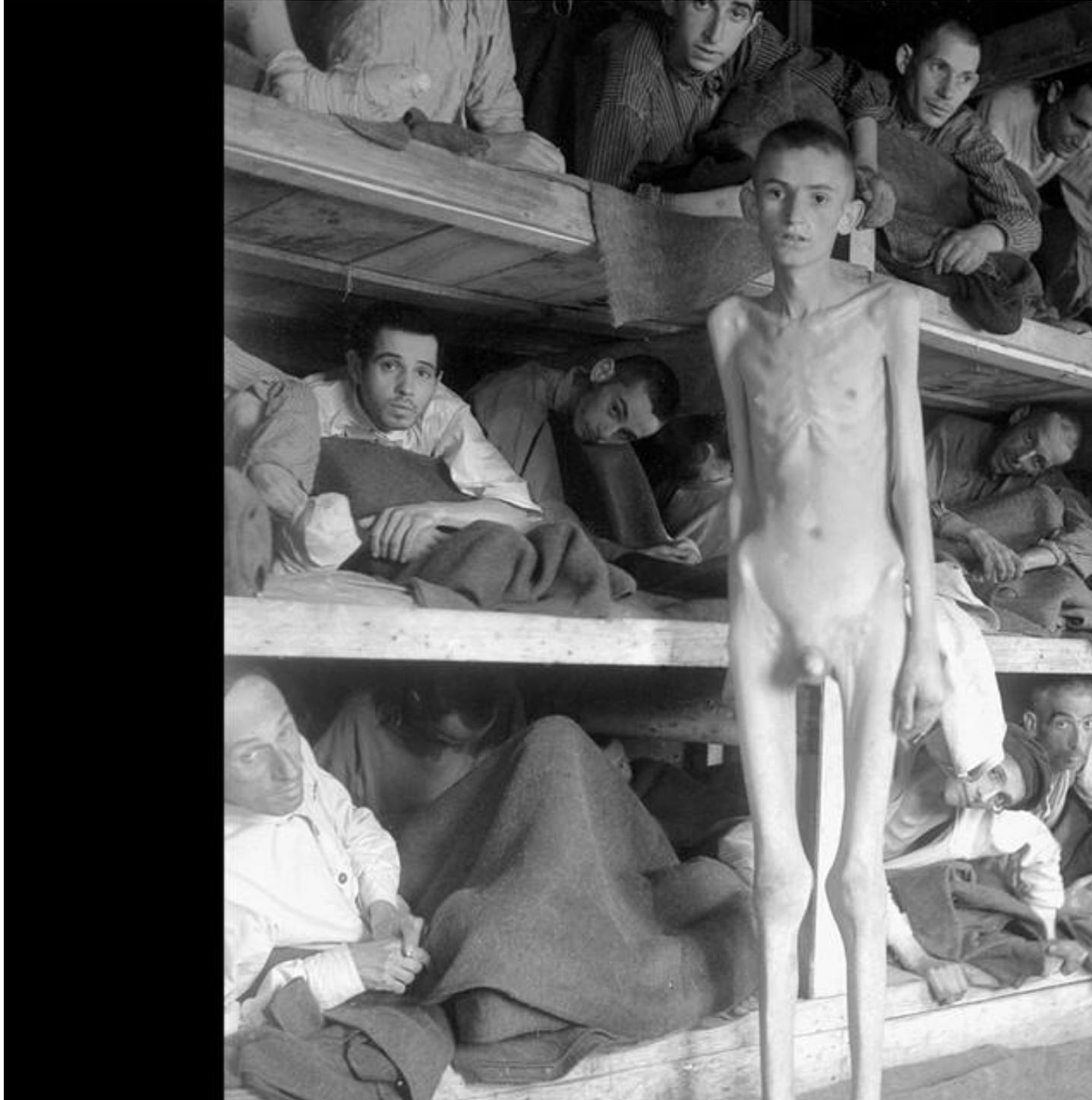
Czeslawa Kwoka, age 14, appears in a prisoner identity photo provided by the Auschwitz Museum, taken by Wilhelm Brasse while working in the photography department at Auschwitz, the Nazi-run death camp where some 1.5 million people, most of them Jewish, died during World War II. Czeslawa was a Polish Catholic girl, from Wolka Zlojecka, Poland, who was sent to Auschwitz with her mother in December of 1942. Within three months, both were dead. Photographer (and fellow prisoner) Brasse recalled photographing Czeslawa in a 2005 documentary: "She was so young and so terrified. The girl didn't understand why she was there and she couldn't understand what was being said to her. So this woman Kapo (a prisoner overseer) took a stick and beat her about the face. This German woman was just taking out her anger on the girl. Such a beautiful young girl, so innocent. She cried but she could do nothing. Before the photograph was taken, the girl dried her tears and the blood from the cut on her lip. To tell you the truth, I felt as if I was being hit myself but I couldn't interfere. It would have been fatal for me." #



A victim of Nazi medical experimentation. A victim's arm shows a deep burn from phosphorus at Ravensbrueck, Germany, in November of 1943. The photograph shows the results of a medical experiment dealing with phosphorous that was carried out by

doctors at Ravensbrueck. In the experiment, a mixture of phosphorus and rubber was applied to the skin and ignited. After twenty seconds, the fire was extinguished with water. After three days, the burn was treated with Echinacin in liquid form. After two weeks the wound had healed. This photograph, taken by a camp physician, was entered as evidence during the Doctors Trial at Nuremberg. #

U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, NARA



Jewish prisoners in Buchenwald concentration camp, after the liberation of the camp in 1945. #

AFP/Getty Images



American soldiers silently inspect some of the rail trucks loaded with dead which were found on the rail siding at the Dachau concentration camp in Germany, on May 3, 1945. #

AP Photo



A starved Frenchman sits among the dead in a sub-camp of the Mittelbau-Dora labor camp, in Nordhausen, Germany, in April of 1945. #

U.S. Army/LOC



Bodies lie piled against the walls of a crematory room in a German concentration camp in Dachau, Germany. The bodies were found by U.S. Seventh Army troops who took the camp on May 14, 1945. #

AP Photo

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A U.S. soldier inspects thousands of gold wedding bands taken from Jews by the Germans and stashed in the Heilbronn Salt Mines, on May 3, 1945 in Germany. #

AFP/NARA



Three U.S. soldiers look at bodies stuffed into an oven in a crematorium in April of 1945. Photo taken in an unidentified concentration camp in Germany, at time of liberation by U.S. Army. #

U.S. Army/LOC



This heap of ashes and bones is the debris from one day's killing of German prisoners by 88 troopers in the Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar in Germany, shown on April 25, 1945. #

AP Photo/U.S. Army Signal Corps



Prisoners at the electric fence of Dachau concentration camp cheer American soldiers in Dachau, Germany in an undated photo. Some of them wear the striped blue and white prison garb. They decorated their huts with flags of all nations which they had made secretly as they heard the guns of the 42nd Rainbow Division getting louder and louder on the approach to Dachau. #

AP Photo



General Dwight D. Eisenhower and other American officers in the Ohrdruf concentration camp, shortly after the liberation of the camp in April of 1945. As American forces approached, the guards shot the remaining prisoners. #

U.S. Army Signal Corps/NARA

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A dying prisoner, too weak to sit up amid his rags and filth, victim of starvation and incredible brutality, at the Nordhausen concentration camp in Germany on April 18, 1945. #

AP Photo



Prisoners on a death march from Dachau move towards the south along the Noerdliche Muenchner Street in Gruenwald, Germany, on April 29, 1945. Many thousands of prisoners were marched forcibly from outlying prison camps to camps deeper inside Germany as Allied forces closed in. Thousands died along the way, anyone unable to keep up was executed on the spot. Pictured, fourth from the right, is Dmitry Gorky who was born on August 19, 1920 in Blagoslovscoe, Russia to a family of peasant farmers. During World War II Dmitry was imprisoned in Dachau for 22 months. The reason for his imprisonment is not known. Photo released by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. #

AP Photo/USHMM, courtesy of KZ Gedenkstaette Dachau



American soldiers walk by row after row of corpses lying on the ground beside barracks at the Nazi concentration camp at Nordhausen, Germany, on April 17, 1945. The camp is located about 70 miles west of Leipzig. As the camp was liberated on April 12, the U.S. Army found more than 3,000 bodies, and a handful of survivors. #

AP Photo/US Army Signal Corps



A dead prisoner lies in a train carriage near Dachau concentration camp in May of 1945. #

Eric Schwab/AFP/Getty Images



Liberating soldiers of Lt. General George S. Patton's 3rd Army, XX Corps, are shown at Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar, Germany, on April 11, 1945. #

AP Photo/U.S. Army

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General Patch's 12th Armored Division, forging their way towards the Austrian border, uncovered horrors at a German prison camp at Schwabmunchen, southwest of Munich. Over 4,000 slave laborers, all Jews of various nationalities, were housed in

the prison. The internees were burned alive by guards who set fire to the crude huts in which the prisoners slept, shooting any who tried to escape. Sprawled here in the prison enclosure are the burnt bodies of some of the Jewish slave laborers uncovered by the US 7th Army at Schwabmunchen, May 1, 1945. #

AP Photo/Jim Pringle



The corpse of a prisoner lies on the barbed wire fence in Leipzig-Thekla, a sub-camp of Buchenwald, near Weimar, Germany. #

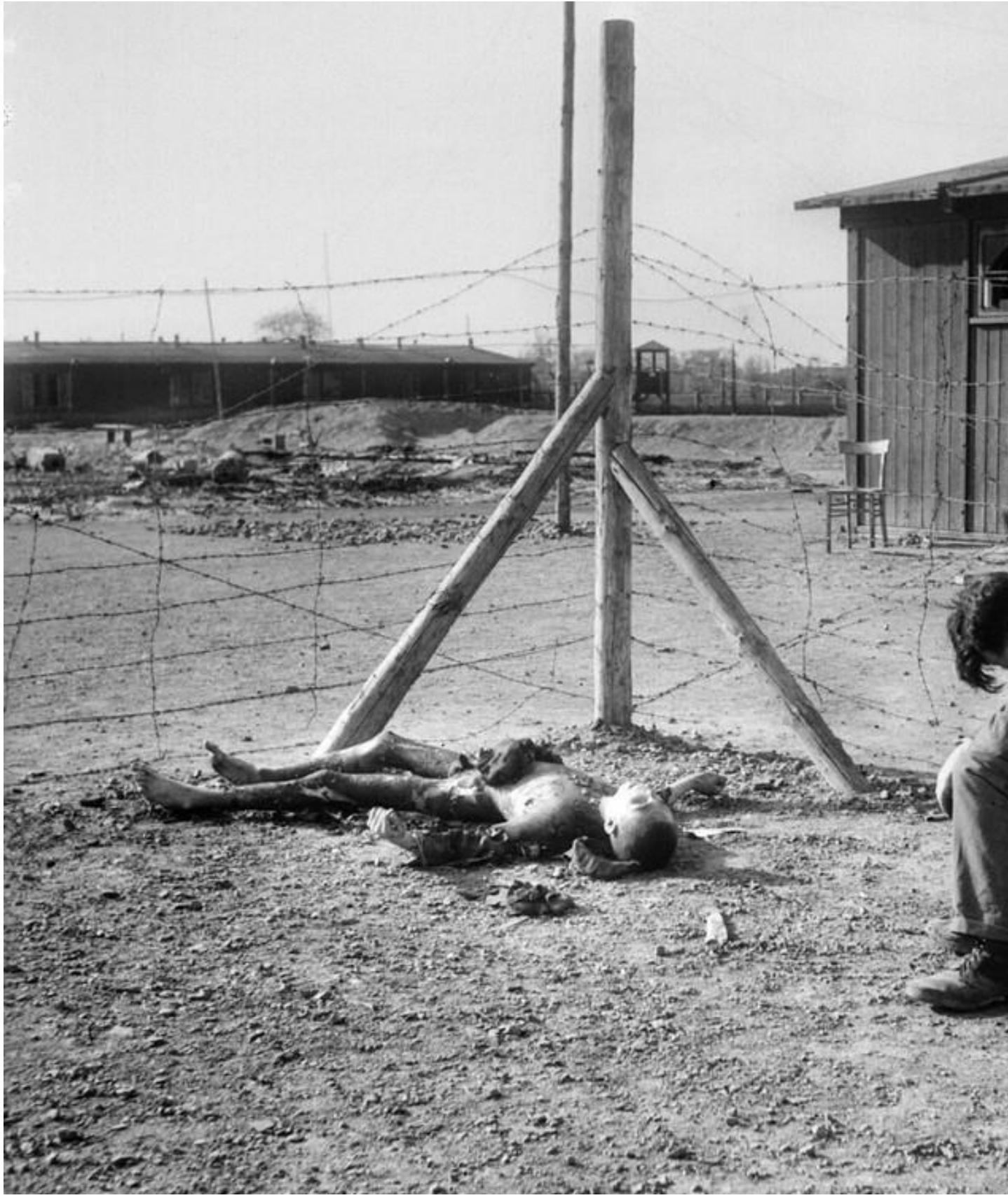
NARA



These dead victims of the Germans were removed from the Lambach concentration camp in Austria, on May 6, 1945, by German soldiers under orders of U.S. Army

troops. As soon as all the bodies were removed from the camp, the Germans buried them. This camp originally held 18,000 people, each building housing 1,600. There were no beds or sanitary facilities whatsoever, and 40 to 50 prisoners died each day. #

AP Photo



A young man sits on an overturned stool next to a burnt body in the Thekla camp outside Leipzig, in April of 1945, after the US troops entered Leipzig April 18. On the 18th of April, the workers of the Thekla plane factory were locked in an isolated building of the factory by the Germans and burned alive by incendiary bombs. About 300 prisoners died. Those who managed to escape died on the barbed wire or were executed by the Hitler youth movement, according to a US captain's report. #

Eric Schwab/AFP/Getty Images



Burned bodies of political prisoners of the Germans lie strewn about the entrance to a barn at Gardelegen, Germany on April 16, 1945 where they met their death at the

hands of German SS troops who set the barn on fire. The group tried to escape and was shot by the SS troops. Of the 1,100 prisoners, only 12 managed to escape. #

AP Photo/U.S. Army Signal Corps

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Some of the skeleton-like human remains found by men of the Third Armored Division, U.S. First Army, at the German concentration camp at Nordhausen on April

25, 1945, where hundreds of "slave laborers" of various nationalities lay dead and dying. #

AP Photo



When American troops liberated prisoners in the Dachau concentration camp, Germany, in 1945, many German SS guards were killed by the prisoners who then threw their bodies into the moat surrounding the camp. #

AP Photo



Lt. Col. Ed Seiller of Louisville, Kentucky, stands amid a pile of Holocaust victims as he speaks to 200 German civilians who were forced to see the grim conditions at the Landsberg concentration camp, on May 15, 1945. #

AP Photo



Starved prisoners, nearly dead from hunger, pose in a concentration camp in Ebensee, Austria, on May 7, 1945. The camp was reputedly used for "scientific" experiments. #

NARA/Newsmakers



A Russian survivor, liberated by the 3rd Armored Division of the U.S. First Army, identifies a former camp guard who brutally beat prisoners on April 14, 1945, at the Buchenwald concentration camp in Thuringia, Germany. #

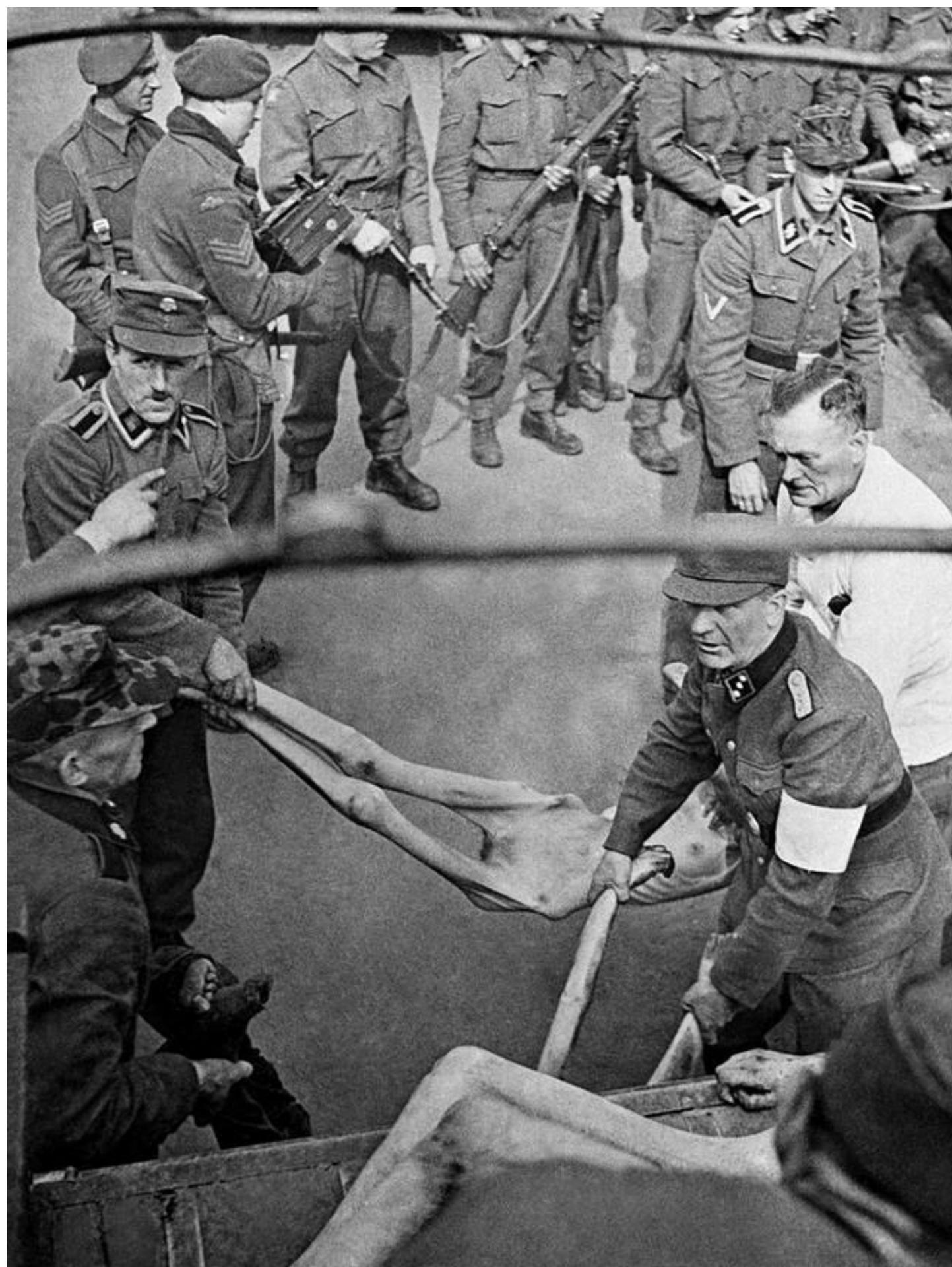
AP Photo

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Dead bodies piled up in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp after the British troops liberated the camp on April 15, 1945. The British found 60,000 men, women and children dying of starvation and disease. #

AFP/Getty Images



German SS troops load victims of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp into trucks for burial, in Belsen, Germany, on April 17, 1945. British guards hold rifles in the background. #

AP Photo/British Official Photo



Citizens of Ludwigslust, Germany, inspect a nearby concentration camp under orders of the 82nd Airborne Division on May 6, 1945. Bodies of victims of German prison camps were found dumped in pits in yard, one pit containing 300 bodies. #

NARA



A pile of bodies left to rot in the Bergen-Belsen camp, in Bergen, Germany, found after the camp was liberated by British forces on April 20, 1945. Some 60,000 civilians, most suffering from typhus, typhoid and dysentery, were dying by the hundreds daily, despite the frantic efforts by medical services rushed to the camp. #

AP Photo



Manacled following his arrest is Joseph Kramer, commandant of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Belsen, photographed on April 28, 1945. After standing trial, Kramer, "The Beast of Belsen", was convicted and executed in December of 1945. #

AP Photo

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German SS women remove bodies of their victims from trucks in the concentration camp at Belsen, Germany, on April 28, 1945. Starvation and disease killed hundreds of the many thousands imprisoned at the camp. British soldiers holding rifles in the background stand on the dirt which will fill the communal grave. #

AP Photo/British official photo



A German SS guard, standing amid hundreds of corpses, hauls another body of a concentration camp victim into a mass grave in Belsen, Germany in April of 1945. #

AP Photo



Piles of the dead at Bergen-Belsen concentration camp on April 30, 1945. Some 100,000 people are estimated to have died in this one camp alone. #

AP Photo



A German mother shields the eyes of her son as they walk with other civilians past a row of exhumed bodies outside Suttrop, Germany. The bodies were those of 57 Russians killed by German SS troops and dumped in a mass grave before the arrival of troops from the U.S. Ninth Army. Soldiers of the 95th Infantry division were led by

informers to the massive grave on May 3, 1945. Before burial, all German civilians in the vicinity were ordered to view the victims. #