

Glossary

Allies

Nations who collaborated militarily to fight Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Japan during World War II. The major allied countries included Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union, the United States and Canada.

American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee

Overseas relief and rehabilitation agency, established by American Jews in 1914. It helped Jews from Germany emigrate after 1930. It provided assistance to European Jews during the war and to displaced persons after the war.

Anti-Semitism

A form of racism, related to the discrimination or persecution of Jews. The term came into widespread use in the 1870's.

Aryanization

The expropriation and transfer of Jewish property to 'Aryan' or German ownership, with nominal or no compensation.

Auschwitz-Birkenau

First established as a Nazi concentration camp in 1940 at Oswiecim, Poland primarily for Polish prisoners. In 1942 it was expanded to include the extermination camp—Birkenau (Auschwitz II) and the labour camp—Buna-Monowitz (Auschwitz III). Surrounded by numerous sub camps, it grew to become the largest of all the Nazi concentration camps. Approximately 1.1 to 1.6 million Jews and 100,000 other victims were murdered or died at Auschwitz. At liberation, only 7600 prisoners—those not forced on death marches-- were found alive.

Belzec

One of six extermination camps established in Poland by the Nazis. Established in 1940 as a forced labour camp for Jews. More than 600,000 people were murdered there between March and December of 1942. The Nazis demolished the camp in the fall of 1943.

Bergen-Belsen

A concentration camp established in 1940 in northern Germany, for Belgium and French prisoners. Renamed Stalag 311 in 1941 for Soviet prisoners. In 1943 it returned to the name Bergen-Belsen and included five satellite camps. Liberated on April 15, 1945 by British forces, who found 60,000 emaciated prisoners and thousands of unburied bodies. After liberation Bergen-Belsen became a displaced persons camp for refugees, assisted in its administration by Canada's Armed Forces.

Berth

A bed or bunk for sleeping on a ship or train.

British Blockade

In May 1939 Britain restricted Jewish immigration to Palestine in order to gain the support of the Arab states in the war against Germany. Britain blocked the attempts of Jews who tried to illegally immigrate. This conflict did not end until the founding of Israel in 1948.

Buchenwald

One of the first concentration camps established by the Nazis in July 1937 in central Germany. The first inmates were Communists and Jews. Following Kristallnacht in 1938, 10,000 Jewish men were imprisoned there. Dora-Nordhausen and Ohrdruf were two sub-camps of Buchenwald. Approximately 43,000 people perished there before American forces liberated it in April 1945.

Canadian Jewish Congress / CJC

An organization of the Canadian Jewish community, founded in 1919, but was dormant until events in Europe revitalized it in 1933. During and after the war, it worked to secure asylum for Jewish refugees in Canada.

Chelmno

One of the six death camps established by the Nazis in 1941 in central Poland. It was built primarily to exterminate Jews from the Lodz ghetto. Carbon monoxide gas from motor exhaust was used to murder victims. Before the Nazis destroyed Chelmno in January 1945 over 250,000 Jews and over 5,000 Gypsies died there.

Concentration Camps

The Nazis established prison camps shortly after assuming power in 1933 to hold and isolate political opponents and those considered to be "racially" undesirable such as Jews and Gypsies. Most of the approximately 1800 camps were transit or labour camps. The first were Dachau, Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen. After the occupation of Poland, extermination camps were established for mass murder at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec, Chelmno and Majdanek.

Crematorium / crematoria

Building at concentration camps that housed the ovens that burned murdered inmates.

Dachau

Established in March of 1933 near Munich Germany, it was the first major concentration camp to be put into operation. Political opponents of the Nazis were the first group held there. Following Kristallnacht, 10,000 Jewish men were imprisoned at Dachau. About 507,000 people died there before the American forces liberated the camp in April 1945.

Death March

In retreating from Allied soldiers at the end of the war, Nazis forced large numbers of prisoners to march long distances under heavy guard and under intolerable conditions. Approximately a quarter of a million prisoners were murdered or otherwise died on these marches between the summer of 1944 and the end of the war.

Deportation

Part of the Nazi program to remove Jews from Germany in order to increase living space for ethnic Germans. Initially an effort to rid German-held land of Jews, deportation eventually became a means to deliver Jews to concentration camps and implement the Final Solution.

Displaced Persons

Dislocated, stateless Jews and others, whose homes were destroyed or occupied by strangers or who feared reprisals or annihilation if they returned to their pre-war communities. In 1945, there were between 1.5 million and 2 million displaced persons; this figure included 200,000 Jews, most from Eastern Europe.

Displaced Persons camps

Facilities established in Germany, France, Italy and Belgium, some located in former concentration camps, where stateless Jews were housed. Some refugees remained in these camps for several years while they waited for permission to immigrate.

Ebensee

Established in November 1943 as a sub camp of Mauthausen concentration camp. Built by 18,000 slave labourers, it included an underground armament plant. Liberated by the American forces in May 1945.

Evian Conference

Conference convened by US. President Franklin D. Roosevelt on July 6, 1938 to address the problem of Jewish refugees. Delegates from 32 countries, including Canada, refused to increase their quotas and admit more refugees. This refusal reinforced Hitler's view of the undesirability of Jews and that his plans would be unopposed.

Final Solution

The Nazi code name for the plan to exterminate the Jews of Europe. Intended as a resolution to what the Nazis called the 'Jewish Question'. The plan was formalized at the Wannsee Conference, held in a suburb of Berlin in January 1942.

Fischer, Greta (1909-1988)

Born and trained as a kindergarten teacher in Czechoslovakia, she fled from Czechoslovakia to London, England in 1939 where she worked with Anna Freud in the Wartime Hampstead Nursery. Fischer joined the UNRRA Team 182, a multilingual group of child specialists sent to Germany in 1945 to rescue and care for children. Helped establish the International Children's Centre in Kloster Indersdorf near Dachau, Germany. Fischer came to Canada with the last group of Jewish war orphans in 1947 where she worked as a social worker.

Gas chamber

Sealed rooms in extermination camps and some concentration camps, often masked to look like shower or delousing facilities. Prisoners were crowded into the chambers where poison gas or carbon monoxide was released. Zyklon B was used at Auschwitz-Birkenau and Majdanek. Most of the other killing centres used carbon monoxide. After gassing victims' bodies were cremated or buried in mass graves.

Gestapo

From the German Geheime Staatspolizei or secret state police during the Nazi period. A branch of the SS, a quasi-military unit of the Nazi party, which dealt with political opponents using terror and arbitrary arrest. Adolf Eichmann commanded the section of the Gestapo charged with implementing the "Final Solution" the deportation and mass murder of European Jews.

Ghetto

The Nazis revived the medieval term ghetto to describe the compulsory "Jewish Quarters" often in the poorest section of the city, where Jews from the surrounding areas were forced to live. Surrounded by barbed wire or walls, the ghettos were sealed before the deportation of Jews to the concentration camps. Established mostly in Eastern Europe, the ghettos were characterized by overcrowding, starvation and forced labour.

Greeners

Term used by others to refer to newly arrived Jewish immigrants. Yiddish word meaning "green" as in people who are new to a place or do not yet know the ropes.

Head Tax

A discriminatory federal tax levied upon Chinese immigrants admitted to Canada. Initially the tax, passed in 1885 was set at \$50 per Chinese immigrant. In 1901 it was increased to \$100 and later to \$500. In 1923, the Chinese Exclusion Act abolished the head tax, replacing it with even more restrictive measures. The head tax was a serious financial burden to Chinese Canadians and effectively stopped any family unification.

Hebrew

An ancient Canaanite language of the Hebrews traditionally used in prayer. It has been revived as the official language of the State of Israel.

Hitler, Adolf (1889-1945)

Founder of the German Nazi party and its leader from 1919 until 1945. Hitler became Chancellor of the Third Reich from 1933-45. He outlined his plans for territorial conquest and expressed his hatred for Jews in his autobiography *Mein Kampf* written in 1923. On January 30, 1942 Hitler set in motion the destruction and murder of six million Jews. He committed suicide in an underground bunker in Berlin on April 30, 1945.

Hitler Youth

Nazi paramilitary and social club for German youth. The organization was founded in 1922 and renamed Hitler Youth in 1926. By 1935, 60 percent of Germany's youth had joined. Indoctrinated with Nazi ideals and virulent anti-Semitism, many became front-line soldiers at the end of the war.

Holocaust

The mass murder of nearly 6 million European Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators during World War II. Many individuals and groups were persecuted and suffered during the Holocaust, but only the Jews were targeted for total "extermination". The term literally means a burnt sacrifice, or sacred burning. The biblical word "Shoah," meaning catastrophe, is the Hebrew equivalent.

Immigrant

A person who comes to a new country to live as a permanent resident.

Janowski (Janowska)

Established in September 1941 as a labour camp in Lvov, Ukraine. In 1943 it became an extermination camp. An estimated 40,000 of Jews from Lvov and eastern Galicia died here.

Jew/Jewish

Someone of the Hebrew or Jewish people. Someone who is either born or converts to Judaism, which is the religion, philosophy and way of life of the Jewish People.

Jewish Immigrant Aid Society (JIAS)

Created by the Canadian Jewish Congress in 1919 as the community agency dealing with immigration. It helped Jewish immigrants with application procedures and integration into Canadian society.

Kapo

Leaders of a block or barrack, or others who helped with the operation of a concentration camp in return for more rations or other privileges. The term may have been coined by Italian prisoners in Dachau from the Latin word capo for head.

Kibbutz

A collective farm where the members own all property in common. Social Zionist organizations promoted this form of collective agriculture. After the Holocaust, kibbutzim were formed in Europe to provide agricultural training to survivors, in the hope of relocating the kibbutzim and their members to Palestine.

Kloster Indersdorf Orphanage

Established by the United Nations Rehabilitation and Relief Administration (UNRRA) after World War II as the only international children's centre to care for orphaned or unaccompanied children. Located in a sixteenth century monastery, near Dachau, Germany.

Komagata Maru

Ship that arrived in Vancouver on May 23, 1914 carrying 376 immigrants from India. Passengers were denied the right to disembark, according to Canada's "continuous voyage" policy, which stipulated that immigrants had to make a direct, non-stop voyage from their country of origin. The ship sat in the harbour for two months while the legality of the exclusion order was debated. The ship and its passengers were eventually forced to return to India.

Kristallnacht

The "Night of Broken Glass" was the Nazi orchestrated attack against German and Austrian Jews on November 9, 1938. Hundreds of synagogues were burned, thousands of Jewish businesses were destroyed and 30,000 Jews were rounded-up and taken to concentration camps. The event marked an escalation in the Nazi persecution of Jews.

Landed Immigrant

An immigrant admitted to Canada as a permanent resident, with full benefits of Canadian citizenship, except he/she cannot vote in federal or provincial elections.

Lodz Ghetto

Established in February 1940 in Lodz, Poland, it was a major German war production centre with Jews used as slave labourers. About 43,500 died in the ghetto from starvation and disease, another 150,000 were deported to the extermination camps of Auschwitz and Chelmo. It was the last remaining ghetto in Poland when it was liquidated in August 1944.

Liberators

British, American, Soviet and Canadian troops who entered the concentration camps at the end of the war.

Lvov Ghetto

Established in 1941 in Lvov in Eastern Galicia, Ukraine. Became a labour camp in January 1943. In June 1943 Jews staged an armed revolt as the Nazis tried to liquidate the ghetto. Thousands died or were deported to Janowska concentration camp.

MacKenzie King, William Lyon (1874-1950)

Canadian Prime Minister from 1921-1930 and again from 1935-1948. He was concerned with growing French Canadian nationalism, saw Jewish immigration as a potentially divisive issue for French Canada and opposed liberalizing Canada's immigration policies to allow more Jewish refugees to emigrate.

Majdanek

Labour and death camp complex established in July 1941 near Lublin, Poland. Prisoners included Jews, Poles and Soviet political prisoners. Approximately 175,000-235,000 inmates died, of starvation, disease, and forced labour. Gassing of prisoners began in October 1942 and continued until the end of 1943. Liberated by the Soviets in July 1944.

Mauthausen

A labour and concentration camp for men established in 1938 near Linz, Austria with forty-nine sub camps. Characterized by extremely brutal conditions, where approximately 120,000 of the 200,000 prisoners were murdered or worked to death. Equipped with gas chambers and a crematorium. Many prisoners were killed by being pushed from 300-foot cliffs into the stone quarries. Liberated on May 5, 1945 by the US Army.

Melk

Sub camp of Mauthausen concentration camp established in Austria in April 1944 to provide forced labour for the construction of a series of underground mountain tunnels. Liberated by the Soviets in April 1945.

Mengele, Dr. Josef (1911-1978)

Physician, anthropologist and member of the Nazi party, who worked at Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1943. Infamous for his 'selections', which sent Jews to the gas chambers, Mengele conducted sadistic medical experiments on Jews, Roma and Sinti, twins and people with physical disabilities. He escaped to South America after the war and is presumed to have drowned in Brazil in 1978.

Muhldorf (Muehldorf or Möhldorf) Concentration Camp

Established in 1942 as a sub-camp of Dachau to support the German war effort. Used forced labourers to produce airplanes, armaments and rockets in large underground factories.

Nazi

A member of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) founded in 1919 and brought to power in 1933 under Adolf Hitler.

Nuremberg Laws

Anti-Jewish legislation announced during a Nazi party rally in Nuremberg, Germany on September 15, 1935. The first of a long series of decrees which stripped Jews of their German citizenship, defined a Jew based on the number of Jewish grandparents, prohibited marriages and sexual relations between Jews and Germans, prohibited Jews from hiring German maids under the age of 45 and raising the German flag.

OSE

Oeuvre de Secours Aux Enfants (Children's Aid Society). Jewish organization devoted to children's welfare and health care, founded in Russia in 1912 and later headquartered in Paris. During the war the OSE hid and protected Jewish children from the Nazis. Several OSE employees and close to 100 supporters lost their lives saving more than 5,000 children.

ORT

The Society for Rehabilitation through Training dedicated to providing Jews with trade and farm skills. After World War II, ORT set up free schools, vocational and cooperative workshops in Europe, North Africa and China for displaced Jewish refugees.

Pier 21

Between 1928 and 1971 Pier 21 in Halifax served as the primary entry point for over 1 million immigrants, wartime evacuees, refugees, troops, war brides and their children arriving in Canada. This number includes over 100,000 refugees and displaced persons. Today Pier 21 is a Canadian Historic Site and museum.

Peterswald Children's Home

The Peterswald Children's Home was established after the war by the Jewish committee of Lower Silesia, Poland to care for displaced and orphaned Jewish children.

Privy Council

Prime Minister's department and the Cabinet Secretariat that provides advice and support to the government and various agencies of the government. It is responsible for preparing Orders-in-Council.

Privy Council Order / Order-in-Council

Order formulated by the Canadian Cabinet or a committee of Cabinet and formally approved by the governor general. Some orders simply make appointments. About a third are legislative, forming part of the law and are enforced by the courts.

Red Cross

International organization, founded in 1863 according to the terms of the Geneva Convention to care for wounded, sick and homeless during wartime. Its mandate later expanded to include the monitoring of humanitarian international law. The Red Cross attempted to assess conditions in prison and concentration camps during the war but was refused entry by the Nazis. After the war the Red Cross assisted in tracing survivors, in family unification and resettlement.

Refugee

Someone who flees their country of origin because of a well-founded fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, membership in a social or political group.

Resistance

Opposition to the Nazis in Germany and occupied countries. Included partisan groups, French resistance groups, the Jewish Fighting Organization in Poland and exiled governments of defeated nations. Some attacked Nazi troops, communication and transportation or helped persecuted peoples hide or escape. Spiritual resistance was expressed in the practice of repressed religion, art, music and literature. Jewish armed resistance occurred in some ghettos and concentration camps.

Righteous Among the Nations

An honour given to non-Jews for their efforts to rescue Jews from Nazi persecution at the risk of their own lives. Awarded by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, Israel.

Selection

The process of choosing victims to be killed in the concentration camps. These 'selections' targeted women, children, the elderly and those physically unfit for slave labour. Medical personnel often carried out the selections.

Shul

Yiddish word for synagogue.

Sobibor

Established in May 1942 in eastern Poland. One of three death camps established specifically to exterminate Jews. About 250 000 Jews were gassed. The camp was closed after an inmate uprising on October 14, 1943.

SS

Abbreviation for Schutzstaffel (Defence Protective Units), usually written with two lightning symbols. Initially established as Hitler's personal bodyguard, the SS was transformed into a larger organization by Heinrich Himmler. Although some SS units were assigned to the battlefield, the organization is best known for its role in the destruction of European Jewry.

S.S. St. Louis

Ship that sailed from Germany to Cuba on May 15, 1939 with 907 German Jews fleeing the Nazis. After being denied permission to land by Cuba, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, the United States and Canada it was forced to return to Europe, where most died during the Holocaust.

Star of David

Symbol adopted by the Nazis as a way to identify Jews. In 1939, all Polish Jews were required to wear the star. This requirement was later extended to Russia, Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe.

Swastika

Symbol of the Nazi party used on Nazi uniforms and flags. A cross with equal arms each of which is bent at a right angle.

Synagogue

A building or place of worship for those of the Jewish faith. A congregation of Jews for the purpose of worship or religious study.

Treblinka

A death camp in Poland where about 870 000 Jews were murdered, including most of the Jews of Radom and Warsaw. Treblinka I, a penal camp was established in 1941 to exploit raw materials from the quarry. Treblinka II, the death camp, was run from July 1942 to August 1943 by the Nazis with the help of Ukrainian guards. After an armed uprising on August 2, 1943, the Nazis completely destroyed the camp and converted the site to a farm.

UNRRA

United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration founded in 1943 by the Allies to aid refugees in the liberated countries of Europe and the Far East. After the war, it provided relief and helped millions of displaced persons repatriate or emigrate.

Visa

An endorsement on a passport or a separate document, which permits the holder to enter or leave a country.

War Orphans Project

An initiative of the Canadian Jewish community that secured the permission of the Canadian government to admit Jewish orphans after the war. In 1947, Privy Council Order 1647 was issued permitting 1000 Jewish war orphans, under eighteen years of age, to immigrate to Canada under the auspices of Canadian Jewish Congress, with the stipulation that full responsibility for the children's welfare be assumed by the Jewish community.

Warsaw Ghetto

Enclosed area in the city of Warsaw, Poland established in November 1940 to imprison the Jews of Warsaw, and those deported to the ghetto from surrounding towns and shtetls. Enclosed by a high wall, topped with barbed wire. Thousands of Jews died there from starvation, and disease. Following the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in April 1942 the Nazis liquidated the ghetto and sent the remaining 300 000 Jews to the Treblinka extermination camp.

World War II

The war fought from 1939 to 1945, in which Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union, the United States, Canada, China, and other allies defeated Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Japan. After Germany invaded Poland in September 1939 Britain declared war against Germany. Canada entered the war shortly afterwards. The United States entered the war after the bombing of Pearl Harbour in December 1941. The war ended with the surrender of Germany in May 1945 and the surrender of Japan in August 1945.

Yad Vashem, Holocaust Martyr's and Heroes' Remembrance Authority

A Holocaust museum and memorial to victims and heroes of the Holocaust founded in 1953 in Jerusalem, Israel.

Yiddish

The language, historically spoken by Ashkenazic Jews of Central and Eastern Europe. Derived primarily from medieval High German dialects, and to a lesser extent from Hebrew and Aramaic.

Zionism

A Jewish movement that began in the late 19th century in response to growing anti-Semitism and pogroms against the Jews, which sought to re-establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Today Zionists are concerned with the support and development of the state of Israel.