

Chapter 15

The Dachau Trial Continued, November 15, 1945

The main trial of Dachau starts today and will not end until December 13, 1945. The main Nuremberg trial will start November 20, 1945, and end on August 31, 1946. Both courts will try subsequent cases.

Sitting against the wall behind the prosecution table, I have a good view of the court on its high bench, and the defense table on the other side of the bench in front of the defendants. The translators and reporters are in the center.

The 40 defendants are a surly, defiant lot; they sit stiffly in four stepped-up rows of chairs, their defense lawyers, headed by Colonel Bates, at a large table in front of them. Each defendant is asked in turn by the court whether he understands the charges and is ready for trial. Each says “yes,” pleading “not guilty” in a firm voice. When asked their nationality, they shout “Deutsch!” with obvious pride.

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Behind a railing are 300 seats for the spectators, mostly from nearby towns. We want as many as possible to hear the facts. We make a detailed record so that no one can say the story is a fabrication.

I listen to most of the testimony, expecting that the first witness will prompt a sober response from the well-fed defendants. Instead, the only visible reaction is a defiant, “so-what?” expression. Nevertheless, all the testimony in this trial, the record of which reaches 1,900 pages, is horrifying.

The stories of several selected witnesses* are illustrative of the crimes committed at Dachau. Col. Lawrence C. Ball, an American army physician, describes the camp soon after it was liberated, noting the dead and dying prisoners strewn about the camp. In response to Colonel Denson’s questions, Ball says:

First, outside the camp we saw a train . . . of about 40 cars . . . and open and closed boxcars. Those had in them 10 or 20 corpses . . . thinly clad. Many of them had their pants down as if they had dysentery. Some used other corpses as pillows.

Inside the camp, the crematorium had large piles of [nude] corpses stacked about it. They had a corpse smell which was rather prominent. There were large piles of clothing nearby.

They were extremely emaciated . . . their muscles had wasted. The fat had disappeared and their skin was leathery. Malnutrition [starvation] was extreme.

* For ease of reading, the answers are quoted without the questions, which are repetitive.

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GIs view the bodies in 40-some open boxcars at Dachau, April 29, 1945.

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Clothing from prisoners and remains from the crematory, April 29, 1945.



Bodies prepared for cremation at Dachau, April 29, 1945.

We also visited the inner camp [and] the hospital in the company of Dr. Blaha, a prisoner doctor from Czechoslovakia . . . in charge of the hospital [which] was extremely crowded. They had wards with three-decker beds . . . placed together so that three could sleep in them instead of two. A few had a blanket, most of them a sheet. A majority of the cases in the hospital were typhus, dysentery, phlegmon, erysipelas, tuberculosis, and general medical and surgical illnesses. Relatively well prisoners slept with those having these diseases.

I would judge about 4,500 were treated in the . . . four hospitals in Dachau [compound] and two [American] evacuation hospitals. [Another] 1,000 were treated in the SS hospital . . . A majority [died] from causes acquired before [liberation in] April 1945 . . . The population of the prison should have been decreased [before that time], and septicides used, and sanitation, bathing, and sterilization of clothing. [While I was there] the principal causes of death [were] typhus fever, dysentery, and malnutrition.

When we arrived . . . they didn't have . . . remedial equipment . . . the medicine . . . the insecticides . . . the vaccines available to the American army.

Colonel Denson also questions Dr. Franz Blaha, 49, on medical treatment of prisoners during his four years as a prisoner-physician. A 1920 graduate of the University of Prague, Blaha had specialized in surgery and pathology. Arrested and held by the Gestapo in 1939 for his anti-Nazi views, he was sent in 1941 to Dachau, where he was put

to work first at menial tasks, then as a nurse, then as head of the prison hospital and pathologist at the morgue. His pertinent testimony relates to the starvation of prisoners:

The daily average per-person food intake in 1942 was 1,200 calories, which a working prisoner received . . . in 1944, less than 1,000, between 1,000 and 800 . . . it should have been 3,000 calories . . . The working time for the majority of the work details was 11½ hours. [Actually, the workers were under orders for about 17 hours every day.]

The prisoners got up at 4:00 A.M.—4:30 in winter . . . breakfast consisted of three-quarters of a cup of black [ersatz] coffee or tea; twice a week it was soup. Everybody received a piece of bread for a whole day; at first it was a quarter . . . and [at the end] an eighth of a loaf of bread. They began to put less flour in it and more potatoes, and beside that, sawdust.

Questioned about the cause of death in the hundreds of autopsies he performed at Dachau, Dr. Blaha testifies:

Besides the epidemics, typhus and typhoid, most [deaths] were due to tuberculosis, from the phlegmon and the sepsis, dysentery and malnutrition, and sickness caused by malnutrition. In many cases the sole reason was malnutrition. We called it hunger typhus. Those deaths took place in the years from 1942 through [liberation] . . . The ones who died solely from malnutrition were Italians, Russians, and Frenchmen.

Dr. Blaha explains that thousands dropped dead at work. Many transports carried away from Dachau those too weak to work:

In 1943 instead of the small transports, there were big transports prepared; they were sent to Auschwitz, Lublin, Linz, and there were often 200 people at a time . . . This was known all over the camp . . . as 'the Heavenly Transport' . . . These people were sent to their death.

Another witness is Norbert Fried, 32, who has a doctorate and is from Prague. He was a prisoner-worker in subcamp Kaufering. He was transferred from Auschwitz in October 1944 (when the Russians were advancing toward Poland) to work at Dachau until its liberation. He tells much the same story:

We lived in so-called earth huts—a trench covered with a roof. There was one window and one door . . . 50 prisoners in each hut . . . 12 meters long and less than two meters wide. We slept on the wooden floor, one blanket but no pillow. We put our head on our shoes . . . [which] being of priceless value, were often stolen . . . there were only three latrines for 3,000 prisoners . . . always overflowing with filth . . . we had to walk through that filth, go back and put the shoes again under our heads . . . anyone who would lose his shoes would get the penalty of death.

In the morning, when we had to get up at 4:30, we got black water, no coffee, no sugar in it . . . at work we got three-quarters of a liter of thin soup water with dried vegetables in

it . . . after returning from work [in an underground Messerschmitt airplane assembly plant] about 8:00 P.M. or as late as 10:00 P.M., we got the soup of the camp . . . made of unpeeled potatoes, about two halves in a liter, and sometimes of cabbage. After the soup we got our bread . . . in the beginning one-fourth loaf . . . and later one-eighth . . . about as much as two slices. At the camp there were 400 dishes [bowls] for 3,000 . . . so we waited our turn at the kitchen. Some were too weak to wait.

Of the 600 Jews who came to Dachau with me, not as many as 60 are alive.

Kaufering Camp Number Four near Landsberg became a sick camp, and Fried was made its record clerk. He says:

There was a special work detail . . . to bury [up to] 30 corpses a day. The naked bodies were put on a handcart, the gold teeth already removed. That was a special duty of one of the prisoners—a dentist under the supervision of the SS men.

Evacuation of the Kaufering camp, holding 3,000 prisoners, started on April 25, 1945, at noon. Some marched out and trains took out those too weak to walk. The earth huts were burned [and the invalids with them]. I ran away before the last train left . . . and I was hidden in the woods [until April 29] and then I found the Americans there.

Oscar Muller, an anti-Nazi German civilian prisoner in the main Dachau compound, testifies:

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In November 1944 a transport came into camp . . . from Hungary. This transport was very much lousy. I was put in charge of delousing—to prevent the typhus epidemic in the camp.

There were always new transports coming into the camp, and that was the reason the typhus epidemic became worse . . . the population of the camp grew. They were clothed in the well-known striped suits . . . they often didn't receive any long drawers, and the largest number had no overcoats in the winter. They were exposed to the cold.

When I first arrived, Dachau had about 22,000 prisoners. In April 1945 there were about 33,000. The camp was suitable under normal conditions for about 8,000 [not including the subcamps]. Underwear was not washed for up to 12 weeks. Some fell apart because they were not changed.



Bodies stacked outside one of the Dachau crematory, April 29, 1945.

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Colonel Denson questions prosecution witness Prince Leopold of Prussia.

Some members of royalty also knew life in Dachau. One prisoner is Friedrich Leopold, Prince of Prussia, 50. He testifies:

I was arrested on May 25, 1944, at Bad Gastein . . . I was taken to Dachau in October 1944.

In the morning we got some so-called coffee, but it was black water, and a piece of bread, and sometimes a little bit of marmalade. For lunch we got some water soup. In there was some cabbage or some pieces of carrots and some peels of potatoes . . . [at the hospital] I received sometimes a little bit

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of some stuff cooked in milk. My normal weight was 155 pounds and [it dropped] to 95 pounds . . . I saw bodies . . . starved to death . . . only bones, which were covered with skin . . . some people had to undress in the open air . . . it was terribly cold . . . they had to line up in front of the dispensary . . . and some of them dropped to the ground.

I worked at the SS canteen where the SS men had their meals. I worked in the cellar . . . I washed dishes. In the cellar I unpacked boxes, which arrived with wine, champagne, and brandy. The SS men had good food, potatoes, vegetables, and very often meat.



A bronze bust of Hitler, above, and a leather Nazi notebook given to the author by one of Hitler's five non-Nazi war-conference recorders.