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RAVENSBRÜCK

GERMANY

The guide was created as part of the "No Statute of Limitations: Routes of Memory to the Sites of Nazi Genocide Against Civilians in Russia and Abroad" project.

The project aims to preserve the truth about the crimes committed by the Nazis and their collaborators against civilians during the Great Patriotic War as manifestations of genocide policy, as well as to foster among young people a rejection of Nazism in all its forms by engaging with significant memorial complexes and sites of memory both in the Russian Federation and abroad.

As part of the project, travel guides and audio guides to memorial sites have been created in Russian, English, and German to facilitate their widespread use in tourism, education, and civic engagement:

1. Ravensbrück Memorial (Germany)
2. Maidanek Memorial (Poland)
3. "Krasny" Concentration Camp Memorial (Republic of Crimea)
4. "Dulag-100" Memorial (Pskov Oblast)
5. "Hatsun" Memorial Complex (Bryansk Oblast)
6. Zhestyanaya Gorka Memorial Complex (Novgorod Oblast)
7. Zmievskaya Balka Memorial Complex (Rostov Oblast)
8. "Peski" Memorial (Republic of Karelia)
9. Piskaryovskoye Memorial Cemetery (St. Petersburg)
10. "Dulag-126" Memorial Complex (Smolensk Oblast)
11. Ksty Memorial Complex (Tver Oblast)

The project seeks to counter historical falsification and improve access to knowledge about the genocide of civilians perpetrated by the Nazis and their accomplices. Its practical novelty and value lie in the creation of unique audio and textual content that can be used not only within Russian society but also integrated into international discourse, influencing interpretations of World War II events in Western countries and the U.S. and exposing the true nature of Nazism.

The project was implemented by the Agency for Social Projects "Culture. Education. Science" with the support of the Presidential Grants Foundation.

NATIONAL MEMORIAL RAVENSBRÜCK

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1 Commandant's Office | 1940–1945

The two-story commandant's office building under construction. The clock has not yet been installed on the tower. National Memorial Ravensbrück.

The administration of the Ravensbrück women's concentration camp was located here. The commandant's office building itself was built in 1940 and was a two-story massive brick structure in the style typical of Nazi architecture — functional and devoid of decoration. On the first floor were the "Political Department", the postal censorship department and the medical department of the camp. On the second floor were the offices of the commandant, his deputy, and other administrative premises. After the camp was liberated in April 1945, the building was used by Soviet troops until 1977. Since 1984, the central exhibition of the memorial has been located here. In 2013, the exhibition " *Ravensbrück Women's Concentration Camp. History and Memory* " was opened.

The commandant's office (SS-Kommandantur) served as the center of administrative and economic control, from where the direct management of the camp was carried out, decisions were made about the life and death of thousands of prisoners. This building became a symbol of bureaucratized violence, where orders and instructions were issued directly concerning the daily life of prisoners, mass and individual punishments of prisoners, executions, medical experiments and deportations.

The Political Department (Politische Abteilung), which reported directly to the Gestapo and the RSHA (Reich Main Security Office), was responsible for:

— maintaining personal files of prisoners;

— organizing interrogations and torture;

— preparing lists for executions and transfers to other camps, including extermination camps in the east. The documents of the Political Department contain a few questionnaires of prisoners, where the "crimes" they had committed (reason for arrest) were indicated (for example, "political unreliability", "Jewish origin"). One of the questionnaires for 1942 mentions: " *Prisoner No. 4782, Anna V., arrested for helping a Jewish family. Recommended for transfer to the punishment block* ."

Polish prisoner Wanda Polanskaya recalled:

"We were summoned to the Political Department, where the SS interrogated us for hours, beat us, and demanded confessions. Many did not return."

Postal Censorship Department (*Postzensurstelle)*

All letters from prisoners were strictly checked. It was forbidden to mention hunger, illness, violence from the camp administration or the conditions of detention in the camp.

In 1943, the censor wrote a report:

"Letter from prisoner # 8921 contains hidden complaints. Send to solitary confinement."

The Medical Department (*Lagerärztliche Abteilung)* was formally responsible for the "health condition" of the camp prisoners, but was actually involved in:

— the selection of women for medical experiments and, in fact, the experiments themselves;

— euthanasia of the sick and weak.

Frenchwoman **Denise Dufournier** recalled: " *We were lined up in front of a medical commission. Those who were too thin or sick were sent to the gas chambers* ."

The second floor housed the commandants' offices and the camp administration. In particular, the following were located here:

Commandant's office

From the moment the camp was founded, SS-Standartenführer Günther Tomaschke, who had previously headed the Lichtenburg women's camp, was appointed commandant. From January 1940 to August 1942, the commandant was SS-Hauptsturmführer ***Max Koegel*** (16.10.1895), who had begun his service in Dachau and was transferred to Lichtenburg with the opening of a women's camp there. In August 1942, he was transferred to Majdanek in the same position. He was arrested in June 1946 by the Americans. He committed suicide in prison in Schwabach on 27 June 1946, before he could stand trial.

In August 1942, Max Koegel was replaced by another veteran of the concentration camp system, SS-Hauptsturmführer ***Fritz Suhren*** (10.06.1908), who had previously served in Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald. He was known for his particular cruelty towards female prisoners. In the final stages of the camp's existence, he personally participated in the creation of a gas chamber and organized "death marches". After the war, he hid under a false name in Bavaria, but was discovered and arrested in 1949. He was brought before a French military court, sentenced to death and executed on June 12, 1950.

Commandant of Ravensbrück Max Koegel. National Memorial Ravensbruck.

Commandant of Ravensbrück Fritz Suhren. National Memorial Ravensbruck.

— **Labor Department** (*Arbeitseinsatz*): in addition to the direct assignment of female prisoners to forced labor, the employees of this department took an active and direct part in the selection of prisoners for extermination in the gas chamber.

— Finally, **the Finance Department,** as its name suggests, was in charge of financial matters relating to the functioning of the camp, including accounting for the confiscated property of prisoners.

Despite the architectural severity of the commandant's building, devoid of decorative elements, one of its dominant features was the clock tower, which towered over the entrance and was clearly visible from any point in the camp. There are several opinions among researchers regarding this architectural solution (from symbolic to purely functional):

— time control. Time in the camp was strictly regulated, being an instrument of absolute control over the lives of prisoners. Thus, the clock in the commandant's office was a visible symbol of this control, reminding each prisoner of the power of the administration over every moment of their lives.

— "the facade of normality." The presence of such ordinary elements as a clock on the tower of the administrative building was probably part of an attempt to recreate the appearance of a normal place — a barracks, a factory, and not a concentration camp.

The original clock has not survived to this day. It was probably dismantled or destroyed in the first postwar years. Today, a new clock has been restored on the tower — an exact replica of the one that was there during the camp's existence.

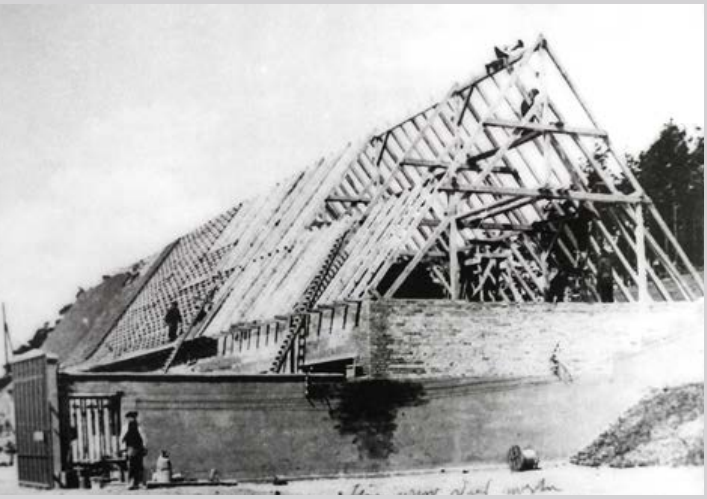
Water tower | 1940–1945

2

The water tower building was built in 1940 and was a massive brick structure with a high tower that supplied water to the entire camp. The water was supplied from the nearby Schwedtsee lake, and the pumps and filters were located on the lower floors. This was not just a technical structure, but a multifunctional facility that played a key role in the functioning of the system: in addition to the water tower, this building housed the drivers' barracks, garages, workshops, and an SS telephone and tele-

graph station. For a time, the personal belongings of the women's concentration camp prisoners (***Effektenkammer)*** were stored on the top floor:

According to the recollections of survivors, immediately after arriving at the camp, everything was taken from the women: clothes, shoes, jewelry,



The water pumping station during its construction. The wooden gates of the camp are visible (left). National Memorial Ravensbrück.

photographs, even children's toys. The things were sorted and sent to the warehouse.

"They made us strip naked. Dresses, shoes, rings — everything was thrown into separate bags. Someone cried, asked to leave at least a cross... But the SS men only laughed."

From the memoirs of Olga Benjaminova, a prisoner of the Ravensbrück concentration camp.

Some of the property was sent to Berlin for the needs of the Reich, jewelry was melted down, and clothing was disinfected and distributed to German families.

The tall tower dominated the camp and served not only as a water storage facility but also as an observation post. The windows on the top floor overlooked much of the camp, including the roll call area and the crematorium area. The National Memorial archives contain SS escape reports that mention " *movement observed in the restricted area from the water tower* ."

Water was also used as a torture device in the camp: in winter, prisoners were forced to wash themselves with ice-cold water, which often resulted in frostbite. Former prisoner **Maria Wanda** recalled:

"They drove us into the shower, but instead of warm water, an icy stream poured out. The girls fell, they were beaten... Many died of pneumonia."

After the camp was liberated, the water pumping station was used by the Soviet administration and later became part of the memorial complex. Today, the building has been preserved almost in its original form. It houses an exhibition dedicated to the infrastructure of violence.

Garage Complex | 1940–1945

3

Built between 1940 and 1942, the complex included a depot, garages, repair shops, and a cinema for the SS. From 1945 to 1977, the buildings were used by Soviet troops. Today, it houses the National Memorial administration, a library, archives, storage, exhibition halls, and an events hall.

The garage complex was built by prisoners. Construction was carried out in the most difficult conditions. **Maria Budzińska,** a Polish prisoner, recalled:

" *We were driven to build a garage in any weather. Bricks, cement, iron beams — we carried everything on our backs. Anyone who fell got hit with a rifle butt. In winter, our hands froze to the metal* ."

The memorial's archives contain SS reports indicating that in order to speed up the work in the winter of 1941, 200 *"voluntary" workers were selected from the women's camp* — in reality, this meant forced labor under threat of execution.

"Black ravens" — this is what the prisoners called the cars that took people to the " **Jugendlager** " (youth camp) or to be shot. From 1942, cars that participated in the extermination of sick and weak prisoners were serviced here.

Erna Lengerinova, a Czech prisoner, recalled:

Every time a column of cars left the garage, we knew that someone would be taken to their death. Sometimes the SS men themselves sat in the back of the cars, laughing, smoking...

Next to the garages there was a cinema hall where the SS watched propaganda and entertainment

films. The archives contain reports of "cultural events" that were held in between the torture of prisoners.

Margarete Buber-Neumann, a German anti-fascist, recalled:

They could torture women during the day and watch movies and drink schnapps in the evening. This duality was monstrous.

After the camp was liberated, the garage complex was taken over by the Soviet troops. It housed car repair shops, fuel warehouses and other administrative premises.

Today, the Ravensbrück garages house an archive and library (documents on 25,000 prisoners), exhibition halls (an exhibition on forced labor), and an events hall.

4 Camp gate and guardhouse | 1939–1945

Next to the gate to the prisoner area was a separate entrance for the guards. The guard room was used to control all incoming and outgoing, especially the prisoner columns. In 1943/44, stone gates were erected. During the period of use of the territory by Soviet troops (1945–1994), the gates were significantly modified.

The first gates of Ravensbrück were wooden and were located between the SS administrative zone and the prisoner zone. By 1943, the camp had expanded significantly, the number of prisoners increased, and the Nazis were forced to strengthen the security system. Stone gates were erected. This design allowed:

— Check columns of prisoners more thoroughly when entering and leaving the camp.

— Prevent escapes.

— Conduct additional inspections and searches (for example, after working on external teams).

Next to the prisoner gates there was a separate entrance for the guards, which emphasized the hierarchy and the SS's complete control over the camp. The guards could move relatively freely between the zones, while for the prisoners the passage through the gates was strictly regulated and often accompanied by humiliation and violence.

The camp gate (view from the camp). On the right is a separate entrance for the SS. On the left, behind the gate, is the guardhouse and the commandant's office. National Memorial Ravensbrück.

The guardroom (" Wachstube ") was located directly at the gate and served:

— A checkpoint — here they recorded everyone entering and leaving.

— The assembly point for the convoy before accompanying the work teams.

— An inspection point — prisoners could have their "contraband" taken away (for example, food brought in from outside). The room contained tables for SS officers, weapons racks, and a telephone line to other parts of the camp.

"The gates were the most terrible place. Every time we passed through them, we didn't know if we would return..." (from the memoirs of a former prisoner).

After the liberation of Ravensbrück by the Soviet Army in 1945, the camp area came under the control of Soviet troops. The gates and guardhouse were significantly rebuilt:

— The stone gates have been preserved, but have lost their original appearance.

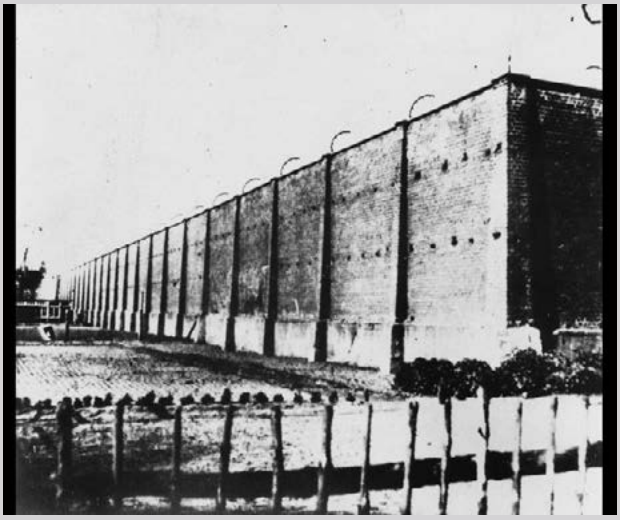
— Some of the premises were used as warehouses or barracks.

— The SS inscriptions and symbols were destroyed.

Today, the gate and guardhouse are part of the Ravensbrück Memorial Complex. They were partially restored as part of a historical reconstruction. Fragments of the stone gate have been preserved to this day — despite the changes, they remain a material testimony to the Nazi terror.

5 Prisoners | 1939–1945

Prisoners of the Ravensbrück concentration camp with children in one of the barracks, liberated by the Soviet Army
Federal State Budgetary Cultural Institution "State Museum of Political History of Russia".
Inv. No. F.III-21838/2



A brick wall with barbed wire that surrounded the entire camp.. National Memorial Ravensbrück.

The first group of 867 women prisoners arrived at the Ravensbrück concentration camp on 15 May 1939 from the Lichtenburg camp, which had been disbanded by that time. On 23 September 1939, the first female prisoners were brought to the camp — residents of German lands and former Polish territories annexed by the Third Reich. On 2 November of the same year, the first five women arrived from the occupied Polish lands. Large transports of Polish prisoners began arriving at Ravensbrück in April 1940.

Initially, the camp consisted of one camp street and two rows of barracks for 3,000 prisoners. From 1940, it was expanded to the south with three camp streets and three rows of barracks. Streets 2–4 were lined with poplar trees. To the east was the "industrial zone", the so-called "industrial yard", and to the south was an SS clothing factory. In 1941, a small camp for men was opened. The entire complex was surrounded by a wall, parts of which have survived to this day. Many traces of the camp's past were destroyed during Soviet use of the territory. Since 2000, the contours of the former barracks have been marked by depressions in the ground.

In the following years (1941–1943), new batches of female prisoners arrived, each numbering between 1,000 and 1,500 people. The largest number of women, over 16,000, was delivered in 1944, with about 12,000 of them residents of the Warsaw uprising. During the same period, some prisoners from Auschwitz were transported to Ravensbrück. Poles constituted the largest national group of prisoners in Ravensbrück — 48,500 people. In addition to Poles, Ravensbrück held 28,000 women from the USSR, 8,000 French women, 2,000 Belgians, 1,000 Dutch women, as well as women of British, German, Jewish and Roma origin. 15% of the prisoners were Jewish, 80% were political prisoners. In total, over the years of the camp's existence, about 132,000 women passed through it, of whom 50,000 died.

We travel for half a day. We stop towards nightfall. Behind the wall of the carriages we hear shrill female voices and barking dogs. The carriage door flies open. Female figures in black cloaks and hoods scurry about, and if you look closely, under the hoods are grey caps with swastikas. Each jailer has a German shepherd… They grab you by the shoulders, by the arms, drag you out of the carriage, throw you to the ground, kick you with their heels. You get up — another kick… They line you up in pairs and drive you through the forest. In addition to the female jailers, there are many SS men with machine guns. Both are screaming. The screams merge with the barking of dogs.

…

Ravensbrück! Translated as Raven Bridge… I don't know why this "bridge" was once called Raven Bridge. For us captives, Ravensbrück was the "bridge of death".

Kharlamova N. F., prisoner of the Ravensbruck concentration camp

6 Utility building | 1939–1945

Kitchen and bathhouse building for prisoners. National Memorial Ravensbruck.

Kitchen for prisoners (interior). National Memorial Ravensbrück.

The one-story building housed a kitchen and bathhouse for prisoners. Many survivors recall the bathhouse as a place of humiliating procedures upon entering the camp. Today, the remaining parts of the walls, the bathhouse floor, and the basements are protected by a canopy.

For newly arrived prisoners, the bathhouse was part of a dehumanization process: women were forced to take off their clothes in front of male guards, had their heads shaved, were forced into cold showers, and were subjected to disinfection — treatment with caustic chemicals.

Many survivors recalled the bathhouse as one of the most traumatic experiences in the camp.

We were led into the building and ordered to undress. The SS men stood leaning against the walls, looking at us, talking, laughing insolently, and gesturing that we had to undress completely. It is hard to describe what kind of torture it was.

Kudryavtseva Z., former prisoner of Ravensbrück- We went through all the humiliating procedures of fascist "hospitality". They strip us naked and take everything away.

Zholobova K., former prisoner of Ravensbrück... mocking "hygienic treatment"...

Leonova M., former prisoner of Ravensbrück

On the very first day we went through all levels of humiliation and mockery of human dignity.

Allaverdyan A., former prisoner of Ravensbrück

As former prisoner A. A. Fursova recalled: " It was night, it was dark, they opened the carriages and started to drive us out of them, beat us, for no reason at all, set them on us with shepherd dogs, beat us with whips, and drove us. These were female guards. In my mind, they remind me of the Spanish Inquisition from the books I've read. They brought us to the camp, cut everyone's hair, dressed us in striped dresses, and shod us in wooden boots # 44. My shoe size is 34. "

A drawing by former prisoner Ati Seigenbeek illustrating the deplorable state of women's shoes

https://editionsampelos.com/atie-siegenbeek/

Food was scarce and was another tool for the destruction of prisoners. Prisoners were fed food designed to slowly starve them. Officially, prisoners were given around 1,000–1,300 kilocalories per day, but in practice, they were often given much less.

The morning meal (around 5:00–6:00) consisted of so-called "Coffee" — a warm, dark liquid that imitated coffee. It was made from roasted barley, acorns or chicory, sometimes with the addition of rutabaga. Bread — around 200–250 g per day — was often issued in the morning for the entire day. The bread

was coarse, with the addition of sawdust, straw or potato peelings. Some prisoners tried to save the bread for the entire day, but hunger forced them to eat it all at once.

Lunch (around 12:00–13:00)

Lunch was the main meal, but despite this it was extremely meager:

"Boulion" (soup) — a thin stew of rutabaga (most often), rotten potatoes, cabbage leaves, sometimes traces of cereals (barley or oatmeal). In rare cases, prisoners found bones or meat waste in the soup. A serving was about 0.5–0.75 liters. The soup was almost fat-free and protein-free, often salty or bitter.

For dinner (around 18:00–19:00), prisoners received "tea" — hot water with herbal additives (sometimes just boiling water). Very rarely, prisoners received a piece of margarine (around 10 g) or a spoonful of jam (once every few days) for dinner.

Prisoners engaged in hard labor were entitled to a piece of sausage or cheese, but they received it extremely rarely.

The terrible camp days dragged on, full of torment and humiliation. Reveille at 4 a.m., followed by a four-hour roll call. Food: a muddy swill with floating chopped beet tops, a little bread and a liter of warm water. If there were deviations from this daily ration, then certainly not in the direction of an increase. At first, one loaf was shared between four, but on Wednesdays and Fridays it was divided between five.

Françoise Kotler, a former prisoner of the Ravensbrück concentration camp, lived with her family in the USSR from 19557.

7 Platz and Lagernaya Street 1 | 1939–1945

From May 1939, prisoners were housed in barracks on both sides of Lagernaya Street 1. The linden trees growing here were planted in those same years.

Camp Street 1 (Lagerstraße 1) was the main road dividing the residential barracks.

The first prisoners were housed in 20 wooden barracks, later their number increased to 32. The prisoners slept on three-tiered bunks, often without mattresses, in unsanitary conditions.

Appellplatz — roll call square. National Memorial Ravensbrück.

Lagerstrasse 1 (Lagerstrasse 1). National Memorial Ravensbrück.

" The barracks have three-tiered bunks, the spaces between them are so narrow that two people can barely pass each other with their backs to each other. Entry into the bedroom is strictly prohibited until eight o'clock in the evening. "

Nikiforova A. A., "Doctor Antonina", a prisoner of the Ravensbrück concentration camp

Drawing by former prisoner Ati Seigenbeek

https://editionsampelos.com/atie-siegenbeek/

The linden trees that have survived to this day were planted in 1939 by prisoners. They served not only as "decoration" but also as a demonstration of the "order" that existed in the camp in case of visits by Red Cross commissions. For the prisoners, these trees were a symbol of longing for freedom — one of the few reminders of normal life outside the camp.

A panoramic photograph of the former concentration camp site, showing linden alleys planted by former prisoners. National Memorial Ravensbrück

The Platz (Appellplatz) — the roll call square — is the square in front of the administrative buildings where daily morning and evening roll calls (appels) were held, where work teams were formed and "penalty formations" were held.

" Appel — roll call — one of the Gestapo inventions that helped send people to the next world. In any weather, everyone was driven out of the block into the street, lined up five people in a row and kept like that for several hours in the wind, in a dress sewn without a sash, so that the wind could freely walk over the body, so that the cold would penetrate you completely ."

Nikiforova A. A., "Doctor Antonina", a prisoner of the Ravensbrück concentration camp

"Often we stood for hours without moving, either in the sun, or in the rain, or in the cold."

Firsova A. A., prisoner of the Ravensbrück concentration camp

A drawing by former prisoner Jeanne Letourneau of the camp depicting the morning roll call and the departure of work teams. Museum of the Army.

Lazaretto | 1939–1945

8

Revere. National Memorial Ravensbrück.

The first hospital (called a revir in the camp lexicon) was located in two combined barracks. By going to the revir, prisoners hoped to avoid backbreaking labor, but staying in the camp hospital also meant the risk of being declared "incapable of work" and being killed. By 1942, the number of patients in the overcrowded camp was growing, so the camp administration decided to expand the revir by converting seven barracks. By the end of the war, a fifth of all the barracks in the women's camp were used as a camp hospital.

" I found myself in the Middle Ages. The only thing missing was chains on the wall to chain the sick...

Revere was considered a medical institution, but in reality people were beaten, maimed, and killed with injections there ."

Nikiforova A. A., "Doctor Antonina", a prisoner of the Ravensbrück concentration camp

All the prisoners were very afraid of this fascist hospital. When one of us fell ill, we took all measures to recover without the "help" of the fanatical doctors. Once in the hospital for examination, a prisoner could be put on the "black transport" list, or placed on a bunk next to an infectious patient6, or become a suitable subject for experiments... They did not provide me with any medical care, they thought I was malingering.

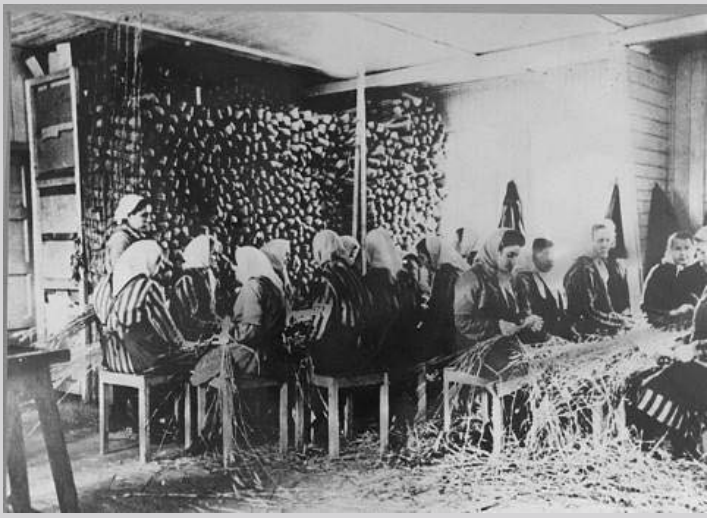
Smirnova E., prisoner of the Ravensbrück concentration camp

One day, the warden ran into the block, called my number and ordered me to come to the doctor. That day, there was a general inspection, sorting of the living souls. Some were sent to work in the workshops, others — to transport sand, and the weak and sick were given pink cards as an exemption from work. But in reality, this card was a ticket to the crematorium.

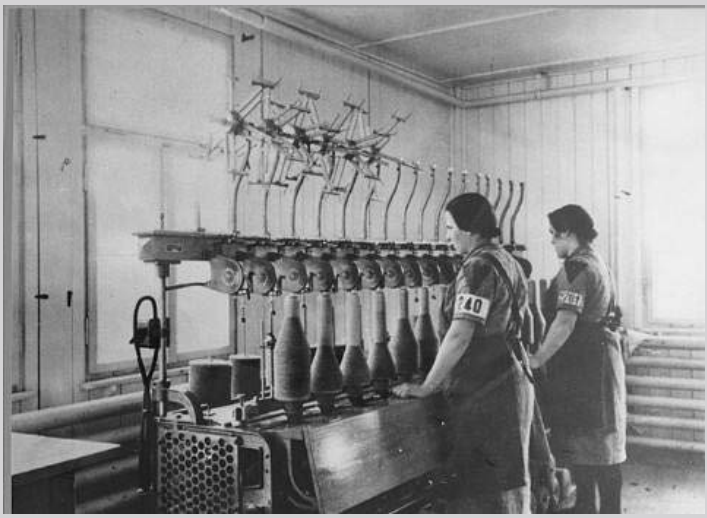
Vlasenko M., prisoner of Ravensbrück concentration camp No. 17248

9 Industrial Yard | 1940–1945

Prisoners in a shoe repair shop (from a propaganda album prepared in 1941 by order of the SS). National Memorial Ravensbrück.



Prisoners in a straw weaving workshop (from a propaganda album prepared in 1941 for the SS). National Memorial Ravensbrück.



Prisoners in a weaving workshop (from a propaganda album prepared in 1941 by order of the SS). National Memorial Ravensbrück.

The first workshops of the industrial yard were built in 1940. Here, women sewed clothes for prisoners and later uniforms for the SS. By 1945, the SS-owned Texled factory was operating here, with workshops for sewing, weaving, fur-making, and dismantling old clothes.

" Lagerstrasse ended with a large gate, behind which was the Industriehof (industrial courtyard). In this courtyard, surrounded by stone walls, were workshops (betribes) — tailoring, embroidery, weaving, straw weaving, etc.

The workshops have their own life. Machines are clattering, machines are turning. Overseers are always on guard, and woe to those who cannot keep up with the work of the conveyor. They beat with a whip,

a stick, a fist, they bang their heads on a table or a machine..."

Nikiforova A. A., "Doctor Antonina", a prisoner of the Ravensbrück concentration camp

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10 "The Sewing Workshop" | 1942–1945

Prisoners at work in a sewing workshop. National Memorial Ravensbrück.

This complex of eight workshops was one of the centres of forced labour for prisoners at Ravensbrück. It now houses an exhibition about the working conditions, including a roller that prisoners used to drag to level the ground.

The head of the sewing workshop, Helene Massar, established strict discipline among the prisoners under her command, which she maintained with beatings.

"The foreman who worked at the sewing factory always carried a whip with him and, as he walked through the shop, he would lash it on the backs of the seamstresses bent over their machines. But he especially loved to hit them with a twisted tunic so that the metal buttons would hit them in the face. Or he would grab a pair of huge scissors and throw them at the workers."

Kharlamova N. F., prisoner of the Ravensbrück concentration camp

Elfrede Sassnik initially worked as a supervisor in the first section of the sewing workshop, later distinguished by her cruelty and exactingness towards the prisoners, and was transferred to the second section of the workshop, where she independently supervised 120–150 prisoners working in this section. Her duties included monitoring the work of the prisoners, so that all prisoners worked continuously for all 12 working hours, fulfilled the established production standards and in case of a bad attitude towards work, forcing was part of the duties of the supervisors of the workshop.

" Because of her hatred for prisoners, Sassnik beat not only the prisoners under her command, but also other prisoners who had nothing to do with her. For example, I personally was not Sassnik's subordinate, but she beat me twice, the first time she hit me in the face with her hand in the fall of 1943, just because I brought her personal ration of bread to the workshop at the request of a Russian girl, Sasha Shikanova, who worked under Sassnik. Seeing this, Sassnik cursed me with obscene words and hit me in the face several times with her hand, and said, "This is for you not bringing bread here to the Russian pigs anymore, let them die of hunger."

I witnessed one incident when Sassnik, in the workshop around March 1943, beat a prisoner under her command on the head with scissors until she bled from the mouth. "

From the testimony of a former Ravensbrück prisoner

Men's Camp | 1941–1945 11

Male prisoners of the Ravensbrück concentration camp liberated by the Soviet Army
Federal State Budgetary Cultural Institution "State Museum of Political History of Russia".
Inv. No. F.III-21838/4

Male prisoners of the Ravensbrück concentration camp liberated by the Soviet Army. Federal State Budgetary Cultural Institution "State Museum of Political History of Russia". Inv. No. F.III-21838/5.

In April 1940, a men's camp was established as a source of labor for the crafts and construction trades that were so needed during the construction and expansion of the women's camp. It was administratively subordinate to the commandant of the women's camp. By August 1941, the men's camp occupied five residential barracks and one utility building in the southeastern part of the camp, next to the industrial yard. It was the male prisoners of Ravensbrück who built the Uckermark youth camp, the Siemens production facilities, the SS settlement, and built roads. Most of the work crews were engaged in construction, reporting to civilian construction firms. From 1943, men were also recruited to work in the war industry. In total, from 1941 to 1945, about 20,000 men from all over Europe, aged 16 to 45, were held in the men's camp.

12 "New Camp" | 1940–1945

The women's camp at Ravensbrück was constantly expanding. The first barracks of the "new camp" (German: Neue Lager) appeared in 1940, and construction continued until 1944. The expansion of the camp reflected the growing needs of the Nazi system to exploit female labor.

Panoramic view of the "new camp". In the distance, behind the fence, the barracks of the men's camp are visible. The Bunker is visible on the right.
National Memorial Ravensbrück

13 Bunker | 1940–1945

The bunker with the adjoining office of the senior warden (on the right). National Memorial Ravensbrück.

Bunker (interior). National Memorial Ravensbrück.

The camp prison, also called the "bunker" or "Zellenbau" by prisoners, was a place of torture.

The bunker was built back in 1939, at the same time as the main buildings of the concentration camp, on the initiative of the first camp commandant, Max Koegel. Koegel justified his concerns in a letter to the Concentration Camps Inspectorate: " It is impossible to maintain order in the camp without breaking the stubbornness of these hysterical women with strict arrest ."

The Bunker contained 78 prison cells, spread over two floors. The camp regulations provided for dif-

ferent categories of arrest, depending on the "offense" of the prisoner. For example, prisoners could be left on bread and water with daylight, in a dark cell with bunks, or without the possibility of sitting or lying down at all. The prisoners were especially horrified by the corporal punishment with a whip, which was carried out in the bunker. Until 1942, the guards in charge of the bunker carried out the punishment with a whip. Numerous prisoners' memories have survived of the atrocities committed by the guards Maria Mandl, Dorothea Binz, Margot Drechsler and Elisabeth Hasse in the bunker. From August 1942, prisoners were forced to carry out corporal punishment on their own comrades. The SS supervised this process.

"As a bunker warden, I reported to the senior warden about the reason why a prisoner was in the bunker. Based on my reports, the camp commandant ordered the prisoner to be flogged."

From the testimony of Maria Mandl, the bunker's warden

In 1959, the first museum was opened here, and in 2006, a permanent exhibition, " Prison Cell. History and Memory, " opened.

In addition to the bunker, the camp also had a punishment block. The punishment block was located in an ordinary wooden barracks, fenced with barbed wire (it has not survived to this day). The windows of the punishment block were tightly closed both day and night. Unlike ordinary barracks, it was locked. It was strictly forbidden for prisoners to leave the punishment block and go into the yard. A guard monitored this in the yard. People were sent to the punishment block for the slightest offense: a woman talking to a man, walking around the camp arm in arm with a friend, failing to meet quotas in the workshops, etc. The existing camp ration was cut in half in the punishment block. The camp administration assigned the most cruel and unprincipled guards here. One of these was Louise Lehmann, who served in the punishment block from May to June 8, 1943, and then from August 1, 1943 to January 15, 1944. The prisoners considered Lehmann "the nightmare of Ravensbrück."

A former German prisoner of Ravensbrück recalled:

“SS warden Lehmann opened the iron gates, and all the prisoners in the punishment block immediately lined up on the platform.

The penal block was separated from the other barracks by a high and strong fence made of barbed wire. The windows of the opposite barracks, facing the penal block, were boarded up, as were the windows on the opposite side of the penal block. Thus, the penal prisoners were completely isolated from the other prisoners. Their appel was held separately from the general camp one.

We waited at the iron gate. As soon as Lehman let us in, we set to work in the washroom.

Towards the end we heard a terrible roar and screams in the day room, interspersed with Leman's piercing squeals, who showered the prisoners with a hail of the filthiest curses. We did not dare leave the washroom, but Leman had to let us out. We were tired of waiting. And although the noise was still going on, we opened the door and froze on the threshold. Leman was beating everyone in the room with a thick baton, not distinguishing whom and what she was beating. Tables and stools were overturned. The women tried to hide behind them. One had a face covered in blood, another was clutching her head. Leman, burning with rage, kept lowering her baton on the defenseless. Her face was distorted with inhuman, bestial rage. But a beast attacks a weaker animal, obeying instinct, trying to get food for itself. And Lehman tortured out of a sadistic desire to torture."

Charlotte Müller, a prisoner at Ravensbrück camp

A drawing by former prisoner Jeanne Letourneau of a punishment block. Museum of the Army.

"In a word, to end up in the penal block meant to find oneself in conditions even more terrible than in the camp itself, to go through such spiritual torture that physical torture paled in comparison. The most terrible thing here was not the hunger, not the cold,

not the stench from the toilets, not the lice and not the beatings, but the atmosphere of complete moral corruption created by the German thieves and prostitutes kept in the penal block."

Kharlamova N. F., prisoner of the Ravensbrück concentration camp

14 Memorial | since 1959

The memorial complex includes a crematorium, a punishment cell, part of the camp wall with a cemetery, a platform and a monument at Lake Schwedt. The central element is the sculpture "The Bearer" by Will Lammert.

Sculpture "The Bearer" by Will Lammert. Federal State Budgetary Cultural Institution "State Research Museum of Architecture named after A. V. Shchusev", Inv. No. GNIMA OF-6563/48

15 Crematorium and gas chamber | 1943–1945

Until 1943, prisoners who died in the camp were cremated in the town of Fürstenberg. In the spring of 1943, the camp administration built its own crematorium, which was expanded in 1944. In 2011, mass graves were discovered near the crematorium,

and the area became a cemetery.

Crematorium after the liberation of the camp. State Archives of the Russian Federation. F. 9526. Op. 4. D. 46. L. 28

The crematorium after the camp's liberation. On the right is probably the gas chamber.. Federal State Budgetary Cultural Institution "State Museum of Political History of Russia". Inv. No. F.III-21838/3

Crematorium ovens after the camp's liberation. Federal State Budgetary Cultural Institution "State Museum of Political History of Russia". Inv. No. F.III-21838/1.

A description of the operation of the gas chamber at Ravensbrück was given by senior warden Ruth

Klosius during the trial.

"When the trucks were full, I would go to the crematorium accompanied by two SS men. Upon arrival, we had to unload all the women and herd them into a wooden barrack. As the eldest, I would order them to strip naked... When all the women had undressed, another SS man, dressed in a white medical coat, would lead the women one by one into another wooden barrack. When the barrack was full, the doors would be closed. Two male prisoners would be ordered to climb up the ladder to the roof and throw something in through a hatch in the roof. The hatch would then be hermetically sealed. As soon as the male prisoners had descended from the roof, the engines of the trucks

16 Cemetery | since 1959

would be started to drown out the screams."

In the 1950s, the camp's victims were reburied here. In 1986, a monument to the murdered Jews was erected, and in 1995, to the Roma and Sinti.

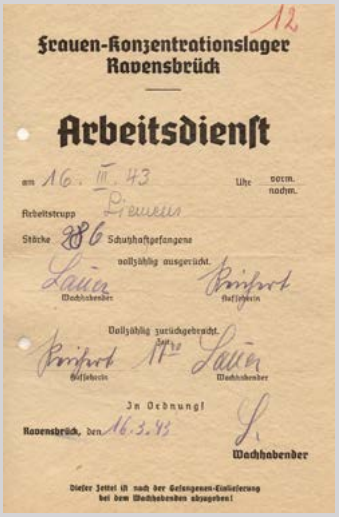
17 Places of executions

A memorial stone marks the site of mass executions. From 1941, Ravensbrück was used as a firing range. Death sentences were carried out here on members of the Resistance movement, prisoners who violated certain camp regulations or sabotaged the fulfillment of quotas at military enterprises. In the last months of the camp's existence, prisoners who were physically unfit for the evacuation marches on foot were shot. The exact number of those shot remains unknown due to the lack of documents. However, former prisoners recalled that the shots of the firing squads could be heard in the camp.

The corridor is the place of execution by shot in the back of the head. State Budgetary Institution "National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan". Inv. No. NEG-5128.

Siemens production facilities | 1942–1945 18

Aerial photography of the Siemens camp. National Memorial Ravensbrück.


Frauen-Konzentrationslager
Ravensbrück

Arbeitsdienst

am 16. III. 43 Uhr vorm. nachm.

Arbeitstrupp Siemens

Stärke 286 Schutzhaftgefangene

vollzählig ausgerückt.

Lauer Wachhabender

Vollzählig zurückgebracht.

Lauer Wachhabender

In Ordnung!

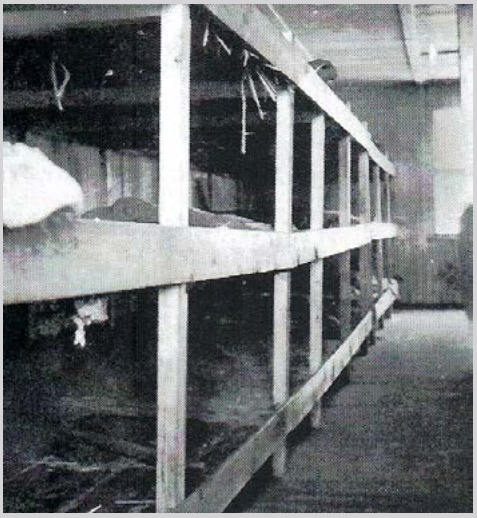
Ravensbrück, den 16.3.43

Wachhabender

Dieser Zettel ist nach der Gefangenen-Einlieferung bei dem Wachhabenden abzugeben!

Distribution of 286 prisoners to the Siemens plant on March 16, 1943.. National Memorial Ravensbrück.

The Siemens camp after its liberation by the Soviet Army. National Memorial Ravensbrück.



The interior of one of the barracks of the Siemens camp after its liberation by the Soviet Army. National Memorial Ravensbrück.

Siemens & Halske used prison labor to produce parts for the military industry.

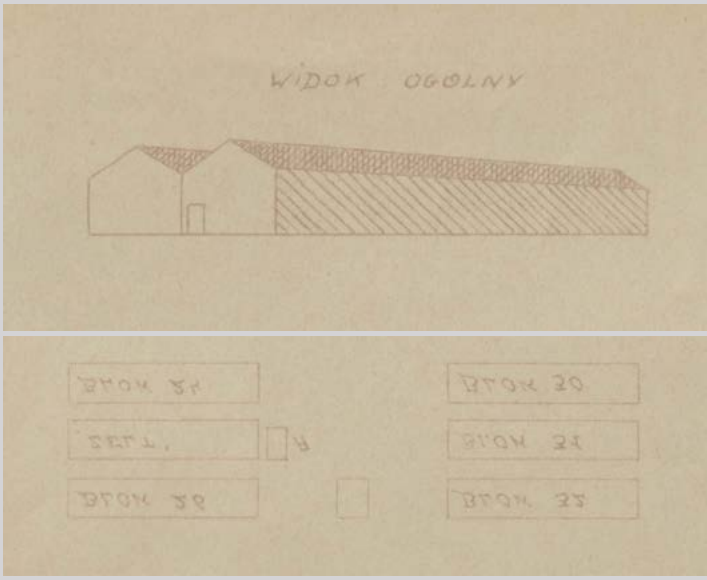
In August 1942, Siemens & Halske set up production facilities near Ravensbrück to use forced labor from prisoners. Prisoners were used to produce electrical components: coils, parts for aircraft instruments and radio equipment.

Siemens built 10 work barracks south of the main camp, covering a total area of 675 square meters. At the end of 1944, residential barracks for prisoners were built and prisoners were moved into them on December 3, 1944. The opening of the residential barracks significantly accelerated the work, since prisoners no longer had to walk several times a day from the central camp to the workshops and back.

Working at Siemens in bright, spacious and heated premises was considered more bearable than other types of work performed in the concentration camp. From November 1943, work was carried out for 11 hours in day and night shifts. Otherwise, the regime was not much different from the regime established in Ravensbrück: daily roll calls lasting many hours, cruelty of the guards and strict control of the Siemens civilian employees.

Initially, Siemens employed 50 female prisoners. By the end of 1944, there were already around 2,400. In the spring of 1945, production was halted due to a shortage of raw materials. The female prisoners were eventually returned to the main camp at Ravensbrück. In the last weeks of the war, the SS housed male prisoners evacuated from other camps on the grounds of the Siemens camp.

Tent | 1944–1945 19



A drawing by a former Polish prisoner shows the exterior of the tent (top) and its location (bottom). Lund University Library.

In August 1944, the SS erected a tent between Blocks 24 and 26, where more than 4,000 people were held in cramped conditions.

"The SS men placed the newly arrived prisoners in a large, unheated tent. It soon filled up so much that the prisoners could not even sit. In the morning, several cans of soup were delivered to the entrance to the tent. But even this did not reach the hungry prisoners. The food was taken by policewomen and "seniors" accompanying parties from other camps... Soon the word "cholerina" thrown out by someone

began to be heard more and more often in Ravensbrück. An epidemic spread through the camp, caused by the decomposition of corpses in the tent... All the horrors of Dante's hell pale in comparison to what was found in the tent."

Cotler Françoise, former prisoner of the Ravensbrück concentration camp

20 Transports | 1939–1945

The camp was connected to the railway. In 2005, a freight car was installed there as a symbol of the deportations: most of the prisoners were transported to the camp by train.

21 "Youth Camp" Uckermark | 1942–1945

Drawing by former prisoner Violette Lecoq, "La voie du ciel" ("The Road to Heaven"), which depicts prisoners being sent towards the crematorium. National Memorial Ravensbruck.

By the end of January 1945, the "youth camp Uckermark" (" Jugendschutzlager" Uckermark), located one and a half kilometers from the central camp, was divided into two parts. One part continued to be used for its previous purpose, that is, for the detention and "re-education" of persons aged 16–21, accused of criminal offenses or antisocial behavior.

The Uckermark youth camp opened on 20 March 1942, when it began to house underage girls who had committed crimes. The camp was not administratively subordinate to Department IV of the RSHA, as most concentration camps were, but to Department V of the RSHA (Kripo — Reich Criminal Police). Despite the fact that the girls held in the camp were called "pupils" (Zöglinge) and not prisoners, the methods of supervision and education used were no different from those that prevailed in nearby Ravensbrück.

By the end of 1944, Uckermark had been converted into a death camp. The SS divided the camp into two parts: one continued to be used for its original purpose, that is, to hold and re-educate girls accused of criminal offenses or antisocial behavior; the other part was used to hold old and weakened women from Ravensbrück. This part was called the " death zone ." Here they either died of starvation or were killed by poisonous injections. Uckermark was used as a kind of transit camp for sending incapacitated prisoners to the gas chamber, which was built near the crematorium in January 1945. Shortly before this, the former commander of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Johann Schwarzhuber, had arrived at the camp and used his wealth of experience gained in the East. Ruth Klosius, who was known for her sadism towards the prisoners, was put in charge of the female staff of Uckermark.

On January 10, 1945, the first transport of 210 prisoners left Uckermark for the gas chamber. Such transports would later become regular. The result of Uckermark's activities would be the extermination of at least 4,000 people in the gas chamber.

To lull the prisoners into complacency, the guards told them that they were being sent to Mitwerda, a "rehabilitation camp." However, Mitwerda existed only on paper. Every day, Klosius, as the camp's commander, prepared lists of 50 to 60 names. Under cover of night, Klosius and her subordinates would force the women, beating them if necessary, into a truck destined for the gas chamber.

" When Auschwitz was disbanded, the Uckermark camp department was created in Ravensbrück. The camp was under the leadership of Schwarzguber, and I was appointed Lagerführerin (camp chief). There were 5 female guards under my command... At 7 o'clock in the morning, roll call began. After meals, there was a selection, which was carried out by Schwarzguber, me, and the guards Moneke and Raabe. My task was to compile lists of prisoners selected by Schwarzguber and the camp doctor Trommer. These selections took place 2–3 times a week. Each time, 50–60 women were selected. I knew that the women whose names I entered on the lists were selected for extermination in the gas chamber ."

From the testimony of Ruth Klozius-Neudyuk

22 Village SS | 1940–1945

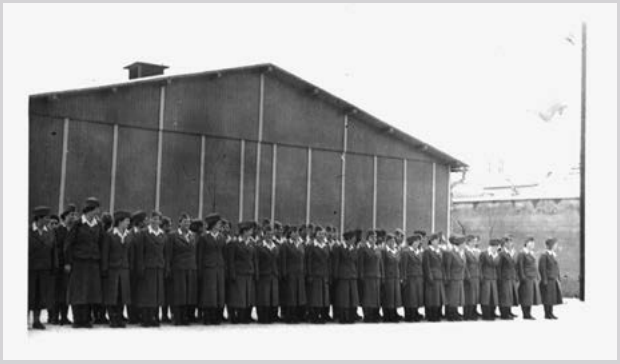
Included houses for SS men of various ranks. Currently, there is an International Youth Center here, as well as exhibitions about SS guards and officers.

In 2010, a permanent exhibition entitled “Officers’ Houses (Führerhaus): Everyday Life and Crimes of the SS Officers of Ravensbrück” was opened in the former camp commandant’s house (directly adjacent to the camp grounds). The exhibition is dedicated to those SS officers who directly determined the lives and deaths of thousands of prisoners. The exhibits focus on the motives and actions, as well as the environment and everyday life of the SS officers. The houses, built in 1939, still bear traces of their former owners.

Another permanent exhibition is "In the SS Auxiliary Units — The Ravensbrück Concentration Camp Guards", located in one of the former guards' dormitories since August 8, 2020. The exhibition covers the following aspects: the women's pre-camp experiences, the power and cruelty prevalent in the camp, career opportunities, and Ravensbrück's role as the main training and recruiting center for concentration camp guards.

House for officers. National Memorial Ravensbrück

Houses of the matrons. National Memorial Ravensbrück



Guards line up during Reichsführer SS Himmler's inspection visit to Ravensbrück. National Memorial Ravensbrück

Guards line up during Reichsführer-SS Himmler's inspection visit to Ravensbrück on 14 January 1941.. National Memorial Ravensbrück

During the existence of Ravensbrück, more than 4,000 women served as guards. Their average age was 24 years: most of them were unmarried and childless girls with primary or secondary education, who had been engaged in low-skilled labor in industrial enterprises, in trade or in the service sector before entering service in the concentration camp.

A small number of women ended up in Ravensbrück voluntarily, having responded to advertisements in the printed media for “easy but well-paid work.”

Most of the women ended up in the camp as part of the mobilization measures after the signing of the Decree on the comprehensive mobilization of men and women for the tasks of the Reich defense in 1943. The number of female guards increased especially with the transfer of concentration camps to economic footing. Industrial enterprises massively attracted prison labor, transferring their own employees to the positions of guards after appropriate training in Ravensbrück and other camps.

Thus, Ravensbrück, in addition to being the largest concentration camp for women, was also the largest training center for women sent by industrial enterprises to work as guards, as well as women who decided to volunteer for service. The head of the

female staff was the chief guard, who was responsible for all matters related to the prisoners entrusted to her and the guards who were subordinate to her. The most odious representatives of the camp administration were Dorothea Binz, Maria Mandl and many others.

Many continued their service in the camps in the East at Auschwitz and Majdanek, taking direct part in the policy of mass extermination of people.

23 Ravensbrück Stop | 1941–1945

Most prisoners arrived via Fürstenberg station, but in 1941 a separate stop was opened.

Railway route to Ravensbruck concentration camp. MBUK "Museum of the History of the City of Simferopol MO GO Simferopol". Inv. No. MIGS KP-1589

24 Supermarket | 1991–2011

Demonstration of public figures opposing the construction of a supermarket in the immediate vicinity of the former camp. National Memorial Ravensbrück

In 1991, a supermarket was planned to be built near the entrance to the Memorial. This project caused a scandal and public outcry. As a result of active intervention by public figures, organizations of former concentration camp prisoners and former prisoners themselves, the construction was frozen. The building was demolished in 2011.

25 Sculpture "Mothers" | since 1965

The bronze sculpture by Fritz Kremer was installed in 1965.

26 Liberation of Ravensbrück | 1945

The liberation took place in the last days of April 1945 during the rapid advance of the Soviet Army on Berlin. The camp was liberated by Soviet troops on April 30, 1945, but its liberation took place in several stages: the evacuation of prisoners by the Nazis, battles for adjacent territories and the direct entry of Soviet troops into the camp.

On April 27, 1945 (Friday), the SS, realizing the approach of the Soviet Army, give the order for a "death march" — a march of prisoners on foot to the west, to camps that were not yet in danger of being liberated. Every day there were fewer and fewer such camps. About 20,000 women and men (from a neighboring camp) are formed into columns and driven towards Mecklenburg. Those who are unable to walk are shot on the spot. About 3,000 people remain in the camp — the weakest, the sick and the dying.

On 28–29 April 1945 (Saturday–Sunday), battles for the approaches to Ravensbrück unfold. Units of the 2nd Shock Army of the 1st Belorussian Front fight in the Fürstenberg area. The 49th Rifle Division (Major General Vasily Margelov) and the 48th Guards Rifle Division advance toward the camp. The German units put up fierce resistance, but retreat under the onslaught of Soviet troops.

On Monday, April 30, 1945, in the morning (08:00–10:00), intelligence reports a large camp, but there is no precise information on the number of prisoners. The first units of the Soviet Army enter Ravensbrück. The SS men have already fled by this time, leaving the camp in the hands of the prisoners.

During the day (12:00–16:00), Soviet soldiers discover surviving prisoners — about 1,975 people, many in critical condition. They also discover ev-

idence of mass murder: a crematorium with the remains of bodies, pits with corpses that the Nazis did not have time to burn. Doctors and orderlies begin to provide assistance.

In the evening (18:00–22:00) the Soviet command reports to Headquarters about the liberation of the camp. War correspondents record the testimonies of the survivors. Food distribution begins, but due to extreme exhaustion some prisoners are fed with caution.

Captain B. L. Lvov, one of the first Soviet officers to appear in Ravensbrück, recalled:

On that day, April 30, 1945, when the advance units liberated the prisoners from the Ravensbrück women's concentration camp, three officers were called to command: medical service majors Bulanov S. M., Leikin D. B. and myself, captain Lvov B. L.

We began to inspect the camp and saw things that made our blood run cold. In the so-called blocks, on three-story bunks, lay prisoners, sick, hungry, exhausted by backbreaking labor and brutal torture. Next to those sick with typhus were healthy, but weak, emaciated people. In the crematorium ovens we found human remains, in the gas chamber — dozens of twisted female corpses. In the basement of one of the camp buildings we found the corpses of executed prisoners. The decomposing corpses threatened those who remained alive.

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