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# AUSCHWITZ

THE NAZIS & THE 'FINAL SOLUTION'

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## BBC TWO UNRAVELS THE SECRETS OF AUSCHWITZ

Auschwitz has a unique place in history. It is where the largest mass murder ever recorded occurred. Yet it is hard to grasp how and why such a chilling place existed.

Now the untold story of Auschwitz is to be revealed in a definitive BBC series to mark the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the camp in January 2005.

Written and produced by BAFTA Award-winning producer Laurence Rees, and using new research, *Auschwitz: The Nazis & the 'Final Solution'* offers a unique perspective on the camp in which more than 1 million people were ruthlessly murdered.

The series follows the trail of evil from the origins of Auschwitz as a place to hold Polish political prisoners, through the Nazi solution for what they called 'the Jewish problem' to the development of the camp as a mechanised factory for mass murder. It interweaves new testimony from camp survivors and members of the SS with archive footage and drama reconstructions of some of the key decision-making moments. And for the first time on television, the buildings that made up Auschwitz-Birkenau are recreated from the original blueprints, using photo-real graphics.

"The name Auschwitz is quite rightly a byword for horror," says series producer Laurence Rees. "But the problem with thinking about horror is that we naturally turn away from it. Our series is not only

about the shocking, almost unimaginable pain of those who died, or survived, Auschwitz. It's about how the Nazis came to do what they did. I feel passionately that being horrified is not enough. We need to make an attempt to understand how and why such horrors happened if we are ever to be able to stop them occurring again."

The series is the result of three years of in-depth research, drawing on the close involvement of world experts on the period, including Professors Sir Ian Kershaw and David Cesarani. It is based on nearly 100 interviews with survivors and perpetrators, many of whom are speaking in detail for the first time. Sensitive shot drama sequences, filmed on location using German and Polish actors, bring recently discovered documents to life on screen, whilst specially commissioned computer images give a historically accurate view of Auschwitz-Birkenau at all its many stages. The computer-animated images are based on plans from the Auschwitz construction offices which were captured after the war, eye-witness testimony and aerial photos, and include the undressing room, the gas chamber and the oven room of one of the crematorium complexes, as well as illustrations of Himmler's vision for a new Germanised town of Auschwitz.

The BBC will be marking Holocaust Memorial Day (27 January 2005) with a number of other television and radio programmes, including a live event on the day, an international musical performance

in and around the museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau, and a documentary that traces one woman's story of survival seen through her grandson's eyes.

A BBC book written by Laurence Rees, *Auschwitz: The Nazis & the 'Final Solution'*, accompanies the series.

The WW2 People's War website at [bbc.co.uk/ww2](http://bbc.co.uk/ww2) is actively seeking memories and testimony from people involved in the liberation of camps and ghettos, or who knew or worked with refugees.

A history of the Holocaust can be found on [bbc.co.uk/history](http://bbc.co.uk/history).



ARBEIT MACHT FREI

HALT  
AUSWEISE VORZEIGEN

# AUSCHWITZ – THE SERIES

## PROGRAMME ONE SURPRISING BEGINNINGS

**“I saw an SS man, a junior officer, walking around the gravel pit with a pistol in his hand... It was sadism. ‘You dogs! You damned communists!’ And from time to time he would direct the pistol downwards and shoot.”**

*Jerzy Bielecki, Polish political prisoner, Auschwitz*

Auschwitz is the site of the largest mass murder in the history of the world – more than 1 million men, women and children were systematically killed there. Yet its genesis is surprising, because although the vast majority of its victims were Jews, it was not built to deal with what the Nazis called ‘the Jewish problem’ at all.

Based partly on documents and plans only discovered since the opening of archives in eastern Europe, ***Auschwitz: The Nazis & the ‘Final Solution’*** is the story of the evolution of the camp and the mentality of the Nazis who created and ran it.

In ***Surprising Beginnings***, camp commandant Rudolf Höss arrives in the Polish town of Oświęcim to create a new concentration camp, its role being to imprison and terrorise anyone who resists the Nazi occupation of Poland. Within 20 months more than half of the 23,000 Poles first sent to Auschwitz are dead. Yet despite its obvious brutality, Auschwitz is almost a backwater in Nazi-occupied Poland.

But Auschwitz is destined for more ambitious things. Its proximity to rich seams of coal, lime and a plentiful water

supply draws the interest of the giant German industrial conglomerate IG Farben. Soon SS-Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler agrees to a massive expansion of the camp to provide the necessary slave labour for synthetic rubber production, and ultimately for the creation of a new model German town.

Hitler’s and Himmler’s plans for the total ‘Germanification’ of the East gather momentum with the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, and soon hundreds of Soviet prisoners of war are arriving in Auschwitz. As the German army advances into the Soviet Union, Jews, including women and children, are ruthlessly executed by special SS killing squads.

But Himmler discovers that killing large numbers of people by firing squad is both bloody and psychologically damaging for many of his troops. A search is launched for a more efficient means of mass killing. An experiment using explosives to detonate groups of prisoners proves disastrous. In the end it is found that exhaust fumes from vehicles, if piped into confined spaces, kill those trapped inside.

In fact, the Nazis’ Adult Euthanasia Programme has been killing mentally ill and physically disabled people in Germany with carbon monoxide since the beginning of the war, but it is too expensive to transport the bottled gas to the East. However, a team from the euthanasia programme now visits Auschwitz to ‘clear’ the camp of those who cannot work.

Ironically, given what is to happen, there is nowhere in Auschwitz to kill them without disturbance. So the first prisoners to be gassed are transported back to the ‘old Reich’ in Germany to be murdered.

In autumn 1941, the first gassing experiments in Auschwitz itself take place, using Zyklon B, a powerful disinfectant used to delouse clothes. The experiment is carried out on Russian POWs and, after a shaky start, proves – from the Nazis’ point of view – to be the solution to the problem.

The journey towards the mechanised extermination of millions gathers pace.

***Surprising Beginnings*** includes shocking testimony from Polish political prisoners speaking about the harshness of life in the early days of the camp; Jewish survivors of Nazi executions; and an SS member who was responsible for murdering Jews by firing squad.

## PROGRAMME TWO ORDERS AND INITIATIVES

**“I could see everything that was going on as though it was laid out in the palm of my hand. An SS man climbed onto the flat roof of the building, put on a gas mask, opened a hatch and dropped the powder in.”**

*Józef Paczyński, Polish political prisoner*

Rudolf Höss is to claim later that he was just acting under orders. But like many involved in the ‘Final Solution’, he actually uses a lot of his own initiative in the killing process; never more so than in the search for more effective means of death.

In October 1941, the plans for the new camp extension at Auschwitz-Birkenau, already designed to house 100,000 people in the most terrible conditions, are altered to take even more inmates. But no more room is created to accommodate the additional 30,000 people. All that is changed is the number of prisoners expected to live in each block. Suffering is built into the very plans. Ten thousand Soviet prisoners are put to work building the extension. They are the victims of appalling brutality, singled out by the Nazis as ‘subhuman’ and beaten mercilessly.

By now many of Germany’s Jews are being sent to the Lodz Ghetto in Poland but, unknown to them, this is not to be their final destination. The Nazis involve the Jewish Ghetto leadership in Lodz in selecting those who are to be sent to Chelmno to be murdered in mobile gassing vans stationed there.

At Auschwitz, Höss is finding that large-scale murder has its complications. The crematorium only yards from his office has been used for gassings since the autumn of 1941. But the location is far from ideal for mass murder. The screams of the victims cannot be muffled, even by two loudly revving motorcycles deliberately posted outside the makeshift gas chamber. Höss, in consultation with his colleagues, now authorises the conversion of a peasant house – the Little Red House – in a remote part of Birkenau, where the killing can be more discreet.

By the summer of that year, Höss and his colleagues at Auschwitz have discovered how to murder thousands of people. But these improvised methods of killing cannot keep pace with the demands of the ‘Final Solution’, which dreams of eliminating many millions. The Nazis begin to scour the whole of Europe for more and more people to bring to Auschwitz and kill.

**Orders and Initiatives** hears disturbing testimonies from prisoners, including those who witnessed the first gassings at Auschwitz. And for the first time on television, there is an interview with a Slovak perpetrator who knowingly helped to send his Jewish compatriots to their deaths.





## PROGRAMME THREE FACTORIES OF DEATH

**“When the vehicle with the mounted machine-gun arrived, there was a silence, a terrible silence.”**

**“My mother was in the first row of the women and she signalled to us with her eyes. Michel was crying. That’s the last image I have of my mother.”**

*Annette and Michel Muller on the separation of children from parents at Beaune-la-Rolande camp, France*

The year 1942 is to be the most significant of the ‘Final Solution’ as the Nazis now begin to comb western Europe, even taking Jews from as far afield as the British Channel Islands.

France is the first western country to deport resident Jews: the Vichy Government makes a deal with the SS to round up ‘foreign’ Jews living in France, but not those with French citizenship. More than 4,000 Jewish children are separated from their parents, deported from France and sent to Auschwitz, where they are gassed on arrival.

Even parts of the United Kingdom that were occupied become involved in the deportation of Jews. In Guernsey, the police hand over three Jewish women living on the island for deportation. When they finally arrive in Auschwitz, 900 miles away, they are murdered. Neither the French nor the Channel Island authorities knew for certain what would be the fate of the Jews they helped to deport – but they most certainly did know how much the Nazis hated the Jews.

Himmler now orders that all Jews in the General Government, an area that had been central Poland until September 1939, are to be killed. He selects newly constructed death camps like Treblinka for the task.

Treblinka, unlike Auschwitz, is a pure extermination camp, but its small gas chambers cannot keep up with demand and, despite burial in makeshift pits, bodies lie rotting in the summer heat. At Auschwitz, the corpses of those murdered in gas chambers in the converted farmhouses are also rotting. The Nazi leadership knows that solutions must be found quickly.

Changes are introduced to the running of the Treblinka camp. In order to lull new arrivals into a false sense of security, a fake railway station with flowers, timetables and signs to other towns is constructed. Bigger gas chambers are also built, capable of killing more than 3,000 people at a time. Ninety-nine per cent of those arriving at Treblinka are dead within two hours.

Höss is also making ‘improvements’ at Auschwitz. In order to make the camp a more efficient killing factory, he seeks advice from the SS expert in body disposal, SS-Colonel Paul Blobel, and examines his new field cremation units at first hand.

Not every German soldier is prepared to facilitate the extermination process. Lieutenant Albert Battel refuses to allow all the Jewish workers in the ghetto of the

Polish town of Przemyśl to be deported. He even shelters some of them in the army headquarters. He is posthumously awarded the title Righteous Among The Nations by Yad Vashem in Israel.

But nothing can stop the forward momentum of the ‘Final Solution’ and by March 1943 the new crematoria at Auschwitz are fully operational. Two months later the camp gets a new physician – SS-Captain Dr Josef Mengele. He will become known as the Angel of Death.

Those interviewed in *Factories of Death* include two Jewish children who were separated from their mother by the French authorities and would have followed her to their deaths in Auschwitz, with 4,000 other children, had she not arranged for their rescue. People who remember one of the Jewish girls deported from Guernsey, with the co-operation of the British police, speak fondly of her, and a prisoner at Auschwitz recalls digging up the rotting corpses of those gassed in the camp.

## PROGRAMME FOUR CORRUPTION

**“If a lot of stuff is piled up together, then you can easily stash away something for your personal gain. Stealing things for yourself was absolutely common practice in Auschwitz.”**

*Oskar Gröning, SS garrison, Auschwitz*

By 1943, 45 sub-camps are dotted round the Auschwitz region, most providing slave labour for armaments factories and other industrial concerns. At the centre of this web is the giant camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau with another, even more sinister, source of income – clothes and valuables taken from Jews arriving there to be gassed.

The Nazi leadership naturally intends such wealth to fill the coffers of the Third Reich in Berlin, but much of it actually stays at the camp, as the SS at Auschwitz have their fingers well and truly in the till. And despite it contravening the Nazis’ strict racial purity laws, sexual liaisons in the camp between the SS and prisoners are also occurring. There are even love affairs.

The corruption is clearly out of control. An SS investigator arrives to root out the offenders and uncovers clear evidence of misdemeanours by the SS. Rather than being disgraced, Höss is promoted to a desk job in Concentration Camp Administration in Berlin. Himmler agrees to formalise the role of sex for privileged prisoners by opening a brothel in the main camp. He believes it will help to motivate the workforce.

Meanwhile, Mengele uses the inmates at Auschwitz to carry out horrific pseudo-scientific experiments. He is particularly interested in children, especially twins, and uses them to research the power of genetic inheritance, an area of interest to many Nazi scientists.

Those interviewed in **Corruption** include a woman who tells how Mengele carried out horrifying experiments on her; a member of the SS garrison who fondly recalls the friendships he made at the camp; a prisoner who was one of the few survivors of a daring escape bid from Sobibor death camp; a Slovak Jewess who still remembers the SS man who fell in love with her; and a Polish political prisoner who had personal access to the Auschwitz brothel.

**VORSICHT**  
Hochspannung  
Lebensgefahr





## PROGRAMME FIVE FRENZIED KILLING

**“If you have to save your life you’ll try it in every way, even in a criminal way if it comes to that, but you have to save it. Your life is first. You are nearest to yourself, whatever people try to say.”**

*Éva Speter, Hungarian-Jewish survivor of the ‘Final Solution’*

The most important year in the history of Auschwitz is 1944, the year when more people are killed than ever before. It is also the year in which the Nazis send unlikely messengers to the East to try to sow seeds of confusion amongst the Allies, and when the Western Allies struggle with the dilemma of whether to negotiate with the Nazis about the Jews and whether or not to bomb the camp.

The Hungarians under Admiral Horthy have been unwilling to deport their Jews up to now, but in the wake of the German occupation of March 1944 comes Adolf Eichmann, the man charged with organising the deportation of all the Jews in Hungary.

Eichmann makes a mysterious offer to one of the most politically involved members of the Jewish community, in which he gives him a chance to broker a deal with his contacts abroad – 1 million Jewish lives saved for the provision of certain goods. But at the same time, Eichmann continues to organise the deportations from Hungary to Auschwitz, where Höss is back in charge to oversee the murder of hundreds of thousands of people. He ensures that the ovens in Crematorium V are fully operational and

that five ditches are dug next to this gas chamber complex. Work is speeded up on the railway sidings into the camp.

Within ten weeks of the start of the deportations, 437,000 Hungarian Jews are sent to Auschwitz. About 75% of them are killed on arrival.

Whilst the scale of the killing grows, the Jewish envoy sent by Eichmann, Joel Brand, meets Jewish Agency representatives in Aleppo, Syria. He does not get the help he expects. News of the offer also reaches the Allies, but it is dismissed as blackmail. The Allies, who by now know in detail just what is happening at Auschwitz – even the location of the crematoria and gas chambers – reject requests to bomb the camp.

Until now, Gypsy families have been kept separate from the other inmates at Birkenau in a special family camp. Orders are given to liquidate it. Because they know what fate awaits them, the Gypsies struggle with the SS to avoid being killed, but without success.

The Sonderkommando, who work in the gas chamber complexes, are aware that they will also be killed one day to protect the secret of their grim task – the processing of the bodies of those killed in the gas chambers. In October 1944, in Crematoria II and IV, they revolt but are crushed by the SS guards.

Meanwhile, the Red Army east of Auschwitz is drawing near and Himmler is busy trying to negotiate a deal with the Western Allies. In December 1944 and January 1945, the gas chambers in Auschwitz-Birkenau are dismantled to cover the Nazis’ tracks.

Those prisoners who are well enough to walk are forced on a march in sub-zero temperatures back towards Germany, while Nazis like Höss and Mengele prepare to go into hiding. Retribution is close at hand.

**Frenzied Killing** includes testimony from a witness to the liquidation of the Gypsy family camp, members of the Sonderkommando who worked in the gas chamber complexes and a Hungarian Jew who survived the ‘Final Solution’ by accepting a place on Eichmann’s ‘goodwill gesture’ to the Allies – a train of Jews supposedly bound for neutral Switzerland.

## PROGRAMME SIX LIBERATION AND REVENGE

**“Question: You were part of the largest killing factory in history; don’t you think you should have stood trial?”**

**Answer: No. You [are wrong to] assume that just being a member of a large group of people who lived in a garrison where Jews were killed is enough to make them criminals.”**

*Oskar Gröning, SS garrison, Auschwitz*

On 27 January 1945 Red Army soldiers liberate the concentration camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau. They are not warned about its existence in advance, so when they enter it, they are utterly shocked by the walking skeletons, the remains of the gas chambers and the piles of human hair. But it is not only Auschwitz-Birkenau that horrifies the world. A few months later other concentration camps are liberated – among them Bergen-Belsen, where thousands of unburied bodies are strewn over the ground. The British are horrified and unprepared for how to deal with the situation – 14,000 prisoners die in the first five days following their liberation; another 14,000 succumb in the following weeks.

Tragically, life for many liberated prisoners continues to be appalling. Women are raped by the advancing Soviet soldiers. When Jewish survivors return to their homes in countries such as Slovakia or Poland, they find that their property has been confiscated and they are told by their neighbours to return to where they came from. Some face pogroms in their home cities. Others decide to leave for Palestine, but many are stopped on their way by British patrols and placed in British camps in Cyprus.

Whilst Hitler and Himmler commit suicide, frustratingly large numbers of perpetrators manage to remain hidden.

Ex-Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Höss is captured by the British but they do not recognise him. He is subsequently freed and finds work on a farm in northern Germany. Adolf Eichmann becomes a lumberjack in the same region, while Josef Mengele works as a farmhand in Bavaria where he writes self-pitying poems about his long and hard-working days.

Groups of avengers are created by Jews who wish to take revenge into their own hands. In the chaos of post-war Europe, they track down Nazis and murder some of them. Höss is hunted down by the British, tried in Poland and eventually hanged at Auschwitz. Eichmann and Mengele escape to Argentina. In May 1960 Eichmann is finally captured by the Israelis, brought to trial and executed a year later. Mengele successfully evades capture and dies of natural causes in 1979.

Overall only a small percentage of the SS men from Auschwitz are ever put on trial. The problem is that they can only be convicted if there is sufficient evidence of personal involvement in the crimes committed in the camp. Many of the perpetrators have never confronted their role in the ‘Final Solution’. In contrast, those they persecuted are unable ever to forget.

*Liberation and Revenge* hears from a member of the SS garrison at Auschwitz who, towards the end of his life, decides to confront the Holocaust deniers. The programme also follows individual stories of former prisoners who did not find peace after returning home, as well as the story of a Jewish avenger who admits to the murder of several Nazis and gives a first-hand description of Adolf Eichmann’s capture.



## ONLINE

### **bbc.co.uk/history**

**Nazi Genocide and Mass Murder in WW2** will go live within the World War Two section of **bbc.co.uk/history** towards the end of 2004.

The site will include a three-dimensional interactive timeline charting the development of Nazi racial policy – from the first racial laws in 1933 to the end of the killing in 1945 – and highlighting events as they happened to the people who lived through them. Visitors can trace the development of the camp through an animated map of Auschwitz-Birkenau and there will be access to detailed analysis from leading historians in a series of features. There are also plans for historians and programme-makers to host message boards during the run of **Auschwitz: The Nazis & the 'Final Solution'** next year.

**Nazi Genocide and Mass Murder in WW2** will also be accessible as a subsection of *Wars and Conflicts* under the heading **Genocide and Mass Murder**. The content is intended as a lasting contribution to the BBC's history website.

### **bbc.co.uk/ww2**

The *WW2 People's War* website aims to capture and preserve for future generations the personal and family stories of the people who lived and fought during World War Two. Visitors to the site can browse several thousand stories online, add their own or their family's memories or photos of the war and join in related discussions and forums.

The 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau will be marked on the site and developed during the run of the series. The call to action will focus on the British experience, such as soldiers who liberated Bergen-Belsen, camp survivors, nurses who went to Europe to treat survivors, and people who met refugees during and after the war. The site will also offer a series of lesson plans on the subject for teachers, focusing on the British experience and its contemporary relevance.

### **bbc.co.uk/cbbc**

In the week of Holocaust Memorial Day in January, the CBBC *Newsround* website will be featuring a Press Pack Report written by one of the group of students who went to Auschwitz with the Holocaust Educational Trust in October 2004. Jack will share his experience of the visit and how it affected him. The main CBBC website will also be covering the event with information on what the day is all about and offering advice to children on how to tackle racism today, with links to our exclusive Press Pack Report.

## HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

The UK Holocaust Memorial Day is a government initiative and was first held on 27 January 2001. It commemorates all the communities which suffered as a result of the Holocaust and Nazi persecution. Whilst its central focus remains the Holocaust, the day also provides an opportunity for reflection on more recent atrocities that raise similar issues, and has a different theme each year.

The fifth Holocaust Memorial Day will be on 27 January 2005, marking the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the former Nazi concentration and extermination camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau. Since 2001, Holocaust Memorial Day has been hosted by a different part of the UK; this year it is the turn of London. Hundreds of activities and events will take place across the whole country exploring the theme 'Survivors, Liberation and Rebuilding Lives'.

For further information on Holocaust Memorial Day, please visit [www.holocaustmemorialday.gov.uk](http://www.holocaustmemorialday.gov.uk)

## OTHER BBC PROGRAMMES

The following programmes are planned for broadcast on or around Holocaust Memorial Day. Exact transmission details will be available nearer the time.

### **Holocaust Memorial Event BBC Two**

Holocaust Memorial Day 2005 will see the biggest assembly to date of British-based survivors of the camps and ghettos of Nazi Europe. All known survivors will be invited to a ceremony in Westminster Hall, London, due to be attended by Her Majesty the Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh and major political leaders.

At the first Holocaust Memorial Day in 2001, survivors were addressed by big names from the world of theatre, film, television and music, including Emma Thompson, Sir Antony Sher, Sir Ian McKellen, Sir Bob Geldof and Sir Trevor MacDonald.

This year will see the world's first performance of *Annelies*, an original oratorio based on the diaries of Anne Frank performed by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. The event will also introduce Stephen Leas to a wider audience. Stephen is the cantor at Great Portland Street Synagogue, London, and will sing the memorial prayer. Unusually for a cantor, Stephen has also trained in secular music with the English National Opera.

### **Holocaust – A Music Memorial Film from Auschwitz BBC Two**

For many prisoners in Auschwitz, music played a unique and precious role. Several orchestras and bands were set up, made up entirely of inmates. Amidst all the horrors, music was a part of daily life: marches were played at the camp gates as labour gangs were led out to work each morning and musicians were called on at all times of the day and night to perform for the SS and Nazi officers.

Now, in a unique tribute to the millions who died in the Nazi genocide and for the first time in its history, the museum at Auschwitz-Birkenau has allowed a number of leading musicians from around the world to come to the camps and perform in a 90-minute film shot entirely on location. A sequence of carefully chosen music, all connected in some way with the Holocaust, will be interwoven with the powerful accounts of three survivors from the men's and women's orchestras.

The list of world-class musicians taking part in the film includes the acclaimed Russian violinist Maxim Vengerov, the American pianist Emanuel Ax, and a number of international singers, including sopranos Isabel Bayrakdarian and Kate Royal, mezzo-soprano Tove Dahlberg and bass-baritone Gerald Finlay. The Sinfonietta Krakowia and Camerata Silesia will be conducted by John Axelrod. The film includes music from the Jewish liturgy as well as works by Chopin, Górecki, Messiaen, Viktor Ullmann and Bach.

A new work for brass and shofars (a Hebrew instrument made from animal horns) by the sought-after Jewish-Argentinian composer Osvaldo Golijov has been specially commissioned for the film.

*Holocaust – A Music Memorial Film* is an international endeavour, with artists coming from as far afield as Poland, the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, the Czech Republic, Sweden and Russia. The film is a co-production between the BBC, TVP (Poland), CBC (Canada) and ZDF (Germany). It will be directed by the award-winning Jewish director James Kent, whose credits include *The Genius of Mozart* and numerous documentaries for the BBC, Channel 4 and HBO. The executive producer is Peter Maniura and the producer is Ben Weston.

### **Descendants of the Holocaust BBC One**

In 1939, Rene was just 12 years old when she was sent to the Lodz Ghetto and later to Auschwitz and Belsen. Her ten-year-old sister was killed in Treblinka and her mother died 12 days after Belsen was liberated. Rene has never discovered what happened to her father. She is the only member of her family to have survived.

Today, Rene, a sprightly 75 year old, lives in a comfortable home in the UK with her husband Charles, who was one of the British volunteers who liberated Belsen. They have been married for more than 50 years and her pride and joy are her five grandchildren, who she never thought she would live to see.

Like so many survivors, Rene has never been able to express fully the pain of her experiences or expunge the guilt of surviving when so many millions perished. "Statistics say I shouldn't be here. I survived so many selection processes under the Nazis that I can't believe I am still here today to tell my story," she says.

Rene's son, Martin, has never asked her about what happened to her during the war; it is something she has not talked about for 50 years. But Martin's own 13-year-old son Adrian is always asking his granny about her war-time experiences. Now, for the first time, Rene is about to reveal to Adrian what her life was really like when she was growing up in Poland, at the same age as he is now.

**Descendants of the Holocaust** joins Rene and her family on an emotional voyage of discovery as she passes on to her grandchildren the memory of what she went through in the hope that it will not all be forgotten. The documentary is a celebration of the continuation of her family, and of families like hers, against all the odds.

### **Songs of Praise BBC One**

This special edition of **Songs of Praise** to mark National Holocaust Memorial Day follows three sixth-form students on a journey to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Laura, Mark and Asha all have very personal reasons for wanting to visit the camp and learn more about the horrors that unfolded there.

Their visit has been organised by the Holocaust Educational Trust, which aims to raise awareness and understanding of the Holocaust and its relevance today.

Presented by Aled Jones, music comes from Libera and The Zemel Choir and includes 'Lead Kindly Light' and 'Abide with Me'.

### **Sunday Worship Radio 4**

**Sunday Worship** on 23 January 2005 comes from Beth Shalom in Newark, on the edge of Sherwood Forest. Beth Shalom – meaning House of Peace – is Britain's first dedicated Holocaust Memorial and Education Centre. Since 1995, the centre has provided a peaceful setting in which visitors can learn, remember and reflect. This ecumenical service will be led by the director of the centre, Dr Stephen D Smith, and includes contributions from member of the local Jewish and Christian communities.



## AUSCHWITZ – FACTS

- In all, 1.1 million people died during the four and a half years of Auschwitz's existence; 1 million of them were Jewish men, women and children.
- Other groups of people who died included Polish political prisoners, Soviet prisoners of war, Gypsy families, homosexuals, people with disabilities and prisoners of conscience or religious faith (including several hundred Jehovah's Witnesses).
- More people died in Auschwitz than the British and American losses of World War Two combined.
- About 60 million Reichmarks – equivalent to £125million today – was generated for the Nazi state by slave labour at Auschwitz.
- Nazis at Auschwitz offered some non-Jewish female prisoners the option of 'light work'. As the women soon discovered, 'light work' meant prostitution.
- To lull new arrivals at Treblinka death camp into believing they were only in transit, plants were placed on the railway station and at the entrance to the gas chambers. The train ramp was disguised to look like a regular railway station with signs, timetables and even a clock painted on the wall. A Star of David was placed above the entrance to the gas chamber and a sign was painted in Hebrew on a purple curtain covering the entrance to the gas chamber that said "This is the Gateway to God. Righteous men will pass through".
- A unit in Auschwitz where valuables snatched from incoming prisoners were kept was known as Canada, because Canada was thought to be a land of untold riches.
- Auschwitz guards had their own athletics team. The camp was like a small town, with its own staff canteen, cinema, theatre and grocery store.
- There were 170 female SS staff at Auschwitz, of whom the most infamous was Irma Grese, the 20-year-old daughter of a dairyman.
- Josef Mengele's scientific experiments at Auschwitz often involved studies of twins. If one twin died, he would immediately kill the other and carry out comparative autopsies.
- Denmark was the only Nazi-occupied country that managed to save 95% of its Jewish residents. Following a tip-off by a German diplomat, thousands of Jews were evacuated to neutral Sweden.
- Some Jewish prisoners secretly wrote eye-witness accounts of the atrocities of the gas chambers and hid them in bottles or metal containers buried in the ground. A number of these accounts were discovered after the war.
- Of a total of about 7,000 staff at Auschwitz, only 750 were ever punished. Many went on to build good careers, including one man who became head of human resources for a large German company.
- There are approximately 500 survivors of Nazi death camps or ghettos living in Britain today.

## AUSCHWITZ – A TIMELINE

### 1933

Dachau, the first Nazi concentration camp, is established near Munich.

### May 1940

Rudolf Höss arrives in the Polish town of Oświęcim to create a new concentration camp on the site of a deserted Polish army barracks.

### 14 June 1940

The first transport of Polish political prisoners arrives at Auschwitz.

### 22 June 1941

Germany invades the Soviet Union. Special Nazi killing squads, the Einsatzgruppen, operate behind the German army in Russia, inciting pogroms against the Jews and murdering “Jews in the service of the party or the state”.

### 28 July 1941

Five hundred and seventy-five sick and disabled inmates at Auschwitz are selected for gassing. There is nowhere to kill them without disturbance, so they are sent back to Germany to be murdered there.

### 14 August 1941

Himmler visits the headquarters of Einsatzgruppe B in Minsk and discovers that shooting women and children is causing some of his troops psychological damage. He contemplates other methods of killing Jews in the East.

### Autumn 1941

The first gassing experiments take place using Zyklon B, a powerful disinfectant, in order to exterminate supposed Soviet ‘commissars’ as well as those at the camp who are considered to be unfit for work.

### October–November 1941

Plans of the new camp extension at Birkenau are altered to exclude basic living space. Ten thousand Soviet prisoners of war arrive to build the extension.

### November 1941

The first German Jews are deported to eastern Europe. Belzec, a small experimental gas camp, is used as a place to kill ‘unproductive’ Jews.

### 20 January 1942

Senior Nazis meet at the Wannsee conference to co-ordinate the ‘Final Solution of the Jewish Question’ and to agree a definition of ‘Jew’.

### Spring 1942

The first large-scale gassing of Silesian Jews in Auschwitz-Birkenau takes place.

### 20 June 1942

Prisoner Kazimierz Piechowski escapes from Auschwitz with three other prisoners, dressed as SS men.

### 2 July 1942

In France, the Vichy Government agrees that gendarmes will co-operate in rounding up foreign Jews throughout France, provided Jews with French citizenship are allowed to remain.

### 19 July 1942

Himmler orders the General Government (eastern Poland) to be ‘cleansed’ of Jews by the end of the year.

### Summer 1942

The hot summer has rotted thousands of corpses. Höss visits Chelmno to inspect machinery for incinerating bodies.

### March 1943

The new crematoria are put into operation at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

### May 1943

Dr Josef Mengele joins Auschwitz as camp physician and begins to carry out experiments on inmates.

### October 1943

The heads of the Danish churches publish a strong protest against Nazi treatment of Jews. Danish social and economic organisations and King Christian X also object strongly, and universities close for a week in protest.

**Autumn 1943**

The war is not going well for Nazi Germany and some other countries, such as Bulgaria and Romania, resist handing over their Jews.

**14 October 1943**

Half of the 600 Jews in Sobibor concentration camp manage to escape on one day. Fifty of them evade capture and survive the war.

**17 March 1944**

Hitler orders the occupation of Hungary, fearing that the Hungarians might be thinking of changing sides. Jewish deportations begin under Adolf Eichmann.

**31 May 1944**

A meeting of the British War Cabinet Committee on the Reception and Accommodation of Refugees discusses Eichmann's 'goods for blood' offer of swapping Jewish prisoners for money. The committee recommends that the Cabinet rejects his offer.

**24 June 1944**

The most detailed news yet about the mass gassings of Jews reaches the US War Department. It is based on reports from a number of escaped prisoners.

**30 June 1944**

A train takes 1,684 to freedom, brokered directly between Eichmann and Jewish organisers. The Nazis charge \$1,000 per head for the places. The train eventually makes it to Switzerland and freedom.

**2 August 1944**

The Gypsy camp at Auschwitz is liquidated.

**7 October 1944**

The Sonderkommando in Crematorium IV of Auschwitz instigates a revolt, and is later joined by those from Crematorium II. They are brutally put down by the SS.

**27 January 1945**

The Red Army liberates Auschwitz-Birkenau and its remaining 7,000 prisoners.

**12 March 1945**

Himmler signs an agreement not to pass on Hitler's order to destroy all concentration camps and kill all prisoners. In early April, against Hitler's express wishes, he permits the Allies to take Bergen.

## BIOGRAPHIES

**Laurence Rees (producer and writer of the Auschwitz series and BBC book)**

Laurence Rees is currently Creative Director of BBC History, and is perhaps best known for writing and producing *The Nazis: A Warning from History* which won him many awards including a BAFTA, an International Documentary Association Award and a Broadcasting Press Guild Award. He went on to write and produce two other acclaimed series on World War Two, *War of the Century* about the Hitler/Stalin war and *Horror in the East* about the war against Japan.

In 1994, Laurence launched the BBC's historical biography strand *Reputations*. He was also editor of *Timewatch* for a number of years and under his editorship the strand won three Emmy Awards in three years.

Laurence's commitment to furthering innovation and accessibility in history film-making is immense. He recently conceived and executive produced *Pyramid* and *Colosseum*. These 60-minute dramas with state-of-the-art computer special effects transmitted on BBC One to large audiences. *Pyramid* became the most watched history programme ever made by the BBC. In 2005 he will receive an honorary doctorate from the University of Sheffield for his contribution to history and television.

Laurence has written five books: a novel, *Electric Beach* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1990), *Selling Politics* (BBC Books 1992), *The Nazis: A Warning from History* (BBC Books 1997), *War of the Century* (BBC Books 1999) and *Horror in the East* (BBC Books 2001).

**Professor Sir Ian Kershaw (series historical and script consultant)**

Sir Ian Kershaw is widely regarded as one of the world's leading experts on Hitler and the Third Reich. He is a fellow of the British Academy and the Royal Historical Society, and was knighted earlier this year for services to history.

Sir Ian is best known for his hugely important and influential work on Hitler. His published work includes *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (fourth edition, Hodder Arnold 2000), *The Hitler Myth: Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford Paperbacks in both English, in 1987, and German) and *Hitler: Profiles in Power* (Longman, revised edition, 2001). But most famous is probably his two-part biography of Hitler that was published in 1998 and 2000 under the titles *Hubris* and *Nemesis* (Penguin Books 2001).

Sir Ian has been a leading figure in overturning much of the traditional thinking about Hitler and the Third Reich, concentrating on the people around Hitler, the atmosphere in Germany and the social climate that made possible Hitler's rise to power and its terrible consequences.

Sir Ian was a consultant both on the BAFTA Award-winning *The Nazis: A Warning from History* (1997) and on the acclaimed *War of the Century* (1999) about the war between Hitler and Stalin.

**Professor David Cesarani (series consultant)**

David Cesarani is Professor of Twentieth-Century Jewish History and Culture at Royal Holloway College, London University, a leading British expert on Jewish history.

He held the prestigious position of Director of the Institute of Contemporary History and Wiener Library between 1989 and 2000. The Wiener Library, established in 1933, is the world's oldest institution for the study of Nazi Germany and, later, the fate of German Jewry, the Holocaust and its aftermath.

David has been involved actively in the prosecution of war criminals, and was a consultant between 1987 and 1991 to the All-Party Parliamentary War Crimes Group, and Principal Researcher of its *Report on the Entry of Nazi War Criminals and Collaborators in the UK 1945–1950*. His research on this culminated in the important and acclaimed book, *Justice Delayed: How Britain Became a Refuge for Nazi War Criminals* (Mandarin 1992; updated and republished in 2000). His work on Nazi war crimes led him to write and edit books on many aspects of the Holocaust. His most recent work is the acclaimed *Eichmann: His Life and Crimes* (William Heinemann 2004).



