

LIBERATION OF CONCENTRATION CAMPS

LIBERATION

Soviet soldiers were the first to liberate concentration camp prisoners in the final stages of World War II. They entered the Majdanek camp in Poland on July 23, 1944 and later overran several other killing centers.

They entered Auschwitz on January 27, 1945, where they found hundreds of sick and exhausted prisoners. The Germans were forced to leave these prisoners behind in their hasty retreat from the camp.

The victims' clothing was also left behind including: 384,820 men's suits, 836,255 women's coats, and tens of thousands of pairs of shoes.



FINDINGS

Prisoners of the camps were freed by the British, Canadian, American and French troops. Americans were responsible for liberating Buchenwald and Dachau, while British forces entered Bergen-Belsen. Even though Germans attempted to empty the camps of surviving prisoners and hide all evidence of their crimes, Allied soldiers came upon thousands of dead bodies stacked upon each other. Prisoners who were still alive were living skeletons.

DEATHS AFTER LIBERATION

Allied troops, physicians, and relief workers attempted to provide nourishment for surviving prisoners, but many of them were too weak to digest food and could not be saved. In spite of the liberators' efforts, many camp survivors died. Half of the prisoners discovered alive in Auschwitz died within a few days of being freed.

SURVIVORS

Survivors had mixed reactions to their newfound freedom. Some looked forward to reuniting with family members, but others felt guilty for surviving when so many relatives and friends had died. Some felt completely overwhelmed with this new "freedom." They were forced to rebuild their lives taken from them by the Nazis.



Liberation of Concentration Camps

Key Date	Event
July 23, 1944	Soviet forces were the first to approach a major Nazi camp, reaching the Majdanek camp near Lublin, Poland. Germans were surprised by the rapid Soviet advance and attempted to demolish the camp in effort to hide the evidence of mass murder. The camp staff set fire to the large crematorium, but left gas chambers standing due to their quick departure. Soviets later liberated Auschwitz (Jan. 1945), Gross-Rosen (Feb. 1945), Sachsenhausen (April 1945), Ravensbrueck (April 1945), and Stutfhof (May 1945).
April 11, 1945	American forces liberated the Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar, Germany, a few days after Nazis began evacuating the camp. On the day of liberation, an underground prisoner resistance organization seized control of the camp to prevent atrocities by retreating camp guards. American forces liberated more than 20,000 prisoners. American forces also liberated the main camps of Dora-Mittelbau (April 1945), Flossenbuerg (April 1945), Dachau (April 1945), and Mauthausen (May 1945).
April 15, 1945	British forces entered the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp near Celle, Germany. There were around 60,000 prisoners still alive at the camp, most in critical condition due to a typhus epidemic. More than 10,000 of them died of malnutrition or disease within a few weeks of liberation. British forces also liberated other camps in northern Germany, including Neuengamme (April 1945).



© Hulton-Deutsch Collection/CORBIS

Liberation!



©Teaching to the Middle

Name _____

LIBERATION OF CONCENTRATION CAMPS

MULTIPLE CHOICE: Choose the best answer.

1. Which of the following best completes the analogy below?
Bergen Belsen : British :: Auschwitz : _____
A. Canadian B. American C. French D. Soviet
2. Why did thousands of prisoners die after liberation?
A. German soldiers killed them B. They died of disease or malnutrition
C. They were killed while traveling back home D. Many committed suicide
3. Which of the following events occurred first?
A. American forces liberated the Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar.
B. British forces entered the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp near Celle, Germany.
C. The camp staff set fire to the large crematorium at Mejdaneck, but left the gas chambers standing due to their quick departure.
D. The British forces also liberated camps in northern Germany, including Neuengamme.
4. "On the day of liberation, an underground prisoner resistance organization seized control of the camp to prevent atrocities by retreating camp guards."
What is the best meaning of atrocities in the previous quote?
A. Wicked or cruel acts B. Strong and powerful men
C. Supportive and helpful D. Interesting and exciting
5. What was the author trying to emphasize by including exact numbers of how much clothing was left behind at Auschwitz?
A. How quickly the Nazis left the camp B. How many people were left behind.
C. The number of people who were killed D. Prisoners were worn at camps
6. *Some felt completely overwhelmed with this new "freedom."* What is the most likely reason the author placed freedom in quotes?
A. They were in captivity so long. B. They were still under Nazi control.
C. They were now under Allied control. D. They were robbed of their freedom.
7. Why did camp staff at Mejdaneck leave the gas chambers standing?
A. They wanted the Allies to find evidence of the murders.
B. They wanted the Jews to remember how they were treated.
C. They left quickly before the Allies arrived to the camp.
D. They were unable to destroy them.
8. Why were most survivors at Bergen-Belsen in critical condition when the British forces entered?
A. The Nazis had starved them B. The Nazis had left the camp
C. There were experiments performed on them D. There was a typhus epidemic
9. Which of the following was NOT typically found by Allied soldiers liberating concentration camps?
A. Dead bodies stacked together B. Healthy prisoners
C. Malnourished prisoners D. Burned buildings