

REVIEW ARTICLE

Lessons from Dachau

DACHAU: 1933-45, THE OFFICIAL HISTORY by Paul Berben. London: The Norfolk Press, 1975, Hardcover, 300 pages, ISBN 0-85211-009-X.

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Sometimes important "revisionist" works are produced, not by the Revisionists, but by believers in Exterminationist theory. A case in point is Arno Mayer's *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?*, which downplays Auschwitz as a center of gassings and admits that most deaths in the camps, including the so-called "death camps," were the result of "natural" causes and not from gassings or executions. Another book that, remarkably, helps the Revisionist case is Paul Berben's *Dachau: 1933-45, The Official History*. *Dachau* begins by positing that Dachau was an "extermination camp," then implicitly demolishes its own thesis.

Berben's *Dachau* was first published in 1968 in Belgium, then republished by the Norfolk Press in 1975 "on behalf and under the auspices of the Comité International de Dachau." The C.I.D. "represents the tens of thousands of deportees who were exterminated in the death camp and also those who survived." (p. xiv) It is incontestably an official history: the 1975 edition, which is reviewed in this article, contains the statement that it was "published for sale only at the Dachau Camp Memorial Site."

The book subscribes to what might be termed the ecumenical version of the Holocaust, according to which not merely six million Jews but millions of others—Communists, Slavs, gypsies et al. were deliberately annihilated by the Germans. The preface, written by C.I.D. leader Major General Dr. A.M. Guerisse, G.C., D.S.O. (alias Lt. Cdr. Pat O'Leary, R.N.), claims that "Many millions of people suffered the horrors of the concentration camps; millions were exterminated in them. Their crime had been to fight for

freedom, for human rights, for the respect due to each and every individual."

Dachau begins, however, by casting some doubt on its claim that the concentration camp's inmates were champions of freedom and human rights. The author makes it quite clear that many of *Dachau's* inmates had been sent there because they were common criminals. Nor were they a small group. According to Berben:

The third *main* category of prisoners was the "criminals." The S.S. distinguished between two groups in their statistical summaries: the P.S.V. and the B.V.; but both wore the same badges. The P.S.V. (*Polizeisicherungsverwahrte*) were criminals who had served their prison terms, in some case many years since, but they were considered to be dangerous and were held

Chart 1:

Number of Prisoners Who Died at Dachau and in
Outside Kommandos, 1940-5

	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945
January	---	455	142	205	53	2,888
February	17	393	104	221	101	3,977
March	86	321	66	139	362	3,668
April	101	227	79	112	144	2,625
May	87	322	98	83	84	2,226
June	54	219	84	55	78	
July	34	140	173	51	107	
August	119	104	454	40	225	
September	134	73	319	45	325	
October	171	88	207	57	403	
November	273	110	380	43	997	
December	<u>439</u>	<u>124</u>	<u>364</u>	<u>49</u>	<u>1,915</u>	
	1,515	2,576	2,470	1,100	4,794	15,384

NOTE: This, chart reprinted from page 281 of Berben's "*Dachau*," illustrates some interesting facts. Note that the death rate in *Dachau* fell slightly in 1942. In 1943 the death rate fell almost 50 per cent. In 1943 the death rate was at an all-time low, yet according to Exterminationist theory the "final solution" should have been in full swing. In 1944, with the reappearance of typhus in the camp, deaths rose dramatically. Note that 66 per cent of all deaths at *Dachau* took place in the last 7 months. It should also be noted that in the winter months of 1942-43 another typhus outbreak hit the camp. There is also an unusually high number of deaths for March, 1944, due to Allied bombings of Kommandos which resulted in the deaths of 223 prisoners. (See p. 95).

in the concentration camp as a preventive measure (*vorbeugend*) . . . The second group, the B.V. (*Befristete Vorbeugungshaft*; often wrongly called *Berufsverbrecher*, professional criminal), was composed of men who were not released on the completion of their prison sentences but sent straight to the camp. (pp. 13-14)

It seems very unlikely that many men in this group (even after thousands had been transferred for various reasons out of Dachau, there were still 759 criminals in the camp on April 26, 1945) were there because they were fighters for human rights.

It also seems unlikely that many of the political prisoners, especially the Communists, were advocates of individual rights. In light of the atrocities committed by Communists throughout Europe and Asia from 1917 to 1945, and beyond, it is certainly naïve at best, and a lie at worst, to paint these people as freedom fighters. Yet most of the prisoners in the camp were political prisoners, of whom a large percentage were Communists or Communist sympathizers. A camp census taken on April 26, 1945 showed that 43,401 prisoners were there for political reasons. In contrast, the number of Jews in the camp was 22, 100; 128 prisoners had been purged from the Wehrmacht; 110 were incarcerated for being homosexual; 85 were Jehovah's Witnesses; and 1,066 were classed as "anti-socials." (p. 221)

What of "the tens of thousands of deportees who were exterminated in the death camp," according to the author's claims? In the first place, Berben, while alleging that there was a homicidal gas chamber at Auschwitz, states at the outset that "the Dachau gas-chamber was never used." (p. 8) Like virtually all Exterminationist writers who claim that the Dachau "gas chamber" was never completed, or completed but never used, Berben neither offers believable evidence that there actually was such an installation at Dachau, nor explains why numerous Dachau inmates swore that thousands had been gassed in it.

Dachau does, nonetheless, offer a precise figure for deaths during the war years at Dachau. According to a chart (p. 281), the number of deaths at the main Dachau camp and its smaller outstations totalled 27,839 for the years from 1940 through 1945 (again, the claim that some 238,000 inmates perished at Dachau, once exhibited on a sign at the entrance to the camp, is passed over by Berben in silence).

An analysis of this figure affords some interesting insights. Of the 27,839, 2,226 are said to have died in May 1945, after the Americans liberated the camp. In other words, fully eight per cent of the wartime deaths at Dachau took place in a month that the camp was in the hands of Allied forces.

If one were disposed to citing such figures without regard to their context (i.e., disregarding the reason for the deaths), a damaging case against the American occupiers could be made. According to the figures Berben provides, during the 65 months from January 1940 to May 1945 27,839 prisoners died from all causes, working out to an average of 428 per month (see Chart 1). During the first month of Allied control of Dachau, therefore, the death rate was 400 per cent higher than average.

Doubtless someone who felt compelled to defend the American "liberators" of Dachau would quickly establish, and argue, that the cause of death was not an American extermination program, but the continuation of the contagion which had racked Dachau in the months before the camp's capture at the end of April 1945. Exactly! Dachau fell prey to a devastating epidemic (of chiefly typhus) from the end of 1944. From November of that year through May 1945, 18,296 inmates died, 66 per cent of the deaths during the war years. If one includes the deaths which took place from November 1943 to March 1944 (another epidemic), the number of the victims rises to 19,605, or 70 per cent of the wartime victims.

If the figures in the official history are correct, and deaths during epidemics taken into account, we are left with 8,234 possible victims of extermination. But Berben makes it quite clear that sickness and disease was a constant problem, and that many people died year in, year out of such natural causes. He also points out that numerous individuals committed suicide, that some prisoners believed to be working for the Nazis were murdered by fellow prisoners, and that some were killed in Allied bombings. Bergen notes that in March 1944 one Allied bombing of a factory where prisoners worked killed 223 prisoners. In another case a tunnel collapsed in a factory, killing 22 prisoners. An Allied bombing at the same site later killed an additional 6. These two incidents alone account for another 251 deaths in the camp, almost one percent of the total deaths. Bergen also claims that some executions took place, mostly by firing squad. But these executions only

account for a very small percentage of the deaths in the camp, about .0087 per cent. (p. 271)

Berben also notes that Himmler wanted to lower the death rate in the camps as much as possible, which seems odd if the extermination of prisoners was the goal.

The death-rate in the camps forced the S.S. to take notice. With the help of copious statistics they watched its progress, not to save human lives, but to economize on man-power. On 30th September 1943 Pohl informed Himmler that the number of deaths in August was 40 out of an average work force of 17,300, that is 0.23 per cent, whereas the previous month the percentage had been 0.32 per cent. They had achieved a reduction of 0.09. Results were obtained from other camps too. Out of a total strength estimated at 224,000 in August, there had been 4,699 deaths, that is 2.09 per cent, compared with 2.23 per cent in July: the improvement was therefore 0.14 per cent. Himmler congratulated Pohl on the results he had obtained even though they were difficult to check! (p. 94-95)

What one finds in this official history of Dachau is not confirmation of Exterminationist theory but a repudiation of it. It is quickly evident that a very high percentage of the total deaths can be accounted for in terms other than an "extermination." While we don't know how many of the remaining non-epidemic deaths fell into "natural" categories, we can rationally assume that many of them were caused by disease, accidents, suicides, and natural causes. The last category is important because Dachau housed quite a few older prisoners. "Statistics made by the camp administration on 16th February 1945 list 2,309 men and 44 women aged between 50 and 60 and 5,465 men and 12 women over 60." (p. 11) This admission is rather significant, since, according to general Exterminationist theory, older prisoners often were not even admitted to the camps, but were separated from the other prisoners immediately upon arrival, then gassed. At a camp which its official survivors' committee calls a "death camp," however, we find 2,910 prisoners of advancing years who had evidently not been exterminated.

Extermination theory, either that focussing on the Jews or the broader version, has long told us that, like the elderly, children were singled out for death immediately, because they were incapable of working. Dachau, however, also housed an unstated number of children. Berben states that a group of prisoners formed an unofficial governing body, called the

International Committee, and that this group started a school in the camp for the children.

As has already been mentioned, there were times when even children were imprisoned in Dachau. The International Committee saw to it that they were not abandoned. A school was organized for Russian children under a Yugoslavian teacher, and the older ones were placed in Kommandos [subsidiary work camps of Dachau] where they were looked after by prisoners who tried not only to keep them in good health but to teach them the rudiments of a trade as well. (p. 175)

While the older children were old enough to work, it is unlikely that the younger children in the school were doing so. Thus, according to Exterminationist theory, they too should have been immediately killed.

An important component of the extermination theory is the notion that prisoners not killed immediately were subject to "extermination through work," in which brutal on-the-job drudgery and miserable living conditions made the life in the camps nasty and short. Under a regime intent on the death of all Jews and other "undesirables" we would expect very little food, medical care, and other necessities to be available to the prisoners. There would certainly be no orders to lower the death rate, just as there would be no elderly or sick prisoners sitting around. Those capable of working would work; the others would have been put to death, the sooner the better. But, as described in this official history, at Dachau the Germans were intent on keeping the prisoners alive, even the sick and the elderly.

Living conditions at Dachau, as described by Berben, offer hard evidence to counter the Exterminationist theory. Berben sketches the history of the camp from its opening on March 23, 1933. His first real reference as to living conditions concerns the kitchen at the camp.

The cleanliness of the cook-house caused visitors from the Nazi Party, from Junker schools [training schools for future high-ranking officers] and the Army to remark that the treatment given to men classified as the "dregs of humanity" was much too good. (p. 4)

Living conditions in the camp didn't suddenly worsen as a result of a decision to exterminate. For most of the camp's history conditions were fairly good, considering that it served

as a type of prison. Berben quotes Wolfgang Jasper, legation counselor and member since 1935 of an S.S. cavalry unit:

We found the camp [in 1937] and the huts in faultless condition and perfectly clean. The prisoners made a very good impression on us and did not seem to be at all hungry. They were allowed to receive letters and parcels and had a canteen where they could buy things. There were also cultural activities available. (p. 43)

The food situation should be investigated. While Berben constantly speaks of the lack of food, his own book contradicts his claims. Regular meals, though Berben always claims that they were inadequate, were of course provided by the kitchens. Other sources of food existed as well, and they seem to have been rather numerous. Berben notes that the camp officials actually increased the number of meals for some work groups during the war:

When manpower needs became pressing during the war supplementary food was sanctioned to increase output. Certain categories of workers were given a much-appreciated "second breakfast," called *Brotzeit*, consisting of an eighth or tenth part of a loaf and 2 ounces of sausage. (p. 69)

It is little known that there was a canteen in the camp from which prisoners could purchase food. As Berben notes, "Money brought on arrival and any that was subsequently sent to a prisoner was credited to him . . ." (p. 60) In 1942 a system of "gift coupons" was instituted and the possession of money forbidden, because it was believed that money in the hands of prisoners would make it easier for them to escape. "The money in their account had to be used for the purchase of articles obtainable at the canteen." (p. 60) Berben lists some of the items available for purchase:

Beetroot jam, oatmeal, sauerkraut, dried vegetables, tinned mussels and fish, cucumbers, condiments, etc. were on sale . . . The canteen also stocked articles such as needles and thread, and particularly lotions, creams and perfume: the close-cropped prisoner was invited to buy something to put on his hair! (p. 69)

The S.S. is condemned because it "made considerable profits" from the canteen. But even if prices were extremely high, "considerable profits" could not have been made without considerable sales. According to Berben, "A large selection of goods could be bought before the war, but the canteen

gradually lost its importance, and little by little reached a state when it could offer nothing." (p. 69)

How goods disappeared from the shelves of the canteen seems irrelevant but is actually quite important. Had the National Socialist regime decided to exterminate prisoners, it would doubtless have closed down the canteen and simply confiscated the money the prisoners had in their accounts. But the canteen didn't suddenly close. Instead it "gradually lost its importance" and goods disappeared from the shelves "little by little." But goods disappeared from the shelves in stores all over Germany "little by little" as the war progressed. We may conclude that the prisoners in Dachau were experiencing shortages of goods, just like those the German people experienced.

In addition to regularly scheduled meals and the second breakfast, and what prisoners could purchase at the canteen, other food was available as well. "From the end of 1942, however, large consignments of food and other useful things did reach the camp . . ." Family and friends of prisoners were sending parcels of food into the camp. In addition to these parcels, "The consignments sent to the Red Cross also brought assistance whose beneficial efforts cannot be over-emphasized." Berben said that the Red Cross shipments alone consisted of "thousands" of parcels. Dachau served as the main camp for all prisoners who were clergy, about 2,700 prisoners. According to Berben:

Food parcels could be sent to clergy and the food situation improved noticeably. Germans and Poles particularly received them in considerable quantities from their families, their parishioners and members of religious communities. In Block 26 one hundred sometimes arrived on the same day. (p. 151)

The clergy continued to receive the "considerable quantities" of food until nearly the end of the war.

This period of relative plenty lasted till the end of 1944 when the disruption of communications stopped the dispatch of parcels. Nevertheless the German clergy continued to receive food through the Dean of Dachau, Herr Pfanzelt, to whom the correspondents sent food tickets: the priest brought bread and sausage with these and sent the parcels by the local post. (p. 151)

Thus Berben, while lamenting the lack of food, tells us that prisoners had regular meals, some had a second breakfast, that

"large consignments" were mailed to prisoners, that "thousands" of parcels arrived from the Red Cross, that food could be purchased at the canteen, that the clergy received "considerable quantities" from parishioners and that this "period of relative plenty lasted till the end of 1944." All of this came to an end, not because the Nazis decided to starve people, but because "the disruption of communications stopped the dispatch of parcels." Yet, in spite of these admissions that large quantities of food were available to the average prisoner, Berben says that "legitimate means of obtaining extras were available to only a limited number of privileged prisoners." (pp. 164-165)

Berben tells us at length how the National Socialist government continually expanded medical services throughout the war. He notes that when the camp was first built in 1933 very few medical services were available. But as the camp was expanded, a hospital was included:

... Blocks A and B: they consisted of an operating theatre with modern equipment. Visitors were invariably shown these buildings, because they proved "the interest taken by the S.S. in the prisoners' health." (p. 104) As the war progressed the demand for health services in the camp increased. In 1940 the hospital was extended to Blocks 1, 3 and 5. But it was mainly from 1942 onwards that increasing numbers caused the sick block to be extended: in September of that year it comprised 7 blocks, one of which had no wards and was reserved for offices, the pharmacy, the laboratory and the rooms occupied by the experimental departments. In the second half of 1944, the seven blocks were linked by a long closed corridor, and then the three blocks, 11 to 15, were added . . . (p. 104)

The hospital care given to prisoners is praised continually in Berben's official history.

The accommodation was complete and modern, and in normal conditions specialists could have treated all the diseases efficiently. Operations were performed in two well-equipped theatres. The laboratory was well appointed, and all the necessary analyses could be made there until, at the end of 1944, the service was overwhelmed. There was an electrocardiograph and the very latest model of a Siemens X-ray apparatus. (p. 104)

The author states that the increase in hospital service was beneficial to the prisoners.

The effect of these changes on the prisoners' situation was beneficial. Generally speaking, there was good understanding between the doctors and prisoner-nurses, and their co-operation achieved good results. Thanks to the doctors' initiative, backed up by the nurses and with the help of workmen, a special hut was built between Blocks 11 and 13 for the tuberculosis patients to take open-air cures. Sputum was examined in the laboratory and most of those prisoners in whom it was found to give a positive reaction were hospitalized and treated by rest and fresh-air cures and given extra rations. (p. 106)

Dachau: The Official History makes clear that the camp officials attempted to keep disease to a minimum. They attempted to enforce certain hygiene standards, which of course became increasingly difficult as the war progressed. Berben writes:

It is obvious that in a camp where thousands of men live in a far too confined area and in deplorable conditions very strict hygiene was vital. In the early years, when numbers were still relatively low and arrivals were in small groups, adequate precautions could be taken. "The newcomers went to the showers, were cropped, given clothes and underwear, wretched, it is true, but laundered." The rooms were not overcrowded. The orders concerning the upkeep of the premises, clothing and bodily cleanliness were irksome and prompted the bullying of prisoners, but all in all they were useful because the vast majority of the prisoners realized that if they were to stand any chance of survival they would have to conform to strict rules. They knew that they could of course expect nothing from the camp authorities; when hygienic precautions were laid down, it was merely to protect the S.S. staff and to have the maximum labour force. (p. 109)

Even a cursory read of *Dachau: The Official History* shows that conditions were fairly decent and only fell apart near the end of the war, when all of Germany was in chaos.

Besides admitting that large amounts of food and generally good medical care were available, Berben provides interesting information as to recreational activities for Dachau inmates. According to this official historian, the prisoners had Sundays off for leisure and culture. He tells us that on Sunday afternoons the prisoners were allowed to play games, but that was stopped in 1938. In 1941, however "this permission was granted again, and there were cultural activities as well. On

Sundays a certain amount of freedom was allowed for amusements."

Theatrical entertainments, concerts, revues and lectures were arranged too. Among the thousands of men who lived in the camp there were all sorts of talents, great and small, to be found: famous musicians, good amateur musicians, theatre and music-hall artists. Many of these men devoted their time in the most admirable way to gain a few moments of escape for their comrades in misery, and to keep up their morale. And these activities helped too to create a feeling of fellowship. During the last months there were also a few film shows, about once a fortnight. (page 72)

In addition to these forms of entertainment, "The camp had a library which started in a modest way but which eventually stocked some fifteen thousand volumes . . . There was a very varied choice, from popular novels to the great classics, and scientific and philosophical works." (p. 72) Berben also notes that "some men in spite of their miserable convicts' existence nevertheless found the energy to take an interest in the arts, in science and in philosophical problems." (p. 73) And if the library was insufficient to meet the reading needs of the prisoner, "A prisoner could subscribe to newspapers and various publications . . ." (p. 75) Newspaper subscriptions were allowed right up until the very end of the war. (p. 180)

An interesting feature of Dachau, regarding prisoner recreation, was the brothel established for the prisoners.

During the summer of 1943 [note that the exterminations are alleged to have been going full-steam at this time] Himmler ordered the setting-up of brothels in concentration camps, called *Sonderbau* (special building). His aim was to solve the sexual problem, combat homosexual practices, and increase the workers' output . . . In mid-December 1944 there were thirteen of these women in Dachau. (p.7)

Somehow, the vision of a brothel for prisoners doesn't fit in with a policy of exterminating all prisoners.

The treatment of the clergy warrants some special attention. Under general German policy most clergymen who came under arrest were transferred to Dachau, the total number reaching 2,720. According to Berben:

On 15th March 1941 the clergy were withdrawn from work Kommandos on orders from Berlin, and their conditions improved. They were supplied with bedding of the kind issued

to the S.S., and Russian and Polish prisoners were assigned to look after their quarters. They could get up an hour later than the other prisoners and rest on their beds for two hours in the morning and afternoon. Free from work, they could give themselves to study and to meditation. They were given newspapers and allowed to use the library. Their food was adequate; they sometimes received up to a third of a loaf of bread a day; there was even a period when they were given half a litre of cocoa in the morning and a third of a bottle of wine daily. (p. 147)

While work was not required from clergymen, some of them did volunteer as nurses in the hospital beginning in 1943. This proved fatal, since typhus was ravaging the camp at that time. Berben notes that "Several of them fell victim to their devotion, as this was the time when typhus was raging in the camp." (p. 151)

The clergy also persuaded the camp officials to build a chapel for religious services. Prior to this, services were held in the camp's prisoner barracks. "The patient work by clergy and lay people alike had in the end achieved a miracle. The chapel was 20 metres long by 9 wide and could hold about 800 people, but often more than a thousand crowded in." (p. 153) Services were held all day long on Sundays, with one service immediately following another. (p. 154) In the last days in the camp the chapel became somewhat controversial. As prisoners from the camps near the front were evacuated to the interior, the camp became increasingly overcrowded. When health care broke down, typhus began to take an incredible toll. Relieving overcrowding was one way of helping stem the disease. Camp officials asked the clergy for permission to convert the chapel into housing in an attempt to improve living conditions. "... the suggestion was put to the clergy that they should give it [the chapel] up in order to combat the shortage of accommodation, which was becoming disastrous." (p. 154) The clergy were adamant that they would not surrender the chapel even to save lives. They argued that not all the buildings in the camp were being used to house prisoners and suggested that instead of the large chapel the smaller cobbler's shop and the brothel be converted into housing. They also argued that the chapel could only house 250, "which was nothing compared with the continuous intake of prisoners." The clergy had the final word. The camp

officials acceded to their wishes “and the chapel was retained to the last.” (p. 154)

While the day to day treatment of prisoners, as described by Berben, doesn't seem to fit a pattern of extermination, charges of medical experiments do raise legitimate concern. The camp was a center for medical experiments studying the effects of malaria, high altitudes and freezing. Abuses in experiments should rightfully be condemned in the strongest of terms. Much of Berben's case, however, rests on the testimony of one Walter Neff. Neff was a prisoner who worked as an assistant to Dr. Sigmund Rascher in the camp. According to Neff medical experiments were conducted on 180 to 200 prisoners. He testified that 10 prisoners were volunteers, and that most of the other prisoners, with the exception of about 40, had been condemned to death. During the course of the medical experiments, he said, 70 to 80 prisoners died. Berben does not make clear how many of these 70 to 80 prisoners had already been “condemned to death.”

Neff worked with Dr. Rascher from the beginning of 1941. He was released from camp custody as a prisoner, on the condition that he continue working with the doctor. Berben notes that Neff would regularly report to the camp for duty in uniform, and carried a pistol. In his testimony Neff claimed that he worked in the interest of the prisoners and tried to sabotage the work of the doctor. He also claimed that he helped in a “revolt” in the town of Dachau a few days before the American forces arrived. Berben notes that Neff's “role in his dealings with Rascher never seems to be very clear, nor the part he played in choosing the subjects for experiments.” (p. 127) Yet Neff is the source for much of the “evidence” of medical experiments at Dachau.

According to Berben:

The most terrible experiment at which Neff was present was one carried out on two Russian officers. They were taken from the Bunker and plunged naked into a tank [of freezing water] at about 4 p.m., and they held out for almost five hours. Rascher had leveled his revolver at Neff and a young Polish aide who tried to give the two wretches chloroform. Dr. Romberg considered the whole episode as described by Neff during the trial to be improbable; in his view, the subject of such experiments is stiff and incapable of making a movement or uttering a word after 10 or 20 minutes, whereas, according to

Neff, the two officers were still talking to one another during the third hour and bade each other farewell. (p. 133)

Neff had no opportunity to face the man he charged with these crimes. Rascher was arrested by the German police and himself imprisoned at Dachau. Berben and Neff both claim that Rascher was executed by the Germans at Dachau. Both point out that he was shot to death, and not gassed.

Accepting the medical experiments as fact does not impeach the case made by Revisionists. These experiments were quite limited in scope and included a very small fraction of the prisoners. Most of the prisoners chosen had been sentenced to death.

Berben lets on that German authorities were concerned with abuses by camp personnel. Commandant Alex Piorkowski, according to Berben, "rarely entered the prisoners' camp. He was not active, and left most things in the hands of his subordinates. They were given a free reign and could treat prisoners at they wished." (p. 48) But Piorkowski was removed from his position on September 1, 1942, and later expelled from the Nazi party. He was replaced by Martin Weiss, former commandant of the Neuengamme concentration camp. Berben notes that:

Some people emphasize that he [Weiss] introduced a number of humane changes in camp administration and that he took a personal interest in seeing that his orders were carried out. He forbade Kapos [prisoners in charge of the camp] and Seniors to strike other prisoners arbitrarily; he personally inspected reports of punishments; he decided the level of these sanctions and was present when they were administered so as to prevent abuses. According to "privileged" prisoners [clergy, high-ranking individuals, etc.] he often showed consideration and obtained a good deal of relief for them (p. 49).

Weiss left the camp to take control of the Lublin camp on November 1, 1943 and was replaced by Wilhelm Weiter. Things seemed to remain in the status quo under Weiter. Berben says, "Few changes were made in the camp due to any personal action of his." (p. 50)

Conditions under Weiss must have been fairly decent. According to Berben, "In spite of the great number of witnesses who spoke for him during the postwar Dachau trial, Weiss was condemned to death and executed." It would have been highly unlikely, particularly in the highly charged postwar atmosphere, for a "great number of witnesses" to have

defended Weiss if he had been a monster. It is also interesting to note that, after moving to Lublin, Weiss was promoted to the position of Inspector of Camps.

Under Weiter's command, conditions in the camp remained fairly decent. Many of the camps did suffer under unscrupulous officers: the National Socialist government convened a special commission to investigate camp conditions and the honesty of the officers who ran the camps. The commissions' findings led to some 200 convictions. Investigations of camp conditions were held at Dachau between May and July of 1944. Berben notes that Konrad Morgen, the judge who investigated the camp, "thoroughly examined all the internal arrangements. The hospital was in perfect order. He had visited all the buildings. There was no significant overcrowding, and what was specially noteworthy was the astonishingly high number of medical instruments for the treatment of the prisoners." (p.44)

If the prisoners, in general, were not being purposefully murdered by the Nazis and generally enjoyed tolerable food, medical care, and housing, then how did they die? The answer to that question is relatively easy to find and Berben is quite helpful. His official history of Dachau supports the Revisionist case that has been made since Rassinier, and decisively refutes ongoing attempts to make the scenes the Americans discovered at the camp the result of deliberate German policy.

As the German government, economy, and infrastructure collapsed during the last months of the war, badly needed supplies became unavailable. Berben regularly notes how food supplies and parcels almost disappeared toward the end of the war. For instance, he tells us that food shipments to the clergy "lasted till the end of 1944 when the disruption of communications stopped the dispatch of parcels." (p. 151) Medical service was "complete and modern, and in normal conditions specialists could have treated all the diseases efficiently" but "at the end of 1944, the service was overwhelmed." Bunk space was sufficient until the last few months of the war, when the huts became increasingly overcrowded. The key factor in the death rate for prisoners was the German breakdown.

As the Allies closed in on the center of Germany, large numbers of prisoners were evacuated from camps near the front and moved to the interior. Dachau, centrally located as

the Reich contracted, became a key camp in these transfers. Thus, while food and medical supplies became more difficult to obtain, the demand at Dachau increased as prisoners were transferred there from the other camps.

From the start of the evacuation tens of thousands of prisoners arrived at Dachau in a state of terrible exhaustion, and a vast number died before the liberation and in the weeks that followed. These massive arrivals caused unparalleled difficulties and a large number of deaths among the camp population, particularly as a typhus epidemic spread. (p. 101)

. . . When the evacuation began of camps situated in areas threatened by the victorious advance of the Allies, the horror surpassed anything that had been seen till then. (p. 100)

The overcrowding could be quite dramatic. In the blocks selected in Berben's book as a point of illustration, the population rose by 49% in 5 months (see chart 2), this during the height of a typhus epidemic in which the number of deaths averaged 2,614 per month.

Berben describes how the disease spread throughout the camp.

Chart 2:

Increase in Numbers of Prisoners in Certain Blocks
Between 28th November 1944 and 26 April 1945

Block	28.11.44	26.4.45
2	654	939
4	733	842
6	901	1,403
8	854	1,356
10	889	1,117
12	855	1,140
14	682	990
16	869	1,137
18	861	1,138
20	889	1,152
22	783	1,446
24	968	1,306
26	524	1,090
28	707	1,547

Finally exanthematous typhus came to this block [Block 30, where invalids and some of the older prisoners were kept] as well; it had thus jumped across the Lagerstrasse and traveled through the unevenly numbered blocks to the west wing. In short, writes Msgr. Neuhäusler, "what happened from the end of December 1944 and in January and February 1945 in the Dachau concentration camp constitutes one of the most frightful tragedies in the history of all concentration camps." (p. 108)

But typhus wasn't the only disease camp officials had to cope with.

Digestive ailments were very widespread, especially diarrhea and persistent enteritis, which could only have been cured by an appropriate diet. Most of the prisoners suffered from oedema, which led to frequent abrasions around the feet; when infected, these caused painful phlegmons. There were all kinds of pulmonary infections, including pneumonia, and infectious diseases, of which erysipelis, very contagious, was the commonest. There were also cases of diphtheria and scarlet fever. All these illnesses accentuated the patient's general debility where there was no adequate treatment or diet, and fatal complications often set in. (p. 102)

Rampant disease killed thousands, "in spite of all efforts," writes Berben. (p. 107) If extermination were the plan, however, why make such efforts, especially in the very last months of the war?

Even the Americans' best efforts were unable to stop the disease. As we have already pointed out, 2,226 died in May, 1945, after liberation. Berben concedes:

However eager they might be to return to their families, the thousands of liberated prisoners had to be realistic: many days would go by before repatriation could begin. The typhus epidemic which had for months reaped a daily toll of lives had to be checked, so that it should not spread to the civilian and military population. Inevitably, the camp had to be put into quarantine until further notice. (p. 197).

The Allies were hampered in their efforts for the same reasons the Germans were incapable of ending the disease: "for want of hospitals and medicines." (p. 198) Even after the quarantine was lifted, May 12, deaths continued due to disease. This official history notes that an additional 200 died in the camp between June 1 and June 16. Berben also notes that in spite of liberation food "continued to give grounds for serious concern."

The death toll, particularly near the end of the war, was high. According to Berben, the victims totaled 27,839 out of a camp population of 168,433 for the years 1940-45. Thus, during the years of the most devastating war ever known, the death rate at Dachau was 16.6%. This is unquestionably high, but is still probably much lower than what is assumed by the public after decades of propaganda. The Dachau death rate is rather low, compared to other wartime catastrophes. The death rate in central Hamburg, in one night of Allied bombing, more than doubled the wartime death rate for Dachau. Paul Johnson, in his massive history *Modern Times*, notes that "... in one night alone fatal casualties in the four fire-storm districts were 40,000 or up to 37.65% of the total population." (p. 403) The infamous fire bombings of the civilian targets of Dresden resulted in an even greater percentage of casualties. David Irving, in *The Destruction of Dresden*, writes:

If a death-rate of this scale [367.5 per thousand] could have been possible in a city like Hamburg, where the most elaborate air-raid precautions had been taken, it seems not unreasonable to assume at least the same proportion and very probably a higher proportion of fatalities during the triple blow on Dresden . . . (p. 229)

The death rates in these two civilian centers were quite high, as were the rates in various armed forces in Europe. For instance, the German military lost 34.3% of its personnel. Death rates were equally high, or higher, for the armies of such nations as Poland, the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Finland, Hungary, and Rumania. Since most of the prisoners in Dachau were non-Jews, we can assume that many of them, if they hadn't been incarcerated in the camp, would have been drafted into the German military. It is certainly one of the strange facts of the war that those prisoners who joined the German army to escape the camp (certain criminal and political prisoners were eventually allowed to do so) actually doubled their odds of dying.

Nor should one forget that about 16,500,000 Germans and ethnic Germans were expelled from eastern Germany and Eastern Europe by the Allies, many of them forced to flee on foot to Germany. Of some 17,000,000 eastern Germans, a total of 3,211,000 died during wartime flight and postwar expulsion, representing a figure of 18.89 percent. (*Nemesis at Potsdam*, Alfred de Zayas, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979, p. xxv)

While, as we have seen, Berben claims that the Dachau "gas chamber" was never used, he includes in his book the confession of Dr. Muthig, Chief Camp Doctor at Dachau. Like so many others after they were "interrogated," Dr. Muthig confessed that "prisoners unfit to work [were] subjected to euthanasia and transferred to Mauthausen concentration camp to be gassed." (p. 275) There are two problems with this "confession." First, as Berben so amply illustrates, prisoners unfit to work were medically treated, given extra rations, offered "open-air cures," etc. Secondly, today's academic Exterminationists concede that Mauthausen was not an extermination camp. Berben does not report on Dr. Muthig's fate.

Berben also commits some eccentric errors when it comes to listing "death camps." On page 292 of the book, he prints a map based on one made by the Service of Research and Documentation of the Ministry of Public Health and the Family from Brussels. This map lists six "extermination camps," but only coincides with current Holocaust doctrine on two of them: Treblinka and Auschwitz. Berben's map lists four camps not currently claimed to be "extermination camps": Soldau, Pustknow [sic], Platzow [sic], and Theresienstadt. Majdanek is classified simply as a concentration camp, disregarding Exterminationist claims that it also functioned as an "extermination camp." Sobibor is listed as an "independent camp," a term left undefined. Amazingly enough the "extermination camps" Belzec and Chelmno don't even appear on his map. One may certainly marvel at such discrepancies in a book published under the auspices of the official committee of Dachau survivors.

Regarding mortality at Dachau, Berben informs us that before 1943 any prisoner who died in the hospital or as a result of a "medical experiment" had an autopsy performed. After 1943, "post-mortems were carried out on all prisoners who died at the sick block or elsewhere in the camp." When the typhus epidemic raged through the camp "they had to be satisfied with a few bodies picked at random." (p. 109) Yet Berben tells us that "More than ten thousand autopsies were carried out under Dr. Blaha's direction." (p. 109). Where are these autopsy reports today? And, if the Nazis were following a program of planned extermination, why would they bother to perform an autopsy? These questions are not even addressed in this official history.

All in all Berben's *Dachau, 1933-1945: The Official History* is fascinating. The book tells us that the prisoners had a brothel, a canteen, Sundays off, church services, plays, lectures, a library, newspapers, concerts, and movies. It tells us that they were given regular meals, some even receiving a second breakfast, that food came in from the Red Cross, that food parcels were sent in by relatives and that prisoners could purchase food at the canteen. It tells us they had a modern hospital with doctors and nurses who made every effort to help the prisoners, until they were finally overwhelmed by disease near the end of the war. It tells us that disease was the primary cause of death at Dachau, and that even the American liberators lost thousands of prisoners to disease. While speaking of "the tens of thousand of deportees who were exterminated in the death camp," *Dachau: The Official History* establishes that no such extermination took place. In the face of continuing propaganda efforts to represent Dachau and other German concentration camps to the public at large as centers of annihilation, Berben's official history if anything gives authoritative support to the Revisionist position.