READER’S GUIDE TO USING THE ENCYCLOPEDIA

The purpose of this section is to give the reader some tips on how best to use this volume and to offer some information on the more technical aspects of the work, such as the use of foreign terms, naming conventions, and cross-references.

The Encyclopedia’s first purpose is to provide as much basic information as possible on each individual site. In order to achieve that end and also to provide for as much consistency as possible among the entries, we asked our many contributors to try to answer questions such as those following, as best they could, in what is admittedly a small amount of space:

- When was the site established, under what authority, and for what purpose? What agencies were involved in its construction?
- What kinds of prisoners did the site hold and how many?
- What type of labor did the prisoners perform? What companies or organizations employed them?
- What were the demographics of the prisoner population, that is, any changes in its composition, decreases and increases in overall numbers, and death rates and causes of death?
- If inmates were killed, what were the methods, motives, and circumstances involved?
- Who were the commanders and key officers at the site and what were their career patterns and length of service there?
- What units guarded the site? Did these units and their composition change and if so, why?
- What elements of the prisoner culture were unique to the site, if any? Were there some particular aspects of the prisoners’ coping mechanisms that are worth mentioning?
- Were there any key events in the history of the site, such as resistance or escapes, organized or spontaneous?
- When, and under what circumstances, was the site dissolved or evacuated? What happened to the prisoners afterward?
- Were site personnel tried after the war and, if so, what were the results of those proceedings?

By and large, the contributors did an excellent job in answering these questions, given the limitations of space and, at times, of the amount of source material available. We did not insist that they address the questions in any particular order, but they nonetheless put their essays together in such a way that particular items of information are usually easy to find, assuming that the information was available in the sources.

The Encyclopedia’s second purpose is to encourage additional research on the sites in question, and so we also asked each author to include, first, citations to key documents, when available, and second, a narrative description of published and archival sources, both primary and secondary, at the end of each entry. In that way readers can see which sources an author has already consulted and where to seek additional information.

In practical terms, this volume can be used for either of two related purposes. If your goal is to learn about a particular camp or camps, and no more, you may of course go to the relevant essays and stop there. If you want to understand a camp’s place within the larger universe of related facilities, and how that system developed and functioned, begin with the introductory essay (on the early camps or the SS-Business Administration Main Office [WVHA] camp system) and work your way down, via the main camp essay, to the particular subcamp essay in which you are interested. This is also a useful approach if you are interested in sources, since those listed for a particular camp may not include broader works that might contain valuable information; for those you must go to the main camp entry.

Finding a particular essay should be fairly easy. If you are looking for a WVHA subcamp and you know the name of the main camp that administered it, just look in the appropriate section of the table of contents or leaf through the body of the volume; the subcamps appear alphabetically under each main camp. (One note: Some subcamps were subordinated to more than one main camp over the course of their existence. A subcamp entry will normally be found under the last main camp to which it was subordinate.) If you are not sure where a camp fits within the larger system, the index might be a better place to look, especially since it includes a variety of alternative camp names.

For the entry titles, we used German appellations, such as Auschwitz instead of Oświęcim, but we have tried to include the most important variants within
the entries. We also standardized the structure of the titles themselves, so that the reader can understand the information in them. Under a given camp, all titles show, at a minimum, the subcamp name (e.g., Alt-Garge is shown under Neuengamme). Some camps had more than one name; alternates appear in brackets with the abbreviation “aka,” for “also known as,” as in Allendorf [aka Münchmühle], under Buchenwald. The Germans assigned code names to some camps; those show up in parentheses and quotation marks, as in Redl-Zipf (“Schlier”), under Mauthausen. Some camps were named for the district of a larger city in which they were located; the district name appears after the city name, such as Bremen-Oberheide, under Neuengamme. Other camp headings indicate a particular organization or address within a town or city (organizations are italicized)—for example, Berlin (Arado) or Berlin (Kastanienvorstadt), both under Sachsenhausen. In rare cases, one essay may cover more than one site, when the subcamps on those sites were linked administratively (as when one camp actually moved from one location to another in the same area or a subcamp actually occupied two nearby sites at the same time), example, Tröglitz [also Rehmsdorf, Gleina], under Buchenwald. There were also sometimes subcamps of subcamps, when one subcamp would administer others, such as Riese/Wüstewaltersdorf, under Gross-Rosen. Most of these types also existed in combination, as in Ellrich (“Erich,” “Mittelbau II”) [aka Ellrich-Juliusritte], under Mittelbau. The exceptions to these general rules consist mostly of the entries for the SS-Baubrigaden and Eisenbahnbaubrigaden. Since these were construction brigades that moved from place to place, their entries’ titles usually show the particular location that is the subject of the essay and the designation of the unit, as in Ferch (SS-BB II).

While we decided not to include a glossary, a few terms require some explanation. The first of these is “concentration camp” itself, from the German Konzentrationslager. The English term is used rather loosely; that is, people apply it to many different kinds of camps. The German term usually applies only to the camps in the second section of this volume. German has many other terms for other kinds of camps, such as Durchgangslager (transit camp), Gefangenlager (prisoner camp), Barackenlager (barracks camp), Polizeihaftlager (police detention camp), Internierungslager (internment camp), Arbeitslager (work camp), and so on, although these were not always used consistently.

One should also take note of the term Schutzhaftlager. Schutzhaft translates as “protective custody,” but the term does not mean, in the German case, that someone was being isolated for their own protection. Rather, the implication was that society was being protected from the prisoner. Within a concentration camp’s administrative organization, the Schutzhaftlager encompassed the prisoner compound itself. The section on concentration camp organization at the end of this guide provides further explanation.

As for the subcamps, the Germans used the terms Aussenlager (external camp) or Nebenlager (satellite camp), and sometimes Aussenkommando (external detail), Kasernierung, (quartering site), Arbeitslager (labor camp), or Arbeitskommando (labor detail), although the Kommandos were usually external work details, without any prisoner accommodations. (In general, Kommando can be translated as detachment, detail, or commando.) We have used the term “subcamp” in all these instances, although in other English-language works, one often sees the terms “satellite camp” or “external camp.”

Wehrmacht is another term that appears fairly frequently. Technically, it referred to all the German armed forces: army, navy, and air force—hence, the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW) was the Armed Forces High Command. In common use, however, Germans understood it to mean the army, which was the dominant military arm in Germany.

Some elements of camp slang also crop up in the entries. A Muselmann, translated literally as “Muslim,” was a prisoner who had reached such a state of deprivation and weakness that he had given up all hope of living. Usually such prisoners did indeed die in short order. A Kapo, on the other hand, was a privileged prisoner who usually supervised labor details or performed other functions on behalf of the SS. The origin of the term has long since been lost, but it may have been a reference to Sicilian Mafia captains.

Readers should also be aware of a couple of space-saving measures. The names of archives have been abbreviated in the source sections and notes; please refer to the List of Abbreviations for the full names. Also, there are only a few cross-references within the text, for the simple reason that most such references would be to other camps, for which there are entries in any case. We have made exceptions to this policy only where there seemed a special need to do so.
As an aid to understanding the material that follows in the body of this volume, this small section, and the organizational chart that accompanies it, will provide some basic information about the organizational structure within a “typical” main SS concentration camp. This is not to say that all camps were organized in exactly this way at all times, but most of them held to this pattern, which the SS developed in their original camp at Dachau.

At the top of the camp hierarchy stood the Lagerkommandant, or camp commandant. He supervised the two main elements of the camp: the Wachtruppe, or guard unit, and the Kommandantur, or headquarters.

The Wachtruppe included a Führer der Wachmannschaften, or commander of the guard force, under whom served company leaders, SS noncommissioned officers, and guards. The Wachtruppe was responsible for manning all the guard posts at the camp and work sites, and for pursuing escapees.

The Kommandantur consisted of six branches: the Kommandantur/Adjutant; Politische Abteilung (political branch); Verwaltung (administration); Medizinische Abteilung (medical branch); and Arbeitseinsatz (labor allocation).

The Kommandantur/Adjutant was responsible for seeing to it that all the commandant's orders were carried out quickly and exactly. This branch also took care of all correspondence, as well as the personnel actions for all the SS officers.

The Politische Abteilung handled admissions and releases of prisoners, interrogations, and criminal investigations, as well as overseeing camp security. It also ran the internal prison where camp inmates went for special punishment, called the Bunker.

The Schutzhaftlager was the heart of the camp itself. The Schutzhaftlagerführer (protective custody camp leader) was the commandant’s deputy, and was in charge of everything that happened within the camp proper, including order, discipline, and cleanliness. He was assisted by the Rapportführer (roll-call leader), a Blockführer (block leader) for each barracks, and sometimes Stubenführer (room leaders) for rooms within barracks.

In the larger camps there might be as many as four Schutzhaftlagerführer. They were so familiar to the prisoners that the latter often called them Lagerführer or confused them with the commandant.

The Verwaltung, or administration, oversaw such matters as the accommodation, clothing, and feeding of both prisoners and SS personnel. It supervised facilities such as the internal camp workshops, the kitchens, and the laundries.

The Medizinische Abteilung administered medical care to SS personnel and, to a much less effective degree, to the prisoners. In the larger camps, it would include one or more doctors, as well as SS medics (Sanitätsdienstgrade).

The Arbeitseinsatz branch was added to the standard organization at the beginning of the 1940s. It was responsible for putting together the Arbeitskommandos, or work details, for employment outside the camp. The Arbeitseinsatzführer led the branch; he had several Kommandoführer, or detail leaders, working for him.

In parallel to parts of this SS hierarchy, there existed a prisoner hierarchy that became increasingly important as time went on. A Lagerältester, or camp elder, assisted the Schutzhaftlagerführer; under him he controlled Blockälteste (block or barracks elders) and sometimes Stubendienst (room duty prisoners). A Schreibstube, or orderly room, staffed by prisoners, provided administrative support. Under the Arbeitseinsatzführer, an office called Arbeitsstatistik, or labor records, did the actual work of assigning prisoners to work details, which Kapos then helped supervise. All these (and other) so-called prisoner-functionaries held enormous power over their fellow prisoners, while simultaneously existing under constant threat from the SS.

Organization of a typical concentration camp

SS offices and personnel are in Roman type; prisoner offices and functionaries are in *italics.*