An SS guard at the entrance to the Stutthof concentration camp, 1941.
USHMM WS #12196. COURTESY OF AMS
From September 2, 1939, until late April 1945, a concentration camp existed near the town of Stutthof (later Sztutowo), some 40 kilometers (25 miles) east of Danzig (Gdańsk). The camp lay less than 2 kilometers (1.2 miles) south of the Baltic Sea and within 3 kilometers (1.9 miles) west of the Bay of Königsberg.

From its beginnings in September 1939 until January 1942, the Stutthof camp was under the control of the Danzig SS and police authorities. In January 1942, it was incorporated into the SS concentration camp system under the SS-Business Administration Main Office (WVHA). The Stutthof camp filled a number of distinct and differing roles in the period of its existence.

First, in the initial period after September 1939, what came to be known as the Stutthof civilian prison camp (Zivilgefangenenlager) was used as the main point for the collection and imprisonment of Poles and Jews forcibly removed from the Polish Corridor and from the former Free City of Danzig. By the end of January 1940, the camp held 4,500 prisoners, of whom at most 400 to 500 were Jews. Most of the Jews were killed by one method or another, and by mid-1941, only a handful of them remained alive.

The original guard force for Stutthof consisted of some 50 Danzig police reservists and Nazi Party activists, called the Wachsturmbann Eimann. They were men who had been hardened in their hostility to the Poles by their participation in the ethnic struggle in Danzig in the 1930s. The first commander of the camp was Obersturmbannführer Max Pauly.

Second, from 1940 on through the end of the war, Stutthof functioned as the main Arbeitserziehungslager (work education camp) in Danzig–West Prussia. Forced laborers—mostly Poles and Soviet citizens—who did not work as the Germans wanted them to were sent to such camps for a sentence of from 28 to 56 days, to correct their attitudes. For many, it was a death sentence.

Third, after its absorption into the WVHA camp system, Stutthof grew into a regular, though lesser, member of the constellation of concentration camps. A steady flow of German prisoners—among them so-called career criminals (Berufserbrecher), “asocials,” political prisoners, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and a handful of homosexuals—was added to the camp population, though overall it remained predominantly Polish until mid-1944. German prisoners were often appointed to the positions of Kapo and barracks block leaders, and a fair number of them found an outlet for their criminal tendencies in their maltreatment of the non-German prisoners. A smattering of prisoners of other nationalities, most of whom were committed to the camp as political prisoners, added an international aspect.

Fourth, Stutthof functioned as the distribution hub for prisoners dispatched to the subcamps of the Stutthof camp system. The sums received for the use of prisoner labor by state and private employers (1 to 3 Reichsmark [RM] per day) were crucial, for the camp had to be entirely self-financing. Among their assignments, the labor detachments from Stutthof worked on river regulation and flood prevention in the Vistula delta, excavated for water lines and sewers in the German cities of East Prussia, and labored in brickworks and gravel pits—the harshest types of physical labor. From 1941, as replacements for German workers who had been called up, smaller labor gangs from Stutthof were assigned to private workshops and to factories in and around Danzig. But these crews never numbered together more than a few hundred of Stutthof’s prisoners—until the late summer of 1944, when the influx of tens of thousands of Jews from the Baltic ghettos radically changed the nature of the camp.

In that final phase, from the summer until the fall of 1944, Stutthof acted as the great overflow camp of Eastern Europe, into which poured over 25,000 survivors of the great Baltic Jewish ghettos (Kaunas, Vilnius, and Riga). Simultaneously, more than 16,000 Hungarian Jews, overwhelmingly women, arrived in the camp from Auschwitz (as that camp had also been overloaded with prisoners). To this massive influx were added thousands of Polish Jews from the Łódź and Białystok ghettos and additional thousands of Polish civilians seized after the crushing of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising. It was thus only in the summer of 1944 that Stutthof assumed the profile that is associated with major concentration camps such as Auschwitz and Mauthausen, in terms of prisoner population and scale.

The initial transport of prisoners sent to the Stutthof site in September 1939 was housed in tents. The prisoners first
cleared a rectangular plot of land at the selected spot, 100 meters (328 feet) from the Danzig-Königsberg highway but screened from view by a dense stand of pines. In this clearing they erected double barbed-wire fences, barracks, latrines, a bathhouse, a kitchen, and an infirmary, as well as workshops. This complex constituted the “Old Camp.” A guardhouse, warehouses, administration buildings, housing for the guard detachment, and a large brick headquarters building, the Kommandantur, completed the complex. Toward the end of 1941, when all this was in place, the camp held approximately 6,500 prisoners.

Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler’s visit to Stutthof at the end of November 1941 marked the beginning of the camp’s incorporation into the IKL (Inspectorate of Concentration Camps)/WVHA system. On his return to Berlin, Himmler instructed Oswald Pohl to enlarge the camp to a capacity of 25,000 prisoners and to establish large armaments and military repair workshops under the control of the SS-owned Deutsche Ausrüstungswerke GmbH (German Equipment Works, Ltd., DAW). Within weeks of Himmler’s visit, the bureaucratic steps necessary to implement Stutthof’s change of status were complete. The nearby brickworks and quarry, which had been operated by prison labor, were taken over by the SS-owned Deutsche Erd- und Steinwerke (German Earth and Stone Works, DESW).

Construction of the “New Camp” commenced in earnest in mid-1942. Prisoners deployed in the forest detail (Waldkolonne) felled trees, pulled stumps, and leveled the area, using only hand tools and muscle power. This labor detail was regarded as the most punitive of those to which prisoners were assigned. In addition to constructing the barracks, guard towers, and fences, the prisoners also built a crematorium for the disposal of the corpses of those who died in the camp. This facility began operation in September 1942. In 1944, the New Camp was expanded with the addition of hastily erected barracks to house the influx from the Baltic states and Auschwitz.

Along with these changes associated with expansion and incorporation into the WVHA system came a change of command. In September 1942, SS-Sturmbannführer Paul Werner Hoppe replaced Pauly as commandant.

The SS-Death’s Head Battalion Stutthof expanded as the camp expanded. It grew from fewer than 100 men in the camp’s first year to a full battalion of some 500 men by the end of 1942. The SS guards secured the perimeter of the camp on foot and from the watchtowers, escorted labor details to and from job sites, and guarded the prisoners while at work. Prisoners attempting to escape were shot without warning; according to a former officer of the SS guards, merely to approach the warning strip inside the barbed-wire fence of the camp or the security zone established by the guards at outdoor work sites was regarded as attempted escape. As the war went on, the guard force increasingly consisted of ethnic Germans recruited in Yugoslavia, Slovakia, and Romania. The guards were assisted by up to 18 attack dogs.

Topography and demography both added to the prisoners’ plight. To the south and west of the camp, the terrain was alternately wooded and swampy, which made outside scrutiny impossible and escape difficult. Moreover, the local population was almost entirely German, so there was little chance that an escaped prisoner could find food or shelter anywhere in the vicinity. The camp was situated on ground that lay below the level of the Baltic. The dampness that resulted from the high-water table was a significant contributing factor to...
the camp's high mortality rate. In the winter, vicious winds blew off the sea into the exposed camp.

All told, about 110,000 registered prisoners passed through the camp, of whom at least 65,000 perished; Polish postwar sources put the death figure at 80,000, to include the number of prisoners who were never registered in the camp rolls but who died or were killed there. The most common cause of death was Vernichtung durch Arbeit, annihilation by work, which involved a combination of physical exhaustion, disease, malnutrition, exposure to a harsh climate, and abuse. Those too weak to work who clung to life were killed with lethal injections or, after the construction of a small gas chamber in September 1943, by gas.

Surviving records from Stutthof include the sole surviving death register (Verstorbene VII), which covers the period January to April 1944, the prisoner registration records (Einlieferungsbücher), and the records of the civil registry office of the village of Stutthof. The Einlieferungsbuch for the period from August 27, 1942, to January 8, 1943, contains typical examples of the fates of the prisoners. Each entry contains the prisoner’s name, date and place of birth, infraction and sentencing authority, and final disposition; 3,266 prisoners were officially registered entering Stutthof in this period. The 274 prisoners in one 10-page section of the book serve as an illuminating sample. Of these, 222 were committed to Stutthof for “corrective labor,” 15 were sentenced to the camp as career criminals, 7 as so-called asocials, 24 as political prisoners, 5 as Jehovah’s Witnesses, and 1 as a homosexual. By national origin they included 105 Russians, 94 Poles, 35 Germans, 25 ethnic Germans, 5 Lithuanians, 1 Gypsy, 1 U.S. citizen (a political prisoner), 1 Estonian, 2 Dutchmen, 1 Czech, 1 Slovak, 2 Frenchmen, and 1 stateless person. By gender, there were 224 men and 50 women.

A sample from the aforementioned register confirms this grim tale. Over the course of three days, January 27 to 29, 1943, 330 prisoners were committed to Stutthof, 298 of them for corrective labor. Within two months, 88 were dead, with another 79 perishing after another two months in the camp. By the time of evacuation in 1945, 250 were shown to have died, and the fates of the other 80 cannot be precisely determined.

In addition to overwork, the cold, and constant abuse at the hands of guards and Kapos, bad diet was a key contributor to prisoner mortality. The standard fare included a breakfast of adulterated bread and grain coffee, a midday meal of thin soup, and more bread and coffee in the evening. By contrast, the guard dogs received 2 kilograms (4.4 pounds) of meat per day.

At night the prisoners slept on bare wooden bunks. Many of them, particularly the large intake in the second half of 1944, had no blankets. Sanitary facilities were limited to cold water spigots in the barracks washrooms. The prisoners' clothing was washed and deloused only every several months. The toilets were pit latrines, which were periodically cleaned by the prisoners the Nazis most despised, the Jews and Polish Roman Catholic priests.

The Political Department at Stutthof maintained separate registers of prisoners' deaths. Only one of these was saved from destruction; it covers the period from January to April 1944. It lists some of the same causes of death contained in the Einlieferungsbücher—plus others, such as the February entries for 1 Pole “hanged in accordance with orders”; another “shot for offering resistance to state authority”; and 16 Red Army officers shot, with no justification given, simply an “E” (for exekutiert) entered next to their names in the death book. On March 15, 1944, 6 Jewish prisoners were shot “for offering resistance.” Executions by hanging were carried out in front of the assembled prisoners. In addition to the execution of prisoners such as these, Stutthof also served as the place of execution for prisoners sent by the Gestapo from Danzig, Königsberg, and other places. These prisoners were

After the completion of their sentences, 74 of the corrective labor prisoners were released, but 53 others were dead within two months’ time. The sentences of the remaining 95 corrective labor prisoners were converted to incarceration for the duration, and 60 of these people also died in the following months; 35 corrective labor prisoners were transferred to other camps. Of the prisoners from this sample who remained at Stutthof, only 14 were shown as alive at the time of the camp's evacuation. The most frequently cited cause of death was “allgemeine Herz- und Körperschwäche” (generalized coronary and physical weakness). Other listed causes of death included “intestinal catarrh,” “edema,” and tuberculosis. The typhus that periodically devastated the camp was never listed as a cause of death, nor was another frequent cause: death by lethal injection, administered in the camp hospital to those too weak to work. A hint of this practice is given by the place of death shown in the records, the notation “Krbaus,” which stands for Krankenhaus—the hospital.

Roman Catholic priests.
not registered as inmates in the camp. One Polish expert calculated 180 deaths by execution took place from the fall of 1939 to the end of 1943. It is likely that at least an equal number of prisoners were beaten to death by the most brutal Kapos, such as Waclaw Kozlowski and Josef Pabst. Still, it was the covert execution by injection that was by far the most frequent method employed at Stutthof.

Plans for the evacuation of Stutthof, ready in the fall of 1944, called for evacuation by sea, with Neuengamme as the main destination. In mid-January 1945, the nearby subcamps were shut down and the prisoners returned to the main camp. Some of the camp records were burned, particularly the sensitive materials of the Political Section and the camp hospital. On January 25, the evacuation commenced—but by forced march. The orders specified that this evacuation would take the form of 11 columns of 1,000 prisoners each. This represented about one-half of the camp’s population (just over 23,000) at the time.

The weather could hardly have been worse, with daily temperatures hovering below -18°C (-0.4°F) and deep snow blanketing the roads. The prisoners received 0.5 kilograms (1.1 pounds) of bread and 57 grams (2 ounces) of margarine as their entire ration. Most of them gobbled it up as soon as it was issued, and for 3 days they received no additional food. The prisoners were cut down by cold, hunger, sickness, and the SS guards, who shot those who could not keep up. After 11 days, the columns had moved between 120 and 170 kilometers (74.6 and 105.6 miles) to the west, and the exhausted prisoners moved into temporary camps. Only 7,000 of the original 11,000 prisoners remained. The survivors were then put to forced labor, digging antitank ditches for the Wehrmacht, in which hundreds more died. The survivors were liberated at the beginning of March 1945.

At Stutthof, the camp descended into chaos. After the evacuation columns departed, the remaining prisoners were not fed for days, nor did they go to work or stand roll call. Hunger and typhus claimed up to 200 lives per day, and by early April the population had declined to fewer than 5,000 prisoners. Another 500 perished by the time of the first evacuation columns arrived. This represented about one-half of the camp’s population (just over 23,000) at the time.

Pauly was sentenced to death by a British military tribunal and executed in October 1946, but for his subsequent service at Neuengamme—not for his actions at Stutthof. Hoppe was tried and convicted in West Germany in 1955; he served seven and a half years of a nine-year sentence. The SS noncommissioned officers in charge of the camp hospital where the lethal injections were administered were tried and convicted in Tübingen in 1964.11

**NOTES**

5. Statement of former SS-Lieutenant Paul Ehle to the Schönböcken Police (BRD), September 13, 1961, in case file EL 317 III Ks 5/63, investigation of defendants Haupt, Knott, and Lüdtke, StA-L.
7. Camp Entry Register, consecutive prisoner numbers 15254 through 18520, AMS, Folder I-II-7.
8. Camp Entry Register, consecutive prisoner numbers 18521 through 21798, AMS, Folder I-II-8.
10. Verstorbene VII, January 5 to April 7, 1944, AMS, Folder I-II-20.
11. Case EL 317 III Ks 5/63; the sentence is reprinted in the series *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, vol. 20 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1979).