

**Name of Camp:** Theresienstadt

**Location of Camp:** NW Czechoslovakia

**Brief description of the Camp:**

In WWII the town served as a ghetto to which the Nazis expelled at least 140,000 Jews, mostly from the “Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia,” but also from Central and Western Europe. The ghetto was controlled by the *Zentralamt für die Regelung der Judenfrage in Böhmen und Mähren* (Central Office for the Settlement of the Jewish question in Bohemia and Moravia) which was under the jurisdiction of the RSHA (Reich Security Main Office).

Theresienstadt was named “The small fortress near the ghetto” and was used as an internment camp for political prisoners. Czech gendarmes served as ghetto guards. Theresienstadt was first mentioned in a Nazi document on October 10, 1941. The plan was to concentrate there most of the Jews from the “Protectorate”, Germany and other western European countries, particularly prominent persons, old people or those who had served in the German Army during WWI. The Jews would be transferred from Theresienstadt gradually to the death camps of Aktion Reinhard and Auschwitz. Theresienstadt also served to camouflage the extermination of the Jews from world opinion by presenting it as a model Jewish settlement.

**How many people were imprisoned at the Camp? How many people perished at the Camp?**

Approximately 140,000 Jews were deported to Theresienstadt. Of these, an estimated 33,000 died there and an estimated 88,000 were deported to the extermination camps. At the time of liberation, 19,000 were still alive, or had been transferred to neutral countries. Only about 3,000 of those Jews deported to the extermination camps survived (mainly Auschwitz).

**What were the dates that the Camp was in existence?** The “camp-ghetto” existed for three and a half years: November 24, 1941 - May 9, 1945.

**When was the Camp liberated? Who liberated the Camp?**

After again visiting the camp on April 6 and April 21, 1945, the International Red Cross took over its administration on May 2, 1945. The SS fled on May 5 and 6. Scattered German military and SS units continued to fight Soviet forces in the vicinity of the camp-ghetto, which became part of the battlefield on May 8. Soviet troops entered the camp on May 9 and assumed responsibility for its prisoners the next day. By the end of August 1945, most of the former prisoners had left the camp, to be replaced by ethnic Germans arrested by the Czech and Soviet authorities.

**Other interesting facts:**

- Despite the terrible living conditions and the constant threat of deportation, Theresienstadt had a highly developed cultural life. Outstanding Jewish artists, mainly from Czechoslovakia, Austria and Germany, created drawings and paintings; some of them clandestine depictions of the ghetto’s harsh reality. Writers, professors, musicians and actors gave lectures, concerts and theater performances. The ghetto maintained a lending library of 60,000 volumes.
- Fifteen thousand children passed through Theresienstadt. Although forbidden to do so, they attended school. They painted pictures, wrote poetry and otherwise tried to maintain a vestige of a normal life. Approximately 90 percent of these children perished in death camps.
- The Red Cross was allowed to visit Theresienstadt once during the war. During that visit, certain inmates were dressed up and told to stand in strategic places. The shops were filled to capacity with candy and pastries that the inmates had not seen during their time in Theresienstadt. Thus, the Red Cross concluded that Jews were being treated humanely.

