



## Plaszow

Forced labor camp located in a suburb of Cracow. Plaszow was established in the summer of 1942. In January, 1944, it became a concentration camp.

Plaszow was situated within Cracow's city limits, on land comprised of 2 Jewish cemeteries, other property belonging to the Jewish community, and the private property of Poles who had been evicted from their homes. Divided into various sections, the camp consisted of housing for the Germans, factories where the prisoners were forced to work, and the prisoners' living quarters. These in turn were divided into sections for men and women and subsections for Jews and Poles. Every once in a while the camp was expanded, reaching its apex in 1944 and covering 200 acres. A 2.5 miles long electrified barbed-wire fence surrounded the camp perimeter.

The Nazis liquidated the Cracow Ghetto on March 13-14, 1943. Approximately 2000 Jews were murdered in the streets of Cracow and buried in a mass grave at Plaszow. Of the surviving Jews, most were deported to Belzec, while about 8,000 were imprisoned in Plaszow.

In July 1943, the Nazis set up a separate camp at Plaszow for Polish prisoners, who had been arrested for disciplinary or political violations. According to the Germans, these prisoners were to be "retrained by work." Those prisoners who had been charged for discipline were kept at the camp for a few months, whilst the political prisoners were detained there indefinitely. This Polish camp also held dozens of Gypsy families, including their small children.

The number of prisoners interned at Plaszow increased over the years. Prior to the liquidation of the Cracow Ghetto there were 2,000 prisoners and during the second half of 1943, the number grew to 12,000. By May-June, 1944, Plaszow held its peak number of prisoners: 22,000-24,000, including 6,000-8,000 Jews from Hungary. The number of Polish prisoners also rose, from 1,000 to 10,000 after the Warsaw Polish Uprising in late summer 1944.

Some German criminal prisoners were also detained at Plaszow, where they were made to do various jobs around the camp. Of those, some 25,000 were



considered to be "permanent prisoners" and given personal numbers. Beyond that, there was an unknown number of other "temporary" prisoners.

Five men served as camp commandant at Plaszow during its two and a half years of existence. Amon Goeth, who held the position from February 1943 to September 1944, was considered to be the most cruel and inhumane. He encouraged *selektionen*, mass murders, and working the prisoners to death. He was also personally responsible for the deaths of many prisoners.

From 1942 to 1944, when Plaszow became a designated forced labor camp, most of the camp's guards were Ukrainians working for the Nazis. When Plaszow became a concentration camp, 600 SS men from the "Death's Head Units" stepped in. Subsequent to the arrival of the SS officers, most prisoners still worked at forced labor, however mass numbers of Jews were murdered. In addition, Poles who had been condemned for participating in patriotic Polish activities were brought to Plaszow and shot. In all, about 8,000 people were murdered at Plaszow, either as individuals or as groups. Some 900 prisoners worked for Oskar Schindler, who protected them from the horrors of the camp in his factory.

By the summer of 1944 the Soviet army was approaching. The Germans began taking apart the camp and sending prisoners to other camps, including extermination camps. 2,000 Jews were sent to their deaths in Auschwitz in May, 1944. In September, the Polish section of Plaszow was also eliminated. The Germans then tried to destroy the evidence of mass murder at the camp: they dug up mass graves, took out the corpses, and burned them in huge piles. The last prisoners were removed from Plaszow on January 14, 1945 and deported to Auschwitz.