The Holocaust, Part Two: The "Final Solution"

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The second in a two-part series

Adolf Hitler ruled Germany from 1933 to 1945. He was the leader of the Nazi government group. Hitler wanted to take over the world. In 1939, he invaded Poland. This act led to World War II. Britain and France declared war against the Nazi state.

In 1940, Hitler sent his army to take more land in Europe. That year, Germany took over Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and France.

Hitler believed that some Germans were better than everyone else. To him, Jewish people were a lower race. Nazi laws punished people for being Jewish.

In 1941, the Nazis began rounding up Jews in Europe. They sent them to Poland. The Jews were forced to live in certain parts of cities. These were called ghettos.

This was the first step of a horrific plan. The Nazis wanted to kill the Jewish people. Beginning in 1941, all Jews were forced to wear a yellow star. This made them easier targets. Thousands were sent to the ghettos in Poland.
The Nazis killed millions of Jews in concentration camps

In late 1941, the Nazis began moving people from the ghettos. They shipped them to concentration camps. These camps were prisons. People were forced to work there.

The camps were where the Nazis’ mass killings took place. The Nazis used poison gas to kill hundreds of Jews at a time.

The Nazis tried to hide the camps. They did not want the world to know what they were doing. But there were hundreds of camps, and too many killings were committed. It was not possible to hide all of the killing.

One of the largest camps was called Auschwitz. At this camp alone, more than 2 million people were murdered. Many were killed with poison gas. Others died of hunger and illness.

The killing continued until the end of World War II. By that point, Hitler had ordered the killing of about 6 million Jews. This is now known as the Holocaust.

The end of the war

World War II came to an end in 1945. Hitler killed himself on April 30. He was afraid of being captured. Germany officially surrendered about a week later, on May 8.

The Nazis started emptying the death camps in 1944. They forced prisoners to march away from the approaching Allied armies. The Allies were the nations fighting against Germany. The marches killed over 250,000 people.

Other camps were not emptied. They still had prisoners inside when Allied armies arrived. One of these camps was Auschwitz. The writer Primo Levi described living there. “We lay in a world of death and phantoms,” he wrote.

Israel was created after the Holocaust ended

Life was not the same after the Holocaust. Jews who survived found it hard to return home. In many cases, they had lost their families. They had also been turned away by their non-Jewish neighbors. In the 1940s, many Jews were looking for new homes. This eventually led to the founding of a new nation called Israel. It was made to be a homeland for the Jewish people.