



Written by [Brian Farmer](#) on April 7, 2014

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## The Holocaust: Denying the Deniers

*“On a recent tour of the forward areas in First and Third Armies, I stopped momentarily at the salt mines to take a look at the German treasure. There is a lot of it. But the most interesting — although horrible — sight that I encountered during the trip was a visit to a German internment camp near Gotha. The things I saw beggar description. While I was touring the camp I encountered three men who had been inmates and by one ruse or another had made their escape. I interviewed them through an interpreter. The visual evidence and the verbal testimony of starvation, cruelty and bestiality were so overpowering as to leave me a bit sick. In one room, where ... [there] were piled up twenty or thirty naked men, killed by starvation, George Patton would not even enter. He said he would get sick if he did so. I made the visit deliberately, in order to be in position to give first-hand evidence of these things if ever, in the future, there develops a tendency to charge these allegations merely to propaganda.*



*“Some members of the visiting party were unable to go through with the ordeal. I not only did so but as soon as I returned to Patton’s headquarters that evening I sent communications to both Washington and London, urging the two governments to send instantly to Germany a random group of newspaper editors and representative groups from the national legislatures. I felt that the evidence should be immediately placed before the American and British publics in a fashion that would leave no room for cynical doubt.”*

— Letter, General Dwight D. Eisenhower to General George C. Marshall, April 15, 1945

What General Eisenhower and his party witnessed in April of 1945 was some of the real-life evidence that hinted at the notion that Nazi Germany was systematically exterminating large numbers of people. Eventually, the mass slaughter of certain European civilians by the Nazis during World War II, with a particular focus on such ethnic groups as Jews and Gypsies, would become known as “The Holocaust.” As Eisenhower suspected, it did not take long for the Holocaust deniers to appear. Wikipedia defines Holocaust denial as “the act of denying the genocide of Jews in the Holocaust during World War II. The key claims of Holocaust denial are that Germany’s National Socialist regime had no Final Solution policy and no intention of exterminating Jews, that Nazi authorities did not use extermination camps



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and gas chambers to mass murder Jews, and that the actual number of Jews killed was significantly (typically an order of magnitude) lower than the historically accepted figure of 5 to 6 million.”

## **An Inmate Debates**

Ironically, Paul Rassinier, a Frenchman who had been incarcerated as a political prisoner in Buchenwald concentration camp in 1943, was one of the first and turned out to be arguably the most prominent of the Holocaust deniers. Soon after the war had come to an end, Rassinier began reading reports of the mass liquidation of people in Nazi “death camps,” utilizing gas chambers and crematoria. He responded by essentially claiming that he had been there and that there were no gas chambers. However, Rassinier was in Buchenwald, one of the first major concentration camps established by the Nazis (in 1937), and it was located in Germany, where no extermination camps were ever constructed. Hence, Buchenwald was not primarily a “death camp,” although a lot of people certainly died there, so there were no gas chambers there.

By the time of Rassinier’s incarceration, the focus of the Nazi “death camp” activity had shifted to the area in Nazi-occupied Poland designated as the General Government. Rassinier used his own experience in Buchenwald as the basis for denying that gas chambers existed at other camps and that systematic mass liquidation of prisoners was taking place. In his early writings, Rassinier put forward two main arguments: First, that any atrocities committed by the Germans were greatly exaggerated and, second, that the perpetrators of the worst atrocities were the inmates who effectively ran the camps, not the German overseers. In 1964, he published *The Drama of European Jewry*, in which he reiterated that there were no gas chambers in the concentration camps, and went on to discount both the generally accepted figure of six million Jews liquidated and the testimony of the Nazi perpetrators following the war. As a result, the three main tenets of Holocaust denial ultimately emerged.

Rassinier offered little evidence for most of his assertions, and he ignored evidence that would contradict his claims. For example, he completely overlooked Hitler’s stated agenda in the Nazi leader’s 1923 manifesto, *Mein Kampf*. Much of that agenda sprung from the belief that Germany had lost the Great War (World War I) not because of defeat on the field of battle, but because the nation had been stabbed in the back by the so-called “November criminals” during the armistice negotiations in 1918. The first part of Hitler’s broad strategy to restore Germany’s proper place in the world was to eliminate from national life the “November criminals” who, in accepting economically disastrous reparations and other humiliating armistice terms, had given in to the Allied Powers too easily. In particular, Hitler’s targets were the Jews, capitalists, and Marxists, whom he regarded as the real and most evil influences among the traitors.

Rassinier also neglected to take into account Hitler’s speech on January 30, 1939 before the Reichstag, in which the Führer stated, “Today I will once more be a prophet: If international finance Jewry inside and outside of Europe should succeed once more in plunging nations into another world war, the consequence will not be the Bolshevization of the earth and thereby the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.”

## **Talking Out Loud**

There were a host of other Nazi leaders who made statements that make it very clear that the Nazis wanted to do far more than merely put Jews under “protective custody,” as some Holocaust deniers



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claim. In a speech on December 16, 1941, Hans Frank, governor of occupied Poland, said,

One way or another — I will tell you quite openly — we must finish off the Jews. The Fuehrer put it into words once: should united Jewry again succeed in setting off a world war, then the blood sacrifice shall not be made only by the peoples driven into war, but then the Jew of Europe will have met his end.... But what should be done with the Jews? Can you believe that they will be accommodated in settlements in the Ostland? In Berlin we were told: why are you making all this trouble? We don't want them either, not in Ostland nor in the Reichskommissariat [the Reichskommissariat Ostland was the civilian occupation regime established by Germany in the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the northeastern part of Poland, and the western part of Belarus]; liquidate them yourselves! Gentlemen, I must ask you to steel yourselves against all considerations of compassion. We must destroy the Jews wherever we find them, and wherever it is at all possible, in order to maintain the whole structure of the Reich.... The Jews represent for us also extraordinary malignant gluttons. We have now approximately 2,500,000 of them in the General Government, perhaps with the Jewish mixtures and everything that goes with it, 3,500,000 Jews. We cannot shoot or poison those 3,500,000 Jews, but we shall nevertheless be able to take measures which will lead somehow to their annihilation, and this in connection with the gigantic measures to be determined in discussions with the Reich.

The Nazi propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, made this entry in his private diary on February 14, 1942:

World Jewry will suffer a great catastrophe at the same time as Bolshevism. The Fuehrer once more expressed his determination to clean up the Jews in Europe pitilessly. There must be no squeamish sentimentalism about it. The Jews have deserved the catastrophe that has now overtaken them. Their destruction will now go hand in hand with the destruction of our enemies. We must hasten this process with cold ruthlessness. We shall thereby render an inestimable service to a humanity tormented for thousands of years by the Jews. This uncompromising anti-Semitic attitude must prevail among our own people despite all objectors. The Fuehrer expressed this idea vigorously and repeated it afterward to a group of officers who can put that in their pipes and smoke it.

Little more than a month later, on March 27, Goebbels continued on the same theme and wrote in his diary,

Beginning with Lublin, the Jews in the General Government are now being evacuated eastward. The procedure is a pretty barbaric one and not to be described here more definitely. Not much will remain of the Jews. On the whole it can be said that about 60 per cent of them will have to be liquidated whereas only about 40 percent can be used for forced labor.... A judgment is being visited upon the Jews that, while barbaric, is fully deserved by them. The prophesy [sic] which the Fuehrer made about them for having brought on a new world war is beginning to come true in a most terrible manner. One must not be sentimental in these matters. If we did not fight the Jews, they would destroy us. It's a life-and-death struggle between the Aryan race and the Jewish bacillus. No other government and no other regime would have the strength for such a global solution of this question. Here, too, the Fuehrer is the undismayed champion of a radical solution necessitated by conditions and therefore inexorable. Fortunately a whole series of possibilities presents itself for us in wartime that would be denied us in peacetime. We shall have to profit by this.

Heinrich Himmler, leader of the SS (Schutzstaffel, an elite organization tasked with, among other



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duties, running the extermination camps), had this to say in an October 4, 1943 speech to SS officers:

I also want to talk to you, quite frankly, on a very grave matter. Among ourselves it should be mentioned quite frankly, and we will never speak of it publicly....

I mean the evacuation of the Jews, the extermination of the Jewish race. It's one of those things it is easy to talk about, "The Jewish race is being exterminated," says one party member, "that's quite clear, it's in our program — elimination of the Jews and we're doing it, exterminating them."... This is a page of glory in our history which has never been written and is never to be written, for we know how difficult we should have made it for ourselves, if with the bombing raids, the burdens and the deprivations of war we still had Jews today in every town as secret saboteurs, agitators, and troublemakers. We would now probably have reached the 1916-1917 stage when the Jews were still in the German national body.

We have taken from them [the Jews] what wealth they possessed.... We have taken none of it for ourselves.... We had the moral right, we had the duty to our people to destroy this people which wanted to destroy us. But we have not the right to enrich ourselves with so much as a piece of fur, a watch, a mark [the unit of German currency], a cigarette or anything else. Because we have exterminated a germ, we do not want in the end to be infected by the germ and die of it. I will not tolerate so much as a small area of sepsis to appear here or gain a hold. Wherever it may appear we shall cauterize it.

In a second speech two days later, Himmler again spoke with utter ruthlessness:

We were faced with the question: what about the women and children? I decided to find a clear solution to this problem, too. I did not consider myself justified merely to "root out" the men — in other words, to kill them or have them killed — and allow the children to grow up as avengers facing our sons and grandsons. The difficult decision had to be made to have this people disappear from the face of the earth.... The Jewish question in the countries that we occupy will be solved by the end of this year. Only remainders of odd Jews that managed to find hiding places will be left over.

## Going to the Ghetto

The Nazi timetable regarding the treatment of Jews passed through several stages, but open persecution started soon after Hitler's National Socialist regime came to power in 1933. Jewish citizens quickly learned that they were to be regarded as social pariahs. They were excluded from the professions, from the civil service, from the military, and from public practice in the arts and sports. Jewish businesses were boycotted, and, in every public place, notices were put up warning all Jews to keep away. For example, Jews could not swim in public pools or even sit in public parks. Many trades were forbidden to them. The goal was to freeze them out of German society and to induce them to leave Germany altogether. Indeed, by September of 1939, when war broke out with Poland, Germany's Jewish population of approximately 600,000 had been reduced to less than half that number. National Socialist policy at this stage was to rid Germany of its Jews at the expense of any country willing to take them. The property of Jews leaving Germany was confiscated by the Nazi State, leaving them as virtually penniless refugees.

So long as there were affluent Jews to pillage and there existed a channel for mass emigration, the Nazis were quite happy to enjoy the proceeds and arrange for the Jews to leave. For a time, Hitler had even entertained the notion of resettling the Jews of Nazi-occupied Europe on the relatively remote



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island of Madagascar, located some 240 miles off the east coast of South Africa. But when war broke out and Hitler failed to win a quick peace settlement with the Allies, after defeating the French and driving the British off the European continent in the spring of 1940, that option had to be taken off the table.

The leaders of Nazi Germany were ultimately forced to deal with the presence of almost two million Jews in the areas of Poland they controlled, as well as the Jews who were still left in Germany. The immediate solution that the Nazi leaders came up with was to move all Jews into ghettos within the General Government. Almost half a million Jews were walled up in the Warsaw ghetto alone, while the rest were segregated in other ghettos and camps that were set up during the winter of 1939-40. Confined in these cruel circumstances and left to fend for themselves, the weaker individuals eventually began to die. In the Warsaw ghetto, 44,630 inhabitants died during 1941, and in the Lodz ghetto, 30,000 of the original 100,000 inhabitants died between May of 1940 and June of 1942.

## Dealing Death to Jews

The greatest concentration of Jews in Europe lay to the east of Germany, with more than three million in Poland (including more than a million in the area of Poland occupied by the Soviets after the invasion of September 1939), more than two million in the western part of the Soviet Union, and around a million and a half in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Romania. Within six months of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June of 1941, the leaders of Nazi Germany found themselves occupying lands inhabited by another six million Jews, which was 10 times as many as there had ever been in Germany. This sudden accumulation of unwanted Jews would require a change in policy, which was recognized early on and implemented after the Jewish resettlement program carried out by the Nazis during the winter of 1939-40. The activities of the four special SS assassination units called Action Groups (Einsatzgruppen), which had been designed to follow behind the German army and eliminate civilian resistance, were stepped up.

The work of the four Action Groups, each of which was composed of five hundred to a thousand men, is well documented, thanks to the reports sent to headquarters that survived the war and were used as evidence during the postwar trials of Nazi war criminals. Typical of the Action Group reports are these comments sent in from the Kiev sector: "In collaboration with the Group staff and two Kommandos of the Police Regiment South, the Sonderkommando 4a executed on 29th and 30th September 33,771 Jews.... The transaction was carried out without friction. No incidents occurred." And the following month: "The difficulties resulting from such a large-scale action ... were overcome in Kiev by requesting the Jewish population through wall posters to move. Although only 5,000 to 6,000 Jews had been expected at first, more than 30,000 arrived who until the very moment of their execution still believed in their resettlement, thanks to extremely clever organization.... Approximately 75,000 Jews have been liquidated in this manner." By the spring of 1942, the Action Groups had succeeded in exterminating more than a million Jews and, by the end of the war, the final toll taken by the Action Groups, based on their meticulous and detailed reports, had reached close to two million.

After the war, the leader of one of the Action Groups, Otto Ohlendorf, described how the massacres were normally carried out: "The unit selected for this task would enter a village or city and order the prominent Jewish citizens to call together all Jews for the purpose of resettlement. They were requested to hand over their valuables to the leaders of the unit and shortly before the execution to surrender



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their outer clothing. The men, women, and children were led to a place of execution which in most cases was located next to a more deeply excavated anti-tank ditch. Then they were shot kneeling or standing, and the corpses thrown into the ditch.”

Through the spring of 1942, the firing squads were the only method of liquidation used by the Action Groups. Over time, however, it was apparent that the executions of women and children in this manner were creating a mental strain on the killers. Himmler responded by ordering that women and children should be executed by gassing. Special gas vans were manufactured with the capacity to handle up to 30 persons and designed to kill by carbon monoxide poisoning in about 10 minutes. The vans also proved to be unpopular, as unloading the vans had an even worse effect on the men than shooting the victims, and their use among the Action Groups was eventually discontinued. However, huge gas vans were used extensively at the Chelmno extermination camp in Poland, where more than 300,000 people were liquidated in this manner, according to documentation made available at the trials of war criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals.

Anticipating the logistical problems that Nazi Germany would face with millions of unwanted Jews under its control (approximately 11 million by the time the empire of the Third Reich had reached its greatest extent, according to the minutes of the Wannsee Conference mentioned below) and the drain that those Jews would impose on vital resources needed for the war effort, Reichsmarshal Hermann Göring, second in power to only Hitler himself, sent a letter to SS Major General Reinhard Heydrich, chief of the Security Service and Security Police, on July 31, 1941, commissioning him to develop a formal plan for the final solution (Endlösung) of the Jewish question. In fact, the liquidation of Jews was already well under way, as the Action Groups had been exterminating the Jewish populations in Nazi-occupied areas for quite some time. Heydrich appointed his subordinate, SS Lieutenant Colonel Adolf Eichmann, to organize a meeting of the relevant administrative officials, in order to create a program for carrying out Goering’s directive. The purpose of the meeting was to streamline the genocide operation and to coordinate the participation of the government ministries that were to be involved. Subsequently, a conference was held in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee on January 20, 1942, in which 15 top ministerial officials participated.

## **Instituting the “Final Solution”**

Even though the Wannsee Conference was top secret, a copy of the minutes survived the war. Although the Nazis were notorious in their use of euphemisms, there can be little doubt what this passage from the Wannsee Conference minutes meant, regarding the fate that was in store for the Jews under Nazi control:

Under proper guidance, in the course of the final solution the Jews are to be allocated for appropriate labor in the East. Able-bodied Jews, separated according to sex, will be taken in large work columns to these areas for work on roads, in the course of which action doubtless a large portion will be eliminated by natural causes. The possible final remnant will, since it will undoubtedly consist of the most resistant portion, have to be treated accordingly, because it is the product of natural selection and would, if released, act as the seed of a new Jewish revival (see the experience of history.)

And, as Eichmann testified during his 1961 trial in Jerusalem, “These gentlemen ... were discussing the subject quite bluntly, quite differently from the language that I had to use later in the record. During the conversation they minced no words about it at all.... They spoke about methods of killing, about



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liquidation, about extermination.”

Other conferences followed the Wannsee meeting, presided over by Eichmann. After Heydrich was killed by Czech partisans in the spring of 1942, Eichmann reported directly to Himmler and was put in charge of organizing the mass movement of Jews to the labor and extermination camps operating in Poland, of which the most notorious was Auschwitz-Birkenau. Gassing was to replace firing squads as the preferred method of liquidation, as it was more efficient and the nasty work of clearing out the dead bodies from the gas chambers could be assigned to specially selected prisoners (Sonderkommandos).

When a transport train of boxcars, usually loaded with a couple thousand people, arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau, the prisoners were marched past a couple of SS doctors, who quickly decided which prisoners were fit for work and which were to be sent immediately to the extermination facilities. The outer rooms to the gas chambers were disguised to look like bath houses, with doors and walls bearing signs indicating that the prisoners were going to take a shower. While the prisoners were made to undress, music was sometimes piped to help put them more at ease. The naked prisoners were then led into the gas chamber, the staff quickly and silently withdrew, and the doors were sealed. Meanwhile, vans deceptively marked with the insignia of the Red Cross had brought up supplies of the Zyklon B granules, which released the gas in the gas chamber after the granules were poured through openings in the roof.

When a period of 20 minutes or so had passed, the fumes from the poison gas were extracted by ventilators, after which the Sonderkommandos moved in, wearing gas masks and protective clothing and carrying water hoses. They hosed down the corpses, dragged them out of the gas chamber, and loaded them into the elevator for the descent into the crematoria below. The mouths of the dead were inspected, and any gold teeth were yanked out with pliers and thrown into acid baths. The valuable hair was shaved off the heads of the dead women and collected. Finally, the corpses were fed in batches of three into one of the 15 ovens, which made up the normal arrangement in each of the five crematoria. Using these fast-burning incinerators, specially designed to use the body fat of the corpses to speed up the process of their destruction, it was possible to turn 45 bodies to ashes in little more than 20 minutes. That works out to 135 in an hour, or 3,240 in 24 hours. In the course of a year, just one of the five crematoria alone could dispose of around a million corpses, when operating at maximum capacity. And Auschwitz-Birkenau was only one of seven extermination camps (the others being Belzec, Chelmno, Maidanek, Sobibor, Stutthof, and Treblinka). The problem in the extermination camps was never a matter of killing people but, rather, it was the disposal of the corpses. Mass burials in huge trenches, the original method of disposal before the installation of the special crematoria, were unhygienic and left the SS with the uneasy feeling that their dirty work might be discovered. The administrators of the Final Solution were greatly relieved when the special crematoria proved to be so efficient.

## **The Deniers Haven't Made a Dent**

One of the main arguments put forward by Holocaust deniers is that the Nazis could not have disposed of millions of corpses without a trace. In that regard, the explanation above makes it very clear that Holocaust deniers are laboring under a serious misconception. Another challenge thrown up by the Holocaust deniers is to question why no great heaps of ashes were found, given all of the bodies that the conventional wisdom says were incinerated. The answer to that question is easy to come by: The ashes of thousands of bodies could be loaded onto a truck, for example, and dumped into the nearest



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river.

As mentioned earlier, one of the fundamental tenets of Holocaust denial is that gas chambers were not used to liquidate Jews, despite the confession to British military authorities made by SS officer Josef Kramer, who was in charge of the gas chambers and crematoria at Auschwitz-Birkenau. In addition, Hans Stark, a member of the Auschwitz Gestapo, testified at the Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt in 1963 that gassings did, indeed, take place. Stark told the court that the roof above the gas chamber was flat and had openings through which Zyklon B granules were poured. On at least one occasion, Stark himself poured the Zyklon B into the holes. Another eyewitness was Filip Müller, a Slovak Jew who arrived in Auschwitz in April of 1942. Müller's job was to move the corpses from the gas chamber to the ovens. Later, he was transferred to Birkenau to work in the crematoria there. In his written account, *Eyewitness Auschwitz: Three Years in the Gas Chamber*, Müller provided a description of the process: "When the last one had crossed the threshold, two SS leaders slammed shut the heavy iron-studded door which was fitted with a rubber seal, and bolted it.... The Unterführers [non-commissioned officers] on duty had gone onto the crematorium roof.... They removed the covers from the six camouflaged openings. There, protected by gas-masks, they poured the green-blue crystals of the deadly gas into the gas chamber."

Given all of the foregoing, one might be tempted to ask, "Aren't Holocaust deniers just a small fringe group unworthy of serious consideration?" One might be tempted to conclude that, but to let the arguments of Holocaust deniers go unanswered presents a real and significant risk: If something is repeated often enough and not refuted, people will begin to believe it. The most prominent Holocaust deniers are fairly knowledgeable about the Holocaust, compared to the average person. Anyone who has not studied the Holocaust and is not well versed in the specifics cannot properly question and answer the claims of Holocaust deniers. For many people, the Holocaust is so unimaginably evil that an explanation claiming that it did not happen according to the conventional wisdom may be accepted with relief. But we know about the Holocaust through a convergence of evidence, such as the following:

- Documents — letters, blueprints, orders, bills, speeches, articles, memoirs, confessions.
- Testimony — accounts from survivors, Nazis, local townspeople.
- Facilities — concentration camps, work camps, extermination camps.
- Inferential evidence — population demographics. (The oft-cited figure of six million Jews liquidated is not, and was never intended to be, a precise accounting. But that number would never have continued to be cited if it did not conform to the scholarly studies that followed the Holocaust and confirmed that tally.)
- Photographs — official military and press photographs, civilian photographs, photographs taken by survivors, aerial photographs, German and Allied film footage.

As Michael Shermer and Alex Grobman point out in their book *Denying History: Who Says the Holocaust Never Happened and Why Do They Say It?*, "There is an assumption by deniers that if they can just find one tiny crack in the Holocaust structure, the entire edifice will come tumbling down. This is a fundamental flaw in their reasoning. The Holocaust is not a single event that a single fact can prove or disprove. The Holocaust was a myriad of events in a myriad of places and relies on a myriad of points of data that converge on one conclusion. Minor errors or inconsistencies here or there cannot disprove the Holocaust for the simple reason that these lone bits of data never proved it in the first place." If





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anything positive can be said about Holocaust denial, it might possibly be this: It is like the defense attorney at a trial, who forces the prosecutor to make his case beyond a reasonable doubt. As for the Holocaust deniers themselves, they have not come anywhere near making their case beyond a reasonable doubt.

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