

Letters to David Irving on this Website

Unless correspondents ask us not to, this Website will post selected letters that it receives and invite open debate.

Quick navigation

Mr Irving, take me to ...

Michael Mills writes from Australia, Friday, August 6, 1999

RE the 1948 **German newsreel** containing information that a Polish war-crimes court found that "altogether nearly 300,000 died at **Auschwitz**".

The 300,000 figure most probably refers to the number of registered prisoners who died. [Gerald] **Reitlinger** quoted a similar figure in his 1953 book **The Final Solution**; as I recall, he wrote that something like 400,000 persons were registered as prisoners at Auschwitz-Birkenau, and of these some 300,000 were recorded as having died.

This figure does not include persons brought to Auschwitz-Birkenau who were not registered but retained in the camp complex as "Depot-Haeftlinge" pending transfer to other camps or places of work, and died in Auschwitz-Birkenau before the transfer could take place. Nor does it include those "Depot-Haeftlinge" who did survive long enough to be transferred elsewhere and subsequently died at another camp (however, if these transferees were registered at their final destination, their deaths would most likely have been recorded there).

The number of unregistered "Depot-Haeftlinge" was quite large, particularly in 1944. For example, only a very small number of the Hungarian Jews transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in the summer of that year were registered there, the vast majority being held as "Depot-Haeftlinge", to the extent that they were not killed on arrival. Accordingly, the number of unregistered arrivals who died could also be considerable, although there is probably no way of calculating it accurately. Whatever it is, it would have to be added to the 300,000 registered prisoners who died.

In part, the problem is one of terminology. Are we talking about the number of persons who actually died within the confines of the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex itself? Or about the total of the persons who were brought to Auschwitz-Birkenau and subsequently died, whether in the camp or elsewhere? A more precise formulation would be the total number of persons brought at one time or another as prisoners to Auschwitz-Birkenau, and who died before the end of the war.

We can be reasonably certain that the majority of the one million or so individuals brought to Auschwitz-Birkenau did die before the end of the war, from one cause or another. However it is likely that less than half died within the camp complex itself, including its various sub-camps. Hungarian Jews for example were sent to some 380 different locations after first arriving at Auschwitz-Birkenau, and it is likely that the deaths of the majority of them occurred at those locations.

To the extent that "Depot-Haeftlinge" transferred from Auschwitz-Birkenau were registered at the camp to which they were sent, it is possible that their deaths have been counted twice, once at Auschwitz-Birkenau (as members of a group of arrivals who were not registered and are assumed to have died there) and again in the death-registers of their final destination.

Michael Mills



David Irving replies:

AN impressive overview, but you have lost sight of the wood for the trees, methinks. In an Allied-controlled January 1948 German newsreel on a 1947 Polish trial and execution of Nazi war criminals, there would be no need to play down a crime-figure and provide the lowest death toll available; the opposite, surely?

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