

Dora-Mittelbau

(also known as Dora-Nordhausen), concentration camp in the Harz Mountains of eastern Germany. Dora-Mittelbau was built in August 1943 as a satellite camp of Buchenwald. In October 1944 it became an independent concentration camp with 23 satellites of its own.

In mid-1943, 10,000 prisoners, mostly from Buchenwald, were brought to the Dora-Mittelbau site to dig tunnels for a huge underground arms factory where V-2 missiles were to be manufactured. Until late spring of the following year, the prisoners had no above ground barracks, and lived inside the tunnels with no fresh air, inadequate food and water, and terribly unsanitary conditions. They were forced to work at breakneck speed without safety precautions. This led to a mortality rate that was higher than at any other camp in Germany.

When the factories were put into production in the fall of 1944, barracks were finally built above the ground, but the prisoners still had to work 12 hour days. Over 12,000 prisoners lived in the main camp and 20,000 more in the satellites. When Jewish prisoners became too exhausted to work, they were sent to their deaths in Auschwitz and Mauthausen.

A strong underground functioned in Dora-Mittelbau, which sabotaged production in the weapons factories and thus disturbed weapons deliveries to the Nazis. Many prisoners were executed for taking part in the sabotage. Over 200 were publicly hanged as a punishment and warning to other prisoners.

In March 1945 there were 34,500 prisoners in the entire camp compound. The Nazis began evacuating them on April 1. Within days most of the prisoners had been sent away, most to Bergen-Belsen; thousands were murdered en route. In one case, several thousand prisoners, mostly Jews, were burned to death in a barn near the village of Gardelegen. On April 9 American troops arrived to liberate Dora-Mittelbau; they found but a handful of prisoners left on the site.

Nineteen members of the Dora-Mittelbau staff were tried by an American military court between August and December 1947. Fifteen were found guilty–

one was sentenced to hanging, while the rest received varying prison sentences.