

Vaivara

Transit and concentration camp in northeast Estonia. Vaivara was established by the SS in 1943 as a camp for Soviet prisoners of war. From August 1943 to February 1944 it served as the main branch of 20 forced labor camps located throughout Estonia. Some 20,000 Jews from Latvia and from the Lithuanian ghettos of Vilna and Kovno were brought to Vaivara, where they were kept before being sent on to the labor camps. For that reason, Vaivara was considered a transit camp. In addition, as a concentration camp, Vaivara housed 1,300 prisoners at a time. These prisoners were mainly Jews, with smaller groups of Russians, Dutch, and Estonians.

The prisoners worked at various types of hard labor, including railroad construction, digging antitank ditches, quarrying, and cutting down trees in forests and swamps. They lived in wooden huts that let in the brutal cold, and they received meager food rations. In addition, water was scarce, while lice and illness were widespread. The prisoners were subjected to selections every two weeks, as a result of which many were murdered, while others died from SS beatings.

As the Soviet army drew closer, hundreds of the surviving prisoners were sent westward on death marches.