

Dachau and the Nazi Terror
1933–1945
Testimonies and Memoirs

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Preface

In spring 1933, immediately after Hitler's assumption of power, the first concentration camp was established at Dachau. Here the political opponents of the new regime were imprisoned and abused, here the terror system of the concentration camps was tried out and developed: Dachau was a testing ground for the SS and became the model for all the other concentration camps throughout the area controlled by Germany. And when from autumn 1944 the territory commanded by the NS state began to dwindle, it was to Dachau that the inmates of the other camps were evacuated — from Natzweiler, from Buchenwald, from Auschwitz and from almost all the other sites of terror, convoys of prisoners came to Dachau. This was where the trail finally ended: the first concentration camp survived longer than almost all the others and was one of the last to be liberated by the Allies. And throughout the world the concentration camp at Dachau was seen as the epitome of the concentration camp system in the state created by Hitler.

Every year almost a million people from all over the world come to the memorial site at Dachau. There is clearly an interest in what happened here and in other camps, in the causes and background. And above all there is a desire for explanation, for elucidation, especially among younger visitors to Dachau and to other sites of persecution and extermination. Early on, many people expressed the need to see in the Federal Republic a forum for information and documentation comparable to the *Hefte* of Auschwitz — which would be available to all those able to make a serious, objective and important contribution to clarifying the historical background and thus also to preventing any repetition of National Socialist injustice.

Thus in 1985 the first volume of the yearly *Dachauer Hefte* appeared. The contents, which are organized thematically, are not restricted to the camp at Dachau and its immediate environment. The subtitle, “Studies and documents in the history of National Socialist concentration camps” indicates the character and range of the *Hefte*. It is intended to provide space for the publication of academic *studies* and for *documents* — reports, diaries and her authentic records describing the experience and fate of those persecuted under National Socialism.

The *Dachauer Hefte* are published under the moral authority of the Comité International de Dachau. The *Hefte* are intended both as an academic publication and as the mouthpiece of those who were persecuted and of those who offered resistance to the NS regime. The editors, who have no conflicting interests, whether in their function as editors or as the

initiators of the *Dachauer Hefte*, vouch both for academic standards and for the authenticity of records published.

Many people have expressed regret that the *Dachauer Hefte* have so far appeared only in German. This volume contains in unabridged form in English a selection of important contributions of survivors of Nazi concentration camps, published in 17 issues of the *Dachauer Hefte* 1985–2000.

Wolfgang Benz, Barbara Distel