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Sachsenhausen concentration camp

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Sachsenhausen ("Saxon's Houses", German pronunciation: [ˈzaksn̩ ˈhaʊzən]) or **Sachsenhausen-Oranienburg** was a **Nazi concentration camp** in **Oranienburg**, Germany, used primarily for political prisoners from 1936 to the end of the Third Reich in May 1945. After World War II, when Oranienburg was in the **Soviet Occupation Zone**, the structure was used as an **NKVD special camp** until 1950 (See **NKVD special camp Nr. 7**). The remaining buildings and grounds are now open to the public as a museum.



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Sachsenhausen under the NSDAP [edit]

The camp was established in 1936. It was located 35 kilometres (22 mi) north of Berlin, which gave it a primary position among the German concentration camps: the administrative centre of all concentration camps was located in Oranienburg, and Sachsenhausen became a training centre for *Schutzstaffel* (SS) officers (who would often be sent to oversee other camps afterwards). Executions took place at Sachsenhausen, especially of Soviet **prisoners of war**. Among the prisoners, there was a "hierarchy": at the top, criminals (rapists, murderers), then Communists (red triangles), then homosexuals (pink triangles) and at the very bottom Jews (yellow triangles). ^[*citation needed*] During the earlier stages of the camp's existence the executions were done in a trench, either by shooting or by hanging. A large task force of prisoners was used from the camp to work in nearby brickworks to meet **Albert Speer**'s vision of rebuilding Berlin.^[1] Sachsenhausen was originally not intended as an **extermination camp**—instead, the systematic murder was conducted in camps to the east. In 1942 large numbers of Jewish inmates were relocated to **Auschwitz**. However the construction of a gas chamber and ovens by camp-commandant **Anton Kaindl** in March 1943^[2] facilitated the means to kill larger numbers of prisoners.

Camp layout [edit]

The Main gate or Guard Tower "A", with its 8mm **Maxim machine gun**, the type used by the Germans in the trenches of **World War I**, housed the offices of the camp administration. On the front entrance gates to Sachsenhausen is the infamous slogan *Arbeit Macht Frei* ("labour makes (you) free"). About 200,000 people passed through Sachsenhausen between 1936 and 1945. Anchoring the base of the triangular shaped thousand-acre site was the large *Appellplatz*, where tens of thousands of prisoners would line up for morning and evening roll call. Creating a semi circular configuration, were the barracks of custody zone I which fanned out from the base of the *Appellplatz*.^[*citation needed*]

Sachsenhausen was intended to set a standard for other concentration camps, both in its design and the treatment of prisoners. The camp perimeter is, approximately, an **equilateral triangle** with a semi circular roll call area centered on the main entrance gate in the boundary running northeast to southwest. Barrack huts lay beyond the roll call area, radiating from the gate. The layout was intended to allow the machine gun post in the entrance gate to dominate the camp but in practice it was necessary to add additional watchtowers to the perimeter. The standard barrack layout was to have a central washing area and a separate room with toilet bowls and a right and left wing for overcrowded sleeping rooms.^[*citation needed*]

There was an infirmary inside the southern angle of the perimeter and a camp prison within the eastern angle. There was also a camp kitchen and a camp laundry. The camp's capacity became inadequate and the camp was extended in 1938 by a new rectangular area (the "small camp")

Part of a series on

The Holocaust



Responsibility

Nazi Germany

People

Major perpetrators Adolf Hitler
Heinrich Himmler Reinhard Heydrich
Adolf Eichmann Odilo Globocnik
Richard Glücks Ernst Kaltenbrunner
Rudolf Höss Christian Wirth Joseph Goebbels

Organizations

Nazi Party *Gestapo Schutzstaffel* (SS)
Sturmabteilung (SA) *Verfügungstruppe* (VT)
Wehrmacht

Collaborators during World War II

Nazi ideologues

Early policies

Racial policy Nazi eugenics Nuremberg Laws
Haavara Agreement Madagascar Plan
Forced euthanasia

Victims

Jews in Europe Jews in Germany
Romani people (Gypsies) Poles Soviet POWs
Slavs in Eastern Europe Homosexuals
People with disabilities Freemasons
Jehovah's Witnesses

Ghettos

Białystok Budapest Kaunas Kraków Łódź Lublin
Lwów Minsk Riga Warsaw Vilnius

Jewish ghettos in
German-occupied Poland
List of selected ghettos

Atrocities

Pogroms

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- Slovenčina
- Српски / srpski
- Suomi
- Svenska

northeast of the entrance gate and the perimeter wall was altered to enclose it. There was an additional area (*sonder lager*) outside the main camp perimeter to the north; this was built in 1941 for special prisoners that the regime wished to isolate.^[*citation needed*]

Custody zone [edit]

The camp was secure and there were few successful escapes. The perimeter consisted of a 3-metre-high (9.8 ft) stone wall on the outside. Within that there was a space that was patrolled by guards and dogs; it was bordered on the inside by a lethal electric fence; inside that was a gravel "death strip" forbidden to the prisoners. Any prisoner venturing onto the "death strip" would be shot by the guards without warning. Rewards such as extra leave were offered to guards who successfully shot and killed any prisoner who entered onto the death zone.^[*citation needed*]

Prisoner labor [edit]

Sachsenhausen was the site of the largest **counterfeiting operation** ever. The Germans forced inmate artisans to produce forged American and British currency, as part of a plan to undermine the British and United States' economies, courtesy of *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) chief **Reinhard Heydrich**. Over one billion pounds in counterfeit banknotes were recovered.^[*when?*] The Germans introduced fake British £5, £10, £20 and £50 notes into circulation in 1943: the **Bank of England** never found them. Plans had been made to drop British pounds over London by plane.^[3] Today, these notes are considered very valuable by collectors.

An industrial area, outside the western camp perimeter, contained SS workshops in which prisoners were forced to work; those unable to work had to stand to attention for the duration of the working day. **Heinkel**, the aircraft manufacturer, was a major user of Sachsenhausen labour, using between 6,000 and 8,000 prisoners on their **He 177** bomber. Although official German reports claimed the prisoners were "working without fault", some of these aircraft crashed unexpectedly around **Stalingrad** and it is suspected that prisoners had sabotaged them.^[4] Other firms included **AEG** and **Siemens**. Prisoners also worked in a brick factory, which some say was supposed to supply the building blocks for Hitler's dream city, Germania, which was to be the capital of the world once the Nazis took over.

Prisoner abuses [edit]

Camp punishments could be harsh. Some would be required to assume the "Sachsenhausen salute" where a prisoner would squat with his arms outstretched in front. There was a marching strip around the perimeter of the roll call ground, where prisoners had to march over a variety of surfaces, to test military footwear; between 25 and 40 kilometres (16 and 25 mi) were covered each day. Prisoners assigned to the camp prison would be kept in isolation on poor rations and some would be suspended from posts by their wrists tied behind their backs (**strappado**). In cases such as attempted escape, there would be a public hanging in front of the assembled prisoners.

Dr Wolfgang Wirth did experiments using lethal gas, Lost, in the camp.^[5] ^[6]

Aftermath [edit]

Some 30,000 inmates died there from exhaustion, disease, malnutrition, pneumonia, etc. due to the poor living conditions. Many were executed or died as the result of brutal medical experimentation. Over the course of its operation, over 100 Dutch resistance fighters were executed at Sachsenhausen. The Dutch subsequently^[*when?*] sought the extradition from **Czechoslovakia** of **Antonín Zápotocký**, who became President of Czechoslovakia, for his alleged role in the murder of the Dutch during his time as a *kapo* at the camp. According to an article published on December 13, 2001 in *The New York Times*, "In the early years of the war the SS practiced methods of mass killing there that were later used in the Nazi death camps. Of the roughly 30,000 wartime victims at Sachsenhausen, most were Russian prisoners of war".^[7]^[8]

Kristallnacht Bucharest Dorohoi Iași
Jedwabne Kaunas Lviv (Lvov) Tykocin
Vel' d'Hiv Waśosz

Einsatzgruppen

Babi Yar Bydgoszcz Częstochowa
Kamianets-Podilskiy Ninth Fort Odessa
Piaśnica Ponary Rumbula Erntefest

"Final Solution"

Wannsee Conference Operation "Reinhard"
Holocaust trains Extermination camps

End of World War II

Wola massacre Death marches

Camps

Nazi extermination camps

Auschwitz-Birkenau Bełżec Chelmno
Jasenovac Majdanek Maly Trostenets Sobibor
Treblinka

Nazi concentration camps

Bergen-Belsen Bogdanovka Buchenwald
Dachau Gonars (Italy) Gross-Rosen
Herzogenbusch Janowska Kaiserwald
Mauthausen-Gusen Neuengamme Rab
Ravensbrück **Sachsenhausen** Sajmište
Salaspils Stutthof Theresienstadt Uckermark
Warsaw

Transit and collection camps

Belgium

Breendonk Mechelen

France

Gurs Drancy

Italy

Bolzano

Netherlands

Amersfoort Westerbork

Divisions

SS-Totenkopfverbände

Concentration Camps Inspectorate

Politische Abteilung Sanitätswesen

Extermination methods

Inmate identification Gas van Gas chamber

Extermination through labor

Human medical experimentation

Inmate disposal of victims

(*Sonderkommando*)

Resistance

Jewish partisans Bricha

Ghetto uprisings

Warsaw Białystok Łachwa Częstochowa

Allied response

Joint Declaration by Members of
the United Nations

Auschwitz bombing debate Nuremberg Trials

Denazification

Aftermath

Bricha Displaced persons

Central Committee of the Liberated Jews

Reparations Agreement between
Israel and West Germany

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Many women were among the inmates of Sachsenhausen and its subcamps. According to SS files, more than 2,000 women lived in Sachsenhausen, guarded by female SS staff (*Aufseherin*). Camp records show that there was one male SS soldier for every ten inmates and for every ten male SS there was a woman SS. Several subcamps for women were established in Berlin, including in [Neukölln](#).

Sachsenhausen [female guards](#) included [Ilse Koch](#), and later Hilde Schlusser. [Anna Klein](#) is also noted for her presence at the camp.

Towards the end of the war, 13,000 Red Army POWs arrived at Sachsenhausen. Over 10,000 were executed in the camp by being shot in the back of the neck through a hidden hole in a wall while being measured for a uniform. Their bodies were then burnt in a crematorium.

With the advance of the [Red Army](#) in the spring of 1945, Sachsenhausen was prepared for evacuation. On April 20–21, the camp's SS staff ordered 33,000 inmates on a [forced march](#) northeast. Most of the prisoners were physically exhausted and thousands did not survive this death march; those who collapsed en route were shot by the SS. On April 22, 1945, the camp's remaining 3,000 inmates, including 1,400 women were liberated by the Red Army and the [Polish Army's 2nd Infantry Division](#).

Camp commanders [edit]

- [SS-Obersturmbannführer Michael Lippert](#), July 1936 – October 1936
- [SS-Standartenführer Karl-Otto Koch](#), October 1936 – July 1937
- [SS-Oberführer Hans Helwig](#), July 1937 – January 1938
- [SS-Oberführer Hermann Baranowski](#), February 1938 – September 1939
- [SS-Sturmbannführer Walter Eisfeld](#), 1939–1940
- [SS-Oberführer Hans Loritz](#), 1940–1942
- [SS-Sturmbannführer Albert Sauer](#), 1942–1943
- [SS-Sturmbannführer Anton Kaindl](#), 1943–1945

Notable inmates and victims during German period [edit]



Wash up area for prisoners

- Captain [Sigismund Payne Best](#) and Major [Richard Henry Stevens](#), British intelligence agents kidnapped during the [Venlo Incident](#), detained at Sachsenhausen before transfer to [Dachau concentration camp](#).
- [Trygve Bratteli](#) of the [Norwegian Labour Party](#), later prime minister of Norway
- [Taras Bulba-Borovets](#), [Andriy Melnyk](#) and [Oleh Stuhl](#) (briefly), [Stepan Bandera](#) and [Yaroslav Stetsko](#), Ukrainian nationalist leaders imprisoned until September–October 1944
- [Francisco Largo Caballero](#), Spanish Prime Minister (1937) and trade unionist, arrested in France, he spent most of World War II imprisoned at Sachsenhausen.
- [Jack Churchill](#), placed at Sachsenhausen, later [transferred to Tyrol](#).
- [Peter Churchill](#), British [SOE](#) agent, later transferred to Tyrol.
- [Leo Clasen](#), a homosexual survivor of the Holocaust who published an account of his ordeal in 1954 under the pseudonym L. D. Classen von Neudegg.
- Wing Commander [Harry Day](#), Flight Lieutenants [Bertram James](#) and [Sydney Dowse](#), [RAF](#) pilots, who had escaped during [The Great Escape](#) from [Stalag Luft III](#), sent to Sachsenhausen as punishment, where with Jack Churchill and Major [Johnnie Dodge](#) escaped via a tunnel built by James and Dowse in September 1944. Recaptured and held in solitary confinement, later returned to the *Sonderlager* (special camp); transferred to [Tyrol](#).
- Major [Johnnie Dodge](#), a British Army Officer and relation of [Winston Churchill](#) who had escaped during The Great Escape from Stalag Luft III. In February 1945, was removed from solitary confinement and sent back to Britain, via Switzerland, to act as a peace envoy to the British Government, arriving just before [VE Day](#).
- [Heinrich Düker](#) political supporter of German resistance, survived
- [Yakov Dzhughashvili](#), [Joseph Stalin](#)'s eldest son, was briefly imprisoned and died there in 1943 under unclear circumstances.
- [Georg Elser](#), opponent of [Nazism](#) who attempted to kill [Adolf Hitler](#) on his own in November 1939; later moved to [Dachau concentration camp](#).
- [Heinrich Feisthauer](#), political opponent of the Nazi regime and a survivor of Sachsenhausen.
- [Einar Gerhardsen](#) of the [Norwegian Labour Party](#), later prime minister of Norway
- [Hans Grundig](#), German artist.



Recreation of the security perimeter at Sachsenhausen



Arbeit Macht Frei gate
52.765882°N 13.264275°E



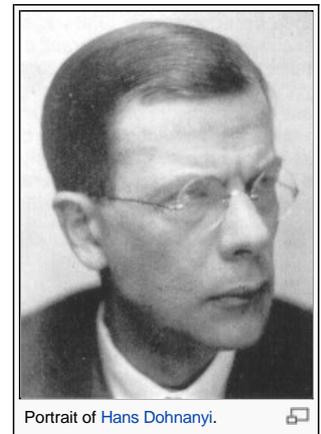


German commemorative postal stamp for Georg Elser, 2003

- **Herschel Grynszpan**, whose November 7, 1938 assassination of the German diplomat **Ernst vom Rath** served as a pretext for **Kristallnacht**, 1940 until he was moved to **Magdeburg**.
- Bayume Mohamed Hussein, a black man from Tanganyika (today **Tanzania**), died in the Sachsenhausen camp^[9]
- **Dmitry Karbyshev**, **Red Army** general and posthumous **Hero of the Soviet Union** briefly imprisoned before he was moved to **Mauthausen concentration camp**.
- **Olaf Kullmann**, Norwegian **pacifist** imprisoned April 1942 and perished there in July of the same year.^[10]
- **Aksel Larsen**, Danish Communist leader, imprisoned 1943 to 1945.
- **Julius Leber**, German **SPD** politician, 1933 until 1937, having been declared a "dangerous opponent of the regime".
- **Georges Mandel**, Minister of Overseas France, 1942–1943.
- Reverend **Martin Niemöller**, a critic of the Nazis and author of the statement "**First they came...**".
- **Oleh Olzhych**, tortured to death in June 1944.
- **Paul Reynaud**, the penultimate Prime Minister of France before **its defeat by Germany**, 1942–1943.
- **Stefan Rowecki**, chief commander of the Polish **Armia Krajowa**, imprisoned 1943 and probably executed there in 1944.
- **Kurt Schuschnigg**, the penultimate **Chancellor of Austria** before the **Anschluss**
- **Fritz Thyssen**, German businessman who emigrated from Germany, imprisoned in Sachsenhausen and later transferred to Dachau.
- **Gottfried Graf von Bismarck-Schönhausen**, grandson of **Otto von Bismarck**, an **SS** officer aware of the preparations for the **20 July plot** to assassinate Hitler, was imprisoned in Sachsenhausen until its liberation by Soviet forces.
- **Hasso von Boehmer**, German Lieutenant Colonel on the General Staff and 20 July plotter, temporarily detained in the camp's clinic in 1944 due to illness. He was then moved to Berlin.
- **Hans von Dohnanyi**, a German jurist, rescuer of Jews, and resistance fighter against the Nazi German regime, 1944 until his execution in April 1945.
- The wife and children of **Rupprecht, Crown Prince of Bavaria**, members of the **Wittelsbach** family, October 1944 to April 1945, before being transferred to **Dachau concentration camp**.
- **Reinhold Wulle**, monarchist and former **German National People's Party** leader.
- **Antonín Zápotocký**, **General Secretary** of the **Communist Party of Czechoslovakia** (later Prime Minister and President), from 1940. He became a **Kapo**, which ultimately helped him survive the war.



Portrait of Hans Grundig by Lea Grundig.



Portrait of Hans Dohnanyi.

Among those executed in "Station Z" were

- **Commandos** from **Operation Musketoon**
- **August Dickmann**, a German **Jehovah's Witness**, publicly shot September 15, 1939 because of his **conscientious objection** to joining the armed forces. The SS had expected his death to persuade fellow Witnesses to abandon their own refusals and to show respect for camp rules and authorities. The effort failed, however. Other Witnesses emphatically refused to back down.
- **John Godwin RNVR**, a British Naval Sub-Lieutenant who managed to shoot dead the commander of his execution party, for which he was posthumously **mentioned in despatches**.
- **William Grover-Williams**, **Grand Prix motor racing** champion
- **Franz Kaufmann**, German jurist, former Chief Secretary of the Reich Public Accounts Office and head of an underground group that created and supplied all manner of fake documents to underground Jews, including certificates of Aryan descent, driving licenses, and food ration cards. Arrested in 1943 and executed in 1944 at Sachsenhausen.^[11]
- **Heinrich Koenen**, a communist spy captured in Berlin, executed at Sachsenhausen in 1945.
- **Willi Lehmann**, **NKVD** spy, probably cremated December 1942.
- Blessed Innocent Guz of Lviv [Innocent] [baptized Józef Wojciech (Joseph Adalbert)], Ukrainian-born Polish Franciscan priest, killed 1940 at Sachsenhausen [Germany] age 50 beatified 1999
- **Friedrich Weißler**, German lawyer active in the resistance movement against National Socialism.
- **Albert Willimsky**, German Roman Catholic priest active in the resistance movement against National Socialism
- **Stanislaw Kubista**, SVD Priest.

The structure under the Soviets [edit]

Further information: **NKVD special camps**

Main article: **NKVD special camp Nr. 7**

In August 1945 the Soviet Special Camp No. 7 was moved to the area of the former concentration camp. Nazi functionaries were held in the camp, as were political prisoners and inmates sentenced by **Soviet Military Tribunals**.^[12] By 1948, Sachsenhausen, now renamed "Special Camp No. 1", was the largest of three special camps in the Soviet Occupation Zone. The 60,000 people interned over five years included 6,000 German officers transferred from Western Allied camps.^[13] Others were Nazi functionaries, anti-Communists and Russians, including Nazi collaborators.

One of the camp's commandants was **Roman Rudenko**,^[14] the Soviet Chief Prosecutor at the **Nuremberg Trials**.

By the time the camp was closed in the spring of 1950, at least 12,000 had died of malnutrition and disease.^[12]

With the fall of the communist East Germany it was possible to do excavations in the former camps. At Sachsenhausen, the bodies of 12,500 victims were found, most were children, adolescents and elderly people.^[15]

The Sachsenhausen camp today [\[edit\]](#)

In 1956, the [East German](#) government established the site as a national memorial, which was inaugurated on 23 April 1961. The plans involved the removal of most of the original buildings and the construction of an obelisk, statue and meeting area, reflecting the outlook of the current government.

The government of East Germany emphasised the suffering of political prisoners over that of the other groups detained at Sachsenhausen. The memorial obelisk contains eighteen red triangles, the symbol the Nazis gave to political prisoners, usually communists. There is a plaque in Sachsenhausen built in memory of the Death March. This plaque has a picture of malnourished male prisoners marching, all of whom are wearing the red triangle of a political prisoner.

As of 2012, the site of the Sachsenhausen camp, at Strasse der Nationen 22 in Oranienburg, is open to the public as a museum and a memorial. Several buildings and structures survive or have been reconstructed, including guard towers, the camp entrance, crematory ovens and the camp barracks.

After [German reunification](#), the camp was entrusted to a foundation that opened a museum on the site. The museum features artwork created by inmates and a 30-centimetre (12 in) high pile of gold teeth (extracted by the Germans from the prisoners), scale models of the camp, pictures, documents and other artifacts illustrating life in the camp. The administrative buildings from which the entire German concentration camp network was run have been preserved and can also be seen.

Following the discovery in 1990 of [mass graves](#) from the Soviet period, a separate museum has been opened documenting the camp's Soviet-era history, in the former *Sonderlager*.

The compound has been vandalized by [Neo-Nazis](#) several times. In September 1992, barracks 38 and 39 of the Jewish Museum were severely damaged in an [arson](#) attack. The perpetrators were arrested, and the barracks were reconstructed by 1997.^[16]



Plaque to honour [Dutch resistance](#) fighters executed at Sachsenhausen

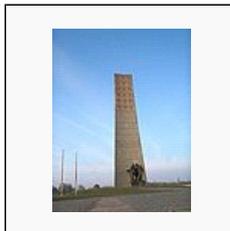


Arson damage caused to this barrack building has been covered in glass to protect it, whilst still showing the damage to those visiting the camp.

Gallery [\[edit\]](#)



Death March memorial plaque – Sept 2010



Soviet Liberation Memorial – full size – Nov 2005



There are eighteen red triangles on each side of the Memorial Obelisk – Sept 2010



The Memorial



Memorial statue at the base of the Obelisk – Sept 2010



Jewish barracks and museum, 2006



Sachsenhausen Crematorium, Oranienburg, Berlin, 2009



Sachsenhausen Crematorium Memorial, Oranienburg, Berlin, 2009



Commemorative postage stamp



Main entrance, July 2006



One of the perimeter watchtowers, May 2007



Prisoner's uniform. May 2007



Pathology Block over Mortuary Cellar used for storing bodies prior to cremation



Infirmiry Barracks, later used for medical experiments and now housing an exhibition.



The green building beyond the entrance gate is the remnants of the SS troop barracks



Entrance viewed from the Roll Call Area



Wall around Roll Call Area indicating positions of barrack blocks



Execution Trench



Execution trench

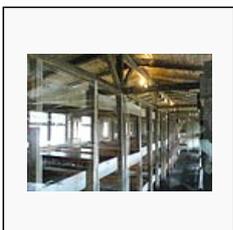
Medical post mortem table



Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp, Oranienburg, Berlin, 2007



Toilet inside the barracks



Bunk beds inside the barracks



Prison cell



Boot-testing track, used especially by pink triangle (homosexual) prisoners

See also [\[edit\]](#)

- [List of subcamps of Sachsenhausen](#)
- [List of Nazi concentration camps](#)
- [International concentration camp committees](#)

Footnotes [\[edit\]](#)

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- Andrea Riedle: *Die Angehörigen des Kommandanturstabs im KZ Sachsenhausen. Sozialstruktur, Dienstwege und biografische Studien*, Metropol Verlag, Berlin 2011, ISBN 978-3-86331-007-3.
-  Sachsenhausen travel guide from Wikivoyage

External links ^[*edit*]

- History of the Sachsenhausen-Oranienburg camp [↗] on the Jewish Virtual Library part of the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise
- Sachsenhausen among the Nazi camps (Germany), with list of its subcamps [↗] on a site is hosted by JewishGen, Inc [↗]
- Gedenkstätte und Museum Sachsenhausen [↗]
- Guide to the Concentration Camps Collection [↗] at the Leo Baeck Institute, New York, NY. Contains lists of prisoners and correspondence from Sachsenhausen.



Authority control WorldCat [↗] VIAF: 143374923 [↗] LCCN: no97029142 [↗]

Categories: Sachsenhausen concentration camp | Oberhavel | Soviet special camps | Buildings and structures in Brandenburg | Museums in Brandenburg | World War II museums in Germany | World War II memorials in Germany | Nazi concentration camps

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