Auschwitz Essay, Research Paper

Where Their Lives Ended Concentration camps are widely involved in people s knowledge of the Holocaust. This is evident because death affects human emotions, and death is what occurred at the concentration camps. The Holocaust is remembered for all of the murdering committed, and these camps were where a majority of where it took place. The Final Solution was issued by Hitler and it was the plan to exterminate the Jewish race . Historians have generally thought that the Final Solution unfolded like this. First, the Einsatzgruppen (special task forces) entered the Soviet Union behind the invading armed forces in late June 1941 and began shooting Jews where they were found. Roughly 500,000 Jews were killed in this way between July and December 1941. At that time, the sheer number of Jews to be killed and the effect on the police of shooting women and children caused other methods to be investigated, culminating in the establishment of death camps such as Auschwitz, Treblinka and Sobibor in early 1942, to which Jews were transported and gassed with carbon monoxide or prussic acid (Zyklon B). One can only speculate what finally catalyzed Hitler into making the ultimate decision in December 1941, but a look at the situation at that time suggests several factors played a role. First, with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the American declaration of war to Japan, and Hitler’s own declaration of war against the United States, Hitler now had the “world” war referred to by Goebbels in his diary entry of December 12, 1941. This diary entry by Hitler stated that if the Jews were to cause a world war involving Germany, then they would be annihilated. Second, the first great reversal of German fortunes in the war against the Soviet Union had taken place. On December 5, at the very gates of Moscow, the German army was stopped its tracks by the onset of a vicious Russian winter. Temperatures dropped to 31 degrees below zero that day, and the next day to 36 below. The Germans were not equipped with winter gear, the panzers (Fast German tanks) broke down, and, on the 6th, General Zhukov attacked on 200-mile front before Moscow with 100 divisions that the Germans had not even known existed. Hitler must have known at this stage that his war effort was in serious, perhaps grave danger. Third, the sheer numbers of Jews to be killed and the difficulties doing it caused for the police who did the shooting were passed on by Himmler to Hitler. There had been discussions on the use of poisonous gas as a means of killing Jews and avoiding public spectacles that sometimes accompanied shooting throughout the autumn of 1941. These events led to the design of the concentration camp. The most infamous camp was Auschwitz. Auschwitz was more than a camp; in fact it was a vast complex consisting of more than 40 satellite camps: it was a prison camp, a labor camp, an industrial center and a death camp. The complex included the I.G. Farben Buna rubber plant, the Monowitz camp where Primo Levi was held, the main Auschwitz camp (Auschwitz I) and the Birkenau (Auschwitz II) extermination camp, three kilometers Northwest of the main camp, where the majority of mass murders by poison gas took place. In a recent estimate of the victims of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camps, Franciszek Piper estimates that at least 1.3 million people were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau among whom 1.1 million were Jews. He estimates that of these 1.3 million at least 1.1 million were killed or died. Piper estimates a maximum of 1.5 million dead including 1.35 million Jews. It is a fact that an early Soviet estimate placed the victims of Auschwitz-Birkenau at 4 million and that the communist regime in Poland adhered to this number long after it was known to be untrue. It is a favorite tactic of deniers to claim that the untruth of this number should somehow affect estimates of the total number of Jews killed in the Final Solution. This claim is invalid. With a few notable exceptions, historians did not take the 4 million number seriously. Additionally, estimates for the number of dead were generally made by the overall European demographics and therefore would not depend on an error in a single camp even if it were made. Both of these points are demonstrated by the conservative estimates of Raul Hilberg who estimates that 1 million Jews were killed in Auschwitz-Birkenau and that 5.1 million Jews were killed in all. Hilberg first made his estimate in 1961 and reaffirmed it in 1985 with the “revised and definitive” edition of his seminal work, The Destruction of the European Jews.

Murder by poison gas took place at several installations in Auschwitz-Birkenau: On 3 September 1941 a trial gassing was conducted in block 11 [of Auschwitz I]. Later, one room of the base-camp crematorium was equipped as a gas chamber [Krema I in Auschwitz I]. After these trials, in 1942, two abandoned thatch-roofed cottages in a wood at Birkenau were transformed into gas chambers; they were known as “the bunkers.” In the spring of 1943 construction of four modern crematoria [Kremas II-V] was completed on the site of Birkenau itself. Each was divided into three parts: a section for the crematory ovens, a place for prospective victims to undress, and a gas chamber. The bunkers were no longer used except in emergencies. The gas chambers were at first, a place of hope. The Nazis told the people that were led into the chambers that they were to shower in them so that they could go home clean. The gas chambers second, usually not widely known cause, came into effect here. The people would strip down and put their clothes into another gas room where the bacteria would be killed. The harsh living conditions caused Typhus to spread and the gas was used to get rid of the bacteria, while the chamber next-door had fake shower installations for the innocent. These showerheads had no water flow from them, they were props that added to the idea of showers for the people. The gas chambers were built with incinerators next to them so that after the people were killed, their bodies could be easily burned and disposed of. The smokestacks shed blood day and night while the ash fell upon the streets of the neighboring towns.The amount of information that is available to write about is enormous. The Auschwitz camp not only dealt with murdering people in gas chambers, but there were other ways for those innocent people to lose their lives. The concentration camps put people to work and they were provided with little food. Many people starved to death or died of other reasons caused by the harsh living conditions. Other times, they would make people dig large burials to bury their own friends and family. There were other digging instances where the soldiers made men dig a grave, and then shoot the gravedigger in the fresh earth that he just uncovered. The men would literally dig their own grave. I feel that digging a grave while knowing that it is meant for you is the hardest way to die, but that is just my opinion which is affected by my own imagination. Then there were death marches. The soldiers took thousands of people on a long march without food or anything. The purpose of the march was for them to die a horrible death.The Holocaust is remembered as a time when a man tried to exterminate a race . I put the word race in quotations because Judaism is wrongly interpreted as a race, not a religion. Hitler tried to exterminate the Jews, but he failed. However, his concentration camps succeeded in murdering millions of people, and the damage was done.