

Blechhammer

(Pol., Blachownia Slaska), concentration camp established in April 1942 near Kozle, a town 18.5 miles (30 km) west of Gleiwitz (present-day Gliwice). In its initial stage, Blechhammer was a forced-labor camp for Jews (a Judenlager). The first group of prisoners, numbering 350, were employed on the construction of the Oberschlesische Hydriewerke (Upper Silesia Hydrogenation Works), a chemical-products plant. After a short time a typhus epidemic broke out, and 120 prisoners who contracted the disease were sent to Auschwitz, where they were killed. That June the remaining prisoners were transferred to a new and larger camp that had been built nearby. Most of the prisoners brought to Blechhammer were Jews from Upper Silesia, but there were other Jews as well, from fifteen different countries. The number of prisoners reached 5,500. They were housed in wooden barracks under appalling conditions, with no toilet or washing facilities. Some 200 female Jewish prisoners were put into a separate section of the camp. Hunger and disease were rife, especially diarrhea and tuberculosis. A crematorium was built, in which were cremated the bodies of 1,500 prisoners who had died from "natural" causes or had been killed.

On April 1, 1944, as part of a reorganization, the camp was put under the authority of the Auschwitz camp administration, and it became the satellite camp Auschwitz IV. Hauptsturmführer Otto Brossmann was the camp commandant until November 1944, when he was replaced by Untersturmführer, Kurt Klipp. Throughout the camp's existence, Karl Demerer, a Viennese Jew, was the "Camp Elder" (Lagerältester). He had the courage to stand up to the camp authorities and in many instances was able to help the prisoners.

On January 21, 1945, 4,000 prisoners, including 150 women, were taken out of the camp and put on a death march lasting thirteen days. Some 800 prisoners were killed en route. On February 2, the survivors reached the Gross-Rosen camp, where they remained for five days before being moved to

Buchenwald. Several dozen prisoners who tried to hide in Blechhammer during the evacuation were discovered and killed on the spot.