

Death Marches

During the clearances of the camps, the SS crammed between 50 and 100 prisoners into goods carriages. On these transports, which sometimes took over a week, the prisoners were given little or no food and water. Because of damaged tracks or the constantly changing position of the front lines, the trains were often unable to reach their planned destinations and spent days travelling aimlessly around the network. Many prisoners died of starvation or disease and were buried beside the tracks during breaks in the journey.

If a transport by rail was not possible, the prisoners were herded out of the camp on foot. For these torturous marches, which went on for days, the prisoners were given no provisions or suitable footwear, and many of them died as a consequence. Those who collapsed or could not keep up were shot by the guards.

I walk like a sleepwalker, my strength is dwindling. The shots from the end of the column can be heard in the distance. Fear drives us on.
Raymond Juillard, former prisoner from France, 1997.

Everybody felt guilty because of our comrades who were shot. Should we have carried them until we collapsed alongside them ourselves?
Raymond van Pée, former prisoner from Belgium, 1995.

No shootings or other forms of killing occurred in my column during the march from Hanover-Stöcken to Bergen-Belsen.
SS Unterscharführer Paul Maas, statement given before the Hanover district court on 30 September 1950.

We all saw that the people in the striped clothes were running from the SS men, who were trying to shoot them.
W.S., inhabitant of Celle, in an interview in 1989.