

Stutthof Concentration Camp:  
A Major New Source of Data, Valuable Yet Frustrating  
by Peter Lande

Stutthof concentration camp records recently acquired by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, warrant particular attention, as much for the quality of the information they include as for their volume. The records, which come from the Stutthof Museum, near Danzig, Poland, comprise a massive collection of 305 reels of microfilm.

Stutthof is one of the lesser-known concentration camps. Located in the eastern suburbs of Danzig, it had the dubious distinction of being the first German concentration camp located outside of Germany. Initially used to hold political prisoners from the city of Danzig, it gradually came to incarcerate prisoners brought from further away; nevertheless, it remained relatively small through 1940–41, with about 12,000 men and women prisoners. During this initial period, many prisoners were transferred elsewhere or even released after “re-education.” It remained primarily a political prison, although the first Russian prisoners of war were brought there in 1941.

Beginning in 1942, prisoners of various nationalities were transferred to Stutthof from other camps, such as Mauthausen and Flossenburg. In 1943, the camp grew larger and established an extensive system of subcamps, with prisoners primarily from Poland, but also substantial numbers from Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Latvia and elsewhere. The major influx of prisoners occurred in 1944 when 75,000 prisoners, especially Hungarian and Polish Jews, were sent there. Another large number of primarily Jewish prisoners were sent to Stutthof from Riga. (Because of a paucity of data about Riga, until now researchers have always assumed that individuals sent to Riga had died there; this new information substantially alters that assumption.) Altogether, between 110,000 and 120,000 individuals passed through or died in Stutthof.

While Stutthof was not a death camp like Sobibor or Treblinka—in theory it served as a work camp for various industries—in fact, treatment was so harsh that an estimated 75,000 to 80,000 persons died there from hunger or disease or evacuation of the camp under brutal conditions in the final stages of World War II.

What has now become available is a massive, filmed collection of Stutthof records totalling 305 reels of film. Perhaps a dozen reels are related to camp administration and lists of guards, but the remainder provide information on a large number of those who were incarcerated in Stutthof. Most consist of *Personalbogen* (personnel files), records of those who officially entered the camp, as well as death certificates, lists of individuals transferred to and from Stutthof, and even a large number of release documents (all non-Jews). Much of the collection is typed, but even handwritten sections are more legible than records from many other camps.

The entire collection is catalogued under RG04.058. The Museum Archive catalog may be searched via the World Wide Web under <http://www.ushmm.org>. After you reach the Web site, enter “query the archive holdings” and then type “Stutthof” and begin the search. RG04.058M is the first item listed. This will show general breakdowns, e.g., Polish Jews (nationality, not place of birth), but will not tell you which letters of the alphabet are included in a particular reel (e.g., reel 22—Eisenberg, Beila, through Farchmin, Johann).

The Museum Archive catalog shows that a large part of the collection has been arranged by nationality and is alphabetical within this arrangement, e.g., Hungarian Jews, A–C; Russian prisoners of war, etc. The major subcategories and the reel number on which they appear are as follows:

<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>Reel #s</b>
Poles and Jews in Poland	1–111
Russian Jews	112–51
Different (mixed) nationalities	152–208, 214–16
Hungarian Jews	252–67
German Jews	267–80
Latvian Jews	287–93
Lithuanian Jews	299–305
Jewish transports from Auschwitz, Riga and other camps	212–13
Jewish women sent to/from Pruszcza camp	222

*Entrance to Stutthof concentration camp. Between 110,000 and 120,000 individuals passed through or died in Stutthof.*

Courtesy U.S. Holocaust Museum Photo Archives

In reality, the data in these files are much more complicated than the catalog reflects, and although the collection is valuable, using it may also be extremely frustrating. For example, “German” Jews are defined using the 1940s Nazi definition of Germany (e.g., including Austria, Memel, parts of Poland, the Sudetenland and Tilsit). Similarly, Poland and Russia are defined in terms of 1940 boundaries (e.g., Poland includes Vilna). Since “nationality” is often difficult to define, one cannot be sure that an individual file has been placed in the correct nationality category, and, at least in cases of individuals who lived in several different countries, it may be useful to check under each category.

Although the catalog indicates that most of the reels are limited to Jews, many other categories of prisoner (e.g., political prisoners and homosexuals) are mixed in. I estimate that approximately half of the prisoners included in the files were Jews. It might be assumed that the different (mixed) nationalities category relates to nationalities that are not otherwise separately identified. In fact, however, the reels reflect a grab bag of nationalities, primarily Polish, but including Germans and Lithuanians. This part of the collection does not appear to be in alphabetical order. While many of the reels in the catalogs show alphabetical breakdowns, e.g. Hungarian Jews A–C, in fact, the same letter of the alphabet may turn up in several reels (e.g., the name Adler appears on at least three Hungarian Jewish reels). The Museum intends to try to improve the catalog in order to correspond more closely to the reality of the films, but the problem essentially goes back to the organizers of the material who were not consistent in their use of nationality categories or alphabetical order. It also remains to be determined how much duplication exists between the individuals on the transportation lists and those with individual files.

Ultimately, the Museum expects to computerize this material, but no date has been set. In the meantime, researchers may access the information in a number of different ways. Best, is to visit the Museum Archives and do one's research personally. In cases of specific requests, such as “a Hannelore Cahn from Germany,” the Museum staff is prepared to try to locate a record of interest—provided that the relevant portion of the collection is one that can be searched in a reasonably short period of time. The German and Lithuanian material is in fairly good order for search purposes; the Hungarian portion is not.

Write to Archives, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, 100 Raoul Wallenberg Place, SW, Washington, DC 20024-2150 or e-mail your request to <archives@ushmm.org>. Please recognize that the museum archives has a small staff already faced with a large number of requests for information. Do not telephone requests. Be aware also that even where a search is possible, the fact that a name is not located does not necessarily mean that it is not in the collection. For example, the “mixed” nationality material includes

information on some Lithuanian Jews, but the Museum staff is not able to search through this section. If you come in person prepared to devote considerable time to your search, the rewards may be considerable.

---

*Peter Lande of Washington, DC, is a retired foreign service officer who writes frequently for AVOTAYNU about German and Holocaust sources. He works as a volunteer at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.*