

# THERESIENSTADT

The Theresienstadt "camp-ghetto" existed for three and a half years, between November 24, 1941 and May 9, 1945. Theresienstadt was a unique facility as a tool of deception, serving an important propaganda function for the Germans.

## NAZI DECEPTION

The publicly stated reason for the deportation of the Jews from Germany was their "resettlement to the east," where they would have to do forced labour. Because it seemed unbelievable that elderly Jews could be used for forced labour, the Nazis used the Theresienstadt ghetto to hide the real reason for the deportations. In Nazi propaganda, Theresienstadt was described as a "spa town" where elderly German Jews could "retire" in safety. In reality, the ghetto was a collection centre for deportations to ghettos and killing centres in Nazi-occupied eastern Europe.

The Germans permitted the International Red Cross to visit Theresienstadt in June 1944. It was all an elaborate hoax. The Germans intensified deportations from the ghetto shortly before the visit, and the ghetto itself was "beautified" – gardens were planted, houses painted, and barracks renovated. The Nazis staged social and cultural events for the visiting dignitaries. Once the visit was over, the Germans resumed deportations from Theresienstadt, which did not end until October 1944.

## DEPORTATIONS FROM THERESIENSTADT

Beginning in 1942, SS authorities deported Jews from Theresienstadt to other ghettos, concentration camps, and extermination camps in Nazi-occupied eastern Europe including Auschwitz, Majdanek, and Treblinka. In total, approximately 140,000 Jews were transferred to Theresienstadt. Of these, nearly 90,000 were deported to points further east and almost certain death, roughly 33,000 died in Theresienstadt itself, mostly from disease or starvation.

## CULTURAL LIFE AT THERESIENSTADT

Despite the terrible living conditions and the constant threat of deportation, Theresienstadt had a highly developed cultural life. Outstanding Jewish artists, mainly from Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Germany, created drawings and paintings, some of them secret depictions of the ghetto's harsh reality. Writers, professors, musicians, and actors gave lectures, concerts, and theatre performances. The ghetto maintained a lending library of 60,000 volumes.

## CHILDREN IN THERESIENSTADT

Fifteen thousand children passed through Theresienstadt. Although forbidden to do so, they attended school. They painted pictures, wrote poetry, and otherwise tried to maintain a hint of normality. Approximately 90 percent of these children perished in death camps.