



# **The Dachau Defendants: Life Stories from Testimony and Documents of the War Crimes Prosecutions**

*Fern Overbey Hilton*

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In the 489 Dachau trials, 1700 criminals of Nazi Germany faced American justice. Held in the old administration building of the defunct concentration camp, they began just weeks after the capitulation in 1945 and were completed on December 30, 1947. The defendants varied from major figures in the Reich, to doctors, engineers, and teachers, to farmers, students, and villagers. The crimes include the abuse or murder of downed American airmen and atrocities committed against victims of all nationalities in the concentration camps and transports. This study concentrates on a selection of the trials that show a broad group of representative crimes and lend themselves to an understanding of World War II German culture. In proving that the average citizen could be as devoted a contributor to the Nazi cause as Hitler, it hopes to reveal something about those who would not stand up to him, who tolerated him, or who joined him. It addresses the disturbing reality that most atrocities committed in the Hitler era were the result of personal decisions made by others than the dictator. Written entirely from primary source documents such as letters, testimony, petitions, military records, physical

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