

Ernst Pack

(March 3, 1895 - unknown)

*This essay is written by and based on the research of Pink Triangle Legacies Project Founder Dr. Jake Newsome.
Thank you for your work in preserving queer history.*



Essen Police photograph of Ernst Pack, 1938.
Arolsen Archives

Ernst Pack was born in Iserlohn, a small town in Germany near the border with the Netherlands. His family owned a construction business, and that's where he worked after graduating high school. When World War I broke out, he volunteered for the army and eventually rose to the rank of staff sergeant. When the war ended in 1918, he returned home after earning an Iron Cross Second Class for his service. He became a partner in the family firm, and in 1925 he moved the business from Iserlohn to the larger city of Essen, located just 40 miles away in Germany's industrial region. He was able to enjoy the comfortable life of a single man with the steady income of an upper management position.

Ernst was 43 years old when he boarded a train to work one day in September 1938. He met a man on the train, and after a bit of conversation, the two found an empty car where they embraced, kissed, and masturbated together. The whole encounter was over soon, and the two went their separate ways.

Unfortunately, the other man reported Ernst to the police as a "warm brother," the German slang for a gay man. Records do not indicate the motivations of the man who turned in Ernst. Ernst was arrested and ultimately convicted of violating Paragraph 175, Germany's national law against "indecent" between men. He served two months in prison.

Four years later, Ernst was arrested under Paragraph 175 again. In November 1942, he was sentenced to 10 months in prison with hard labor. Even before his sentence was complete, the police department requested that the Nazi Gestapo transfer him to a concentration camp, writing "In order for Pack to agree to a better way of life and divert him from his vices, I consider a longer and stricter incarceration in a camp absolutely necessary. Only through the implementation of this measure is there hope for an improvement and his return to the German community."

This letter reflects the broader understanding of the time that people were not born gay. Instead, as the letter argues, engaging in same-sex behavior was an undesirable lifestyle choice that people made. According to this view, people could be trained or forced to stop making these actions. Authorities like the police officer who wrote this request believed that hard labor and harsh conditions would make someone “tougher” and more “manly,” which would “cure” them and reorient them. In short, time in a concentration or labor camp can be seen as a violent form of “conversion therapy.”



Ernst Pack's prisoner photograph at Natzweiler concentration camp, 1942.
Arolsen Archives

The Nazis transferred Ernst to the Natzweiler concentration camp in December 1943. They then transferred him south to Flossenbürg concentration camp in January 1944. Officials ultimately concluded that Ernst would not be “rehabilitated” by behavioral modification. They believed that more drastic measures were necessary to cure him of his vice. The officials told Ernst that he would be released from the camp only if he submitted himself to so-called voluntary castration. This action was meant to remove his sexual desires altogether.

Ernst knew that if he stayed in the camp, he would most likely die. On February 28, 1944 – only three days before Ernst's fiftieth birthday– the Flossenbürg camp physician performed the castration. Ernst was released in September, but only after being forced to sign a nondisclosure agreement declaring that he would never turn against the Nazis nor speak about the facilities inside the camps.

Records do not indicate what happened to Ernst Pack after that.

Sources & Further Reading

W. Jake Newsome, [Pink Triangle Legacies: Coming Out in the Shadow of the Holocaust](#). Cornell University Press, 2022.

Geoffrey J. Giles, “‘The Most Unkindest Cut of All:’ Castration, Homosexuality, and Nazi Justice,” in *Journal of Contemporary History* 27 No. 1 (Jan. 1992): 41-61.

Read more about Ernst Pack [online](#). For more LGBTQ+ Stories from Nazi Germany, visit pinktrianglelegacies.com/stories.