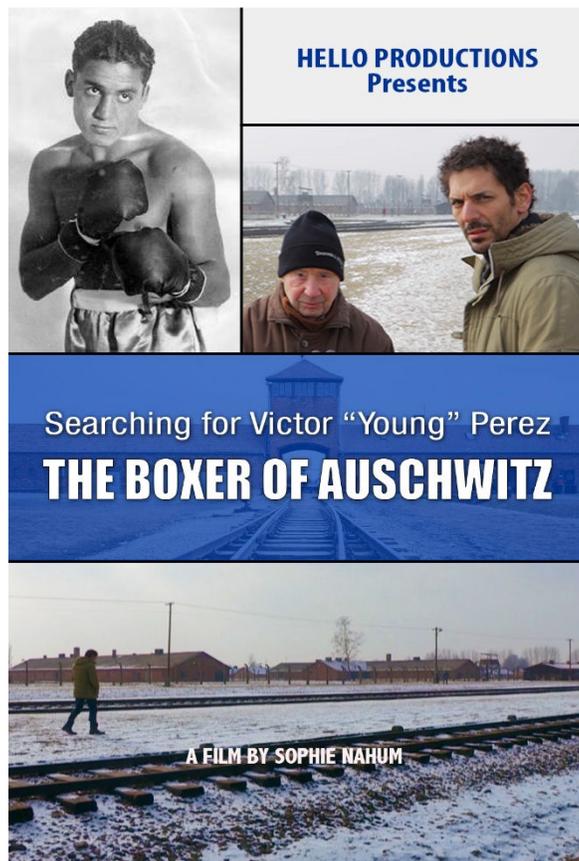




# SEARCHING FOR VICTOR “YOUNG” PEREZ THE BOXER OF AUSCHWITZ



## STUDY GUIDE

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# SEARCHING FOR VICTOR “YOUNG” PEREZ: THE BOXER OF AUSCHWITZ – STUDY GUIDE

When actor Tomer Sisley first heard about Victor “Young” Perez, he couldn’t believe his ears. Inspired to make a movie about his life, Sisley became fascinated with the long-forgotten story of Perez, who rose to great fame in 1931 as the youngest world champion in boxing history—only to be deported to Auschwitz, where he was forced to box in the concentration camp for the amusement of the guards. This compelling documentary follows Sisley on his quest to learn more about Perez’s harrowing, emotional story and to meet the last people who knew Perez and the secret of his tragic fate.

## **The Holocaust**

When the Nazi Party came into power in Germany in 1933 it began a systematic effort to persecute and exterminate the Jewish population of Europe, in an event also known as the Holocaust. Adolf Hitler, leader of the Nazi Party, was convinced that the Jews were racially inferior to the German people. He felt that their existence posed a dangerous threat to Germany, and he led the effort to rid Germany—and every territory it occupied throughout the war—of its Jewish population. At first, Jews were singled out from German society, and their citizenship and other rights were taken away. Soon after that, the Nazis started to physically remove Jewish people from their homes in Germany and its occupied territories, sending them to concentration camps, primarily in Germany and Poland. At these camps, prisoners were abused and starved, forced into slave labor, and subject to horrific medical experiments. Hundreds of thousands died. Finally, the Nazis came up with a plan that they called the “final solution,” where they could eliminate Jews in large numbers. Under this plan, they created camps that were specifically designed to quickly kill as many people as possible. Millions of Jews were transported to these killing centers, where they were gassed to death, then their bodies were burned in crematoriums.

## **The Camps**

The first killing center opened in 1941 at Chelmno, in what is now western Poland. At the Chelmno camp, Jews were gassed in mobile vans, 50 to 70 people at a time. The next year, the Nazis greatly increased their efficiency at killing, when they opened more camps—including Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka—with large gas chambers that could kill hundreds of people at a time. Overall, it is estimated that the Nazis established thousands of concentration camps and killing centers.

The majority of the people sent to these camps travelled there by train. The Nazis used trains to transport Jews from all over Europe, and at some camps multiple trains arrived each day with new prisoners. On the trains, prisoners were tightly packed inside sealed cars, with no room to move around. They were often trapped there for days, in many cases with no food, water, or bathroom. Temperatures were freezing inside the train cars during the winter, and extremely hot during the summer. Many people died inside them as a result of illness, starvation, or suffocation.

Upon arrival at the camps, the prisoners were typically forced to stand in a line, and Nazi guards selected some to be kept alive as laborers, while the majority were sent to the gas chambers. In order to avoid panic, those being sent to the gas chambers were told that they were going to be showered or disinfected. Instead, they were herded into rooms, then after they were locked inside, the rooms were filled with poison gas. Most people were dead after a few minutes. The bodies were then buried, or burned in large crematoriums. Among those who were not sent straight to the gas chambers, most soon died from overwork, or due to starvation or illness.

### **Buna-Monowitz**

Auschwitz was one of the largest among all the Nazi concentration camps and killing centers. It was located in southern Poland, near the German border, and was divided into sub-camps. Auschwitz I opened in 1940, followed by Auschwitz II the following year, and Auschwitz III the year after that, in 1943. Auschwitz III was also known as Buna-Monowitz, Monowitz, or Buna. It is estimated that overall, approximately a million people died in the Auschwitz camps.

In 1943, after the Nazis invaded France, Victor Young Perez was deported to Buna-Monowitz. Buna-Monowitz was located near a small village called Monowice, which Polish residents were forced to leave so that the camp could be constructed. Unlike some of the other camps, Buna-Monowitz was not designed as a killing center; instead it was built in order to provide labor for a nearby factory which manufactured synthetic rubber and fuel. Auschwitz III opened in 1942, and is estimated to have held about 10,000 men.

### **Death Marches and the End of the War**

In January 1945, as Soviet forces began to approach Auschwitz, the camp commanders tried to erase evidence of what had taken place there, destroying both records and buildings. They also evacuated many of the remaining prisoners, sending them west or northeast to the Polish towns of Gliwice (called Gleiwitz in German), or Wodzislaw. An estimated 60,000 prisoners were forced to march to these towns on foot. Gliwice, where Perez was sent, was about 55 kilometers (30 miles) away from Auschwitz. On these marches, thousands of prisoners died from exhaustion, exposure, and starvation, or were shot by SS guards when they could not keep up. So many people died that the marches are often called "death marches." Those who did survive the death marches were sent by train to concentration camps in Germany.

As Soviet and Allied forces moved across Europe and ultimately defeated Germany, they liberated those people who remained alive in the Nazi camps. However, most of the Jews who were sent into the camps died before they could be rescued. In total, it is estimated that more than 6 million Jews died in the Holocaust. Most of those who did survive lost homes and families and were left with physical and mental scars that would stay with them for the rest of their lives.

## Glossary

- **Auschwitz:** A large complex of concentration camps built by the Nazis. Buna-Monowitz (also known as Auschwitz III) was a sub-camp of Auschwitz. Prisoners at Auschwitz were subject to forced labor, and many were killed there in gas chambers.
- **Mireille Balin (1909-1968):** A famous French actress during the 1930s. During World War II, Balin fell in love with a German officer, which led to her arrest and imprisonment at the end of the war. She was released in 1945, but never regained her fame, and she died poor.
- **crematoriums:** Located in the Nazi death camps, crematoriums were used to burn the bodies of the people that were killed in the gas chambers.
- **death marches:** Forced marches of prisoners from Auschwitz and other concentration camps, to the Polish towns of Gliwice and Wodzislaw. Prisoners were then transported to camps in Germany. The marches were called death marches because so many prisoners died while walking.
- **deportation:** Under Nazi authority, millions of Jews were forcibly deported from their homes throughout Europe, and sent to concentration camps and killing centers. The majority died from abuse, illness, and starvation, or they were killed in gas chambers.
- **Drancy:** Located near Paris, Drancy was a transit camp for Jews being deported to the concentration camps and death camps.
- **flyweight:** A weight class in competitive boxing.
- **gas chambers:** A method by which the Nazis murdered millions of Jewish people. The gas chambers were large rooms. Prisoners were locked inside, then poisonous gas was released, killing everyone inside within minutes.
- **Gliwice (Gleiwitz in German):** A town in Poland. When some of the concentration camps were evacuated in 1945, many of the prisoners were forced to walk to Gliwice, then transported to concentration camps in Germany.
- **final solution:** A term used by the Nazis, which meant the annihilation of the Jewish people. In order to accomplish this, the Nazis systematically rounded up the Jews in Germany and its occupied territories and sent them to camps where they were gassed to death.
- **ghetto:** Ghettos were separate living areas set up by the Nazis in order to segregate the Jewish people from the rest of the population. Some Jews lived in ghettos for days or weeks, and others for years.

- **Noah Klieger** (1926-present): A concentration camp survivor, Klieger says that he boxed with Perez in the Auschwitz concentration camp.
- **Nazis**: The political party that gained control of Germany in 1933, under Adolf Hitler. The Nazis were in control of Germany until the end of World War II.
- **Heinrich Schwarz** (1906-1947): Heinrich Schwarz was a captain in the SS, and the officer in charge of Auschwitz III from 1943 to 1945. He was a boxing fan.
- **Shoah Memorial**: A holocaust museum located in Paris, France. The museum includes a wall upon which is engraved the names of 76,000 Jews who were deported from France by the Nazis.
- **SS (*Schutzstaffel*)**: A military organization that worked for Adolf Hitler and the Nazis. SS guards ran the concentration camps and death camps.
- **Tunis**: The capital of the country of Tunisia in North Africa.
- **Tunisia**: A country in North Africa that borders the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea. Tunisia was occupied by the Nazis during World War II
- **yellow star**: During the Nazi era, Jews in Germany and its occupied territories were forced to wear a yellow Star of David on their clothing at all times. The star identified them as Jews.
- **zyklon B**: An extremely poisonous insecticide that was originally used to kill insects and rats. Zyklon B was used to poison millions of Jews in gas chambers in the Nazi death camps.



## Timeline

- **1911:** Victor “Young” Perez is born in Tunis, Tunisia.
- **1931:** Perez becomes the world flyweight champion in boxing.
- **1933:** Adolf Hitler is appointed Chancellor of Germany. Under his Nazi regime, the first concentration camps are established.
- **1935:** The Nazi Party introduces the Nuremberg Laws which prohibit Jews from marrying Germans, and takes away their German citizenship.
- **1938:** During an attack known as the Night of Broken Glass (*Kristallnacht*), the SS destroys Jewish houses and businesses in Munich, and beats and kills Jewish men, women, and children.
- **1939:** Nazi Germany invades Poland and World War II begins.
- **1940:** Paris is occupied by the German army. The French government passes a number of anti-Semitic measures similar to those existing in Germany. The Auschwitz concentration camp opens.
- **1941:** Chelmno, the first killing center opens. Victims are gassed in vans.
- **1942:** The Nazis open more killing centers, where victims are gassed in large room. Auschwitz II opens. Jews in Paris are forced to wear the yellow Star of David on their clothing. The Nazis begin deporting Jews from France to concentration camps and killing centers including Auschwitz.
- **1943:** Buna-Monowitz (also called Auschwitz III) opens. Perez is arrested in Paris, and deported to Auschwitz III. He is forced to box for the amusement of the camp guards.
- **1944:** German forces in Paris surrender to Allied troops.
- **1945:** Perez dies on the death march to Gliwice. He is 33 years old. Germany later surrenders, and the war is over. Allied forces enter the camps and free those prisoners left alive. They see evidence of the mass killings that have taken place. Overall, more than 6 million Jews have been killed.
- **1945-1949:** A series of 13 trials in Nuremberg, Germany, are carried out in order to bring Nazi war criminals to justice. More than a hundred defendants are tried, with some sentenced to death, and others to imprisonment.

## Online Resources

- Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum. <http://auschwitz.org/en/>
- History: The Holocaust. <http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/the-holocaust>
- Holocaust Education & Archive Research Team.  
<http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/toc.html>
- The Holocaust Explained. <http://www.theholocaustexplained.org/>
- Jewish Virtual Library. <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/>
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. <https://www.ushmm.org/>

## Books:

- Friedman, Saul S. 2004. *A History of the Holocaust*. Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell.
- Greene, Joshua M., and Kumar, Shiva, eds. 2000. *Witness: Voices from the Holocaust*. New York, Free Press.
- Hill, Jeff. 2006. *The Holocaust*. Detroit, MI: Omnigraphics.
- Rees, Laurence. 2005. *Auschwitz: A New History*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Steinbacher, Sybille. Trans. Shaun Whiteside. 2005. *Auschwitz: A History*. New York: ECCO.

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