

## **Excursion to Mauthausen Memorial**

On Friday, March 9th, our class went on an excursion to the former concentration camp and memorial site Mauthausen. It was active under the National Socialists from 1938 until the end of WW II in 1945.

After a two-and-a-half-hour coach ride we arrived at the former camp, which is located on a hill, overlooking the picturesque scenery of Upper Austria.

Upon entering we were greeted by our guide, a friendly, middle-aged woman. She gave us a tour of the site, showing us the gas chamber, quarry, underground crematoriums and the barracks. This place was designed to make people work - and die.

We saw the field on which the SS used to play football while the inmates' tortured screams and cries could be heard from inside the camp.

Our guide described the horrific conditions under which thousands of primarily Soviets and Jews, but also people of other ethnicities, were forced to live and work.

Prisoners had to do labour in the quarry, sometimes referred to by the Nazis as "Wiener Graben", and carry immensely heavy rocks up the steep and uneven "stairs of death". This hard and dangerous work consumed many lives, not least because Nazi officers would often find joy in pushing inmates off the cliff into the quarry or down the stairs.

Underground, next to the gas chamber, is a room that is decorated with glass panels with names etched onto them. These are the names of the victims of Mauthausen and its subcamps. The sheer number of humans who lost their lives to the Nazis' reign of terror is overwhelming.

People were degraded, ripped of all dignity, then forced to work themselves to death or just murdered immediately. Murder. There is no other word for it.

Throughout WW II, millions of Jews and other minorities, other ethnic groups met their demise in killing camps like Mauthausen, which were situated across Europe.

We can only hope humanity learns from its perhaps biggest mistake in modern history.

Ben F., 4a