

## **Concentration Camp Melk**

Companion Brochure to the Permanent Exhibit in the Memorial Building of the former Concentration Camp Melk

Vienna 1992

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## EXHIBIT

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The exhibit was made possible with the help of the following Institutions and Companies:

Federal Department of the Interior

Federal Department for Education and Art

Federal Department for Science and Research

State Government of Lower Austria

Umdasch Joint Stock Company, Amstetten

Voest Alpine Stahl AG Linz

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For the support we received in realizing the exhibit we thank:

Manfred Anderle, The Union of Metall-Bergbau-Energie

Jermia Eisenbauer

Gerhard Flossmann

Anton Harrer

Paul Le Caer

Renate Mayrhofer

Elisabeth Morawek

Wolfgang Neugebauer

Helmut Oberchristl, Chief Business Counsel  
VOEST

Alpine Stahl

Josef Rosel

Michelle Piquee-Audrain

Madame Scherer

Colette Thilges

Suzanne Ulmann

Jean Varnoux

Michael Wrobel

Amicale Nationale des Deportes et Familles de  
Disparus de Mauthausen et ses Commandos, Paris

Document Archive of the Austrian Resistance

Institute of Contemporary History of the Vienna  
University

Austrian Camp Society Mauthausen

COMPANION BROCHURE

The following historical treatise about the history of Concentration Camp Melk has been put together from material collected from: Bertrand Perz: Project Quarz. Steyr-Daimler-Puch and Concentration Camp Melk. Publishing House on Social Criticism, Volume 3 of the Line Industry, Forced Labor and Concentration Camps in Austria, Vienna 1991. Detailed source references about the texts cited above can be found there.

Cover design is based on a photograph made by Michael Wrobel from the series "Projekt Quarz".

Printing: Plochl-Druckgesellschaft m. b. H. & Co. KG, 2040 Freistadt.

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## **THE BUILDING IN WHICH THE EXHIBIT IS HOUSED**

Concentration Camp Melk existed from 21 April 1944 until 15 April 1945 and was located on the grounds of the “Freiherr von Birago” barracks. This building was erected in 1913 by Pioneer Battalion No. 9 from North Bohemia and occupied by them. These barracks were named after military engineer Karl Birago who was born in 1792 in Milan and who had developed a new way to build bridges.

Until 1944 these barracks were always occupied by military units regardless of the changes in the political system.

After 1945 it served as a Garrison for the Soviet Army and also as an assembly camp for the so-called ethnic German resettlers. Since 1956 the Birago barracks are being used again by the Austrian Federal Army.

The Memorial to the former Concentration Camp Melk was established in 1963 inside the crematorium of the camp on the initiative of some of the former prisoners and since 1992 it houses the permanent exhibit of the history of Concentration Camp Melk.

The crematorium was erected during the Fall of 1944. Up to the time when the crematorium was made ready in December 1944 the dead prisoners were transported on trucks to KZ Mauthausen to be cremated. During the period of December 1944 and April 1945 more than 3,500 corpses of dead and killed prisoners were cremated in the Melk Crematorium. Among the reasons by the SS for the burning of corpses in all concentration camps was covering up what had happened in those camps. Mass graves, on the other hand, allowed one to draw conclusions about the number of people buried there. Dead prisoners were to disappear without a trace. The decisive points about erecting a crematorium in Melk - crematoria were only built in the larger concentration camps - were the high number of deaths in the area of the construction of the Tunnel Complex Quarz and also the long planned existence of that concentration camp. After the prisoners had completed the underground building project “Quarz” they were to be put to work, under life threatening conditions, in the production of war materiel.

Site Plan of Concentration Camp Melk and Work Details of the Prisoners.

Legend:

1. Concentration Camp Melk.
2. Tunnel Complex "Quarz".
3. Pumping Station for the main water lines to the tunnel complex.
4. Railroad Stops for the transport of the prisoners to the construction site.
5. Drinking water reservoir for the concentration camp near the Kupferschmied intersection.
6. Housing for civilian construction workers.
7. Housing for the German Airforce at Loosdorf-Eastt.

*I am happy that I did it although it was difficult at times. For the past three days I have been in Spain on vacation and during these three days and nights this whole deportation process passed before my eyes. I am happy that I completed this report because it is good to know that there are people who are interested in knowing about suffering while there are others who deny that concentration camps ever existed. We are alive. What will happen once we are gone? I have tried to be as objective as possible, not to dramatize anything, while during the telling of my story I will try to forget the mountains of corpses but in spite of it all you will know that there are things that one simply cannot describe such as: the cold, the hunger, the exhaustion, the fear, and becoming accustomed to death.*

That is how the former French prisoner, Yves Briand, ended his memories of Concentration Camp Melk all of which he wrote down in 1985. These few pages expressed his whole ambivalence in which he attempted by means of this exhibit to describe the history of the Nazi period, the Nazi terror and remembrance of things that happened in this concentration camp.

Every attempt at 'historical memory', every 'text', even the ones that are in an exhibit of eyewitness reports, photographs, documents, objects, that try to explain what happened here have their own limits as they pertain to such horrible memories of those events. One's state of being, and understanding, towards a later, sympathetic and rational reconstruction will form the basis of a narrative that will hang together and will have "meaning" in presenting the past reality in its most real sense which becomes a true central dilemma for him who attempts to write about the Nazi regime and the Nazi terror.

On the other hand it means that in view of these difficulties on the workings of memory one cannot do without it in that there are so many taboos and suppressions that hang over the Nazi history that it does work in one's favor.

At present there are very few places in Austria where one can learn about the things that took place during the Nazi period and about the system of the concentration camps; Mauthausen and its permanent exhibit, the exhibit at the Documentation Archives of the Austrian Resistance in Vienna, for example, are such places.

The documents on which we worked for the Memorial of the former Concentration Camp Melk showed the ambivalence of memory for the events that have been uncovered document the real facts connected with the concentration camp, and thus corrections were necessary.

The individual rooms within the crematorium were organized in a thematic and chronological order in which the political and economic premises were described, which led to the use of forced labor by the concentration camp prisoners in the so-called shifting to the underground and which led to the establishment of the Tunnel Complex “Quarz” between Loosdorf and Melk, which caused the establishment of Concentration Camp Melk, how it impacted the lives of the prisoners and their daily life-threatening existence while doing their work within the tunnel complex and, finally, the evacuation of the camp and the liberation by the Allies. All this forms the “reappraisal”.

The documentation is supported basically on the testimony of the documents, photographs and a commentary which, because it is so sparse due to the lack of authentic material, is the best we could do.

The first room, whose original purpose was the storage room of the corpses that were slated to be burned, was used to describe the concentration camp system in Austria, its connection with the expansion of the armaments industry and the use of forced laborers and concentration camp prisoners in its production.

Then comes the role that was played by Steyr-Daimler-Puch Company in the establishment of the concentration camps, especially the one in Melk in connection with the shifting to the underground and the importance of the war production and the establishment of Tunnel Complex “Quarz” near Loosdorf. The second room basically deals with the shifting to the underground project so that the production within would be protected from Allied bombardments.

The third room, the so-called dissection room, informs the visitor about the planning, establishment and organization of Concentration Camp Melk, about the origins and nationalities of the prisoners, their “daily life” in the camp, the “prisoner community” and the reasons for being assigned to a concentration camp.

The fourth room describes to the visitor the construction of the underground Tunnel Complex “Quarz”, the working conditions of the prisoners, their transport to and from the construction site and it also describes the interplay between the SS, Steyr-Daimler-Puch and project “Quarz”. The fifth room deals with the evacuation of the prisoners and their liberation from Camps Mauthausen and Ebensee. We have tried, with a number of completely contradictory lives, to show the visitor how each life, “at that time” was lived and how each “made use of it” and how that, in turn, in varying ways, could determine the fate and the action of the victim.

The room in which the cremation ovens are located have remained intact and are being used, and will continue to be used, as the individual and collective memory of this place, ever since the creation of the Memorial.

### **The System of Nazi Concentration Camps and Camp Complex Mauthausen**

In 1933 Nazi concentration camps were organized with the specific goal of holding the opponents of National Socialism, expanding terror and fear and by doing this to enforce the Nazi dictatorship. At no time was it a state within the State. Its development and its function followed closely the development of the National Socialist dictatorship.

During the 30ies the concentration camps were expanded into a camp system, which took place well before the “Anschluss” of Austria, and the purpose was that not only political enemies would be incarcerated in them but also those of certain social marginal groups according to the racist ideology of National Socialism which had decided that they were “asocial”. The imprisonment of all those, who had been removed from the National Socialist labor discipline had, because of the required workings of the labor input, an economic function even indirectly. With the “Anschluss” of Austria, the occupation of Sudetenland and the attack on Poland there were extensive movements against potential political enemies and against Jews; countless new camps were erected.

On March 28th, 1938, a few days after the “Anschluss” of Austria, Gauleiter (Regional Leader) Eigruber let it be known that a concentration camp would be erected in Austria. Eigruber saw in this “a sign of our achievements during the period of our struggle.” Already on August 8th, 1938, the first prisoners, mostly Austrians, arrived in Mauthausen. They had been assigned to Concentration Camp Dachau after the “Anschluss”. There had been other reasons that led to the construction of a concentration camp in Mauthausen. In spite of the fact of erecting a special Camp for Austrians - in fact the Austrians remained a constant minority in Mauthausen - in retrospect it is clear that the Nazi leadership wanted to create more concentration camps to allow a larger number of prisoners into the enlarged space which was required due to the intensive measures by the security police at the start of the war. The prisoners would be made useful by removing from the quarries the rocks which were to be used on the magnificent buildings that had been planned by the Nazis. Mauthausen is one of the many concentration camps that were built from material of the former quarries and brick factories. At the very same time that the plans for Mauthausen were being developed, in April 1938, the activities of the SS were brought together with those of the Construction Material Section of the “German Earth and Stoneworks GmbH.” (DEST) in which, partly, “those

wasted workers, in view of the Four-Year Plan, can be made useful.”

The political function of Concentration Camp Mauthausen/Gusen still remained its primary function in spite of the economic activities. Until the middle of the war the primary goal of the camp complex was the

destruction of their political-ideological enemies. The economic activities of the SS in the quarry of Mauthausen, and as of May 1940 in the nearby located sub-Camp Gusen, had catastrophic results for the prisoners due to these political priorities. The death rate among the prisoners in Mauthausen and Gusen during the period from 1942 on was among the highest of all concentration camps within the German Empire. In January of 1941 Mauthausen held approximately 8,000 prisoners and yet that same number of prisoners died during all of 1941. By the end of that year there were about 159,000 prisoners in Mauthausen and Gusen due to new arrivals. The extremely high death rate was the result of a strategy employed by the SS, which was to mobilize the labor force of the prisoners mostly by a systematic regimen of terror, without giving this large group of prisoners the material resources and the necessary food. This strategy did not stand in opposition to the economic interests of the SS because after the start of the war there was an enormous increase into the concentration camps of new groups of people who were to replace the prisoners who were no longer able to work, were exhausted or had died.

Until 1942 work was the main method of punishment in concentration camps. "Education" or "Revenge" was not the goal of imprisonment even when ConcentrationCamp prisoners were usefully employed in different SS-owned enterprises. Yet the political assignments stood in the foreground and the maximum profit to be gained from their work was not its primary goal.

Only when difficulties developed in the recruiting of foreign workers (due to military setbacks) who had been brought forcibly into the German Empire by the millions did the economic meaning of the concentration camps become important. The concentration camps, the power and destruction instrument of the Nazis, now entered the system of forced labor and was assigned a special role. In greater numbers the prisoners were forced to work in relevant enterprises that were part of the war economy. Together with this the number of prisoners into the concentration camps increased enormously and these newcomers came from different groupings of people. While the concentration camps had a population of about 95,000 by the middle of 1942 it had increased to 224,000 by August 1943. At the beginning of 1945 700,000 people were held captive in concentration camps.

The SS did not give up on its power and ideological goals as the reason for incarceration. The input of concentration camp prisoners as a labor force in the armaments industry is first noted in 1942.

As of 1942/43, and on the initiative of companies engaged in making armaments, more and more sub-camps were erected in the vicinity of industrial enterprises that were making especially important war products or at construction sites of power stations that were essential in the support of the armaments industry. The use of concentration camp prisoners in the armaments industry led in Austria to the construction of a countless number of sub-camps of Concentration Camp Mauthausen and a marked increase of the number of prisoners. At the start of 1943 about 14,000 people were incarcerated in Mauthausen and its sub-camps and by October of 1944 this had increased to a total of about 73,000 mostly male prisoners. Due to the evacuation of the concentration camps that were located in Poland (because of the ever forward moving Red Army) the total number of prisoners by March 1945 reached its highest point of 84,000 people.

In addition to Steyr-Daimler-Puch AG and the Hermann Goring Empire factories with their newly constructed Linz shack and the connected Steelplants "Oberdonau", they were mostly enterprises that expanded quickly and were located in "safe -from-air-attacks" Austria which was the airplane and (rocket) industry in which the prisoners were used to build the facilities and then work in them. Selection for the construction of sub-camps near

the industrial enterprises in Austria was for Upper-Austria Central Area, and the industrial area around Vienna had a Regional rationale.

Usually concentration camps were located near those companies that ordered up prisoners on their own initiative. Good personal contacts with high Nazi functionaries did play a decisive role in the common interests of the SS and the armaments companies.

During the Fall of 1943 concentration camps were mostly erected in conjunction with the large underground complexes that were being constructed in which the key industries of the war economy were to be located to safeguard them from Allied air attacks, which by the summer of 1943 had also reached the Austrian area.

The largest tunnel complexes to be created - next to the ones for the Steyr-Daimler-Puch in the neighborhood of Melk, which was called "Quarz" - was the one in Ebensee for the creation and development of rockets and the one near St. Georgen on the river Gusen for the aircraft manufacturer Messerschmitt. The camps that had been erected for the sole purpose of building the underground complexes held, by Fall 1944, about 40% of all the prisoners of the Mauthausen Concentration Camp system who were engaged in that work.

The meaning of concentration camp forced labor for the war economy in the "Ostmark", in the later phases of Nazi rule, is, in comparison with the prisoner count in Mauthausen, where relatively few prisoners were directly working on the armaments production, very clear with regard to those of the sub-camps. At the end of 1944 there were about 10,000 prisoners in Mauthausen while in all the sub-camps there were over 60,000 prisoners, as about one quarter of the total labor force. These consisted of foreign civilian workers and prisoners-of-war who were engaged in the construction of the complexes and were employed by the industry. At the start of November 1944 the number of the concentration camp prisoners who were employed by the industry and doing work for the industry amounted to about 8 percent.

Presentation of the products of the Walzlager facilities of Steyr-Daimler-Puch AG during the International Automobile and Motorcycle Exhibition in Berlin in 1939 (from right to left Propaganda Minister Goebbels, State Secretary Milch, General Director Meindl, Goring, Hitler). Photo: Steyr-Daimler-Puch AG, Commemorative Book of 75 years of the Steyr Facility.

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### **Steyr-Daimler-Puch and “Project Quarz”**

Steyr-Daimler-Puch Ag (SDP) was created in 1934 by the merger of the automobile and arms producer Steyr-Facilities and Austro-Daimler-Puch. After the “Anschluss” in 1938 the Empire Factories’ “Hermann Goring” was able, because of intensive political pressure, to have this very important company added to its group of companies; until then it had been owned by the “Creditanstalt-Bankverein”.

Per the specific request of Empire Marshall Goring Dr. Georg Meindl, a Board of Directors member of Alpine-Montan, was made the new General Director of the SDP. While at Alpine-Montan Dr. Meindl had functioned as Governor of the NSDAP. He was also a Party Member, a member of the SS (in 1944 he held the rank of SS Brigade Commander) and, in addition, held the title of "War Economy Leader". During the following years he will play a decisive role in the expansion of the Company. In addition to his General Director's post of the SDP he also held numerous functions in the Arms Committees and was on the Supervisory Counsel that supervised banks and industrial enterprises.

In the "Ostmark" hardly anything in the economic sphere could be undertaken without Meindl's input. He had excellent relations with the Nazi leadership, mostly with Goring and Juttner, Commander of the SS Leadership Headquarters, as well as the top representatives of the German economy.

With the takeover of the SDP by the Empire Factories and the active expansion politics of the SDP Board of Directors this company had grown enormously. Within a few years the SDP grew to one of the largest German arms manufacturers; all financed by the German Army, and was involved in nearly all aspects of creating war equipment. That is how a new airplane engine assembly line facility was created in Steyr, while in Graz-Thondorf they built a complete facility to create parts for airplane engines, gear boxes and crankshafts for tanks. In St. Valentin they erected a factory to make tanks, the so-called "Nibelungen Factory", which until 1944 alongside Krupp would expand into the largest producer of tanks in the German Empire. In Steyr-Munichholz they created a rolled steel mill which allowed it to become, within three years, the third largest provider of ball bearings within the Empire. After the occupation of Poland the SDP was able to add both of the large Polish state-owned rifle factories in Warsaw and Radom under their acting management and thereby made themselves into one of the important rifle suppliers to the German Army.

This expansion is impressive when measured by the yearly turnover of the SDP, which was 57 million in German marks in 1938 and increased to 456 millions in 1944. The increase in the number of workers makes the extent of the expansion rather clear: in 1937 the company employed about 7,000 people while by 1944 it had increased to about 50,000 people of whom at least half were foreign slave laborers from all over Europe. In addition to those numbers there were the thousands of concentration camp prisoners which were not counted as employees of the company. This enormous expansion of the company would not have been possible without the input of the foreign slave laborers and the concentration camp prisoners.

Because of the company's speedy growth there was always a huge shortage of workers in spite of the massive inpouring of foreign workers. Most of all they were lacking skilled workers which became even more decisive when during the second half of 1941, they took possession of the newly created production branches, and the increased demands of the German Army came all at once. As the first Arms Company in Austria the SDP was also the first to make use of concentration camp prisoners in the construction of their facilities and in their factories as workers. At the start of 1942 General Director Meindl was able to get his own concentration camp in Steyr-Munichholz by getting the higher SS police leadership involved. The prisoners came from Mauthausen.

## IN WAR AS IN PEACE ALWAYS IN THE FOREFRONT

STEYR-DAIMLER-PUCH  
PUBLICLY OWNED COMPANY

Advertising for Steyr-Trucks. From: Oberdonau.Crossection of Culture and Creativity in the Homeland of Hitler, 1st Year, 2nd Issue, April/May 1941.

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The close cooperation between the Steyr management and the SS continued afterwards as well. In the Spring of 1943 the Steyr plant relocated a portion of their carbine production to Concentration Camp Gusen which had existed since 1940. The carbines were mostly used by the SS and it is because of that that they showed a great interest in rifle production.

Also after the takeover of the functions of the acting manager of the airplane engine facility Ostmark (FO) in Wiener Neudorf by Meindl he personally initiated the use of concentration camp prisoners. In a personal letter directed to Himmler Meindl requested a concentration camp of 2,000 prisoners for FO of whom half should at least be skilled metal workers in order to solve the worker problem - one of the causes of the great difficulties in production. As a consideration in return he promised Himmler "to look after the interests of the Waffen-SS" in the Steyr Facilities. Meindl's wish was fulfilled soon thereafter.

The unhindered expansion of the Steyr Companies found an early end due to the steady intensive air attacks by the Allies who, since the Summer of 1943 were now able to reach Austria from North Africa. As of the fall of 1943 the SDP considered relocation plans as did a number of other arms manufacturers. The first considered to be protected were the especially threatened ball bearing producers and the airplane engine assembly lines, which were the primary targets of the Allied air attacks.

During all of fall they considered the different projects and rejected many but by February 1944 they had decided to construct a large underground project in Rogensdorf near Melk for the most important production branches of the Steyr-Companies and also for the acting manager of the airplane engine facility Ostmark. This location had especially favorable geological conditions within the Wach Mountains, had good transportation access and a secured supply of energy.

The planned tunnel complex near Melk, was to have a usable floor area of which at least 65,000 square meters and was to be used for production and after the first tunnels had been completed a portion of the tank production, a part of the "Nibelung Facility". The necessary management and offices that belonged to that part of the production, would also be placed therein in addition to the ball bearing and airplane engine assembly lines. The SDP management pursued this enormous project in an especially intensive manner because it guaranteed a rational business area even under the conditions of the relocation, protection for a considerable portion of the assets and allowance by the SDP of full control over the central production output.

The Steyr Facility wanted to make use of concentration camp prisoners in the construction of Project "Quarz" prior to the project being turned over to SS Special Staff Kammler. Already in February of 1944 Meindl recommended that the prisoners in Ostmark and employed at the airplane engine factory, be relocated as a unit to Melk. However, this did not happen because during the takeover by SS Special Staff Kammler he was notified that the implementation of construction and the allocation of prisoners to the construction companies had to be decided at a ministerial level. SS Special Staff was led by Dr. Engineer Hans Kammler, who were in charge of the construction section within the Economic Administrative Headquarters of the SS and had about 20 such large projects assigned to them. In return the SS made it possible for concentration camp prisoners to be used during the underground relocation of the industry. In the execution of this plan, in spite of the top leadership of Kammler's group, the first prisoners arrived in Melk on April 21st, 1944, through the "de facto" efforts of one of the sister companies established by the Steyr Factory which controlled Quarz GesmbH.

In addition to this very large project near Melk another two smaller underground complexes were being created in the Steiermark (Peggau, Aflenz near Leibnitz). In good order the company was given its own concentration camp for the construction of these complexes.

Part of the original plan of Tunnel Complex “Quarz”, Engineering Office Fiebinger, 20 April 1944.

Main Tunnel A, planned as the underground railway station of the tunnel complex. At the end of the tunnel one can see the mountain stone that had not been taken out. Photo: Michael Wrobel, 1988.

Inasmuch as the tunnel complex in Melk existed only on paper at the start of 1944 the SDP relocated a number of their production facilities in provisionally adapted cellars and bunker complexes, all of which was caused by the pressure that a number of air attacks placed on their facilities. These relocation activities led to some very stark differences between SDP management and the appropriate inter-ministerial oversight staff of the entire underground relocation. The SDP blocked the forced merging of the sensible arms production units of other companies as mandated by the oversight staff because they feared that in such a situation their control over the allocation of people and machinery would be lost and they would be less competitive and that, later on, during the “Quarz” project they would be limited as to what they would be able to do. Business management and combined arms economic interests, whose partial identity until now had made it possible for the expansion of the companies, could no longer be protected during the crisis situation in 1944. The SDP was only interested in relocating if they saw that it could further the interests of the company. With Project “Quarz” the SDP was not only concerned with the hope of the Nazi leadership that with these underground relocations they would still be able to win the war but with saving the accumulated floorspace they had gained during the war. Hence, these prisoners worked in these underground construction projects for the postwar interests of the industry. Geological, technical and increasingly larger supply difficulties that were caused by the war led to the realization that in spite of the massive use of concentration camp prisoners these construction projects could not

be finished by the end of the war. By the end of March 1945 only two-thirds of the construction project of the tunnel complex had been removed. By the spring of 1945 only 7,900 square meters of floor space in the Walzlager Plant of the SDP had been created and shortly thereafter they started their production. By the end of March many pieces of equipment were removed from the tunnel complex and transported westward so that they would be out of Soviet's reach.

### **The Establishment of a Concentration Camp in Melk**

In March 1944 the representatives of the Steyr Company and the SS went in search of a suitable place for a concentration camp. They considered erecting a camp with barracks that would be located close to the tunnel entrance and would be placed on land between Roggendorf and the West Railroad. To establish a camp that would hold 7,000 prisoners would require lots of time and lots of material resources because of the number of prisoners needed in the construction. During their search for an easily available building they soon came upon the Birago barracks in Melk which was released to them by the German Army on April 1st, 1944, so that a concentration camp could be established. On April 21st, 1944, the first 500 prisoners arrived in Melk. The barracks was divided into two parts. The prisoner compound was surrounded by barbed wire and later on there would be guard towers. Another part of the camp would house the SS Camp Leadership and the guards. During the Summer of 1944 several hundred of these prisoners were used in enlarging the original camp to make room for the total strength of 7,000 prisoners. In addition housing barracks were erected, as was a sick bay (the so-called "Revier"), as were workshops, and by the fall of 1944 their own crematorium was erected because of the large number of deaths.

Concentration Camp Melk, like all the other sub-camps in Austria, was under the direct control of the Concentration Camp Mauthausen Command. All the organizational and technical management, plus the financial interests of the sub-camps, were handled in Concentration Camp Mauthausen.

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The prisoners were separated in Mauthausen and sent to the sub-camps according to the need of workers in the arms and construction companies. Usually each prisoner spent some time in Mauthausen before he was shipped to a sub-camp, at least for the time he spent in the so-called "Quarantine". The prisoners were registered in Mauthausen and given prisoner numbers that identified them throughout the Mauthausen sub-camp system.

### **The Camp's SS and Guard Details**

The camp leadership and the most important leadership positions were occupied by members of the SS. At the top of the camp's hierarchy stood the SS Camp Leader who, in turn, reported to the Commander of Concentration Camp Mauthausen. The Report Leader and the Work Detail Leader reported to the SS Camp Leader as did those who were responsible for the housing of the prisoners (called Blocks) and they were titled Block Leaders. In addition to them there were SS men in the kitchen and in the Medical Division. The camp doctor, as well as the guard details, came from the Luftwaffe (Air Corps). 500 soldiers of the Luftwaffe were assigned to do guard duty in Melk and in the Fall of 1944 they were commanded by the SS. These Guard Detail

units for the camp had been formed into Companies and became part of the SS Guard Storm Banner of Mauthausen.

There were two Camp Leaders in Melk who served one after the other. During the preparation and initial construction phase of the camp SS-Untersturmfuhrer Anton Streitwieser was the Camp Leader. Streitwieser, who had the nick name “smart Toni”, was one of the most brutal SS members according to the Mauthausen prisoners who set his dogs onto the prisoners with the words “where is the scoundrel?” Streitwieser was in Melk for only a few weeks and was then made Camp Leader of sub-Camp Schwechat near Vienna.

His successor was SS-Obersturmfuhrer Julius Ludolph who arrived in May 1944. Ludolph was born in Hamburg and had been a taxi driver there. Before he arrived in Melk he had been Camp Leader of sub-camps Loibl-Pass and Gross-Raming. Statements about Ludolph characterized him as a feared thug and drunkard with an extravagant life style which he financed with corruption and embezzlements all made by privileged position. The former SS-Hauptscharfuhrer and temporary commander of the guard detail in Melk, Alois S. reported the following to the Court about Ludolph:

*“It was commonly known that Ludolph and some of his cronies were very violent and allowed prisoners to be handled cruelly”.*

The former prisoner and camp Administrator Hermann Hofstadt, an Attorney in Berlin, wrote this about Ludolph:

*“At the expense of the prisoners Ludolph led a very full life which can hardly be described in words. Every day he ordered the best meat and other such food items from the prisoner’s kitchen and also from the troop’s kitchen. He stole large amounts of cigarettes from the prisoner’s canteen. All these large quantities of food items and cigarettes he could not use just for himself and he sold these goods to civilians and in this manner was able to obtain wines and other such alcoholic drinks. He traded fowl and other such food items that could only be gotten by means of ration cards with the items he had stolen from the prisoners.*

A view to the North of Concentration Camp Melk, Photo: Robert Pachon, 1948, made available by Jean Varnoux.

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*“The scope of his extravagant life style and his daily sallying with different women made me believe often that I was dealing with a sick person. But then I realized that he, Ludolph, was fully responsible for his deeds. When a part of his brutalities was directed towards the prisoners during one of his alcoholic bouts he was fully aware of what he was doing and he acted out what he had planned ahead of time.”*

Camp doctor Dr. Josef Sora reported about Camp Leader Ludolph’s excesses:

*“Especially at night these people did some things that frightened me because of the things I saw. At midnight he had the prisoners brought out from their barracks by floodlight and once I witnessed this early in the morning when he liked to do this sort of thing. He had them form up and when they stood there at attention, all lined up, one of the prisoners stood by with a pail of water while another prisoner held a towel. He would then select a prisoner at random and beat him extremely hard with his fists until blood flowed. Then he would wash his hands in a ceremonial fashion, had the towel handed him whereupon he would select yet another prisoner and beat him so thoroughly that he drove him into the electric fence by kicking him constantly.”*

The Camp Leader wasn't the only SS-man who mistreated prisoners. This was especially so of the Block Leaders, who remained in camp at all times, and were feared most by the prisoners. The prisoners tried as well as possible to stay out of the way of the SS-men, so reported the Frenchman Yves Briand:

*“Most of the time I tried to avoid running into them. Sometime, when things did not go right for them they would turn on the Senior Block Leader (a prisoner) or a Kapo. They would order them to do gymnastics: running - crouching - up - running - crouching - lying down - up - it would take a half hour or longer sometimes. When that was over the Senior Block Leader and the Kapos would, of course, turn on us.”*

In general the Luftwaffe soldiers were described by the prisoners as being usually less brutal. The guard details were basically there during the guarding of the prisoners when they were outside the camp or at the work details, when they would be allowed to enter the camp only with a special permit. They did have contact with the prisoners, especially during the walks to and from the work places, and when they guarded small work details which had not been secured like the tunnel construction sites, with fences, towers and a chain of guard posts. Thus reported the former French prisoner Yves Briand:

*“Naturally their behavior depended on their individual characters. After having left the main gate and having started into the march we tried to slow things down and some of the guards would beat us. Others wouldn't say a word. Most of the time we had nothing to fear from the older guards but this was not so with the younger ones. Sometimes in the darkness of the truck (on the way to the work site) one would hand a prisoner, who sat next to him, a piece of bread. But that was the exception. Most of all they were afraid of complaints.”*

## **Prisoners**

From the date that the camp was established on April 21st, 1944, until its evacuation in the middle of April 1945, 14,390 male persons had passed through Concentration Camp Melk. The first prisoners were designated to

meet the requirements of the construction companies which determined the frequency and size of the transfer transports from Concentration Camp Mauthausen. The necessary requirement of workers for the construction site was transmitted by the workers input department of Company Quarz. In cooperation with the Rapport Leader they also handled the “renting out” of prisoners and the accounting of these “rented ones” with the individual construction companies. Company Quarz had determined at the outset of the construction that at the apex of the construction of the tunnel complex they would need 7,000 concentration camp prisoners as workers.

The prisoners who had been transported from Mauthausen to Melk came from at least 26 different countries. The largest national groupings came from Poland, Hungary, France, the Soviet Union, Germany, Italy, Greece and Yugoslavia. Smaller groups of prisoners, and individual prisoners, came from Albania, Egypt, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Holland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Rumania and Spain, and there were also some from Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, Turkey and the USA. The prisoners whose birthplaces had been in Austria were listed as of German nationality. About 30% of all prisoners who had been assigned to Melk had been categorized by the SS as being “Jews”.

The first transport in April 1944 consisted mostly of French prisoners who, at the end of March and the start of April 1944, had been brought to Mauthausen from Transit Camp Compiègne in connection with the

preparations by the German occupier against the anticipated allied invasion. Among the prisoners in May who had been assigned to Melk were a great many Greeks.

In Mauthausen there were constant delays in supplying the requested number of prisoners. But even when transports arrived a little later on Company Quarz would again demand further additions of prisoner workers, because due to bad working and living conditions many prisoners would quickly weaken and within a few weeks they would report sick in increasing numbers. A considerable number of the sick and weak prisoners were returned to Mauthausen. In May 1944 alone 156 prisoners were "sent back" which was almost 20 % of the number of prisoners that had been sent that month.

On the basis of Hitler's decision, 200,000 Hungarian Jews, who in the spring of 1944 had been deported to Auschwitz, did not have to go through the destruction process at Auschwitz until further notice. Instead they were to be employed as forced labor on the construction sites in the empire. Thus was Concentration Camp Mauthausen able to fill the orders of the SDP representative and send more prisoner workers quickly to Melk. By the end of June 1944 nearly 4,200 prisoners were employed on the construction site.

Due to an American air attack on the Concentration Camp Melk on July 8th, 1944, more than 200 prisoners were killed and another 200 were heavily wounded. As a result they were returned to Mauthausen which caused the number of available prisoners for the construction site to shrink so badly that Company Quarz saw fit to immediately demand additional prisoner workers. As per the wishes of Quarz GesmbH. by the end of July 1944 they then sent 1,000 prisoners to Melk in two additional transports.

In spite of the favorable climatic conditions during the summer months many of the prisoners became sick. The construction leadership was forced to order additional prisoners and file a complaint with the Commander of Concentration Camp Mauthausen because of the long time it took to get these prisoners to the job site. Because of this complaint an additional 2,291 prisoners were moved from Concentration Camp Mauthausen to Melk during the second half of August while at the same time 230 sick prisoners were returned to Mauthausen. Most of the prisoners who had been assigned to Melk during the summer months of 1944 were Soviet citizens, Italians, Yugoslavians and Poles.

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During the middle of September 1944 the camp's complement reached the planned number of 7,000 prisoners. On September 20th, 1944, the first prisoners from evacuated concentration camps arrived in Melk. From Concentration Camp Natzweiler, which had been evacuated in September 1944 ahead of the onrushing Allied troops, came 1,080 prisoners most of whom were Frenchmen, Soviet citizens and Poles. Because of the large number of sick prisoners and the ever larger number of deaths increasingly more prisoners were assigned to Melk and the number swelled to a total of 10,000 by the end of January 1945 in spite of the growing number of dead.

Of the 4,767 prisoners who had been assigned to Melk between October 1944 and the evacuation of Melk in April 1945, the majority were Poles, Soviet citizens, Germans and Austrians as well as Italians. The overwhelming number of prisoners who had been brought to Melk during this period of time came from Concentration Camp Auschwitz. The last largest transport with 2,000 prisoners arrived in Melk on January 29th, 1945. They were the surviving prisoners of an evacuation transport that had left Concentration Camp Auschwitz on January 19th, 1945, and had been the last largest such transport. There were 199 children in this transport whose ages were between 9 and 15.

The prisoners came from all social strata and all professions. Those who had been assigned to concentration camps were opponents of National Socialism, or persecuted because of race, or were prisoners-of-war and slave laborers as well as people who had been designated by the Nazi Authorities as criminals and asocials.

Persecution by the Nazi Regime did not discriminate as to whether a person belonged to a group subjectively such as a religious organization, a cultural or political one, etc., or whether he/she was an active participant. It was all strictly up to the classification as instituted by the Nazi Regime.

Among the prisoners were politicians, attorneys-at-law, artists, teachers, workers, soldiers, officers, cooks, tailors and craftsmen. The writers among them were the likes of Michail Rusinek, who had been the president of the Polish Writers Union for many years, or there was the father-in-law of the former French President Giscard D'Estang. He died in Melk.

Prisoners who had been assigned to concentration camps by the Nazi Regime were categorized by the numbers, capital letters and colored markings they wore on their prison uniforms, and were treated differently than others according to their markings. Prisoners within the camp were not equal. One's national origin and the assigned categorization by the SS determined one's life in camp and also one's chance of survival. At the top of the hierarchy stood the German and Austrian non-Jewish prisoners and at the lowest rung of the hierarchy in the prison society stood the Jews and Gypsies of whatever nationality. The different treatment worked especially well in the handing out of prisoner functions within the camp. This so-called self administration was organized so that they could oversee the internal camp administration and the supervisory functions to control the prisoners. This way the SS was able to use less personnel of their own. The SS preferred assigning certain functions within camp to any German or Austrian prisoner who had come into the concentration camp as a "Criminal". They looked upon those prisoners as their tools by which they could rule over the prisoners' community.

The real purpose of the handing out of these functions was, next to the safeguarding of personnel, the prevention of creating solidarity among the prisoners. Prisoners who had been assigned certain functions were given broad powers and privileges (better food, better clothes and housing, lighter work loads) and in turn were responsible to the SS only. Many of the so-called "criminal" prisoners who had been assigned a function made use of these positions to help assure better chance of survival, give themselves an advantage over the other prisoners and thereby help to support the SS, who were in complete agreement, and in fact depended on them. Many of the so-called Kapos were very much feared because they were the foremen among the prisoners whose job it was to egg the other prisoners on to work.

Detail from one of the original site plan of Concentration Camp Melk, 1944

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## LEGEND

### Prisoner area:

The Prison Camp is surrounded by a barbed wire fence and 15 guard towers (doublestriped line and black rectangle).

Object X Melk Block	(large Garage) on the 1st floor of which the first prisoners who were deported to were housed. Until June 1944 this part of this floor was divided into Block 1 and 2; later on they were housed in Blocks 10, 11, 12 and 13. The Prisoner Kitchen was on the ground floor.
Flugdach F UB II	As of July 1944 this became Blocks 17 and 18. (Housing Barracks) Block 6 and 7, after the air attack in July 1944 Blocks 14 and 15 (Living and Guard Detail Building II) on the ground floor of Block 4 which also held the Camp's Administrative Office, on the floors of Blocks 1 through 3
Material Warehouse MAG. W I W II	As of July Blocks 7 to 9 (Warehouse) Block 16 (Work Place Building) Block 5 Smithy, Carpentry Shop, Shoe Repair Shop

Hopf.	(Barrack of the Hopferwieser Company) as of July 1944 Block 6
W. u. E.	Lavatory, Laundry, Shower and Delousing Complex as of June 1944
W. A. Anlage	Laundry and Lavatory Complex
F1	Water Pond for Firefighting
ST	(Stables) Washroom and Toilet, Camp Police
R	Sickbay, large Barrack
San. Baracke	(First-Aid Barrack), small Barrack of the Sickbay
Krematorium	as of the Fall of 1944

### **SS/Luftwaffe-Area**

I	(Living Quarters I) Officer's Quarters for the SS/Luftwaffe
III	(Living Quarters III) Guard Detail's Quarters for the SS/Luftwaffe
Wi	(Maintenance Barrack) SS-Kitchen
W	Guard Detail Building, Camp Entrance Gate
S-U	(First-Aid and Housing Building) SS-Sickbay and Non-Commissioned Officers
St1, St2	(Masonry Building) SS-Camp Leadership
G	(Garage) SS-Camp Leadership
F2	Water Pond for Firefighting
UB	(Housing Barracks) Barracks for the Camp Leadership, later on Housing for SS-Block-Leaders

“Return to Camp”. Drawing by the French Deported person Daniel Piquee-Audrain, made available by Michelle Piquee-Audrain.

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Political prisoners who held functional positions in Concentration Camp Melk, as they did in other camps, tried to take over the positions the “criminals” held in that they believed that this would improve the conditions of the entire camp. They were helped in this situation by the fact that the SS had need in “Work Camps” for prisoners who were intellectually inclined and thus could run the camp’s bureaucracy. Because of this the camp’s Administrative Office, the Office of the Camp which ran the day-to-day administrative functions were filled with political prisoners since its founding. Most of these people were Frenchmen because they had been the largest single national group from the beginning. In the Fall of 1944 the “political ones” also took over the job of Senior Camp Leader and were able, because of that, to have a positive influence, in their own way, as to how the camp was to develop. However, the possibilities were limited. The supplies of the camp were so tight that the food rations did not reach all the prisoners. Also the number of better work details was rather limited. The prisoner functionaries could not openly act against the SS, but had to work very carefully in secret.

### **Living Conditions**

Living conditions in concentration camps were now governed by the especially heavy work that was required to construct building projects for “underground relocation”. The high death rate among prisoners was an accepted fact so that the underground construction projects could be finished as quickly as possible. When the prisoners had been worked to the bone and were exhausted they would be replaced by new prisoners from the main camp.

The specific living conditions in a camp such as Melk were not the same for all prisoners. The racially different treatment of the prisoners by the SS meant that individual prisoners, as well as entire groups of prisoners, would get neither more nor less terror and harassment from the guard detail units, but that all of them had different entries into the material resources of the camp and to better working conditions. There were very few “good” work details, and only reduced possibilities, for obtaining better food or better housing. To get one additional slice of bread each day or an extra spoon of soup could decide life or death in a camp.

The former French Deported one Raymond Hallery reported about this situation in Concentration Camp Melk:

*“The first time was especially hard, one had to get accustomed to the hard work and the very meager amount of food handed out. I, myself, did not have to do such hard work but the work was especially hard for those people who had been imprisoned for a long time and were no longer accustomed to working. Because of that the initial period was especially hard. (...) In July things improved somewhat, conditions had evened out some, also in the food department, but the brutality did not diminish (...). The SS came to the realization that it did not make sense at all to treat the prisoners so brutally because by doing that they would be working less efficiently and would die quicker (...). The third phase started in the winter of 1944. It was mostly known for the reduction of the food rations.”*

How small the average daily food rations in Melk were is described by the Frenchman Yves Briand:

*“At that time the diet consisted of a piece of bread, while in the evening this was augmented by coffee or something that was supposed to be tea. Sometimes we received a white semolina type soup. For breakfast we received a simple soup or coffee or tea, a black type liquid.”*

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*At noon: Soup, often a green soup, perhaps made from spinach or stinging nettle. In any case it was a very liquid type thing. We swallowed this green soup and the next time we had to urinate, after about an half hour, the thing had run its course and the soup was out of our system. Later on this type of soup was replaced by a cabbage type soup, dehydrated cabbage, out of which the water had been removed. This had absolutely no nutritional value and we would get diarrhea from it. That was about all. Once per week there would be a thicker soup which had been made from beans, somewhat thicker than normal, when one had the opportunity to scratch some from the bottom of the vat.”*

A cleverly designed system of premiums, that would offer the prisoners some material rewards for the work incentive they had shown, had been instituted in concentration camps with the general objective of advancing the work input by the prisoners. The premium system, such as the one that was used in Melk, which was based mainly on cigarettes, did not provide an improvement of their situation for most of the individual prisoners. More than likely the effect was that some of the Kapos would drive their prisoners into a more intense work output in order for them to be favored with premiums. The distribution of food among the prisoners was handled and supervised in camp by the job-holding prisoners, the so-called Senior Block Prisoners. How justly the portions were distributed among the prisoners mostly depended upon these job-holding prisoners. Often this caused disturbances. By creating disturbances prisoners always risked being beaten by the Senior Block Prisoners or the SS Block Leaders.

The noon soup was always distributed by the Kapos during the lunch break when they were on the construction site. During the distribution of food the skill and experience of ordinary prisoners came to the fore

as to whether they could secure a larger and more nourishing portion for themselves. The French prisoner Pierre Pradales writes about the distribution of food process:

*“Noontime, soup: The overhead light is turned on and off three times and this way everyone is informed. Everyone comes and holds his dear eating bowl in his hands. It appears to be bean soup. The vats are there. We all stand in line. The Hungarian Kapo stands to the right while the Polish Kapo stands to the left. Everyone knows that the Hungarian deals out more so everyone stands on his side. But the contents of the vat from which the Polish Kapo deals out the soup is unquestionably thicker. His line grows without him having to beat people. Carette stands in his line, I stand in the Hungarian’s line. The soup is eaten very quickly. It isn’t bad but too liquid. I count the beans at the bottom of the bowl: eighteen. Carette comes to me quite proud. In fact his soup is much better: five or six spoonfuls of beans. (...) There is an entire science about the distribution of the soup and the Kapos learn very quickly. This, then, is the tactic: don’t stir the soup too much and only distribute the liquid which is at the top of the vat and when one comes to the bottom of the vat keep that for oneself. When they are fair and something is left over they will sell it for two, three cigarettes to a non-smoker. We are done, the bowls are empty! We have to get back to work and the guards chase us back to work with beatings.”*

In addition to the official food rations the prisoners tried to obtain other food items (which is forbidden for them to do). In the camp’s vernacular this is called “Organizing”. This was a prerequisite if one wanted to live longer. To “organize” food within the camp was mainly possible by those prisoners whose jobs were located inside the camp which, relatively speaking, was a small minority. It was normal for the sick bay to forward the death report on a daily basis so that the food rations of those who had died that day could be consumed by others.

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Food items were not just “organized” for individual purposes. Perhaps the most important act of solidarity amongst the prisoners was the redistribution of food items by job-holders or other prisoners who were situated in better work details to those prisoners who had very little chance of survival. The politically organized prisoners in camp saw to it that whenever possible those prisoners would be in charge who had their fullest confidence in the key operation of the administration of food items, in the preparation and distribution of same. Those selected prisoners would not “organize” things for their own personal advantage but would see to it that these food items would be passed on to others. Even with this kind of action that the total amount of food in camp would always be a constant and even in a fair distribution of the food it would not be enough to reach everyone. The shortage of food items, regardless of a greater cooperation among the prisoners, made it impossible to keep all the prisoners alive. All of this led to very strict distribution principles among the prisoners. Prisoners, who one could see were near death because of their hopeless condition, were called “Muslim-men” in the camp’s vernacular. Sometimes food would be kept from a Muslim-man so that others, who had a chance of survival, could be saved. Josef Cieplys writes about the fate of such a doomed-to-death prisoner:

*In Melk, where the Muslim-men were not gassed, we would carry such a colleague to and from his work site. They would not accept him in the sick bay (...) because the work detail to which he belonged would have been too small. When we left the camp in the morning for the work site he would manage the few steps it would take to go through the control gate and after that his comrades would carry him the rest of the way on their shoulders. At the work site we would lay him down somewhere and no longer worry about him. Once he came out of one of his hiding places with a cigarette butt and walked to one of the fires on which water was being*

*heated for the cement mixers. His co-workers rebuked him but he didn't understand anything and he did what he could not avoid. On another occasion he found a hole in one of the Tunnels and slept there like a lamb. At the end of our shift we could not find him and we looked for him all over the place. After we did find him the Kapo was so angry that he gave him a few strokes with a piece of cable on his thinned behind; this sort of awakend him. He rode on our shoulders the way back into camp. However he clattered along again, he was unable to die anywhere...! This was the way it went every day. One day they had carried him to the work site and had placed him against a wall. There he sat, half-lying, his head hanging to his side, and the world no longer existed for him. The evening bread was handed out and we received our miserable daily portion and the soup and someone had also thought of him and gotten his portion. He sat there still the way we had left him and his fellow prisoners walked by him as if he were an object and wasn't interested in anything. When the evening Roll Call was held and when the Senior Block Prisoner would deliver the block count they would surround him and the Block Administrator, a Pole from Poznan, would ask them if he was still alive. The person of whom the question had been asked would walk over to the "Muslim-man", who was lying on the ground, and touch his face with his toes. That face was expressionless and as if made of stone but something within him still showed life. The entire Block, standing at attention and in smooth rows, stared at the face of the "Muslim-man". Suddenly he shook, stretched his legs a little and went stiff. 'Done!' said the Senior Block Prisoner in an expert fashion and wrote the corpse's name into his Report. 'Yes! Done!' confirmed the Block Administrator with carefree laughter. They carried the "Muslim-man" away as if he were a piece of wood, like a bucket of trash, like something that had lost its value."*

“Soup in the Tunnels”. Drawing by the French Deported one Daniel Piquee-Audrain. Made available by Michelle Piquee-Audrain.

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Every prisoner who had nothing to do with the food distribution could only obtain additional food items by bartering. What was bartered were the few things the prisoners owned and everything they could lay their hands on at the work site or in camp and which could be traded. The most important items to barter were cigarettes. Thefts, extortion, mistreatment or murder were the accompaniments of such trades which happened mostly among the criminally categorized Kapos and Senior Block Leaders. Because of lack of other valuable objects individual prisoners who had gold teeth became quickly the victims of those job-holding prisoners who had the opportunity to trade that gold secretly with members of the guard detail for food items and other items of practical use. But the SS, also, had been looking at these gold teeth of the prisoners but in an official manner. As soon as the prisoners arrived in Concentration Camp Mauthausen those who had gold teeth were specifically listed in case these prisoners died there would be a record about the whereabouts of their gold teeth. In Melk it was the responsibility of the prisoners’ dentists and corpse carriers to remove the gold teeth, to clean them very well and turn them over to the SS. Jacques Darcq was such a corpse carrier and each day he had to watch this procedure being performed which, at times, would take on grotesque forms:

*“Every day a German Kapo would come by to collect the gold teeth. One day one of those teeth disappeared into the throat of a corpse. We had to grasp the corpse by the feet, lift it up and shake it. The Kapo was pleased to get the tooth back because the gold tooth had been inventoried by the SS.”*

In Melk the prisoners were housed in a total of 18 housing units of masonry, so-called Blocks. During the construction of the camp the accommodations were reasonably well equipped inasmuch as the furniture inside the barracks was still in place. In addition to that Company Quarz people and the SS Leadership Staff received new beds, straw-sacks and blankets.

With the growing number of prisoners that arrived one after another other buildings were needed and so wooden barracks were erected as well. For the majority of the prisoners the living conditions got worse month after month. All-in-all the living quarters in Melk were much too small to house 10,000 prisoners. Because prisoner groups had been scheduled to work in shifts every bed, in each Block, was used all day long. The wooden bunks with their sacks of straws, used as mattresses, were never cleaned. The prisoners suffered most severely in the housing units during the cold winter weather. The housing units were not heated. The prisoners would organize fire wood at the work sites and smuggle it into camp always aware of the danger of being caught by SS-Control at the camp's main gate. The lack of heating possibilities meant that the prisoners, when they returned from the work site damp, or totally wet, would be unable to dry their clothes. When they had to report for their next shift they put on their wet clothes again. Such conditions caused lots of illnesses due to colds, even more so because there was a shortage of warm winter clothing. An ordinary prisoner did not have a second garment to wear. It was the custom that prisoners would wear thin blue-white striped overalls, but they also wore civilian clothes that had been marked specially and had come from the murdered prisoners of the Destruction Camps. They also wore old uniforms most of which were booty stolen by the German Army. Those garments were usually in very poor condition when they were handed out to the prisoners and thus offered no protection from the weather. By the change of year 1944/1945 the supply of clothes in Melk had so deteriorated that a large number of gloves and for months now the of the prisoners, in spite of cold and snow, had to go to work without protection for their feet. There was a great lack prisoners had not received a new shirt; their clothing was torn to shreds.

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In order to protect themselves from the cold the prisoners tried to get the paper sacks in which cement was brought in, and to place them under their shirts or wrap around their feet. This raw paper when stuffed in the wooden clogs would create sores. The cement dust led to inflammations and blood poisonings that in a concentration camp often led to deadly illnesses. The fight to obtain good shoes was, for the prisoners, not just a question of survival. The walking and working in these raw and quickly deteriorating wooden clogs was extremely arduous. In order to improve the soles of these clogs and to give them longer life the prisoners would cut portions of the rubber conveyor belts inside the tunnels in those moments when no one was watching, and they would try to smuggle them into camp, always with the danger hanging over them that they might get caught and be mistreated because of sabotage, and then killed.

The prisoner's daily routine was carefully organized and was based on the rhythm of the work shifts. The time allocated to the different activities, before and after work, was so tightly measured that the prisoners were always in a hurry. All the prisoners who were in camp at around 4:00 AM were awakened by a bell. The prisoners then had to make their bunks which was no small task when it came to straw sacks. After the bunks had been made they were ordered to line up for their toilet and also to go to the WC, after this they had to line up once more for their "morning coffee" then to Roll Call Square for Roll Call. During Roll Call all the prisoners who were in camp at that hour were required to line up in an exact order Block by Block (this was not required of the prisoners who were in sick bay). Sometimes these hours-long Roll Call counting served the SS as a control to see whether any prisoners had escaped. This long standing around in inadequate clothing was a torture for those whose bodies had been severely weakened, and led to illnesses and death for many prisoners. Often prisoners were mistreated by SS men while standing on Roll Call Square. In addition to the SS Camp Leader the SS-First Aid man Muzikant stood out for his most gruesome acts. The former German prisoner Adolf R. reported about Muzikant to the investigators of the West-German authorities:

*“I have also observed that Muzikant often kicked prisoners in their kidney areas, after they had fallen down during Roll Call, thereby killing them. They had fallen down during Roll Call because of their weakened condition. Frequently these prisoners who had fallen down were ordered to get up with the words ‘Get up you filthy swine, you are only lingering, and when they were unable to do so quickly enough they would be kicked. Many of them had fallen down on Roll Call Square who, I must assume, were dead when they fell. Many others were first accused and then were kicked, mostly in the kidney area by other SS-men, from which they died.”*

Roll Call Square was also the area at which all the official camp punishments (floggings, executions) would be handed out. The most frequently handed out punishment on Roll Call Square was the 25 or 50 lashes on ones rear end which was given by the SS-men for the slightest infraction and according to their moods or arbitrariness. Prisoners who were lashed in the kidney area or their spine would be severely hurt by this and would often die as a consequence.

During the construction phase of the camp the prisoners received hardly any free time after they returned from the construction site because they had to build the camp. But even later on the prisoners, after they returned from the work sites and after Roll Call, were not able to simply rest. Many of them were assigned to additional work by their Senior Block Prisoners. The prescribed order in the camp served the SS-men in that they often would have the pretext to let the Senior Block Prisoner do the harassing. One of the most loved harassments of the SS-Block

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Leaders was called “exercises” and this would come about when, from their point of view, for example, the bunks had not been properly made. Among the so-called “making use of the prisoner’s free time” was also counted the cutting of hair and shaving the prisoners. The obligated short haircut had very little hygienic purpose, the purpose of this short haircut was that a noticable and characteristic band of hair would remain standing in the middle of ones head so that chances for escape would be reduced. Even without any special harassments the prisoners found very little rest for themselves. Josef Cieply writes:

*“The prisoners worked in three shifts. Prisoners of all shifts slept in the same Block. Because of that there was never any quietness in the Blocks. There was always noise: all day and all night long. The time when things were quiet lasted no longer than two hours which was then interrupted by the other shifts when they returned from their work sites. When they entered their Blocks they were issued their ‘daily portion of bread’. That was the reason that the prisoners were always half awake, before they went to work, at work and after their work when day was done.”*

### **The Air Attack on the Concentration Camp**

On July 8th, 1944, at 11:00 AM thirty American bombers from the 15th US Air Force came in from the east presumably convinced that the pioneer barracks of Melk was an actual military compound. They began to attack the concentration camp with bombs and machine gun fire, an attack lasting only 15 minutes.

The results of the attack were devastating. Many of the buildings of the pioneer barracks were heavily damaged, among them was the large garage with the prisoner kitchen on the ground floor and prisoners housing blocks on the 2nd floor. At the time of the attack many Hungarian Jews were living there. According to the official death report from the camp Administrative Office 223 prisoners were killed due to that attack. On the

very day of the attack a transport with 197 severely wounded prisoners went to Mauthausen. Presumably most of those wounded prisoners died in Mauthausen or were killed there.

The days after the air attack were very difficult for the surviving prisoners. In addition to the shock of having survived and the grief over their lost comrades, no food was handed out for a long time and there was also a great shortage of water. A very special torture were the endless Roll Calls that followed on the days after the attack which was done to verify the exact prisoner count and also to determine the number of casualties and the identity of the dead. Because of this the SS ordered reprisals against the Jewish prisoners as revenge for the bombing raid. The air attack also caused the death of 22 men of the guard details.

The camp after the Air Attack. Photo: County Museum Melk

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## **Escapes from Camp**

The prisoners tried constantly to get away from their horrible situation by escaping. Until 1942 few prisoners succeeded in escaping from concentration camps. The establishment of countless sub-camps at the requests of companies and construction sites increased the chances of escaping. In contrast to the large, technically perfected and expensive guard installations of the main camps, sub-camps were equipped with improvised guard installations. This opened up many better possibilities for the prisoners to escape, especially so inasmuch as quite a few of the work details had to work in open country. The many small work details, consisting of about 20 to 30 prisoners that were part of construction site "Quarz", were guarded mostly by 2 guards, which offered a certain chance of escaping in spite of the relative long and poorly guarded transport routes to and from the individual work sites. By doing work outside the confines of the camp there were also possibilities of making contact with foreign civilian workers, or prisoners-of-war, with whom the prisoners had daily contact at their work whether it was in a factory or on a construction site. These could become important support elements in the preparation, or execution, of an attempt to escape.

Concentration Camp Melk listed 29 escape attempts. How many prisoners actually attempted an escape can no longer be certified today. What is known from nearly all the concentration camps is that it was the normal procedure of the SS to hide on their death report the prisoners they had murdered by listing them as "shot while attempting to escape".

The prospect of succeeding in all escape attempts was rather minimal. In Concentration Camp Melk 9 of the 29 reported escape attempts were clearly documented as failures. The only one known to have successfully survived his escape is the French Deported one Gabriel Picornot and this with a great deal of luck.

From within the area of the camp itself an escape was practically impossible. All day long there was the barbed wire, the guards posted on the guard towers as well as the chain of guards which were an insurmountable handicap for the ordinary prisoner. When darkness came the camp's fence was electrified and the entire area covered with intensive searchlights. When prisoners came too close to the surrounding fence they would be shot at from the guard towers. While going to work the prisoners were watched very closely by the soldiers of the Luftwaffe. The railway station's approach ramps in Melk and Roggendorf were, as they were

at the construction sites, completely fenced in with barbed wires. As a control the prisoners were counted when they left the camp, when they returned to camp and were even counted on the construction sites.

This very intensive guarding was one of the many handicaps that stood in the way of the escapee. The biggest problems for a prisoner began when he found himself outside of the direct control of the SS and was no longer subject to their persecution. For a successful escape one had to get civilian clothes because without them the prisoner could easily be identified because of the special concentration camp's haircut. One had to have an exceptional sense of direction in order to move during the night-time cross-country walks; an escapee had to avoid daylight, streets and all residential areas to make headway. The biggest problem was to get food which the escapee was able to get from homes and other places. When an escape had been reported the entire search operation was set in motion. In addition to the guard units of the camp German Army units would be employed as well as State, Security and Regular Police, National Guard Units, County and City Guard Units. The alarm search operation remained in place for three days and the most outlying guard chain would not be brought to camp at night during all this time.

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Among the prisoners escape attempts were rather controversial because it was the custom of the SS to punish entire prisoners groups collectively for it. When an escape first gets noticed at Roll Call the prisoners had to remain standing on Roll Call Square until the name of the escapee had been determined, often as well until he had been captured or at least until the search for him within camp had been finished. He who tried to escape from the SS was immediately threatened with death when caught and usually suffered an agonizingly painful death. What the escapee could look forward to, when caught, is painted by Gille:

*"His first punishment is being tied to a stake, left standing, without food or liquid, in all sorts of weather, almost nude, often next to the electrified fence, below the observation tower next to the main gate of the camp so that everyone would be forewarned by this example. His face would be swollen from the beatings he had received and stood there shivering in the ice-cold mud, in the cold winter wind, in rain or snow.*

*He was only freed from the stake to be turned over to his torturer, the doctor with the deadly injection, or a killing shot, to be strangled, it is unimportant which form of death was used. For some time now they have deferred sentences until an investigation had been completed to find possible abettors. The former escapee is carefully watched while at the work site or when he walks through Camp. On the front and the back of his uniform he now had a large red cross sewn on until one day he disappears and no one ever sees him again."*

The deaths of those who had been recaptured were, in many cases, covered up as accidents. That the SS covered these escapes in a certain way can be seen from the death report they turned in which dealt with the Russian prisoner Ostrikow who had escaped at the start of August 1944. That Report stated: *"O was recaptured on 5.8.44 and died that very same day from a heart attack."*

Guy Lemordant, the prison doctor, reported about the fate of a young Russian who had tried to escape:

*"I cite as a typical example the case of a young Russian who jumped off the train that took him to the work site. He fell in such an awkward way that his left foot was cut off three centimeter above his ankle. His foot was left hanging from his leg by the skin. The wounded prisoner was subsequently brought to the operating table where he was questioned by the SS Camp Commander and his staff in order to determine whether he had any accomplices during his escape attempt. The SS-Adjutant pressed burning cigarettes onto his body so that he*

would come to. This took place while the questioning was going on. (...) The Russian did not reply, he did not scream, he did not cry, although he was only 20 years old. In connection with this the operating table was rolled to the other side of the room and I will always see the face of that young hero when he stood up so that he could go to the toilet, dragging the cut-off foot along when he hit this lifeless foot without a word, without a single scream and no tears. After several hours the SS-man took him to a room in the basement that had steel bars over the windows where the corpses of the last few days were lying about in a criss-crossed manner. They threw him, naked, onto the pile of corpses and closed the door after which they took a solid drink of schnapps and took the key. During the night, against specific orders, I went into the basement and took him some food and some coffee. He was numb from the cold, sat on a pile of corpses and looked at me with sharp clear eyes without saying a word or uttering complaints. The next day I tried, in vain, to find out what I should or could do for him. I did not want to kill him with a liberating injection which I would not have been able to obtain anyway. I believed that I would be able to repent for this and have tried to forget it. Four days later my friend, who removed gold teeth from the corpses, told me about his death.”

“Tunnel work”. Drawing by the French Deported One Daniel Piquee-Audrain. Made available by Michelle Piquee-Audrain.

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### **Forced Labor of the Prisoners**

During the construction of the Tunnel Complex “Quarz” the prisoners were “rented out” by the SS to Company Quarz and other construction companies by the SS. Among the companies that were engaged in Melk were many that play a big role today in Austrian construction economy. They are: Czernilofsky, Himmelstos & Sittner, Hofman & Maculan, Philip Holzmann AG, Lang & Menhofer, Latzel & Kutscha, Mahal & Co., Mayreder, Kraus & Co., Bau AG Negrelli, Rella, Stigler & Rous, STUAG, Wayss & Freitag. AEG, Siemens and Brown-Boveri provided electrical installations, telephone exchanges and telephone installations. The prisoners were assigned to independent work details which were guarded by SS-guards and were supervised and led by civilian master craftsmen and prisoner Kapos. Hundreds of prisoners worked inside the camp in different work details or were busy with the expansion of the camp which lasted until November 1944, except for those who worked at the crematorium.

During the first few months of the camp the prisoners were mostly employed in establishing the construction site. They installed railroad tracks, worked on the concrete reinforcing of roads that led to the construction site, built housing units for civilian construction workers, created barracks for the construction leadership and for equipment and machinery, installed electrical and water supply lines and dug sewer canals and water lines and worked in sand pits. A large number of prisoners were used in the off-loading of the enormous assortment of construction materials and construction machinery which daily arrived by train at the Loosdorf Railroad Station and were then transported to the construction site by truck. Some prisoners were taken daily to Amstetten to work in the facilities of the Wood Construction Company Hopferwieser where they worked on large and very heavy tree trunks that were being used in supporting the mountains above while the tunnels were being dug. At the eastern section of the market town Loosdorf they erected estate housing for members of the Luftwaffe while in the nearby and further removed areas of the construction sites the prisoners erected a number of barrack communities for the workers and factory members of Steyr-Daimler-Puch AG.

The overwhelming number of prisoners were used in the construction of the tunnels in Roggendorf. During their first weeks in camp the prisoners were driven to their work sites in trucks until the railroad loading docks in Melk and Roggendorf were completed and a train could take the prisoners to their work sites. Every day the three shifts of prisoners marched from the barracks through the Abt-Karl Street to the railroad loading dock which was located on the easterly side of the Melk Railroad Station. Six times per day, in columns, the prisoners marched through the streets of Melk going to work and coming back from work . The first shift left camp at 0500 hours, the second shift at 1:00 PM and the third shift at 9:00 PM.

The daily repeated ritual of the marching columns of prisoners, their torn clothing hanging from their emaciated bodies, driven along the streets of Melk by the brutal actions of the guards, gave the population of

Melk an impression that did not leave them without a response. Chief Administrative Officer of Melk, Convall, reported about the increasing complaints about the behavior of the guard units:

*“The population of Melk and Loosdorf, as well as the national comrades who would come into the County seat on an off-and-on basis, expressed their outrage often about the inhumane treatment of the concentration camp prisoners by the people in charge. A few of them registered complaints in my office about this and demanded action from my office to improve things, making mention of the fact that if their attempts to get the guard units to moderate their actions towards the prisoners would not be successful there would be*

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*reprisals towards the guards in a more brutal and threatening way. That this outrage is justified can be seen from the many reliable accounts that were filed with my office although, of course, I was unable to help them at all under any circumstance.”*

It was impossible for the prisoners to make any contact at all with civilians this way if they were not employed in the tunnel construction or in small work details. The former Luxembourgian prisoner Metty Dockendorf writes about the question of contacts with the population of Melk:

*“No, that was out of the question, not possible in Melk, except for those people whom one had met in Loosdorf/Roggendorf in the tunnel construction. All of us worked in the tunnel construction and not just with civilians or in the camp’s kitchen, or I don’t know where else, but we could talk with a craftsman or an engineer of this Company. But a regular civilian, that could not be done. When we walked from camp through Melk to the loading docks on the other side of town we could see people on the street, or stand near their houses, but talking with them was just out of the question.”*

The daily railroad trip to the work site was a defining reason for the many illnesses the prisoners got as can be seen from the report that camp doctor, Dr. Sora, wrote to the presiding SS-Chief doctor of Mauthausen:

*“It is worth mentioning that it is a fact that the prisoners in this camp receive, by far, more difficult assignments at their work place as is, perhaps, the case in other camps, which from my point of view causes the increased number of sick. On average the work sites are about 6 kilometers away from camp. The prisoners are transported in their own train to and from their work sites; this train has been provided us by the German Railroad. As of a few weeks ago it now happens almost daily that this prisoner’s train, on average, arrives 1 to 2 hours late and often, of late, it has been later yet. This forces the prisoners to wait for several hours in an open temporary waiting area, which I believe is the main reason why the prisoners have such a high number of colds (...) It so happens that at each work shift that has a normal 8 hour work period there is an additional period of at least 2 to 3 hours in which they have to stand about in inadequate clothing in cold and wet weather, and the prisoners always remain in camp for at least 11 hours which, in some cases, increases to between 13 and 16 hours.”*

The work at the construction site of the tunnels placed a severe strain on the physical strength of the prisoners. The shortage of proper construction equipment, technical difficulties with drilling machines and the failures of the cement pumps led to the prisoners having to remove the sandstone with jack hammers and then carry it outside by hand or shovel it onto conveyor belts and onto lorries, while the concrete had to be carried in buckets to the upper reaches. Because of the high water table inside the tunnels the prisoners often had to stand

in water. Lacking the necessary safety measures it often happened that prisoners were submerged in sandstone. The former French prisoner Yves Briand reported about the work inside the tunnel's construction:

*“Since the start of this work detail it had always remained a relatively small unit of about 100 prisoners. The Kapo was a German who had been imprisoned for a rather long time. He was not a bad guy. He did not beat us on a systematic basis, often he was a little bit in over his head due to the responsibility he had been given, and*

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*because of that he shoved us about just for kicks, beat and banged us whenever it suited him, but it wasn't done by him on a systematic basis. He was not one of the bad ones.*

*At the start of this “Carpenters Work Detail” we carried fir trees to the tunnels to support the borings going on. This carrying of trees was very tiring. From six to seven people were needed for one single tree trunk. For six to seven people it was not too bad to carry a tree but the floor was so uneven that when the tree was resting on the shoulders of everyone and one found himself in the middle of the tree and on a higher plane for a moment one was practically carrying the tree by oneself. Of course at the end of the day our shoulders were rubbed raw and the next day it would start all over again.*

*After about 8 days of this, Stanis, a Polish friend who had been a mine worker in the north of France and who, as a communist had already been imprisoned for about two to three years, said to me: ‘Come with me into my tunnel’. And so we were with him in his tunnel, this one was perhaps about 2 times 2 meter high, there were four of us; Stanis and another fellow worked the air-hammer...*

*I shoveled the sand into a small cart and would then take it outside. A fourth of that area was covered with wood. There was a professional mine worker in each of the tunnels who, naturally, watched over the wood supports so that cave-ins would be avoided. We would then remove the debris from these tunnels, this underground factory, and piled it all on a heap which consisted of sand, quartz dust, which at times, of course, caved in. Then we had to shore it up correctly and maintain it properly.*

*All of this was part of the first tunnel, Tunnel A, for which we had dug four smaller tunnels; the two upper ones measured about 2 times 2 meters while the lower ones measured about 3 times 3 meters. Then the tunnels would be connected with each other and with the help of a conveyor belt we would shovel the rest of that material to the outside and would now have a very large tunnel. After that we built the others: B, C, D, etc.*

*But during the construction of the first tunnel things didn't move too well. When we were doing Tunnel B, a bit later, we tried the use of a Schramm machine, a piece of equipment that was equipped with a metal chain to which were attached metal shovels which turned constantly and scraped the sand down. But even that was not enough. None of these methods were fast enough so that by the middle of July or August dynamite was being used. A first group, using an air-hammer, would make the holes and place the dynamite within and explode it. The result was that often we now had tunnels that were 10 meters high; under these conditions often there now were cave-ins. Originally we made small holes in order to move forward, after which the workers with the air-hammer would have to get off the scaffold again so that the cave-in inside the tunnel could proceed. But as soon as the explosion had taken place the wood supports, and everything else, would cascade down onto the prisoners. During the months of July, August and September, each and every time, every day, when a work detail would return to camp from the work site there would be two to three dead prisoners and injured ones.”*

The material that had been broken out of the tunnels by the prisoners had to be shoveled onto conveyor belts. The conveyor belts carried the sandstone to the mine cars which had been shoved out of the tunnels by the prisoners. Pushing these heavy mine cars was considered a punishment detail. Mostly this work was done by Jewish prisoners.

The working conditions really depended on the behavior of the supervisory and guard units. In smaller work details that operated in the open country the prisoners had to deal with the SS-Work Detail Leaders who guarded them. In the tunnel complexes the working prisoners dealt mostly with civilian craftsmen and Kapos while the guard units guarded the areas outside of complexes. The behavior of most of the Austrian or German civilian

civilian workers was described very differently by the former prisoners - some would hustle the prisoners to work and would beat them while others, on the other hand, felt sorry for the prisoners.

As with the civilian craftsmen the behavior of the prisoner Kapos who had been given the job by the SS, most of whom were German speaking prisoners, would also be described differently. In general all Kapos were looked upon by the prisoners as tools of the SS in order for them to increase the work output. Many of the prisoner Kapos were feared as beaters.

The prisoners tried, by working very slowly whenever possible, to reduce their quick exhaustion. Every moment when they were not looked at was taken advantage of in doing the least amount of work. When they were watched they would show diligence at work in order avoid being punished. At the same time many of the prisoners saw in these working conditions a possibility to slow down the construction progress and by doing that to sabotage the German arms efforts. The desired work progress could be attained by the SS and the construction companies by means of exactly fulfilling their required results by a massive input of prisoners even though the work output by the prisoners was rather small due to the lack of care of the prisoners. Yves Briand writes:

*“The resistance in Melk: we produced no weapons. There was no such factory in Melk. We dug an underground factory, that’s all. Also, as best we could we slowed down the production. However, there were rules one simply had to abide by, one had to keep moving, move a little bit, even when one didn’t do much, a little had to be done regardless. The work tempo was also slow but when a Kapo or an SS-man came by it would pick up some. The large number of prisoners employed at the work site moved forward, but not in the tempo that the SS had decreed; by Christmas two or three tunnels were ready, as well as the cross-tunnels, which were made with reinforced concrete, in which machines were housed, where prisoners-of-war and free workers were employed. They would produce ball bearings.”*

## **Sickness and Death**

Bad nutrition, the shortages of housing and clothing, the conditions of the work place, the ever present hurrying, the mistreatments and the constant fear of all this led to a rapid physical debility of the prisoners.

From a report by the camp doctor, Dr. Sora, that he sent in early 1945 to his superior, the main camp doctor in Concentration Camp Mauthausen, it became ever so clear what the connections were between the shortage of care, the hurrying at the work sites and the number of sick prisoners:

*“In the present frigid time of year I receive daily prisoners who have returned from their work sites having collapsed from circulatory problems. On an average I receive two to four such cases per day, occasionally this number will get as high as 10 and sometimes even more. It is noticeable that in most cases these things do not pertain to prisoners who suffer from consumption illnesses but there are others who never before had been in sick bay and suddenly collapsed during work. To be sure these people are, without exception, in a general bad condition. (...) I believe these cases are mainly due to the fact that there is a shortage of winter clothing for the prisoners and even more so that when they return from their work there are no clear possibilities for them to*

*warm up because of the shortage of fire materials in thier housing units so that they cannot be properly heated. The death rate of those who collapse is nearly 40%. (...)*

*As indicated above most of the prisoners do not own sox. Yes, sox, or cloths, to cover their feet are issued to every prisoner but one quickly figures out that the usable life of those pieces of clothing will not last much longer than a week, so that the prisoners look for paper sacks to protect them from the cold. The same is true about laundry. The prisoners do not own a second shirt so that their garments are in a wretched condition after they have been worn for months on end. Initially the camp received 500 pairs of gloves for the 9,000 prisoners. Only in the past few days have we received some more which, because of their quality, can barely protect the hands against the cold, not counting the fact that a large number of prisoners do not own gloves at all so that the first signs of frostbite on fingers has been seen as has frostbite on toes because of the poor feet coverings of the prisoners.*

*The general condition of the prisoners is (...) even worse. All of this can be attributed to the nutrition of the prisoners which, in view of the work they are to perform, is too little and mostly devoid of any fats. This makes the work too demanding of their physical well-being. At the moment I have 600 sick in my sick bay who are not really sick but cannot be used for any work at all due the general weakness of their bodies.*

*In addition I do not have any special diets for them nor any additional foods to give the sick or those who are recovering from pneumonia, or other severe illnesses, to help them strengthen their condition. Because of the constant demand for ready-to-work workers it is impossible for the SS-Camp Leadership to make a convalescent barrack available in which those prisoners could remain for a while in order for them to regain their strength.”*

During the first months of Concentration Camp Melk it did not have its own prisoners' sick bay. For those prisoners who were very ill bunks had been set aside in a corner of Blocks 1 and 2 and also in the large garage. From May until June 1944 prisoners erected a sick bay which was isolated with a barbed wire fence from the rest of the camp. During the latter part of fall 1944 another two smaller barracks were added. The French prisoner doctor Guy Lemordant, a practicing internist, thought the initial condition of the sick bay was, in relation to the Mauthausen conditions, quite acceptable. The initial satisfaction disappeared rather quickly with the increase of the number of sick:

*“Our sick bay could have remained an orderly place; all that it required was the the number of sick would never exceed one hundred. However, we soon had well over three hundred, then six hundred, one thousand, fifteen hundred, seventeen hundred, and then it became dreadful. The once clean barracks were filled to overflowing and were full of growling oneswho smelled very foul.”*

That the catastrophic conditions in the sick bay during the fall of 1944 were mostly due to overcapacity was also confirmed by sick bay Administrator Otto B.:

*“The sick bay had been erected to hold 150 prisoners but in the weeks after it opened it had more patients than it had been designed for. Soon after the sick bay opened the number of patients increased to an intolerable level. Shortly before Christmas, when the occupancy had reached about 500 patients, Muzikant decided to erect a second barrack. But even this barrack was not large enough to hold the ever increasing number of patients; it had been built to hold 250 patients. In retrospect it can be seen that the number of patients increased proportionally as nourishing nutrition decreased. The physical deterioration of the prisoners also increased*

*with the arrival of patients in rail transports from Auschwitz in January 1945. As of January 1945 both barracks were filled with about 2,000 prisoners. The patients were lying four to a bunk, they were lying in the hall ways and on the floors.”*

Until the summer of 1944 Melk did not have its own camp doctor. The running of the sick bay was left to the SS-First Aid Men, the so-called First Aid Grade (SDG). Even after the arrival of Dr. Sora, a Luftwaffe Staff Doctor, the SDG continued to hold a central role in the sick bay although they had been formally ordered to report to Dr. Sora. Inasmuch as the camp doctor did not belong to the SS this situation obviously played a fundamental role.

Especially feared was SDG SS-Unterscharfuhrer Gottlieb Muzikant who had been transferred to Melk at the end of August or the beginning of September 1944 and remained in Melk until the evacuation of Melk. He moved to convert Concentration Camp Melk's sick bay division into a place of horrors for all prisoners. Prisoner doctor Guy Lemordant paints Muzikant as a cold and brutal person, completely devoid of feelings. As for SS-Camp Leader Ludolph, he behaved

*“in the manner of an abnormal person, a crazy one at that, who was always wild and gesticulated like an odd madman running around the camp. Muzikant was never excited, never over-excited. He always spoke in a deliberate measured quiet voice. He would beat prisoners but never appeared excited while doing that. He did not bother about the diagnoses and the treatments ordered up by the prisoner doctors. He didn't trust anyone. In order to convince himself, for example, that the bandages had been installed properly he would tear them off without any particular excitement, and without any consideration that by so doing he would cause pain.”*

In 1960 when he was confronted with the accusation in the County Court of Fulda that he had singlehandedly murdered a large number of prisoners Muzikant defended himself with the hint that he had been under pressure from the SS-Camp Leader. He had been given to understand that “there were too many useless eaters in sick bay.”

*“I was not only pressured by SS-Camp Leader Ludolph, once in a while I would be given a kick in my rear-end by him when he wasn't satisfied with what I was doing. I was even confined to barracks by him. Under that kind of pressure I killed those patients.”*

Even when Muzikant showed his independence from Ludolph as a means of justification to drown out those allegations, it became very clear what sort of things were possible between members of the SS. Muzikant knew Ludolph from the time they were together in Concentration Camp Gross-Raming where Ludolph had also been the SS-Camp Leader:

*“I knew he was a pig. When he was in Gross-Raming he had 2 or 3 dogs which had been trained to bite prisoners in their genitals. He would always bring me those harmed prisoners and would say: ‘See to it that they get well again.’ Gross-Raming was, like most of the concentration camp, a work detail camp so that the prisoners could be used as workers. When I reported to Ludolph in Melk he greeted me as ‘his old Sani’ and stated in addition: ‘Here blows a different wind than in Gross-Raming.’ “*

Dr. Josef Sora became camp doctor of Concentration Camp Melk during the summer of 1944. He had been ordered to Melk by the SS-Hygienic Institute in Berlin. This they did with many members of the Luftwaffe inasmuch as those camps served the Luftwaffe. All former prisoners unanimously described Dr. Sora as a person who was sympathetic towards the prisoners and who tried to improve the conditions within the camp. Because of that the illegal prisoner organization was quickly able to enlist him and he saw to it that they were constantly being kept informed about the plans by the SS-Camp Leadership and, in fact, he gave the prisoners in the administration office a radio. At different critical moments for the prisoners, such as the evacuation, he had given them reliable help.

Most of the work done in sick bay was performed by doctors who were prisoners themselves. With the increasing number of patients the number of such doctors also increased in sick bay. All-in-all about 15 such doctors had been employed in sick bay.

No prisoner wanted to be admitted to sick bay as a patient as long as his health and his physical strength, somehow, allowed him to stay away. The entire camp knew, according to Austrian prisoner Leo G., that in the "Era of Muzikant" one would leave sick bay as a corpse. Severe illnesses, injuries, forced many prisoners to risk a stay in sick bay. The SS-First Aid Man was usually the one who decided about who was to be admitted. Even the admitting procedure, as performed under Muzikant's leadership, was feared by the prisoners. This always led to mistreatment by members of the SS who saw in those patients "work refusers". Muzikant would beat those whom he sent back to work with a rubber hose or who did not quickly enough leave sick bay or who, because of their condition, were unable to leave at all. Those who had severe illnesses and were sent back to work would return a few hours later to the crematorium as corpses.

Especially bad were the conditions in the division that handled intestinal illnesses. Ernst H., who had been a professional doctor in civilian life and who had been in sick bay for a long time as a patient blames Muzikant for the catastrophic proportion of the number patients who had dysentery:

*"Once there was infectious dysentery in Concentration Camp Melk which, in most cases, led to blood in ones stool. It would have been easy for Muzikant to save hundreds of people if he had given them coal pills. At that time there was no shortage of them had he permitted these pills to be administered, and there were other natural remedies available as well. Those pitiful patients were assigned to a special division within the sick bay, the so-called "Shit Division" where they would walk about in their own feces, stark naked, until they died."*

The prisoner doctors would discuss among themselves what could be done about those intestinal illnesses. The Frenchman Raymond Hallery, who had gotten admitted to the sick bay due to an injury, worked with the prisoner doctors and one of the illegal prisoner organizations to obtain substitutes for missing or unavailable medications, and thereby, more than likely, helped save the lives of many prisoners.

*"Lemordant had told me that there were no medications but that coal pills were a good thing. However, they were difficult to obtain because it would take sacks of coal pills. The only solution was to use bread for that instead, it was the long kind of bread, not a real bread, but something that was made out of bran, very heavy. But instead of giving them the bread plain we would have to toast it. The next day we, and the secret camp leadership, decided to toast the bread. We did not hand out the rations but instead cut them into slices and*

The Large Garage of the Barracks Complex with the Prisoner Kitchen on the Ground Floor and two Prisoner Blocks on the First Floor. Photo: Robert Pachon 1948. Made available by Jean Varnoux.

*placed them in wooden boxes. There were about 20 rations in each box, about 20 kilos of bread for 40 patients. Carrying those boxes on my shoulders I went into the kitchen to toast the bread. With the help of a Spanish comrade who spoke German, I told the SS-man who worked in the kitchen, that I wanted to toast that bread for the patients in the sick bay. This SS-man was responsible for what took place in the kitchen. We placed the bread on the stove but it started to burn. The SS-man told us that we couldn't do it this way. He called the interpreter back who, in turn, had called a prisoner who worked inside camp and he built us a grill. Since that day I have always toasted my bread. I actually was illegal in camp. I was never officially sent away from sick bay. I became a floor orderly. My personal particulars never appeared in the sick bay card file nor in the camp card file. All this was done with the understanding and approval of the Camp Administrator. In fact I held a secret job.*

There were the customary "selections" among the prisoners in sick bay. Those who had severe illnesses and/or injuries and had no prospect of getting well again, even after a long stay in sick bay, were selected, that is to say their recovery to be a useful worker were not expected. They had been dubbed by the SS-Camp Leader as "useless consumers". Therefore, those who had long-term illnesses or injuries, were the ones most threatened by those selections.

A possible result of a "selection" was a transfer to the sick bay in Concentration Camp Mauthausen, in order to guarantee the smooth operation of Work Detail Camp Melk. Altogether a total of 1,440 prisoners were transferred to Mauthausen between 21 April 1944 and the evacuation of the camp in 1945. Most of these prisoners were gotten rid of because of their inability to work due to their illnesses or injuries. In the Mauthausen SS-First Aid Camp these patients were in danger of being murdered by members of the SS or through regular selections for the slaughter house in Hartheim.

Dr. Sora reported that in the fall of 1944 an attempt was undertaken, by those in charge in Mauthausen, to gather up and transport to Concentration Camp Melk all prisoners who suffered from tuberculosis.

*"I was aware that many things in camp had reached a certain level but because most of the SS looked upon me with mistrust, because I belonged to the Luftwaffe, I was not told anything. In time there were certain concrete cases that made clear to me that I was being passed by where it pertained to illegal treatment of prisoners. Thus in the fall of 1944 I received a telephonic order from the Main Concentration Camp Mauthausen to select all prisoners who had TB and report them to Mauthausen where they would be placed in a recuperation camp. By then I knew that a "recuperation camp" was the same as a "gaschamber" and I did not report them."*

One can assume that hundreds of patients who had severe illnesses, or had been injured severely, had been murdered in Melk by members of the SS. Most of this was done by a so-called "lethal injection" given by members of the SS; this kind of murdering was done by injecting them with Phenol, Gasoline or air. This method used in Melk was identical to those used in other concentration camps and was an often common method.

In Concentration Camp Melk the causes of death were systematically falsified. The former German prisoner Karl Heinz R. who, since January 1945 had been busy in the sick bay Administration with putting the death lists together writes:

*“In each case the cause of death was listed as due to natural causes even in those cases where the prisoner in question had been beaten to death. As the cause of death I had to list them as: ‘heart attack, stomach ailment, tuberculosis, etc.’ As best as I can remember there were 8 different kinds of causes that repeated themselves. The causes of death had been designed this way by Muzikant.”*

The Death Book of the Chief Camp Doctor of Mauthausen shows 4,801 prisoners by name who had died during the existence of Concentration Camp Melk. During that period of year when it got very cold the death rate grew rapidly. Most of the prisoners in Melk died in January 1945: 1,019 deaths are listed which means that the daily death rate was more than 30. The living conditions in camp changed considerably due to the change of the weather. The summer months showed (including the neglected prisoners who died as a result of the air attack) a fundamentally low percentage of deaths and it listed the prisoners who had been sent to Mauthausen during the very wet spring of 1944 and winter of 1944/45. Within the time frame of one year a third of the prisoners who had been assigned to Melk had lost their lives which was not just due to the sadistic treatments by members of the SS like Muzikant, but was also due to the withholding of the most elemental supports to sustain life among the prisoners. After all, this was the result of an armaments policy that accepted the deaths of people as an economic factor.

### **The Murders of the Slovaks**

On 19 February 1945 a transport convoy of the SS, on its way to Concentration Camp Mauthausen from Slovakia with a load of political prisoners, was attacked by a group of low flying Americans in the vicinity of Melk during which at least 20 prisoners lost their lives. The survivors were taken to Concentration Camp Melk and the following day they were transported to Mauthausen. Between 15 and 30 of those who had sustained injuries remained behind in Melk. They were cruelly murdered in the sick bay of Melk by the SS-First Aid Man Gottlieb Muzikant. Their fate was listed in the judgment document of the County Court of Fulda during the trial of Gottlieb Muzikant:

*“He ordered the male nurses to completely empty the room behind the Pharmacy in which about 20 patients were lying about in 8 to 10 double tiered bunks. The patients were placed in the several sick bay wards and some of the double tiered bunks were set up in a similar manner. The remainder of the double tiered bunks the accused had ordered to be placed in the store room which was located underneath the large sick bay barrack. Finally the accused had the window taken out, in front of which barbed wire had been secured, and by order of the accused he had it removed. Whereupon the 15 Slovaks had to move into this completely emptied room after they had been ordered by the accused to undress completely. Then he locked it. He took the key with him and he forbade these prisoners any service, food or other such help or for anyone to enter the room at all. (...)*

*Every day the accused entered this room at least once, by himself, holding a club in his hand, he would lock the door behind him and beat the injured, hungry and freezing prisoners in such a manner that the penetrating screams of the ones being mistreated could be heard in the sick bay. The naked corpses, which, when alive, had been attacked on a daily basis and which showed the marks of his beatings, he dragged out of the room and*

*threw in front of the door. The former sick bay Administrator B. would then have the corpses taken to the crematorium where they were incinerated. It took at least 7 days before the last Slovakian died.”*

The number of deaths in Concentration Camp Melk according to the statistics of the SS:

Poles	1,575	Czechoslovakians	22
Hungarians	1,432	Norwegians	17
Frenchmen	546	Spaniards	12
Soviet Citizens	388	Belgians	9
Italians	302	Swiss Citizens	3
Yugoslavians	174	Luxembourgians	4
Germans (and Austrians)	150	Turks	2
Greeks	101	Portuguese	1
Estonians, Lithuanians, Latvians	36	Albanians	1
Dutchmen	26	Stateless	2
Total			4,801

### Evacuation and Liberation

The efforts by the SS not to allow a single living prisoner to fall into the hands of the enemy had awful consequences for the prisoners in concentration camps. They lived in fear that they might be killed at the very last moment when liberation was upon them. Most of the camps were evacuated ahead of the Allied advance and the prisoners were driven from the front in forced marches. At least a third of the 700,000 prisoners who had been listed in January 1945 as being within German concentration camps were put in those strenuous evacuation marches of week-long rides in hither and yon transport trains. They were subject to dying in the overflowing ill-provisioned reception camps in the months and weeks just before the end of the war.

At the start of April 1945 the SS also began to evacuate the camps in Austria. The first ones to be evacuated were the prisoners of a sub-camp in the area of Vienna, who were force-marched in the direction of Mauthausen as the Red Army drew closer. Those sick prisoners who were unfit for the march were shot when the prisoners left camp; the same was true for those who could not maintain the march tempo because of exhaustion.

During the spring of 1945 the prisoners of Melk wavered constantly between the hope of being liberated soon and the worries that they would not see that day. They feared the SS would kill all prisoners at the very last moment. The small illegal prisoner organization, which had formed themselves around the job holders in the camp's administrative office, tried to prepare themselves for that moment. Hence Hungarian Jewish prisoners, with the cooperation of civilian workers on the construction sites were able to smuggle 7 pistols into camp. In truth such an armory was of very little value. Realizing this the organized prisoners tried, most of all, to learn as

much as possible about the plans of the SS. The first sign that the decisive moment was not too far off came in March 1945. On the basis of discussions between the International Red Cross and the SS-Empire Leader

Himmler the Scandinavian prisoners were released from concentration camps. On 12 March 1945, 34 Scandinavians were taken from Melk to Mauthausen and from there, by way of Concentration Camp Neuengamme, to their countries of origin.

Presumably even in March 1945 prisoners in the camp's administrative office of Concentration Camp Melk learned from Dr. Sora, the camp's doctor, about an order from Concentration Camp Mauthausen that when the front moved closer they were to sound the air-attack alarm of a faked air attack and drive the prisoners into the tunnels of Roggendorf and then blow the tunnels to smithereens.

Camp Administrator Hofstadt informed all prisoners at once that during the following days no prisoner would enter the tunnels again, regardless of what the SS desired. During this situation the camp doctor was a great help. Dr. Sora intervened with the County Chief Administrative Officer in behalf of the prisoners:

*“Finally it came to pass that I went to see the County Chief Administrative Officer. I knew that, of late, he had been none too happy with the camp and I also knew, thank God, that he was not a Nazi, and so I told him: ‘Listen to me, all preliminaries aside, we don’t have any time, I am also not a Nazi and I know you are not one either and you do not have to be afraid because I did not come from camp to arrest you but we must face the following facts: ‘This and that is being planned and if that were to happen, and the Russians arrive no stone will remain unturned. They won’t be bothered at all and they will start their great revenge and they will kill all women and children’. I continued: ‘We’ve got to do something,’ and he replied, ‘in the name of God, I’ve been worried about that as well inasmuch as they are there. What can...’ Well,’ I said: ‘Doctor, I have a plan. I have learned that Dr. Jury, the Nazi Area Leader of Lower Austria, is a man who likely can be reasoned with when it comes to humanitarian considerations. Go see him and tell him he is very much responsible for the civilian population of Lower Austria in the same way that you are responsible for the people of Melk. For you that will be an easy task, to have him get in touch with Mauthausen and tell them he has heard some rumors. But for Heaven’s sake’, I told him, ‘don’t tell him that this was concocted by us because what we are doing is high treason and we will be strung up. Tell him that you have heard some rumors, after all there are many rumors about, and he should tell them that he has heard a rumor, that this cannot be allowed to happen. He should make Mauthausen put on the brakes.’*

*“Actually 14 days later Ludolph, the SS-Camp Leader, came to see him and told him that he had received a telegram which forbade him to blow up the tunnels, but that he was to relocate the prisoners to the Melk Concentration Camp located on Lake Traun. It was as if a load had dropped from my heart. Whether in fact Convall and Jury had taken action or that Mauthausen, for one reason or the other, did not think this an opportune thing to do, I do not know.... the order arrived two or three days before the Russians arrived in Krems, stating briefly, ‘get out of there’. Everything in camp was left as it was, nothing was blown up, and we got out of there as fast as we could. The SS-men had a great interest in getting out of the Russians’ reach, for they hoped that the Americans would arrive and treat them better. Except for the higher-ups, such as SS-Camp Leader Ludolph, they all knew exactly what would happen to them and because of that they drank copious amounts of booze.”*

Camp Ebensee after the liberation. Photo: Archives Główna Komisija, Warsaw

On April 11th, 1945, a transport consisting of 1,500 youthful and ailing prisoners was put together to go to Mauthausen. 30 to 40 of the very ill prisoners who could not be transported were killed with injections by SS-First Aid Man Muzikant inside the Melk sick bay. About the fate of the majority to be evacuated to Mauthausen nothing is known. More than likely a portion of the ailing prisoners were murdered in the gas chamber of Concentration Camp Mauthausen during the last days of the existence of that Camp.

On April 13, two transports with a total of 4,400 prisoners, traveled from Concentration Camp to Concentration Camp Ebensee. Some of them were taken to Ebensee in freight cars. The larger portion was transferred to Melk on barges that traveled on the Danube to Linz. From Linz the prisoners marched to Ebensee. Prisoners who could not keep up with the tempo of the march were shot by a special SS-Detail. All-in-all a total of 21 prisoners were shot on this march according to the official reports of the SS; 15 prisoners succeeded in escaping. The last transport, consisting of 1,500 prisoners, left Melk on 15 April 1945, in the direction of Ebensee. With that Concentration Camp Melk ceased to exist exactly one year after it had been established. Every third prisoner had lost his life in that camp.

The situation in Ebensee was unbelievably bad for the Melk prisoners who had been relocated there after surviving the march to this camp. Concentration Camp Ebensee, which looked more and more like a reception camp for the evacuees of the other camps, offered only catastrophic conditions during the last months of its existence, and had become a definite hunger camp. For the already very weakened prisoners this meant a really great danger. How many of the 5,839 prisoners, who had been evacuated from Melk to Ebensee, died during the last two to three weeks is unknown to us. However, one can assume that the extremely high death rate during the last phase of the camp must also have included Melk prisoners who died because of the horrible conditions during the the last weeks before the liberation of Concentration Camp Ebensee. This was due to the fact that there was so very little food and water on hand for the prisoners, who, until then, had been able to survive the National-Socialistic destruction machinery. "Good Fortune" for some of the prisoners of Melk, who survived the force-march to Ebensee, touched them because their incarceration in Concentration Camp Ebensee was so brief before their liberation.

On May 6th, 1945, Concentration Camp Ebensee was liberated by American troops. The day before, the prisoners in Mauthausen had also been liberated by American troops.

Department of the Interior, Herrengasse 7, 1010  
Vienna, Tel. 0043-1-53126.

### **Contact Addresses**

The Memorial can be visited by getting in touch by mail or telephone with Mrs. Blak, Schiesstattweg 8, 3390 Melk, 02752/31725. One can also get information about the Public Memorials and the Mauthausen Museum, and those of the Sub-Camps, from the Federal

Federal Ministry for Education and Art,  
Division for Political Education,  
Minoritenplatz 5, 1014 Vienna, Tel.  
0222/53120/4438, 4326, 4128 DW, Fax  
0222/53120/4504 4499 DW.

Documentation Archives of the Austrian Resistance. Old City Hall, Wipplingerstrasse 8, 1010 Vienna, Tel. 0222/534 36/779 DW. The Archives and the Library are open from Monday through Thursday from 0800 hours until 1700 hours. Free tours of the currently existing historical exhibition are possible provided one has requested such free tour in advance.

Memorial of the former Concentration Camp Mauthausen is in Marbach 38, 4310 Mauthausen. From 1 February through 15 December the Memorial is open to the public from 0800 hours until 1600 hours each day. Management and Archives are located at the Federal Department for the Interior, Herrengasse 7, 1010 Vienna, Tel. 0222/53126.

### **Additional Literature**

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Running Amok against Reality. Nazi Criminality and "Revisionistic" Writing of History. Publisher: Documentation Archives of the Austrian Resistance, Federal Ministry for Education and Art, Vienna 1991.

Florian Freund: Work Camp Zement. Concentration Camp Ebensee and the Rocket Weaponry, Vienna 1989 (Publisher: Social Criticism).

Florian Freund/Bertrand Perz: The Concentration Camp in the Serbenhalle. The War Industry in Wiener Neustadt, Vienna 1987 (Publisher: Social Criticism).

Hans Marsalek: The History of Concentration Camp Mauthausen. Documented. Vienna 1980 -2nd Edition (Austrian Camp Community Mauthausen).

Nazi Mass Murders by means of Poisoned Gas. Reissued by Eugen Kogon, Hermann Langbein, Adalbert Ruckerl, among others, Frankfurt am Main 1983 (Publisher: Fischer).