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Das mehrsprachige Webportal publiziert fortlaufend Informationen zur historisch-politischen Bildung in Schulen, Gedenkstätten und anderen Einrichtungen zur Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts. Schwerpunkte bilden der Nationalsozialismus, der Zweite Weltkrieg sowie die Folgegeschichte in den Ländern Europas bis zu den politischen Umbrüchen 1989.

Dabei nimmt es Bildungsangebote in den Fokus, die einen Gegenwartsbezug der Geschichte herausstellen und bietet einen Erfahrungsaustausch über historisch-politische Bildung in Europa an.

### The Flossenbuerg concentration camp and its auxiliary camps

The Flossenbuerg concentration camp near the town of Weiden in the Upper Palatinate was founded in May 1938 as the fifth major concentration camp. It came into existence after arrests were increased mid 1936 and the construction of large concentration camps had begun in preparation for the planned occupation of Austria and Czechoslovakia and the unleashing of the war. Besides the dominating function of terror and suppression, the camps were also supposed to fulfil an economical function. The Flossenbuerg concentration camp was mainly founded for the use of forced labour. The prisoners were initially employed for the construction of the camp and in the nearby granite quarries. The dominance of the air space soon gained by the allies during the war forced the NS-leadership to move arms factories to regions that were not at risk from bombings, particularly in the east and south-east of the German Reich. Therefore a rising number of auxiliary camps were constructed in addition to the concentration camps (now called "*Stammlager*", or main camps) as of 1943/ 44. According to available information, the Flossenbuerg concentration camp alone had 60 auxiliary commandos in Bavaria, 43 in Saxony, 32 in today's Czech Republic and one in Poland. Female prisoners were incarcerated in 27 of these 136 auxiliary camps. The number of prisoners working for the SS in Flossenbuerg concentration camp was around 6,000; the number of prisoners carrying out forced labour for the arms industry and the German "*Reichsbahn*" (national railway system) was more than 10-fold, amounting to 80,000 - 90,000 prisoners. The "payment" for a prisoner's day's work was six Reichsmark for skilled labour and four Reichsmark for unskilled labour, which the companies, having previously deducted 0,65 - 0,70 Reichsmark worth of "subsistence costs" per prisoner and day, had to transfer to the SS. Of course, the prisoners never saw a penny of it. The companies' managements were aware of the fact that the hard work combined with insufficient nutrition wasted the strength of the female prisoners. They obviously accepted the principle of "killing by attrition".

The external camp "Freia GmbH" in Freiberg

After heavy allied bombing attacks on German air munition factories - the "big week" in February 1944 - the 27 most important aeroplane factories were divided into 729 small units. These included units of the

Arado Flugzeugwerke GmbH Potsdam-Babelsberg (aeroplane manufacturing). Apart from aeroplane types Ar 95 and Ar 96, the units also produced fuselage and parts for Heinkel and Junkers under licence, later also for Messerschmitt and Focke-Wulf. In 1943/ 44, Arado developed the dual-trace jet bomber 234. The more German workers were drafted to make up for losses in the war zones, the more important it became for the group to employ concentration camp prisoners in addition to civilian forced labour. The workforce had grown from 14,537 employees in 1938 to 26,296 in 1942, including a large amount of forced labour from European countries. In October 1944, 49 percent of the group's workforce consisted of civilian foreign forced labour and 8 percent of prisoners of war and concentration camp prisoners. Allocations were based on the "Jägerstab", which was established on March 1. 1944 on the orders of the arms minister Albert Speer and planned to drastically reduce the number of aeroplane types in favour of the fighters, while continuing above-ground decentralisation of factories and underground relocation. New factories came into existence in Wittenberg and Brandenburg. The production sites Anklam, Rathenow and eventually Freiberg were added in 1943/ 44. Civilian foreign workers, Italian, Flemish, Walloon and French prisoners of war, but also around 1,000 Jewish female prisoners, specially selected for this purpose in the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, were designated to work in Freiberg. The selection on the "death ramp" in Auschwitz-Birkenau was made by SS doctor Josef Mengele. He decided which women were transported and which had to go to the gas chambers. The Arado factory in Freiberg built wings for the Messerschmitt Bf 109 fighter. The parts were constructed in converted factory halls of the Freiberg Porcelain factory on Frauensteiner Road. Up to 1932, ceramic high-performance isolators had been manufactured there; thereafter the buildings had practically stood vacant. Freiberg had enough experience in deploying forced labour. After all, there were already 14 "foreigner camps" in existence, in which a total of 1,100 Russian, French, Italian, Flemish and Ruthenians worked for, amongst others, the German Reichsbahn, the Küchenmeister asbestos spinnery, the Schnell & Co. cooler factory, the Grumbach & Co. manufacturer of agricultural machines, the Moritz Stecher leather factory or the Max Hildebrand und Paschke & Co " *Wehrbetrieb*" (military factory). Meetings with local authorities concerning the construction of a barracks to accommodate an auxiliary branch of the Flossenbuerg concentration camp were held as early as December 1943. At the beginning of May 1944, the Arado relocation plant was given the code name "Freia GmbH". When, on August 31<sup>st</sup> 1944, the first transport carrying 249 mainly Polish Jewish women and girls from Auschwitz arrived, the barracks camp at Hammerberg had not yet been completed. The women, who were given the prisoner numbers 53,423 to 53,671 by the Flossenbuerg concentration camp commanders, were initially accommodated in empty factory halls at Frauensteiner road, where they had to sleep in twos in one of the three-story wooden beds that had been set up there. On September 22<sup>nd</sup> the second transport arrived from Auschwitz carrying 251 mainly Polish Jewish women, who received the prisoner numbers 53,672 to 53,922. The third transport from Auschwitz was registered by the Flossenbuerg concentration camp for the Freiberg auxiliary camp on October 12<sup>th</sup> 1944. It brought 180 Czechs, 127 Slovaks, 91 Germans and Austrians, 28 Yugoslavs, 22 Dutch, 15 Hungarians, one Italian, one Russian, one American and 21 stateless women. The nationalities of nine of the women remain unknown. The 502 women of the third transport received the prisoner numbers 53,923 to 54,435 as well as 56,801 to 56,803. The number of prisoners in the auxiliary camp rose to 1,002. Sorted by years of birth, the largest age group was that of ages 25 to 35; the youngest worker had just turned 14.

SS "*Unterscharführer*" (staff sergeant) Richard Beck had the command over 19 SS guards, as well as one female SS "*Oberaufseherin*" (chief supervisor). Initially 20 and later 28 female SS supervisors, some

recruited from the Freiberg area and some having arrived with the Auschwitz prisoners, supervised the women. According to concurrent reports from prisoners, they worked in shifts of 12 to 14 hours with a 15-minute break at lunchtime. The foremen behaved very differently. Some were cruel and inhumane, many indifferent. Only very few were interested in the prisoner's fates and showed compassion.

It was strictly forbidden to make contact with the foreign forced labour working in the factory, nevertheless Italian prisoners of war tried to lighten the concentration camp prisoners' load. Some German foremen and workers also secretly helped, sometimes with an apple, sometimes at least with a pair of socks against the frost. Nevertheless, indifference and fear remained predominant. One group of prisoners, the auxiliary commando Hildebrand worked in plant 2 of the "Wehrbetrieb" (military factory) Max Hildebrand, right beside the shaft construction of the David shaft at Himmelfahrtsgasse. The "Max Hildebrand" company (previously "August Linke & Co. Optical Plants") had become famous since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century for its optical precision instruments. The demand for nautical equipment for the German navy, but particularly for optical target instruments for army and air force led to a rapid expansion of production in the 1930s. Amongst other things, target devices were assembled for the V2 in plant 2. There was also another auxiliary camp consisting of approximately 15 female prisoners, who were employed by the SS for labour in the town area, to unload Reichsbahn (national railway service) wagons, for transport and cleaning tasks, and before Christmas 1944, to chop down Christmas trees. They were given white and blue Belorussian-Ukrainian shirts, so that they would not be recognised as Jewish concentration camp prisoners in the town. When the accommodation was moved to the meanwhile completed barracks camp at Hammerberg after Christmas 1944, the women's living conditions deteriorated. The makeshift barracks, which had been completed just in time for Winter 44/ 45, were cold and damp. The extremely freezing winter became a daily martyrdom for the girls wearing only thin rags. There was a sick ward, but the prisoners' doctors were missing appliances and medication. There was no disinfectant. Toilet paper was used as bandage material. At least eight girls and young women died from weakness, hunger and cold in the Freiberg concentration camp. On March 31<sup>st</sup> 1945, work was stopped. The women in the barracks camp were left to their own resources. Their food rations had been cut, finally they were hardly looked after. At dawn on April 14<sup>th</sup> 1945, the SS drove the female prisoners to the train station. They were loaded into open freight wagons for "evacuation", which was nothing other than a way of describing extermination. The destination was Flossenbuerg concentration camp. The swift approach of the allied troops forced a redirection of the transport. After an odyssey of more than 14 days, the train arrived in Mauthausen concentration camp on April 29<sup>th</sup> 1945. After hours of waiting on the camp's huge parade ground, the women were driven into barracks nine and ten of the sanitation camp and left to their own resources. On May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1945, the SS guards fled from Mauthausen. Two days later the first American units reached the concentration camp.

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