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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.

Interview with farmer Karl Hintermeier, Bauern road Gersthofen on April 22nd 2001

Do you know something about the forced labour camps in the chemical companies IG Farben and Transehe?

There were many rumours, but we were not able to get much information. We knew that there were forced labourers interned there. We young people were surprised that there were so many air raids on Gersthofen and Augsburg, but Lech chemicals always survived. We really found that astonishing, many attacks were also flown during daytime.

As schoolchildren we very consciously experienced wartime daily life. During this time I attended the Pestalozzi School, but every time new prisoners of war arrived, the classes were relocated; we then had lessons in the Hillenbrand Restaurant in Bauern Road or in the Strasser Brewery.

The prisoners of war were guarded and were housed in the first floor of Strasser Brewery and Hillenbrand Restaurant. The Lindenmeyer Machine Factory also had prisoners of war, as did Lech Chemicals and the *Lechwerke*. At harvest times, when there was not enough manpower, as almost all farmers had gone to war, the prisoners of war had to help out. Many farmers had an agricultural forced laborer from 1940 to 1945. Some were prisoners of war, who were irregularly controlled by the *Wehrmacht* (German armed forces) and the police.

They then completely ransacked the chamber. The last agricultural labourer we had on our farmyard was a Russian, Gregor was his name, a giant of a man, and very sensitive. When the Russian posts came to search his chamber, they found a long dagger amongst his things. The Russian posts reproached my family and wanted to take Gregor away. My mother pleaded for him, so that Gregor could return to work on our farmyard a few days later. But we had to sign a large amount of papers saying we took him back in at our own risk.

During an air raid Gregor fled into the basement when a projectile hit our yard. We had to dig him out of the basement together, half of our machines had fallen into the basement with him.

After the war, Gregor lived with us for about another 8 weeks, which proves the good

relationship we had with him. Sometimes he helped with the work, although he no longer had reason to do so after the liberation. He drank a lot with his Russian comrades, until one day the police informed us he had been found dead in Oberhausen. He had literally drunk himself to death. A young man aged 25.

The first prisoner of war on our farmyard was an English man. He was a pilot and knew nothing of agriculture. We just showed him what he had to do but he really was not of much use to us. One day we sent him off with a scythe to make food for the horses. He left on a bicycle, the scythe on his back. An hour later there was still no sign of the English man. When he had not returned by 10 o'clock we called the police. They gave us such trouble for not having paid enough attention to him! To make a long story short, a week later the English man was found near Lake Constance, with the bicycle and the scythe. A good camouflage. But we don't know what happened to him. Surely he was punished very harshly.

The guards at times really were very harsh with the prisoners. Next door in the dance room of Hillenbrand restaurant there were once 40 to 50 very young Russians. As always, they were guarded by soldiers of the *Wehrmacht*, older soldiers who probably were no longer of use at the front line. The bread for the Russians, so-called „Kastenbrot“, was stored in our basement. A young Russian was caught by a guard when he was stealing bread from us. Don't ask how he was treated. There was a huge fuss. It always depended on the guarding teams how forced laborers or prisoners of war were treated.

Once we had a Russian living with us. He was very skinny and smoked almost non-stop. Paper, straw, anything that burned. He really could eat, in my life I never again saw such a thing. And yet he was so thin.

Another time we had a French man on our farmyard. There was a large amount of fluctuation with the forced labourers. I cannot explain by which criteria the workers arrived or were sent away again. Anyway, this French man was an exceptional worker, very hardworking and liked by all. This applied to almost all the French in town. They had a great charm. Particularly the women regretted greatly when he had to leave again.

Our neighbours also always had different forced laborers. Once a French man, the next time a Ukrainian, then it was a whole family, father, mother, daughter. The daughter was 22 years old, beautiful and very well educated. She spoke several languages. Of course you were not allowed to get close to her, that was severely punished.

I can also remember that there was a guarded settlement down by Thosti. Russian women lived there in a pretty long barracks. They sang such wonderful chorales, I still remember that. You never saw them in town, they were interned. They probably worked right down there in Thosti's storage or were brought to their respective places of work every morning. That's how it was with the prisoners of war anyway. They were assigned to the various work places in the village every morning. Hans on the corner of Donauwörther and Bauern Road had two Poles in his wood and coal shop.

Incidentally, the Poles were the only ones people were afraid of after the American occupation. They rampaged through the town and pulled men and women off their bicycles. Apart from that I have no knowledge of forced laborers or foreign laborers being treated badly. I cannot say much about the camps at the Lech chemicals factory and *Transehe*.

During wartime there were not only forced laborers and prisoners of war housed in the farmyards, but also officers. We had housed officers of the air raid defences on our farmyard

since 1942. They were also irregularly controlled by higher-ranking officers, to see if they kept their bed and room clean etc. Shortly before the end of the war, *Wehrmacht* tractors as well as horses and wagons were still commandeered.

Those forced labourers that stayed here were buried at the cemetery wall. But the graves were removed a few years ago. Party members came to the farmyards; the farmers who employed forced laborers were told that German prisoners of war in Russia were treated badly, therefore one was not to be too good to the Eastern laborers.