

# March of Life



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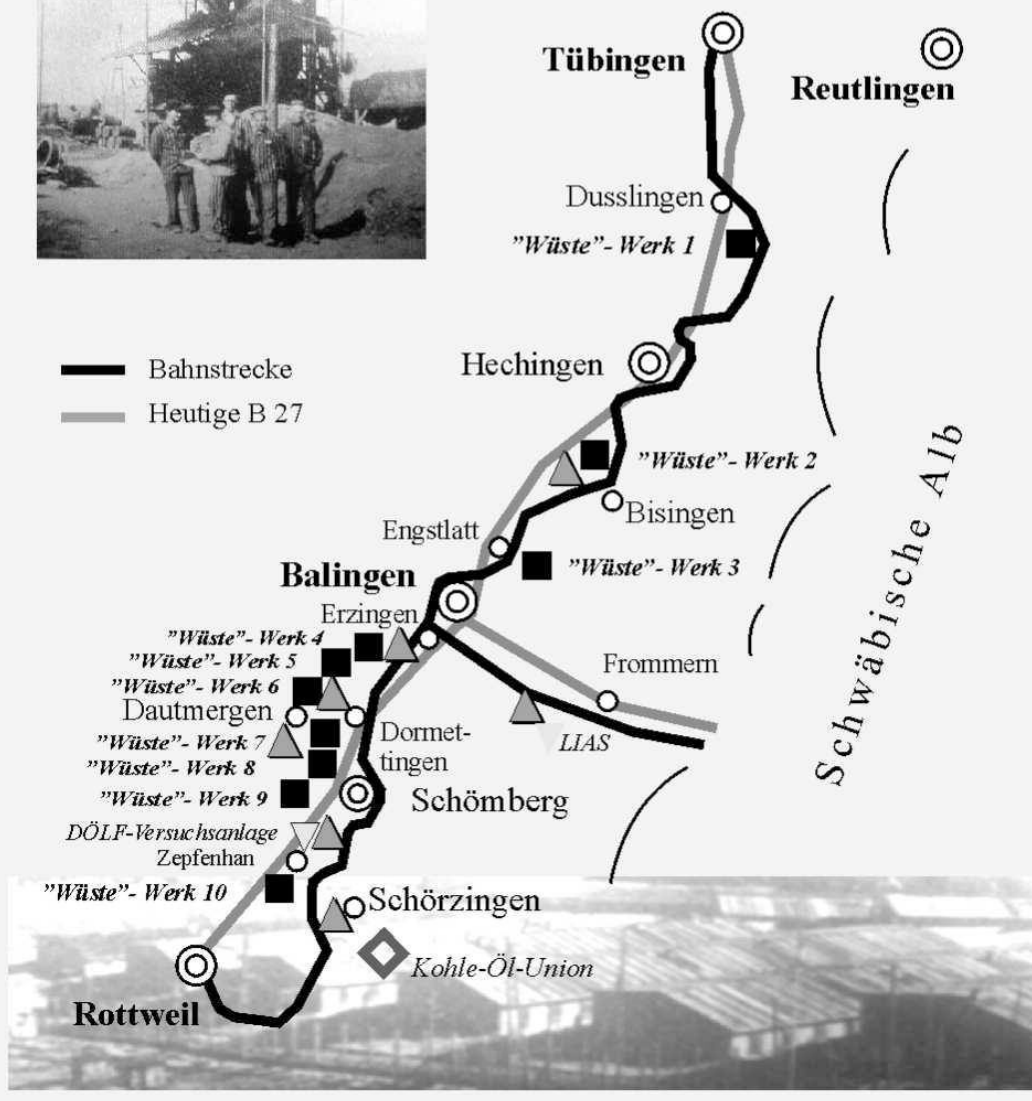
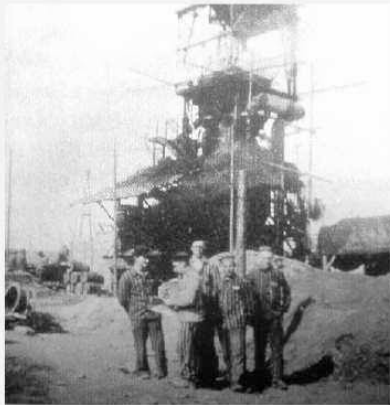
# Unternehmen "Wüste"- Lager und Werke zwischen Tübingen und Rottweil 1945

Hitlers letzter verzweifelter Versuch, den nationalen Treibstoff-Verlust durch Gewinnung von Öl aus den schwäbischen Ölschiefer-vorkommen zu kompensieren, kostete Tausende das Leben.

-  die 7 KZ-Lager
-  die 10 Ölschieferwerke

## Orte der Konzentrationslager:

- Schömberg (Bahnhofs-KZ)
- Schörzingen
- Frommern
- Erzingen
- Bisingen
- Dautmergen
- Dormettingen



Operation Desert - Source: Opfermann

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## Greetings

Dear Friends! I am glad to hear that you have decided to retrace the route from Bisingen to Dachau in a march. I am especially touched by this idea because to me, personally, Bisingen was the worst of all the camps I experienced. I am glad there are people who are willing to walk the route in commemoration of our march.

*Isak Wasserstein, Survivor of the Bisingen concentration camp and of the death march, liberated in Schongau*

The planned walks from Bisingen to Dachau along the route of the death marches of 1945 are a well thought out commemoration.

The distance from this continent to Europe and my advanced age restricts me to be present at that time. Notwithstanding I give you my full moral and spiritual support from this distant land to succeed in your endeavour.

It is good to know there are people around the Swabian Alb who face up to the history of the recent past of their country. In doing so you are actively taking steps that things that happened in the past can never happen again in the future.

In this work I wish you and the members of your church success and fulfilment.

Best wishes and regards

*Otto Gunsberger*

*Survivor of the Bisingen concentration camp, transported by train to Allach, where he was liberated*

A very personal greeting

It was already the first contact with the organizers of the "March of Life" in the Bisingen concentration camp memorial in January 2007 that touched me deeply. The municipality of Bisingen and the organization of the memorial of the concentration camp is now directly involved in the great event organized by the TOS church of Tübingen, and I consider this to be a very special signal for the work "Against Forgetting" in the entire area of the Swabian Alb.

My personal greetings and thanks go to you, dear friends of the TOS church, and all those who prepared the way for this march, as well as those who are also involved in the whole organisation.

It is also my prayer that the ETERNAL would richly bless all the participants of the march during the days from April 11<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup>, especially the international guests and the survivors of the Holocaust. And I pray that He also would pour His immeasurable blessing on all the sections and events of the march, but also on all places and people reached by the "March of Life."

*Uta Hentsch, Bisingen*

## Preface

Dear Friends,

it is a great joy and privilege to be able to go on this march together. Originally, we did not plan on inviting any guests or even making this prayer and reconciliation march a public event. But over and over again, the Lord spoke about setting a mark, and about how the "veil of silence" must never again cover these terrible events of our past.

We are grateful and amazed to see the great approval and support on the part of our American friends who are mostly from Messianic congregations. It is my prayer that the "March of Life" will leave a mark that is widely visible, and we believe it will release a great blessing in the spiritual realm over Germany

Thank you very much for being part of this march. The Lord bless you during this time.

Jobst Bittner

# Introduction

## Operation Desert

In 1944 seven satellite camps of the Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp in the Alsace existed in the area of today's Zollernalb county. They were located in Bisingen, Dautmergen, Dormettingen, Erzingen, Frommern, Schömberg and Schörzingen and were part of the "Operation Desert" project which was established in June 1944. This project was of prime strategic importance and was designed to secure fuel supplies. For that purpose it was intended to exploit the oil shale deposits located along the steep cliff of the Swabian Alb in order to extract oil shale.

Under the management of the Todt organization, ten plants were designed for completion within three months. The SS provided the prisoners for the forced labor. The exchange value of one man was four to six *Reichsmark* per day. This meant profitable business for the SS. Eventually, 5000 concentration camp prisoners became victims of the ruthless forced labor of this crisis project which only senselessly delayed the military defeat.

The prisoners of the "Desert" camps suffered from excessive overexertion, damp, cold, hunger, diseases and epidemics, they had to endure humiliations, beatings and torture. Conditions were incredibly cruel and can hardly be put into words. Isak Wasserstein, a former Jewish prisoner, describes these camps as the worst he knew. *"The actual brutality, barbarism and baseness that prevailed there – just cannot be committed to paper. Only those who have been in that hell, can grasp it."* Extermination through labor was the aim of these concentration camps!

The Operation Desert fulfilled Himmler's expectations towards the project in no way. The prisoners, emaciated and suffering from the dreadful, inhuman conditions, were not able to do the labor as was expected. In March 1945 five of the designed ten plants were given up. Besides, the procedure to win oil was not matured enough and oil shale mining was not profitable. In part, the kilns were only put into operation in February/March 1945. Altogether they did not produce more than 1200 tons of oil. The contemporary witness A. Korn describes the absurdity of the oil shale mining: *"...every five, could also have been four or six minutes, one drop would flow out of the pipe into the tank, if one can put it like that ... Anyway, hundreds of prisoners labored for one drop to tick every five minutes..."*

## Death Marches – The Historical Background

When the German defeat was inevitable in spring 1945, the Nazi regime changed its hold out policy and ordered the complete devastation of Germany instead, the so-called *Nero Command* on March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1945. For Hitler a lost war meant that the German people was lost, too. One of the most urgent problems now were the more than 714,000 concentration camp prisoners who were still in the camps by January 1945. The camps were to be evacuated and the inmates, for the most part, were to be killed. Therefore in so-called death marches the survivors were brought to camps located further behind the front line. This served to kill witnesses of the Nazi atrocities.

Throughout Germany about a quarter of a million people were sent on such death marches. One of the hubs for these relocations was Dachau. Here prisoners from different camps of Germany were rounded up.

For days and weeks these miserable convoys were on their way, often without sufficient clothing and almost always going hungry. Those unable to walk on were shot by the SS. Military police, Hitler Youth and the *Volkssturm*\* ensured that fugitives were captured again and killed. Often the population gave the decisive hints.

In mid-April Himmler's evacuation command reached the "Desert" camps, too. On April

12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, 1945 approx. 800 non-ambulant concentration camp inmates were taken away by train, heading for Dachau, and transferred to the satellite camp in Allach. Between April 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> the remaining 2000 to 3000 prisoners of the "Desert" camps were sent on the death marches in the direction of Upper Swabia and Upper Bavaria. Among them was also a large number of Jewish prisoners, especially from Bisingen and Dautmergen. Under the lead of SS guards the convoys were marched on byways from Bisingen to places as far as Ostrach, where they arrived on April 22<sup>nd</sup>. In Ostrach one convoy was left behind, others marched on. Along the route these convoys disbanded as French troops were drawing near. Many of the completely exhausted and emaciated men did not survive this last torture. The few who endured were eventually liberated in Dachau, Ostrach, Althausen or Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

## Facing the past

The reactions of the population during the post-war period to these appalling events that took place right before their very eyes were highly diverse. The most intense work was done in Bisingen by the Society of the Concentration Camp Memorial. They were supported by the mayor there. For the Society of the Memorial Site Eckerwald, the situation was different. They had no support by the surrounding municipalities nor could they count on the population there.

Also our own investigations along the route of the death marches revealed that the veil of silence is still covering almost all of the Swabian Alb and Bavaria. Although the population had seen the groups of prisoners according to the eye-witness account of I. Wasserstein ("They had seen us marching. They spit at us, laughed at us,..."), only a few people know now about the events and the death marches at that time.

Even up to the 80's the role of the State Railway Company in the mass murder in the Third Reich has never been publicly discussed. Yet this has started to change: The German Railways started to face their past and make restoration for their guilt.

## March of Life

As a prayer and memorial march, the "March of Life" follows one of the main routes of these death marches. It is a mark against suppression and concealment and for reconciliation, forgiveness and restoration on the Swabian Alb and in Southern Germany.



*"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland..."*  
(Isaiah 43:19-20)

\* The **Volkssturm** (literally translated as *People's Storm* in the meaning of *National Storm*) was a German national militia during the last months of Germany's Third Reich. It was founded on Adolf Hitler's orders on October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1944 and effectively conscripted all males between the ages of 16 to 60 (who did not already serve in some military unit) as part of a German territorial army. The term 'Sturm' was historically used for militia units, as the reserve forces in Prussia had been called "Landsturm" for many years prior to 1945.

# Schedules

## Schedule for Wednesday, April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2007

10.00 am - 1 pm	Preparation seminar (Tent Hall Tübingen)
2.15 pm	Departure to the "Desert" Camps
3.00 pm - 4 pm	Prayer at the 7 "Desert" Camps and at "Desert" Plant 10 (Eckerwald)
7:30 pm	Start-up meeting with Rose Price (Tent Hall Tübingen)

## Schedule for Thursday, April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2007

8 am – 8:30 am	Assembly point at the footbridge in Bisingen
	Start of the marches: Section Bisingen - Bad Waldsee
3 pm	Simultaneous prayer meetings in <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stetten am Kalten Markt/Heuberg</li><li>• Ostrach</li><li>• Aulendorf</li></ul>
5 pm	Joint meeting in Sigmaringen (FEG / Free Evangelical Church)
6 pm	Dinner for all participants of the march
7 pm - 9 pm	Open event in Sigmaringen (FEG / Free Evangelical Church)

## Schedule for Friday, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2007

10 am	Assembly point at the Tourist Information in Bad Waldsee
	Start of the marches: Section Bad Waldsee - Schongau
	Children's march starting from Bad Waldsee
5 pm	Shabbat meal for all participants (Marktoberdorf)

## Schedule for Saturday, April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2007

8 am	Assembly point at the fairground in Schongau
	Start of the marches: Section Schongau - Dachau
10 am	Meeting in Allach at the former concentration camp
11 am	Marching-off from Allach to Dachau
2 pm	Arrival at Dachau, joint assembly point
2:30 pm	Joint walk into Dachau right into the concentration camp memorial (possibility to visit the site)
4 pm	Memorial Service
7 pm	Concert of Life in the Gospel Life Center, Munich

## Schedule for Sunday, April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2007

4.00 pm	Closing service "20 Year TOS" Anniversary (Tent Hall Tübingen)
7:30 pm	Israeli-style buffet (Tent Hall Tübingen)



## Prayer Information for Wednesday, April 11th, 2007



*“The LORD will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; He will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the LORD, Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing.” (Isaiah 51:3)*

### “Desert“ Camp 1: Schöenberg Concentration Camp

**Period:** December 16<sup>th</sup>, 1943 to April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1945

**Prisoners:** At times there were up to 800 prisoners in this camp. Prisoners came to Schöenberg from Natzweiler-Struthof, Auschwitz, but also many other “Desert” camps. Prisoners from Luxemburg had a special position in the camp filling all higher positions in the camp hierarchy because of their ability to speak German.

**Number of Deaths:** The precise number of victims is not known. Many hundreds of people died. Only the first few were cremated in Schwenningen am Neckar.

### Information About the Camp

#### History

The concentration camp was located near the train station and for that reason was called the “station camp”. Towards the end of 1943, the first transport with prisoners from the main camp Natzweiler-Struthof arrived in Schöenberg. There were already some barracks

on the way from the train station to the camp. A factory site was constructed across the street. You could see pipes, boiler plants, half-built walls and there was the stench of tar.

### Structural and Sanitary Conditions

There were four blocks of barracks on the one side of the roll call square. On the other side the depot, the kitchen, the wash room, the cobbler's workshop and the sick room were located. At the corners of the square camp site there were four watchtowers. The SS barracks, construction management, another kitchen etc. were located outside the camp area.

The lack of soap and showers combined with the dirty work in the factory led to the spreading of vermin and bugs. There were no clothes to change and no opportunity to wash the stripy convicts' clothes. The sanitary situation was so disastrous that Numa Meunier reported that in 1945 the air in the sick room was so disgusting that you did not even want to breathe it. Bandages were only available for the social elite, made of sterile paper, and they were changed only once a week.

### Clothing and Food

A former prisoner reports that the prisoners arriving from Auschwitz in November 1944 received wooden shoes and were rejoicing. But there were also groups of prisoners without shoes during this cold winter period. There was great hunger, the prisoners ate garbage and stole whatever possible. The chief of the kitchen, Busch, is said to have stashed away masses of food.

### Labor

The prisoners had to build fences, streets and barracks, mine oil shale, construct rail tracks and work in the storage and the desulphurisation units. Or they unloaded freight wagons full of stones, sand, gravel and cement pipes. 64 prisoners were occupied with duties within the camp.

### Treatment of the Prisoners

As in all camps, the treatment of the prisoners was largely depending on the responsible leaders. Commander in chief was SS Technical Sergeant *Hauptscharführer* Seuß, and the prisoners called him "Sharp-up". He had temporarily been commander in chief over several "desert camps" and Spaichingen. The camp elder Roger Hoffmann tried to spare the prisoners as much as possible. He had the gift of keeping order in the camp without screaming and beating. With his diplomatic skills he lowered the death toll close to zero. It is his merit that some prisoners described this camp as comparatively "bearable". Also the more humane barracks with windows, floors, wash rooms and indoor toilets left quite a good impression. The prisoners even were allowed to plant flowers. They had a gardener in the concentration camp.

On the other hand the block warden Gleich and communications officer Seith showed great brutality and much cruelty. The records of camp elder Hoffmann are a testimony of the atrocities in the concentration camp: Prisoner No. 6748, Wasili Alexandrow, was put into the dog kennel by SS member Reichenbach and sustained severe injuries from bites. On May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1944 prisoner No. 5425 Matwejo was "shot attempting escape". On October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1944 prisoner No. 16860 Woytycha committed suicide by hanging himself in the peat shed. On January 21<sup>st</sup> two Russians were hanged in front of all the inmates. SS *Hauptscharführer* Seuß, called "Sharp-up" officially formed labor battalions "without shoes", as the prisoners had to work without shoes even in winter.

The only form of care the sick received were pills. Inmates suffering from tuberculosis were killed by injections, some sick prisoners who went to the latrine never returned.

*A report by the former prisoner Tadeusz Noiszewski: "When the first transport of prisoners from the main camp Natzweiler-Struthof in Alsace arrived at the train station of the little village Schömberg near Balingen at the end of 1943, hardly anything of the "Operation Desert" was visible at that time. One part of them had to construct the concentration camp, fences and barracks, they built streets and laid rail tracks. The majority had to labor in the quarries and the kilns. Their main work was to dig, to cart and to grind the shale. With hammers and pickaxes, later with bare hands they had to remove huge masses of earth on the Swabian Alb. Most of the prisoners were barefoot even in winter or had only wooden shoes. The striped convicts' clothes and a cap were the only protection against damp and low temperature. The clothing could not be changed or washed and therefore was full of lice that passed on typhus of which many prisoners died."*

*Numa Meunier, one of the witnesses during the Rastatt trials reported: "I do not want to accuse the Polish doctor, but I have to say that the sick going to the latrine did not return. There were lethal injections. I had protested and the doctor banned me from passing the sick room. They told me that the injections were based on formaldehyde (normally used for embalming). But I cannot confirm this. The sick rooms were disgusting. You could not breathe the air because it was so dirty. We had to care for the sick, but were not allowed to spend anything. The bandages were only for the "social elite" of the camp. They were made of sterile paper and we changed them once a week. Every day, we had between one and four deaths in the sick rooms. Those suffering from tuberculosis disappeared with the aid of injections, most certainly by orders. The sick were robbed of all their possessions. Then they were taken to the train station and were told that they would be brought to a camp to recover. I assure you that once there were 40 deaths before the departure of the train in Schömberg."*

### **Dissolution of the Camp**

When the SS dissolved the camp on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1945, hundreds of prisoners were transported to Allach, a satellite camp of Dachau. Others had to start a death march to Lake Constance and were liberated only near Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

## **"Desert" Camp 2: Schörzingen Concentration Camp**

**Period:** February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1944 until April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1945

**Prisoners:** Originally intended for 200 prisoners, after September 1944 up to 1079 prisoners lived in the camp. Among them were Jews from almost all the German occupied countries: Poland, Russian, Czechia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, France, Slovakia.

**Number of Deaths:** all in all 549 deaths were registered. Many of the victims were taken to the crematory in Schwenningen. The death rate was extremely high. Most of them died because of the terrible working conditions in the plant in Eckerwald.

### **Information about the Camp**

#### History

The camp was a satellite camp of the concentration camp Natzweiler, Alsace. It was build

by prisoners of Natzweiler-Struthof and of the concentration camp Schömburg. It was close to the oil shale factory "Kohle-Öl-Union/Busse". 50 to 60 SS men administrated the camp.

### Structural and Sanitary Conditions

The camp consisted of four barracks with three-storied cots, tables and benches. It was surrounded by a double electric barbed wire and watchtowers. Sometimes up to 400 prisoners had to sleep in a room with 120 cots. As of September 1944 the camp was overcrowded and the prisoners vegetated cramped into very little space. Three or four had to share one cot, and they were happy to get one, as others had to find rest even in the latrines.

### Clothing and Food

The entire clothing of a prisoner consisted in shirt, trousers, sometimes underpants, jacket, cap and shoes made of cloth with wooden soles. Especially during winter they were poorly dressed. Even though there were enough woolen socks and warm underwear for the prisoners in the camp, the camp commander Oehler and the camp elder Telschow refused to give them out..

### Labor

First the prisoners had to construct the camp. 200 or 300 prisoners no longer needed for the construction were sent to work underground, digging or desulphurising shale for the Kohle-Öl-Union/Busse. The SS in the camp enforced the labor with cruelty and brutality. Every morning and evening the prisoners had to muster for a roll call. Even worse was the situation of those prisoners taken to construct the satellite camp and labor plant in Zepfenhan, Eckerwald. As of September 1944 they were assigned to the project "Desert 10". Even more prisoners were cramped into the camp and forced to work in Zepfenhan, Eckerwald. The majority of the prisoners were occupied with the construction of the new and last "Desert plant". Permanently malnourished, exposed to the brutality of the SS and to the chilling cold, the prisoners were often laboring in mud up to their hips. The number of dead increased dramatically.

### Treatment of the Prisoners

The prisoners were exploited until the intended "extermination through labor". Even more so than the prisoners working underground, the "Eckerwald" prisoners faced death because of the cold, mud, constriction, lice, violence and labor conditions. They had to work 12 to 16 hours a day. Weakened or tired prisoners were struck dead or shot. Those unable to work were executed by the SS or deliberately chose death e.g. by jumping into the electric barbed wire. There was hardly any chance for weakened prisoners to escape, only those strong enough had the opportunity to run away. But when they were caught, they were either struck dead or shot. Some were tortured, until they were deformed beyond recognition. Jews were regularly beaten without cause with hands, feet and sticks. Very often they were tortured violently.

Witness account of Leon Donven, former prisoner: *"The men were in a dreadful state – full of lice, physically and morally exhausted, not able to stay clean – apathetically lying on the cots. During the best days of the camp, they received 200 grams of bread a day, a little bit of jam and one plate of beet soup."*

Julien Hagenbourger describes Herbert Oehler as one of the worst SS-men: *"Our arms were twisted on our backs, forged S-shaped flattened steel bars furnished with padlocks put around our wrists. Then Oehler put the keys in his pockets and made us stand the whole night with our hands pressed against the wall. The whole day we had to stand at one*

*end of the camp. The other prisoners fed us and helped us defecate. The sharp-edged shackles cut into our wrists, causing terrible pain. This torture continued for 14 days. Every morning Oheler would examine whether the shackles were still tight, tearing at them, cutting deep wounds. My pain seemed to give him pleasure.”*

### **Dissolution of the Camp**

As the French approached, the camp was evacuated on April 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>. In four convoys guarded by 40 SS men headed by SS colonel Oehler the 554 survivors marched southeastwards.

## **“Desert“ Camp 3: Frommern Concentration Camp**

**Period:** March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1944 to April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1945

**Prisoners:** On October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1944 there were 179 prisoners in the camp

**Number of Deaths:** 8 prisoners died in the period from January to March

### **Information About the Camp**

#### Structural and Sanitary Conditions

At first there were three big barracks, as of March 1945, there were five wooden barracks surrounded by barbed wire. Food was extremely bad and insufficient.

#### Labor

At first, the labor of the prisoners was limited to structural and civil engineering for the oil shale factory, which was to be constructed. Later they worked to quarry the oil shale.

#### Treatment of the Prisoners

According to statements of witnesses the prisoners were treated relatively well. There are no reports about executions. Their average working hours were 48 hours a week. From January to March 8 deaths were registered. According to statements on the death certificates three prisoners in the concentration camp died of exhaustion and the other five died of the consequences of bomb attacks.

Michael Schreiner, an excavator in Frommern from January 11<sup>th</sup>, 1943 to April 18<sup>th</sup>, 1945 reports that food had been extremely bad and insufficient. But he couldn't say anything about brutal behavior of the guards. *“I want to add that during my work there I have never been an eyewitness to an execution or a corporal punishment. It was just the foreman Pulver who told me that the SS guards beat some of the prisoners. (...) All in all I would like to say that they treated the prisoners well in Frommern, in contrast to other camps.”* The former mayor of the village Frommern stated, “In my opinion, Frommern was one of the best managed camps.”

### **Dissolution of the camp**

64 prisoners were ordered to march towards Dachau on April 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>.

## **"Desert" Camp 4: Erzingen Concentration Camp**

**Period:** May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1944 until April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1945

**Prisoners:** Approx. 200 prisoners; given the purpose of the camp, fluctuation was very high.

**Number of Deaths:** Precise number of victims is unknown.

### **Information About the Camp**

#### History

The Erzingen camp is a so-called "Hidden Camp" (German: "Nacht- und Nebel-Lager"), in short referred to as NN camp.

On December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941 (= Pearl Harbour) the supreme command of the armed forces issued a order, also known as "Keitel Decree", that was intended to make captured members of resistance groups disappear. Nothing was supposed emerge about the fact of detention and the whereabouts of the detainee. This uncertainty was supposed cause a maximum of mental torture to both the family members and the detainees. Therefore there was a general ban on writing for these so-called NN prisoners and they were isolated.

The prisoners even enjoyed "humane" treatment by the guards. For instance, after the landing by the Allied armies in Normandy, an SS man put a radio outside the window, so the prisoners could listen to the daily report of the armed forces at eight o'clock.

#### Constructional and Sanitary Conditions

Nothing known to us so far, unfortunately

#### Clothing and Food

The Erzingen camp was managed in a "comparatively humane" way which was due to the camp commander SS Colour Sergeant Haas. He socialized with the villagers and achieved a considerable improvement of the food rationing situation.

#### Labor

The prisoners had to build the SS owned Bronnhaupten oil shale works which was incorporated into the operation "Desert" in August 1944.

#### Treatment of the Prisoners

Though some have reported a certain measure of "comradeship" and "humanity", that had its limits. In the Rastatt trials, for example, camp commander Karl Rieflin is characterized as a "torturer" who spread "fear and terror". The same holds true for Paul Olesch who terrorized camp inmates with kicks and blows. Also the two SS guards Anton Geisel and Siceron Kellinger are said to have beaten prisoners with rifle butts again and again.

### **Dissolution of the Camp**

On April 12<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> 159 prisoners were committed to the Dachau concentration camp by two transportations.

## “Desert“ Camp 5: Bisingen Concentration Camp

**Period:** August 1944 to April 1945

**Prisoners:** 4163 altogether (1500 on average at any one time)  
Most of the prisoners were Jewish (coming from Auschwitz and Stutthof)

**Number of Deaths:** About 1200 prisoners died until the camp was closed, which means that on average 5 prisoners died every day. With the exception of two, all prisoners are buried on the cemetery of the local concentration camp.

### Information About the Camp

#### History

In April 1944, the first 1000 prisoners were transported from Auschwitz to the concentration camp in Bisingen. They had to construct the camp themselves. They had to lay a water pipe throughout the whole village into the quarrying area, which was very rough. Camp barracks and the oil shale factory were built in the “Kuhloch”. The prisoners then had to work in “Desert 2” (Bisingen), in “Desert 3” (Engstlatt) and in “Desert 1” (Dusslingen-Nehren), as well as in the village of Bisingen.

#### Structural and Sanitary Conditions

The prisoners worked under the most dreadful conditions. Food, clothing and accommodation were completely insufficient. Because of the constant rain in the fall of 1944, the barracks that resembled horse stables were always wet. On wooden stands with room enough for just one person, three prisoners had to lie together. At the beginning, they didn't even have blankets, later on three prisoners had to share one blanket. The sanitary conditions were also terrible. In order to get to the latrines, the prisoners had to walk through 50 to 60 metres of manure and mud. There were no real paths and there was almost no water for washing.

*“Today not even a pig would be forced to live like that.”*

Purposely prisoners unable to work were exposed to infectious germs.

#### Clothing and Food

The prisoners were dressed insufficiently. When they were wet, they were not allowed to change their clothes. When they tried to protect themselves against the cold with covers or sacks, they had to expect punishment from the camp overseers. *“When they saw us doing this, we were beaten... in Bisingen they would whip us.”* Food was also a disaster (half a liter of dark, lukewarm water and one slice of bread in the morning, parsnip soup at midday and in the evening, but there was not always enough soup for everyone.)

One inhabitant from Bisingen reported, *“The faces were dirty, bearded and bony. Hunger and misery as well as illness and desperation had left deep lines in their faces and they looked revolting. Most of them were nothing but skin and bones, and they staggered like drunks because of their weakness. They didn't really walk, but they dragged themselves along, fell and stayed on the ground or they crawled like animals.”*

#### Labor

The only goal of the living conditions in the barracks (both structural and hygiene) and the senseless, futile labor was to exterminate as many people as possible. To produce one ton of oil, at least 35 tons of shale had to be quarried under the most severe conditions. Even before work started in the mornings, the prisoners, including the sick, were mustered for a roll call. They were often left to stand in the freezing cold for more than four hours.

Sometimes they were dragged from their barracks in the middle of the night. In a quote you can read, *"I know...that prisoners, who were ill or unable to work were forced to work in Bisingen. Whoever wanted to report sick was beaten and so terribly mistreated by the block officer that no prisoner dared to report sick anymore, when it was time for the roll call."*

### Treatment of the Prisoners

The cruel, inhuman and deathly conditions of the camp reached a climax here. Although it was officially forbidden to the SS leaders to beat the prisoners, they were constantly mistreated. The following descriptions can only partially show the cruelties the prisoners were exposed to every day.

*"In this camp I have repeatedly seen him beating the prisoners unable to walk with a stick. Many prisoners died because of the beatings."*

*"...he wanted to force me to eat my own excrement. When I refused, he beat me."*

*"Whoever collapsed during the hard work because of hunger and cold was beaten brutally by the SS guards or some other overseer."*

There is a report about a prisoner, who was caught after an attempted escape. *"This prisoner had to stand outside in the freezing cold for the whole night and was dead the following morning."*

It is reported about the hanging of a Russian prisoner, *"They put the head of a slaughtered horse on his head....When he was then led to the gallows, we all lined up and I saw how Hofmann kicked him on."*

Isak Wasserstein who remembers Bisingen as the worst camp, writes, *"The true brutality, the bestiality and the perfidy prevailing there – it can't be put into words. Only once you have been in hell, you can imagine what it was like. It is inconceivable and inexplicable that people who call themselves humans can do such cruel things, no matter if they acted under orders or with their own intention. I saw the great joy of the beasts attacking their victims and I saw how they treated the "subhuman creatures". A dog was more valuable than a human being."*

### **Dissolution of the camp**

206 prisoners were sent to Dachau on April 12<sup>th</sup>. Further 563 prisoners were transferred to Dachau on April 14<sup>th</sup>. They were transported in open freight cars covered with barbed wire. The same day the rest of the prisoners set out on a march with unknown destination.

## **"Desert" Camp 6: Dautmergen Concentration Camp**

**Period:** August 1944 until April 1945

**Prisoners:** On October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1944 the largest of the "Desert" camps had its highest occupancy rate of 2777 prisoners. The prisoners were from the concentration camps in Auschwitz, Dachau and Stutthof. "Among them there were many Jews from Lithuania, Polish Jews as survivors of the Warsaw Uprising, Sinti and Romanies as well as members of the resistance from Western Europe and Norway."

**Number of Deaths:** 1773 deaths were registered. It is documented that 780 Jews from



Wilna perished here.

## **Information About the Camp**

### History

It is the largest of the "Desert" camps and was managed as a satellite camp of the Natzweiler, Alsace concentration camp. It was opened on August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1944 by a convoy of 600 Poles, 400 prisoners from Dachau followed in September. In early October 1944 another documented transport with 2500 prisoners from the Stutthof concentration camp arrived. The prisoners of the first transport had to construct the camp themselves. Two prisoners reported that initially the camp consisted of a boggy field fenced with barbed wire. In the center of the camp, in the mud, there were some tarpaulins. The prisoners were herded together there. They had to lie on rotten, soggy straw, piled on top of one another, as there was not enough space. The existing watch towers were equipped with powerful floodlights. Three men had to share one blanket, even cement bags were used for warmth and the men wore them underneath the tattered camp uniforms, as there was no winter clothing whatsoever.

### Structural and Sanitary Conditions

In the camp there was a complete lack of sanitation, not a single faucet, neither washbasin nor toilet. Mud everywhere. In fall 1944 the camp is a downright mire. They had to lie on rotten, soggy straw, piled on top of one another, as there was not enough space. Many died simply because of the disastrous living and labor conditions. The death rate was up to 50 deaths per day, also caused by typhoid and paratyphoid fever.

### Clothing and Food

Food consisted of just one piece of rye bread and a watery beet soup per day.

### Labor

The prisoners were employed in oil shale exhaustion. They had to do very hard excavation works. They laid railway tracks and dug tunnels in order to build an underground factory. The extraction of oil shale which was processed in a neighboring factory also required trench works.

### Treatment of the Prisoners

In Dautmergen prisoners were systematically cramped into "horse shacks" for the purpose of extermination. According to witnesses, in one "block" alone 550 Jews were cramped in. Dautmergen was both a labor camp and an extermination camp. According to former prisoners Dautmergen was *"worse than Auschwitz"* and stood for *"death", "hell", "bone crusher"* and *"mud everywhere"*; the camp was nothing but a mire.

The camp commandants and SS troops were fanatic and ready to kill at any time. They forced the prisoners to stand in the mud for roll calls that lasted for hours; they even had to do physical exercises. Whoever was too slow or slipped, was beaten with an iron chain or kicked until he got up again or stayed on the ground. At the end of the roll calls many remained on the ground for ever. A 15 hour working day was ahead of them, at night they had to carry the dead back to the camp.

An Account by Boutbien as Witness in the Rastatt Trial: *"It is difficult to give an appropriate picture of the whole, if you didn't know the climate in that camp. The thing that astounded the human consciousness most is that the quality of being human was not recognized in the concentration camps. We did not belong to the human species any longer. We were*

*kind of a hybrid being, somewhere in-between animal and man. Human life did not count any longer and had no longer any meaning. It was used, and it was abused."*

## **“Desert“ Camp 7: Dormettingen Concentration Camp**

**Period:** January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1945 to April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1945

**Prisoners:** 300 to 500 mainly Russian and Polish prisoners

**Numbers of Deaths:** 16 registered deaths between March 27<sup>th</sup> and April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1945

### **Information About the Camp**

#### History

The camp was constructed just before the liberation of Auschwitz. It was the last satellite camp and was in operation for only 96 days.

#### Labor

The prisoners had to work in the quarries between Dormettingen and Dotternhausen under the most severe conditions mining oil shale. Another work unit dug ditches for the water pipes in the village of Dormettingen.

#### Treatment of the Prisoners

Official documents in the municipality of Dormettingen registered 16 deaths between March 27<sup>th</sup> and April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1945. In the case of five prisoners the cause of death is said to be “shot during an attempted escape”. But there is no doubt that camp leader Ehrmantraut arbitrarily shot at least two of the five.

During the weeks preceding the liberation, the guarding of the prisoners was said to have been very “generous”. The catholic priest of Dormettingen remembered that prisoners even were allowed to eat in the village. Matthäus Pfaff, former official messenger, testified, *“I know that even members of the SS looked after the prisoners, smuggling food into the camp.”*

#### **Dissolution the camp**

From April 6<sup>th</sup> to April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1945, 428 prisoners were taken to the Dachau concentration camp.

As early as April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1945, survivors of the Dormettingen concentration camp returned to establish a camp to take revenge on those who had wronged them. But also inhabitants of the surrounding villages were held captive in the camp and terrorised, because they were held responsible and blamed for the events during the Nazi regime.

About 60 people were carried off to this illegal camp, 17 were murdered, some of them shot, some cruelly tortured to death. Among them were the mayor of Dotternhausen and also three women, who were also shaven and raped repeatedly. Among the victims was also an unnamed child. After four weeks, the French commander put an end to the self-administered justice.

## **“Desert“ Plant 10: Zepfenhan satellite camp, Eckerwald**

**Period:** September 1944 to February 1945

**Prisoners:** 500 prisoners on average were ordered for this operation, mainly from the Schörzingen camp, the so-called “moor soldiers”

**Number of Deaths:** 95% of the deaths at the Schörzingen camp are attributed to this satellite camp, all in all approximately 500 dead prisoners.

### **Information about the Industrial Plant**

#### History

The Zepfenhan plant and satellite camp was situated on the road to Zepfenhan in the Eckerwald.

It rapidly developed into an “extermination of human life through labor” camp. The long walks, heavy physical labour in bad weather conditions, insufficient food and inadequate clothing of the prisoners, cramped and miserable accommodation in the camp, no possibilities to wash; all these points were the reason why the prisoners quickly lost their strength to live.

Julien Hagenbourger wrote, *“The situation in the satellite camp of Zepfenhan got worse and worse. The dead prisoners, who had not been able to take the strains on the construction site any longer, were carried back to the camp at the end of the queue of laborers every day. But who cared about these conditions? It was a labor unit, and when the number of ants decreased, simply new ones came from other camps.”*

Most of the attempted escapes were also registered for the Zepfenhan satellite camp, partly because the degree of suffering was greatest there and partly because guarding the place was difficult, due to the large area it covered.

#### Clothing and Food

Only very few prisoners had wooden shoes, most of them had just some rags as protection for their feet, many of them walked barefoot. Open wounds and bad frostbites were the consequences. The thin zebra suits, which were dirty and wet from weather, subjected the prisoners to hypothermia.

#### Labor

Every day the prisoners walked the distance of two and a half miles from the concentration camp of Schörzingen to their workplace, the Zepfenhan satellite camp. Work mainly consisted of heavy labor like digging and carrying all sorts of weights. They had to dig wide trenches into the clay of the hillside for the foundations for the metal constructions of the industrial plants that were to be built on top of them. Due to heavy rains the construction site became so boggy that the men often were in mud up to the waist.

#### Treatment of the Prisoners

In spite of these terrible labor conditions the SS guards drove the prisoners to work with dogs and incessant beatings. Whoever was unable to continue, did not receive any food rations any longer because of “refusal to work”. Many prisoners died of these murderous conditions because of starvation and exhaustion. Every day up to four dead prisoners were carried back to the camp by the other exhausted prisoners.

During the night it was almost impossible for the prisoners to recover and to find a quiet place. There was not enough space for everyone to sleep, three prisoners had to lie on one plank bed and many of them had to spend the night crouching down in a corner or in the latrine.

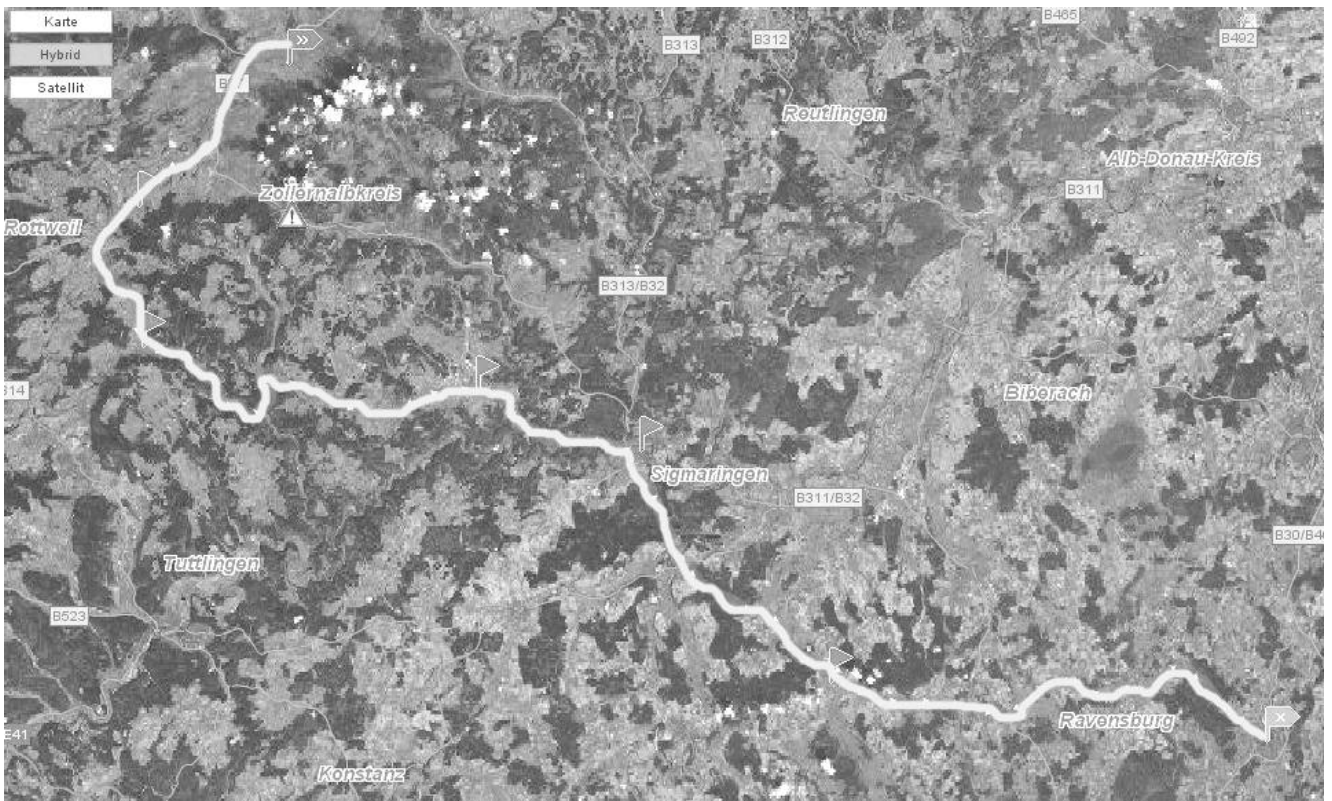
Eyewitnesses report:

*"We were working out in a field. It was about 3 pm. Two prisoners tied together with wire were forced along the field by two guards. One of them was limping....and then there was a shot! One of the prisoners was still standing, after the second shot he also fell to the ground. The guards went away, heading for the camp and returned with eight "zebras" carrying two stretchers, on which they put the murdered prisoners. They covered them with large leaves resembling rhubarb. Then they marched off in direction of the camp."*

In February 1945 labor on the building site in Zepfenhan had to be stopped because of increasing difficulties in material and transport, as well as fighter-bomber attacks. The plant was not even half completed. No single drop of shale oil from Zepfenhan was ever used to lubricate the German war machine.

# Prayer Information for Thursday, April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2007

## Section: Bisingen – Bad Waldsee (split into ten sections)



*“The poor and needy search for water, but there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the LORD will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs. I will put in the desert the cedar and the acacia, the myrtle and the olive. I will set pines in the wasteland, the fir and the cypress together, so that people may see and know, may consider and understand, that the hand of the LORD has done this, that the Holy One of Israel has created it.” (Isaiah 41:17-20)*

## Concentration Camp Heuberg near Stetten am kalten Markt

**Period:** March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1933 to December, 1933

**Prisoners:** 3,500 to 4,000 prisoners at a time, a total of about 15,000 prisoners; homogeneous groups with following characteristics: male, 20-40 years old, workers or craftsmen, 95% political prisoners, members of the communist or socialist party or actively involved in a church. Most of them were imprisoned in March or April and released until August.

**Number of deaths:** 40 deaths, in addition that an unknown number died of the consequences of imprisonment after their release.

## History of the Region

The region around the Heuberg is ancient settlement area. The Celts had already settled on the Heuberg, as is proven by the more than 1,000 cairns as well as the ancient cult sites "Götzenaltar" (Idol's Altar) and "Heidentor" (Pagans' Gate). The so-called "Heidentor" is a Celtic place of pilgrimage for women. Even today witch cults are still practiced here.

## Information about the Camp

### Concentration Camp

The concentration camp Heuberg was the first concentration camp not only in Württemberg, but also one of the first in all of Germany. Actually, in the short time of its operation it became the biggest camp in the Nazi empire. Its main aim was to enforce the objectives and ideologies of National Socialist rule, as is clearly shown by the selection of the prisoners. Dissenters were imprisoned in order to turn them into "good national comrades".

Already during the first weeks of its operation, the press was invited in order to spread appropriate reports. The "Argen Messenger" reported, *"The protective custody on the Heuberg is neither punishment nor pure summer pleasure. Part of the prisoners are in protective custody to protect themselves, the far greater part, though, needs to be imprisoned in order to protect the population as they are expected to disturb the national elevation."*

This was a way of introducing the population to the idea that peace and order were restored by detaining people who resisted the National Socialist rule. The Ministry of the Interior, which was responsible for the concentration camp, purposefully used these reports to both trivialize the conditions in the camp and depict them as something positive and useful for the general public as well as to exemplify that resistance would not be tolerated. In this way the reports were also used as a threat against the people, warning them to resist. The press left no doubt that everyone disturbing peace and order would be confined likewise.

### Treatment of the Prisoners

The prisoners were divided into three groups and each group received a different treatment.

1. Harmless prisoners, who were able to persuade their captors they had changed their attitudes. They could count on a quick release.
2. Ordinary activists. They were treated as regular prisoners, but sometimes also bullied.
3. Upper functionaries. They were kept separate from the rest and were especially mistreated and abused. Additionally they were forced to even harder and more humiliating labor.

As a punishment, prisoners were sent to barracks 19 and 23. Here they had to stand for hours facing the wall while the SS guards enjoyed banging their heads to the wall until their faces were dreadfully crushed and bleeding. Among them was Dr. Kurt Schumacher, a famous social democrat and member of the "Reichstag" (Parliament).

Another way of abusing the prisoners was to make them put their heads in the firehole of the oven and shout 50 times, *"I am a red dog."* If the prisoner collapsed, they poured water on him and let him start all over. A very common form of punishment was locking the prisoners up with only half a food ration or even none at all, assigning them to extra hard or disgusting labor like emptying the latrines. It was always commandant Buck, who was in charge of the camp, who gave these orders.

Simon Laibowitsch of Eberbach on the Neckar was especially brutalized by Buck. He was

tortured to death on the Heuberg. He was a Jew and that was reason enough for the SS to submit him to “special treatment”. Laibowitsch was not particularly strong and fell ill. When Buck heard that Laibowitsch was sick in his room, he ordered immediately, “Get this pig of a Jew out of his room.” Laibowitsch was dragged to the courtyard by two SA guards. He was ordered to carry two buckets of wood to the attic. But he collapsed. Immediately Buck started cursing, “You sluggard, you malingerer, you dirty pig of a Jew”, which first had to be washed. Buck’s exclamation was immediately put into practice by SA men who obviously felt great sadistic pleasure. They ripped the clothes from his body and dragged him to a trough. Two men lifted him up and dipped him into the cold water as two other men scrubbed him with a coarse brush until he lost consciousness. The following morning an SA man fetched his belongings from barrack 19. Laibowitsch had died of internal injuries. Without mentioning any cause of death, Simon Laibowitsch’s death was registered at the register office in Stetten am Kalten Markt. It was only seven months later that his wife was informed her husband had died on the Heuberg.

### **Dissolution of the Camp**

As the armed forces reclaimed the compound towards the end of 1933, the camp was dissolved. 264 prisoners were taken to the camp “Oberer Kuhberg” near Ulm and soon they, too, were released.

### **From Concentration Camp to Probation Battalion 999**

Mussolini came to the Heuberg, as well as general H. A. Wlassow, who fought against Stalin together with captured Russians under German command. Like in the days of the German Emperors, soldiers were drilled on the Heuberg. Many former concentration camp prisoners met again on the Heuberg. This time not as prisoners, but as Adolf Hitler’s “soldiers by punishment” sent to the probation battalion 999.

The treatment in this battalion was not much different from the torments the former prisoners had had to endure in the concentration camp of 1933, taking place in the same barracks. The usual drill of the armed forces escalated to sadistic orgies. No visitors were allowed to the camp and permissions to leave the camp were rarely given. Wives wanting to visit their husbands and mothers wanting to see their sons could usually only speak to them through the barbed wire. Already minor offences or if a soldier stayed away for too long carried death punishment.

According to the records of the register office of Stetten am Kalten Markt, 39 soldiers of this “punishment battalion” were shot between December 1942 and November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1943. Next to Dachau, the Heuberg was the most famous concentration camp in Germany at the time.

The last dramatic chapter of Hitler’s rule was heralded by Himmler’s SS itself, the secret project “Natter” (adder), a manned wonder weapon. This weapon was supposed to carry “Himmler’s Nibelungs on missiles” against allied bomber groups. On March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1945 the first manned missile of the world was launched near Stetten am Kalten Markt, which is on the Heuberg, the Bachem Ba 349 “Natter”.

Today the area is used by the Bundeswehr (German Federal Armed Forces).

## Ostrach

### Reports by various eyewitnesses

#### Death Marches

Several death marches went through Ostrach, one of them ended there. Many prisoners of the "Desert" concentration camps died in Ostrach and its surroundings.

#### The pastor at that time reports

*"Just after the service, Ostrach changed into a concentration camp. Long convoys of prisoners from the concentration camp Schömberg near Balingen arrived in Ostrach. The prisoners wore their zebra suits. They stopped for a break at the river Ostrach near the barn of the restaurant "Zum Hirschen". Two dying prisoners of Mongol looks were taken to the hospital. They died some hours later; their names are unknown."*

#### A report from the prisoners' point of view

*"The forced marches had brought all of us to a state of great exhaustion. At about ten o'clock we arrived in Ostrach. Our convoy was in complete disorder. Normally the SS guards would have scolded, "Bunch of pigs!" But after that long march they were also exhausted and they had sore feet from walking. They were not used to such strains."*

Some prisoners had fallen and remained behind by the side of the path, either because they were absolutely exhausted or because they were weary of life or because they wanted to flee. All of them were found by the dog of the SS officer "Unterscharführer Wolf", who personally shot them.

One event near Ostrach came to a bloody end. *"Just before our liberation, we were taken into some barns near Ostrach. On the morning, when the guards left us, they threw hand grenades into one of the barns, which was full of prisoners. I was sitting in a different barn and I could see the prisoners running out the barn after the explosions. Then the guards shot them with their rifles and submachine guns. From a distance of about 200 meters, I was able to see them collapsing, hit by the shots."* The number of victims is unknown. The prisoner convoys had arrived in Ostrach on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1945 – after the occupation by the French Army a multitude of dead bodies was found in Ostrach and surroundings. Just on the road between Pfullendorf and Ostrach alone the SS had shot 10 prisoners. When the first French tanks arrived in Ostrach, the guards ran away. All in all, about 20 prisoners died there during the final days of the war.

Scattered groups of prisoners dragged themselves through the villages surrounding Ostrach in a state of complete exhaustion. There also the SS guards shot many of them. One convoy of prisoners arrived in Eichstegen on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1945. Some of them were marched in the direction of Aulendorf, others were suddenly free, because the SS guards ran away. Later they found the dead body of a shot prisoner in Kreenried in the district of Eichstegen.

#### The liberation

About 3 pm hell broke loose for a last time. The SS guards drove the prisoners out on the street. They shot the prisoners, who tried to flee into the gardens.

The temptation to flee was great for the prisoners at this moment, but the example of their hit comrades showed that death was still lurking everywhere. The best decision was to stay on the street. The convoy moved in the direction of the lower city and arrived at a bridge. At last the women of Ostrach overcame their fear. They started insulting the SS



challenging them to leave the village. Indeed, the courageous intervention of the women was successful. The SS men fled.

*"It still took a while, which seemed like an eternity to us. A silence and quiet had settled that was terrifying."*

But they were still not free. When they tried to leave Ostrach in the direction of Saulgau, they were stopped by the "Volkssturm" (militia). They tried to leave in the direction of Hoßkirch-Altshausen and came up against the German armed forces (Wehrmacht). Finally they succeeded in crossing over the railroad embankment; this led them to the neighboring villages of Unterweiler and then Königseggwald. The mayor of Königseggwald allows them to stay in a barn.

*"The SS are gone, they said. I looked around and sure enough, there was not a single SS guard around. The following day the French arrived in jeeps. They gave us food. But many of the prisoners died of it. The French had meant well, but the people were so hungry they wolfed down everything, too fast and too much. This was not good for everyone.... The French brought us everything, and also the farmers treated us well. Then we didn't stay together, that was the end of it."*

*"At 2 pm the first French tanks arrived in Ostrach and we were free. What happened then, was deeply touching. The prisoners were overcome with joy. At last, this was the moment of liberation. I will never forget this feeling."*

### **After the end of the war**

For weeks, even for months after the end of the war, life in Ostrach was characterised by the presence of the former prisoners from the concentration camps of the oil shale project "Desert Area" in Southern Württemberg. Many farmers provided the half-starved survivors with potatoes. The potatoes were boiled pot by pot. Five times a day, a farmer's wife from Dichtenhausen baked bread for them. During the French occupation, the hospital of Ostrach ("Elisabethenkrankenhaus") was full of sick former prisoners of the concentration camps. Even after the end of the war, several of them died of the consequences of the terrible strains and mistreatments they had suffered. A few prisoners stayed in Ostrach after the end of the war, the place of their liberation; and they founded families there.

## **Aulendorf**

The town of Aulendorf, an old railway center, plays a very special role regarding the evacuation of the "Desert" concentration camps. Eye-witness accounts bring evidence that both death marches and trains with concentration camp prisoners passed through here.

### **Death Marches**

Sunday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1945

At an anti-tank roadblock soldiers and *Volkssturm*\* men became witnesses of a death march. It is quite certain that this was the death march Isak Wasserstein was part of.

*"At the Saulgauer Road they were approached by a convoy of miserable, emaciated figures who dragged themselves along arduously. Underneath the porch of a farmhouse they were granted a short rest. Some of the guards took advantage of this break to slip away inconspicuously. Others tried to get a hold of the key to the cemetery. Four dead persons had been carried along. They were taken to the cemetery and simply laid on the*

ground there.

*Then commanding words forced the wretched figures in convict uniforms with shaven heads and sunken cheeks to march on. Bare-footed the prisoners shuffled down to the station, driven by their guards. They reached a railroad station that had been closed long ago. They had hardly crossed the rails when two of them collapsed. The guarding soldiers shot them dead and had them buried, hastily and scantily by the other prisoners. The column of misery marched on towards Waldsee. At a copse the weakest were liquidized again and left at the wayside covered with earth."*

### **Train Transports**

*"On April 17<sup>th</sup>, shortly after noontime, a train with concentration camp prisoners arrived at the station. The railroad employees were exposed to a sight of horror: the prisoners were crammed in open freight cars, covered with barbed wire, begging for water. SS guards, armed with machine guns, prevented any kind of help. Especially one car caused the accidental witnesses to cringe. In it the dead were lying, lain on top of each other, nothing but skin and bones, covered with hematomes, callus and open wounds. 50 to 60 dead had just been thrown on top of one other."*

Based on contents and date it can be concluded fairly safely that the train transport was the "death train" from Bisingen to Allach which also carried former concentration camp prisoner Otto Gunsberger.

Otto Gunsberger:

*"At the sight of the train my whole body was trembling. It was made up of about 25 open freight cars, most of which were already cram-full. ... Even for completely healthy people it is tough to travel in open cars for days. For us it meant the death sentence. Based on experience I knew that we would receive no food during the whole ride. For many of us life depended on the length of the train ride.*

*I was put into a freight car which was loaded with at least 60 people. The train left Bisingen in the afternoon ... This time no arrangements were made for buckets or chamber pots. I tried to keep a corner free for this purpose, but the others were too sick to even take notice of me. In less than a day the car looked like a cesspit, and it smelled exactly like one. The train was only allowed to run on spurs of minor importance. During the entire ride the destruction of stations and industrial plants could be seen clearly. The train stopped for hours due to air raids and could not run into the stations as the rails were blocked by overturned cars and debris. On the third day, many of the inmates were dead. Those still alive were hardly able to move and were on the brink of death. I myself passed out during longer phases. Once, when the train stopped, I witnessed an air raid against the nearby station. Some of the planes flew low and bombarded trains and buildings. One plane flew over our train; I crouched on the ground and was waiting for the bullet that would put an end to my misery. But it was not fired off. The plane came back a second time and flew on, almost without firing a single shot. Maybe it had run out of ammunition or the pilot recognized the miserable human load and wanted to save our lives. We were spared from the bullets, but the next morning, when the train arrived at its destination, the majority of prisoners, except for a few, had died of hunger or thirst."*

### **The German State Railway (*Reichsbahn*) – Bulk Transports into the Holocaust**

In the course of extermination measures approx. 3 million Jews were brought to concentration and extermination camps by rail. The victims were told they were going to be relocated or taken to a labor deployment. Due to this deception most of the Jews had no

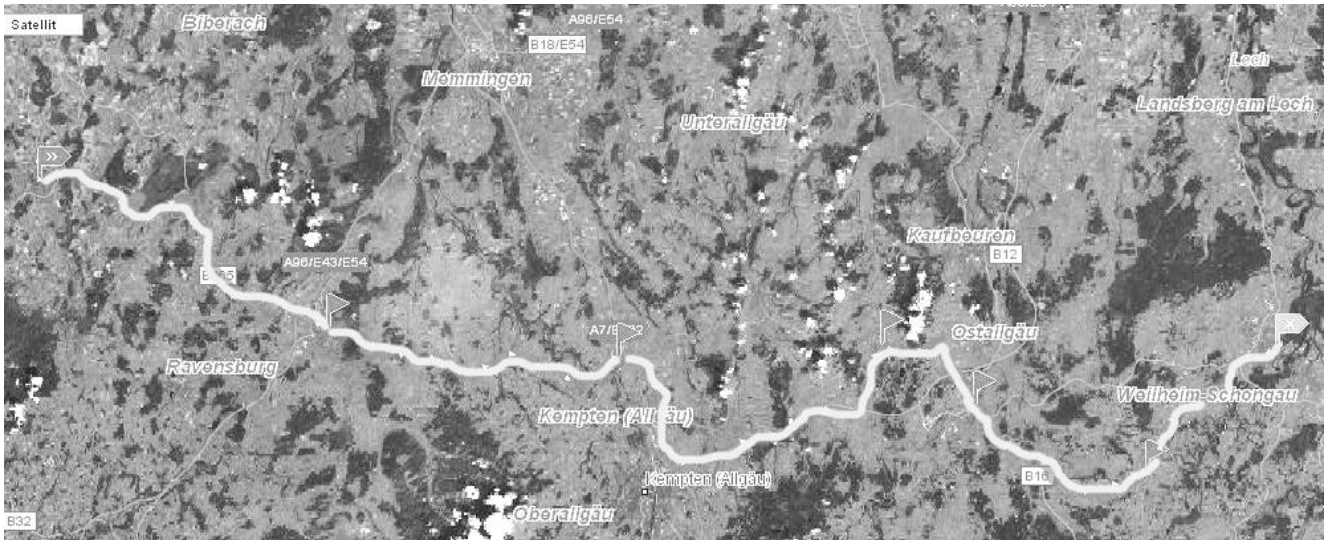
concerns when getting into the cars and, upon arrival at their destination, they were unsuspecting entering the gas chambers, disguised as shower rooms, in which they died an agonizing death. By 1942 at the latest, even Himmler knew that the state railway participated in the Holocaust without substantial restrictions. Without its participation the mass murder probably would not have been possible.

### **Some facts:**

- The deportation was carried out in freight trains, the cars were often filled with more than 100 people. Their windows were barred, closed with barbed wire, the doors were sealed. During the ride, the people received neither drink nor food. There was no toilet available. These conditions alone already caused a great number of Jews, especially the sick, invalids and children, to perish during transportation.
- More and more people were crammed into the cars. Originally, 1000 people were transported per train. By the end of 1942 this number had already risen to 2000 and on shorter distances up to 5000. Thus every person had approx. 2.7 square foot of space! For a distance of 250 miles trains needed often up to 23 hours, not counting waiting time.
- The state railway profited monstrously from these transports: For every carried Jew the state railway received money, often the unsuspecting victims paid their ride into the gas chambers even out of their own pocket. The transport for the death camps (4 pennies per rail kilometer = 0.62 miles) was more than twice as expensive as the transport of soldiers (1.5 pennies)! The "transport rate" referred to third class cars, however, only freight cars were provided, in fact, as far as possible old, scruffy ones. *"For Jews this was good enough!"*  
The state railway's contact point was the SS, and they haggled over every mark!
- The SS demanded special trains for the deportations into the death camps. They received special marks. Transports with Jews were marked with "Da", an abbreviation for "David". Trains carrying strategic material always had right of way. Deportation trains often had to wait a long time, until the track was free. Especially at stations the people in the death trains were often screaming for water which, of course, was noticed by civil travelers. This annoyed the state railway! In the German Reich people wanted to keep these transports secret.
- Upon arrival of the trains at the camps, at times there were more dead than living persons, some corpses had even started decaying.
- Even on their way back to the West, the freight cars often were filled. They brought the clothes and the entire possessions of the murdered persons back into the German Reich, where they were distributed. Trains carrying crop, potatoes, sugar, meat, eggs etc. ran westward in order to "cater for" the population. In reality these were "forays" that transported what had been robbed from the defeated East Europeans. Nobody will ever be able to calculate how many of them starved, because the railroad company took the foodstuff West.

**Friday, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2007**

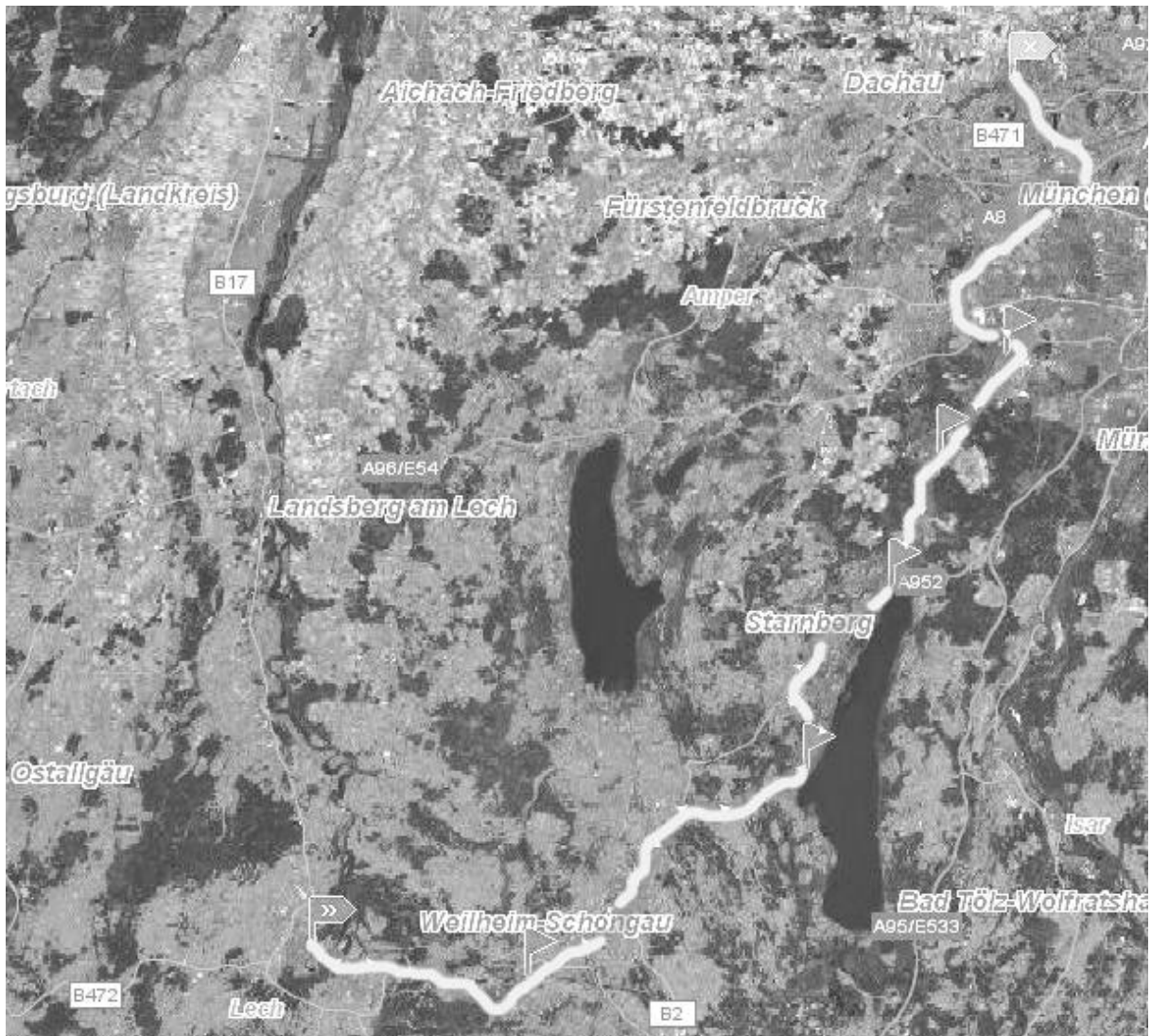
**Section: Bad Waldsee to Schongau**  
(split into ten sections)



*“The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendour of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendour of our God.” (Isaiah 35:1-2)*

# Prayer Information for Saturday, April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2007

## Section: Schongau to Dachau (split into nine sections, power marches)



*“Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the LORD. Yet he too is wise and can bring disaster; he does not take back his words. He will rise up against the house of the wicked, against those who help evildoers.” (Isaiah 31:1-2)*

### General Information

Originally the prisoners of the “Desert” camps were supposed to be taken to Dachau and Allach via Schongau. The last of these death marches ended in Schongau with the liberation by the American army. It is well-known that there were also rail transports along this way. Prisoners were brought from all over Southern Bavaria to Allach. The death marches from Dachau also followed this route in part. Thousands died during these marches.

*The purpose of the power marches is to establish the connection Swabian Alb – Dachau.*

## Allach

**Period:** March 1943 until April 1945

**Background:** Due to a sharp shortage of workforce in the armament and building industry, Allach was opened on March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1943 as the largest satellite camp of Dachau.

*“At the same time I would like to ask you to provide a maximum possible number of concentration camp prisoners for the air force armament, as experience until now has proven these workforces to be very useful. The aerial warfare situation requires the industry to be shifted to underground locations. Especially on this occasion concentration camp prisoners can be pooled very effectively in terms of labor deployment and camp management. (...)”*

Quotation from a letter of Göring to Himmler dated February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1944

**Structure:** 18-22 wooden barracks (former horse stables)

**Division of the Camp:** Separate camps for men and women, each for Jews and Non-Jews

**Number of Prisoners:** Men: approx. 3,000-4,000 (according to other sources up to 20,000, depending on the point in time)

Women: approx. 200-300 (other sources: 350-1,000)

**Prisoners:** Mainly French, Russians, Poles, Czechs and Dutch, as well as victims of racial persecution and German opponents of the regime.

**Conditions in the Camp:** Poor sanitary facilities, insufficient hygiene, vermin. Initially the prisoners slept on bunk beds. Later, as their number increased, they slept on straw lying on the ground.

**Function of the Camp:**

- Provision of cheap workforce for the BMW armament factory, for the Dyckerhoff gang and for the Allach china factory (SS owned firm), for the Organization Todt.
- Replacement of German military draftees
- Isolation of unpopular minorities (opponents of the regime)

It was the first of seven satellite camps in service of BMW. Here mainly airplane engines were produced and repaired.

### Eye-witness Accounts

*“From the camp to BMW a wire corridor was built through which we were driven to our labor like sheep into the pen.” Henri Lafitt*

Otto Gunsberger was transported by train from Bisingen to Allach:

*“... When the train arrived at its destination the majority of prisoners, except for a few, had died either of hunger or of thirst.*

*The survivors of each car could be counted on one hand. I was the only survivor in my car, when I heard the command to get out. Outside the station there was a huge bomb crater, the remnant of a former air raid. Special work units threw the corpses out of the train into the deep hole. I could only drag myself to the crater. There I laid down at the edge between the dead without strength to move further. More and more dead bodies were thrown down*

*around myself. Here and there I saw some still breathing. Soon they died from suffocation as more corpses were piled on them. Several times I had to move back and forth on the ground in order to avoid the same fate. Wheel barrows were pushed by prisoners of the special work unit and the corpses were thrown into the pit. Two men lifted me up. I told them that I was still alive, but not able to walk. This made no difference to them. They told me to report this in the camp where they would take us to. Then they threw me on the cart between the corpses. One corpse after another was thrown on top of me. They almost suffocated me. I had to shove with arms and legs in order to push the dead bodies aside, so I would have enough space to breathe. Luckily it didn't take long until I was in the camp. I wasn't able to hold up the corpses any longer. Now they were thrown on the ground, then they were lifted up again by others and taken to the crematorium. They just let me fall down, so I was lying between the dead for a while, until an elderly prisoner noticed that I was still alive. He came near to me and was surprised to find that I still conscious. He told me that I should stay at this place any longer, otherwise I would sure enough be finished. Even if I had to crawl, I had to leave this place and get into any of the barracks that were only about 100 to 130 feet far away. With his help I got up and took a few steps. He accompanied me for a little distance before he walked away. I thanked him. I staggered across dizzily and leant against the walls of the barracks, until I reached the second building. I stepped into the barrack to find a lot of prisoners lying on the floor which was covered by a thin layer of straw. Only a small section of the building had multiple bunk beds where elder prisoners slept. I slumped down on the straw and received a bowl of grain coffee from the barrack supervisor. This was my first drink in more than three days. While the barrack supervisor registered my data, he told me that I was in the Allach camp, not far from Munich. The camp was managed from the Dachau main camp.*

*The prisoners were kept on a diet of one hundred grams of bread and a bowl of soup per day. No wonder that a number of dead was pulled out from the straw every day. The majority of prisoners had no more strength to walk; they just lay on the floor like animals in a stable. (...)*

*The older prisoners watched us, as we were lying in the straw the whole day, doomed men, and, on top of everything else, they often reduced our food rations in order to improve their own chance of survival. My condition worsened quickly and three weeks after my arrival in Allach I was just skin and bones with a shrunken back and bottom, incredibly weakened (...)*

*I knew in case of an evacuation I wouldn't survive the first two hours. My will to survive diminished more and more and I was slowly approaching death as almost all my strength was fading away. But at the point when I had practically given up, a strong life instinct came crawling back into my consciousness. I decided to try it at the barrack for invalids here, too, which had already helped me twice in the past (...)*

*It was located on the opposite side of the path, not more than fifty meters (164 feet) away. I needed half a day to master the distance. Part of the way I dragged myself along on my hands and feet. Two barrack guards didn't want to let me in because there was no medical care at all. My problem was that food would have been the only medicine for me, and this was not available (...)*

Otto Gunsberger barely escaped death and experienced liberation by American troops in Allach. Today he lives with his wife in Australia.

## The concentration camp Dachau

**Period:** March 1933 – April 1945

**Prisoners:** The first prisoners were political opponents of the regime, communists, social democrats, trade unionists, sporadically also members of conservative and liberal parties. Later on new groups of prisoners came: Jews, homosexuals, Sinti and Romanies, Jehova's witnesses, clergymen etc. Following the November pogrom 10,000 Jews were deported to Dachau. After 1938 additional prisoners from the war zones arrived in the camp, most of them from Poland and the Soviet Union. All in all there were more than 200,000 prisoners from over 30 nations imprisoned in Dachau.

**Jewish prisoners:** Dachau has never been a particularly "Jewish camp". In 1941 nearly 1000 Jews were taken to Lithuania for a "labor mission" and shot there. Following the Wannsee conference, the remaining Jews in Munich were transported to extermination camps. By December 1944, Munich and Dachau were "cleansed from Jews".

**Number of deaths:** 30,000 registered and thousands of non-registered prisoners lost their lives in Dachau. They died of hunger, diseases, exhaustion, humiliation, through beatings and torture. They were shot, hanged, and killed through injections.

### Information About the Camp

#### History

The establishment of the concentration camp in Dachau marked the beginning of a terror system that was incomparable to any other state persecution and penalty system. The commander of Dachau, Theodor Eicke, made the concentration camp a model for all other camps and a school for murderers for the SS.

#### Labor

During the time before the war they had to work in companies belonging to the SS, in road construction and gravel pits beside working in the camp. After 1942 a network of satellite camps was formed especially for the arms industry. In these camps more than 30,000 prisoners worked under murderous conditions. Most of them were Jews from Hungary, Poland, and Lithuania.

#### Site of Mass Murder

After October 1941 several thousands of Soviet prisoners of war were shot in Dachau, as well as other prisoners destined for execution by the Gestapo.

A large number of prisoners was abused for medical experiments by SS doctors. An unknown number of prisoners suffered agonizing deaths in the course of experiments with low pressure, hypothermia, malaria and many other experiments.

Beginning in January 1942, more than 3,000 prisoners were sent to the mental home at Hartheim Castle near Linz on the so-called invalid transports and murdered with poison gas.

#### The Hebertshausen Shooting Range

This shooting range was built especially for the SS. Here the prisoners brought to Dachau for execution were killed. These prisoners were not recorded in the concentration camp files. These murders of thousands of prisoners of war were a clear violation of the provisions laid down in the Geneva Convention for prisoners of war. The SS used the cynical term "special treatment" for these criminal executions.



### Situation at the End of the War

With the victorious advance of the Allied troops, the SS evacuated more and more of the concentration camps, transporting the prisoners to camps located in areas still under Nazi control. On these transports, which often lasted weeks, thousands of prisoners died; they died of diseases, exhaustion, malnutrition, beatings by the SS or, if it was no longer possible to transport them, they were simply shot. The number of prisoners at Dachau rose dramatically at that time, and after December 1944 the conditions in the camp were disastrous. The barracks were hopelessly overcrowded and a typhus epidemic took the lives of thousands.

### Death Marches

Towards the end of April the SS began to evacuate more than 100 satellite camps. A large number of prisoners died during these marches.

### **Dissolution of the Camp**

On April 27<sup>th</sup>, 1945, approximately 7,000 prisoners were sent from the main camp at Dachau on a death march southwards.

On April 28<sup>th</sup>, 1945, the majority of the SS left the camp, and one day later, on April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1945, units of the US Army liberated the Dachau concentration camp.

Upon liberation over 67,000 prisoners were held in the Dachau concentration camp, half of them in the main camp.

## Annotations

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This prayer guideline is exclusively intended for confidential use by the participants of the March of Life.

If you need further information, please contact us.

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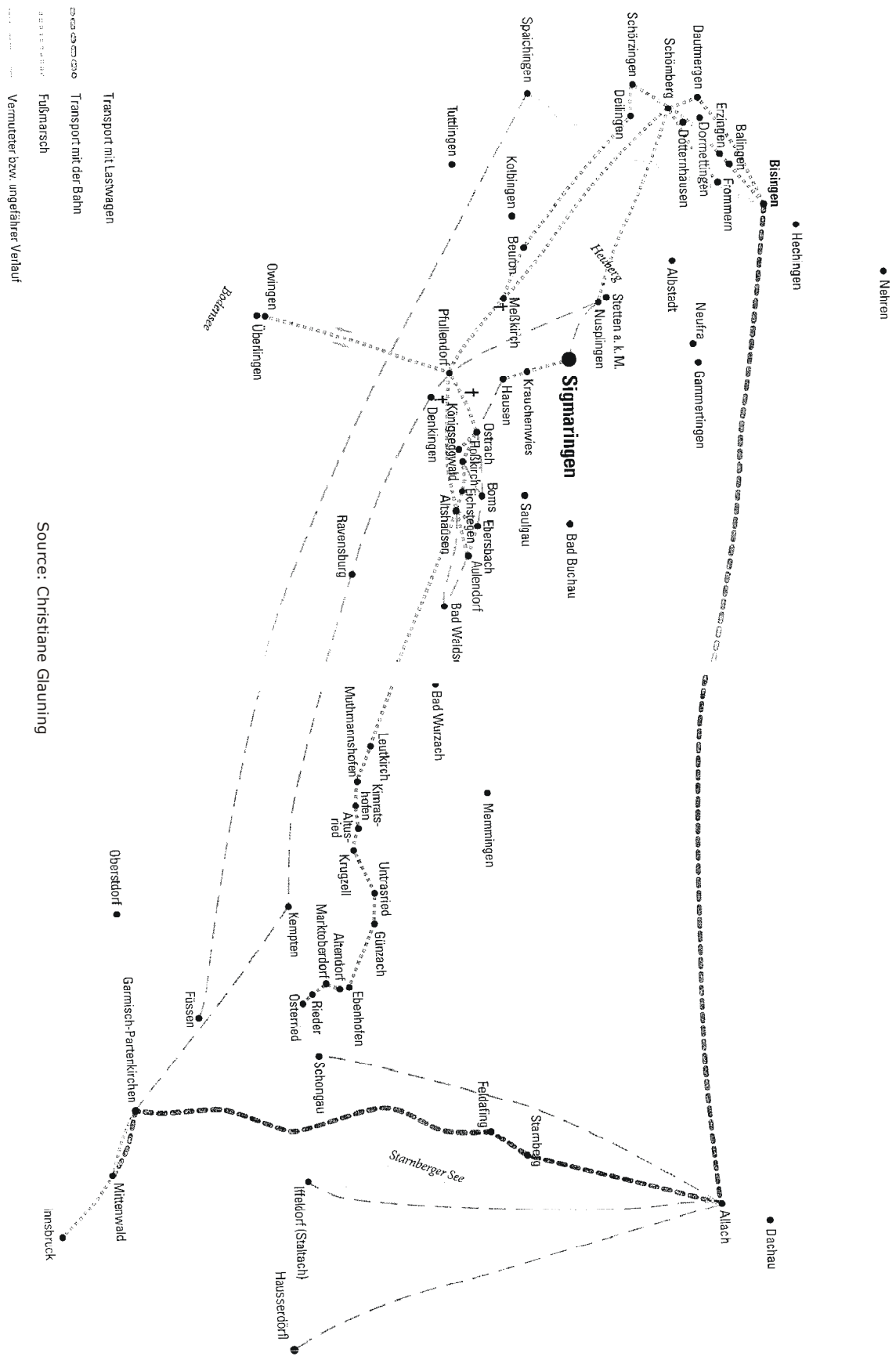
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# ● Tübingen Death Marches of the "Operation Desert"



Source: Christiane Glauning