

The Bunker Complex in the Mühldorfer Hart

An Arms Race and Human Suffering

Written by Peter Müller

Translated into English by Christian A. Wimmer

During the last years of World War II, the Allied bombing of Nazi Germany increased to such a point that German industries critical to the war effort were being destroyed. Among the favorite targets of the Allies were German aircraft factories, especially the ones producing defensive fighter aircraft. The worsening war situation led the *Reichministerium für Rüstungs und Kriegsproduktion* (Ministry of Arms and War Production) in cooperation with the *Reichsluftfahrtministerium* (Reich Aviation Ministry) to move factories to central and southern Germany where more concentrated protection could be offered and the completion of wonder weapons, among them the Messerschmitt Me-262 jetfighter, could be finished without a great deal of interruption. Twenty-seven major aircraft factories were broken up into 300 little workshops and distributed throughout central and southern Germany. They were hidden in street- and train tunnels as well as in mountains. Naturally, this led to supply problems in both the delivery of raw materials and the deliverance of the final product. To solve this problem, it was decided to centralize aircraft production into six specially constructed, half-submerged (in earth) bunkers.

First, however, suitable sites had to be found. There were four major considerations. Firstly, the selected area was to be rich in gravel that could be used for construction purposes. Second, the chosen site was ideally to have a nearby water supply (also for construction purposes). Third, a heavily forested area was preferred as it could offer a natural camouflage against enemy aerial activity. The last consideration called for a suitably located train station for supply reasons.

The following sites were deemed suitable and selected: Landsberg am Lech (in which three factories were to be built, the former Sudetenland, a site in the Rhineland and the a forest in Mühldorf am Inn.

The Allied invasion of Normandy in early June of 1944 caused a change in plans, and as a result, the Germans focused on finishing only two bunkers: Landsberg and Mühldorf. The conditions around Mühldorf were especially ideal for the project.

With the increased activity of Allied bombing, the Germans were forced to concentrate on fighter aircraft. All factories that were still producing bombers were ordered to immediately begin production of defensive fighter aircraft. All across Germany, aircraft factories began retooling and switching their production to fighter aircraft. This became known as the *Jägerprogramm*.

Under the *Jägerprogramm* plan, it was envisioned that the bunker in Mühldorf, once completed, would produce over 900 of the new Messerschmitt Me-262 jetfighter per month. To ensure this figure, the production of various Me-262 parts were to be divided amongst local workshops within the region. For example, the bunker in Mettenheim was tasked with producing the engines and airframes while the final production and assembly would take place in the Landsberg bunker. From there, the aircraft could use the makeshift runway to take off and fly to their destination.

OVERVIEW: ORGANIZATION AND WORKFORCE

Germany's civil and military engineering group, the *Organization Todt*, planned and organized the project from their headquarters in Berlin. For reasons of secrecy, the project was called "Weingut I" and various *Organization Todt* offices in Ampfing, Mettenheim and in Ecksberg began handling local affairs in regards to the project. Various firms were hired among them *Polensky & Zöllner*.

Polensky & Zöllner, founded in 1880, specialized in the construction of towering and underground steel and cement projects. During the construction of the *Innwerkkanal* from 1919-1924 in Mühldorf, they funded the firm *Zweigwerk Mühldorf*. From 1933-1942, *Polensky & Zöllner* was heavily involved in the construction of *Autobahns* and obtained permission in 1935 to begin construction on the *Innkraftwerk* in Gars. *Polensky & Zöllner* also built the *Großglockner Passstraße*, worked on the *Tauernkraftwerk Kaprun* and put up many parts of the *Deutschen Alpenstraße*. At the beginning of World War II, *Polensky & Zöllner* was ordered into the occupied territories to begin construction on streets, bridges, fortresses, airfields, submarine bunkers, ports and various other structures needed by the German Army.

Polensky & Zöllner recalled 200 of its workers and equipment from various parts of occupied Europe to aid in the construction of the bunker. The division of *Polensky & Zöllner* that took care of the bunker was called *Bautrupp 773*. Manager of the "Weingut I" project was *Polensky & Zöllner* Chief engineer Gickeleiter. 70-80% of *Polensky &*

Zöllner construction capacity was routed to aiding the fighter program. The firm was also ordered to expand the following train stations: Kraiburg, Ampfing and Jettenbach.

Strangely, there was no formal contract awarded to *Polensky & Zöllner*, despite the firm's request for one. *Polensky & Zöllner* also sent a construction bill to the *Organization Todt* for 25,867,592 Reichsmark near the end of the war. The *Organization Todt*, however, refused to pay (probably due to the worsening war situation).

A project of this scale required a large workforce. At the beginning of 1942, the Germans had forcefully recruited millions of people from occupied territories to work as laborers in the German armament industry. The man in charge of this was Fritz Sauckel, *Generalbevollmächtigten für den Arbeitseinsatz*. Alone the bunker in the Mettenheim would require at least 8,000 workers. The *Organization Todt* supplied the engineers, management and master chiefs while the majority of the 10,000 laborers were composed of prisoners of war and concentration camp inmates from Dachau.

To further mask the operation, the *Organization Todt* went as far and organized their tasks with the appropriate firms and the SS and even set their "payment". Concentration camp inmates were classified as *Hilfsarbeiter* (laborers) and were being "paid" 60 Pfennigs an hour. The payment of the inmates was to be done at the end of each month. In reality, the inmates never saw the money. Dr. Edith Raim, a respected researcher at the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte* in Munich, has mentioned the following facts:

"At the end of the war, prisoners of war had worked a total of 322,513 hours. They had cost the firm Polensky & Zöllner an estimated 193,507.80 Reichsmark. Concentration camp inmates worked a total of 2,831,974 hours and were supposed to receive 1,699,184.40 Reichsmark as payment, which never materialized."

The final responsibility for the decision to use slave labor lies with Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS and SS-Obergruppenführer Pohl, head of the SS-WVHA (SS-Wirtschafts- und Verwaltungshauptamt). SS troops and *Organization Todt* employees guarded inmates on the grounds. Makeshift barracks and tents were created on site to house the prisoners. The camps Waldlager 1,2 and 3 were located near the state road *Mühldorf-Werk Kraiburg* and housed the forced laborers. The living spaces of concentration camp inmates were allocated to the concentration camps Mettenheim, Waldlager 5/6, Mittergars and Obertaufkirchen-Thalham. Russian prisoners-of-war were housed in barracks located in Mettenheim and in Ampfing.

PREPARATION OF THE CONSTRUCTION SITE

The land on which the bunker was to be built was taken from its rightful owners (farmers from the Ampfing and Mettenheim region) without permission. In mid May, 600 members of the *Organization Todt* took over the nearby Ecksberg institution as an office and also built makeshift barracks next to it for housing purposes.

First, the construction site needed the respective facilities and these were soon constructed including a joinery (for the wood), cement shop (for mixing) and a cement brick bakery.

Water was sapped from the local Inn canal. Small makeshift bunkers onsite and in Ecksberg, Mettenheim and Ampfing provided shelter against Allied air raids. Light FLAK artillery was positioned onsite to defend against low-flying enemy aircraft. To confuse Allied air reconnaissance and shift potential interest away from the region, a fake construction site was built between Altötting and Burghausen designed to attract Allied air reconnaissance.

In order to efficiently transport construction materials, a quickly built rail track was built from Mühldorf to Munich. These rails led to the onsite cement depot as well as the main bunker construction site. Beside these tracks was a smaller rail track measuring 90 cm in width which led from Notzen to Ampfing. A further rail connection from Mühldorf to Rosenheim was planned but was work never started on this.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE BUNKER

Despite the massive visible damage on the only surviving arch (twelve were originally planned), the structure permits some insight into the construction techniques used to build it. The original plans called for the bunker to be 400 meters in length from east to west. A single semi circular roof arch was to measure 33 meters in width and was separated from the next arch by a 30 cm gap, which was to be covered as soon as the bunker was completed. The entire width of the bunker arch was 85 meters. From the sole to the ground, a distance of 32.20 meters was recorded of which 13 meters were above and 19.20 below ground level. The thickness of the roof was precisely 3 meters to which another 2 meters of concrete were to be added upon completion for a total thickness of 5 meters. The top layer of the roof was to be covered with earth to promote tree and plant growth which would serve as natural camouflage against enemy aerial reconnaissance. A 5

meter thick wall was planned to cover both entrances which would add safety in case of air attacks and ground fire.

The bunkers conception also introduced new construction techniques. After clearing the forest, the humid soil was transported away to make way for the bunker. First, a five meter deep *Entnahmetunnel* was constructed. The *Entnahmetunnel* was a small service tunnel that was dug into the ground under the planned position of an arch. Its purpose was to remove the gravel that would be used to shape the arch. Next, holes were dug for the foundations of the bunker, which had to be extremely resistant. Once the concrete foundations were planted, gravel and earth were shoveled over the closed *Entnahmetunnel* and foundations to help in the shaping of the arches. As soon as this was completed, the semicircular mound was smoothed and flattened and then covered with a 10 cm thick layer of concrete. Long metal rods were then inserted into the thick concrete layer to act as the starting point for the three meter thick bunker roof. Most of the cement was created at the nearby cement mixing sites. Pumps pumping liquid cement were also employed in the building process.

The picture on page twenty-five shows the construction condition at war's end, viewed from east to west. In the foreground along the construction site, train tracks are visible next to the cement air vents as well as an entrance and exit. A wall made of light cement dominated the middle section. Also visible in the background are the three-meter thick doors from arch seven. Heavy-duty cranes are also visible.

After the concrete of the first arch fully dried (which took almost twenty days) the builders then removed the semi-circular gravel and earth below the arch, which had been allowed to stay in order to shape the arch's roof. It was exactly for this purpose that the *Entnahmetunnel* was built.

The tunnel functioned as follows.

A small lorry on rail tracks entered from the east side. Once parked in the proper position, the silo doors of the tunnel would open allowing gravel and earth to fall through and filling up the lorries. Once finished, the gravel was used to aid in the construction of other arches. Upon the completion of the single arch, the tunnel was removed. The same process would be applied to all the other completed arches.

It was originally planned that the bunker would have eight internal levels. Plans were also drawn up to add stairs, elevators and more pillars for added structural support, all made from finished products that had been put together in workshops in Ampfing and Mittergars. However, these plans were never realized due to the war situation. At the end of April 1945, only arches one to seven of the original twelve planned had been completed. Disruptions in the supply of materials, air raids and lack of skilled workers delayed the project. The bunker itself was never bombed by the Allies.

THE BUNKER AFTER THE WAR

American troops reached the Inn River on May 2, 1945 and occupied the bunker and appropriate construction sites. Interestingly enough, the Americans allowed the involved firms to reclaim their equipment – possibly as means of reparations. The Reichsbahn for instance was allowed to remove the onsite tracks and it was attempted to turn the land back into the agricultural state it had been before the bunker construction began. In the summer of 1947, the Americans began placing explosives inside the bunker and parts of the nearby air raid shelter for demolishing purposes. After numerous tries, the Americans finally succeeded using 120 tons of TNT. It was found that the bunkers arches were collapsed

Private firms around Mühldorf and the surrounding area made good use of the available debris, especially steel. The firm *Polensky & Zöllner* remained in business until its demise in 1992. An admission of guilt and self-critique on their involvement in aiding the war effort using slave labor never materialized. Instead, one was generally satisfied with the firm's achievements. During the firm's 75th anniversary in 1955, which was celebrated in the Munich Hofbräuhaus, actor Michl Ehbauer and a remorseful colleague from *Polensky & Zöllner* brought into question the company's involvement through an emotive poem.

Starting in the 1950s, local farmers from Ampfing and Mettenheim began suing the government for compensation. Their claim was that their taken land was permanently unsuitable for farming purposes.

It was also during this time that the bunker complex was used by the media. A few years later, the bunker proved an ideal photo shooting ground for the TV series "*Am grünen Strand der Spree*".

From 1982 to 1983, a rumor began to circulate that there were still Wehrmacht supplies of a chemical nature being stored in the bunker. Only after maintaining silence for many years did the government, in 1987, finally remove these chemicals to prevent ecological and environmental damages.

Starting in 1986, the museum of Mühldorf, the *Lodronhaus*, opened up a permanent exhibition of the town during the Nazi period entitled "*...bis alles in Scherben fiel*". A hefty section of the exhibit is dedicated to the aircraft bunker and has become one of the major attractions of the museum.

In 1987, Rainer Ritzel and Josef Wagner, both Mühldorfers, filmed the documentary "*...mit 22 wollte man noch nicht sterben*" on the premises of the bunker complex. This documentary dealt with the general history of the bunker and the human suffering involved in constructing it.

Over the years, the bunker has developed into a place of remembrance. Survivors have traveled from afar (often with their families), schools have taken field trips to the bunker and people with an interest in the past have come to see the remains of the bunker. Under pressure from various groups (among them the *Mühldorfer Heimatbund*), the bunker was eventually added to a Bavarian list of historic memorials. It was therefore a

shock when in 1991 the *Bundesfinanzministerium* proposed a plan of having the bunker torn down. Despite massive protests, demolishing work started in 1995-1996 with the tearing down of the nearby air raid shelter ruins. Due to this incident, the future existence of this historical site is questionable.

Hope for the preservation of the bunker can perhaps be found in the 1999 founded group "*Für das Erinnern*", which aims to preserve the history of the bunker. The group is run by the *Katholisches Kreisbildungswerk Mühldorf e.V.* and has led to the bunker earning support from institutions and some famous personalities.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CONCENTRATION CAMP GROUP MÜHLDFORF

Various concentration camps had so-called *Außenkommandos* which were responsible for selecting suitable laborers from concentration camp inmates. Near the end of World War II, the Dachau concentration camp had established 164 *Außenkommandos* all over southern Bavaria.

Außenkommando Mühldorf was part of the biggest three in Bavaria (Kaufering and München-Allach being the other two) with 5,000 to 10,000 inmates.

In July of 1944, SS-Hauptscharführer (senior squad leader) Sebastian Eberl arrived from Dachau in Mühldorf with 50 inmates. This inmate unit was formed to overhaul and revamp the 1940/1941 *Wehrmachtsbekleidungs-lager* (Wehrmacht clothing storage facility), which was located next to the *Ersatzflughafen Mettenheim* (auxiliary airfield Mettenheim) into barracks for other inmates. At the same time, the *Organization Todt* and SS-Hauptscharführer Ammer took control over specific property in the forest for the construction of Waldlager 5, a concentration camp housing project. *Unterkommandos* arrived at the end of October, 1944 in Mittergars and in Thalham in March of 1945, *Oberkommando Zangberg* arrived. The SS soon divided the inmates based on sex. The larger male population was housed in Mettenheim and Waldlager while the smaller female population was lodged in Mettenheim II or Waldlager 6. Another Waldlager (Nr. 4) was planned in the fall of 1944 to be built along the rail tracks Mühldorf-Rosenheim route and like Waldlager 5/6 was to be surrounded by a safety fence made up of barbed wire. Due to the ending of World War II, these projects were never completed.

CAMP METTENHEIM

The concentration camp Mettenheim was located in the modern day Mettenheimer Hart, north of the old state road and close to the western part of the gravel pit. It was almost square shaped and was facing Ampfing. On the northern side of the camp was a rail track of the *Lagerbahnhof* and behind this was a small Luftwaffe airfield. The camp was surrounded by a

high-positioned barbed wire fence. Next to the camp was a farmhouse and next to that was the main water storage facility of the camp. For protection against air attacks, it was defended by a light FLAK battery. As there were no pipelines to transfer the water, water had to be transported into the camp via truck. On the Westside of the farm were four barracks for the SS and the engineers of the *Organization Todt*. The concentration camp was made up of at least twenty wooden barracks built on stacked concrete slabs. Next to the barracks were functionary rooms for the kitchen, washing rooms, sickbay, mechanic shop as well as a mortuary. The inmates slept in tight spaces. A single bunk bed had three levels. There were an estimated 150-200 people per barrack.

WALDLAGER 5/6

The few surviving remains of Waldlager 5/6 have allowed researchers to partially reconstruct the camp layout. Waldlager 5/6 used up virtually the entire forest known as *Roter Steig* and was square shaped. The still visible deep holes of the barbed wire fences have given researchers the size of the camp: 375 x 450 meters. For camouflage purposes, this specific site was chosen for the camp because of the tall trees that would provide excellent cover from Allied airplanes. Waldlager 5/6 was located precisely 2 km from the bunker construction site. The workshops were located in Ampfing and prisoners were marched back and forth daily.

The camp was originally built for summer standards, but conversions to cope with the winters took place in late fall of 1944 on the eastern part of the camp. During the winter, inmates were transferred to the winter section. However, functionary rooms like the kitchen, deicing station and mortuary remained open in the summer section of the camp. Measures were taken with the barbed wire fence to prevent locals from seeing into the camp. To prevent and discourage escapes, the barbed wire fence was dug deep into the ground making escapes by means of underground-dug tunnels impossible. The camp was surrounded by a double-layer of barbed wire fencing with 1.50 meters in-between the two fences, which were referred to by the SS guards as "freies Schussfeld" (shoot at will). Powerful search lamps illuminated the camp at night and SS guards patrolled the grounds. On each of the four corners of the camp were towers manned by SS guards with machine guns.

The SS barracks, about six of them, were located across from the entrance to the summer camp in the northwest sector of the forest called *Tafelweg*. To protect the SS guards from possible enemy air attacks, ditches were located were dug around the SS sector of the camp where one could take quick shelter. The winter camp was also shut off by its own barbed wire fence as were the female section of the camp as well as sickbay.

A light rail track ran through the camp to aid in the transportation of gravel resources from a nearby pit. The SS had also begun in the building of concrete structures, which the remains showcase today. 1 km southwest of the Waldlager is a forest section known as *Kronprinzstein* where 20 meter

deep pits were located: mass graves for the dead from Waldlager and Mettenheim.

Life for a camp inmate was extremely primitive. In the summer camp, inmates had slept in so-called *Finnenzelte* which measured 5 x 5 meters and were filled with straw. These *Finnenzelte* were constructed out of wood and painted dark green. The only source of natural light was available when the doors were opened, so each *Finnenzelt* came with an electric lamp mounted at the center of the hut. Spread out through the entire camp were eleven latrines, some of which have survived until this day.

Inmates had no means of heating inside the *Finnenzelts* during the winter months, so the SS ordered the construction of *Erdhütten* (mud huts). As primitive as it may sound, the mud huts were praised by some survivors as being effective in keeping out the cold and keeping in the heat. The construction of the mud huts was quite simple. A piece of land measuring 6 x 8 meters was selected. An 8 meter long, 2 meter wide and 1 meter deep access walk was dug into the forest floor and occupied the center of the mud hut. To the right and left of this creation were 40 cm deep, 2 meter long sleep outlets filled with straw. Each *Erdhütte* offered space for 20 inmates. The general shape of the hut was then built with wood and then covered with cardboard and mud. Interestingly enough, these mud huts were also equipped with a stove and chimney all owing inmates to heat their hut and keep warm. In the eastern sector of Waldlager 5/6, five to six *Erdhütten* were built next to each other and in rows of ten. More mud huts were constructed in other parts of the forest.

The water supply situation proved difficult in the first months as no water pipes had been laid down. Water had to be driven to the camp by trucks until water pipes were finally constructed to take over this task.

THE UNTERKOMMANDOS MITTERGARS, THALHAM AND ZANGBERG

The drive to produce as many aircraft as possible resulted in heavy rail traffic. Furthermore, it was planned to construct factories in close proximity to the bunker that would produce finished parts for the aircraft and the appropriate *Unterkommandos* were setup in Mittergars, Thalham and Zangberg. *Unterkommando* was a term used to describe a small external detachment of a concentration camp.

The concentration camp Mittergars was across from the Mühldorf-Rosenheim rail track and measured 75 x 150 meters. At the beginning, this concentration camp was primarily composed of tents. Later, the 300 inmates lived in 34 small wooden barracks. A barbed wire fence and a single guard tower ensured that nobody tried to escape. Outside the camp, in the forest, were the SS barracks. The dead were buried in a mass grave near the SS barracks. After the war, they were moved to Lohen. Today, a few structural leftovers of this camp remain.

The camp Thalham was located to the rear in the county of Weilers and Obertaufkirchen. An *Arbeitserziehungslager* (Work education camp) was located in the region and was possibly controlled by the Gestapo. There was also a prison that housed Italian forced laborers. Behind this were the barracks of the Jewish camp.

The monastery in Zangberg had been taken over by the Mühldorf *Landratsamt* (district administration office) in order to convert it into a small munitions factory. The nuns had previously been moved in 1941 to a smaller building located nearby. The monastery itself was occupied by a technical staff of from Peenemünde. On a daily basis, a work detail from the Waldlager was sent to the monastery for installation and expansion work. Later, Zangberg became an *Unterkommando* with around 60 inmates.

THE INMATES: ORIGINS AND MANAGEMENT

From mid August to early September 1944, inmates were being transported to Mühldorf via train. Each train was capable of carrying 1,000 people. These were all dropped off at Ampfing, the closest station to the Waldlager and bunker project. Secondary stops included Mettenheim and Mühldorf where inmates were distributed to various *Unterkommandos*. The total number of inmates in the Mühldorf region was estimated to be at 8,300 of which 5,224 survived the war. 4,929 of these survivors were male and 295 were female. The other 3,076 inmates all died in captivity.

Under direct orders from Adolf Eichmann, "Aktion Höss" was launched which included the rounding up of over 400,000 Hungarians. The arrests were carried out on the basis of race and religion. Most of those arrested, Jews and Gypsies, were killed at Auschwitz, the rest was sent to German labor camps. As a result, most of the Mühldorf inmates came from Hungary. A lot of inmates also came from Lithuania, France, Poland, Italy, Czechoslovakia, Greece and even Germany. Many political prisoners and criminals also found their way into the Mühldorf camps. Most of the Jewish Mühldorf inmates had sewn the *Star of David* unto their blue-white prisoner garments, which led many Mühldorfers to believe that this was a concentration camp for Jews. The clothing of the inmates, especially shoes, rotted quickly. Inmates therefore made shoes for themselves using wood and other useful materials.

ORGANIZATION OF THE CONCENTRATION CAMP MÜHLDFORF

For the simple inmate, self-management was virtually impossible. On the one hand, inmates didn't have to deal with the SS the entire time, but on the other, they were at the mercy of Kapos and the camp elders. Camp elders were inmates often chosen based on their level of authority amongst prisoners. They were tasked with keeping order amongst the prisoners as

well as being their spokesperson. Despite the positive-sounding nature of this system, the camp elders were often abusive towards their fellow prisoners.

One famous camp elder was H. Rohr, one of the oldest inmates in the camp who was described by survivors as being a "sleazy fellow". Rohr was a criminal who had previously terrorized inmates at other camps. Armed with a nightstick, he controlled the camp while riding on his bicycle. Due to his brutality, he was popular with the SS and enjoyed many privileges such as being permitted to wear civilian clothes.

Most of the Kapos were usually German criminals. They were sent by Dachau to "stir things up". To prevent fighting among inmates, a camp police was created - using inmates. For identification purposes, they wore a black armband.

THE SS

Theodor Eicke became the second commander of Dachau in June of 1933 and *Inspektor General* of all concentration camps in May of 1934. Eicke had set the standards for all German concentration camps in 1933 including the disciplinary and punishment measures. Many concentration camp guards had learned their training in Dachau under Eicke, including many of the Mühldorf camp guards.

Officially, all concentration camps were known as *Schutzhaftlager* (*protective custody camp*) and were sent there if arrested by the Gestapo. These were mostly Jews and other racially undesirable individuals. Later, common criminals arrested by the German police were also sent to Dachau. The extermination camps in the east were hugely different from their western counterparts, despite many inmates in western camps dying as well. Most people died from being overworked and underfed, also so in the Mühldorf camps.

The Mühldorf camp was officially known as *Waffen-SS-K.L. Dachau-K.L. Mühldorf Fp Nr. 27451*. SS SS-Sturmbahnführer W.A. Langleist was in October of 1944 given the task of commanding the Mühldorf camp. Smaller *Unterkommandos* were usually led by SS-Hauptscharführers. Camps with female prisoners had female SS guards. All Mühldorf camps were run from an office in the camp in Mettenheim. A courier delivered messages once a week and a phone call to Mettenheim from Mühldorf let gave feedback on inmate strength, deaths etc.

The SS camp guards had nothing to do with the organization of the camp and inmates. They were simply there to ensure order and guard the prisoners and camp. Guards were prohibited from talking to the inmates and were simply told to escort the inmates out of camp and guard them when they were working. The guard unit took the name of *12/SS-T.Stuba KL-Dachau* and in the Mühldorf region numbered around 250 men. At *Organization Todt* construction sites, inmates were guarded by *Organization Todt* personnel.

Commander of the SS guards unit was Hauptmann (captain) A. Ostermann. A portion of the SS guards ad come directly from Auschwitz. Almost all guards were former members of the regular German Army, the *Wehrmacht*, that had been wounded or were considered unfit for frontline combat duty. They were drafted into the SS beginning of 1944. The reason behind this is possibly due to Heinrich Himmler himself. After the failed July 20, 1944 assassination attempt on Hitler, Himmler became the commander in chief of the *Ersatzheer*, which was a reserve of the regular German Army. The Mühldorf guards soon took on SS ranks, except for Hauptmann Ostermann, who kept his Wehrmacht rank.

The treatment of prisoners varied immensely. Ostermann relied on the discipline principle of the *Wehrmacht* and did not tolerate mistreatment of prisoners. Despite this, there were many instances of guards abusing prisoners verbally, with the butt of their guns (beatings) or shooting those who tried to flee.

There were also some sympathetic guards who turned a blind eye when a prisoner took an extra loaf of bread or a potato from a farm field. Other sentries lost control and brutalized inmates if caught in such situations. Often cited as a "nice guy" was G. Ammer, a former Wehrmacht *Feldwebel* and at that time the camp commander of the Waldlager.

The most brutal and fanatical Nazis were the SS men of *Volksdeutsche* descent. Campführer Eberl for example was described by SS men and survivors as somewhat of an enigma. Before the war, Eberl had already joined the SS and his motto of, "*Mehr tun als die Pflicht befiehlt!*" (Do more than your duty expects) was well known. Eberl was said to roam around camp screaming and slapping people at random. He favored Kapos and camp elders who brutalized their fellow prisoners and rewarded them with extra food rations and cigarettes. On the other hand, Eberl had an empathetic side to him and he ensured that camp conditions remained bearable by allowing heating installations to be installed and expanding the number of barracks. Sometimes, when the disruption of supplies meant that inmates couldn't work, he'd prevent them from leaving the camp. Incredibly, he allowed a pregnant Jewish woman to obtain milk for herself from a nearby farm. Eberl also prevented an ailing inmate (who's brother had pleaded with him) to be shipped off to an extermination camp.

LIFE IN THE CAMP

Viktor E. Frankl, a former inmate in the Türkheim camp outside of Dachau explained the moral situation of the inmates and the behavior of the SS. Whether or not an inmate survived all depended upon his or her capability of ignoring the suffering of their fellow inmates.

Generally, the prisoners were awoken at 4:15 AM. They were allowed to freshen up and then proceeded to having breakfast. After breakfast, the prisoners were to assemble in the camp inspection yard for roll call and news. Often, prisoners were made to stand in the inspection yard for hours –

simply as means of harassment. At 7 AM, the prisoners were marched out of the camp gates, often being forced to sing in the process. Once the construction site was reached, they would work until 12:30 when *Mittagspause* was announced. This lasted until 13:00. Around 19:00-20:00 hours, prisoners would return to the camp, eat dinner and then sleep. On Sunday, they were freed from working.

Inmates were never fully treated according to international rules. The prescribed calorie intake could never be met from the beginning. The reasons for this are as follows. Often, SS guards or the Kapos would black market the camp food for their own personal gain. The worsening war situation and lack of supply also led to a drastic food shortage.

The daily food rations of a Mühldorf inmate were as follows:

BREAKFAST	250 g bread for the entire day, ½ L Ersatzkaffee Sunday: Some margarine, cheese or sausage (if available)
LUNCH	½ L vegetable soup, sometimes animal organs and often potatoes
DINNER	1 L soup

The food was brought by inmates from the kitchen and served in between the barrack streets. Near the end of the war, these rations dropped considerably. A common form of punishment involved refusing to feed an entire block or a whole camp with bread, depending on the degree of offence.

The hygienic conditions of the camp were terrible. Inmates had no chance at showering or changing clothes during the first weeks, especially in the Waldlager, Mittergars and Thalham. Only when a well was erected in the Waldlager camp did the inmates have a chance to shower. In Mittergars and Thalham, farmers delivered the water in order to fill storage tanks. The presence of water finally allowed a camp barber (an inmate) to operate who was responsible for cutting other inmates hair. Even the SS guards had themselves shaved by inmates.

Due to the poor sanitary conditions, it is not surprising that the camp soon crawled with vermin. The delecting stations lagged behind schedule and could not cope with the increasing pestilence of lice. The consequences were phlegmon and typhus, which since January of 1945 had affected all camps. Typhus also caused the most fatalities since the starved and weakened inmates were weakened even further through physical work. In the last three months, 25 inmates died on a daily basis in the Mühldorf region from exposure, fever and other factors. Dead inmates from the Waldlager and Mettenheim were at first stored in the mortuary where their gold teeth were removed. Then, a funeral squad (composed of inmates) took the bodies to *Kronprinzstein* where they were thrown into a mass grave.

The medical supply state was in chaos with the clinic being overfilled with two to three inmates sharing one sick bed. The *Organization Todt* doctor, Dr. Flocken, never checked the inmates for their health, unless a selection was in progress where the weak would be shipped off to certain

death in concentration camps. Due to her lack of concern, it was up to inmate doctors and nurses to care for the sick. The medical supplies at their disposal were thin and few, supplied from Schwindegg by the *Organization Todt*. The inmate doctors performed urgent operations on using only primitive tools such as scissors. Sometimes, inmate doctors secretly received medical supplies from local pharmacies.

Many of the sick soon turned into what was called *Muselmänner*. *Muselmänner* could best be described as walking corpses. They were thin to the bones (which gave them a skeletal appearance) and suffered from fever. They were destined to die. From time to time, Dr. Flocken would perform a fitness selection. Here, she would select the inmates incapable of working to be sent off to almost certain death in a concentration camp. Many Mühldorfer inmates lost many of their loved ones in this fashion. A similar selection occurred in Mettenheim.

On the 25th of October 1944, a train laden with 525 *Muselmänner* left Mühldorf. Its destination: Auschwitz. Upon returning, the train crew reported that the "cargo" had been properly taken care off. Ending November 1944, Himmler ordered the cessation of gassing. Despite this, fitness selections still took place in Mühldorf, but the selected could hope for a chance of survival for they were sent to the clinic at Kaufering.

WORK

Every inmate had to work, provided they were listed as sick. The chore most prisoners had as civilians was of little value in the camp. Exceptions were locksmiths, blacksmiths, electricians, tailors, barbers or a joiner. About ¼ of the camp population worked as functionaries and camp helpers. Aside from the above-mentioned positions, there were also jobs available in the following sections: kitchen, SS cafeteria, clothes storage, stockroom, washrooms, deleicing, funeral commandos, latrine commandos, woodcutter and ox commandos (handling transports in a wagon pulled by an ox).

Outside the camp, inmates had to work on potato fields and centers that supplied food to the horses and oxen of the camp. In Mettenheim, sixteen inmates were forced to pull a plow to prepare a field under the brutal hits of nightsticks from their SS guards.

Women and youths under sixteen years of age were well-suited for light tasks controlled by the *Organization Todt* such as cleaning and kitchen work.

The majority of inmates were sourced to private firms by the SS. A farm for example could rent prisoners to aid in food production as well as farm work. This was somewhat beneficial to prisoners since they worked for the farmer, not the SS, and could expect better treatment. The food situation could turn out positive for the prisoners if they had a sympathetic family and escort guard who turned a blind eye.

After the bombing of the Mühldorf train station, inmates were brought to the scene to replace, repair and reconnect damaged tracks. Even bomb damage to private homes was occasionally fixed by inmates.

The biggest work commandos were the aircraft bunker and the smaller branch of a Munich firm that operated in Ampfing. Added to that were the construction sites for a second train embankment as well as a cement production facility in Mittergars and Thalham.

The hardest, most physically exhausting work was said to be the main aircraft bunker, Weingut I, and the accompanying sub-jobs around it (brick carrying etc.). Work took place in two shifts around the clock, even at night (floodlights were used to illuminate the site). All together, 4,000 prisoners, half of them concentration camp inmates, worked on the bunker at the same time.

Due to the bunker's enormous length, the prisoners from Mettenheim, who's camp was located close to the east section of bunker, worked on the eastern part while the Waldlager prisoners worked on the western part. Prisoners were drilled by the Kapos and SS guards to work as efficiently as possible as the bunker was classified as a project that could turn the war in Germany's favor.

Some of the onsite German engineers often allowed the prisoners to stop working at 17:30: half an hour before work was supposed to end. Only when the *Organization Todt* found out about the practice were the German engineers warned that they could face a military court. From 12:30 to 13:00, prisoners could rest and eat what prisoners referred to as "Bunkersuppe" (Bunker soup).

In order to boost inmate productivity, incentives were offered in the form of tobacco. Most inmates however were weakened by the constant marching from and to the camp to the construction site. A lack of proper feeding also caused the inmates to weaken considerably. Because of this, and the brutality of the Kapos, there were many onsite accidents and deaths. The average lifespan of a Mühldorfer inmate was estimated at 80 days. On the way to work, many inmates committed suicide by throwing themselves in front of the approaching train. To avoid this, inmates were later brought to the construction site via a different route.

CRIMES AGAINST PRISONERS

The arresting of innocent people, and keeping them inside a prison camp, was a violation of human rights. It is a sad fact that crimes were committed against these people inside the camp and at the construction site. Most of the stories told in this book were presented by eyewitnesses: survivors.

Physical abuse, through the SS, Kapos and some of the *Organization Todt* personnel happened on a daily basis. There was also a form of "official punishment" which included twenty-five hits with a hard stick among others. Generally, the *Rapportführer* applied for permission to punish an inmate at

the camp commander. Once given, the task of punishing an inmate was given to either the camp elder or block elder. Often, the punishment was carried out on Sunday with all camp inmates present and forced to watch.

Ex-inmate Sandberg tells of an incident that occurred at the Waldlager. An inmate arrived late at roll call and was severely beaten until he wasn't screaming anymore: the man was dead. Guards were ordered to shoot at inmates that tried to flee. On a December 7, 1944 an SS guard shot the inmate Samuel F., who was trying to flee. Twenty days later, on December 27, an SS guard shot another prisoner who came from the Zangberg camp. The man had been out begging in the local area. During clean-up operations at the Mühldorf train station, a prisoner was shot on the spot after a guard spotted him taking a can of tobacco from a train. A Waldlager inmate lost his life when he was caught eating potatoes from the potato storage shed. He was killed on the spot. On September 21, 1944, seven Italian forced laborers were arrested on the grounds that they refused to work. They were presumably sent to Munich-Stadelheim where they were put to death.

Camp Mittergars was known as a death camp. More inmates were killed through human brutality than from typhus. At fault were particularly brutal camp elders as well as the commander, a man named Kirsch. Kirsch was so sadistic; he apparently killed an inmate after a night roll call with an ax.

Worse than the SS, according to eyewitness testimonies, were the camp elders, block elders and the Kapos. The Kapo "L" as considered an especially brutal man who punched and beat as he pleased. He was a recurring criminal and had been arrested since 1934. Many lives were taken by him. During roll call, he would beat inmates and enjoyed hanging them by their feet. His main area of terrorization was the main construction site.

Eyewitness "K" claims to have transported many bodies to their graves as part of a funeral commando. The degree of brutality was plainly visible on the bodies. Many of the bodies were covered in blood, showed severe head wounds and many had broken bones.

Another eyewitness account claims that his cousin was brutally murdered by Kapo "L" with a shovel, which decapitated the unfortunate man. Such murders were ignored and tolerated by the SS who wrote the deaths down as "construction accidents". The transfer of such brutal Kapos was common practice as they were expected to brutalize inmates.

THE END OF CAMP MÜHL DORF

Beginning March 1945, the collapse of Germany seemed just a matter of time. The Red Army had moved into Pomerania and Silesia and the Americans and British had crossed the Rhine and were advancing into central Germany. The county of Mühldorf wasn't immune from war damage either. Allied air attacks from March 19 to April 20, 1945 had destroyed the Mühldorf train station and nearby installations killing 150 Mühldorfers. A low altitude

air attack by US fighter aircraft on an airfield in Mettenheim claimed many destroyed aircraft as well as killing nine inmates at the nearby camp.

Due to a disruption in supplies and building materials, work at the bunker could not be carried out on a daily basis and eventually, with the end of the war in sight, was abandoned.

Camp discipline and rules became more relaxed during the last weeks of the war, which gave the inmates hope. Some of the SS guards even started friendly conversations with some of the inmates.

However, on the 26th of April 1945, the order to depart was announced to all camps in the region. The official explanation that was told to the inmates was that they were being brought to safety from the advancing Allied armies. Sick inmates were left behind and the majority of prisoners were to now go through some of their worst experiences as slaves of the Third Reich. 4,000 prisoners were crammed into freight trains (100 per wagon) and given a small slice of bread and cheese, then the journey began. Destination unknown. Rumors among the prisoners theorized that they were going to be taken to an extermination camp. It soon turned out that the train was traveling south to the fictional *Alpenfestung* (National Redoubt). During the journey south, the train had stopped in Poing on the outskirts of Munich.

On the morning of April 28, 1945, the accompanying SS guards opened the doors of the trains and told the prisoners that the war is over and they're free to go wherever they wish, then the guards fled. After plundering the supply train, the former inmates dispersed throughout the area. Suddenly, shots and screams were heard. An SS field police unit had materialized and with them, some of the former Mühldorf camp guards. The prisoners were rounded up and forced back into the freight train and locked up. The incident was not without fatalities. Some inmates had been bayoneted and shot during the skirmish and were either dead or dying.

This sad incident can be traced back to the failed actions of the "*Freiheitsaktion Bayern*" group, a small breakaway unit of the German Army that tried to prevent fighting in Bavaria and was willing to surrender to the Allies. In the night from April 27 to 28, Hauptmann Gerngroß of the Wehrmacht had ordered the occupation of the radio broadcasting station *Freiman*. The SS guards in Poing, having found out about the incident responded with the utmost brutality by killing civilians and Wehrmacht soldiers belonging to the freedom group.

To make matters worse, a low-level air attack by American fighter aircraft, which had mistaken the train for a troop transport, claimed the lives of several inmates. Nevertheless, the train went underway and for days, traveled around aimlessly with no set destination before coming to a halt near *Tutzing* and *Seeshaupt*. On April 30, 1945, American troops finally liberated the prisoners.

The American occupation forces took over the Mühldorf prison camps in early May. Most of the SS guards had already fled. Prior to doing so, they had dumped their supplies of alcoholic drinks in the nearby forests out of fear that the freed inmates would obtain these, become drunk and vengeful towards the local population. With the end of the war in sight, the prisoners became anxious and threatened to break down the fence of the now heavily

understaffed Waldlager camp. In order to maintain peace and quiet, the camp commander sent a trusted civilian from Ampfing to meet the advancing Americans and lead them to the camp.

In the Mettenheim camp, a medical orderly who had stayed behind with the sick contacted the Americans and gave the location details of the camp. Prior to the liberation, one of the camp commanders, possibly Hauptmann Ostermann, had sought written assurance from the inmates that he had treated them well, which for the most part was true. In his defense later in court, Ostermann produced a written order that had charged him with the destruction of the camp, which he disobeyed. This and the fact that Ostermann had indeed treated camp inmates fair ensured that the former captain came away with a light sentence. Captured SS guards were interned and sent to an American prisoner-of-war camp.

The American liberators immediately fed the freed inmates. The many sick were transported to Mühldorf's main city hospital and to the military hospital in Ecksberg as well as setup facilities in Ampfing. Due to a shortage in medical manpower, local women and girls, including some from the *NS-Frauenschaft* (an organization that trained German women as workers, nurses and a variety of other useful tasks) and the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (League of German Girls) were recruited to aid in caring for the sick.

Many former inmates were not able to enjoy their freedom for long. They died from sickness and disease as well as the consequences from months, if not years, of ill treatment. The lack of suitable living conditions for the liberated inmates caused the Americans to accommodate inmates with local families for a period of two years, until they could return home or immigrate. Some survivors found a new home in Bavaria.

The US Army was quick to take to court guilty SS as well as some *Organization Todt* personnel and also the management of *Polensky & Zöllner*. The trials were held in Dachau. The first trial, on December 1945, former camp commander W.A. Langleist and former SS-Oberscharführer J.V. Kirsch were sentenced to death. In another hearing, G. Schallermair was also sentenced to death. The court found these three men guilty of war crimes and for encouraging the brutal treatment of prisoners. Langleist and Kirsch were executed on May 28, 1946 in Landsberg. Schallermair survived until 1951. He was executed on June 8th. Five other defendants were sentenced to death, including Dr. Flocken during the Mühldorfer trials (April - May 1947). However, their sentence was later reduced to prison sentences. Captain Ostermann was spoken free. The former SS-Oberscharführer F. Auer was put to death on November 28, 1948 in Landsberg.

There were also trials in a German court against former camp commander Sebastian Eberl and other former SS men as well as the camp elder H. Rohr and Kapo "L". The trials were inconclusive due to a lack of convincing eyewitness accounts and evidence and were ultimately shut down.

THE LOCAL POPULATION AND THE INMATES

E. Israel Bornstein recalls his arrival in Mühldorf when his train stopped at the local station. A civilian passenger train was passing and Bornstein clearly remembers the reaction of the people inside.

"Most of them were well-dressed, well-fed and there were also many women amongst them and they looked at us wide-eyed and seemed to be uncomprehending of the situation..."

Eugen Kogon, a German journalist, states that this was almost too typical of the periods. The German people were also frightened by the power-hungry criminals who ruled the country. What went on in concentration camps wasn't known to the vast majority of Germans. The SS did an excellent job in preventing nosy Germans from coming close to the camps. Propaganda also told local peoples that the prisoners were composed of criminals, social misfits and of course, Jews. Germans were prohibited from speaking to inmates. Even passing near the camp fence was threatened with immediate shooting by the guards. To deceive the public even further, misleading signs were posted outside that lied about inmate activity and tasks.

However, since 1933, the newspaper-reading citizen would have known or developed a sense for what concentration camps were for. Beginning in 1933, the first arrests took place in Mühldorf under the guise of *Schutzhaft* (protective custody). Nevertheless, the citizens of Mühldorf must probably have developed an idea about the true purpose of the camps. On a daily basis, they encountered the haggard prisoners as they were marched to work. Reports of the brutality of the guards also spread quickly amongst the local populations.

Showing disgust and disdain at the treatment of prisoners was not possible in a police state like Nazi Germany. The Gestapo had an abundance of informers and this instilled fear into the German population. When reading today about what little Germans did to aid Jews or prisoners, it has to be taken into view that the aiding of enemies of the state was a crime and meant either harsh treatment at the hands of the Gestapo, imprisonment or even death. Despite this, there were many Germans who tried to help. Below are some examples of courageous locals who helped in their own way.

A family from Ampfing hid potatoes inside a bucket and filled it with pig food. The bucket was positioned so that inmates could easily find it and help themselves. At the same time, the accompanying SS guard, allowed himself to be "invited" for a cup of tea and thus allow the inmates to eat. Sadly, this particular SS guard was later transferred out.

A female farmer hid bread the food-wagon that supplied food to the camp oxen.

A woman from Ampfing was imprisoned for three days after having given inmates some apples. She was told that if she were caught aiding prisoners again, she'd be arrested and imprisoned in the same camp as the inmates.

Life-saving help was given to some of the inmates who managed to escape. A few local farmers hid these escaped prisoners at their own risk.

Things didn't always work out well for both parties. In a tragic incident, seven farmers from nearby Poing were executed for showing their good side and sheltering escaped inmates.

After the war, former Nazis were forced by the occupying Americans to uncover the bodies of dead camp inmates who were hastily buried in mass graves inside the forest. The bodies were exhumed and reburied in cemeteries strewn across the region.

Only through these actions did the local civilian population finally understand what had occurred in their forest during the last few months of the war.

The bodies from the mass graves were reburied in small concentration camp cemeteries in Burghausen, Kraiburg, Mühldorf and Neumarkt. Buried in each are the following:

Burghausen: 253

Kraiburg: 242

Mühldorf: 480

Neumarkt: 392