



GEDENKSTÄTTE FLOSSENBÜRG

In October 1938, two months after the Nazi occupation of the Czech Sudetenland region, the Germans took over a large glass factory at the small town of Holýšov (renamed Holleischen by the Germans) and transformed it into a munitions factory for the Luftwaffe, known as the Metallwerke Holleischen (MWH). Initially employing a mixed workforce of voluntary civilian workers, both Czech and German, production grew rapidly, leading to the construction of a second production site in the nearby

woods in 1941. In April 1944, the plant's ever-increasing demand for labour led to the employment of political prisoners as slave workers in the MWH factory and the creation of a small concentration camp nearby to house them. Known as KZ-Aussenlager Holleischen, it was a satellite camp of Flossenbürg and grew to hold up to 1,000 inmates. This picture of the factory in the town was taken in the spring of 1945. By then, it had suffered from Allied bombing raids, which explains the damage to the roof.

# HOLLEISCHEN CONCENTRATION CAMP

In the western part of the Czech Republic, nestled into the gentle rolling forested hills 20 kilometres south-west of Pilsen (Plzen), on the bank of the Radbuza river, not far from the border with Germany, lies the small town of Holleischen (Holýšov). It was here that, from April 1944 to May 1945, existed a little-known concentration camp, known as AL Holleischen. A satellite camp of Flossenbürg, one of the largest of the Nazi concentration camps (see *After the Battle* No. 131), it housed prisoners put to work in a nearby armaments factory set up by the Third Reich.

Holleischen lies in the Sudetenland, the borderland region of Czechoslovakia that was annexed by Nazi Germany in October 1938 following the Four-Power Conference at Munich in September (see *After the Battle* No. 62). Five months later, on March 15, 1939, Germany invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia, setting up the so-called Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren (Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia) in the German-occupied western half of the country and establishing a collaborating puppet government in Slovakia in the east.

*Right: Repaired after the war, and since used by various industries, the large factory complex, comprising various large production halls and workshops, still stands on the northern edge of town. A labyrinth of tunnels and underground chambers — used as ready-made air raid shelters during the war — stretches underneath the whole complex.*

## METALWERKE HOLLEISCHEN (MWH)

Soon after the annexation of the Sudetenland in October 1938, the Deutsche Waffen- und Munitionsfabriken AG (DWM — German Arms and Ammunition Factories Inc.) took over the land and properties of a vacant former glassworks at Holleischen. The large factory, complete with its huge labyrinth of underground rooms and passages, was an excellent location for an armaments factory,

By Carl Barwise

the site being mainly chosen for its transport links (the train station was located very near to the factory) and good power supply. On August 6, 1939, the plant became a recognised munitions factory for the Luftwaffe, and in 1941 it was named the Metalwerke Holleischen (MWH — Metal Works Holleischen).



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Right: Holýšov lies 20 kilometres south-west of Pilsen, close to the border with Germany. Flossenbürg, of which Holleischen was a sub-camp, lay just 60 kilometres to the north-west. We have also indicated Weiden, the location of Stalag XIII B, from which the Soviet and French prisoners of war, who arrived in 1941 to work on the expansion of the factory, originated.

Taking up production in the winter of 1939, the factory employed a workforce made up of Czech and German civilians. Most of them came from the surrounding areas — the factory was almost the only opportunity for work in the region — but through the Arbeitsamt (Labour Office) many others came from far and wide, not just from within the Protectorate but beyond the borders. They came at their own free will, with a proper labour contract, although there were also some who had been sent there by the Arbeitsamt. Most of the foremen and qualified technicians were men but the majority of the labourers were women. To house them, two Arbeitslager (labour camps) were built near the site in 1941, one for the 700 female workers and one for the smaller number of male workers. The employees were provided for by the Deutsche Arbeitsfront (DAF — German Labour Front) and NS-Frauenschaft (NSF — National Socialist Women's League).

Production increased throughout 1940, and by 1941 full capacity had been reached, the plant manufacturing aircraft ammunition, 20mm anti-aircraft shells, 30mm shells for MK108 cannon, anti-tank shells, incendiary shells and, later, Panzerfaust weapons. Work groups, known as Kommandos, worked 12-hour shifts on the completion of shells in the pressing shops (Kommando 137), chemical filling (Kommando 453) and the more dangerous aspect of dealing with volatile shells, a duty that was left to Kommando 119. Despite the risks, no accidental deaths were ever recorded at the MWH.



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The large halls of the glass factory were transformed into production sites for various types of ordnance, including aircraft

ammunition, anti-aircraft and anti-tank shells and, later, Panzerfaust anti-tank weapons.





Another of the production halls. Note the large number of female workers at the machines.

### PRISONERS OF WAR ADDED TO THE WORKFORCE

For the first 23 months of its existence the factory relied solely on voluntary civilian labour but this changed in June 1941 when French and Soviet prisoners of war were sent to Holleischen to work as forced labourers in the expansion of the factory. The first batch — 360 French POWs sent from Stalag XIII B at Weiden in the Oberpfalz, close to the Czech border, just 80 kilometres due west of Holleischen — arrived towards the end of June 1941. They were billeted in the sheep pen of an empty farmstead known as Nový Dvur (New Yard), located about a kilometre north of Holleischen along a secondary road leading into the forest and on to the town of Hradec.

This farm had formerly belonged to the Picman family. On October 27, 1938 — just 17 days after the German occupation of the Sudetenland — the Gestapo had arrested Jaroslav Picman, son of the owner Václav, for publicly demonstrating against the lack of a Czech school in the area. After his release, the family were constantly harassed by the Gestapo, and in the summer of 1939 the Gestapo returned to take control of the premises, arresting both the father and son in the process. Later, they were sent to the Gestapo detention centre at Karlsbad (Karlovy Vary). Despite protestations from the family, on August 11, 1939 ownership of the farm passed to the German state. All property and belongings went to the Deutsche Ansiedlungsgesellschaft (DAG — German Settlement Organisation), and the family were given until November 4 to vacate the premises. Further, they were also obliged to find new accommodation at least 30 kilometres from the Sudeten border.

The POWs billeted in the sheep pen, which was located across the road from the main farm, were put to work as part of the Bau-Kommando (construction team) engaged on expanding the plant. This comprised a new complex of factory buildings and workhouses, designed for the testing and completion of the munitions, together with a large settlement of residential units planned to house around 1,000 German staff and workers employed at the factory. To distinguish the old and the new sites, the original factory was known as Werk I and the new site, which was located in the woods two kilometres north of Holýšov, as Werk II. The prisoners referred to it as 'the forest'. The two sites were connected by a cable-car system, used to transport materials and machinery from one to the other.

*Right: Werk II was largely abandoned after the war but many of the buildings still stand, derelict and unused.*



Today the whole factory stands empty and disused, the last industrial user having ceased production around the year 2000.



In 1941, the MWH embarked on a huge expansion of the plant, building a whole new factory complex in the woods to the north of the town. This not only included workshops and production sites but also a large complex of dwellings and hatted accommodation for the German staff and workers. Henceforth, the original factory was known as Werk I and the new complex as Werk II.







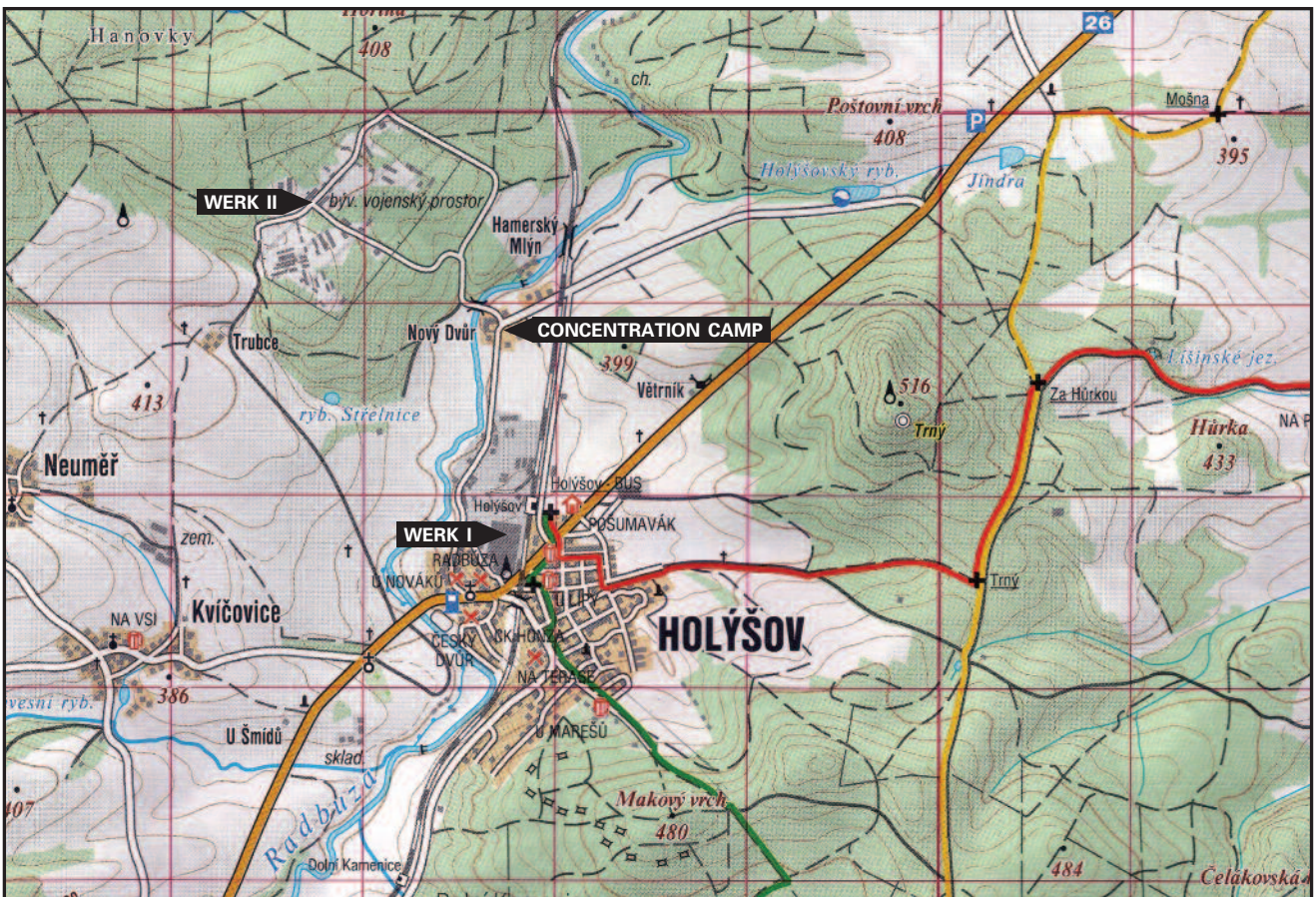
CARL BARWISE

The POWs also worked on the Werkstrasse (main factory street) located in the central industrial area, and also performed heavy labour duties in a nearby stone quarry. Unlike the civilian workers, who lived and worked without being guarded, the POWs were watched over by Wehrmacht guards.

The new factory complex was brought into use before the end of 1941. An MWH report that year put the total number of workers employed at the plant — German staff, Czech and German workers, and French and

To assist in the construction of Werk II, in June 1941 the Germans began employing a force of several hundred Soviet and French prisoners of war. These were billeted in the sheep pen of a farm located on the road between Werk I and II (see the map below). Three years later, in August 1944, this same building became the so-called Männerlager (men's camp), housing 200 male concentration camp prisoners sent here from Flossenbürg as an additional workforce engaged on a further expansion of the plant. Still later, in March 1945, the building was used to hold some 400 Hungarian Jewish women, who had been sent to increase the slave labour force in the factory. The former sheep pen still stands across the road from the main farm.

Soviet POWs — at 4,627. By December 31, 1942, the number had risen to 5,990. The total number of workers at the two plants during the war was approximately 8,000.



The original factory (Werk I) lay right next to the railway station. Werk II lay two kilometres to the north, and the farm that

became the POW camp in 1941, and later the concentration camp, was located about halfway up the road between the two.

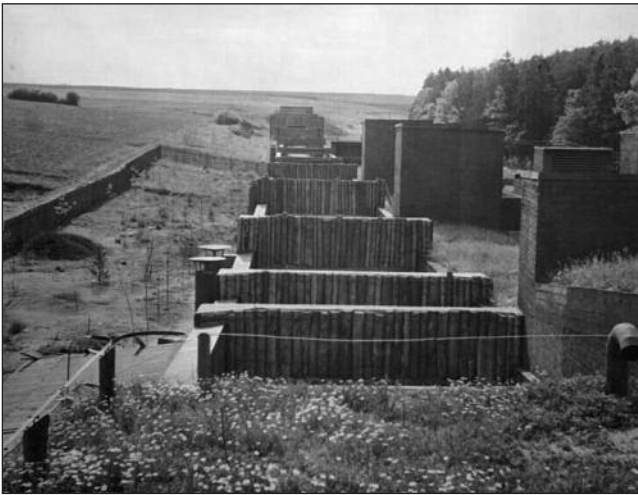




*Left:* Werk II included many buildings specially constructed for the safe handling of munitions, like this storage bunker with



*Right:* Carl Barwise found the same building surviving to this day.



The shell-testing area at Werk II, constructed during the latter part of 1944.



Its gutted remains moulder in the forest, increasingly overgrown by trees and bushes.

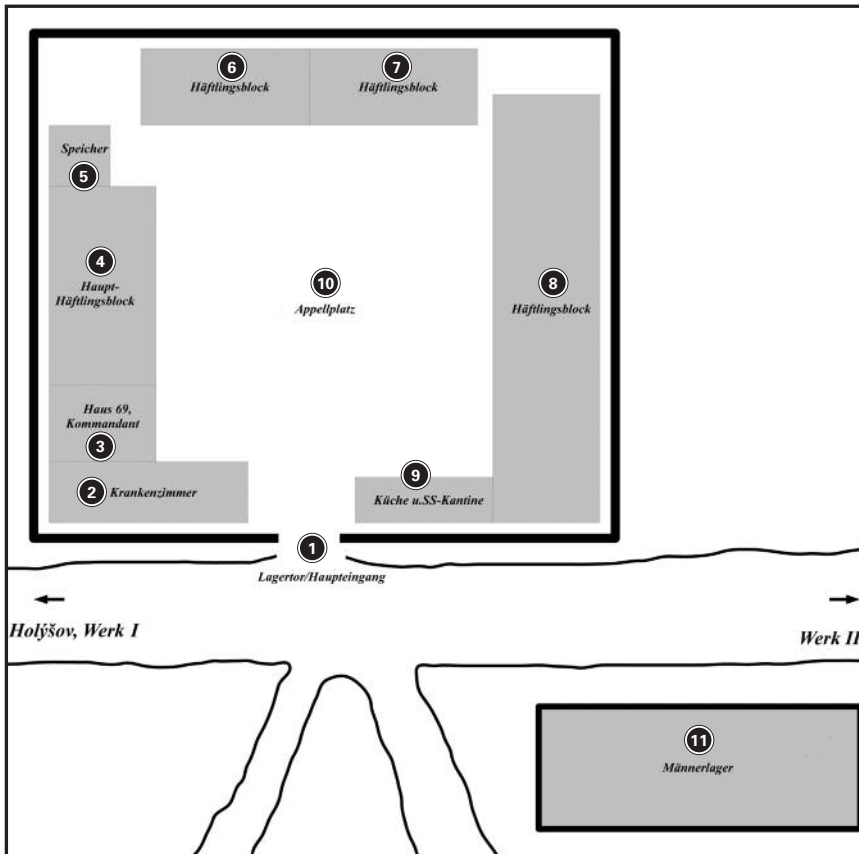


*Left:* An extensive supply system was built to link the two factory sites. *Right:* The pipework has been dismantled but the



stone supports remain at regular intervals in the fields between the two sites.





In April 1944, faced with the increasing shortage of workers, the factory began utilizing female concentration camp inmates as slave labourers. To house them, the farm along the road between Werke I and II, was converted into a concentration camp. Known as Nový Dvůr, this farmstead had stood empty since November 1939. Its sheep pen across the road was the building in which the French and Soviet POWs had been housed since 1941, and which later in 1944 became the Men's Camp. [1] Camp gate. [2] Sick bay. [3] Kommandant's office. [4] Main prisoner block. [5] Stores room. [6]-[8] Prisoner's blocks. [9] Kitchen and SS canteen. [10] Roll-call area. [11] Men's camp.

### THE CONCENTRATION CAMP

It was not until the spring of 1944, when the MWH company increased the demand for female workers, that the next stage of the development of the camp occurred, the establishment of a concentration camp. The recognised date for the beginning of Konzentrationslager Holleischen is April 15, 1944, when the camp became an official Aussenlager (satellite camp) of Flossenbürg, with 195 female prisoners. These had all arrived from Ravensbrück, the concentration camp for women located north-east of Berlin. Two days later, on April 17, a second group — comprising 66 French women — arrived, followed by another of 280, again mostly French women, on the 18th, both from Ravensbrück. A further group of 150 reached the camp on June 6, also from Ravensbrück. Of the total of 691 women, about half were French with Poles and Russians each representing about a quarter. At Ravensbrück the women had carried prisoner numbers in the 27,000 series (the ones that arrived in April) and 35,000 series (those that arrived in June) but now, in addition, they were enrolled in the Flossenbürg administration, all receiving prisoner numbers in the 50,000 series.

The women were housed across the road from the POW compound in the main buildings of the Picman farm. Significant alterations were made around this time including the erection of a main gate, new roofing, barred windows, barbed wire, and an electrified perimeter fence. The site consisted of several rectangular brick buildings, which were turned into prisoner blocks, and two farmhouses that together formed a near-square around a central yard measuring 60

by 40 metres. The main prisoner's block was a former grain store. A Waschraum (ablution facility) with 12 sink units and seven shower-



A vertical aerial photograph of the camp, taken in 1946.

heads was provided although the water was always cold, so instead prisoners usually took showers in the basement of the Werk I. Toilets were separated but without doors.

The prisoner blocks had three-tier bunkbeds with straw mattresses. Each prisoner initially received two blankets but this was later reduced to one per person. Basic DAF-style tables and benches, each accommodating ten people, were used in batches of four or five tables per room, each of which held around 250 prisoners. Small coal-fired stoves in each room were the only method of heating water but in the winter of 1944-45 the coal supply ran out. The third floor of the main building was converted into a loft dining area, complete with tables and china plates, a welcome change for the prisoners who had arrived from lesser-equipped camps.

Being a women's camp, Holleischen originally came under the administration of Ravensbrück even though it was accountable to Flossenbürg for its labour achievements. It remained so for the first four and a half months of its existence until Flossenbürg assumed full control of the camp on September 1. The first Kommandoführer or Lagerführer (camp commander) of Holleischen was SS-Oberscharführer Schmerze.

The camp was guarded by a detachment of Luftwaffe guards and SS-Aufseherinnen (SS female guards). By August 1944 there were 64 of the former and 27 of the latter. Right from the beginning, KL Holleischen served not only as an Aussenlager but also as an Ausbildungslager (training camp) for female guards who were later posted to other sub-camps of the extensive Flossenbürg camp network.

Due to the increasing need for more men at the front, these female overseers were increasingly employed at a number of concentration camps and more than 100 eventually served or were trained at Holleischen. SS recruitment campaigns were designed to attract women away from their menial roles in the factories, enticing them to become active participants in the concentration camp system by stating that their role 'only involves the watching over the prisoners'! Lured by the higher salary, promise of light physical work and



The farm's large grain storage was converted into the main prisoner block, accommodating hundreds of female prisoners. The Kommandant's office is on the left. Note the electric fencing in the foreground, added following the arrival of the new camp commander, Emil Fügner, in the autumn of 1944. The picture was taken in the spring of 1945.

undoubted prestige attached to a position working amongst the elite SS, moral scruples often faded once the indoctrination process converted these women into members of the cruel camp staff.

At Holleischen they escorted Kommandos to and from work, guarded them throughout the day and delivered punishment as and when they saw fit. As a result the female guards enjoyed a position of power that was both feared and reviled. As far as the prisoners were concerned, they scathingly nicknamed the Aufseherinnen 'mice' due to their grey uniforms.

Erstaufseherin (First Matron) Anna Schmidt was the head of female guards. Nicknamed 'Honeyfly' by the prisoners, she was infamous for the aggressive treatment she meted out. Two Oberaufseherinnen (Chief Matrons) served at Holleischen, Dora Lange and Elfriede Tribus. The latter was transferred from the Graslitz sub-camp, replacing Anna Schmidt as head female guard on March 14, 1945. Another female guard of note was Blockführerin (Block Leader) Frederike Schneider. Born in Vienna in September 1911, she had trained at Auschwitz I (see *After the Battle* No. 157) before transferring to the Babitz sub-camp where she was promoted to Blockführerin as reward for her 'good' conduct. Later, she served at Auschwitz-Birkenau, before accompanying a group of prisoners to Ravensbrück in November 1944. She arrived at Holleischen in late January 1945.

Some of the female guards were accommodated at the camp staff quarters, others lived in the nearby village. In April 1945 there were 46 male SS and 48 female guards at the camp.

All female prisoners of Holleischen wore the inverted red triangle insignia on their prisoner jacket, indicating their status as *Schutzhäftlinge* (political prisoners). The oldest was Marguerite-Marie Michelin, a Frenchwoman of 50 who had been arrested

for resistance work in July 1943. She was first incarcerated at Saarbrücken, then sent to Ravensbrück before being transferred to Holleischen in September 1944 where she was assigned to the dangerous shell-testing Kommando 119. She survived and was liberated, having spent eight months at the camp.

The prisoner's day would typically start with wake-up call at 0530 followed by breakfast at 0600 consisting of substitute coffee and a small piece of bread. At 0630 they departed for either Werk I or Werk II for a

12-hour shift. Civilian workers and camp prisoners worked alongside each other. Apart from a short late-morning pause and a lunch break of weak turnip or potato soup from 1415 to 1500, work continued until 1900 when diluted soup and another small piece of bread were dished out. Lights out was at 2200.

Due to the low caloric intake, prisoners typically lost between 20 and 40 kilos during their stay at the camp. Towards the end of the war, the quality and regularity of meals fell and hunger increased. During the final days in April 1945 only one small meal was served daily and even this usually consisted of rotten potatoes.

Although there was a sick bay at the women's camp, it was unable to cope with the frequent bouts of typhus, scarlet fever and tuberculosis, so sick prisoners were usually sent to the hospital in nearby Pilsen, surviving records indicating that nine camp inmates died there.

Frostbite was a threat, especially during the winter of 1944-45, when temperatures fell below minus 20C. Many inmates suffered from oedema, a condition in which excessive fluid builds up within body tissue, causing swollen feet and ankles. Constant contact with the chemicals used at the plant resulted in skin and throat irritations. Despite regular delousing, the inmates suffered from fleas and bugs.

As was the policy within the Nazi concentration camp system, for each prisoner supplied by the SS, the MWH had to pay four Reichsmark (later reduced to 2.9 RM) to the SS-Wirtschafts- und Verwaltungshauptamt (SS-WVHA — SS Main Economic and Administrative Department).

The camp history records several acts of defiance by the prisoners. For example, on July 14, 1944, French members of Kommando 137 at Werk II stopped work to sing the *Marseillaise* in recognition of their national day. As a result, they received a beating from the guards.

On August 11, 1944, Holleischen opened a Männerlager (men's camp), when some 200 male prisoners arrived from Flossenbürg to reinforce the factory workforce. They were put to work building a testing firing range at Werk II. The new arrivals — mainly Poles (half of them of Jewish descent), Russians and Czechs — were housed in the sheep pen that was located just across the road from the main camp area and which had previously



A long low shed has been built against the grain-storage building dividing the yard into two separate compounds.



**Right: The inmates at Holleischen all wore the inverted red triangle of political prisoners. The 'R' visible on the patch of the woman standing at top right designates her nationality, Russian. Prisoner numbers in the camp were all in the 50,000 series.**

served as accommodation for the French and Soviet POWs. Mainly due to their arrival, the number of prisoners at Holleischen rose from 600 in August 1944 to 946 by October 1, of whom by then some 250 were males. (It is not altogether clear what happened to the POWs, it being uncertain whether they remained at Holleischen, had been transferred back to a Stalag or — more likely in the case of the Soviet prisoners — had been worked to death.)

On September 13 three Polish females — Stanislawa Swiergola (prisoner No. 50487), Anna Fabicki (No. 50276) and Irene Cholewa (No. 50480) — made a successful escape from the camp, the only recorded break-out in the history of Holleischen. They were never caught and their subsequent fate remains unknown but their escape instigated a change in command, SS-Oberscharführer Scherme being relieved as Lagerführer and replaced by SS-Hauptsturmführer Emil Fügner.

Immediately after his arrival the atmosphere of the camp changed. Windows were bricked up and guard patrols reviewed with the prisoner's accommodation blocks being placed under non-stop surveillance. Also the whole site was camouflaged in an attempt to hide it from Allied bombers which were now ranging further over German-occupied territory.

The Männerlager existed for only six months, being dissolved sometime during February 1945, although the subsequent fate of the men is unknown. On February 3, there were still 148 male inmates on the camp roster but by the end of February only 694 female prisoners were recorded. They comprised 379 French, 169 Polish and 132 Russian women and 14 others of various nationalities including German, Belgian and Spanish.

In early March 1945, a contingent of 402 Hungarian Jewish women arrived at the camp, a first group of 143 arriving on March 6 and a second one of 259 following on the 9th. They were housed in the former sheep pen that had served as the Männerlager until the previous month. Their arrival led to a



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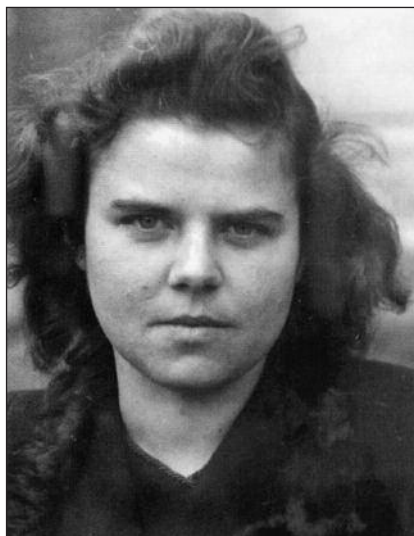
**The prisoners at Holleischen were supervised by SS-Aufseherinnen (female guards), over 100 of them either serving or being trained at Holleischen. Many of them had portrait shots taken when they were investigated for war crimes after the war. This is Anna Wolf.**

**Anna Rauner began work as an Aufseherin on March 30, 1944. Born on June 25, 1923, an ethnic German from the Sudetenland, she also served at Flossenbürg and one of its satellite camps, Zwodau — the largest camp for women in the Czech lands.**



COURTESY JAN VALES

**Margit Heitler, born October 11, 1921 in Drachowitz, was employed from October 9, 1944 and also served at Flossenbürg. She reported to Lagerführer Fügner. Sentenced to 12 months in 1946.**



COURTESY JAN VALES

**Anna Pausch was one of the youngest Aufseherinnen. Born in Sokolov on September 27, 1923, she was only 21 when she came to Holleischen. (The oldest Aufseherin was Ida Behnstedt, 47.)**



COURTESY JAN VALES

**Paula Seidl worked as a supervisor in the camp kitchen. Tried after the war, she received a sentence of 17-months in prison and forfeiture of all her possessions to the Czech state.**

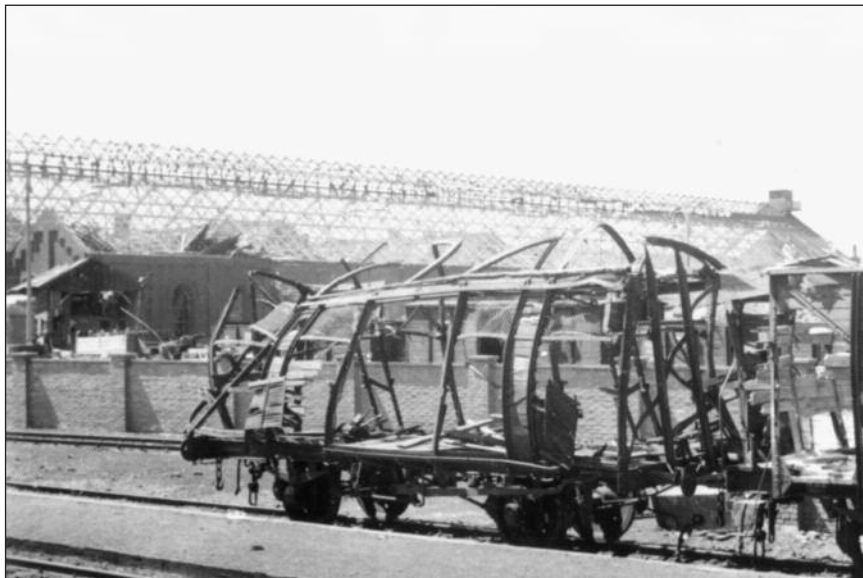


sudden increase in the number of prisoners, a total of 1,090 inmates, all female, being recorded on April 9, 1945.

Before coming to Holleischen these women had endured an arduous period. Part of a group of 550 Hungarian Jewish women, they had originally been held at Auschwitz, from where they were transferred to the Siemens-Schuckertwerke (SSW) electrical engineering factory in Nuremberg, a sub-camp of Flossenbürg that had been established in October 1944. After integration into the SSW company, their prisoner numbers were changed from Auschwitz to Flossenbürg series (Nos. 55740 to 56290). On January 20 and 21, 1945, their prison block was destroyed during Allied air attacks. After spending a few days out in the open, without food and subject to the harsh winter conditions (leading them to resort to eating dirty snow in order to survive), they were housed in the basement of a nearby school, from where they worked clearing the rubble from the recent air raids. Following further bomb damage to the Schuckertwerke, 405 of the 550 women, aged between 13 and 40 years and each selected for their small hands and good eyesight, were transferred to Holleischen. Due to the disruption of rail traffic by Allied air attacks, they had to walk part of their journey before being put in open coal trucks. Three of the first group of 146 died on the voyage. Emaciated and exhausted, the 402 survivors finally disembarked at Holleischen, along with a complement of SS-Aufseherinnen.

In early April 1945, three French women employed at Werk II — Noémi Suchet (prisoner No. 50279), Hélène Lignier (No. 50414) and Simone Michel-Lévy (No. 50422) — were all suspected of acts of sabotage at the munitions facility, and subsequently sentenced to 25 lashes. Following a report to camp commander Fügner by Aufseherin Anna Graf, the three women were then transferred to Flossenbürg where they were hanged on April 13.

From mid-April 1945, the factory became a frequent target of the Allied air forces (it was known as the Stod ammunition plant after the nearby city of that name eight kilometres to the north-east). During the afternoon of April 20, an alert sounded which sent the SS staff into a state of panic as they frantically herded the prisoners into the underground shelters. The raid by the US Eighth Air Force knocked out the cable-car system connecting the two sites as well as destroyed many of the Werk II installations. Another raid by 132 A-26 bombers of the US Ninth Air Force on May 3 finally brought an end to all work at the MWH. The railway station, located near Werk I, was also destroyed with severe damage to the tracks.



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**By early 1945 Holleischen had become the target of frequent Allied bombing attacks and two heavy raids on April 20 and May 3 effectively wrecked the factory, halting all production. Severe damage to the railway tracks also made any further transportation of goods completely impossible. One of the production halls of Werk I can be seen behind the wrecked cargo train.**



CARL BARWISE

**The brick wall separating the railway tracks from the factory remains unchanged.**



GEDENKSTÄTTE FLOSSENBÜRG



CARL BARWISE

**The railway station was also destroyed by the bombing . . .**

**. . . but was rebuilt after the war.**





**Left:** Following the liberation of the camp by Polish partisans on May 5, the French national flag was raised in the Appellplatz. Most of the 700 French inmates declined to leave the camp with the Poles, being either too weak or preferring to

**LIBERATION**

Two days later, on May 5, Holleischen was liberated but strangely enough not by the Soviet Red Army or Western Allied military forces, nor even by Czech resistance fighters, but by a partisan unit from Poland. The Brygada Swietokrzyska (Holy Cross Mountain's Brigade) was a unit of the Polish underground military force known as the Narodowe Sily Zbrojne (NSZ — National Armed Forces). Created during the summer of 1944, they refused to merge with the Armia Krajowa (Polish Home Army), instead choosing to operate as a unit of the NSZ-ZJ, an alliance of the NZN and the Zwiasek Jaszczurczy (ZJ — The Salamander Association), a military arm of the Oboz Narodowo Radykalny (ONR — National Radical Camp). Having crossed into western Czechoslovakia and fighting their way around the Protectorate, they were heading towards Pilsen in mid-April 1945 when, as

they approached the town of Tábor, they received intelligence from the Czech underground that SS forces were lying in wait to ambush them near the town. Taking a detour around Tábor, they moved in a westerly direction towards the German border which brought them to Holýšov.

Meanwhile the camp staff, aware of the approaching enemy yet unaware of their proximity, had begun to make preparations for their own departure, as fear spread among the prisoners who believed that their lives were in peril. At 1100 hours on the morning of May 5, whilst the starving prisoners nervously awaited their fate, members of the Polish partisan brigade emerged through the trees and approached the camp, climbing over the walls with guns firing and taking the guards completely by surprise. As the surrendering SS were rounded up in a corner of the yard, the partisans rooted out the petrified Aufseherinnen from their hiding places. The

prisoners had feared that the SS would wipe them all out at the last moment, but the swiftness of the assault meant that no such barbarity was possible.

As the gates of the camp were opened, the inmates appeared from their barracks — joyful that their torment was over. Some of the women left with the partisans, who continued on their journey. Those that stayed behind — some 700, mostly French women and Hungarian Jews — were either too weak to leave or chose to wait for the Allied forces.

On May 6, one day after the departure of the Polish partisans, American troops of the 2nd Infantry Division, part of the US Third Army, arrived at the camp. Eleven prisoners, including Polish, Hungarian and Soviet inmates, who had died shortly after the liberation were laid to rest in Holýšov's eastern graveyard. The surviving women remained in the camp for another five weeks until repatriation was organised to their respective countries.



**Right:** The new shed prevented Carl from taking an exact match but his comparison shows how the camp commander's office has been turned into a nice family home.



**Left:** American troops of the US 2nd Infantry Division arrived the following day, May 6. The French women were delighted to find that among them were French-speaking members of a Belgian unit attached to a US tank destroyer battalion. Here, freed prisoner Marie Michelin talks to some Allied troops in the



yard. The Belgian soldiers were instructed by the American medical staff to refrain from feeding the starved prisoners lest they suffer from digestive complications that might easily kill them. **Right:** Looking across the yard to the former prisoner blocks on its eastern side.





**A group of women gather outside one of the accommodation blocks on the northern side of the roll-call square.**

**POST-WAR TRIALS**

Several of the former SS-Aufseherinnen were investigated for war crimes after the war though not all of these enquiries led to prosecutions. Angela Ottenschläger, who had served at both Flossenbürg and Holleischen, was questioned regarding reports of her torturous behaviour towards inmates. Anna Hässler and Maria Dobner were also interrogated, Hässler whilst living at her parents house near Beroun, just outside Prague, in April 1946, and Dobner whilst heavily pregnant with a child rumoured to have been fathered by a US soldier. However, none of

teurs executed at Flossenbürg led to her being sentenced by a French Military Court in Rastatt to 15 years.

Some of the female guards escaped all judicial action. Anni Bräsick was arrested by the Polish partisans yet her fate is unknown. Frederike Schneider fled to her native Vienna and was never prosecuted.

Camp commandant Emil Fügner was never called to account for his deeds at Holleischen. A rumour circulated in post-war Czechoslovakia that he had been shot and killed by the Polish partisans during the liberation but in fact he escaped prosecution

and died in Aussig-an-der-Elbe (Ustí nad Lábem), an industrial city in the north of the present-day Czech Republic near to the German border, in 1966.

In 1968, the state attorney for Frankfurt-am-Main began an investigation against the MWH's former managing director, Walter Schlemp, but this led nowhere. Also the investigations into Holleischen carried out by the German Central Office of the State Justice Administrations for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes in Ludwigsburg, which were later taken over by the state attorney of Baden-Baden, were closed in 1976.



**The part of the building closest to the street has been turned into a family dwelling.**



**Left: Two of the French girls, Jackie Marnée (left) and Renée Braun (right), savour the freedom of being able to leave the**



**camp at their own choosing. Right: A group of survivors posing at the camp gate.**

the three women ever went on trial. Anna Schmidt, the first head of female guards, was investigated for her aggressive treatment of inmates but the case was officially closed in 1948 amid confusion regarding her identity and that of another A. Schmidt.

However, other ex-Aufseherinnen did not get off so lightly. Anna Rauner, born and raised in the Sudetenland, claimed that she had been pressurised into the role due to her background. Despite one prisoner's testimony that she had been pleasant and actually helped to keep them alive, she was found guilty, losing all her property and being sentenced to a term of seven years. Paula Seidl, Margit Heitler and Ernestine Frisch were all given sentences ranging from 12 to 18 months. The heaviest punishment was reserved for Anna Graf, whose report to Fügner concerning the three French sabo-

**Right: The same gate, now just an ordinary yard entrance.**







Left: Eleven of the freed prisoners died shortly after the liberation and were buried in the village cemetery. A large group of



their comrades attended the funeral. Right: Today marked with proper headstones, the graves remain carefully tended.

**AFTERMATH**

Before the end of the war, Jaroslav Picman, son of Václav, the farm's owner at the beginning of the occupation (who had died in 1940), had been arrested by the Gestapo in his Prague office for 'anti-state activity' and subsequently incarcerated in Pankrác Prison in Prague. Several months later, he was transferred to the Gestapo prison at Theresienstadt (Terezin), known as the Kleine Festung (small fortress), where he was given prisoner number 2484. He was hospitalised

in late April 1945 and died soon thereafter. Another son of the same family, Bohumil Picman, then took ownership of what was left of their property and tried to restore the farm but gave up in 1948.

Today, the former camp site is privately owned and although the original gateway and outer walls have been demolished, the majority of the original structures remain standing, including the main barracks, the former kitchen, SS canteen and offices and the sheep pen across the road. The MWH

installations at Werk I were utilised for various industrial enterprises, the last of which ceased operation around the turn of the century. Meanwhile, the structures that survived from Werk II have gradually been swallowed up by the advancing forest.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The author would like to thank Martina Meštanová, Jan Valeš, Rudolf Švec, Miroslav Skála, Annette Kraus, Gedenkstätte Flossenbürg, Magda Watts and Louis Gihoul.

Right: Today, a memorial outside the former camp records its dark history: 'On this site during the Second World War, there was a concentration camp for men and women of Russian, Polish, Dutch, Italian and French nationalities.' Commemorative services for the victims are held every year in May. Among those attending the ceremony on May 4, 2013 were (L-R) Czech historian Jan Valeš (far left), our author Carl Barwise (third from left) and Louis Gihoul, a Belgian veteran (fourth from left) who was with the US forces when they liberated the camp.



Above: A memorial plaque adorning the red triangle of French political prisoners was placed on the outside wall by the French Association of Former Inmates of Flossenbürg and its Satellite Camps. Below: Another wall plaque, dedicated in 2006, records the camp's liberation by Polish partisans of the Brygada Swietokrzyska (Holy Cross Brigade) on May 5, 1945.



At former Werk I, on the tower near the entrance, is a large mural memorial with the text: 'People, never forget what fascism means!' Next to it is a small plaque commemorating that this was the spot where on April 29, 1945 — a week before the liberation — several Italian prisoners were shot.