

AFTER THE BATTLE



FLOSSENBÜRG
CONCENTRATION CAMP



Number 131

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Front Cover: One of the watch-towers of Flossenbürg concentration camp. Between 1938 and 1945 thousands of prisoners (*inset*) were worked to death in the camp's granite quarries. (Karel Margry/NIOD)

Centre Pages: It is not the impregnable fortress of Dover Castle that is the only symbol of a nation's strength but it is also the unseen labyrinth of tunnels beneath the white cliffs that served England during the Second World War and afterwards. (FotoFlite, Ashford, Kent, TN23 4FB www.fotoflite.com)

Back Cover: The grandeur of a military funeral in Arlington National Cemetery.

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Flossenbürg was a small village in the wooded Fichtel Mountains in the Upper Palatinate in north-eastern Bavaria, close to the Czech border. Its granite quarries were conveniently situated to supply the huge Nazi building projects in Nuremberg.

In 1938, the Nazi regime set up three new concentration camps — Mauthausen, Flossenbürg and Neuengamme. Contrary to the camps established earlier — Dachau near Munich (opened in 1933), Sachsenhausen near Berlin (1936) and Buchenwald near Weimar (1937), which had been set up primarily to incarcerate political opponents of the regime — these camps of what could be called the second wave were primarily created for economic reasons.

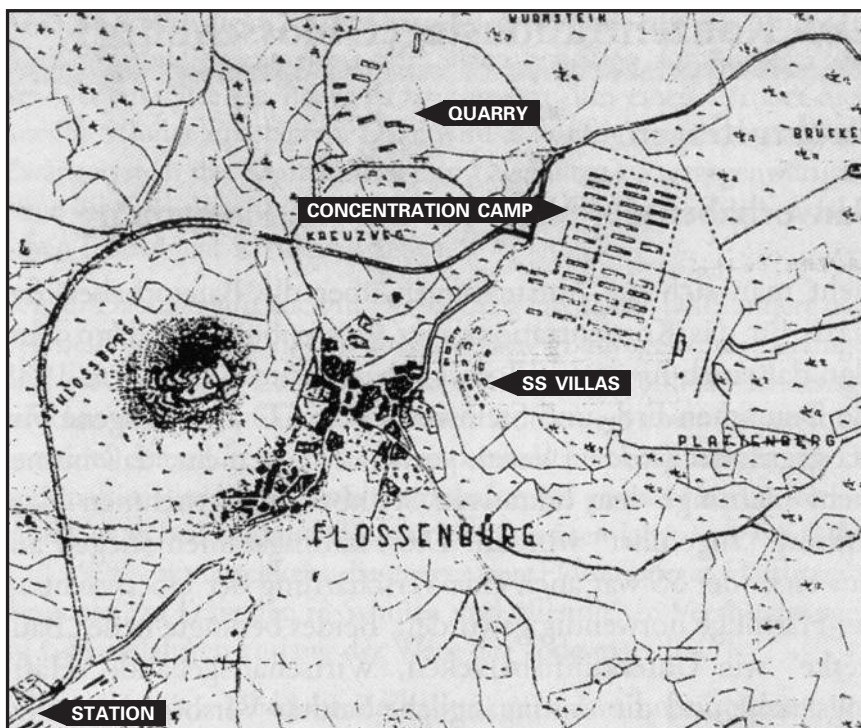
In April 1938 the SS had founded the firm of Deutsche Erd- und Steinwerke GmbH (German Earth and Stone Works Ltd — DEST), the main purpose of which was to set up brickworks and exploit granite quarries for the SS. The labour force for these enterprises was to be provided by concentration camp inmates.

The use of slave labour for the production of stone and brick under SS management was closely connected with the National Socialists' ambitious building programmes — directed by Albert Speer — designed to transform the Reich capital Berlin and other

cities such as Munich, Nuremberg, Weimar and Hamburg. The plan was jointly conceived by Speer and Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler.

In the already existing camps, brickworks were set up at the nearest location where suitable clay could be found: at Sachsenhausen they were at Lehnitz, two kilometres to the north-east; at Buchenwald they were at Berlstedt, six kilometres to the north. Buchenwald already had a stone quarry adjacent to it, and this also became part of the DEST concern.

The choice of the location of the new concentration camps was purely determined by the presence of suitable clay or workable granite. The site for Neuengamme, just south-east of Hamburg, was chosen because of the presence of blue clay on the site. The presence of stone quarries determined the location of Flossenbürg and Mauthausen, and also of two other camps established in 1940-41: Gross-Rosen in Lower Silesia and Natzweiler-Struthof (see *After the Battle* No. 108) in Alsace in occupied France.



The concentration camp and the quarries lay immediately north of the village.



Flossenbürg was one of the deadliest Nazi concentration camps. Between May 1938 and April 1945, over 100,000 persons passed through its gates, of which at least 30,000 perished through hard physical labour, illness and starvation, mistreatment and torture, wanton killing and deliberate executions. The first batches of prisoners sent to the camp consisted solely of so-called 'criminals' and 'anti-socials' but from September 1939 an increasing number of political prisoners arrived, from Germany itself and from the occupied countries, followed later by Russian prisoners of war and large contingents of Jews.

In all, prisoners from 30 different countries were registered in Flossenbürg. Decisive for the choice of location of the camp was the presence of granite stone, the SS-owned firm of Deutsche Erd- und Steinwerke (German Earth and Stone Works) having selected and acquired the site in 1938 with the special purpose of starting a quarry and using the camp inmates as cheap slave labour. The prisoners put to work in the granite pits suffered indescribable misery and thousands of them perished. Here the quarry workforce lines up for the mid-day soup. (NIOD)

Flossenbürg is a small village in the wooded Fichtel Mountains in the Upper Palatinate in northern Bavaria, close to the Czech border. In 1938 it had a population of some 1,200. High up in the hills, surrounded on all sides by deep woods, with few roads and only a small branch railway leading up to it, it is an isolated place. The nearest large town is Weiden, 13 kilometres to the south-west. Granite quarrying had taken place in this area for centuries, but never on a large scale.

On March 24, 1938, a commission of experts visited the village to survey its possibilities for setting up a quarry with associated concentration camp. The delegation consisted of SS-Gruppenführer Theodor Eicke, chief of the SS-Totenkopfverbände (SS Death's Head Units), which was to provide the camp's SS staff and guard detachment; SS-Gruppenführer Oswald Pohl, chief of the SS-Verwaltungsamt (SS Administrative Department), which supervised the DEST and other SS firms; Hubert Karl, a construction engineer from Pohl's office; Freiherr von Holzschuher, the Regierungspresident (chief administrator) of the Regensburg district of which Flossenbürg formed part; Freiherr von Waldenfels of the local Forestry Office; and Otto Fürnrohr, representing the Neustadt canton.

Their visit yielded a positive report and on July 1, the DEST concluded a 30-year lease contract with the land of Bavaria for the Wurmstein, an 820-metre-high granite massif just north of the village, where there already existed a small quarry.

Construction of the concentration camp, planned to house 1,600 slave labourers, had by then already begun. Konzentrationslager Flossenbürg was officially founded in late March-early April. Its first commandant was SS-Sturmbannführer Jakob Weiseborn, a professional who had gained his experience at Buchenwald.

The prisoners for the new camp began arriving in May. The first arrivals were transfers from other camps: between May 3 and July 1, 421 prisoners arrived from Dachau; then between August 8 and November 4 another 460 came from Buchenwald; finally

FLOSSENBÜRG

By Karel Margry

on November 17 and 26, 578 came in from Sachsenhausen — giving a grand total of some 1,500 inmates by the end of 1938.

All of these first arrivals belonged to categories of prisoners which the Nazis labelled 'criminals' and 'anti-socials'. Most of them had been arrested — 'taken into preventive custody', as the Nazis called it — in nationwide round-ups carried out by the Gestapo in March 1937 and March-April and June 1938. The 'criminals' group included many real villains — professional thieves, burglars,

swindlers, murderers — but especially the category of 'anti-socials' hid a wide variety of people whom the Nazis wanted to have removed from society simply because they did 'not fit into the national community': vagabonds, beggars, gypsies, pimps, alcoholics, persons considered 'work-shy', persons with convictions for creating disorders, doing bodily harm and causing brawls, etc.



The ruin of the Schlossberg castle towers above the village as before. Our comparison was taken on Bocksbühlweg, the road that leads from the camp to the quarries.



When the camp was established by the SS in May 1938, no facilities existed at all to house the prisoners or their SS guards, and the first arrivals — numbering 1,500 by the end of 1938 — had to both build the camp and start the quarrying. Construction was an on-going process, the first phase being completed in early 1940, but more huts and other facilities being continuously added in later years. This picture, taken sometime in late 1941 or early 1942, shows inmates at work just outside the camp. The buildings in the

foreground are those of the SS part of the camp, the two light-coloured huts on the right being those of the Medical and Dental Post on the SS compound's forecourt and the small square structure to their left the camp's transformer station. The stone building under construction on the terrace furthest left, higher up on the slope, is the SS-Kasino (SS canteen). The stone watch-towers guarding the prisoners enclosure, which lies behind the SS area, were completed in 1941. (NIOD)

While the arrest and detention of people on such grounds violated basic rights, the Nazis simply changed the laws to suit their purposes. Even with the real criminals, their imprisonment was in many cases illegal, for not based on a sentence after a trial but carried out as a preventive measure.

There was also a clear economic motive behind the mass arrests of these so-called criminals and anti-socials: in fact, the main purpose of the police actions of 1937-38 was not so much to protect the community against them but to provide forced labour for projects important to the Reich and for the SS-owned enterprises. This is evidenced by the fact that Himmler's orders for the round-ups specifically asked for able-bodied men and even specified the required number of them.

To mark the various categories of concentration camp prisoners the Nazis had introduced a uniform system. Each inmate had a triangular piece of cloth sewn to his prisoner's garment, with a different colour for each category: green for criminals, black for anti-socials, pink for homosexuals, purple for Jehovah Witnesses, red for political prisoners, and blue for emigrants. Jewish inmates in addition had an inverted yellow triangle sewn over their other triangle, which produced a six-pointed Star of David. Because the 'criminals' formed the majority of Flossenbürg's initial population, the camp soon became popularly known as 'the green camp' — a label which it retained even after large contingents of prisoners from other categories had arrived and the 'green triangles' no longer formed the majority.

The prisoners were immediately put to work, both on the construction of the camp and on the quarrying.

The site selected for the camp was a shallow valley located just 100 metres from the northern end of the village and 300 metres from the quarry. It was built on a series of terraces on either slope, and consisted of two adjoining sections, the SS-Bereich (SS compound) and the Schutzhaft-Bereich (prisoners compound). In both sections the same

type of standard wooden huts were erected, 12 for the SS and 13 (increased to 20 in 1940-41) for the prisoners. Five (later seven) of the huts in the SS compound were accommodation blocks to house the SS enlisted personnel, the other huts were used as offices, storages and workshops. In the prisoners compound there would eventually be 14 accommodation huts, two storage huts, two workshop huts and two hospital huts. The terrace layout of the site caused eternal problems with irrigation and an often poor supply of water, which would lead to very bad hygienic conditions, especially in the upper huts.

The camp's stone edifices (most of them completed in 1940 and 1941) were all at the bottom of the valley floor. Those in the SS compound included a two-storied gate building (housing the Kommandantur), a mess and a metal-workshop. Those in the prisoners compound included a camp kitchen, a laundry/bathhouse, a prison block, the latter known as 'the Bunker', and a crematorium. The square between the kitchen and bathhouse formed the Appellplatz (roll-call square). A high-tension barbed-wire fence and six stone watch-towers surrounded the prisoners' compound. To guard the camp at night, the towers were equipped with searchlights and other lamps were attached to the perimeter fence posts.

Entry into the prisoners enclosure was only possible though the SS compound, the passage being through a small gate. One of its posts was adorned with a plaque with the words 'Arbeit macht Frei' (Labour makes free) — the same cynical slogan used at other concentration camps.

Simultaneous with the construction of the camp, the prisoners also had to build a small settlement for the SS officers and NCOs and their families. Located on two terraces on the Plattenberg hill just south of the camp, it comprised a series of 13 blockhouse-type villas. They were ready in late 1938.

Quarrying began in the summer of 1938. The prisoners worked long days, starting at 6 a.m. and not finishing until 6.30 p.m. with

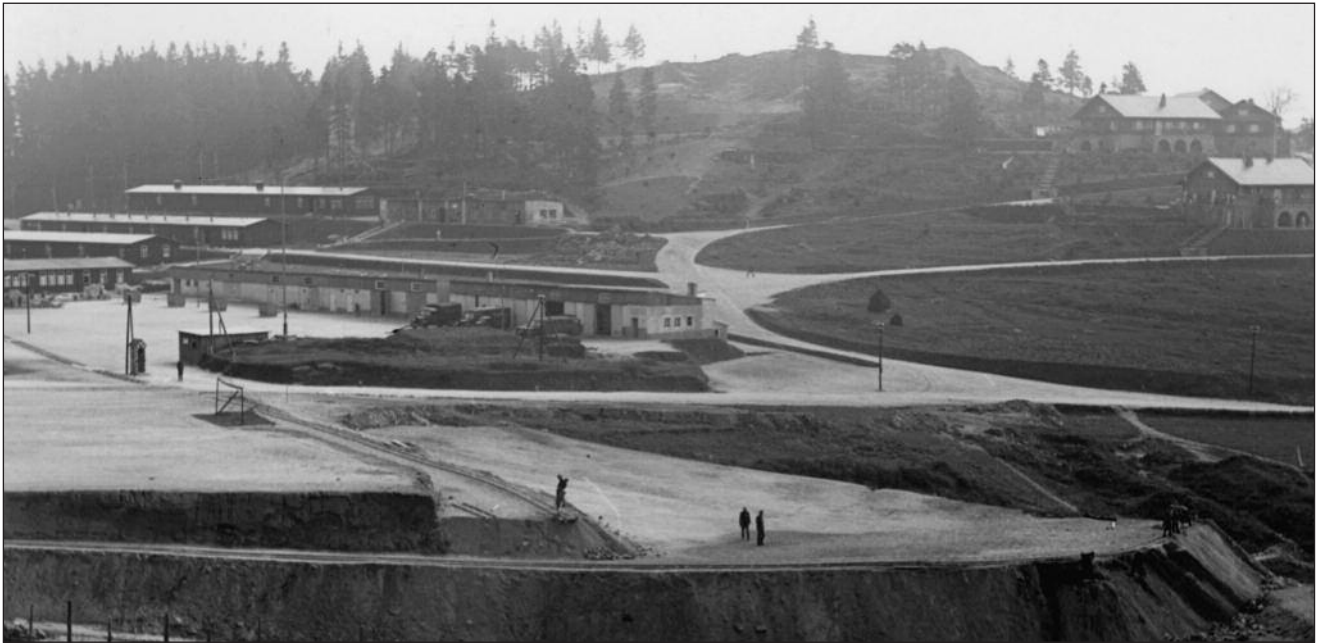
only an hour's break at midday. The labour was heavy, dangerous and exhaustive. The prisoners had to quarry by hand, using nothing heavier than primitive hammer drills and transporting the quarried stone with muscle power. Heavier equipment only became available later. Within a year, the DEST had opened three quarries in the Wurmstein massif with a total working area of 12 acres.

With its cheap labour, the Flossenbürg quarry quickly proved a very lucrative enterprise. Of the five DEST firms in existence in 1939 — the brickworks at Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen and Oranienburg and the quarries at Flossenbürg and Mauthausen — it was the only one to make money, yielding a profit of RM 70,000 in its first year.

Work continued through the harsh winter of 1938/39. With temperatures of 25 degrees below zero and without proper winter clothing, many inmates had fingers or feet frozen, but camp commander Weiseborn forced them to continue work nonetheless.

The camp outer perimeter and the quarry work site were secured by armed SS guards belonging to the Totenkopf-Sturmabteilung Flossenbürg. They watched the prisoners from the guard towers and patrolled the quarry. The guards needed very little excuse to open fire. Prisoners who attempted to flee were ruthlessly shot, but many others reported 'shot while trying to escape' had done nothing of the sort.

Camp commander Weiseborn instigated a severe camp regime characterised by strict discipline, long roll-calls, obligatory saluting, and cruel punishments for the slightest offence. The latter included beatings with whips or sticks in public and group punishments. Often, whole blocks had to stand or do exercises on the roll-call square for hours on end. Acts of wanton cruelty and violence were common. During the first winter, SS men sometimes enjoyed themselves by submerging a prisoner in a water basin and then letting him stand on the roll-call square until he was literally frozen stiff. If this treatment carried on long enough, the victim died within five to eight hours.



Another picture from around the same date, showing the view just to the right of the previous picture. The huts that are visible are again those of the SS compound, the ones against the slope being used as storage of prisoners' belongings and

offices. The long hut in the centre (Werkstatt) houses the SS garages and motor pool and the small stone building above it is the camp's metal-workshop. On the right are the villas built for the SS officers and NCOs. (NIOD)

The camp organisation in Flossenbürg followed the same system as in all Nazi concentration camps. The camp commander reigned supreme. His two chief subordinates were his Adjutant, who headed the Kommandantur staff, and the Schutzhaftlagerführer (preventive custody camp leader), the man in charge of the prisoners compound.

Flossenbürg's first Adjutant was SS-Hauptsturmführer Andreas Hansen, replaced in April 1940 by SS-Obersturmführer Lutz Baumgartner. He would hold this position till the end of the war and this long tenure alone, through a series of camp commanders, secured him a position of considerable power.

The first Schutzhaftlagerführer was SS-Hauptsturmführer Hans Aumeier. He was relieved in late 1941 by SS-Hauptsturmführer Karl Fritsch, who would stay for nearly two and a half years. When he left in March 1944, his task was taken over by Baumgartner, who now combined two of the most powerful positions in the camp. Baumgartner, Aumeier and Fritsch were all concentration camp professionals; all had been trained at Dachau camp and were ruthless, cruel characters, who maltreated inmates to death on many occasions.

Operating separate from the Kommandantur was the Politische Abteilung (Political Section), the Gestapo detachment within the camp, whose task it was to keep prisoner records, interrogate people, decide on a prisoner's release or continued detainment, assign penalties for political offences committed within the camp, etc. Consecutive chiefs of the Politische Abteilung were Kriminalkommissar Wilhelm Fassbender (from April 1938 to September 1943), Kriminalsekretär Fritz Multhaupt (until March 1944) and Kriminalobersekretär Konrad Blomberg (till April 1945).

A fourth section within the SS staff was that of the camp doctor, the first one being Dr Fritz Baader.

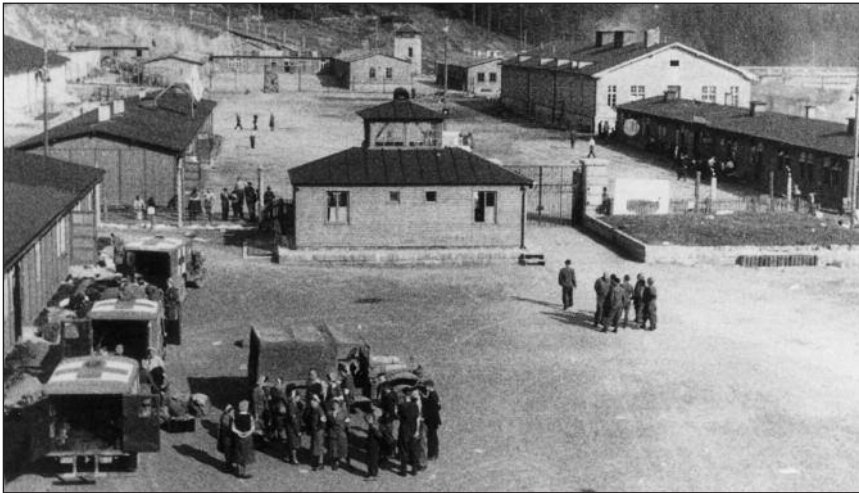
The total number of SS functionaries within the camp was small, a mere two dozen men. Most of the other duties within the camp were performed by inmates themselves. Prisoners appointed by the SS ran and manned the camp registrar, the kitchen, the bathhouse, the infirmary, the clothing depot, workshops, etc.



New trees block most of our view today but the roofs of the SS villas still stand out above the modern houses of Flossenbürg.



All 13 villas of the SS settlement survive completely unchanged, albeit now privately owned. They are along two streets named the Unterer Plattenberg and the Oberer Plattenberg.



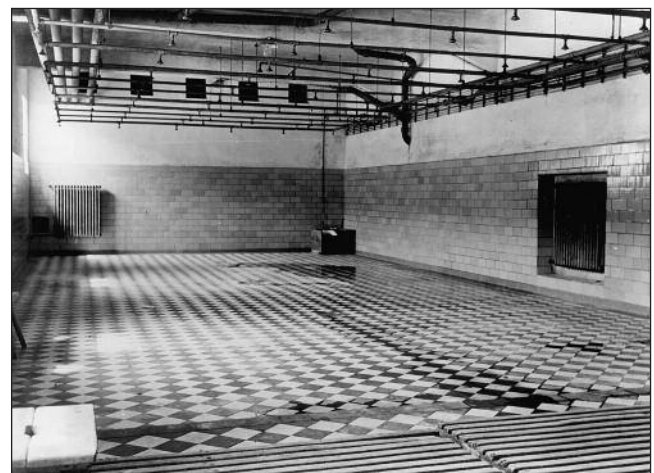
View of the central part of the Häftlingslager (prisoners' part of the camp) as seen from the SS compound. The small cabin in the foreground housed the office of the Rapportführer, the feared SS NCO responsible for taking roll-calls and general administrative duties. Behind it lies the Appellplatz (roll-call square), reached through the gate on the right. The two stone buildings on either side of this are the Lagerküche (camp kitchen), just visible on the left, and the Wäscherei (laundry/bath-house) on the right — both completed in 1940. The wooden huts on either side of the Rapportführer's hut are Blocks 1 (left) and 19 (right) and the huts on the far side of the roll-call square comprise the Baulager (construction yard and tool shop). The picture dates from April 1945. (NIOD)



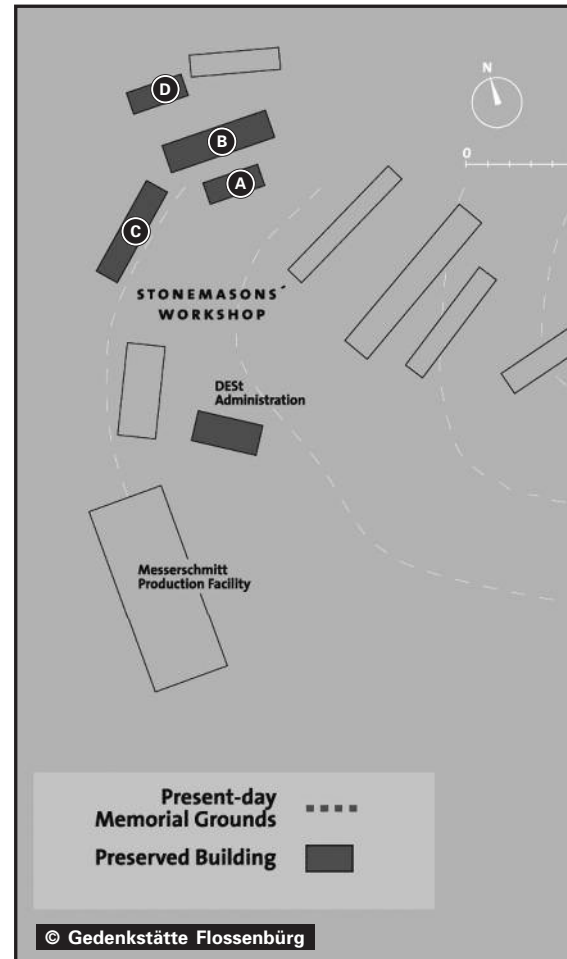
The kitchen and bath-house are today the only buildings surviving around the former roll-call square. For many years they were swallowed up by post-war factory workshops built around them and so were difficult to recognise. They emerged in their original state when the later buildings were removed in 2000.



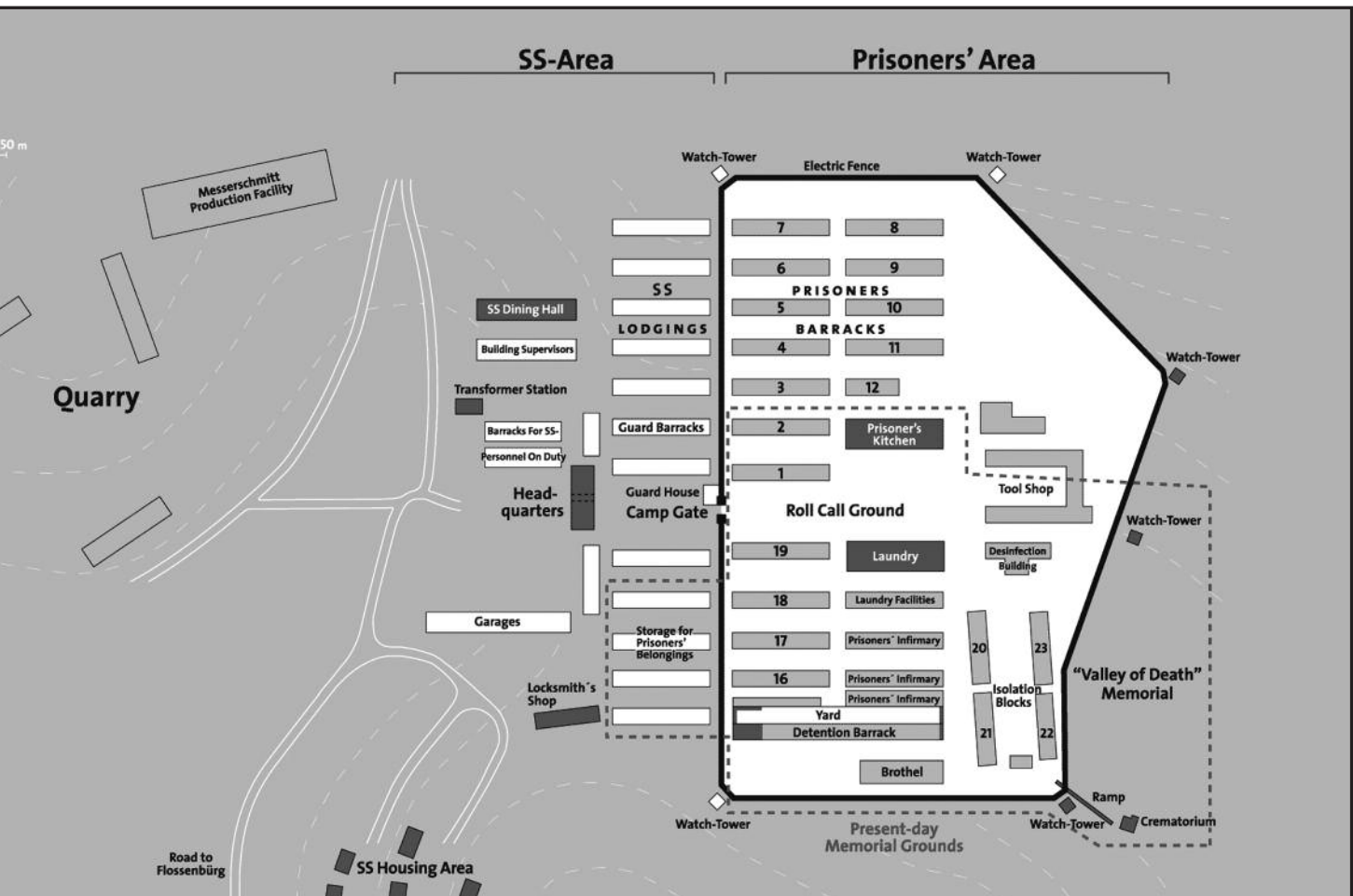
Left: The bath-house had a large hall on the ground floor and a laundry and large shower-room (pictured right in 1945) in the basement. Here, on arrival, new prisoners had to hand over their clothes and all their personal belongings. Next, all their body hair was shaved, they were showered, and then issued



with the blue and grey striped prisoner's uniform and assigned a prisoner's number. Once a month the prisoners had to hand in their clothes for delousing at the laundry. While this was being done they had to stand naked in the shower-room.



The SS instituted a kind of prisoners self-government, appointing a Lagerälteste (Camp Elder), Blockältesten (Hut Elders) and so-called Kapos (prisoners overseeing prisoner work squads). The cynical system was designed to cause rifts between the prisoners and prevent solidarity among them. Prisoner functionaries and Kapos yielded powerful positions and enjoyed certain privileges, but the SS could take these away from them at will. Some men did everything to help and protect their fellow prisoners but others thought only of their own survival or became brutal and violent despots. Many a Kapo was hated as much as the SS.



Because they were the first arrivals, the 'green triangles' — the prisoners with a criminal background — secured most of the privileged positions, and kept them long after this group ceased to be the majority within the camp. The first two Camp Elders — Willi Rettenmeier (who held the function from May 1938 to June 1941) and a man named Kliefoth (June 1941 to end of 1942) — were both 'green triangles'. Many prisoner functionaries and Kapos developed a clientele, a clique of their own, quite a few of them based on homosexual relations. Corruption, denunciations and black-market activities were the order of the day in these circles.

On January 20, 1939, camp commander Weiseborn was found dead at his villa. He had committed suicide, apparently because he feared being prosecuted for embezzlement committed at Buchenwald. His successor was SS-Obersturmführer Karl Künstler, who would remain camp commander for three years. The prisoners' initial impression of him was that he was an improvement but his arbitrariness and increasing bouts of drunkenness made him as hated as his predecessor.

A major change occurred at Flossenbürg in September 1939. With the outbreak of war, the camp at Dachau was temporarily closed (it was needed for the mobilisation of

the first Waffen-SS division) and its inmates were divided over three other camps, Buchenwald, Mauthausen and Flossenbürg. Hence, on September 27, a transport of some 1,000 prisoners arrived in Flossenbürg from Dachau. Most of these were 'red triangles' — political prisoners — incarcerated because of their opposition to the Nazi regime, and their arrival completely changed the composition of the camp population. Although they were housed in separate blocks, they were assigned 'green triangles' as Kapos.

At Christmas 1939 dysentery broke out among the prisoners, which spread rapidly but completely surprised the SS staff. There



Left: Another view of the roll-call square, pictured after the liberation of the camp by American forces in April 1945. Every morning and evening the prisoners had to stand here, often for hours on end, while the SS counted them. It was the scene of many acts of cruelty. In March 1941, after a Polish prisoner had escaped, all Polish inmates had to stand here for 20 hours, while the SS picked out individuals for ill-treatment. About 40



men did not survive this group punishment. The same happened in August 1941, and this time the Poles had to stand for 50 hours and over 100 of them succumbed. The SS used the electricity pole as gallows, the other inmates being forced to watch the execution. (USNA) *Right:* The gallows have gone but the camp kitchen survives. Note that its door has been moved two windows to the left.



The prisoners compound as it looked in its final form. The huts were of a standard type designed to accommodate 300 men but in 1944-45 almost 1,000 persons were crammed into each. Note the barbed-wire fence on the left, separating the area from the SS part of the camp. Six stone guard towers, interspersed at intervals with 12 smaller wooden guard platforms, ringed the enclosure. A seventh stone tower stood halfway between the camp and the quarry.

was no prepared quarantine block, no suitable medicine and no medical expertise to fight the epidemic, so the SS just locked the inmates in their compound and let the contagion run its course. For a month all quarrying was stopped. As soon as the infection was over, work was resumed.

On March 2, 1940, 921 prisoners of the Dachau group (in five months 56 had died) were sent back to that camp. To replace them, 823 men arrived from Sachsenhausen on April 8 and 10, most of them again political prisoners. By now the camp held some 2,500 inmates, about one-third of them 'red triangles'. Although the latter were no longer held in separate huts, the 'green triangle' criminals still held all the privileged jobs.

Until now prisoners had always arrived in the camp as groups but, starting in April 1940, police authorities also began to send individual detainees straight into the camp.

Also, for the first time, prisoners of other nationalities began arriving. These were almost always political prisoners, people arrested for anti-Nazi activities, underground workers, resistance fighters. The first, reaching the camp on April 5, were 98 Czechs from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Many of the German 'green triangle' Kapos treated the non-German prisoners with even more violence than meted out against their fellow countrymen.

Another new category of prisoners assigned to Flossenbürg for the first time during this period was Jews. The first of them, comprising German, Polish and Czech Jews, arrived in mid-1940 and they grew to a group of about 80. They became the favourite target of SS bullying and by mid-1942 at least 72 of them had succumbed to maltreatment or been shot by guards. On October 19 of that year, on Himmler's order to concentrate all Jews in special camps, the last 19 survivors were shipped off to Auschwitz and Lublin in Poland.

In 1941 and 1942 Flossenbürg received a large influx of Polish prisoners, some 1,500 of them arriving in each year. First, in January 1941, was a group of 583 political prisoners — arrested resistance fighters and partisans — sent from the prison camp at Auschwitz. Between February 6 and September 8, on special Gestapo orders, at least 186 of them were executed by SS firing-squads. The group

killings took place on the SS shooting range, which lay in the shallow valley just outside and behind the prisoners compound, near the camp crematorium. The largest execution took place on July 2, when 40 of the Poles were shot. Camp commander Künstler and Schutzhaftlagerführer Aumeier both participated in the killings, the latter giving those not immediately dead the coup de grâce.

Later Polish arrivals were mostly civilians who had been deported to Germany to work in agriculture or industry, then taken in police custody for refusal to work, absenteeism, relations with German girls or other offences — and sent to a concentration camp for it. Of those who arrived in 1941, 166 succumbed to maltreatment or perished in the first year. In all, of the 696 inmates who died in Flossenbürg in 1941, nearly half — 343 — were Poles.

In September 1941, yet another category of prisoners began arriving: Soviet prisoners of war who had been singled out for execu-

tion either because they were Marxist political commissars, members of the intelligentsia, Jews or due to illness or invalidity. Men thus selected were transferred from POW camps to concentration camps to be eliminated. At Flossenbürg the first such group of 17 Russians was executed on September 4. By mid-1942, 330 had died this way. In all, between 1941 and 1944 an estimated 800-1,000 Russian POWs were murdered at the camp.

Until April 1942 the killings were carried out as executions on the rifle range near the crematorium. However this method had to be abandoned because the repeated salvos could be heard outside the camp; because the local population complained about blood and even body parts polluting the local brook, and because the strain was too much for the SS gunmen. From then onwards, the Soviet POWs were killed by lethal injections, applied in the crematorium building by the camp's SS doctor, Dr Richard Trommer. At least 200 Russians were disposed of in this way. Others were killed in the crematorium by means of a neck shot. The large number of bodies to be disposed of severely overtaxed the crematorium's single oven.

By early 1940, the first building phase of the camp was over. No sooner was the camp ready or preparations began for its expansion, the plan being to raise its capacity from 1,600 to 3,000. Prisoners were put to work removing part of the slope on which the camp lay to create new space for additional huts. Construction of the new blocks was coupled with the electrifying of the wire fence around the prisoners compound.

The planned expansion of the camp was directly connected to SS plans to raise production of the quarry. The yield achieved in 1939 had been 4,700 cubic metres of stone, and 3,000 cubic metres in 1940, but for 1941 the DEST aimed to increase output to 12,000 cubic metres. For that purpose the company had leased further land to start a fourth quarry, and purchased modern cranes and equipment to supplement the manual labour provided by the camp inmates. At the same time, to keep the death rate among the slave workers down, instructions were issued to curb some of the excessive bullying and punishments by the SS guards and Kapo overseers. To improve the quality of production, Himmler ordered that selected inmates should be trained as stonemasons and be rewarded with extra canteen coupons for their improved work.



Today new houses, built in the late 1950s, occupy the northern terraces of the former camp.

The quarries were located just a few hundred yards west of the camp. This picture, taken shortly after the war, was taken from the quarry's main crane looking back towards the village and shows the various workshops on site. The stone building at the top of the slope, below the castle ruin, is the DEST-Verwaltungsgebäude (administrative building) housing the Deutsche Erd- und Steinwerke manager and his staff.

The fourth quarry, started in 1941, grew to encompass an area of 25 acres. Like in its first year, Flossenbürg remained the most profitable of all the DEST works, producing 39.3 per cent of the concern's revenues in 1940, 24.6 per cent in 1941, 20.5 per cent in 1942 and 27 per cent in 1943.

In January 1941, the Reichssicherheits-hauptamt (Reich Main Security Department — RSHA) divided the concentration camps into four categories, criteria being the seriousness of the inmates' offence and their usability for work. Category Ia was for prisoners 'inapt for work or likely to improve'; Category I was for those 'not too seriously charged and who could be employed in light work'; Category II was for 'more seriously charged prisoners yet still likely to improve and to better'; and Category III for 'heavily charged prisoners and for criminals and anti-socials unlikely to be re-educated'.

Flossenbürg was ranked a Category II camp, together with Buchenwald, Neuengamme and Auschwitz II (Birkenau). The two lighter categories included Dachau, Sachsenhausen and Auschwitz I; the heaviest category was reserved for Mauthausen. Although this grouping was not meant to describe the harshness of the regime in the various camps, it is however an indicator that assignment to Flossenbürg meant hard labour.

A better indication of the camp's severity and deadliness is a document from 1943 listing deaths in 19 different camps for the month of August. It shows that of the 4,800 prisoners present in Flossenbürg on August 1, a total of 155 died that month — a death rate of 3.2 per cent. This made Flossenbürg the fourth-deadliest camp on the list, surpassed only by Maidanek (7.6 per cent), Auschwitz (4.4 per cent) and Stutthof (3.4 per cent) in Poland, but before Mauthausen (1.3 per cent), Buchenwald (0.6 per cent) or Dachau (0.2 per cent) — at least for that moment of the war.

As part of the proposed increase of productivity, the Germans also planned to transfer Soviet prisoners of war to Flossenbürg, this time not to kill them off but to put them to work in the quarries. The idea to employ Russian POWs at Flossenbürg had been first broached in February 1941, a full four months before the actual invasion of the Soviet Union. And so, in October 1941, 2,000 Russian POWs arrived in Flossenbürg. They were housed in a special wired-off enclosure, known as the Sonderlager (Special Camp), which initially comprised Huts Nos. 11, 12 and 13. Already exhausted, underfed and infected with typhoid, the Russians suffered a terribly high death rate, over 300 of them succumbing within three months. In the summer of 1942, four horse-stable huts were completed to house the Russian POWs, by now much reduced in numbers. However, that September most of the POWs were transferred to other camps, 650 going to Mauthausen and another 600 to Neuengamme and Sachsenhausen. The four stable huts, which stood in a plot between the prisoners compound and the crematorium, were henceforth used as quarantine blocks for new arrivals. By the war's end only 107 Russian POWs remained in the camp.

From early 1942, a growing number of Soviet civilians — as opposed to Soviet prisoners of war — was incarcerated in Flossenbürg. Like the Polish civilians, they had been



rounded up for forced labour in their motherland and deported to Germany, then taken in police custody for refusal to work or other offences and sentenced to a stay in Flossenbürg. By the end of 1942 their number had risen to about 2,000.

As the war progressed, an increasing number of political prisoners from the occupied countries of Western Europe — France, Belgium, Holland — ended up in Flossenbürg. Most of them belonged to the special category of so-called 'Nacht und Nebel' (Night and Fog) prisoners. These were persons arrested for anti-German activities whom the Sicherheitspolizei wanted tried by special courts in Germany and disappear in concentration camps without their families getting any news of their fate.

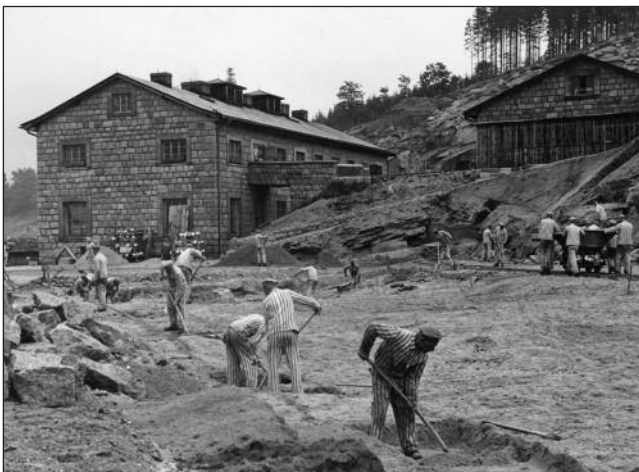
By early 1943, composition of the camp population had changed to such an extent that the original group — the criminals and anti-socials — no longer formed the majority. Nor were the German nationals the largest group. A daily record taken on February 8 shows a total of 4,004 inmates (excluding the Soviet POWs in the Special Camp). Of these, 2,033 were listed as political detainees, the majority of which were non-Germans (Russians, Czechs, a few Frenchmen and Dutch); 782 as criminals; 66 as work-shy persons; 105 as homosexuals; 11 as Wehrmacht penal convicts; 7 as Jehovah Witnesses and 1 person convicted for 'racial shame' (sexual relationship with a non-Aryan). The latter six categories, totalling 1,971 persons, were almost exclusively made up of Germans.



The DEST building survives unchanged, although much in need of repair. The former Nazi quarries are today exploited by the Oberpfälzer Steinindustrie GmbH, taken over by Jakob AG in 1975.



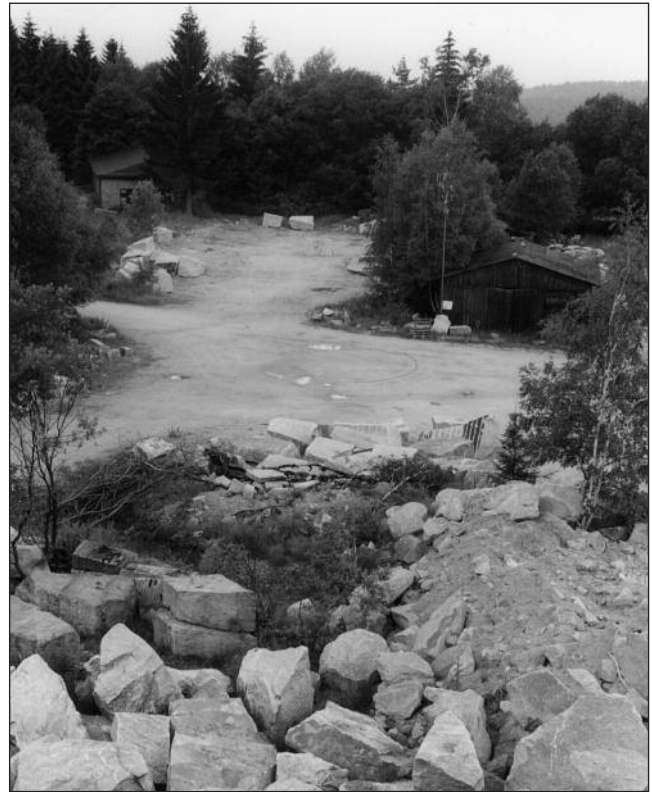
Above: Max Wittmann, an Austrian prisoner at Flossenbürg from 1941 to 1943, recalled the hard labour in the quarry: 'What a terrible coldness is embedded in the stones! Such a deadly enemy! The skip wagons are loaded full and brought to the various workshops where prisoners are working as stonemasons. In a large depression, which has filled up with mud and melted snow, about 20 prisoners are stumbling around with heavy stones on their back. They are from the penal company. The devil knows why these poor lads are being tortured like this. Suddenly a shouted command: "Lie down!" We all drop to the ground. Yet another one, unable to continue any longer, has walked into the wire. Gunshots ring out. One more prisoner "shot during flight".' In this picture, the DEST managerial building again appears on the horizon. (NIOD) Right: Today, only the stone buildings and parts of some huts survive in the original, much-overgrown quarry. This is the building marked [B] on the picture on page 9 (and on the plan on page 6-7) with [A] in the background.



Prisoners levelling the ground for the construction of a new stone building behind buildings [B] and [A]. (NIOD)



Our comparison was taken closer in, with our back against the wall of the quarry's transformer station.



Above: Before 1940 the men had to quarry by hand with nothing more sophisticated than picks and jack-hammers. Later heavier equipment such as cranes became available. The granite was sold for use in the Reich's prestigious building projects, the residue being used for autobahn construction. The building on the left is the quarry's garage [D]. (NIOD) *Top right:* The garage can be seen among the trees on the left. Part of the shed on the extreme right also survives.

By this phase of the war, the function of the concentration camps had changed from being primarily institutions to lock up and eliminate opponents of the regime to centres important to the Reich's war economy. The priority had shifted from 'elimination through work' to getting the highest productivity out of the cheap slave labourers. The start of the new policy had been clearly marked in March 1942, when the Inspektion der Konzentrationslager (Inspection of Concentration Camps), the SS office administrating all the camps, was made a sub-department of the SS-Wirtschaftsverwaltungshauptamt (SS Main Department for Economic Administration — WVHA).

The new task of the camps also showed itself in the appointments of camp commanders but, in the case of Flossenbürg, this did not work out very well. On August 10, 1942, camp commander Künstler was relieved from his post. By now an SS-Obersturmbannführer, he had made himself impossible with his superiors by his continued drunkenness

Right: Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler visited Flossenbürg only once — in April 1940. Here he is (second from right) inspecting the DEST quarry accompanied by the camp commandant, SS-Obersturmführer Karl Künstler (behind Himmler), the camp's Adjutant, SS-Obersturmführer Lutz Baumgartner (behind Künstler) and the Schutzhaftlagerführer (commander of the prisoners' camp), SS-Hauptsturmführer Hans Aumeier (on the left). Himmler's visit was in connection with plans to expand the camp and increase production of the quarries.



Prisoners working on the granite blocks. (NIOD)

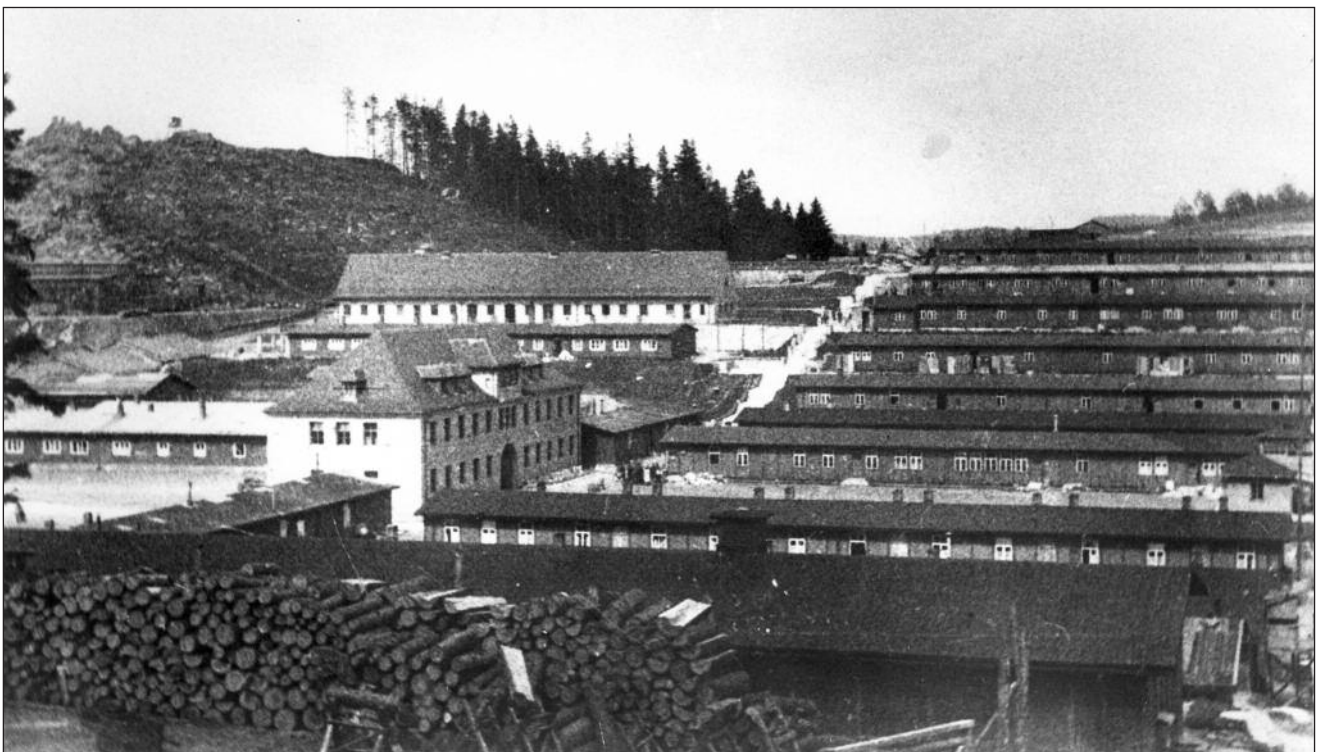




Left: This is the new Kommandantur building which was completed in 1942. It housed the offices of the camp commandant and the Schutzhaftlagerführer and was also where the Gestapo interrogated and tortured prisoners. As in other concentration camps, the gateway was planned to be the central



entrance to the prisoners enclosure but because construction work on the camp was never finished, the prisoners' enclosure actually started 50 metres behind the building. *Right:* The former SS-Kasino (canteen) is today occupied by the Café-Restaurant Plattenberg.



View of the SS compound as it looked after 1942. On the right are the accommodation blocks for the SS personnel. On the

left now stands the Kommandantur building with the SS-Kasino on the terrace behind it. (NIOD)

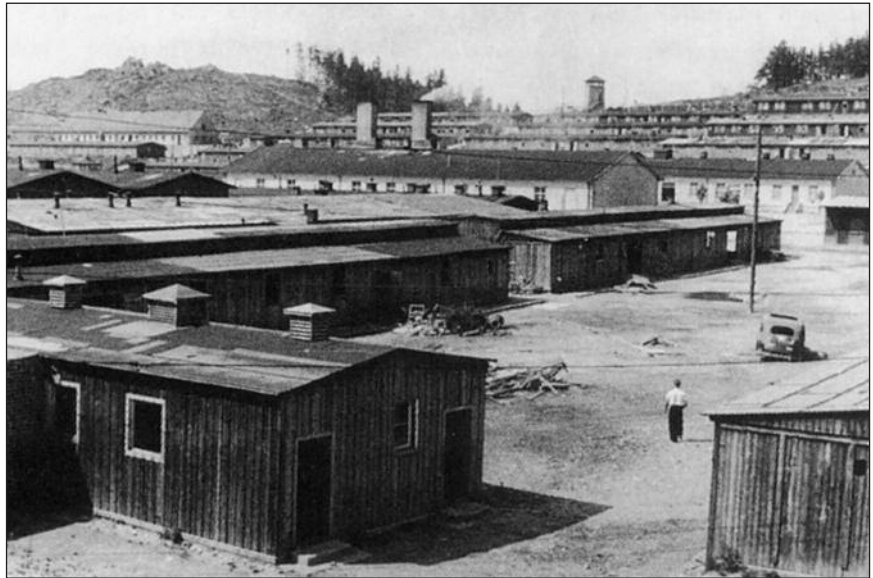
and unwillingness to co-operate with the DEST quarry manager Alois Schubert. SS-Hauptsturmführer Karl Fritsch, the Schutzhaftlagerführer, acted as interim commandant until the appointment in mid-September of SS-Sturmbannführer Egon Zill, who had previously been commander of the Natzweiler camp. However, Zill did not stay long, soon showing himself overtaxed by the rapidly expanding size and economic activities of the camp. In late April 1943 he was relieved by SS-Sturmbannführer Max Koegel, a man with many years of concentration camp experience, having served at Dachau and Lichtenberg and then commanded Ravensbrück and Maidanek camps. However, he too was unable to cope with running a large enterprise, something which he tried to compensate by acting brutally against the inmates, yet he would remain until the end.

Like all concentration camps, and as a corollary to its growing economic activity, Flossenbürg from early 1942 developed an



SS-Obersturmbannführer Max Koegel, the fifth and last camp commandant of Flossenbürg, who reigned from April 1943 to April 1945. Born on October 16, 1895 at Füssen, and having joined the NSDAP and SS in 1932, Koegel was one of the professional camp operatives trained at Theodor Eicke's 'concentration camp school' at Dachau where he served from 1933 to 1937 (his latest positions there being Schutzhaftlagerführer, then Adjutant of the camp commander). He then served as director of the Lichtenberg women's camp (1937) and as director (1938-39), then camp commander of Ravensbrück (January 1940-August 1942) and of Maidanek (August 1942-January 1943) before coming to Flossenbürg in April 1943. After the war he tried to hide under a false name, having appropriated the identity papers of one of his prisoners. Arrested by the American CIC on June 26, 1946 he died the following day, after having attempted to hang himself in his cell.

Right: In October 1941, some 2,000 Russian prisoners of war were incarcerated at Flossenbürg, in a separate POW enclosure run by the Wehrmacht. The Russians were initially put in Blocks 11, 12 and 13, but in March 1942 four large wooden huts were erected for them on a separate plot adjacent to the prisoners compound. Of the Type RL 260/9 model, they were essentially horse stables, far more primitive than the standard camp huts. By the time they were ready for use, most of the Russian POWs had already perished. Conveniently closed off from the rest of the camp by a barbed-wire fence, the huts (numbered 21 to 23) then became the camp's quarantine area, where new arrivals were kept for a few days to make sure they did not carry any dangerous diseases and where prisoners infected by contagious diseases, such as typhoid and tuberculosis, were isolated. This picture looks across the quarantine area, with Blocks 20 and 21 on the left and 22 just visible on the right. The small building in the left foreground is the area's latrine hut.



increasing number of satellite camps. Groups of prisoners, their numbers varying from a few dozen to several hundred people, were sent out to places far and near to be employed in building activities, factory work, war production, and many other tasks. Some sub-camps were only temporary, others developed into permanent establishments, often with an SS reign as bad or worse as in the main camp. The number of Flossenbürg's satellite camps rose from just six in 1942 to 17 in 1943, to 75 in 1944 and to over 100 in 1945. Most of these sub-camps were located in the regions closest to it — Bavaria, Saxony, and Bohemia. Many had a workforce made up of female prisoners, transferred here from Ravensbrück or other camps, and then subordinated to Flossenbürg. Of the 92 sub-camps that existed at the war's end, 35 were women camps.

Flossenbürg's two largest and most infamous sub-camps were at Happurg near Hersbruck (25 kilometres east of Nuremberg) and Leitmeritz (just across the Czech border), both set up in late 1944, at each of which some 6,000 inmates were put to work excavating tunnels for underground armaments production under the most excruciating conditions.

In early 1943, Flossenbürg gained in economic importance by expanding into the armaments industry. The Messerschmitt aircraft factory in Regensburg, a main production centre for Bf 109 fighters, had approached the DEST Flossenbürg with the

proposal to employ camp inmates in the fabrication of aircraft parts. An agreement was reached and on February 5, production was started, 200 inmates manufacturing tin casings for aircraft parts. Production took place in two big factory halls erected in the quarry grounds. Messerschmitt provided machines, raw materials and qualified foremen. The camp's aircraft works operated under the name 'Kommando 2004'.

The shift to aircraft fabrication brought definite improvements for the inmates. Work was indoors, protected from the elements; the Messerschmitt engineers, technicians and foremen generally behaved correctly towards the prisoners; and food rations were better.

To reward prisoners and stimulate them to work harder, in the summer of 1943 a camp brothel was opened in a hut behind the prison block. Visits were almost the exclusive privilege of prisoner functionaries and Kapos. The price of a visit was two Reichsmark. The prostitutes detained here, 12 on average, were deportees themselves, selected and transferred here from the Ravensbrück women's camp. After six months' service the girls were shipped off to Auschwitz and replaced by a new crew.

After most of the Regensburg factory was destroyed by Allied bombing on August 17, Messerschmitt transferred further production to Flossenbürg (and to Mauthausen). The number of inmates employed on aircraft production at Flossenbürg rose from 800 in

August 1943 to 1,500 in December. By March 1944, 2,200 were engaged and producing all parts for the Bf 109 except the engine, guns and controls. Production was round the clock, initially in two shifts of 11½ hours, later in three shifts of eight hours. In October 1944 Messerschmitt production at the camp reached its zenith, 5,000 inmates turning out 180 frames and wings. Thereafter production figures decreased due to lack of raw materials.

As the importance of Flossenbürg's aircraft production grew, so that of granite production decreased, and by mid-1944 the number of men working in the DEST quarry had fallen to some 1,000 men.

The reign of the Kapos continued as before, although slightly less brutal and corrupt compared to the early years. By 1944, the monopoly of the 'green triangles' on the privileged prisoner jobs had somewhat lessened. In late 1942, the SS had for the first time appointed a 'red triangle' political prisoner as Camp Elder — first Karl Mayer, then in early 1943 Karl Mathoi. Also, with the accelerated creation of the sub-camps from 1942 onwards, many of the old 'green triangle' Kapos had been transferred out of the main camp, opening up privileged jobs to the 'red triangle' political prisoners. By 1944, some of the camp functions even fell to the non-German inmates, mostly Poles and Czechs. However, the 'green triangles' maintained their grip on many of the crucial positions.



Left: In February 1943 Flossenbürg shifted to war production, the inmates being put to work fabricating parts for the Messerschmitt Bf 109 fighter. In due course, two large Messerschmitt production halls were erected in the quarry grounds, the one seen here being located just opposite the camp entrance, and



the other just south of the DEST managerial building (see the map on page 6-7). *Right:* The interior of one of the Messerschmitt halls, pictured in 1945. By October 1944, 5,000 inmates were employed in aircraft fabrication, turning out an average of seven aircraft every 24 hours. (USNA)

Right: Another shot of the Schutzhaft-lager showing two other special buildings. The hut on the right is the Sonderbau (Special Building), a camouflage name for what was actually the camp brothel. Set up in the summer of 1943 and crewed with female prisoners selected from the women's camp at Ravensbrück, its purpose was to provide an extra incentive to the inmates to work harder. The brothel housed on average 12 girls (note the number of chimneys, one for each cubicle). Some of them had been professional prostitutes, others had been lured by the SS's false promises of release afterwards. However, after a six-month stint they were sent to Auschwitz and killed, to be replaced by new girls. The long building to the left of the Sonderbau is the Arrestbau (camp prison block). Built in 1940, it comprised a wall-enclosed courtyard and a cell block containing 40 separate cells. (USNA)



Despite the increase of political prisoners with a Socialist or Communist background, Flossenbürg never saw the organisation among the inmates of mutual solidarity groups or underground anti-Fascist committees organising resistance or sabotage, such as existed in most other camps. A few examples of such activities are known from some of the sub-camps, but hardly any from the main camp. The main instance of resistance was a revolt by the inmates, mostly Russians, of the sub-camp at Mülsen-St Michel in Saxony on the night of May 1/2, 1944. The SS guards smothered the escape attempt in bullets. The instigators of the revolt were transferred back to the main camp and at least 40 of them were executed in the prison cell block between June and September 1944.

These killings formed part of a whole series of deliberate executions, which began in April 1944 and lasted for over a year, until the very last days of the war. They all took place in the wall-enclosed yard of the penal block and were either by hanging or by a neck shot. In all, between April 1944 and April 1945, an estimated 1,500 persons were thus killed. The victims included several categories of people, both men and women: camp inmates who had attempted to escape or committed acts of sabotage; foreign labourers, Soviet POWs or German civilians who had been sentenced to death for various offences and whom the German police transferred to Flossenbürg to be executed there; Allied agents dropped behind German lines to organise sabotage and resistance; and Germans involved in the July 20 plot to kill Hitler.

In need of ever more labourers to keep the Reich's dispersing war factories going, from mid-1944 the SS began transferring large



Most of the Arrestbau was pulled down in 1964, but the foundations of the cells and the courtyard walls remain. On the left are the bath-house and the kitchen building. Note also the watch-tower on the hill above — one of the three surviving today.

numbers of Jewish prisoners from ghettos and camps in Poland to the Reich. Many Jews had originally been sent to Poland to be gassed or worked to death, but now their value as cheap labour was more important. By 1944, the largest surviving group were the Hungarian Jews, whose deportation had only begun in the spring of that year. Between

August 1944 and January 1945 at least 10,000 Jews were sent to Flossenbürg and its sub-camps. The largest groups included one of 2,699 from Krakow on August 4; one of 2,238, mostly Polish Jews, from Warsaw on October 28; and a total of 3,189 Hungarian Jews arriving in marching groups straight from Hungary in November-December.



Left: Incarcerated in the Arrestbau were inmates who had committed an offence against camp rules, persons who had been sentenced to death, and special VIP prisoners from Germany and abroad. Over 1,000 executions by neck-shot or hanging took place in the courtyard. For the latter the SS had affixed six



hooks on the courtyard wall on which a beam could be placed to be used as gallows. The hut overlooking the prison yard from the terrace above was part of the SS compound. (USNA) *Right:* The small part left standing of the prison block houses two preserved cells and a small exhibition.



On April 23, 1945, troops of the US 90th Infantry Division, part of the US Third Army, liberated Flossenbürg. The Americans found the camp almost completely empty, the SS having marched out over 14,000 inmates just three days earlier, driving them south in attempt to reach Dachau. The Americans found only the 1,526 sick inmates which the SS had left behind in the camp hospital. Here two GIs inspect a banner hung up by the remaining prisoners on the camp forecourt. Note that, despite the fact that it is the last week of April, snow has still not melted — evidence of the harsh climate at this high spot in the mountains. (USNA)

Most of the new arrivals were sent to and put to work at one of Flossenbürg's many satellite camps. By the end of 1944, Flossenbürg and its sub-camps held a total of some 40,000 prisoners, 11,000 of them women. The number of inmates held in the main camp had by now doubled to some 8,000. Rather than build additional huts outside the confined space of the valley, the SS cramped ever more people into the same number of huts. Day and night shifts could share the same bed, but problems arose when prisoners had a day off. Hygienic conditions in the overcrowded huts became a nightmare. Tuberculosis ran rampant, completely filling up Block 13, the TBC quarantine block. In late September 1944 a typhoid epidemic broke out, which exacted a heavy toll. So many prisoners were affected that two huts, Blocks 20 and 21 in the north-east corner of the camp, were separated from the rest of the camp with barbed wire and turned into a quarantine area. Known as 'Chinatown', these huts became true charnel-houses with some 50 patients succumbing each day for weeks on end.

From the spring of 1944, prisoners who were too sick or invalid to work could be transferred to the camp at Bergen-Belsen, which the WVHA had stipulated as dumping ground for 'unproductive' prisoners (see *After the Battle* No. 89). The first 120 sick inmates left Flossenbürg for Bergen-Belsen on August 24. The next batch of 180 followed on October 3.

The year 1944 saw the murderous activity of one of the camp medical doctors, Dr. Heinrich Schmitz. Suffering from manic depressions, Schmitz was a loose canon who alternated periods of acute gloominess with bouts of hyperactivity. He had once tried to commit suicide. Also, under the Nazis' eugenics programme he had been forcibly sterilised in 1943 and, due to his mental instability, been exempted from Wehrmacht service. However, Schmitz had friends in the SS medical service and enlisted them to find him a job. Although his medical record was fully known, Himmler ordered that Schmitz be employed in one of the concentration camps. In May 1944 he was appointed to Flossenbürg as civilian practitioner attached to the SS camp doctor, Dr Alfred Schnabel, and made responsible for the prisoners compound. He became particularly infamous for his many strange and unnecessary surgical

operations on inmates. He would decide to operate for the lightest ailments. His operations included intestine surgery, amputations, and on one occasion even a skull operation. Disregarding all rules, he would usually sterilise his instruments only for a first operation and then carry on with others without properly sterilising them again. He habitually operated without gloves, face mask or head cover. In six months he carried out over 400 operations, 300 of them amputations, of which some 250 ended with the death of the patient.

In the autumn of 1944, the SS medical service — in a resumption of the so-called 14f13 'Euthanasia' Action of 1941-43 ('14f13' being the WVHA's code-name for the operation) — ordered that sick and invalid inmates in concentration camps should be given 'Special Treatment', i.e. killed by lethal injections. Schmidt selected the candidates and killed them in a prepared room in Block 13, the tuberculosis block. In all he murdered an estimated 300 prisoners in this way.

When it was really necessary to intervene, Schmidt failed to take proper action and

acted totally irresponsibly. When typhoid broke out in September, he refused to accept the diagnosis of the prisoner doctors and did nothing, causing 200 to die. When typhoid broke out again in January 1945, he allowed infected prisoners to be transferred to other camps, thus spreading the disease.

Schmidt's catastrophic activities lessened with the appointment in October 1944 of a new SS camp doctor, Dr Hermann Fischer, who gradually curbed Schmidt's tasks and finally replaced him with two other doctors, Dr Hans-Joachim Geiger and Dr Otto Adam.

Meanwhile, the deliberate executions in the prison block continued. Among those hanged in 1945 were three Polish women from the Warsaw underground movement on January 8; 193 Czech resistance fighters from Brno together with their families in February; 110 Russian soldiers and their families from the army of General Andrey Vlassov in March; and 13 captured Allied officers (one American, one Canadian, six British, and seven French and Belgians) on March 29.

In the final months of the war, despite the high death rate, the number of inmates at Flossenbürg grew rapidly due to the arrival of large groups of prisoners evacuated from other camps in the East. This movement had begun in the summer of 1944 but reached its peak in early 1945. The largest influx occurred in February 1945 when Flossenbürg and its satellites received nearly 10,000 prisoners from the Gross-Rosen camp in Silesia. The trains bringing the new arrivals carried hundreds of dead and dying, and most of the others were starved, exhausted living skeletons. Camp commander Koegel ordered the seriously sick and ill to be concentrated in Block 18, which soon became an overcrowded patch of hell on earth. That month Flossenbürg main camp reached a strength of 11,000 inmates.

At the same time, provision of supplies for the camp became increasingly problematic due to the breakdown of the Reich's transport system. Especially the food situation was getting worse every day. The overcrowding, under-nourishment and bad hygienic and medical situation, coupled with the negligence and disregard of the SS, combined to produce an extremely high death rate. From January to April 1945, an estimated 4,200 persons died at Flossenbürg — a daily average of 42. The worst month was February, when 60 perished each day. With the crematorium unable to cope with the mass of dead bodies, the corpses were piled up in a heap outside the building, doused with petrol and set alight.



The camp forecourt was landscaped in 1997 but the Kommandantur building remains as a link with the gruesome past.



In the rear corner of the camp, next to one of the watch-towers, the Americans found a curious construction. In the autumn of 1944, with the number of inmates dying at the camp increasing rapidly, the SS had designed a method to efficiently move



corpses from the prisoners enclosure to the crematorium, which stood in a valley some ten metres below the level of the camp. A grate-covered entrance gave access to a short tunnel which led to a ramp

On March 1, the camp reached its highest prisoner strength ever: 14,824. In an attempt to lessen the overcrowding, some 7,000 prisoners were transferred to satellite camps or other camps that month. As part of this, on March 8, occurred the final transport of sick and invalid prisoners to Bergen-Belsen. That day, the 1,157 patients from Block 18 were marched to Flossenbürg station — a wretched column of half-dead creatures — and put on a train to Belsen. Much of the transfers-out was however negated by the arrival in the last days of March and first days of April of some 6,000 prisoners evacuated from Buchenwald.

By the first week of April, it was clear to everyone that the war was coming to its close. On the 8th the SS staff started burning documents, removing incriminating objects such as the camp's whipping bench and the hanging hooks on the lamp-post on the roll-call square, and cleaning up the blood-stained execution site in the Bunker.

Still, on April 9 and 12 on special orders from Berlin and as a last act of violent revenge, seven of the leading figures of the anti-Hitler plot were hanged in the Bunker's courtyard: Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, Generalmajor Hans Oster, Heeresrichter (Army Judge) Dr Karl Sack, Hauptmann Ludwig Gehre, pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Hauptmann Dr Theodor Strünck and General Friedrich von Rabenau. Immediately afterwards the gallows hooks in the courtyard wall were removed as well.

In these final days, camp commander Koegel tried to evacuate various special categories of prisoners. On April 4, 8, 15 and 19, the various VIP prisoners remaining in the prison block were transferred to Dachau by car. On April 16, the Jewish inmates, over 1,700 of them, were put on a train, also with destination Dachau. They never got there. Soon after departure, the train was shot up by Allied fighter-bombers on three occasions, which killed many and disabled the

train's locomotive, after which the SS guards split up the prisoners in ten smaller parties and drove them eastwards on foot. In the following days most of the survivors were liberated by American troops.

That same day, April 16, believing American troops were approaching, the entire SS detachment — staff and guards — fled from the camp and holed up in the woods near the Czech border, apparently planning to join the SS-Division 'Nibelungen', which was fighting nearby. They left the camp in charge of the current Camp Elder, 'green triangle' Anton Uhl. However, the prisoners' freedom was short-lived for that same evening the SS returned, taking charge again and removing the white flags that the overjoyed prisoners had hung up.

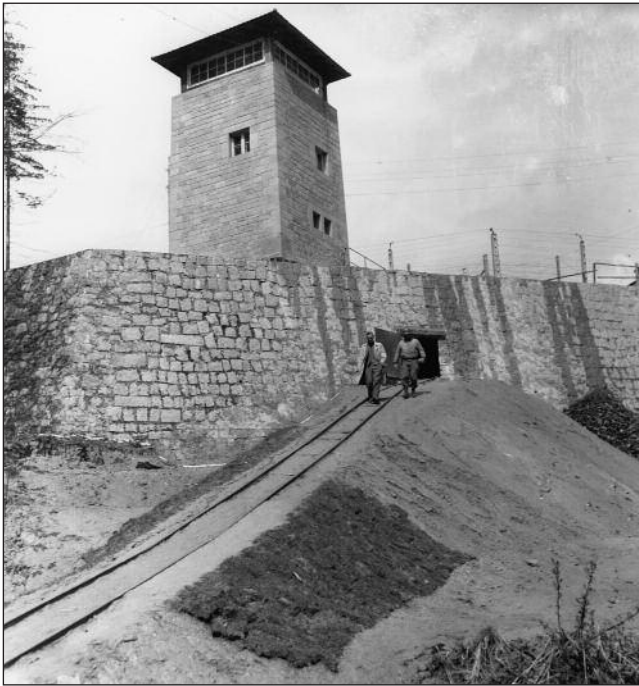
On April 19, Koegel despatched two evacuation trains, again with destination Dachau. One containing 300 inmates, mostly privileged prisoners from Blocks 1 and 2, got to Nabburg, 40 kilometres from the camp, from



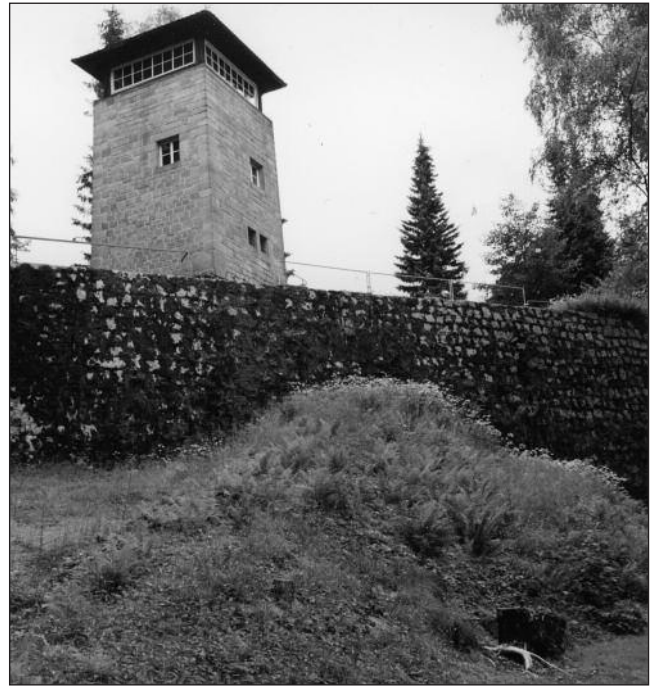
. . . on which a small trolley car ran down narrow-gauge rails straight onto the roof of the crematorium. The trolley could be used to transport corpses and also carry fuel for firing the



crematorium oven. This picture was taken by Tech/5 Fred Poinsett of the 166th Signal Corps (Photographic) Company on May 4. (USNA)



The view from the crematorium roof up to the tunnel exit by Signal Corps photographer Pfc Howard E. James. (USNA)

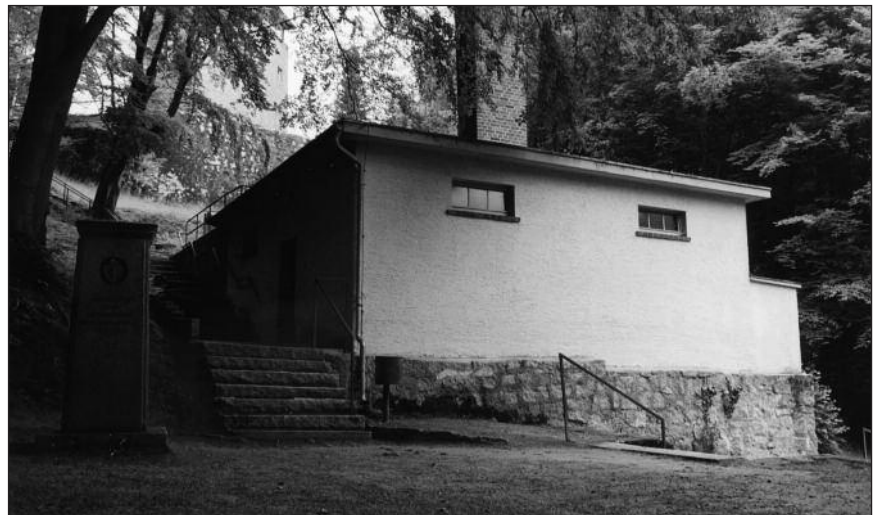


The rails have been removed and the slope grassed over, yet the outline of the ramp can still be clearly discerned.

where the prisoners marched 15 kilometres to Klardorf, where they managed to shake off their guards. The other train, with 1,000 inmates, including many sick, 35 prisoner functionaries and 15 prostitutes, got to Schwandorf, 50 kilometres distant, where Allied aircraft shot it up, killing 41 and enabling 111 to escape. The other 807 marched south until liberated by US troops 13 days later. That same April 19, another group of 750, this one including prominent Hungarian prisoners, left Flossenbürg on foot. They never reached Dachau, being liberated by the Americans near Heiligenkreuz.

Later that same day (April 19) Koegel received orders from Himmler to completely empty the camp and move all inmates to Dachau. By now some 16,000 inmates remained. That evening, in a final conference with his staff, Koegel issued orders for an evacuation in four march columns, three of 4,000 prisoners each and one of 2,500. Only the 1,500 or so sick inmates in the camp hospital would be left behind.

The march groups departed the following day, April 20. The trek quickly developed into nightmarish death marches. The prisoners had been issued with very little or no food and many had only a blanket to cover



The camp crematorium was built in 1940-41. Construction was approved in May 1940, its price set at 11,400 Reichsmarks. Before it was completed, corpses from the camp had to be taken to Selb in Oberfranken, some 90 kilometres to the north, to be burned in the municipal crematorium there.



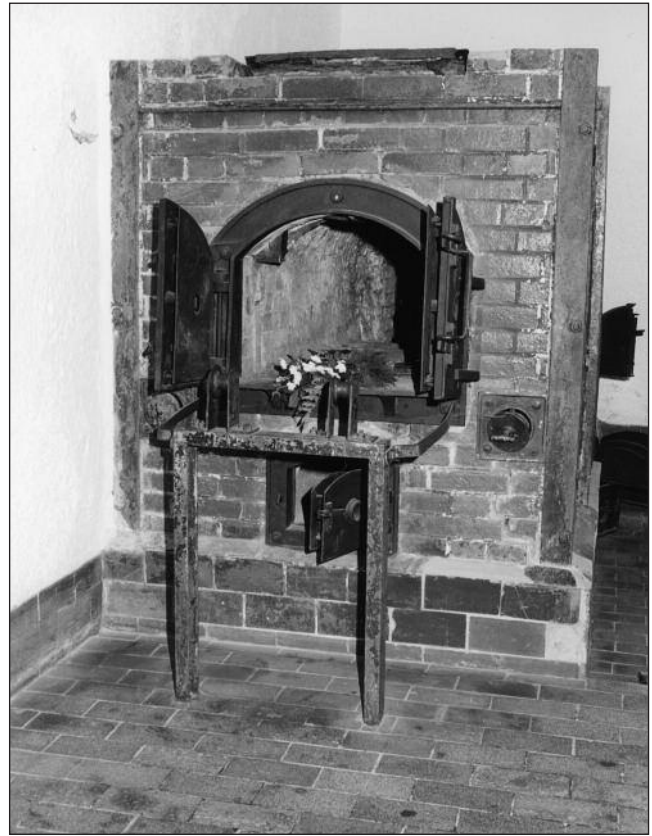
Left: The crematorium consisted of four rooms: mortuary, autopsy room, incinerating room, and coal storage. The Americans found some 60 unburned corpses in the mortuary. (USNA)



Right: This is the autopsy room where gold teeth were extracted from the dead. Today memorial plaques adorn its tiled walls.



The crematorium had one oven of a standard type supplied by the firm of Kori in Berlin. Here a freed French prisoner shows the incinerator to 2nd Lieutenant John J. Reid of the 79th Division's War Crime Investigation Team 203. From



April 29 to May 8, Reid and his assistant, Tech/5 Benjamin B. Ferenc, inspected the whole camp and interrogated 25 former prisoners and several members of the DEST staff before compiling a full report. (NIOD)

themselves. A large number of them suffered from typhoid and could hardly stand on their feet. Several thousand of them had only just come in from Buchenwald and were still worn out from that journey. However, with complete disregard for their misery, the SS guards and Kapos drove the prisoners on through rain and cold. Any prisoner too weak or unable to follow the column was shot or beaten to death and left by the wayside. To avoid attacks by Allied aircraft, most marching was done during the night.

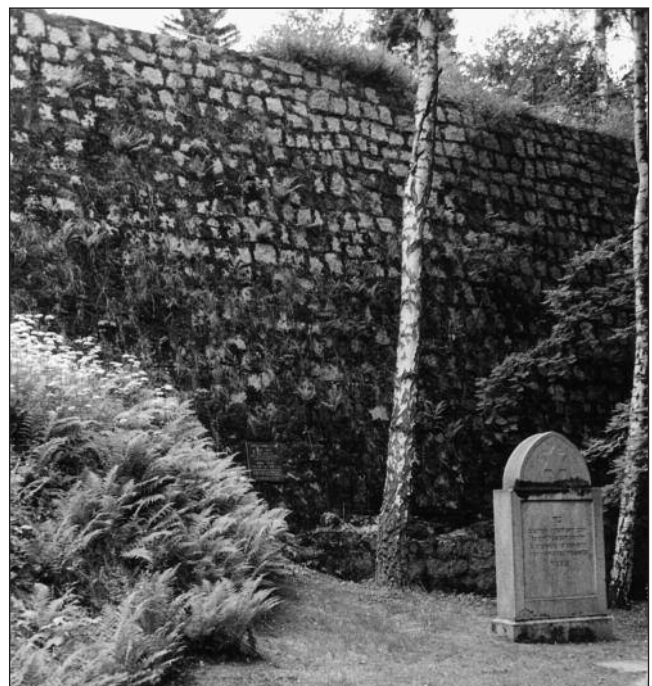
Of the total of 25,000 to 30,000 prisoners evacuated from Flossenbürg and its subsidiary camps, only about one-third reached Dachau. Of the four main columns from the main camp, only one, led by SS-Obersturmführer Hermann Pachen and with 2,654 survivors, reached Dachau as an intact group on the night of April 28/29. The three other main columns wandered southwards through Bavaria, changing directions to avoid advancing Allied forces, until they had nowhere to go. Two columns and part of

another, with a combined total of some 7,000 survivors, were liberated by US troops at Wetterfeld near Cham in the Bavarian Forest on April 23. Smaller groups, which had separated from the latter column, were liberated near Straubing and Ergoldsbach.

Exact figures of the toll in human lives taken by the Flossenbürg death marches are unknown but the best estimate for the main camp is around 5,400. The total number for Flossenbürg and all its sub-camps is estimated at 7,000.



Above: Shoes taken from dead prisoners were thrown down the buttress wall beside the crematorium ramp (the same pile of shoes can be seen in the picture of the ramp on page 17). (NIOD) Right: Today the spot is marked by a memorial stone commemorating the camp's Jewish victims.



Right: The horrible scenes discovered by the Americans in the camp hospital. Of the 1,526 inmates liberated, 186 were found to be suffering from typhoid, 98 had tuberculosis, two diphtheria, two malaria and most of the others were seriously ill. The emaciated inmate being held by two others was a 23-year-old Czech. (USNA)



On April 23, troops of the 395th Infantry Regiment of the US 90th Infantry Division reached Flossenbürg, liberating the 1,526 ailing inmates left behind in the camp hospital. In the crematorium the shocked GIs found some 60 unburned corpses.

The Americans immediately organised medical care for the freed inmates, but for at least 350 of them help came too late. A week after the liberation, 10 to 15 persons were still dying every day. Halting the operation of the crematorium on May 1, the Americans opened a small cemetery in the centre of Flossenbürg village where 146 were buried.

The final death toll of Flossenbürg is shattering. Of the over 111,000 persons assigned to the main camp or one of its subsidiaries between 1938 and 1945, an estimated 30,000 perished.



Many of the inmates freed on April 23 were so weak that despite immediate medical treatment by the Americans, over 350 still died. For a week after the liberation the crematorium was kept in operation to dispose of the bodies, but from May 1 onwards — following general instructions from Allied Supreme Headquarters regarding the burial of victims of Nazi atrocities — the Americans forced the local population of Flossenbürg to give the dead a proper burial. A special cemetery plot was opened in the centre of the village and coffins made for the dead. Signal Corps photographer Private E. Vetrone photographed a funeral procession leaving the camp on May 3. The cynical 'Arbeit macht frei' sign still adorns the gate post. (USNA)



Immediately after the camp's liberation, the War Crimes Section of the US Third Army began investigations into Flossenbürg, which led to the arrest of numerous members of the camp SS and Kapos. Between 1946 and 1948, 19 different Flossenbürg trials were held before the US Military Court at Dachau against a total of 90 persons. The judges passed 25 death sentences, of which 17 were carried out at Landsberg prison. The other eight death sentences were commuted to life imprisonment. Fifty-two other accused received prison sentences varying between four months and life, and 13 men were acquitted. Most of the prison sentences were later also reduced, and by the mid-1950s all of the convicted had been released.

From 1949 West German courts conducted additional research into more than 200 other former SS personnel and Kapos of Flossenbürg and its sub-camps, which led to further trials against 18 persons between 1949 and 1969.

Of Flossenbürg's five camp commanders only one was ever brought to justice; of the others, three died before they could be held to account for their deeds and one was never captured. Jakob Weiseborn had committed suicide in 1939; Karl Künstler, shipped off to service in the SS-Division 'Prinz Eugen' in 1942, was killed in action near Nuremberg on April 20, 1945; Karl Fritsch disappeared after the war and was never seen again, while Egon Zill escaped punishment until 1955. That year he was tried and sentenced to life imprisonment, which was later commuted to 15 years. He died in 1974. Max Koegel went to live under a false name but was arrested by the Americans on June 26, 1946. He hanged himself in his cell in Schwabach prison, and died the following day, June 27.

The post-war history of Flossenbürg is varied. From July 1945 to April 1946, the Americans used the camp as a POW enclosure to intern 4,000 German prisoners of war. Then, from April 1946 to late 1947, the camp was used by the UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) to house 1,500 to 2,500 Displaced Persons, mostly Poles. After that, the huts and stone buildings of the camp were gradually taken over by German refugees — people ejected from Czechoslovakia or from German territories lost to Poland. By then the barbed-wire fence around the prisoners enclosure had been dismantled.

Left: Block 19 has been replaced by the modern building used by the Camp Memorial, but the bath-house remains.



Tech/4 James F. Flaha of the 97th Division band blows 'Taps' over the graves in the newly-opened cemetery in the centre of Flossenbürg. Local residents, forced by the Americans to witness the burials, stand beyond the fence. (USNA)



Sixty years have passed . . . this is the same spot in the KZ-Ehrenfriedhof (Concentration Camp Cemetery of Honour) today.



Camp survivors lower a casket into the grave. In all, 146 victims were buried in the cemetery which Eisenhower's directive stipulated should be maintained by the local community in perpetuity. Both wartime pictures by Private Vetrone. (USNA)



The Cemetery of Honour along the village main street as it looks today. The memorial constructed from Flossenbürg granite was conceived by Polish Displaced Persons living in the former camp and inaugurated on October 27, 1946.

Because most of the original camp was being inhabited, the committee of former inmates set up in June 1946 to create a camp memorial had to do this on the fringe of the camp's perimeter or even outside it. The crematorium was preserved, as were three of the guard towers. The other four guard towers were demolished and from their stones, in 1946-47 a memorial chapel was built next to one of the preserved towers.

In later years, the gulch between the chapel and the crematorium — site of the SS shooting range where the executions by firing-squad had taken place in 1941-42 and known as the 'Valley of Death' — was landscaped into a memorial park. A mass grave was laid out containing the ashes of thousands of dead. A grass-covered pyramid-shaped monument was erected containing more ashes from the crematorium and thousands of shoes found in the camp. The execution site was marked by a large concrete red triangle. Other memorial plaques were added later.

In 1957 the State of Bavaria began construction, in a plot just west of the memorial chapel, of a Cemetery of Honour for the victims of the 1945 death marches and some of the sub-camps. By August 1958 a total of 4,387 human remains had been disinterred from numerous grave sites in Bavaria and re-interred in this cemetery, (Later transfers raised the number of graves to 5,451.)

By 1958 some 500 refugees, now accepted as permanent settlers in the village, still occupied the now very dilapidated huts of the former camp. In that year all huts were pulled down, and modern houses built on the same terraces. The camp's stone buildings were left standing and eventually found other uses. The Kommandantur building became a municipal housing block. The former SS canteen became an inn, the Gasthof Plattenberg. The prisoners kitchen building and bath-house were incorporated in a small industrial park.

In 1964 most of the prison block and the walls enclosing its yard were pulled down. Only the foundations and a small section containing two cells were preserved as a memorial. Inside, a small exhibition was set up.

Other real estate connected with the camp had by then long reverted to civilian use. The small settlement of villas built for the SS officers on the Plattenberg near the camp had become private houses. The former DEST quarries had been taken over by the State of Bavaria. In 1949 they leased it to a private enterprise, the Oberpfälzer Steinindustrie, who resumed quarrying. The stonemason's workshops and the buildings that had been used for Messerschmitt production became part of the quarry's real estate.



The 'Jesus in the Dungeon' Memorial Chapel, built from stones from demolished watch-towers and dedicated on May 25, 1947. Next to it stands one of the three that survive.



Small sections of the old electric fence still remain on the former camp perimeter.

Thus, by the mid-1960s, the outward look of the former camp had changed radically. Most of its site had been absorbed into the general landscape of the village. People could visit the prison block memorial, and walk through the memorial park with the chapel, cemetery and crematorium, but most visitors found it difficult to orientate themselves and only the well-informed, such as delegations of former prisoners, could recognise the precise site of the former camp. There was no sign-posting to the site of the quarries, which were on private territory and inaccessible. Compared to other camp memorials — such as Dachau and Belsen in West Germany, Buchenwald in East Germany, and Mauthausen in Austria — Flossenbürg received few visitors. Despite the fact that it had been the fourth-largest of the Nazi camps, the general public hardly knew about it. Many historians called it 'the forgotten camp'.

This situation lasted for nearly four decades. It was only in the mid-1980s that initiatives were taken to better preserve the memory of the camp and make its traces more visible, but it took until the late 1990s for any real change to be effected. The most important alteration has been the clearing away of the post-war factory buildings and workshops on the site of the former camp. The removal of these buildings has unmasked the original camp kitchen and bath-house and restored the open space of the Appellplatz. Another



The Valley of Death, as seen from the crematorium. In the foreground is the Red Triangle Monument, with the Pyramid of Ashes behind.

change has been the incorporation of the former Kommandantur gate building into the memorial grounds. The building no longer contains private dwellings, but now accommodates the staff of the KZ-Gedenkstätte (Camp Memorial) and has a cinema room

showing historical footage of Flossenbürg camp. A large map and information plaques in the building's archway explain the history of the camp and help visitors to orientate themselves. The Gedenkstätte is maintained by the State of Bavaria.



Left: The Square of Nations commemorating the victims of 18 nationalities. Above: Plaque for the American liberators. Right: Memorial to the seven men involved in the anti-Hitler coalition who were hanged in the prison yard in April 1945. The plaque, unveiled on April 10, 1970, states all seven murders took place on April 9, but it appears General von Rabenau was actually killed on the 12th.

