Post-liberation photograph of an execution site in the Riga-Kaiserwald concentration camp.
USHMM WG #96909, COURTESY OF STA. LG HAMBURG
On March 15, 1943, the Inspectorate of Concentration Camps (IKL) established the Riga-Kaiserwald concentration camp, with SS-Sturmbannführer Albert Sauer as commandant.\(^1\) Situated at the Mežaparks Forest resort near Riga, Latvia, the camp was divided into male and female sections separated by barbed-wire fencing. Some 47 German and Polish criminal, political, and “asocial” inmates from the Sachsenhausen concentration camp set up the “prisoner self-administration.” This contingent grew to 500 prisoners, but most were returned to the Reich by December 1943. A Ravensbrück detachment, including “asocials,” opened the women’s section. Under the supervision of the Wolf & Döring construction firm, Jews from the Riga ghetto built the camp, which had three accommodation barracks per section and an infirmary.\(^2\) Located in the camp’s rear was the Anode Kommando, a battery recycling detachment, which was accessed by a narrow path between the men’s and women’s sections. Holding approximately 2,000 to 3,000 prisoners at a time, Kaiserwald was a clearinghouse for an estimated 15,000 Jewish prisoners deployed in 12 to 14 subcamps, called quartering sites (Kasernierungen).\(^3\) Although Kaiserwald registered the prisoners, some were moved from one site to another without entering the main camp. Kaiserwald’s prisoner statistics are scant, because shortly after the camp opened, SS-Brigadeführer Richard Glücks, the head of IKL, exempted the newly established camps in the East from reporting admissions and deaths to IKL and because most of its records were destroyed prior to evacuation.\(^4\) An incomplete mortality list, from December 15, 1943, to August 8, 1944, recorded 484 deaths.\(^5\) To these must be added the numerous prisoners killed in shooting operations (Aktionen), the synonym for “selections” that carried over from the ghetto. The victims were placed on trucks and dispatched to the forests for shooting. Prisoners and staff referred to the killing sites by the euphemism, “base command” (Stützpunktkommando).

Although ostensibly a concentration camp, Kaiserwald differed from other IKL camps in three salient respects. First, family life and friendships formed in the Riga, Vilna, and Libau ghettos carried over into the camp. Husbands and wives and, in some cases, their children communicated across the fences dividing the men’s and women’s sections. Friendships from the ghetto fostered a reliable rumor mill between Kaiserwald and its subcamps. The placement of friends and relatives at other sites and regular transfers between the sites made this source of unofficial news possible.\(^6\) Second, except for the Sachsenhausen and Ravensbrück inmates, the Kaiserwald prisoners did not normally wear prisoner uniforms with color-coded triangles. Most were ordered to paint or sew yellow stars and prisoner numbers on their civilian clothes; in some cases, they had to paint white stripes on the sleeves and trouser legs as well. Many did not get “zebra” uniforms, as the prisoners called them, until just prior to the evacuation in the summer of 1944, at which time they also got prisoner haircuts, with a stripe shaved down the middle of the scalp for males and shaved heads for females.\(^7\) Finally, as discussed below, the establishment of Kasernierungen rather than a full subcamp system distinguished Kaiserwald from other IKL camps.

Prefiguring the establishment of Kaiserwald and its quartering sites was a dispute between the SS-Business Administration Main Office (WVHA) and the Reich Commissariat Ostland (Reichskommissariat Ostland, RKO) over the status of the Salaspils police camp. On December 1, 1942, the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) in Berlin asked the Commander of the Security Police and SD (BdS) Riga, Dr. Rudolf Lange, whether Salaspils was a concentration camp and, if so, why it did not fall under WVHA jurisdiction.\(^8\) Located to the southeast of Riga and built by Riga ghetto labor in 1941, Salaspils held non-Jewish Latvians, Estonians, and Lithuanians. An SS-Obersturmbannführer, later Standartenführer, in the SD (Nazi Party no. 290308), Lange emphatically denied it was a concentration camp, instead calling Salaspils a work education camp (Arbeitserziehungslager [AEL]) and police prison (Polizeigefängnis).\(^9\) That Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler found this explanation unsatisfactory was evident shortly after Kaiserwald’s establishment, when he called Salaspils a concentration camp in everything but name, pointing out that it properly belonged to the WVHA and ordering that it perform war-related tasks, not construction or “peat work” (Torfstich).\(^10\) In a demonstration of Lange’s autonomy,
Salaspils remained under Security Police (Sipo) control until the German abandonment of Latvia.

On June 21, 1943, Himmler decreed the closure of all ghettos in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia (the Ostland) and the formation instead of IKL camps by August 1, 1943. Jews were to perform war work, especially for Wehrmacht units but not for “private firms.” Those deemed unfit were to be deported “to the East,” a euphemism for mass murder.11 With the important exception that Kaiserwald never had a gas chamber/crematory complex, Himmler’s model was the Lublin-Majdanek concentration camp, which confined Jews from liquidated ghettos in the General Government. Himmler’s order similarly affected the concentration camps at Kauen (Kaunas) and Vaivara. In Riga, Higher-SS and Police Leader (HSSPF) Ostland Friedrich Jeckeln informed his superior, Reichskommissar Hinrich Lohse, about the reorganization. The ghetto authorities quickly closed 125 old Kasernierungen, and, according to historian Andrew Ezer-

On August 12, 1943, the RKO’s and BdS Riga’s interference became apparent when the Riga Stadtkommissar announced the creation of “Jewish camps” (Judenlager). Naming 13 “big” Kasernierungen, the Stadtkommissar claimed they were answerable to the Sicherheitsdienst (SD)—that is, to Lange of BdS Riga—not to the WVHA. The list included “old,” ghetto-administered, as well as “new” quartering sites designed for big projects. They were (1) Kaiserwald, (2) Dünamower, (3) SD-Werkstätte (Lenta), (4) Truppenwirtschaftsbuger (TWL), (5) Spilwe airport, (6) Heereskraftfahrzeugpark (HKP), (7) Papierfabrik Schlock, (8) Reichsbahn, (9) Armeebeleidungsamt (ABA) 701, (10) Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft (AEG), (11) Zementfabrik Riga, (12)strasdenhof, and (13) Generalkommissar (GK) Abteilung Finanzn. Not all of these quartering sites became subcamps. Of the 16,450 Jews to be allocated, over 7,800 prisoners had already been deployed.14

The Stadtkommissar’s list was misleading. The paper factory utilized Kaiserwald prisoners, and it has yet to be established whether GK was a quartering site or a Kaiserwald work detachment. In the fall of 1943, Kaiserwald opened a complex of camps near the Baltic Sea in Kurland (Kurzeme), for the erection of the Dondangen (Dundaga) SS “sea camp” (Seelager). The camps consisted of Dondangen I, Dondangen II (Papierwahlen), and Kurben. The HKP and ABA sites spawned subcamps, respectively, at Hirtenstrasse and Krottingen. Kaiserwald also formed a quartering site in October 1943 for railway work at Elley-Mieten. The International Tracing Service’s (ITS) claim that AEG had a battery-producing subcamp at Strasdenhof appears to be unfounded, because witnesses place this detachment in the Kaiserwald camp. The Kaiserwald detachment was contracted to the Wehrmacht, not to AEG. In the class-action suit brought against AEG in the late 1950s, one witness mentioned working in the Anode Kommando, but she was removed from it by truck to work at the AEG camp at Strasdenhof.15 Depending upon whether the Dondangen complex is counted as one camp or three, then Kaiserwald had 12 to 14 subcamps. According to the ITS, Kaiserwald also furnished work details for Gummifabrik “Meteor,” a rubber factory, and for a number of SS construction projects.

Although Himmler ordered the Ostland ghettos’ closure by August 1, 1943, the liquidations concluded between September and November 1943. From Lithuania, the Germans dispatched the survivors of the Vilna (Vilnius, Wilno) ghetto to Kaiserwald in late September 1943. From Kurland, the Libau (Liepaja) ghetto’s survivors arrived in early October 1943. In October 1943, the Germans stopped assigning Riga ghetto inhabitants to the Kasernierungen. On November 2, 1943, the Riga Sipo sent its remaining inhabitants to Auschwitz II-Birkenau, where 850 were gassed upon arrival.16 In addition to the Ostland ghettos, Kaiserwald received approximately 2,000 Hungarian Jewish women from Birkenau in June 1944.

Several Kaiserwald staff members had lengthy IKL experience. Born on August 17, 1898, in Misrod, Sauer (Nazi Party no. 862698; SS no. 19180) served at the Berlin Columbia Haus early camp in 1935, was the commandant of the Bad Sulza early camp during its dissolution in 1937, and worked in Sachsenhausen’s administration. He was the first commandant of the Mauthausen concentration camp but was dismissed in early 1939 after a dispute with the Austrian police. Working for the Reich Commissariat for the Strengthening of Germandom (RKFDV) until 1943, he was briefly attached to the Auschwitz staff before assuming command at Riga. Posted to Ravensbrück after Kaiserwald’s evacuation, Sauer was killed in action on May 3, 1945.17 Kaiserwald’s administrators were SS-Obersturmführer Eberhard von Bonin, until June 1, 1944, and SS-Hauptsturmführer Wilhelm Vogler from the Stutthof concentration camp, from that date until Kaiserwald’s closure. The chief of labor allocation (Arbeitsinsatzführer) was SS-Hauptsturmführer Hans Brüner.

Born on August 8, 1894, Kaiserwald’s camp doctor, SS-Sturmbannführer Dr. Eduard Krebsbach, had previously occupied the same position at Mauthausen. His eagerness to murder patients by phenol injection at Mauthausen gave rise to his nickname “The Needle” (Spritzbachi).19 In the Mauthausen Trial, the U.S. Army condemned him to death and executed him on May 28, 1947. Krebsbach’s assistant SS-Sanitätsdienstgrad (SDG) Heinz Günther Wisner was born Heinz von Wisotzky in Danzig on December 5, 1916. Joining the Allgemeine-SS on March 14, 1935, he worked in the Danzig sanitarium and trained as an SDG. On February 1, 1939, he joined the Nazi Party and became a police reservist on August 22, 1939. Before Stutthof became an IKL camp,
Wisner served as its SDG and from May 27, 1942, held the same post at the Flossenbürg concentration camp. After joining the Waffen-SS in June 1943, he underwent ideological training in Berlin and was promoted to Unterscharführer in the summer of 1943. On November 1, 1943, Wisner joined Kaiserwald’s staff and was later promoted to Oberscharführer. Wisner selected numerous Jews in Kaiserwald and its subcamps for murder and killed infirmary patients by lethal injection. Of the infirmary victims were from the subcamps, especially Dondangen, which consumed lives at a catastrophic rate.

Kaiserwald’s camp elder (Lagerältester) was Xavier Abel, known to the prisoners as “Mr. X.” A Sachsenhausen criminal, he committed homicides at Kaiserwald and carried on illicit relationships with younger female prisoners. According to Josef Katz, a Jewish prisoner from Lübeck, Abel drowned the Riga ghetto’s police chief, Haar, in the latrine during a drinking party for the German prisoners. According to Katz, “Mr. X” and other German prisoners still at Kaiserwald shortly before its evacuation were recruited for the Dirlwanger Brigade, a Waffen-SS unit composed chiefly of German green and black triangle prisoners in 1944.26 Kapos Hans “Hannes” Bruhn and Reinhold Rosemayer also brutalized the inmates. For a time, Bruhn was the camp elder at the Stradenhof subcamp. The prisoner-functionaries instituted penal drills, forcing new prisoners, like Ernest Kan, to remove caps with the appropriate snap.27 In 1961, the Hamburg State Prosecutor inconclusively investigated Bruhn for his activities at Sachsenhausen.

Approximately 30 male and female prisoners worked in the Anode Kommando. The men unloaded large Wehrmacht truck batteries from an adjacent train depot, and in a small workshop, the women dismantled them in order to extract their carbon anodes. One prisoner, Schoschana Rabinovici (born Susanne Weksler), credited the detachment leader, a German army Feldwebel, with protecting her during an Action. For the women at least, the work took place indoors, but it required the handling of corrosive and noxious chemicals that blackened and burned the hands.

“Children’s operations” (Kinderaktionen) occurred regularly at Kaiserwald and in the subcamps. Especially endangered were children who stayed in the blocks while their parents worked. Thanks to alert adults, a few youngsters managed to evade these selections. As an 11-year-old, Rabinovici was deported in late September 1943 from Vilna to Kaiserwald with her mother and older stepsister. Her mother, Raja Indurski-Weksler, used subterfuges with the connivance of friends from Vilna to prevent the Germans from discovering that Schoschana was prepubescent, including standing in front of her when prisoners were ordered to undress and awakening her earlier than the rest of the block so that she could clean up in private. At Kaiserwald, Rabinovici usually worked in the Anode detail, but when her mother perceived a change in SS behavior, thereby indicating an imminent Action, she was told to report to an outside detail for the day.28 From May to September 1944, the Sonderkommando (SK) 1005 B under SS-Obersturmführer Walter Helfsgott attempted to obliterate evidence of the “Final Solution” in the Riga area, exhuming mass graves that dated back to 1941. At Lange’s insistence, Helfsgott deployed only Jews for this task. At his 1969 jury trial in Stuttgart, where he was acquitted on technical grounds, the court noted that the likely source of this labor was Kaiserwald. In succession, two detachments of 30 inmates disinterred mass graves in the Rumbula and Bikerniekis forests, cremated the bodies, and scattered the ashes and bones. As “bearers of secrets” (Geheimnisträger), the groups were shot after completing their tasks.29

With the Red Army advancing on Riga, Kaiserwald commenced preparations for evacuation in late June and July 1944. Among them Krebsbach and Wisner conducted a series of selections, including the “Krebsbach Aktion” on July 28, 1944, which involved the main camp and every subcamp in Riga. Apart from some prisoners who reached Stutthof overland via Libau, most were marched to the port of Riga, where they boarded ships bound for Danzig. On August 6, 1944, the Bremerhaven departed Riga with 6,382 Jews from the subcamps. Subsequent sea evacuations took place in mid-September 1944 (called the Rosh Hashanah Transport by prisoners) and on September 24 or 25 (the Yom Kippur Transport).30 On the latter, the Kanonier carried 3,135 prisoners to Danzig. A final 190-member cleanup detail left Riga on October 11, 1944. Held below decks for three days with few provisions, the inmates suffered from overcrowding and seasickness caused by rough seas. To distribute food and remove excrement from the holds, the Kapos improvised a bucket-and-winches system, but the high seas caused food and excrement to spill onto the prisoners below. A few prisoners got fresh air by relaying buckets to the deck. Landing at Danzig, the survivors were marched to the Vistula River, where they boarded 500-person barges for two or three days before entering Stutthof.31 According to Rabinovici, the vessel carrying her family sailed under a Red Cross flag, which protected it from attack. Katz remembered that the last vessel in the Rosh Hashanah Transport was sunk by a Soviet submarine.32 Most of Kaiserwald’s survivors were scattered among the Stutthof subcamps. Others were sent to Dachau/Mühldorf, Buchenwald/Magdeburg (Polte), and Nevangame/Hamburg-Fuhlsbüttel.

**Sources**
The Riga-Kaiserwald concentration camp is discussed in chapters and articles on the Latvian Holocaust, but to date there is not a one-volume history of the camp. The most recent and best-documented study is Andrej Angrick and Peter Klein, *Die “Endlösung” in Riga: Ausbeutung und Vernichtung 1941–1944* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006). Another useful work is Andrew Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia, 1941–1944: The Missing Center* (Riga: Historical Institute of Latvia; published in association with USHMM, 1996). Ezergailis erroneously terms Kaiserwald and other IKL camps “SD” camps. The source of his confusion is the Riga Stadtkommissar’s announcement of August 18, 1943. Additional information may be gleaned...

horrible summary is to be deposited at USHMMA. There are many unpubl
ished witness statements on Kaiserwald at WL and reproduced in Testaments to the Holocaust (originally WL), http://159.104.6.6/testaments/en/t3h.asp. Particularly useful


4. NO-1558, Glücks circular, April 26, 1943, TWC 4: 387.


NOTES

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1. USHMMA, RG 11.001 M.05, Reel 75, RGVA, 504/2/8, RSHA IV C 2 (Heinrich Müller), Rundschriften Nr. 43086, Btr.: “Konzentrationslager (Arbeitslager) Riga,” April 2, 1943, p. 170.


4. NO-1558, Glücks circular, April 26, 1943, TWC 4: 387.


In the late summer of 1943, Riga-Kaiserwald concentration camp established a subcamp for the SS “sea camp” (Seelager) at Dondangen (Dundaga). The camp was intended to erect an SS colony near the Baltic coast in Kurland (Kurzeme), Latvia. According to a West German report, Dondangen held 12,000 prisoners.\(^1\) A more conservative estimate by Margers Vestermanis puts the total number of prisoners, mostly Latvian, Lithuanian, and Hungarian Jews, at 5,000.\(^2\) Dondangen’s catastrophic death rate, 10 to 20 prisoners per day, may help to reconcile these estimates, because the camp was constantly replenished by fresh Kaiserwald prisoners. Unlike other camps and quartering sites (Kasernierungen) in the Riga-Kaiserwald complex, the prisoners at Dondangen wore striped uniforms with yellow stars.\(^3\)

Dondangen had two successive camp leaders (Lagerführer), SS-Oberscharführer Gröschel and SS-Hauptscharführer Gustav Sorge. Gröschel’s mismanagement prompted the commandant of Riga-Kaiserwald, SS-Sturmbannführer Albert Sauer, to replace him with Sorge on January 30, 1944. Sorge assumed command at Sorge’s former post, the Kaiserwald Kasernierung at Riga-Spilwe. An Esterwegen and Sachsenhausen concentration camp guard whose career in the Inspectorate of Concentration Camps (IKL) dated back to 1934, and who had been a guard at the Esterwegen early camp in 1933, Sorge lived up to his nickname “Iron Gustav” (Eiserne Gustav). During the two years prior to commanding Dondangen, he had been Arbeitseinsatzführer at Vught, the Herzogenbusch main concentration camp in the Netherlands, and served in the summer of 1943 in a “bandit”-hunting (anti-partisan) detail for the Higher-SS and Police Leader (HSSPF) Ostland. In the Riga complex, he had previously commanded Spilwe and the neighboring Heereskraftfahrzeugpark (HKP) Kasernierung.\(^4\)

Designed as a “Germanization” colony, the SS-Seelager Dondangen was to become a permanent SS base.\(^5\) At Dundaga, the SS displaced some 15,000 Latvian farmers in the summer of 1943. For the SS, one of Dondangen’s attractive features was Dundaga Castle, erected in 1249 for the Livonian Order of crusaders, which served as the SS headquarters. Critical to the project was the erection of a troop training base (Truppenübungsplatz) for SS-Panzer personnel. To create the base, Dondangen’s prisoners cleared forests, built roads, and erected troop barracks. A survivor of Dondangen II (Poperwahlen), Vestermanis observed that the Seelager “was probably Himmler’s only colonization experiment in the temporarily occupied Soviet territories that was half-way realized. It shows how the ‘European New Order’ strived for by the Nazis should have looked.”\(^6\)

The living conditions at Dondangen (and subsequently the Poperwahlen and Kurben subcamps) were by far the worst in the Riga-Kaiserwald complex. Prisoner Abraham Shpungin characterized Dondangen as an “extermination camp,” but historian Andrew Ezerghis described it as a camp for “extermination through labor” (Vernichtung durch Arbeit).\(^7\) While the prisoners erected SS troop accommodations, they lived in “Finnish tents” (Finnenzelt), plywood structures with dirt floors and a stove in the center, somewhat like primitive Quonset huts.\(^8\) The overcrowded tents did not protect against the cold Baltic winds. The SS never bothered to erect a barracks camp at Dondangen or in its subcamps. The prisoners’ rations consisted of thin soup, bread, and very little else.

Compounding the lethal conditions was the brutal behavior of Gröschel and Sorge. Gröschel dealt with Dondangen’s staggering mortality by ordering the bodies dumped into the half-frozen Baltic Sea.\(^9\) In the spring of 1944, as the ice thawed, fishermen discovered some corpses, which prompted Sorge, who had already assumed command, to institute the “bathing Kommando.” Consisting primarily of weakened prisoners, this detail removed the bodies from the sea and cremated them in improvised pyres on the beach. According to Shpungin, the detachment also had a high mortality rate.\(^10\)
Despite the frightful conditions, the Truppenübungsplatz opened by the spring of 1944. Training at this facility were the Nachrichten-Ausbildungs- und Ersatz-Abteilung 1, SS-Panzer-Ausbildungs- und Ersatz-Regiment 1, and the Fourth SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Ausbildungs-Abteilung 2. Some of the Waffen-SS troops were Dutch volunteers. Sorge ordered the Waffen-SS to shoot escaping prisoners on sight.11

A small exception to Dondangen’s brutal conditions was the troop supply depot (Truppenwirtschaftslager [TWL]), which was situated in the city of Dundaga. Not to be confused with Kaiserwald’s separately listed TWL Kasernierung, this detachment consisted of 20 Jewish men and 5 Jewish women. Fearing epidemics, the detachment leader, SS-Oberscharführer Wilhelm Wichmann, had the prisoners cleaned up and ensured that they received a steady supply of nutritious rations. Eventually, he secured Sorge’s permission to quarter them in an apartment in Dundaga, with the women held in the smaller and the men in the larger room. The detachment’s prisoners included Shpungin and Mendel Poliak, who escaped in late July 1944, when word came to evacuate Dondangen. In the city of Dundaga, the Vanags family (parents Antoon and Klara and daughter Skaidrite) gave them food and shelter until the Soviet liberation, which in Kurland did not take place until the German surrender on May 8, 1945.12 For their efforts in saving Shpungin and Poliak, Yad Vashem awarded the Vanags family the Righteous among the Nations medal in 1993. Dondangen opened a second subcamp for both male and female Jewish prisoners at Popervahlen (Popervâle), also known as Dondangen II. Under SS-Rottenführer Baufeldt, this subcamp also consisted of Finnish tents. The first 165 prisoners, 15 of whom were female, entered the camp in November 1943, but the camp swelled to 1,000 prisoners by June 1944, including some Hungarian Jewish women dispatched from Auschwitz II-Birkenau.13 The prisoners cleared swamps in preparation for the erection of an airfield. Some Popervahlen prisoners were redeployed inside the Reich in May 1944, in fulfillment of a March 1944 order from the SS-Business Administration Main Office (WVHA).14 According to Vestermanis, Popervahlen opened a crematorium for the disposal of Dondangen’s dead in the spring of 1944.15

The sources disagree on the existence of the third Dondangen subcamp at Kurben. While the International Tracing Service (ITS) counted Kurben as a Dondangen subcamp, Vestermanis does not list it. Shpungin claimed that Kurben was the third “entity” of Dondangen, which held as many as 5,000 Hungarian Jewish women dispatched from Birkenau, an estimate that is exceedingly high.16 Prisoner Ernest Alols likewise called Kurben a Dondangen subcamp. Survivor Helen Rodak-Izzo, a Jewish woman from Kassa, Hungary, who was deported to Birkenau on June 4, 1944, and shortly thereafter dispatched to Kaiserwald, was held at Kurben, which she called “Kurbe.” Rodak-Izzo built roads and felled trees for approximately one month. An Oberscharführer headed the camp, and the guards included female SS, who oversaw the work details.17

With the Red Army’s approach, Dondangen II (Popervahlen) closed in late June or early July 1944, after which the prisoners were moved to Dondangen. En route, the prisoners had to cross the Venta River by swimming and holding on to one another, as the main bridge had been bombed out and only German troops were permitted to use the temporary bridge. A number of Popervahlen prisoners escaped during the march, including Vestermanis, who shortly joined the partisans.18 Like those from Popervahlen, the Kurben prisoners undertook a similar crossing of the Venta before arriving at Dondangen.19 Dondangen I closed on July 26 or 27, 1944, and the prisoners proceeded in the direction of Goldingen (Kuldiga). The SS dumped many of the dead in a mass grave at Zlekas.20 From Windau, most of the prisoners were dispatched by sea to the Stutthof concentration camp in Poland. A smaller group marched to Libau (Liepāja) and then were sent by train to Stutthof.

A Bonn court sentenced Lagerführer Sorge to life imprisonment plus 15 years for 67 murders and 20 attempted murders. None of the charges brought against him arose from his service in Latvia, however.21


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erroneous. The Vanags family is listed in *Index to the Righteous Gentile Registry of Yad Vashem* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2002), p. 166. Some background on Dundaga Castle may be found at www.castle.lv/castles4/episkop-eng.html.


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8. Ibid., p. 152.


ELLEY-MEITEN

Between October 1943 and June 1944, the SS deployed nearly 3,000 male and female Jewish prisoners from Lithuania and Poland at Elley-Meiten (Eleja-Meitene). Elley-Meiten was 1 of about 12 to 14 subcamps, called quartering sites (Kasernierungen), that were absorbed or established by the Riga-Kaiserwald concentration camp. The date of its foundation indicated that Elley-Meiten was a “new” Kasernierung. Living in 16 barracks at a disused tractor factory, the prisoners performed railway repair work for the construction firms of Rippel, Berger, and Ottlieb. The SS returned the prisoners to Riga-Kaiserwald beginning in May 1944, well before the dissolution of other Kasernierungen, most of which closed in August 1944 in connection with the Red Army’s advance.

SOURCES This subcamp is briefly discussed in Margots Vestermanis, “Die nationalsozialistischen Haftstätten und Todeslager im okkupierten Lettland, 1941–1945,” in *Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager—Entwicklung und Struktur*; ed. Ulrich Herbert, Karin Orth, and Christoph Dieckmann (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 1998), 1: 488. It is listed...
as separate men’s and women’s camps in ITS, Verzeichnis der Haftstätten unter dem Reichsführer-SS (1933–1945) 2 vols. (Arolsen, 1979), I: 248. It is also listed with some information on the construction firms in Das nationalsozialistische Lagersystem (CCP), ed. Martin Weimann, with Anne Kaiser and Ursula Krause-Schmit, prepared originally by ITS (1949–1951); repr., with new intro. matter, Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, (1990), p. 661.

As cited by Vestermanis, the primary sources for this subcamp may be found in LVVA, in file P-132/26/13, p. 197.

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KROTtingEN

According to the International Tracing Service (ITS), Krottingen originated as a Buchenwald subcamp that was transferred to Riga-Kaiserwald’s administration in order to supply female Jewish labor for the Army Clothing Office 709 (Armeebekleidungsamt [ABA]). The subcamp was the second Riga-Kaiserwald quartering site (Kasernierung) established for the ABA; the first was Mühlgraben, which furnished female Jewish inmates for ABA 701. Krottingen opened in May 1944, when 200 Mühlgraben prisoners were transferred to the new site. Eventually, the subcamp grew in size to approximately 700 prisoners, according to survivor Johanna Rosenthal.1

Appointed a prisoner forewoman (Vorarbeiterin) after two weeks in the camp, Rosenthal reported that cold, hunger, and “heavy labor” made existence difficult.2 There were several selections at Krottingen, which in the language of Kaiserwald were called “operations” (Aktionen). The largest took place on July 28, 1944, when 200 weakened prisoners were removed for killing. In preparation for Riga-Kaiserwald’s evacuation, the Krottingen inmates were given concentration camp haircuts in early July 1944, but the issuance of “zebra clothing” (Zebra-Kleidung) only took place in August 1944.3 Although Krottingen officially closed in August 1944, with most of the prisoners removed by sea and evacuated to the Stutthof concentration camp in Poland, Rosenthal and a small group remained behind at Krottingen until Yom Kippur 1944. The remaining prisoners were evacuated to Libau (Liepāja).4


Mühlgraben and Krottingen prisoner Johanna Rosenthal described Krottingen in her testimonies, listed in Testaments to the Holocaust, http://159.104.6.6/testaments/en/t3h.asp, which were originally collected by WL. Rosenthal’s undated statement said that the major selection took place on July 28, 1944, while her June 26, 1945, statement placed the date on June 28, 1944.

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3. Ibid., p. 3; P III h No. 283 (Riga), Rosenthal Statement, n.d., p. 4.
4. P III h No. 538 (Riga), Rosenthal Statement, June 26, 1945, p. 3.

RIGA (BALASTDAMM)

According to the International Tracing Service (ITS), Riga-Kaiserwald had a men’s and women’s quartering site (Kasernierung) located at Balastdamm (Balasta) on Kipsala Island in the city of Riga. Listed as “Zementwerk Riga” by Detachment III of the Riga Stadtkommissar, it was 1 of 13 Kasernierungen absorbed from the Riga ghetto or established by Kaiserwald on August 18, 1943. Balastdamm had a planned capacity of 300 prisoners but an effective strength at the time of 205.1 The cement factory was the Sägewerk Zunda, which manufactured prefabricated construction parts. According to chronicler of the Latvian Holocaust Max Kaufmann, the camp reached the planned strength of 300 prisoners, of whom 30 were females, and had Latvian SS guards. The prisoners also worked for the SS-Bauhof, a construction unit, and for a carpentry workshop.

According to Riga (Lenta) prisoner Abrahm Bloch, prisoners from Balastdamm reported, in early August 1944, that the SS had just concluded a “children’s operation” (Kinderaktion) in their subcamp, during which 25 young Jews were selected for killing.2 Kaufmann subsequently listed 22 young victims of this Aktion and stated that most of its remaining Balastdamm prisoners were murdered at the Riga-Kaiserwald concentration camp after Balastdamm’s closure on August 7, 1944.


Primary sources for this subcamp begin with the documents compiled by Wolfgang Benz, Konrad Kwiet, and Jürgen Matthäus, eds., Einsatz im “Reichskommissariat Ostland”: Dokumente zum Völkermord im Baltikum und in Weissrussland, 1941–1944 (Berlin: Metropol, 1998), Doc. 254, pp. 265–266, which reproduces the Riga Stadtkommissar’s memorandum on the Riga-Kaiserwald Kasernierungen of August 18, 1943. As cited by Kugler, Abrahm Bloch’s memoirs are available in Yiddish and Russian in MSS form at MEL.

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VOLUME I: PART B
NOTES


RIGA (DÜNAWERKE)

Established in the city of Riga, with a planned capacity of 1,500 male and female Jewish prisoners, Dünawerke was 1 of 13 old and new quartering sites (Kasernierungen) formed or absorbed by the Riga-Kaiserwald concentration camp on August 18, 1943. On the date of its foundation, the subcamp had 398 prisoners. Important information on this Kasernierung comes from survivor Lily Margules, who entered Kaiserwald and Dünawerke after the liquidation of the Vilna ghetto in September 1943. According to her account, the inmates performed construction work under the supervision of Organisation Todt (OT) personnel and older German guards who were unfit for frontline duty. The prisoners wore civilian clothing with white rings and white stripes painted on them in order to prevent escape. At Dünawerke, Margules and other prisoners hauled sand in wheelbarrows. “Russian” civilians who worked on the same job site were kind to the prisoners. The men’s and women’s compounds, she recalled, were in the same building but separated by “a very heavy door.” The availability of water and beds made this Kasernierung relatively tolerable. Margules recalled that the camp leader (Lagerführer), who was an SS-Obersturmführer, had an illicit relationship with a Jewish woman from Berlin that benefited the prisoners, as his treatment softened somewhat. According to Riga survivor and historian Alfred Winter, the Lagerführer was actually an Oberscharführer, which is more consistent with the ranks of known Kasernierungen leaders.

Margules’s sister, who for a time worked for the camp administration, contracted rheumatic fever while at Dünawerke. Unlike the fate suffered by many patients in the infirmaries of the Kaiserwald Kasernierungen, she received care from a German doctor, who gave her more than three weeks to recover. As Margules recognized, patients who stayed longer than three days were usually selected in operations (Aktionen) and murdered in the forests near Riga.

As evidenced by the account of Golda Geller Lewinsohn Klein, there were some transfers of prisoners between Dünawerke and the other Kasernierungen. Dispatched to Kaiserwald from the Vilna ghetto in late September 1943, Klein was sent to Dünawerke three days later. After five months, she and other prisoners were returned to Kaiserwald and reassigned to the Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft (AEG) camp at Riga-Strasdenhof.

At Dünawerke, the prisoners composed poetry and songs to keep up their morale. Margules’s friend Toshia, who subsequently perished, composed a song called “Dünawerke,” which “tells us that . . . [the camp was] an island surrounded by waters and forests, and there are Jews from all [over] the world that work very hard and are constantly freezing in the cold weather. In the morning, it is still dark, but the bell rings and we have to go out, stand up and go to work. And we are asking the world why are the Jews punished? . . . For whose things are Jews being punished?”

As part of the dissolution of Kaiserwald’s Kasernierungen, Dünawerke closed in the summer of 1944. The prisoners were evacuated by ship via Danzig to Stutthof.

SOURCES

This subcamp is briefly mentioned in Andrej Angrick and Peter Klein, Die “Endlösung” in Riga: Ausbeutung und Vernichtung 1941–1944 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006), p. 405. Dünawerke is described in some detail in Alfred Winter, The Ghetto of Riga and Continuance (Monroe, CT: Self-pub., 1998), pp. 112–113. This account must be used with due caution, as the author, who was a survivor of the Riga ghetto and Kaiserwald concentration camp, synthesizes many uncited survivors’ accounts and continually employs the first-person plural in describing Kaiserwald and its Kasernierungen, making it difficult to distinguish what he personally witnessed from what he pieced together from other survivors’ accounts. It is listed as having separate women’s and men’s camps in ITS, Verzeichnis der Haftstätten unter dem Reichsführer-SS (1933–1945), 2 vols. (Arolsen, 1979), 1: 250.

Primary sources for Dünawerke begin with its listing in the documents compiled by Wolfgang Benz, Konrad Kwiet, and Jürgen Matthäus, eds., Einsatz im “Reichskommissariat Ostland”: Dokumente zum Völkermord im Baltikum und in Weißrussland, 1941–1944 (Berlin: Metropol, 1998), Doc. 254, pp. 265–266, which reproduces the Riga Stadtkommissar’s memorandum on the Riga-Kaiserwald Kasernierungen of August 18, 1943, and copied from NARA. The affidavit of Golda Geller Lewinsohn Klein was submitted in the class-action suit against AEG brought by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany. It is located in USHMMA, RG-12.004.02*04, Benjamin Ferencz Collection, Claims against German Industrial Firms Records, 1952–1994. The most detailed account of Dünawerke is found in USHMMA, RG-50.030*0150, Lily Margules oral history interview, January 3, 1990, which is available in videotape and transcript.

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NOTES

Riga (Heereskraftfahrzeugpark)
Hirtenstrasse [aka Park]

According to the International Tracing Service (ITS), Riga-Kaiserwald established a quartering site (Kasernierung) at Hirtenstrasse, Riga, at the end of January 1944. Called “Park,” Hirtenstrasse provided male and female Jewish prisoner labor for an army vehicle repair facility (Heereskraftfahrzeugpark [HKP]). It was the second HKP Kasernierung formed in Riga; the first had already been established by August 18, 1943. The subcamp closed on August 6, 1944, as the SS closed the Kasernierung during the Red Army’s advance, and the survivors were eventually sent by ship and barge to Stutthof.

Sources
The only source for the Hirtenstrasse subcamp is ITS, Verzeichnis der Haftstätten unter dem Reichsführer-SS (1933–1945), 2 vols. (Arolsen, 1979), I: 251, where the men’s and women’s camps are listed separately.

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Riga (Heereskraftfahrzeugpark)

On August 18, 1943, the SS established a quartering site (Kasernierung) for male Jewish prisoners for the army vehicle repair installation (Heereskraftfahrzeugpark, HKP) in the city of Riga. Located near the Spilwe (Spilva) airport, this camp held 1,000 male Jewish prisoners from the Riga ghetto, then in the process of being liquidated by the Germans. According to the Stadtkommissar of Riga, it held 375 prisoners when it began operating. HKP was 1 of the original 13 Kasernierungen established or absorbed by the Riga-Kaiserwald concentration camp. According to the International Tracing Service (ITS), the SS established a second HKP Kasernierung at Hirtenstrasse in Riga in late January 1944 [see Riga-Kaiserwald/Riga (Heereskraftfahrzeugpark, Hirtenstrasse)]. According to survivor Max Kaufmann, the prisoners from the two Kasernierungen were able to maintain some informal communications.

On December 15, 1943, the camp leader (Lagerführer) of Riga-Spilwe, SS-Hauptscharführer Gustav Sorge, also assumed command at HKP. He had only been appointed camp leader at Spilwe on December 1. A staff member at the Esterwegen and Sachsenhausen concentration camps whose career in the Inspectorate of Concentration Camps (IKL) dated back to 1934, and who had even been a guard at the Esterwegen early camp in 1933, Sorge lived up to his nickname “Iron Gustav” (Eiserne Gustav). During the two years prior to taking command at Spilwe, he had been Arbeitseinsatzführer at the Herzogenbusch main concentration camp [aka Vught] in the Netherlands and served in the summer of 1943 on a “bandit”-hunting (antipartisan) detail for the Higher SS and Police Leader (HSSPF) Ostland. At Spilwe, Sorge had already imposed a severe regime along IKL lines. On January 31, 1944, he was transferred from Spilwe and HKP to the massive Kaiserwald subcamp at Dondangen. At HKP, Sorge’s replacement was SS-Hauptscharführer Ludwig Blatterspiel (called in some survivor testimonies “Platterspiel”). After the September–October 1944 evacuation of Kaiserwald, Sorge assumed command of SS-Baubrigade XII (Construction Brigade XII) in November 1944, which was organized at Sachsenhausen. U.S. troops captured him on April 28, 1945, and held him in the SS internment camp at Bad Kreuznach.

Prisoners at HKP repaired vehicles for the German army. Although the ITS listed HKP as a men’s camp, there were some Jewish women held there as well, according to survivor Josef Katz. Katz was a German Jew from Lübeck who entered HKP in the late spring or early summer of 1944. At Kaiserwald, Katz was assigned to a gardening detail to be established at HKP, but upon arrival at HKP, he was arbitrarily dispatched to Spilwe, where he worked on airstrips. After repeated entreaties, he finally gained admittance to HKP’s gardening detail, where he worked with another Jewish man and five Jewish women. The Kommando raised vegetables, fruit, and flowers. As Katz recalled, the Red Army Air Force bombed HKP in July 1944. Unlike other concentration camps inside and outside the Reich, the prisoners were able to enter an air-raid shelter during the attack.

According to Katz, Kaiserwald’s SS medic (Sanitätsdienstgrad), SS-Oberscharführer Heinz Günther Wisner (mis-spelled “Wiesner” in Katz’s account), carried out a mass selection at HKP in June 1944. During this “operation” (Aktion), the euphemism used at Riga for selections for murder, Wisner ordered 40 men and 30 women to board trucks, which took them, in another Riga euphemism, to the “base command” (Stützpunktkommando), the nearby forests where they were murdered. Born Heinz von Wisotzky, Wisner had served since 1939 as an SS orderly at Stutthof and Flossenbürg. Promoted to Unterscharführer in the summer of 1943, Wisner joined the Kaiserwald staff on November 1, 1943, where he subsequently advanced in rank to Oberscharführer. Known to the prisoners as “Dr. Wisner,” he was sentenced in 1985 to five years’ imprisonment by a Düsseldorf court, in connection with the selections committed at Riga Kasernierungen, as well as homicides committed in the Riga-Kaiserwald main camp. The prosecution did not charge him in connection with selections at HKP, however. By the time of his arrest in 1979, Wisner had retired from a mechanical engineering firm located in Düsseldorf.

HKP was closed on August 6, 1944, and the prisoners were marched to the port of Riga, where they boarded the
Bremerhaven with almost 6,400 other prisoners. After three days below decks in overcrowded and filthy conditions, the Bremerhaven’s prisoners were sent via barges on the Vistula River to Stutthof.

In 1959, the Bonn Landgericht (Regional Court) sentenced Spilwe’s former Lagerführer, Sorge, to life imprisonment plus 15 years for the murder of 67 prisoners and for 20 additional attempted murders. Inexplicably, the charges against him did not involve his service in Riga.

**NOTES**

1. Auszüge aus einem Schreiben des Stadtkommissars Riga an den Generalkommissar, Abt. III, August 18, 1943, Btr. “Umsetzung” von Juden in Konzentrationslager [reproduced from NARA, T-459 Reel 19, fr. 503], in Wolfgang Benz, Konrad Kwiet, and Jürgen Matthäus, eds., Einsatz im “Reichskommissariat Ostland”: Dokumente zum Völkermord im Baltikum und in Weissrussland, 1941–1944 (Berlin: Metropol, 1998), Doc. 254, pp. 265–266, which reproduces the Riga Stadtkommissar’s memorandum on the Riga-Kaiserwald Kasernierungen of August 18, 1943, and copied from NARA. Investigation files for Wisner are available at ZLNW-K under the heading 130 Js 2/78 (Z). The case of Gustav Sorge (8 Ks 1/58) is found in for Wisner are available at ZLNW-K under the heading 130 Js 2/78 (Z). The case of Gustav Sorge (8 Ks 1/58) is found in


5. Ibid., pp. 168–169.
From August 1943 until April 1944, Sipo official SS-Untersturmführer Eduard Roschmann directed the camp along with Scherwitz. A Jewish affairs specialist, Roschmann exercised little influence at Lenta until the completion of the Riga ghetto’s liquidation on November 2, 1943, and the departure of Scherwitz on a business trip to France, in December 1943, for the procurement of luxury goods. In Scherwitz’s absence, Roschmann arrested Tamara Sherman. After his return in January 1944, Scherwitz reportedly offered a bribe of 20,000 Reichsmark (RM) to secure her release. Imposing a harsh regime, Roschmann instituted the IKL practice of 25 cane blows for punishment and construed work accidents as sabotage. Dismissing two Latvian Jews from the subcamp’s ghetto-like prisoner police force (Jewish ghetto police, Ordnungsdienst), he appointed a German Jew, named Levi or Levy, from Cologne as its head. As Roschmann’s factotum, Levi instituted a search for so-called organizers (thieves), seizing stolen goods and punishing the offenders, in some cases, resulting in their torture. Roschmann transferred 250 less productive prisoners to the SS factory (Betrieb) at Strasdenhof on the orders of Kaiserswalde commandant SS-Sturmbannführer Albert Sauer. According to Kugler, Lenta’s population declined to 550 by January 1944. In light of these conditions, 4 male prisoners, Hirschberg, Schnaider, Juter, and Juter’s son, escaped and reached the home of Janis and Johanna Lipke. The Lipkes sheltered almost 40 Jews, nearly two-fifths of the 103 Jews rescued in Latvia. In 1989, Yad Vashem honored them with the Righteous among the Nations medal.

According to Kugler, the combination of mismanagement and escapes led to Roschmann’s removal in April 1944. Roschmann’s successor as co-commandant was the lower-ranking SS-Hauptsturmführer Robert Nickel, whom Roschmann had appointed as a guard in February 1944 on the strength of Nickel’s performance at the Salaspils police camp. More pragmatic than Roschmann, Nickel cooperated with Scherwitz and the prisoner staff in the improvement of production and somewhat relaxed his predecessor’s regime. According to prisoner Werner Sauer, Scherwitz and Nickel even organized tennis and European football matches for the prisoners. Sauer’s building Kommando team wore red-trimmed black pants with red shirts with a masonic’s trowel as team symbol, while the furriers had blue-and-white-striped shirts emblazoned with a fox symbol.

In June 1944, Scherwitz returned to France for another procurement trip. After his return, as other Kaserneurungen prepared for evacuation, Scherwitz marched nearly all of Lenta’s prisoners to the police camp at Salaspils on July 31, 1944. At Salaspils the Lenta inmates were segregated by gender but housed in a separate part of the camp. They were not generally subjected to Salaspils’s harsh regime. As Kaiserswalde’s camp doctor (Lagerarzt) Sturmbannführer Eduard Krebsbach and SS medic (Sanitätsdienstgrad) SS-Oberscharführer Heinz Günther Wisner undertook mass selections in the various Kaserneurungen for the killing of Jews no longer capable of working, called Aktionen, it is possible that Scherwitz sought by this abrupt move to forestall a selection. If this were the case, then he only delayed it, because after the prisoners’ return to Lenta, on August 8 or 9, 1944, 110 prisoners by Kugler’s estimate were dispatched to the “base command” (Stützpunktkommando), the Kaiserswalde euphemism for murder in the neighboring forests. Scherwitz used his influence to spare at least one family. Some 300 of the surviving Lenta prisoners boarded the Kanonier on August 24 or 25, 1944, in a transport that totaled 3,155 prisoners. After crossing the Baltic, the prisoners disembarked at Danzig, where barges then took them to the Stutthof concentration camp. Separately, Scherwitz took a smaller group of prisoners with him to Libau (Liepāja).

During the U.S. occupation of Bavaria, Scherwitz posed as a Lithuanian Jewish refugee named Eleke Scherwitz and claimed to be a Riga camp victim. As he worked for a survivors’ association, former Lenta prisoners identified him to the Americans. Transferred from U.S. to Bavarian custody, where he called himself Elika (Eleken) Sirewitz, a Jew who joined the SS in 1943, Scherwitz was tried for murdering three escapees in August 1944. Listed in the case under a variant spelling of one of his aliases, “Elke S.,” the court described him as a “full Jew” (Volljude). Kugler argues that the Bavarians eagerly tried him because of his alleged Jewishness. As discovered by investigator Christel Paulsen in 1950 at the Berlin Document Center (BDC), then run by the U.S. Department of State, Scherwitz’s Nazi Party card revealed his date of birth as August 21, 1903, not August 8, 1910. While the BDC card listed his SS number as 51561, which indicated entrance into the SS before the Nazi takeover, his SS autobiography (Lebenslauf) showed an SS number of 241935 with entry into the SS in 1933. After a complicated series of legal proceedings, Scherwitz was sentenced to six years’ imprisonment with credit for two years of time served. He died in 1962.


contain little useful information on Lenta and reproduce Scherwitz’s false identity. The Scherwitz cases are listed as LG München 1 Ks 26/49, OLG München 1 Ss 70/49, and Bayerischen OLG I, III 16/50. Kugler makes extensive use of the original prosecution and trial records, which include testimonies and Scherwitz’s scanty personnel records. The trial records are held at BHStA-M, Sta. München, Scherwitz Verfahren, 1743; and Gsta. OLG München Nr. 207 (Sierwitz). Scherwitz’s personnel card is available in the SSO collection at BA-B. Kugler reproduces his Lebenslauf in the photographic section. As cited by Kugler, two unpublished survivors’ accounts for this camp are Werner Sauer’s “Mensch unter Menschen” (unpub. MSS, n.d., YVA 033/4126); and Abraham Bloch’s letters and memoirs in Russian and Yiddish, which are available at MEL. Lange’s listing as a participant in the Wannsee Conference may be found in John Mendelssohn, ed., The Holocaust: Selected Documents in Eighteen Volumes, vol. 11, The Wannsee Protocol and a 1944 Report on Auschwitz by the Office of Strategic Services, intro. Robert Wolfe (New York: Garland, 1982).

**NOTES**


4. Quoted in ibid., p. 354.


**RIGA (MÜHLGRABEN) [AKA ULTRA]**

On July 7, 1943, Chief of the Sicherheitspolizei (Sipo) and Sicherheitsdienst (SD) in Riga Dr. Rudolf Lange designated Mühlgraben (Milgravis) a quartering site (Kasernierungen) for the deployment of at least 1,000 Jewish inhabitants from the Riga ghetto, which was then in the process of being liquidated. On August 18, 1943, the Stadtkommissar Riga confirmed Mühlgraben’s inclusion among the Kasernierungen absorbed or established by the Riga-Kaiserwald concentration camp. Although the site was supposed to hold 1,300 prisoners, it had 737 at the time. Other accounts place the camp’s total population at 1,500 Jewish prisoners. The Mühlgraben inmates worked for the Army Clothing Office 701 (Armeebekleidungsamt [ABA]), which sorted and repaired soiled and damaged uniforms for the German army. The camp was situated inside a former Latvian chemical factory called Lēverkūzi Ultramarina fabrics, which once had commercial ties to the German IG Farbenindustrie AG chemical concern. Called “Ultra” by some prisoners, the camp betrayed signs of its original purpose, as everything inside the complex had been painted blue, according to survivor Hilde Sherman-Zander, and the main sorting operations and roll calls took place in the former “gas hall” (Gashalle). Segregated by gender, the prisoners lived in two “community rooms” (Gemeinschaftsräumen). The camp population originally included children as well as adults.

The camp administration belonged exclusively to the German army. Unteroffizier Heinz Müller was the camp leader (Lagerführer), and his deputy was Obergefreiter Franz Schwellenberg (or Schwellenbach). It is possible that Schwellenberg may have been an SD or police member. The soldiers mistreated and harassed the prisoners. Former Mühlgraben prisoners attested to the brutality, recalling that Schwellenberg threatened to beat “black and blue” anyone caught stealing military uniforms. Jakob Galanter remembered that punishments included 25 blows with a cane. The work pace imposed upon the prisoners, he reported, was frenetic.

Mühlgraben had a penal column (Strafkommando), which held prisoners deemed guilty of minor infractions or whose work pace was too slow. Hilde Sherman-Zander was assigned to the penal detachment on two occasions, respectively, for three and four weeks. In one instance her work performance was judged inadequate, and in the second, she was caught with books in her possession and thus punished for holding contraband. Another prisoner in the penal detachment, Erwin Sekules, hauled wagons filled with wood at the double for six hours straight, which resulted in his being brought to the camp infirmary in a state of utter exhaustion. The prisoner doctor, Dr. Josef (called “Dr. Joseph” in some survivors’ accounts), a Jewish physician from Vienna, warned that additional labor would kill him. Nevertheless, Sekules was dispatched on yet another penal detail shortly afterward.

As was the case at the Riga (Lenta) quartering site, Mühlgraben had a Jewish Ordnungsdienst (OD) that kept internal order. From Zander’s testimony, which named some of the Jewish “police,” the army displayed a degree of favoritism toward German over Latvian Jews in the appointment of OD members.

In May 1944, the ABA opened a second Kasernierung at Krottingen, on behalf of ABA 709. For this camp, the army dispatched approximately 200 Mühlgraben inmates to form this subcamp.
According to Max Kaufmann, who produced the earliest chronicle of the Holocaust in Latvia, Kaiserwald camp doctor (Lagerarzt) SS-Sturmbannführer Eduard Krebsbach and SS medic (Sanitätsdienstgrad) Heinz Günther Wisner selected children at Mühlgraben. The selections, called “operations” (Aktionen) at Kaiserwald, involved the removal by truck of weakened and youthful prisoners who were then shot in the forest. In the Kaiserwald euphemism, the unknown destination of these victims was the “base camp command” (Stützpunktkommando). Although Mühlgraben was not cited in Wisner’s indictment, Kaufmann’s claim accorded with the pattern of the Aktionen that took place in other Kaiserwald sub-camps in the Riga area, for which Wisner was held responsible at his 1985 trial in Düsseldorf. Survivor testimony further underscored Kaufmann’s charge. According to Sherman-Zander, three major selections occurred at Mühlgraben: the first was the “January [1944] Aktion,” during which 24 children and about half the adult population were selected for murder. The second selection occurred while Sherman-Zander was kept in the infirmary. The timely intervention of Dr. Josef prevented her selection, but most of the patients were taken away. The third Aktion occurred on or around August 6, 1944, shortly before the camp was evacuated.

Most of the remaining Mühlgraben prisoners were evacuated by sea on a harrowing three-day journey aboard the Bremerhaven to Danzig. From the port of Danzig, the survivors proceeded via barges on the Vistula River to Stettin. Although the International Tracing Service (ITS) listed the official closure date for the Mühlgraben men's and women's camps as August 6, 1944, Sherman-Zander recalled that a small detachment of prisoners, including herself, remained behind to operate the clothing depot, until slightly before the Germans abandoned Riga to the Soviets. Sherman-Zander dated her evacuation aboard the Sanga, to late October 1944. The prisoners in her transport were dispatched to Libau (Liepāja).

Primary sources for Mühlgraben begin with its listing in the documents compiled by Wolfgang Benz, Konrad Kwiet, and Jürgen Matthäus, eds., Einsatz im “Reichskommissariat Ostland”: Dokumente zum Völkermord im Baltikum und in Weißrussland, 1941–1944 (Berlin: Metropol, 1998), Doc. 254, pp. 265–266, which reproduces the Riga Stadtkommissar’s memorandum on the Riga-Kaiserwald Kasernierungen of August 18, 1943, and copied from NARA. As cited by Angrick and Klein, Lange’s conference discussing Mühlgraben can be found in BA-B, R 91 (Gebietskommissare im Geschäftsbereich des Reichskommissars für das Ostland/164. Investigation files for Wisner are available at ZLNW-K under heading 130 J 2/78 (Z). Unpublished testimony may be found in P III h. No. 1034, Erwin Sekules (and 11 others), Evidence against “Unteroffizier” Franz Schwellenberg, August 17, 1947, in Testaments to the Holocaust, originally WL, http://159.104.6.6/testaments/en/t3h.asp. The survivors listed in this testimony are Erwin Sekules, Else Sekules, Rosa Federmann, Malli Federmann, Soft Billig, Karl Schneider, Heinz Rosenhain, Clare Rosenhain, Hilde Lehmann, Erika Manne, Martin Manne, and Ilse Herzberg. In the same collection may be found P III h no. 1034a, Statement of Karl Schneider, Evidence against “Unteroffizier” Franz Schwellenberg, August 17, 1947; and P III h No. 1034 c, Statement of Jakov Galanter, Evidence against “Unteroffizier” Franz Schwellenberg, September 3, 1947. Two testimonies by the same witness on the subcamps at Mühlgraben and Krottingen are also found in Testaments: P III h No. 283 (Riga), Statement of Mrs. Johanna Rosenthal, n.d.; and P III h No. 538 (Riga), Statement of Mrs. Johanna Rosenthal, June 26, 1945. Also see the detailed published testimony by Hilde Sherman-Zander, Zwischen Tag und Dunkel: Mädchentage im Ghetto (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1993).

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5. P III h. No. 1034a, Karl Schneider, Evidence against “Unteroffizier” Franz Schwellenberg, August 17, 1947, in Testaments to the Holocaust, pp. 1–2.
6. Quoted in P III h. No. 1034, Erwin Sekules (and 11 others), Evidence against “Unteroffizier” Franz Schwellenberg, August 17, 1947, p. 3.

RIGA (REICHSBahn)

The SS established a quartering site (Kasernierung) for 600 male and female Jewish prisoners on August 18, 1943, to work for the Deutsche Reichsbahn (German Railways). This Kasernierung was 1 of the original 13 absorbed from the Riga ghetto, then in the process of liquidation, or established by the Riga-Kaiserwald concentration camp. On the date of its first mention, in a memorandum from the Stadtkommissar of Riga concerning the reorganization of the ghetto's Kasernierungen, the Reichsbahn camp held 192 Jewish prisoners.1

According to Riga ghetto and Kaiserwald survivor Alfred Winter, who has compiled prisoner testimonies on this camp, the inmates were mostly skilled workers who repaired railway equipment under the direction of Reichsbahn personnel. The work pace was unrelenting, but the prisoners had marginally better living conditions, including weekly showers, than in other Kasernierungen. Some overseers took care of their work detachments in the name of improving performance. The work day began with a scramble for usable tools, which were in perennially short supply. As was common elsewhere in the Riga camps, the imposition of concentration camp uniforms and haircuts, including the cropping of women's hair, began only shortly before the camp's dissolution.

In preparation for the evacuation, the Kaiserwald medical staff conducted a selection, or Aktion, as Riga prisoners called it, at the Reichsbahn camp on July 27, 1944. Present were Kaiserwald's camp doctor (Lagerarzt) Dr. Eduard Krebsbach and the SS medic (Sanitätsdienstgrad) Heinz Günther Wisner. Forcing the male and then the female prisoners to run naked past a reviewing area, Krebsbach and Wisner dispatched the weakest by truck to the “base camp command” (Stützpunktkommando), a Kaiserwald euphemism for murder in the nearby forests. Krebsbach was previously the Lagerarzt at Mauthausen, where, in a play on his name, he was called “The Needle” (Spritzbach). Born Heinz von Wisotzky, Wisner had served since 1939 as an SS orderly at Stutthof and Flossenbürg. Promoted to Unterscharführer in the summer of 1943, Wisner joined the Kaiserwald staff on November 1, 1943, where he subsequently advanced in rank to Oberscharführer. Known to the prisoners as “Dr. Wisner,” he was sentenced in 1985 to five years’ imprisonment by a Düsseldorf court, in connection with the selections committed at this and other Riga Kasernierungen, as well as homicides committed in the Kaiserwald main camp. By the time of his arrest in 1979, Wisner had retired from a mechanical engineering firm located in Düsseldorf.

On August 6, 1944, as the Red Army closed on Riga, the SS conducted the remaining Reichsbahn prisoners to the port of Riga, where they boarded the Bremerhaven with almost 6,400 other prisoners from Riga's Kasernierungen. This departure marked the first stage in the evacuation of the Kaiserwald camps. After a harrowing three-day journey aboard ship, they arrived in Danzig and proceeded by barge to the Stutthof concentration camp.

SOURCES This subcamp is discussed at some length in Alfred Winter, The Ghetto of Riga and Continuance (Monroe, CT: Self-published, 1998), pp. 114–115. This account must be used with caution, as the author does not cite his sources and often employs the first-person plural, making it difficult to separate his personal testimony from other accounts. The Reichsbahn subcamp is listed as separate men's and women's camps in ITS, Verzeichnis der Haftstätten unter dem Reichsführer-SS (1933–1945), 2 vols. (Aroslen, 1979), 1: 242. The Wisner case (Lfd. Nr. 896) will be included in a forthcoming volume of Justiz und NS-Verbrechen but is listed cursorily on the publication's Web site at www1.jur.uva.nl/jnsv. The author would like to thank Dick de Mildt for furnishing supplementary biographical information on Wisner. Anita Kugler, Scherbwitz: Der jüdische SS-Offizier (Cologne: Kiepenhauer & Witsch, 2004), p. 411, reports that 6,382 boarded the Bremerhaven.

Primary sources for this subcamp begin with its listing in the document collection by Wolfgang Benz, Konrad Kwiet, and Jürgen Matthäus, eds., Einsatz im “Reichskommissariat Ostland”: Dokumente zum Völkermord im Baltikum und in Weißrussland, 1941–1944 (Berlin: Metropol, 1998), Doc. 254, pp. 265–266, which reproduces the Riga Stadtkommissar's memorandum on the Riga-Kaiserwald Kasernierungen of August 18, 1943, and copied from NARA. Investigation files for Wisner are available at ZLNM-K under heading 130 Js 2/78 (Z).

Joseph Robert White

NOTE
Riga (Truppenwirtschaftslager, TWL)

According to the Stadtkommissar of Riga, the Troop Supply Camp (Truppenwirtschaftslager, TWL) was one of the quartering sites (Kasernierungen) established or absorbed by the Riga-Kaiserwald concentration camp during the liquidation of the Riga ghetto. First mentioned on August 18, 1943, the subcamp was intended to hold 700 prisoners, of whom 419 were already quartered at TWL on that date. Located only a few miles from the Kaiserwald main camp at Mežaparks, some of its prisoners originated from the old Kasernierung for the Reichskommissariat Ostland (RKO). According to survivor and Riga chronicler Max Kaufmann, some 350 men, women, and children entered TWL from the Reichskommissariat’s quartering site during the reorganization. TWL’s prisoners sorted clothing and other supplies for the German army.

Among the TWL prisoners was Steven Springfield, who volunteered to work in this subcamp in order to escape the vicious conditions inside Kaiserwald. After learning that his older brother and father had been dispatched from the ghetto to Kaiserwald, Springfield attempted to get word to them to volunteer for TWL as well. Regular exchanges of prisoners resulted in the establishment of tenuous lines of communication between prisoners in the TWL and Kaiserwald camps. In particular, TWL prisoners having dental problems had to report to Kaiserwald for treatment, which created opportunities for communications and smuggling. Feigning a toothache, Springfield reported for one such transport, bringing with him contraband socks stolen from the warehouse, in order to contact his family. Upon realizing that the prisoners faced a close search at the Kaiserwald gate, Springfield surreptitiously handed over the socks to a Latvian SS man. His move was too late, however, as another prisoner who had also tried to sneak socks into the main camp panicked and dropped his contraband on the ground. As Springfield’s fellow prisoners knew he was carrying ill-gotten goods, and had not seen him hand them over to the Latvian guard, they pressured him into confessing to the SS, lest the remainder face retaliation. Springfield did so in the knowledge that someone else had committed the offense. Tortured in the Kaiserwald bunker, Springfield credited the TWL camp elder, David Kagan, who accompanied two infuriated German guards, with saving his life:

As they entered the bunker, before the Germans had a chance to draw their guns, the camp Ältester [elder] started beating me, saying you lousy son of a gun. . . . How dare you . . . steal from the Germans, and kicked me and beat me and kicked me and beat me. I started bleeding profusely from all over my body and he beat me into unconsciousness. But somehow, ironically, that saved my life. He beat me so much that the Germans assumed that I was dead or close to dead. They just turned around and walked out, which I was told later because I was unconscious. I was laying in this bunker for another two or three days and then finally the camp elder came and got me and took me back to [the TWL] camp and it is something which I have never forgotten. Mr. Kagan who did not have a very good reputation from everybody because a lot of people felt that he was too strict and sometimes too merciless, but I must, if I want to be honest, I really have to admit that if not for him I wouldn’t be alive today.

Just prior to the camp’s evacuation in the summer of 1944, the Kaiserwald medical staff conducted a mass selection of weakened prisoners at TWL. Present were Kaiserwald’s camp doctor (Lagerarzt) Dr. Eduard Krebsbach and the SS medic (Sanitätsdienstgrad) Heinz Günther Wisner. Krebsbach and Wisner dispatched the victims by truck to the “base camp command” (Stützpunktkommando), a Kaiserwald euphemism for murder in the nearby forests. Krebsbach was previously the Lagerarzt at Mauthausen, where, in a play on his name, he was called “The Needle” (Spritzbach). Born Heinz von Wisotzky, Wisner had served since 1939 as an SS orderly at Stutthof and Flossenbürg. Promoted to Unterscharführer in the summer of 1943, Wisner joined the Kaiserwald staff on November 1, 1943, where he subsequently advanced in rank to Oberscharführer. Known to the prisoners as “Dr. Wisner,” he was sentenced in 1985 to five years’ imprisonment by a Düsseldorf court, in connection with the selections committed at this and other Riga Kasernierungen, as well as homicides committed in the Kaiserwald main camp. By the time of his arrest in 1979, Wisner had retired from a mechanical engineering firm located in Düsseldorf.

After succeeding in getting his father and older brother to transfer into TWL, Springfield witnessed the selections that took place in the camp. As his account makes clear, he had to protect his father against the selections:

In the meantime, periodically the Germans would come into our camp, line everybody up in front of a table where one of the Germans would sit. Everybody had to undress naked and walk in front of him, and if there was something he would not like on your body, any scar or anything like that, you went to the left, and left meant certain death. And my father was an invalid and who was with us at that time yet still on many occasions he would have been doomed if . . . we’re [un]able to save him by not letting him go into the line, by sneaking him out. When once I remember my father was taken out and sent to the left, and he was still standing there and waiting [for] the truck to take him away, and the German guard was walking back and forth, and as he turned his back I snuck in. I grabbed my father and pulled him out of there which at that time saved his life.

Springfield’s father subsequently perished at Stutthof concentration camp.
According to the International Tracing Service (ITS), the TWL men’s camp was dissolved on June 28, 1944, and the women’s camp closed in October 1944. According to Springfield, however, the men did not evacuate the TWL subcamp until the fall of 1944. After the sea evacuation, which took them first to Stutthof near Danzig, some of the survivors were moved to one of the Magdeburg subcamps near Buchenwald, according to Kaufmann.


Joseph Robert White

**Notes**


2. USHMA, RG-50.030*0220, Steven Springfield interview (transcript), March 30, 1990, pp. 7–9.

3. Ibid., p. 9.

**Riga-Spielwe**

According to the International Tracing Service (ITS), the SS established a quartering site (Kasernierung) for Jewish women at the Spielwe (Spilva) airport on July 5, 1943. On August 5, 1943, a men’s camp also opened at the same site. The Luftwaffe deployed the prisoners on construction and repair details at the airport, whose military significance increased with the Red Army’s approach. On August 18, 1943, the Stadtkommissar of Riga reported that Spielwe’s planned capacity was 1,500 prisoners, of which 775 were already on-site. Spielwe was 1 of the 13 original Kasernierungen absorbed or established by Kaiserwald. The constant turnover due to horrific working conditions, mistreatment, selections, and epidemics has led one chronicler, Riga ghetto and Kaiserwald survivor Alfred Winter, to estimate that as many as 3,000 Jews passed through this camp.

Before the establishment of the Riga-Kaiserwald concentration camp in March 1943, a small Kasernierung of the Kovno ghetto existed at this site but worked only in support services for the Luftwaffe, not construction. Situated in the Ilgezener Brewery adjacent to the airport, this structure subsequently served as living quarters for the much-larger Spielwe Kasernierung under Kaiserwald’s jurisdiction. Its limited space produced catastrophic overcrowding.

On December 1, 1943, SS-Hauptscharführer Gustav Sorge became Spielwe’s camp leader (Lagerführer). A staff member at the Esterwegen and Sachsenhausen concentration camps whose career in the Inspectorate of Concentration Camps (IKL) dated back to 1934, and who had even been a guard at the Esterwegen early camp in 1933, Sorge lived up to his nickname “Iron Gustav” (Eiserne Gustav). During the two years prior to taking command at Spielwe, he had been Arbeits­einsatzführer at Vught, the Herzogenbusch main camp, in the Netherlands and served in the summer of 1943 on a “bandit”-hunting (antipartisan) detail for the Higher SS and Police Leader (HSSPF) Ostland. At Spielwe, the new Lagerführer imposed a harsh regime along IKL lines, in a departure from many of Kaiserwald’s other Kasernierungen. According to Winter, in one incident Sorge emptied the men’s barracks one night and forced the prisoners, already weakened by hunger and exhaustion, to perform penal exercises and endure beatings. One former prisoner called this ordeal the “witches’ dance,” which was similar to collective punishments practiced in the early Emsland camps.

On December 15, 1943, Sorge also assumed command of the neighboring camp for army vehicle repair, the Heereskraftfahrzeugpark (HKP). Sorge’s deputy at Spielwe was a Luftwaffe Gefreiter, Schuhmacher, who had already been an administrator at the Spielwe Kasernierung before its absorption by Kaiserwald. Schuhmacher enjoyed setting dogs upon the prisoners and otherwise complemented Sorge’s brutality. Worsening the situation for the prisoners was the second camp elder (Lagerältester), “Mr. X,” the nickname of Xavier Abel, the notorious camp elder and German criminal prisoner at Kaiserwald. After replacing the first camp elder, a German Jew named Kohn, Mr. X beat and otherwise harassed the Spielwe prisoners. On January 31, 1944, Sorge was transferred from Spielwe to the Kasernierung at Donlanden. After the September–October 1944 evacuation of Kaiserwald, Sorge assumed command of SS-Baubrigade (Construction Brigade) XII in November 1944, which was organized at Sachsenhausen.
U.S. troops captured him on April 28, 1945, and held him in the SS internment camp at Bad Kreuznach. Sorge’s replacement at Spilwe was Dondangen’s erstwhile camp leader SS-Oberscharführer Gröschel. Gröschel lost his post at Dondangen because of chronic alcoholism and mismanagement. At Spilwe, he proved susceptible to bribery and drink, in the form of alcohol pilfered by a prisoner, which somewhat tempered his violent behavior.4

Spilwe's male and female prisoners worked for the construction firms of Wolf und Döring, Firma Müller, and Organisation Todt (OT), which repaired and maintained the Spilwe airport. The work consisted of laying steel matting on airstrips, hauling heavy construction materials, and other hard labor. Some of the women were transferred to the Kauen/Schaulen subcamp in the spring of 1944, but the ITS erred in claiming that the women’s camp closed in April of that year, because Hungarian Jewish women were dispatched to Spilwe from Auschwitz II-Birkenau in June 1944. According to Winter, these women brought the Spilwe prisoners the first reports about gas chambers and crematories.

Josef Katz, a German Jew from Lübeck, was held at both the Spilwe and HKP camps in the spring of 1944. Although he was originally dispatched to work in a garden at HKP, the SS on-site arbitrarily transferred him to Spilwe, where he worked on airfield repair under OT supervision. The Hungarian women at Spilwe, reported Katz, were worked to death. After repeated importuning, Katz succeeded in gaining a place in the garden Kommando at HKP.5

The infirmary at Spilwe was little more than a place to die or to be selected for murder. In the spring of 1944, Emil Würth-Tscherne entered Spilwe as a prisoner orderly (Sanitäter). A political prisoner who held the same post at Dachau until late 1943, Würth had no medical experience. During his time at Spilwe, many Jewish women suffered from typhoid fever, which led to numerous selections.6

Just prior to the camp’s evacuation in the summer of 1944, the Kaiserwald medical staff conducted a mass selection of Spilwe’s weakened prisoners. Present were Kaiserwald’s camp doctor (Lagerarzt) Dr. Eduard Krebsbach and medic (Sanitätstsdienstgrad) Heinz Günther Wisner. Krebsbach and Wisner dispatched the victims by truck to the “base command” (Stürzpunktkommando), a Kaiserwald euphemism for murder in the nearby forests. Krebsbach was previously the Lagerarzt at Mauthausen, where, in a play on his name, he was called “The Needle” (Spritzbach). Born Heinz von Wisotzky, Wisner had served since 1939 as an SS orderly at Stutthof and Sachsenhausen as late as 1942, but the prosecution inexplicably did not charge him with causing any deaths at Spilwe, HKP, or Dondangen.

Spilwe was closed on August 6, 1944, when the surviving prisoners were marched to the port of Riga, where they boarded the Bremerhaven en route to the Stutthof concentration camp in Poland. The conditions aboard ship, which held about 6,400 Jews for three days, were lethal. According to ITS, a small group of Jewish men were retained at Spilwe after the closure, to undertake “clearance work” (Aufräumungsarbeiten).7

In 1959, the Bonn Landgericht (Regional Court) sentenced Spilwe’s former Lagerführer Sorge to life imprisonment plus 15 years for the murder of 67 prisoners and for 20 additional attempted murders. The charges included homicides committed at Esterwegen as early as 1934 and included cases at Sachsenhausen as late as 1942, but the prosecution inexplicably did not charge him with causing any deaths at Spilwe, HKP, or Dondangen.

SOURCES This subcamp is discussed at some length in Alfred Winter, The Ghetto of Riga and Continuance (Monroe, CT: Self-published, 1998), pp. 97–102. This account must be used with caution, as the author does not cite his sources and often employs the first-person plural, making it difficult to separate his personal testimony from other accounts. The Spilwe subcamp is listed as separate men’s and women’s camps in ITS, Verzeichnis der Haftstätten unter dem Reichsführer-SS (1933–1945), 2 vols. (Arolsen, 1979), 1: 253. The Wisner case (Lfd. Nr. 896) will be included in a forthcoming volume of Justiz und NS-Verbrechen but is listed cursorily on the publication’s web site at www1.jur.uva.nl/jans. The author would like to thank Dick de Mildt for furnishing supplementary biographical information on Wisner. Anita Kugler, Schwerzitz: Der jüdische SS-Offizier (Cologne: Kiepenhauer & Witsch, 2004), p. 411, reports that 6,382 boarded the Bremerhaven.


NOTES

and in Weißrussland, 1941–1944 (Berlin: Metropol, 1998), Doc. 254, p. 266.

RIGA-STRASDENHOF (AEG/VEF)

In 1942, the second-largest German electronics enterprise the Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft (AEG) took over the Latvian state-owned electronics factory Valsts Elektrotechniska Fabrika (VEF) in Riga-Strasdenhof (Strazdumvižā). Between 1943 and 1944, around 800 female Jewish prisoners from the Riga-Kaiserwald concentration camp worked as forced laborers for the AEG, manufacturing cables.

In 1941, after the German occupation of Latvia, the AEG established a sales office in Riga to promote its products mostly produced in Berlin with the Reichskommissariat Ostland (RKO). Products such as plugs, heating elements, cook tops, and electric ovens, which the AEG sent to Riga until October 1941, could only be sold in compliance with the Reich Economics Ministry (RWM) to the Wehrmacht for its winter quarters, workshops, and accommodations.

In the same period, the AEG prepared to take over the VEF, which had been compulsorily acquired by the German Military Administration. The VEF was the largest Latvian industrial enterprise. One of the best-known VEF products was a small camera, the Minox, which had been mass-produced in Riga beginning in 1938.

When the Wehrmacht took over the factory in the summer of 1941, it appointed an AEG representative as temporary director. Factory production valued at approximately 7 million Reichsmark (RM) was set with the production almost exclusively for the Wehrmacht. The factory was to supply the needs of the army, Luftwaffe, and navy, producing radios, batteries for flashlights, hand held microphones, head microphones, transmitting and receiving devices, as well as other electrical equipment. The AEG continued producing these items even after it leased the VEF factory in 1942. “The new factory,” as it was referred to in an AEG directive in October 1942, “shall supply primarily the Wehrmacht, so that for the time being there shall be no supplies for civilian requirements.” The factory was formally operated by the AEG through a new company, AEG Ostlandwerk GmbH, but from a technical and production point of view, it was administered by the AEG-owned Apparatwerk Treptow in Berlin. Berlin supplied all the employees for the management of the Riga factory. The majority continued with their careers after the war in management positions in the AEG concern.

The VEF factory was the largest AEG production site in occupied Eastern Europe, even larger than the Krakau Kabelwerk, if measured by the number of employees. In May 1943, it had 4,800 Latvian employees both on the production floor and in offices.

In the late summer of 1943, the AEG began to use female Jewish prisoners from the Kaiserwald concentration camp in the production process. The decision to use a large number of concentration camp prisoners arose probably as the result of a decline in the number of Latvian employees from 4,600 to 3,350. Additionally, Jews, beginning July 1943, could only be used outside the Riga-Kaiserwald concentration camp in large enterprises vital for the war effort that had their sub-camps (called “quartering sites,” or Kasernierungen) to accommodate the prisoners.

In August or September 1943, around 200 mostly young women were used in the factory to test their suitability. The numbers were eventually increased to approximately 800. Among them were Latvian Jewish women from Riga and Liepāja as well as German, Lithuanian, Czech, Polish, and Hungarian Jewish women.

The women were taken by truck from the Kaiserwald concentration camp to factory grounds opposite the main VEF factory building on the then Grosse Freiheitsstrasse. Here they were accommodated in a factory building equipped with three-tiered wooden bunk beds. Hygiene was better in the subcamp than in the Kaiserwald concentration camp.

Each day the women had to assemble for roll call, before and after work in the factory. From the end of 1943, the women working in the factory wore prisoner uniforms and wooden shoes. They worked alternatively in three eight-hour shifts in different departments without protective clothing, producing lightbulbs, cables, and batteries. They worked under the supervision of Latvian foremen.

“The people were afraid,” according to Eugenia Borvoskaja, a survivor from Riga born in 1922. “They tried to work good [so] they [would] not to be shot or punished.”

The food from the Kaiserwald concentration camp was always inadequate. Sometimes the women were secretly given food while working by Latvian workers. The survivor, Paula Zaltzman-Frankel, states that they could secretly roast potatoes in the factory.

According to Else Schwarz-Katz, technical director of the factory Herbert Dallmann declined to make additional food available. On the other hand, he intervened for the return of Zaltzman-Frankel and four other concentration camp prisoners after they had been transported by the SS to the Kaiserwald main camp because they were “good workers.”

The use of prisoners ceased in the summer of 1944 in Riga, and the factory was evacuated in the face of the Red Army advance. The AEG transported raw materials such as...
copper, lead, and iron from Riga to the Apparatfabrik Trep- tow in Berlin, where some of it was distributed to other AEG factories.\textsuperscript{18} Preparations were made to relocate part of the production process to Thorn in Poland, where production would recommence in a 900-square-meter (1,076-square- yard) cellar in the air-raid-safe fortress called Fort XIII. Fort XIII was the southernmost part of a defense ring established in the city of Thorn in the nineteenth century.

The concentration camps for women were also to be relocated from Riga to Thorn. On August 9, 1944, approximately 450 women were taken in goods train cars from the Riga factory grounds to the Thorn central railway station, and they were initially held in Fort XIII. The female concentration camp prisoners were to work in Thorn on the machines also transported from Riga, but the machines would not work. Wehrmacht soldiers were to be quartered in the cells of Fort XIII in October 1944. As a result, the women were transferred to a newly erected wooden barrack camp on the Vistula. It had three accommodation barracks. The Thorn-Winkenau subcamp was under the control of the Stutthof concentration camp.\textsuperscript{19} The SS camp commander was SS-Hauptscharführer Ludwig Blatterspiel, who had been the leader of Kaiserwald’s AEG, Strasdenhof (SS-Betriebe), and Heereskraftfahrzeugpark (HKP) subcamps in Riga.\textsuperscript{20}

In addition to the first transport of female prisoners at the beginning of August 1944, there were other transports until mid-October 1944 of female prisoners from Riga in the direction of Thorn.\textsuperscript{21} The SS did not transport these women in a train to Thorn but by ship via Danzig to the Stutthof concentration camp.\textsuperscript{18} From there, at the direction of the SS-Business Administration Main Office (WVHA) in Orani- enburg, 250 female concentration camp prisoners were transported on September 13, 1944, most likely to Thorn.\textsuperscript{22} On October 30, 1944, another 280 women were transported from the Stutthof concentration camp to Thorn. They were to replace 230 women also transported from Riga to Thorn, who were to be sent by the SS to Stutthof.\textsuperscript{23} A Stutthof concentration camp strength report from January 1945 puts the number of female concentration camp prisoners in the Thorn subcamp at 510.\textsuperscript{24}

The women in the AEG production process in Thorn put rubber around the cables and probably produced weapons, grenades, and munitions. They also built the barracks for the subcamp.\textsuperscript{25}

In January 1945, again in the face of the Red Army advance, it was planned to relocate the AEG assembly line from Thorn. The Thorn subcamp was dissolved at the end of January 1945.\textsuperscript{26} The remaining female concentration camp prisoners were forced to march by the SS for 50 kilometers (31 miles) to the city of Bromberg (Bydgoszcz). Shortly before Bromberg, the women were freed when the SS guards fled the Red Army.\textsuperscript{27}


The archival sources on the history of the VEF and the AEG are held in LVVA, the BA-B, LA-B, and BA-MA. Individual documents in the AEG-Firmenarchiv in DTM contain few details on the use of the forced labor. Unpublished survivors’ accounts may be found in USHMMA in RG-12.004.02 *02 and *04, Benjamin Ferencz Collection, Claims against German Industrial Firms Records, 1952–1994, AEG Correspondence. Published memoirs on the AEG subcamp include Paula Zaltzman-Frankel, Haftling No. 94771, ed. M. M. Shafir (Montreal: Concordia University Chair in Jewish Studies and Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Right Studies, 2003); Hartmut Schmidt, Zwischen Riga und Łocarno: Bericht über Hilde Schneider, Christin jüdischer Herkunft, Diakonisse, Ghetto- und KZ-Häftling, Gefängnispfarrerin (Berlin: Wichern, 2001); and Vanessa Schwarz, “My Great Grandmother [Else Schwarz-Katz],” EI 7 (June 1999): 35–38.

Thomas Irmer, trans. Stephen Pallavicini

**NOTES**


3. Wehrwirtschaftsinspektion Ostland, KTB Nr. 8, July 1–September 30, 1943, entry July 26, 1943, BA-MA, RW 30/8, p. 8RS.

4. Wehrwirtschaftsinspektion Ostland, KTB, Nr. 8, July 1–September 30, 1943, Vierteljahresbericht für die Zeit vom 17-30.9.43, BA-MA, RW 30/8, p. 35RS.


RIGA- KAISERWALD

7. Borovskaja interview; and Schmidt, Zwischen Riga und Locarno, p. 163.
8. Borovskaja interview.
10. Schwarz, “My Great Grandmother [Else Schwarz-Katz].”
11. Zaltzman-Frankel, Häftling No. 94771.
17. Schwarz, “My Great Grandmother [Else Schwarz-Katz].”
22. Schwarz, “My Great Grandmother [Else Schwarz-Katz].”
23. Zaltzman-Frankel, Häftling No. 94771.
24. Schmidt, Zwischen Riga und Locarno, p. 175; Borovskaja interview.

RIGA-STRASDENHOF [Aka SS-BETRIEBE, STRAZDENHOF]

Situated near the Widzemer-Chaussee Bridge on the Jugla River, the SS factory (Betriebe) at Strasdenhof (Strazdumvīža) was one of the original quartering sites (Kasernierungen) absorbed or established by the Riga-Kaiserwald concentration camp with the dissolution of the Riga ghetto. According to the Stadtkommissar of Riga, the subcamp, misspelled Strazdenhof, held 820 Jewish prisoners on August 18, 1943, with a planned deployment of 3,000 male and female prisoners. After the final liquidation of the Riga ghetto on November 2, 1943, the Kasernierung held approximately 2,000 inmates, including many children and elderly. While most prisoners manufactured SS uniforms on-site at the SS-owned textile factory, other detachments performed street construction. This Kasernierung is not to be confused with the Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft (AEG) subcamp at Strasdenhof, which fell under separate administration.

Under the camp leader (Lagerführer), SS-Unterscharführer Hermann “Usche” Dering, the guards consisted of ethnic Germans (Völksdeutsche) from Transylvania. Some prisoner accounts also listed Dering’s rank as Untersturmführer. Dering’s deputy was Hans Hoffmann. According to survivors, Dering and Hoffmann were responsible for Strasdenhof’s harsh conditions. Prisoners were routinely forced to perform “sport,” an SS euphemism for penal exercises designed to exhaust, humiliate, and kill; roll calls were used for beatings and humiliation; and the food conditions were completely inadequate for the camp population.

Compounding Dering’s and Hoffmann’s brutal rule was the first of three successive camp elders, Hans Bruhn. A German “green” prisoner who was at Sachsenhausen and then a Kaiserwald block elder, Bruhn imposed a vicious regime at Strasdenhof. In 1949, survivor Jacob Efrat described Bruhn:

I was later transferred to Strasdenhof where, to my misfortune, Bruhn [misspelled Bruns] was put in charge at the same time, so that I had to remain under his control for a longer period. He saw to it that the conditions in the camp were so bad that many died daily of starvation and ill-treatment. He supervised any possible attempts at smuggling food into the camp so strictly by examining all incomers at the gates, that it was impossible to supplement the hopelessly inadequate ration. Besides this he instituted the custom of awaiting the prisoners on their return from work in the evening, when they were tired to exhaustion and then forcing them to take part in various exercises, marching in the grounds and generally sapping their last remaining energies. His brutality rose to such heights at the camp that he beat 2 men to death with his own hands and buried them on the banks of the Jugle [sic].

Bruhn’s successors were Reinhold Rosenmeyer and Rago. According to Efrat, conditions somewhat improved after Bruhn’s transfer.

The conditions in this subcamp prompted many escape attempts. According to the first chronicler of the Latvian Holocaust, Max Kaufmann, the following prisoners attempted to flee: Rachil Berman, Brudner, Luba Drujan, Liolia Gittelsohn, the Keile sisters, Raja (a female prisoner), Salgaller, the Seidemann brothers, and the column leader (Kolonnenführer) Morein. According to Samuel Atlas, 10 prisoners caught hiding in the factory incurred severe beatings from Hoffmann after their discovery.

Eyewitness accounts and West German trial reports document two major selections or “operations” (Aktionen) at Strasdenhof, as the roundups of weakened Jews were termed at Kaiserwald. Survivor Bella Gepen Mirkin accused Hoffmann of overseeing the “Children’s Operation” (Kinderaktion) in March 1944, which resulted in the removal of between 60 and 90 young prisoners. Taken to “base camp command” (Stützpunktkommando), the Kaiserwald euphemism for a shooting site in the forest, the children’s selection was part of an overall targeting of Jewish children in the Riga Kasernierungen in the spring of 1944. The second, much larger Aktion occurred in early August 1944, shortly before the camp’s evacuation. Estimates place the number of victims in this selection at around two-thirds of the camp’s population, as all Jews over 30 and under 18 were boarded on trucks and taken to the forests. Efrat estimated that the SS removed some 1,300 prison-
ers during this Aktion, leaving only 500 in the camp. Hoffmann allegedly coaxed the victims to cooperate by promising their imminent evacuation from Riga aboard ship.

The SS participants in the second selection included Kaiserwald's Sanitätsdienstgrad Heinz Günther Wisner. If this selection followed the pattern found in other Riga Kasernierungen preparing for evacuation in the summer of 1944, then it is likely that Kaiserwald Lagerarzt Dr. Eduard Krebsbach was present as well. Born Heinz von Wisotzky, Wisner had served since 1939 as an SS orderly at Stutthof and Flossenbürg. Promoted to Unterscharführer in the summer of 1943, Wisner joined the Kaiserwald staff on November 1, 1943, where he subsequently advanced in rank to Oberscharführer. Known to the prisoners as “Dr. Wisner,” he was sentenced in 1985 to five years' imprisonment by a Düsseldorf court, in connection with the selections committed at this and other Riga Kasernierungen, as well as homicides committed in the Kaiserwald main camp. By the time of his arrest in 1979, Wisner had retired from a mechanical engineering firm located in Düsseldorf.

When Strasdenhof (SS-Betriebe) was evacuated on August 6, 1944, the camp population stood at approximately 700. The survivors boarded the Bremerhaven at the port of Riga for a harrowing three-day journey to Danzig, where barges then took them to Stuttgoff, via the Vistula River.

**SOURCES**

Joseph Robert White

**NOTES**


VOLUME I: PART B
Undated photograph of the "roller detachment" marching to work.
USHMM VS#92827, COURTESY OF AGS