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SS-Baubrigaden and SS-Eisenbahnbau Brigades

SS-Baubrigade II prisoners remove debris from the destroyed residence of a Nazi Party leader in Bremen after an Allied bombing raid, 1944.

USHMM WS #28406, Courtesy of BPK
The SS-Baubrigaden and SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigaden should be viewed as particular types of subcamps. First established in the autumn of 1942, they were the first larger prisoner detachments deployed in major cities of the German Reich, thus exposing for the first time the living conditions of the concentration camp prisoners to a broader German public. As a rule, an SS-Baubrigade consisted of 1,000 prisoners, while an SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade consisted of around 500 prisoners, each having SS leaders and guards. Table 1 (p.1357) lists all 13 Baubrigaden existing at the end of the war. There were around 9,500 prisoners in the Baubrigaden before the evacuation transports and death marches began in the spring of 1945. The total number of those who went through the Baubrigaden between 1942 and 1945 is estimated to be at least 17,000 male prisoners.

Prisoners and SS personnel came mostly from the Buchenwald, Neuengamme, and Sachsenhausen concentration camps. While administratively the SS-Baubrigaden remained subordinated to these three camps, in the early summer of 1944 four of the five existing SS-Baubrigaden at this time were concentrated in the area around what was to become the Mittelbau [aka Dora] concentration camp. The SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigaden, which were established in the late summer of 1944, utilized prisoners mostly from Auschwitz and Dachau. The transfer of control of all Baubrigaden to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in the summer of January 1945 was of a purely formal nature and did not alter the relationships between the main camps and the subcamps.

The conceptual origins for the Baubrigaden can be traced back to planning in the SS office “Haushalt und Bauten” (budget and buildings) at the end of 1941. Heinrich Himmler, in view of the successful war of conquest in the East, gave the order to develop a plan for a peace-building program (Friedensbauprogramm), with a view to supporting his plan to “Germanize” the East.\(^1\) The SS would largely rely on its own resources when constructing SS and Police bases, including settlements, camps, and supply depots in the conquered territories. On February 10, 1942, the head of the Amtsgruppe C-Bauwesen in the recently formed SS-Business Administration Main Office (WVHA), doctor of engineering and later Generalleutnant der Waffen-SS Hans Kammler, submitted his “Suggestions for the Establishment of SS Construction Brigades” (Vorschlag für die Aufstellung von SS-Baubrigaden). According to this paper, an SS-Baubrigade, each consisting of 4,800 “prisoners, prisoners of war [POWs], Jews and foreign auxiliary labor,” would be established in each area under the control of a Higher-SS and Police Leader (HSSPF). Kammler assumed a construction volume of between 20 and 30 billion Reichsmark (RM) and the need for 175,000 prisoners, which as mobile labor detachments would be dispatched to construction sites.\(^2\)

As a result of developments in 1942—the Wehrmacht’s advance in the East had come to a halt, the murder of the European Jews had begun, and the armaments industry had started to prepare itself for a long war of attrition and demanded prisoner labor—the SS construction program had to be changed radically. In light of the intensified bombing of German cities, reaching its first climax in the summer of 1942, Himmler changed the nature of the SS-Baubrigaden project for defensive purposes. At the end of August 1942 and the beginning of September 1942, he personally inspected the extent of the destruction. Convinced of the threatening crisis of legitimacy for the National Socialist regime, he ordered that SS-Baubrigaden be put together, to be deployed in cities targeted by aerial attacks.\(^3\)

The establishment of prisoner detachments to clean up the destroyed cities was closely coordinated with Reich Minister for Armament and Munitions (Reichsminister für Bewaffnung und Munition) Albert Speer, who had been in office since February 1942. On September 15, 1942, under Speer’s chairmanship, high-ranking representatives from the Armaments Ministry and the WVHA discussed the year’s pressing problems: the destruction of the Jews, the increase in armaments production, and the management of the damage in the bombed cities. A day later, Speer’s representatives worked out with the chief of the WVHA, Oswald Pohl, the details for the establishment of an initial three SS-Baubrigaden, each with 1,000 prisoners.\(^4\) Speer kept both Adolf Hitler and Himmler constantly informed about the plans. Until the end of the war, Speer repeatedly intervened in the use of the Baubrigaden.

Starting in September 1942, the first Baubrigaden, each with 1,000 prisoners, were sent to Bremen, Osnabrück, Düsseldorf, Duisburg, and Cologne. Close cooperation between the cities’ administrations and the SS became the camps’ characteristic element. The cities not only supplied the necessary infrastructure; in addition, “leaders of the immediate measures” (Leiter der Sofortmassnahmen) attached to the municipal construction administrations coordinated the rubble removal and the use of the prisoners. In so doing, the cities accepted the visible brutality with which the SS treated the laborers and at times expressly praised the SS terror. The Bremen construction senator (Bausenator) wrote to the WVHA in January 1943: “I will not miss the opportunity to state my recognition of the extraordinary work done by the Baubrigade in removing the air-raid damage in Bremen. I especially would like to emphasize the appropriate work deployment, which I attribute in the first instance to the strict supervision by the SS leaders and men.”\(^5\) The strong demand by mayors and regional party leaders (Gauleiter) for prisoner laborers resulted in the deployment of the Baubrigaden being extended several times and the establishment of the first subcamps in larger cities.

The SS-Baubrigaden were commanded by SS officers, who for the most part had the rank of Obersturmführer and who had similar powers to those of camp commanders. These SS-Führer were mostly trained architects or engineers and had worked already for a long time in SS construction projects, reporting to the Amtsgruppe C. Additionally, there was a Lagerführer, 5 SS noncommissioned officers (Unterführer), and 25 men from the Amtsgruppe D who acted as guards. They were complemented by guards from the local police and Auxiliary Police and, from 1943 on, by Wehrmacht soldiers.
The prisoner detachments moved into the cities for up to a week at a time. They mostly did heavy physical labor such as breaking up and transporting away the rubble, loading and unloading, and recovery of reusable materials, or they constructed bunkers or emergency accommodations. They were often assigned to the physically demanding Corpse Detachments (Leichenkommandos) that had to recover bodies from the rubble and place them in coffins. Work in the bomb detonation detachments (Bombensprengkommandos) was feared because many prisoners were killed while recovering unexploded bombs. With inadequate tools and poor clothing, working up to 12 hours a shift, lack of food, and almost nonexistent medical care, the prisoners in the Baubrigaden were also subject to a high degree of terror from the SS guards and Kapos.

In 1943, the emphasis for the Baubrigaden shifted from working for the cities’ administrations to benefiting German industry. Indicative of this transformation was the establishment of the SS-Baubrigade IV, which was sent in August 1943 to Wuppertal following an aerial offensive against the Ruhr. The Armaments Ministry had determined that it was less the damage than the absence of workers after bombing raids that caused a decline in armaments production. The SS-Baubrigade IV would create dwellings for the workers in the Ruhr as well as reestablish the companies’ infrastructure.6

Since the autumn of 1942, shootings and execution of concentration camp prisoners for real or supposed escape attempts or for looting took place increasingly under the eyes of the German public. The Düsseldorf poet Emil Barth is one of the few to document in writing the prisoner columns. He noted in his diary on December 7, 1943, on the prisoners in an SS-Baubrigade: “Out of the silence of those rooms built almost air-tight into the social structure and to which Dostojewsky in his time gave the name of the charnel house . . . already for a long time a gloomy army has been drawn into our cities to clean up the rubble: a cursed shadow people, dishonored, enslaved, lost, like figures in the twilight of the underworld, swaying on the rubble and stones, almost melting into the colorless mass of the ruins.”7 The surrounding community reacted with a mixture of disgust, fear, and withdrawal to the SS-Baubrigaden camps, which were mostly established in the center of the cities. To be sure, there were gestures of sympathy vis-à-vis the prisoners, such as secretly giving them food. However, substantial help during an escape or direct intervention during visible acts of violence was an exception. The attitude toward the SS-Baubrigaden shows that the city population had to a large degree accepted the concentration camp system, thereby providing a basic factor for the preservation and expansion of the central instruments of National Socialist rule.

Nevertheless, the prisoners regarded the majority of the SS-Baubrigaden as better camps. The work in the deserts of rubble was difficult to guard and gave the prisoners an opportunity to find food, which was of central importance to survival. In addition, in the largely destroyed cities there were better opportunities to escape, especially during bombing raids. Information on events at the front was easier to gather, and illegal communication much easier to organize in the Baubrigaden than in the main camps, due to outside contacts. Escape attempts were supported by those who were determined opponents of the regime, above all by male and female foreign forced laborers who would organize false papers or refuge.

The SS-Baubrigaden consisted as a rule of male non-Jewish prisoners. An exception is the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade X, which consisted overwhelmingly of Hungarian Jewish men who had escaped destruction in Auschwitz II-Birkenau. Based on the system of prisoner self-administration (Häftlingsselbstverwaltung) in the main camps, German prisoners usually formed the thin layer of leaders as prisoner-functionaries, while the large majority of the prisoners were of Polish or Soviet nationality. There were often internal struggles in the SS-Baubrigaden, lasting for months, over who would occupy one of the functionary positions. To the extent that the prisoners were able to act with solidarity and to remove violent or especially collaborative functionaries, they managed to limit abuses and lower the death rate.
An analysis of the death rate in the SS-Baubrigaden shows that at times it was higher than the death rate in the main camps. There were also considerable differences between individual SS-Baubrigaden camps. At one extreme was the sub-camp of the SS-Baubrigade II in Osnabrück, where 86 out of 250 prisoners died within six months; the other end of the scale was the SS-Baubrigade IV in Wuppertal with only 1 recorded death within a nine-month period, out of 600 prisoners. Diverse death rates resulted from the behavior of the SS leadership, the type and length of the work, the prisoners’ food supply, the internal relationships of violence, and the behavior of the outside community.

The more the German Reich was pushed into a defensive position, the more the SS-Baubrigaden were deployed in areas crucial to the war effort. The SS-Baubrigade I took the lead in March 1943, when it was relocated to the occupied British Channel Island of Alderney. Hitler had ordered that the Channel Islands, the westernmost German outpost facing Great Britain, were to be converted into unconquerable fortresses. The prisoners worked with Wehrmacht soldiers, Organisation Todt (OT) units, and forced laborers on the inhabited island in converting it into a fortress. The first plans were developed here to murder all prisoners in the event of an Allied advance. In August 1943, Himmler instructed the leaders of the SS-Baubrigade I: “If during an attack the prisoners give the slightest indication of creating difficulties, you are to intervene immediately and shoot the guilty ones. If turmoil persists, then without a moment’s hesitation you are to shoot all the prisoners.”

In the spring of 1944, Kammler relocated just about all SS-Baubrigaden to his new areas of responsibility, the V weapons construction program and the underground relocation of the armaments industry. From March 1944, 2,500 prisoners of the SS-Baubrigade I and IV had to build sites for the V weapons at various locations in northwestern France, under the direction of the Army and Luftwaffe. Beginning in May 1944, the SS-Baubrigaden III and IV, and later the SS-Baubrigade I and V after being recalled from the West, worked on relocation projects in the Harz Mountains and were subordinated to the Dora concentration camp, which became independent in October 1944.

In the autumn of 1944, Kammler appointed the commander of the SS-Baubrigade V, SS-Sturmbannführer Gerhard Weigel, as Inspector of All Baubrigaden (Inspekteur sämtlicher Baubrigaden), as Kammler was no longer capable of fulfilling this role due to his many special tasks. At this time, the Allied offensive had substantially damaged the rail network, especially the marshaling yards. The Amtsgruppe C with its SS-Baubrigaden was in a position to react quickly. In close cooperation with the Armaments Ministry and the local railway directorates, the SS established nine SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigaden by the end of the war, whose prisoners had to live in converted goods wagons. In these concentration camps on rails, the prisoners were sent to strategically important railway junctions to restore destroyed facilities. The guards included a range of railway employees who underwent a short training course in Dachau.

The first signs of the dissolution of the SS-Baubrigaden appeared with the last phase of the evacuation of the concentration camps in the Reich, although the functioning of the SS-Baubrigaden was to be maintained until the end. Kammler directed the SS-Baubrigaden to the area of the planned Alpine Fortress (Alpenfestung), where the Germans meant to make a last stand to hold Bavaria, Upper Italy, and Upper Austria. The objective of the weeks-long evacuations, which began in March 1945 and were marked by shootings and mass escapes, was the Mauthausen subcamp system, but not all of the 10 SS-Baubrigaden sent there would reach their destination. The dissolution of the remaining 3 SS-Baubrigaden occurred as part of the evacuation of Mittelbau (III, IV) and Neuengamme (V).

None of the SS leaders commanding SS-Baubrigaden were convicted after the war. They argued, successfully, that as architects or engineers they had only been in charge of technical matters. Some convictions occurred as part of denazification proceedings for membership in the SS. For crimes committed in the SS-Baubrigaden, mostly lower SS ranks or a few prisoner-functionaries were sentenced in cases in which their direct involvement could be proven.

SOURCES Before becoming the subject of a dissertation—Karola Fings, Krieg, Gesellschaft und KZ: Himmlers SS-Baubrigaden (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005)—the SS-Baubrigaden were, for the most part, only referred to briefly in monographs on concentration camps. Only a few construction brigades have been dealt with in regional studies; for the SS-Baubrigade I: Andreas Kussmann, Ein KZ-Aussenlager in Düsseldorf-Stoffeln (Düsseldorf: Landeshauptstadt Düsseldorf, Bezirksverwaltungsstelle 3, Stadtarchiv, 1988); SS-Baubrigade III: Karola Fings, Messegelag Köln. Ein KZ-Aussenlager im Zentrum der Stadt (Cologne: Emons, 1996); for a few SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigaden: Bernd Boll, "Konzentrationslager auf

In addition to the fact that subcamps became the subject of research only relatively late, and that local camps were taboo topics for local city histories for a long time, the poor state of research is largely due to the extreme lack of primary sources. In the absence of a coherent central collection on the SS-Baubrigade, there are only a few conceptual sketches and reports in the BA-B (NS 19/14, NS 19/771, NS 19/1572, NS 19/2065, NS 4 Buchenwald). In the archives at German memorial sites one can find only memoirs of former prisoners of the SS-Baubrigaden. For the Buchenwald concentration camp, the THStA-W holds a relatively detailed contemporary report (KZ Buchenwald und Haftanstalten). One of the most important sources comprises the investigation files and court proceedings at the BA-L, which holds not only problematical interrogation records but sometimes also diary sketches by former prisoners or copies of prisoner lists. The files in the former BDC as well as the files of the denazification proceedings (Spruchgerichts- or Enntnazifizierungsverfahren) in the BA or in German state archives are of importance in reconstructing administrative relationships. Also useful are holdings of city archives, especially those dealing with building construction as referred to in the notes to this entry.

Karola Fings
trans. Stephen Pallavicini

Table 1
The SS-Baubrigaden and SS-Eisenbahnbauabrigaden

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date Created</th>
<th>Prisoners from/Subordinate to Main Concentration Camp</th>
<th>Locations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SS-Baubrigade I</td>
<td>October 1942</td>
<td>Sachsenhausen</td>
<td>Düsseldorf, with a camp in Duisburg</td>
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<tr>
<td>(SS-BB I)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Neuengamme (March 1943)</td>
<td>Alderney (March 1943)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Buchenwald (August 1944)</td>
<td>Kortemark (July 1944), with a camp in Proven</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mittelbau (October 1944)</td>
<td>Sollstedt (September 1944), with a camp in Hohlstedt</td>
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<tr>
<td>SS-Baubrigade II</td>
<td>October 1942</td>
<td>Neuengamme</td>
<td>Bremen, with camps in Osnabrück and Wilhelms-Haven</td>
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<tr>
<td>(SS-BB II)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hamburg (August 1943), with a camp in Bremen</td>
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<td>Berlin (April 1944)</td>
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<td>Nürnberg (February 1945, as an Eisenbahnbaurigade)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Landshut (March 1945)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SS-Baubrigade III</td>
<td>September 1942</td>
<td>Buchenwald</td>
<td>Cologne, with camps in Duisburg, Düsseldorf, Essen, and Bensberg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SS-BB III)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mittelbau (October 1944)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wieda (May 1944), with camps in Nüxei, Osterhagen, and Mackenrode</td>
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<tr>
<td>SS-Baubrigade IV</td>
<td>August 1943</td>
<td>Buchenwald</td>
<td>Wuppertal</td>
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<tr>
<td>(SS-BB IV)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mittelbau (October 1944)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ellrich (May 1944), with a camp in Günzerode</td>
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(continued)
### SS-Baubrigaden and SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigaden

Table 1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Prisoners from/Subordinate to Main Concentration Camp</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SS-Baubrigade V (SS-BB V)</td>
<td>March 1944</td>
<td>Buchenwald</td>
<td>Amiens, Aumale, Doullens, Hesdin, Lille, Rouen, as well as additional camps in the French Departements Haute-Normandie and Nord-Pas-de-Calais Returned to the Mittelbau camp in Nordhausen (September 1944) Shared out to various subcamps, then formation of SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade V Mittelbau (October 1944)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade V (SS-EBB V, created from Baubrigade V)</td>
<td>September 1944</td>
<td>Buchenwald</td>
<td>Osnabrück</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade VI (SS-EBB VI, created from SS-EBB I)</td>
<td>September 1944</td>
<td>Buchenwald</td>
<td>Berga-Kelbra</td>
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<tr>
<td>SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade VII (SS-EBB VII, created from SS-EBB II)</td>
<td>September 1944</td>
<td>Auschwitz</td>
<td>Karlsruhe</td>
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<tr>
<td>SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade VIII (SS-EBB VIII, created from SS-EBB III)</td>
<td>November 1944</td>
<td>Buchenwald (October 1944) Mittelbau (October 1944)</td>
<td>Stuttgart</td>
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<tr>
<td>SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade IX (SS-EBB IX)</td>
<td>November 1944</td>
<td>Sachsenhausen</td>
<td>Stuttgart, Offenburg, Darmstadt</td>
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<tr>
<td>SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade X (SS-EBB X)</td>
<td>December 1944</td>
<td>Buchenwald</td>
<td>Offenburg, Darmstadt</td>
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### SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigaden

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Name</th>
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<th>Locations</th>
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<tr>
<td>SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade XI (SS-EBB XI)</td>
<td>February 1945</td>
<td>Neuengamme</td>
<td>Soest</td>
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<tr>
<td>SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade XII (SS-EBB XII)</td>
<td>December 1944</td>
<td>Sachsenhausen</td>
<td>Bad Sassendorf, Kamp am Rhein</td>
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<tr>
<td>SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade XIII (SS-EBB XIII)</td>
<td>January 1945</td>
<td>Dachau</td>
<td>Bad Kreuznach, Reichertshofen, Neuhof bei Fulda, Oberlahnkreis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Compiled from Karola Fings, *Krieg, Gesellschaft und KZ: Himmlers SS-Baubrigaden* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004).

### NOTES

5. Der Senator für das Bauwesen, January 13, 1943, in StA-Br, 4, 29/1-1307.
6. SS-Gruppenführer Dr. Ing. Kammler, Bericht Nr. 6, February 14, 1944, to SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt.

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**VOLUME I: PART B**
The only concentration camp on British soil existed between March 1943 and June 1944 on the Isle of Alderney, one of the Channel Islands lying off the coast of Normandy. The Wehrmacht occupied these islands at the end of June 1940, and Alderney was the base for the SS-Baubrigade I. Adolf Hitler paid special attention to the military fortifications of the islands and ordered that they should be made into impregnable fortresses as part of the “Atlantic Wall.”

The SS-Baubrigade I was assigned to Alderney as a result of an agreement between Hans Kammler, head of the SS-Business Administration Main Office (WVHA) construction bureau, and Xaver Dorsch, head of the Organisation Todt (OT) and under Albert Speer.1 The background to the use of concentration camp prisoners was the decision made in mid-1942 that, if possible, only those foreign workers would be deployed on the Channel Islands who could be placed under particularly close guard, thereby eliminating the possibility of sabotage or espionage. As it was, the harsh living and working conditions on Alderney meant that many forced workers from the East soon died or became incapacitated and had to be replaced.

Alderney, which is only eight square kilometers (three square miles) large, is the third largest Channel Island after Jersey and Guernsey. Other than a handful of locals, all 1,500 inhabitants had been evacuated to Great Britain before the German troops occupied the island. In the spring of 1943, around 3,800 Wehrmacht soldiers and 4,000 workers from the OT lived on Alderney. Of the latter, as many as 3,000 were foreigners, most of them Soviet forced laborers, and they were quartered in four barracks camps distributed across the island. Each camp was named after an island in the North Sea.

Sylt, one of these barracks camps, was constructed in August 1942 for workers from the East and was occupied by the prisoners of SS-Baubrigade I. They had been sent from Düsseldorf on February 22, 1943, in a transport holding 730 prisoners from Sachsenhausen and 270 from Neuengamme, and they arrived on the island on March 5, 1943. The barracks camp construction, located on the grounds of the former British airfield, was not completely finished, so many prisoners had to live outside for a longer time. In the first months, the water supply was very inadequate.

When the SS took control of the Sylt camp, they strengthened the security measures, enclosing the interior of the camp, which included the prisoners’ barracks, with an electrified barbed-wire fence. Around that was a fenced-in exterior ring, and the SS barracks and offices were in the western part of this exterior ring.

Camp commandant Maximilian List lived in a newly constructed building outside the fences. More than 60 SS men were assigned to guard the construction brigade, half of them Germans from the Reich, the other half SS men recruited from Alsace, Croatia, Poland, the Sudetenland, and Slovakia.

Dr. Otto Panzer, the OT-Frontführer and head of construction administration for the OT-Section “Adolf,” coordinated the work deployment of the forced laborers and thereby also the deployment of concentration camp prisoners on the island. The engineer Leo Ackermann, an OT construction supervisor, replaced him, most likely in September 1943. Such supervisors allocated the prisoners to the work sites, while the SS was responsible only to guard them.

Concentration camp prisoners had to work 12 hours a day and once a month had a half-day on Sunday off. They were almost exclusively employed in heavy physical labor, building tunnels or roads, and excavating material used for construction purposes. When they worked on building fortifications during 1943, their work was supervised directly by OT companies.

The prisoners were terrorized at their work by the SS, certain violent Kapos, workers of the OT, and Wehrmacht officers. In a November 1943 report from Kammler about the SS-Baubrigade I, one reads: “During the construction of the fortifications, there was a sixty percent increase in productivity during the first nine months of 1943 as compared to 1942. This was accomplished with the concerted and combined efforts of all participating parties.2 Kammler attributed this to the high productivity shown by the concentration camp prisoners, in which he had a vested interest, though it is also true that the presence of these prisoners increased the pressure on the other forced laborers. The OT used the Sylt camp as a labor education camp (Arbeitserziehungslager) once the sub-camp was in place.

The SS-Baubrigade I was Germany’s westernmost sub-camp and, in the case of an invasion, would have fallen into the hands of the British and the Americans. Already in August 1943, Commandant List was given directions from Heinrich Himmler personally on how he was to deal with the prisoners to avoid this eventualty at any cost. A secret order of August 19, 1943, reads: “In the event of an attack, if there are prisoners who give the slightest signs of making difficulties, you are immediately to intervene and shoot the guilty parties. If this does not quell the disturbance, then you are to shoot all the prisoners without hesitation.”

The situation for the concentration camp prisoners was oppressive on this island, occupied as it was solely by military personnel and members of the paramilitary OT. Aid to prisoners was expressly forbidden, and one could not even consider trying to flee from this heavily mined island. Poor hygienic conditions, malnutrition, and heavy physical labor led to the quick spread of disease. A number of sick prisoners are said to have been taken out of the infirmary by SS men and shot dead. In June 1943, 200 prisoners were classified as unfit for work, and on instruction from the military commander of the island, List ordered that they be returned to the Neuengamme concentration camp.3 In early July 1943, about 150 prisoners were taken to Cherbourg, and several of them were able to escape once they reached French soil. Himmler opened disciplinary proceedings against List, as well as
against Kurt Klebeck, head of the guard troop, but dropped them again by October 5, 1943.¹

List and Klebeck were replaced in the spring of 1944, as they were needed for other tasks, and SS-Obersturmführer Georg Braun took command of SS-Baubrigade I in March 1944.⁶ Braun was 32 at the time, a surveyor by profession, and had served at the French and Polish front before being transferred for a 4-month stint at the central construction office in Lublin. In April 1942, he was transferred to Oranienburg (Amtsgruppe C), where he worked in various departments, including for 10 months as adjutant to Hans Kammler. A former prisoner described Braun as an unpredictable, mostly drunken SS officer who remained a fanatical Nazi to the very end.⁷

At the end of 1943, the construction brigade was assigned to help build launching ramps for the V-2 rocket at St. Omer and, to that end, was transferred on December 17, 1943, to the “Rommel Barracks” in Cherbourg on the French mainland. However, Dorsch successfully intervened with Himmler, and the construction brigade was transferred back to Alderney on January 7, 1944.⁸

When, during the night of June 24–25, 1944, the SS-Baubrigade I was finally withdrawn from the island, only 636 of the 1,000 original prisoners remained.⁹ Some 54 had escaped during the transport to Alderney, and about 210 prisoners had been selected to be transported back to Neuengamme. About 100 deaths can be reconstructed from the surviving records, many of which can be ascribed to malnutrition and epidemics. But other killings can be identified as the result of violent crime: numerous prisoners were shot.¹⁰ Among the dead, one also finds the victims of a “prisoners’ war” that raged on Alderney. Several prisoner-functionaries turned out to be particularly brutal and corrupt; some were murdered by other prisoners, others by the SS.

After an odyssey through the English Channel lasting several days, the construction brigade reached St. Malo on July 1, 1944.¹¹ From there, they continued on by train on July 4, 1944. As rail transport in France had come almost to a standstill due to precision bombing attacks, the train had to make a wide detour around Paris and travel via Rennes, Nantes, Angers, Tours, Dijon, Nancy, Toul, Namur, and Ghent to its final destination at Kortemark, Belgium. The SS officers in charge, Georg Braun and Otto Högelow, showed ruthless severity during this flightlike relocation. Will Kreuzberg wrote of the evacuation: “Yes, we got to know the bloodhound and his sidekick in their naked form during the following weeks.”¹²

Högelow threatened that for every Russian who escaped he would shoot another Russian, and for every escaped German, another German. Yet the prisoners were encouraged in their resolve to escape by the openly sympathetic French population they encountered. In Angers, where the train rolled slowly through and where a prisoner who had died was buried at a railway embankment, the French had yelled out to the SS: “You murderers! Take your corpses with you!”¹³ When the train finally arrived at Kortemark on July 28, 1944, only 572 prisoners of the original 634 remained; 27 had managed to escape, 9 had died during the trip, and 26 had been shot, 17 of them during an escape attempt in the Toul area on July 26, 1944.

Because Alderney was “the only concentration camp on British soil,” speculation about unimaginable acts of cruelty, even of gas chamber killings, that might have taken place on this Channel Island began in Great Britain soon after the war. T.X.H. Pantcheff, a military intelligence officer, was sent by the British War Office to the liberated Channel Islands already in May 1945 to investigate, and his subsequent publications indicated the subcamp was not an extermination camp. In fact, a comparison of the Düsseldorf and Alderney locations is particularly instructive, as the key members of the SS were identical in both places, and the replacement of List and Klebeck did not lead to any qualitative changes at Alderney. Every sixth prisoner died in Düsseldorf, while it was every tenth prisoner who died on Alderney. That means significantly fewer prisoners died in a relatively closed-off area populated only by German military units than did in a camp in the middle of a large German city.

After the war, not a single SS member was convicted for crimes committed on Alderney. List lived on, undisturbed, in the Federal Republic of Germany, into the 1980s.

**SOURCES**

T.X.H. Pantcheff published a study that paid particular attention to the Alderney subcamp: Alderney, Fortress Island (Sussex: Phillimore & Co., Ltd., 1981); and also an article about his subsequent research, “Britain’s Only SS-Concentration Camp,” *WWII-I* (May 1988): 31–35. In 1982, Solomon H. Stockeck collected a series of articles that had been published in the newspaper *The Observer* into a book, *The Alderney Death Camp* (London, 1982). It would only be 20 years later that a German publication addressed this subcamp in more detail, and this permitted some of the factual errors in earlier works to be corrected: Karola Fings, *Krieg, Gesellschaft, und KZ: Himmler’s SS-Baubrigaden* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005).

The archival sources are relatively plentiful. Former prisoner Willi Kreuzberg published his memoirs about Alderney just after the war, *Schutzhaftlinge erleben die Invasion* (Weimar: Thüringer Volksverlag, 1947). In addition to the reminiscences collected by Pantcheff after the war, the ZdL (now BA-L) also holds numerous eyewitness reports (IV 404 AR-Z 57/67 and 410 AR 63/77). Other reports are held at the Hans Schwarz Archive in the FGNS-H, and here one can also find the originals of the reports of prisoner deaths. This information and a list of burials, which can also be found at the ASM and the AG-N (which contain data on deceased prisoners), provide important sources of information.

Karola Fings

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**NOTES**

1. SS-WVHA, Report No. 5 about the deployment of the SS-BB, November 9, 1943, BA-B, NS 19/14, p. 24; and telegram from Kammler to the RFSS, Persönlicher Stab, in ibid., NS 19/1572, 1.
Between April and August 1944, there was a subcamp for the SS-Baubrigade V stationed in Doullens in Aumale, which lies between Rouen and Amiens in northwestern France. The prisoners worked for the Luftwaffe constructing launch pads for V-1 rockets. The code name of the Aumale subcamp was “Inga.”

The guards, the majority of whom were soldiers, were quartered in an abandoned castle. A barracks’ camp was constructed on the grounds of the castle. In July 1944, there were 571 prisoners in the camp; in August there were 541. The prisoners were taken to work daily in the surrounding forests, and some prisoners were hanged for sabotage.

Numerous prisoners in Aumale, as in the other camps of the SS-Baubrigade V, tried to escape and make contact with the French resistance. Kazimierz S. remembers that as a result the SS implemented punishment actions in the camp: “I would also like to add that I often saw prisoners’ bodies at the camp gate in Aumale. I heard they were the corpses of prisoners that had been shot because others had escaped from the camp. As a result, the prisoners, fearful of being shot, kept an eye on each other to make sure no one tried to escape from the camp.”

Toward the end of August 1944 the camp was dissolved. The prisoners were transported, via Doullens, to the Harz, where, in October 1944, they were placed under the control of the newly established Mittelbau concentration camp.
and accommodation for the guards was on the second. Windows facing the street or the Berlin-Spandauer-Kanal were bricked up to prevent escapes. From this location, prisoners were taken into the city, under guard and by tram, to remove piles of corpses and to clean up rubble, principally at the Hansa-Ufer (embankment) on the Spree River. Prisoners pulled down buildings that had been destroyed and reinforced walls that were threatening to collapse—dangerous and difficult work, according to survivors. Stones or bricks that could be reused were sorted from the rubble, cleaned, and then loaded onto ships. Pawel Wasiljewitsch Pawlenko remembered the advertising slogans he had read in the Berlin trams even more than 50 years later: “Respecting others in traffic reduces your cares” and “Well lathered is half-shaved.”

Gradually, more and more prisoners were transferred to a construction site at Müggelheim, and by October 1944 at the latest, the SS-Baubrigade II was divided. Some prisoners, the so-called Auer Kommando, remained at the building of the Auergesellschaft AG and were formally designated as SS-Baubrigade IIa, while others were part of the Müggelheim Kommando, formally designated as SS-Baubrigade IIb, under the command of SS-Oberscharführer Christian Thode. Two smaller subcamps existed at Ferch and Spreenhagen.

Müggelheim lies in the Köpenick district of Berlin, and according to survivors, prisoners had to build makeshift housing and small apartments for soldiers and SS members, and their dependents, who had been bombed out of their homes. Thus, one can conclude that this construction brigade was acting on behalf of the Berlin SS-Bauinspektion. In June 1944, the SS-WVHA (Amtsgruppe C) had issued an order, following a directive from Heinrich Himmler, according to which the Waffen-SS and Police Construction Inspection Offices were to build makeshift housing for bombed-out or evacuated members and dependents of the Waffen-SS, the general SS, and other “loyal followers.” To save on men and materiel, such housing was to be self-constructed when at all possible, and the use of prisoners was only permitted if “important war-related construction programs” would not thereby be hindered. Amtsgruppe C apparently intended to employ this particular construction brigade for its own purposes.

Prisoners in this brigade lived in Müggelheim in a barracks camp, lit at night, that was encircled by barbed wire and guard towers. Food was brought from Sachsenhausen, and the guards lived in small houses around the camp, some of which were still under construction. Even civilians lived in these small houses. Smaller groups of prisoners were continually deployed for special projects, including building a bunker at Gosen or doing carpentry work at a shipyard.

But the main work of the brigade was to build houses, using stones or bricks reclaimed from the rubble as construction material. These were brought from the Hansa-Ufer down the Spree River. Some prisoners used what strength they had left to sabotage this work that was being done for the benefit of SS families. According to a report by Georg M., his work detail diverted so much cement and lime that the work almost came to a standstill for a prolonged time period.

According to statements from former prisoners and SS guards, the small Müggelheim detachment grew from around 100 to around 800 prisoners and became the largest subcamp of the SS-Baubrigade II. While no definitive figures about the Berlin construction brigade exist, reports on arrivals and departures of SS men in early 1945 allow one to conclude that the Friedrich-Krause-Ufer detachment must have had several hundred prisoners. In January 1945, almost the entire guard was replaced, with those born after 1900 replaced by men born in the 1880s and 1890s who had been drafted by the SS at the end of 1944 and had attended a short training course in Oranienburg. At the end of January, 59 SS men were standing guard at the Friedrich-Krause-Ufer, and 71 at Müggelheim.

Around mid-February 1945, some of the prisoners in SS-Baubrigade II were transferred to Sachsenhausen. Others, some from the camp in Müggelheim and some from the Friedrich-Krause-Ufer camp, were combined with prisoners from the Lichterfelde subcamp to create a group of 504 men. The prisoners were corted to Köpenick in a construction train and left Berlin on February 25, 1945, as “2. SS-Baubrigade (E).”

While the members of the SS were not called to task after the war, their victims often suffered for decades from the terrors they lived through. Pawel Wasiljewitsch Pawlenko, who survived the SS-Baubrigade II in Bremen, Wilhelmshaven, Hamburg, and Berlin, said in a 1992 interview:

I dream most of all about the roll call parade grounds, and lining up. I dream in particular about how they led us to the work squads, but hundreds of people who had fallen were lying there. Or how they deliberately threw a cap beyond the boundary, and shot people just to get three days’ leave. When I dreamt that, I screamed: “Come back! Don’t go there!” That was what I dreamt at first, but then the dreams began to lessen. I still dream even today, once about how I crawled over corpses when we worked in Berlin, that something exploded, I fell, and it ripped into me. I awoke and was still whole. In those first years, I dream of how I was strung up by the Gestapo.

**Sources** The SS-Baubrigade II in Berlin was first researched as part of a larger study of all the SS-Baubrigaden: Karola Fings, *Krieg, Gesellschaft, und KZ: Himmler’s SS-Baubrigaden* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005). Before this, data could only be found in the more general studies of the Sachsenhausen subcamps or of the Berlin camp system. They did not go much further than what could be found in the lists compiled by the ITS.
On June 19, 1943, 40 prisoners from the SS-Baubrigade III at the Duisburg subcamp were transferred to Bochum. There they were assigned to a Luftwaffe demolition squad (Sprengkommando).¹

The prisoners from Baubrigade III, stationed in Cologne, to the demolition squad was the result of a directive from Heinrich Himmler. Faced with a high death rate among construction brigades already existed, Himmler had stated: “To save on guard duty, concentration camp prisoners used for this work are to be kept in police prisons for the duration.”¹

Until August 12, 1943, regular reports sent to Buchenwald gave the strength of the squad at 40 prisoners. After August 12, there were only 26, but by December 13, it had risen to 39.¹ In the extant Baubrigade III reports after this date, there is no further mention of this subcamp, so one may assume it was disbanded at the end of 1943.

The drop in the number of prisoners in August 1943 can be traced back to a tragic accident. On August 12, 1943, in Bochum, SS-Unterscharführer Hans Born and 13 prisoners were killed when an unexploded bomb detonated. One severely injured prisoner survived the blast but died two days later in Bochum’s Protestant hospital.¹ According to a political prisoner who was a member of the Kalkum detention squad, the explosion occurred because the ordnance technician acted improperly. In a 1988 interview about the incident, Kurt Selbiger said: “[It was] a bomb with a delayed fuse as well as an additional displacement fuse. That was a major impediment to digging up such bombs: if the bomb was moved, this displacement fuse was prematurely activated. It was very, very difficult to disarm this type of fuse. And then the ordnance technician ties the bomb to a car and has a dozen prisoners grabbing the rope to help pull the bomb out of the hole... And then they all went to heaven.”²

The bodies of the prisoners whose names are known were cremated in Cologne’s Westfriedhof cemetery.²

SOURCE: For more information on the SS-Baubrigaden, see Karola Fings, Krieg, Gesellschaft, und KZ: Himmler’s SS-Baubrigaden (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005).

VOLUME I: PART B

Primary sources for this camp and the SS-Baubrigaden more generally may be found in the following collections: NWHStA-(D), ASt-N, IFZ, THStA-W, ASt-Dü, and ASt-Kö. A published photograph of the SS-Baubrigade III, Bochum, at work may be found in Karola Fings, *Messelager Köln. Ein KZ-Aussenlager im Zentrum der Stadt* (Cologne: Emons, 1996), p. 11. The photograph is reproduced from collection “Bo37” of ASt-Boc.

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NOTES
2. RFSS November 3, 1942, ASt-N, NG-1002.
3. SS-WHVA, Amtsgruppe D, November 9, 1942, IFZ, MA 414, 6380, cited in ASt-Dü, Collection Kussman, Nr. 34.
5. SS-BB III, August 13, 1943, in ibid.; Buchenwald concentration camp, Nr. 9, 313, and SS III. BB, August 16, 1943, in ibid., p. 309.
7. SS-BB III, Cremation Record in Historical Archive, ASt-Kö, Collection 753-25.

BREMEN (SS-BB II)

In October 1942, the SS-Baubrigade II was assembled at the Neuengamme concentration camp and comprised 1,000 prisoners; 750 of them were sent to Bremen and 250 to Osnabrück, both of which Heinrich Himmler had visited in early September 1942 during his tour of cities destroyed during bombing raids. In Bremen, heavily bombed during the night of June 25, 1942, the city administration, the Gau leadership, and the Weser-Ems Gau Chamber of Commerce all made efforts to obtain labor for the city. The manager of the latter wrote to the Reich Labor Ministry in September 1942: “We are in a war zone. You can see this when you visit Bremen... The last heavy attack on Bremen caused immense damage and created a large number of new problems. One of the most important concerns labor, for what we lack above all are people who can remove the enormous amount of rubble.”

At this point, SS-Hauptsturmführer Gerhard Weigel, in his capacity as leader of the SS-Construction Brigade II, was already in negotiations with the Bremen city administration. The most important issue to be resolved was accommodation, but there were also questions about the specific deployment of labor, payment, and guarding the prisoners. Weigel inspected a barracks camp owned by the Francke Werke, located on the Warturmer-Heerstrasse, and declared it suitable. The 750 prisoners were moved there no later than October 14, 1942.

However, the office of the Senator for Construction (Senator für Bauwesen) noted that as the camp “did not meet the necessary requirements for guarding concentration camp prisoners,” a different site had to be found. Thus, in 1942, a camp then being built for the Deutsche Arbeitsfront (German Labor Front, DAF) in the stable buildings of the Hindenburg barracks, located on Bossdorfstrasse, was requisitioned. Prisoners were quartered in the stable buildings, while barracks for the SS, lavatories, the canteen, and a kitchen still had to be built. The Senator for Construction Matters paid rent to the Bremen military administration for the use of the stable buildings and the grounds. From the Bremen registry office death notices, one can ascertain that relocation occurred between December 18 and 22, 1942, as prisoner Petris Jonis is recorded as dying at the camp on the Warturmer-Heerstrasse on December 18, 1942, while the address of Alexej Trubatsch, who died on December 22, is given as Bossdorfstrasse.

The SS-Baubrigade II remained in Bremen until April 1944, though their numbers shrank continually. Some prisoners went with the SS-Baubrigade I to Alderney in February 1943, a larger detachment went to Wilhelmshaven, and the greatest part of the prisoners, and thus the main camp of SS-Baubrigade II, was transferred to Hamburg after August 1943.

At this point, only 272 prisoners remained in the camp. SS-Hauptsturmführer Weigel was a notable early member of Nazi organizations and had considerable experience in responsible positions in concentration camps as well as at SS construction offices. Born on February 23, 1908, in Flöha, Saxony, Weigel joined the Hitler Youth when he was 16, then the SA in Bautzen in 1929, and switched to the SS in 1930. Trained as a heating engineer, he only became firmly established in party positions by 1933, after a longer period of unemployment. From 1934 on, he was part of the SS contingent at the Sachsenburg concentration camp, and following the dissolution of that camp, he participated as an engineer in constructing the Buchenwald concentration camp. After working at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, at the SS administration office, and with the SS-Verfügungstruppe (Special Assignment Troops), Weigel joined the SS-Bauinspektion at the Higher-SS and Police Leader (HSSPF) for Reich Süd. In January 1942, he then became head of the Bauinspektion at the HSSPF for Russland Süd in Kiev and remained there until he was transferred to the SS-Baubrigade II.

Weigel negotiated with the authorities and directed the deployment of the prisoners, but he was less visible to the prisoners than were the camp leaders in Bremen, Osnabrück, and Hamburg who reported to him. Weigel was assigned a deputy, Diplomingenieur Johann Karger, who was in command of the technical deployment, and when Weigel was ordered to take command of the SS-Baubrigade V in March 1944, Karger took over as commander of the SS-Baubrigade II. As of mid-October 1942, only 30 SS men were available to serve as a guard detail, so it was necessary to recruit local help to strengthen prisoner surveillance.

As in other cities, the construction administration coordinated the brigade’s deployment. In Bremen this was divided
The situation in Bremen eased markedly when the majority of the SS-Baubrigade II was transferred to Hamburg in August 1943, along with camp leader Gerhard Weigel. In the course of 1943, some of the SS personnel were also withdrawn and replaced by older guards. Pawel Wasilewitsch Pawlenko reported: “And then the lame appeared, those who had been shot up at the front. They had been at the front for two years, and had seen what that meant. They behaved better toward us.” The situation was also helped by an improvement in the supply of food. A report for the period from July to September 1943 mentions that the city of Bremen allocated additional rations to the SS-Baubrigade II “in recognition of its extraordinary work.” In fact, former prisoners report that in 1943 supplies improved. However, it is not possible to say to what extent this improvement can be attributed to the city. It is certain that beginning the fall of 1943, Bringmann passed on several hundred kilograms of potatoes in a sealed storeroom to fellow prisoners. When the loss was discovered, Bringmann had to flee, according to him on April 4, 1944.

As in other construction brigades, when it became known that the camp was to be transferred from Bremen to Berlin, efforts to escape increased, supported in particular by the forced laborers and imprisoned opponents of the regime. At the high point of the use of forced labor in 1944, Bremen held about 200 camps with about 25,000 foreigners, both male and female. Bringmann said:

At that time, there were tens of thousands of forced deportees who had to work in the firms. They were also used to clear rubble and as a result came in contact with our comrades. What bound them together was their similar background, that they had been violently separated from their relatives, and their common interest in returning home alive. . . . It did not take long for help to be offered in the form of forged identity papers or as permits from relatives who worked in labor camps for Eastern workers in Hannover, Braunschweig, Osnabrück, and other places. With these identity papers and often with pre-bought train tickets, good preconditions were in place for a quick departure from Bremen. We arranged and provided appropriate clothing, food, and money.

According to Bringmann, 15 prisoners were able to escape in this manner between the fall of 1943 and the spring of 1944, and only 1 was recaptured.

Neither the leaders of the construction brigades nor others belonging to the SS guard were ever prosecuted after the war for crimes committed in the Bremen camp. The dead are buried in the Osterholz cemetery in Bremen.

**SOURCES** As part of an investigation into the SS construction brigades, the Bremen camp has only recently become the focus of research in Karola Fings, *Krieg, Gesellschaft, und KZ: Himmler’s SS-Baubrigaden* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2017).
SS-Baubrigaden and SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigaden

2005). Prior to this, it was only mentioned in passing in other works about Bremen during the Nazi era, such as Inge Marssolek and René Ott, *Bremen im Dritten Reich: Anpassung—Widerstand—Verfolgung* (Bremen: Carl Schünemann Verlag, 1986). On the history of Bremen during the Nazi era, see Herbert Schwarzwälder, *Geschichte der Freien Hansestadt Bremen*, vol. 4, *Bremen in der NS-Zeit* (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1995).

Primary source material for SS-Baubrigade II at Bremen is widely dispersed. The most important is the Hans Schwarz Archive in the FGNS-H (memoirs and the *Totenbücher* from Neuengamme) as well as the AG-NG (memoirs and other collections of material). Another source is the files of the Senator für Bauwesen in the StA-Br (Collection 4,29/1) and the files at the ZdL (IV 406 AR 245/69), available at BA-L.


1. RFSS, September 9, 1942, BA, NS 19/14, p. 11.
3. Senator für Bauwesen, October 7, 1942, StA-Br, 4, 29/1-1307.
4. The first documented death occurred on this day. See Prisoner Death Notifications from May 4, 1942, to December 16, 1942, FGNS-H, Hans Schwarz Archive.
5. Senator für Bauwesen, August 31, 1942, AG-NG, Material Collection, Ng. 6/4/92.
6. Ibid.
7. Data Bank of the AG-NG; and Prisoners’ Death List in FGNS-H.
9. See BA, BDC/PK/RS/SSO for the information referred to here.
10. BA, BDC/SSO.
11. Senator für Bauwesen, October 7, 1942, StA-Br, 4, 29/1-1307.
14. SS-WVHA, February 14, 1944, BA, NS 19/14, p. 34.
The names of the first 40 prisoners are in the above-mentioned SS-Baubrigade III document, dated May 31, 1943. The 5 prisoners killed on June 9, 1942—the Yugoslav Hermann Bobeck, the Poles Stanislaus Affek and Edward Kapłónski, and the Ukrainians Petro Jajez and Michailo Saloid—when an unexploded bomb detonated in Derne, near Dortmund, were probably among them and were probably also part of the Dortmund bomb disposal squad.3

 SOURCES: The Dortmund bomb disposal squad was cited only in one publication that dealt with the SS-Baubrigade III, Karola Fings, *Messelager Köln: Ein KZ-Aussenlager im Zentrum der Stadt* (Cologne: Emons, 1996), p. 112.

 The THStA-W (NS 4 Buchenwald and KZ Buchenwald) has a few records on the SS-Baubrigade III, Dortmund. There are no known survivors’ reports.

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NOTES

1. SS-BB III, May 31, 1943, NWHStA-(D), Court Report 118-76.
2. RFSS, January 3, 1942, ASt-N, NG-1002.
3. SS-WVHA, Amtsgruppe D, November 9, 1942, IZ, MA 414, 6380, cited in ASt-Dü, Collection Kussman Nr. 34.
5. SS-BB III, June 15, 1943, THStA-W, KZ Buchenwald Nr. 9, 342.

**DOULLENS (BUCHENWALD) [AKA SS-BAUBRIGADE WEST] (SS-BB V)**

The SS-Baubrigade V, also known as SS-Baubrigade West, existed from March to October 1944 and, with its complement of about 2,500 prisoners, was the largest of all the SS construction brigades. Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler ordered it formed on December 29, 1943. It was tasked with building V-weapon sites in the northwestern part of occupied France.1

Prisoners for the new brigade initially were selected from the Cologne SS-Baubrigade III, which was expanded on January 7, 1944, with the addition of 1,000 prisoners from Buchenwald. In March, further transports included prisoners from Buchenwald and from the Neuengamme SS-Baubrigade.2 In selecting prisoners, care was taken to ensure none among them spoke French, to make it difficult for them to be in contact with the civilian population. However, a number of prisoners hid their linguistic abilities, as they hoped to escape once they were in France.

Some 60 percent of SS-Baubrigade V were Soviet citizens, 30 percent were Poles, and the remainder were Germans, Czechs, or Yugoslavs.3 The construction brigade left Cologne in four transports between mid-March and early April 1944, the first (with 500 prisoners) going to Liques, the second (with 576) to Hesdin, the third (with 750) to Rouen, and the fourth (with 700) to Aumale. However, a total of 2,518 prisoners arrived in France, as 4 prisoners had managed to escape from each of the last two transports. The first two transports were directed to the area west of St. Omer and south of Calais, where they were to construct V-2 sites for the Army. The 1,442 prisoners on the other two transports were to construct V-1 sites for the Luftwaffe further south, in the area around Aumale and Rouen.4

The SS-Baubrigade V was commanded by SS-Hauptsturmführer Gerhard Weigel, previously leader of the SS-Baubrigade II, who upon being appointed to lead SS-Baubrigade V also was promoted to SS-Sturmbannführer, effective June 21, 1944.5 Weigel accompanied the first prisoner transport and organized the quarters for the next transports. He also conducted the initial negotiations with the military offices of the LXV Army Corps, and together with Colonel Zimmermann of the Supreme Command—West (Oberbefehlshaber West), he determined the sites of the deployment;6 95 SS men were assigned to guard duty, and 26 men were sent to deal with administrative and technical matters, all of them having come from Buchenwald. The Army and Luftwaffe, respectively, made 61 and 213 soldiers available.7

In order to have prisoners quartered as closely as possible to the construction sites, the brigade gradually set up at least 14 camps in the Haute-Normandie and Nord-Pas-de-Calais départements. Several hundred prisoners were quartered in the large halls of the citadel at Doullens, often referred to as the “main site.” Weigel is supposed to have directed the activities of the construction brigade from there.8 Larger subcamps existed for a long period of time in Aumale, Hesdin, and Rouen. Other locations of deployment listed are Amiens, Arras, Beauval, Berguenese, Cassel, Mimoysques, Montdidier, St. Omer, and Vignacourts. Prisoners were allocated to camps and construction sites according to need. In July 1944, there were four large camps, given the cover names “Lisa I,” “Lisa II,” “Inga,” and “Heilag,” and by August there were 8.9

In the main, prisoners worked at “special construction sites” of the LXV Army Corps, building launch sites as well as bunkered supply depots. Heavy physical labor was required and included excavation, laying concrete, and moving building materials. In addition, prisoners were repeatedly set to work at “immediate tasks important to the war effort,” such as repairing roads or rail lines after bombing raids. They also built bunkers, and after the Allied invasion of Normandy, they dug trenches, removed unexploded bombs, and repaired the damage to fortified positions.

The heavy physical labor was immensely difficult for prisoners, some of whom weighed less than 50 kilos (110 pounds). In June 1944, the head of the SS-Business Administration Main Office’s (WVHA) Amtsgruppe C, Hans Kammler, wrote that because of the time pressure, prisoners were constantly “kept working at a furious pace.”10 Tomasz Kiryłłow, a survivor, has described what this really meant: “Piotr grabbed
the wheelbarrow, yanked it forward and stumbled. The SS man hit him in his chest with his rifle butt. Piotr protected himself with his arms and pulled back, his eyes filled with horror. I liked him. I had to watch how he tried to turn away from the blows of the SS whip. Blood ran from the wounds on his head. Finally, he pulled himself up and tried to move. ‘Stop!’ an SS man screamed, aimed his machine gun and fired. Piotr Majczenko turned his face to his murderer, took a few steps forward, and then sank to the ground.”

The situation in Normandy meant that, for the first time, a construction brigade was working in an occupied country. That meant the SS was surrounded by an overwhelmingly hostile civilian population, and it was nearly impossible to prevent contacts between prisoners and the French population. Right in front of the SS guards, and apparently without fear, French men and women approached the prisoners, asked them questions, and gave them food. When prisoners were taken to work by truck, they were helped in the villages they passed through. The SS men became increasingly nervous, as resistance fighters targeted these transports.

It was difficult terrain for the SS, particularly since the increased bombing raids on the French Atlantic coast made it harder and harder for guards to know what was going on. Prisoners also had become more and more restless and refractory after D-Day. Given the military situation, Weigel had considerable difficulties maintaining discipline among the SS men, with Army and Luftwaffe guards in particular accused of lapses in duty. In one detachment, either May or June 1944, there must have been a mass breakout after a Wehrmacht post was attacked and overrun. Prisoners were now threatened with random reprisals: for every prisoner who escaped, some of those left behind would be shot indiscriminately.

Yet despite this draconian threat of punishment, escapes remained common. At the end of June 1944, 91 prisoners were reported as having escaped, and 11 had been shot either while escaping or while trying to escape. The high number of successful escapes was due to the great willingness of the French population to render assistance; only 2 prisoners who had fled in France were recaptured.

As a result, Commander Weigel was even more determined to break the link between prisoners and the surrounding population. On July 7, 1944, he put together a large transport of 350 prisoners suspected of planning escapes or of being in contact with the French, to be sent to Buchenwald. He also ordered further disguising measures: the SS-Baubrigade V was renamed the “SS-Baubrigade VII,” and some of the prisoners were given civilian clothes and permitted to grow out their hair so as not to be recognized as concentration camp prisoners.

Initially, Weigel actually was able to slow the prisoner exodus. However, before the SS-Baubrigade V was to be transferred back to Germany, the number of escapees increased again—many prisoners not wishing to return under any circumstances. In fact, in the statistics kept by the Buchenwald concentration camp, the Normandy numbers stick out: during 1944, no other subcamp had so many prisoners successfully escaping in such a short time. Almost 20 percent of the escapees noted in these Buchenwald records until mid-September were from the SS-Baubrigade V.

The actual use of V-weapons, on whose launching sites prisoners had worked, only began after the Allied landing in Normandy with a June 11, 1944, order from the LXV Army Corps. There were initial difficulties, but by the end of July, some 5,000 V-1 rockets had been launched against Great Britain. Anti-aircraft Artillery Regiment 155 was in charge of firing the rockets, but the Allied advance forced the LXV Army Corps to order this regiment to retreat on August 12, 1944. The Allied advance probably also prompted the SS-Baubrigade V to begin preparing to evacuate.

During August 1944, prisoners from the Aumale, Hesdin, and Rouen subcamps were gathered together in Doullens; the SS-Baubrigade V returned to Germany by rail via Lille. During a bombing raid in Lille on August 31, 27 prisoners died. Survivors said that among these victims were prisoners wounded in an earlier bombing raid and being cared for by the French in their homes. The next day, the SS are said to have collected 10 to 15 of the wounded, stuck them in a bunker, and killed them with hand grenades.

Between August 30 and September 11, 1944, 1,824 prisoners arrived at the Harz Mountains, in three large groups with about 550 prisoners each and in three smaller groups with less than 100 prisoners each. As no appropriate accommodations were available, they were divided up among SS-Baubrigaden III and IV, as well as the camps of the Mittelbau complex. Despite this, SS-Baubrigade V continued to exist in an administrative sense through September, the number of hours they worked (on projects B15 and B17) being calculated by Special Inspectorate II. Mittelbau, which had become an independent concentration camp by this time, assumed responsibility for 648 prisoners of the SS-Baubrigade V by the end of October—though by this time the construction brigade itself was in Osnabrück and had been renamed as an SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade.

Sources
It was only late in the research into the SS-Baubrigaden that this particular brigade was examined in Karola Fings, Krieg, Gesellschaft, und KZ: Himmler’s SS-Baubrigaden (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005).

Documentation of the SS-Baubrigade V is very spotty. In addition to contemporary reports, which are in the BA-B (NS 19/14, pp. 51–58), there are also collections of material titled “NS 4 Buchenwald” and “KZ Buchenwald und Haftanstalten” to be found at the THStA-W. The ITS Sachdokumenten collection holds documentation on the administrative continuation of SS-Baubrigade V. Of particular significance are the trial documents of the former ZdL held at BA-L (IV 406 AR-Z 207/73). Here one can find copies of the transport lists which permit an almost complete reconstruction of the names of the prisoners in SS-Baubrigade V. There are references to the SS-Baubrigade V as well in the interviews with former forced laborers archived at NS-Dok. Kiryłłow, who success-
fully escaped from the Hesdin camp, has also written an impressive memoir, Tomasz Kiryłłow, “Und ihr werdet doch verlieren”: Erinnerungen eines polnischen Antifaschisten (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1985).

NOTES

1. SS-WVHA, December 29, 1943, BA-B, NS 19/2066, p. 57.
2. Transportmeldungen, January 17, 1944, March 9, 1944, March 25, 1944, April 12, 1944, THStA-W, NS 4 Buchenwald Nr. 136a.
3. SS-WVHA, July 29, 1944, BA-B, NS 19/14, p. 53.
4. Ibid., p. 52.
5. Gerhard Weigel, born February, 23, 1908, BA-Bl, BDC/RS.
6. SS-WVHA, July 29, 1944, BA-B, NS 19/14, p. 37; and SS-WVHA, July 29, 1944, in ibid., p. 52.
7. Ibid.
9. SS-BB V (Feldpost Nr. 15566), July 30, 1944, August 25, 1944, THStA-W, NS 4 Buchenwald Nr. 54.
13. Ibid.
17. Namentliche Aufstellung, October 9, 1944, in ibid., NS 4 Buchenwald Nr. 54.

DUISBURG (BUCHENWALD) (SS-BB III)

Between February 1943 and May 1944, there was a subcamp of the Cologne SS-Baubrigade III in Duisburg. The prisoners’ main task was to clear the city from rubble. The prisoners were accommodated in a barracks camp on the corner of Korn Strasse and Emmerich Strasse, in the suburb of Meiderich. The SS-Baubrigade I from Sachsenhausen was previously quartered here.

A few days after the SS-Baubrigade I was transferred to Alderney on February 21, 1943, the commander of the Cologne camp, Karl Völker, took control of the remaining 342 prisoners. During the transfer, the commander of the guard detail of SS-Baubrigade I and four unknown members of the Duisburg city administration were present. The commander of the camp in Duisburg was SS-Oberscharführer Franz Janitschke. Prior to this appointment, he had been a security guard in Cologne. Völker had all the prisoner-functionaries transported back to Buchenwald and replaced them with other prisoners.

Völker instigated a thorough selection of the Sachsenhausen prisoners now registered in Buchenwald. On the day he took control, 59 of the 342 prisoners were in the infirmary and 5 were in the hospital. In his report, sent to Buchenwald on the takeover, he wrote: “The condition of the prisoners is so bad that on Monday, February 22, 1943, only fifty prisoners could go to work. . . . The condition of their dress (Zebra), underwear and shoes is the worst imaginable.” During the course of the day he forced another 100 prisoners to work, although their ability to function was limited. In order to keep numbers high for the work details, Völker, on March 6, 1943, returned all weakened or sick prisoners to Buchenwald. On March 13, the Duisburg camp received a transport of 270 prisoners from Buchenwald.

The barracks camp was completely destroyed during a bombing raid on the night of April 26–27, 1943. The prisoners had no chance to seek refuge during the raid; 30 prisoners died, and another 28 were severely injured. The Diakonen Institute at Kuhlenwall 64 was selected as the new quarters. The buildings of the Institute had been severely damaged in the summer of 1942 and had partially been reconstructed by the autumn so as to accommodate “workers from the East.” The SS took over the building in April 1943. During the next few weeks, the prisoners had to finish the repairs to the Diakonie building. Once that was done, they were accommodated in the infirmary.

Engelbert Oberhauser, who with another prisoner was transferred from Buchenwald to Duisburg in the summer of 1943, reported that [the camp was in a hospital, burnt out during a bombing raid, a former convent of the Zisterzensier Order. It had extremely strong walls. Completely burnt to the ground, it stood in the ruins of the city centre. The Duisburg concentration camp was situated in the remaining commercial buildings. As an emergency measure the prisoners’ accommodation was covered with paper maché and boards. The truss was completely burnt. The prisoners were dressed in Zebra and to a large extent in civilian rags. Among them were several German prisoner-functionaries; mostly the prisoners were Soviet and Polish SS slaves. . . . Full of lice, dirty and half-starved we learned the evening roll call. The buttocks of many were exposed; for most, only their knees stuck out of
For months, the conditions in the Diakonen Institute remained catastrophic. A report prepared in September 1943 indicates that the camp was being extended. A bombing raid again heavily damaged the building. The camp became plagued with lice, and a delousing chamber was built. There was a lack of washing facilities, and the kitchen was equipped with the bare minimum. The catastrophic conditions did not prevent Völkner from asking for an additional 500 prisoners. Numbers in the camp varied considerably. Prisoners were often transferred to other detonation squads, to Buchenwald or to other camps. During the summer there were just under 400 prisoners; in October 1943, there were 1,018, the highest-known number; and in the spring of 1944, there were just over 800. The Duisburg “Office for Immediate Measures” (Amt für Sofortmassnahmen) was a special authority located within the city’s Building Administration. The prisoners worked at the request of the office in cleaning up and repair-
ing damage caused by bombing raids. In March 1944, on instructions from the city, the prisoners were required to work additionally on Sundays and recycle bitumen roof sheeting so that the small allotment holders had roof sheet-
ing to repair the buildings on their garden sheds. Occasionally, the prisoners had to work for private companies, including August Gähringer, between September 1943 and the end of January 1944, and the German General Electric Company (AEG). The largest prisoner detachment worked at Franz Mün nemann; 40 prisoners are documented as working there daily between October 1943 and January 1944. Many prisoners were seconded over a period of weeks from Duisburg to demolition squads in the Ruhr, which were under the control of the Higher-SS and Police Leader West. In June 1942, 120 prisoners were brought to the SS-Baubrigade III subcamp in Düsseldorf on Kirchfeld Strasse. These prisoners operated as a detonation squad until at least August 1943. Other prisoners were sent to Bochum and Essen to retrieve unexploded bombs. During the spring of 1943, the number of deaths in the Cologne camp decreased significantly. The death rate remained high in Duisburg, however. Camp commandant Franz Janitscke was responsible for the conditions in the Duisburg camp. According to the prisoners, he was autocratic. Janitscke was born on March 1, 1897, in Ober glogau (Upper Silesia). By trade he was a carpenter and had joined the SS in 1935. In 1939, he joined the SS-Death’s Head Storm Unit at the Buchenwald concentration camp, where he remained until September 1942, when he was transferred as a guard of the SS-Baubrigade III to Cologne. The prisoners in Duisburg were guarded by 10 SS men. While they were working, they were guarded primarily by local police. There were at least 49 other deaths at the SS-Baubrigade III subcamp in Duisburg, in addition to the above-mentioned 30 victims of the bombing raid. Of these, 15 died while defusing bombs; 2 were killed while cleaning up; for 20 the cause of death was said to be “Lungs—TB” or “Cachexy” (excessive loss of weight); 4 are said to have been shot while “trying to escape”; and 1 is alleged to have “committed suicide” by hanging. At the end of March 1944, 400 prisoners were withdrawn from Duisburg to help form the newly created SS-Baubrigade V. The subcamp was finally dissolved on May 9, 1944: the remaining 131 prisoners were taken to Cologne, where a day later they were taken with prisoners from Cologne to Wieda in the Harz Mountains. Following preliminary inquiries by the Central Office of State Justice Administrations (ZdL) regarding crimes committed against prisoners in the SS-Baubrigade III, the Cologne State Prosecutor began investigations in 1968. Janitscke was one of the three accused; based on survivors’ statements, he was suspected of taking two French prisoners to Cologne, where they were killed, and of shooting two Russian prisoners in the nape of the neck during a bombing raid. The State Prosecu-
tor could not prove Janitscke’s involvement, and the proceedings ceased in 1975.

**NOTES**
1. SS-BB III, February 24, 1943, THStA-W, KZ Buchenwald Nr. 9, p. 383.
2. Ibid.
3. Transport List from-to Duisburg, in NWHSStA-D, Court Reports 118/1177.
4. SS Camp Doctor Schiedlausky, March 19, 1943, HStA-W, KZ Buchenwald and Haftanstalten (Prisons), Nr. 9, pp. 53–56.
5. Street Directory, Duisburg, 1939; Diakonen-Anstalt (Institute) Duisburg, June 12, 1951, HAtSStK, Acc. 606/19, p. 446.
8. Buchenwald Camp Doctor, September 6, 1943, THStA-W, NS 4 Buchenwald Nr. 9, p. 290.
10. See HStA-D, Court Rep. 118–1177; and Numbers' Reports, THStA-W, NS 4 Buchenwald Nr. 227, Nr. 136a, Nr. 210, Nr. 161.
12. Building Office (Debit Ledger of the Office for Immediate Measures), Ibid., 600/866.
14. Building Office, Debit Ledger of the Office for Immediate Measures, ASSt-DU 600/866, Entry Nr. 805735–

**DUISBURG (SACHSENHAUSEN) (SS BB I)**

On October 15, 1942, 400 of the 1,000 prisoners made available to the SS-Baubrigade I by the Sachsenhausen concentration camp were sent to Duisburg to perform cleanup work after bombing raids. The Duisburg camp itself was administered from the headquarters of SS-Baubrigade I in Düsseldorf, though it had its own command structure as well as its own SS and police guards.

Local Nazi Party (NSDAP) functionaries and police are reported as having taken part in discussions over a suitable location for this subcamp. According to one set of memoirs, an NSDAP member suggested Sterkrade, a city district of Oberhausen, as a site, since locating a camp there would also intimidate the surrounding population. The counterargument was that Communists living in Sterkrade might hide prisoners who managed to escape. For that reason, Duisburg was chosen instead.

A fenced-in camp with four housing and one "commercial" barracks was built for the prisoners in the Meiderich district of the city. According to the recollection of a nearby resident, the camp at the corner of Korn and Emmerich Strassen was erected "overnight," and in the ensuing months, four or five barracks were added to it.

Prisoners were put to work following directives issued by the city administration's "Office for Immediate Action," headed by Duisburg's Mayor Freytag. Invoices between the city and the SS-Business Administration Main Office (WVHA) for food, lodging, and the labor performed were handled by the Düsseldorf construction brigade. The prisoners' main task was to clear rubble from the city. The city administration was so pleased with their work that the mayor personally requested that the WVHA extend the prisoners' time beyond the planned two months.

Neighbors could look directly into the camp. Nevertheless, by the 1980s memories of the camp were vague. One eyewitness tried to explain it this way: "You could see into the camp from a few apartments, but most people in Meiderich did not know what kind of a camp it was. To begin with, most thought it was a labor camp, and no one had any idea that this was a subcamp of a concentration camp. National Socialist indoctrination meant hardly anyone gave a thought to what was going on inside the camp."

The reason for this limited view was the widespread belief that concentration camp prisoners were in any case "criminals" and opponents of the regime, whose imprisonment and tough handling were therefore justified. This is reflected in Walter Ring's city chronicle of Duisburg, published soon after the war: "Passers-by on the street could see the work [of rubble removal] being done by the closely guarded prisoners in their zebra-striped clothing, but could not get closer to them. It was said that they were professional criminals and anti-socials (Assoziale)."

The torments and arbitrary brutality typical of the SS could be seen in Duisburg as well: "On the Sundays when prisoners did not have to work, the SS ordered them into the courtyard. Prisoners had to collect small rocks in buckets, but when a bucket was full, it was dumped out and the whole process began again. Those who didn't work quickly enough risked a beating." Inside the camp, the only protection against bombing raids was a trench dug out of the earth, with a makeshift cover over it. According to residents in the area, the SS even hindered prisoners from using these trenches. These neighbors themselves felt the camp endangered them, since their neighbors themselves felt the camp endangered them, since during night bombing raids, the camp remained brightly lit in order to prevent escapes.

The prisoners also were punished for acts committed by corrupt SS who enriched themselves on goods retrieved from the rubble. In cleaning up the rubble from a Duisburg Gymnasium (state-maintained secondary scheme), for example, bottles stored in the city's wine cellar underneath it.

**VOLUME I: PART B**
disappeared—according to a former prisoner, they were stolen by SS men. However, a police officer investigating the loss accused three Russian prisoners of the theft, and they were sent back to Sachsenhausen and were said to have been hanged there.8

Three members of the SS-Baubrigade I, all German, are buried in Duisburg.9 There are no exact numbers for others who died. The SS-Baubrigade I began withdrawing from Duisburg during February of 1943. One small group of prisoners was taken to Düsseldorf on February 19 and, together with prisoners already there, left three days later in freight cars heading to the British Channel Island of Alderney. Some 342 prisoners remained in Duisburg-Meiderich and were then integrated into the SS-Baubrigade III on February 21 in Cologne, thus coming under the control of the Buchenwald concentration camp.10

The first systematic investigations began in the 1970s, though the State Prosecutor in Ludwigsburg responsible for the investigations found insufficient evidence to justify a prosecution. Only the camp elder from Duisburg, Adolf Fehrenbacher, was sentenced to a multiyear jail term for the crimes he committed later in the war.

**SOURCES** In the early 1980s, a trade union youth group composed of Gymnasium pupils drew attention to the fact that a subcamp of a concentration camp had existed in Duisburg during World War II. That initiative led to a publication in 1986 of their research and survey results, though this long remained the only (and difficult to obtain) information about the SS-Baubrigade I camp: see Eric Hannschöck, et al., *Initiative wider das Vergessen: KZ Aussenlager Duisburg-Ratingsee. Das Lager und die Entstehung des Mahnmals* (Duisburg: Stadt Duisburg, 1986); Annelie Klother, “Wider das Vergessen: KZ Aussenlager Duisburg,” in *Tatort Duisburg 1933–45. Widerstand und Verfolgung im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Rudolf Tappe and Manfred Tietz (Essen: KlarText, 1993), 2:634–637. It would only be much later that a proper examination of the camp history, correcting some previously incorrectly interpreted data, would follow: Karola Fings, *Krieg, Geiselschaft und KZ. Himmlers SS-Baubrigaden* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005).

The ASt-DU hold only a few sources (Bestand 600, Bauverwaltungsamt). As the Duisburg subcamp was only a subcampa of the SS-Baubrigade I in Düsseldorf, it did not feature significantly in postwar investigations by the ZdL (IV 404 AR-Z 57/67 and 410 AR 63/77), now BA-L.

**NOTES**

2. See Sollbuch des Amtes für Sofortmassnahmen 1943, in ibid., 600/865.
3. SS-WVHA Ch. C 10/10Dr. Ka/Sei., November 25, 1942, in BA-B, NS 19/14, p. 16.
7. Ibid., p. 18.
9. List of Concentration Camp victims buried in Duisburg, ASt-DU, 607/266.

**DÜSSELDORF (BUCHENWALD)**

**[SS-BB III]** On July 19, 1943, 120 prisoners of the SS-Baubrigade III were brought from the Duisburg subcamp to Düsseldorf in order to be deployed by order of the Higher-SS and Police Leader (HSSPF) West to retrieve unexploded bombs.1 The deployment of prisoners for demolition squads by the SS-Baubrigade III stationed in Cologne was due to an order by Heinrich Himmler. In the face of the high number of fatalities of firemen and members of the security and rescue services in defusing unexploded bombs, Himmler advised the offices responsible for the removal of unexploded bombs on November 3, 1942, to follow an order by Adolf Hitler dating back to October 1940. According to that order, the dangerous exposure and removal of unexploded bombs was “in all cases as far as possible” to be done by inmates from prisons or concentration camps. The senior commanders of the Order Police were responsible for the quarters, food, and further security of the prisoners.2 A few days later, Amtsgruppe D instructed the commanders of the concentration camps to hold appropriate groups of prisoners ready. In those concentration camps that had organized construction brigades, prisoners were to be taken from these camps.3 Another factor in the decision was that the Royal Air Force, in the early summer of 1943, had dropped an increasing number of bombs with delayed fuses in the Rhineland and Westphalia. The removal of these fuses was extremely dangerous.

The prisoners were accommodated in a school building at Kirchfeldstrasse 74–80 in that part of the city known as Fried-richstadt. A month earlier, 50 prisoners from the “Kalkum” detonation squad had been quartered there. On June 30, 1943, Wasil Bliznjuk (born in 1921) and Semjon Plushnikow (born in 1921) both killed while digging out unexploded bombs.4

The remaining 118 prisoners remained at Kirchfeldstrasse until August 23, 1943.5 Thereafter, the camp appears to have been dissolved—presumably the prisoners were returned to the Duisburg subcamp of the SS-Baubrigade III.

**SOURCES** There is no available research into this camp, which existed for only five weeks. The prisoners of this bomb search squad have not been given any attention because the buildings at Kirchfeldstrasse 74–80 were used for a long time.
to accommodate the Buchenwald subcamps Kalkum and Deutsche Erd- und Steinwerke (German Earth and Stone Works, DES).  

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NOTES
2. Reichsführer-SS, November 3, 1942, StA-N, NG-1002.
3. SS-WHVA, Amtsgruppe D, November 9, 1942, IZZ, MA 414, 6380, cited in ASt-Dü, Collection Kussman, Nr. 34.

DÜSSELDORF (SACHSENHAUSEN) (SS-BB I)
The SS-Baubrigade I was one of the first generation of construction brigades, sent by Heinrich Himmler into the destroyed cities of western and northwestern Germany. On October 13, 1942, 1,000 prisoners marched from the Sachsenhausen concentration camp to the Oranienburg railway station. Two days later, they arrived at Duisburg. There the detachment was divided: 400 prisoners remained in Duisburg, while 600 prisoners on October 20, 1942, proceeded to Düsseldorf.

The SS-Baubrigade I took up quarters in an undeveloped area at Stoffeler Kapellenweg, district Stoffeln, Düsseldorf. There the Düsseldorf Road Construction Authority had already commenced construction of barracks for the accommodation of prisoners. Next to where the hotel present-day Haus Kolvenbach is to be found was the barracks camp. Housing did not adjoin the site, but a public park used frequently for recreation was not far away, and next to the camp, there were the Stoffeln Cemetery and small garden plots.

The commander of the SS-Baubrigade I was Maximilian List.1 He was born on February 9, 1902, in Munich, where he graduated in 1930 from the Higher Technical College as a building engineer. In February 1937, he began his career with the SS-Construction Office. From August 1941 he commanded the SS-Building Inspectorate (Bauinspektion) Ostland at the Higher-SS and Police Leader (HSSPF) Riga, until September 25, 1942 when he was recalled to take command of the SS-Baubrigade I. List is seldom mentioned in surviving prisoners’ reports; instead, SS men from Amtsgruppe D under his command are emphasized. Admittedly though, a former prisoner holds List responsible for the terror at work that reigned in the construction brigade: “On instruction of Hauptssturmführer (Captain) List, they [the prisoners] were forced to the workplace by all means possible, including beatings. Those who could not walk were beaten, as were the comrades who suffered from diarrhea. When these frail prisoners were driven into the camp in the evening, the SS, with Hauptssturmführer List at the head, had only a smile to spare for them.”2

List administered the construction brigades’ camps in Düsseldorf and Duisburg with a staff structured in a way similar to the concentration camps’ headquarters. Deputy Commander and head of both camps was SS-Obersturmführer Kurt Klebeck, who was in charge of prisoner security, accommodations, and supplies. At both locations, additional camp leaders, work commanders, and commanders of the guards were instrumental in determining the atmosphere of the camps. In Düsseldorf there were SS-Unterscharführer Roland Puhr (the camp’s deputy commander), SS-Hauptscharführer Otto Högelow (commander of the guard), and Kurt Wittwer (commander of the labor detachments). All three remained with the construction brigade when it was transferred in February 1943 to Alderney. All three, as well as Klebeck, were charged on numerous counts of unlawful killing after the war. Wittwer, by trade a bricklayer and builder of stoves and a member of the SS since 1932, was feared in his role as construction foreman: “Everyone trembled when he came. He was ruthless with the prisoners and did not even spare the sick.”3 After the war, Wittwer in turn described Puhr, who was the subject of investigations regarding a number of murder charges, as a totally brutal and scheming person.4 Högelow was repeatedly described as a “political fanatic” who mistreated prisoners for slight reasons and who also participated in shootings.5 The SS guards were reinforced by local police working in the field.

The prisoners, most of them Soviet and Polish nationals, had to march daily into the city, where they had to clear rubble from the city. More than 100 deaths are known. Notwithstanding the deaths, there must have been a constant supply of new prisoners because the brigade’s strength, at the time of its withdrawal from the city, was stated as 600.6 The use of the prisoners was under the direction of the city’s Air Protection Office, Labor Assignment Department. It was responsible for the “recruitment of German and foreign laborers of every type” and for their distribution, accommodation, food, and payment.7 The importance of the quota of prisoners for cleaning up the city is apparent, because the prisoners represent nearly one-fifth of the 3,300-strong labor force that was available for this work in January 1943.8

Germans living in the vicinity of the camp could see how the prisoners, under blows, shifted earth from one place to another and back again. The neighborhood could see how the SS men threw rocks at the prisoners and how prisoners were pushed from the roof of a barrack, and the residents could hear screams and shots at night. It was soon generally known that after work the prisoners were punished in the camp by the SS men. Repeatedly, residents in the neighborhood saw dead prisoners.

To see the debilitated prisoners became an everyday occurrence also for the rest of the population. However, as Emil Pascha reported, in a few cases it seems to have generated a shocklike reaction: “As the overcrowded train slowly went past you could not help but see the faces of those miserable
yellow-tainted people, their skulls shaved close, nothing but skin and bones. Their appearance was shattering—the passengers slowly turned their faces in silence and the women wiped their tears.95

Even when there was an initial desire to help, people preferred to stay away from the camp fence and the prisoners. According to Heinz Zimmermann, who was then 14 years old: “The prisoners swayed more than they were walking. They were closely guarded by SS guards. Not one of us, including our mothers, dared to give food to the prisoners. We were too scared.”10 Few bystanders registered the reality of the concentration camps. The limits of perception are reflected by Emil Barth in his diary entry on the camp: “I will never forget that human community is based on violence and suffering. But it is demoralizing to look eye to eye with the victims—victims who, not to mention the innocent, agonizingly force the question whether or not, even with the individual case of perfect guilt, guilt is acquitted with guilt.”11

Heavy labor, hunger, and violence were the main causes for the 111 deaths, registered in the first five months of the existence of the SS-Baubrigade I Düsseldorf. Embezzlement resulted in minimal food rations. According to Alfons Kupka, a former prisoner, “[T]he food was extraordinarily poor. . . . Roll Call Leader Puhr with the help of the cook expropriated food so that the physical constitution of the whole detachment was very poor; almost all had degenerated to ‘Muslims’ [Muselmänner].”12 Sick and enfeebled prisoners received no medical care. Despite their condition, they had to go to work. In the evenings, the weakest were mistreated and were often forced during the winter of 1942–1943 to spend the nights outdoors. Two SS members, Puhr and Wittwer, were later accused of deliberately killing prisoners.

Dr. Allermann was the SS doctor for the SS-Baubrigade I in Düsseldorf. He completed the death certificates so that the deaths could not be construed as occurring due to violent crimes. Only in 6 cases are deaths by tuberculosis or septicemia recorded in the cremation records at the Düsseldorf-Stoffeln Cemetery. In all the other more than 100 cases, deaths were recorded as being due to “circulatory weakness,” “heart seizure,” or “heart attack.”13 It did not escape Julian von Tempski, senior city inspector at the Stoffeln Cemetery in charge of the supervision of cremations, that the death certificates did not match reality. He stated as early as May 1946, “Among the dead were many who had been shot or hung. In most cases, death certificates were prepared stating that the relevant person had died from a weak heart or heart seizure and the like.”14

A rather large group of around 55 Jehovah’s Witnesses were assigned to SS-Baubrigade I. Some of them had been in the Sachsenhausen Punishment Detail because they had regularly gathered together in the “Bible Researchers” blocks.15 They were able to make contact with fellow female believers in the city just a few days after their arrival in Düsseldorf. The women brought them food at the construction sites, and by this means they were able to send letters to their relatives.16 These connections were either not noticed by the SS and police guards or were silently tolerated. It was generally known that Jehovah’s Witnesses, because of their religious convictions, would not attempt to escape from concentration camps. One Jehovah’s Witness stated that in the camp they were singled out for torture by the Kapos. The Kapos soon fell out among themselves and one by one drove each other to their deaths.17 Not one of the 111 dead of the SS-Baubrigade I in Düsseldorf was a Jehovah’s Witness, which can be partly explained by the strong sense of solidarity among the Jehovah’s Witnesses and their complete isolation from camp corruption.

The SS-Baubrigade I was withdrawn from Düsseldorf on February 22, 1943. None of those responsible for crimes committed in Düsseldorf were convicted after the war.

SOURCES For his book Ein KZ-Aussenlager in Düsseldorf-Stoffeln (Düsseldorf: Bezirksverwaltungsstelle 3, Stadtarchiv, 1988), on the SS-Baubrigade I in Düsseldorf, Andreas Kussmann interviewed former inhabitants of the camp neighborhood. While especially these sources gave a graphic picture of the reaction of the neighborhood, the organizational connections of the subcamp to the city bureaucracy are explored in Karola Fings, Krieg, Gesellschaft und KZ: Himmlers SS-Baubrigaden (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005).

The most important of the dispersed sources are the investigations IV 404 AR-Z 57/67 and 410 AR 63/77 in the BA-L. The ASt-Dü, inventory IV, contains records of the Building Administration. A copy of a list of the dead of the SS-Baubrigade I survived in the Düsseldorf Cemetery Administration. It is printed in Kussmann, KZ-Aussenlager, pp. 202–211.

NOTES
1. BDC/RS and BDC/SSO, BA-B.
3. Ibid., p. 40.
4. Ibid., p. 91.
5. Ibid., p. 20.
10. Ibid., p. 190.
The SS-Baubrigade IV had an especially close connection with the Ellrich-Juliushütte camp. The Ellrich-Juliushütte camp in close proximity cast a shadow also on the lives of the construction brigade prisoners. The prisoners had heard, in part from the local population and in part from Diembt, that the conditions were very brutal in this camp. Emil W., who worked in the office of the construction brigade, had to enter Erich I more than once. In doing so, he saw many corpses, consisting of only skin and bones, in the filthy camp, which was on the grounds of a former factory. According to Emil W., the conditions were "difficult to describe in words" and "the most gruesome that I have ever seen in my life." There was discussion in the construction brigade that prisoners in Ellrich-Juliushütte were shot for the smallest trifling. It was made clear to the prisoners by Diembt that he distanced himself from what was happening in Erich I. Emil W. stated that "his aversion to the nearby commandantships and rejecting any communication with them was generally known."

It also appears that Diembt prevented prisoners of his construction brigade from being transferred to Dora. The judgment delivered by the denazification court on Otto Diembt on April 2, 1948, states: "The situation in the camp in Ellrich became even more precarious, since there was a second subcamp where prisoners were miserably treated and where severe failures were noted. Moreover, in nearby Nordhausen there was the infamous camp Dora. The commandant of this camp tried to prompt his superior authority to deploy the accused's prisoners, on account of their visible healthier condition, in the underground ordnance factory at Nordhausen. The accused was able to frustrate the attempt."

It is not possible to verify these statements concerning the death rate in Ellrich with verifiable data. Three prisoners died prior to Mittelbau officially assuming control in October 1944. There are no reliable records after this date. Robert Rousseau, a former French prisoner, called Ellrich an "infamous camp" in which "countless French died."

According to a statement made by Diembt in 1961, the dispute he had with the commandant of the Mittelbau concentration camp at the beginning of 1945 also centered on the question of a possible evacuation of the camp. He then stated that he did not want to evacuate the camp but to hand it over "after the collapse." This is said to be the reason for his removal on January 31, 1945. Officially, his removal was based on "irregularities in caring for troops and prisoners."
Neuenamme. In March 1945, he took command of a company known as Kampfgruppe (Battle Group) Dusenschön in Schleswig-Holstein.

Diembt’s successor was SS-Untersturmführer Erich Scholz, who was born on May 18, 1911, in Tarnowitz, Upper Silesia. He studied architecture in Berlin and since August 1940 had been a member of the SS-Main Office of Finance and Construction. In September 1942, he was transferred from the WVHA to the Reich Ministry for Armaments and Munitions. There he was an adjutant to the Armaments Delivery Office of SS-Brigadeführer Staatsrat Walther Schieber. It was from here that he was transferred on February 1, 1945, to the SS-Baubrigade IV. Former German prisoners explicitly described Scholz immediately after the war as very human. Of central significance for this predominantly positive assessment of the survivors was his behavior during the dissolution of the camp in April 1945.

Indeed, the evacuation of the camp of the SS-Baubrigade IV in the spring of 1945 was atypical. Former prisoners stated that Scholz discussed all questions regarding the evacuation “in a downright comradely manner” with them and tried to save their lives. Scholz tried in the last days of the war to obtain the confidence of a few of the prisoners. However, his concern for the well-being of the prisoners neither included a group of about 200 Jewish prisoners, who in the last days of the war were transferred from the SS-Baubrigade III to Ellrich, nor those incapable of marching. He is said to have made these prisoners available for the infamous “Transport Brauny,” which in the night of April 6–7, 1945, gathered together in the camps of Mittelbau the last prisoners incapable of marching. According to both Scholz and survivors, he was forced by the commander in charge of the city of Nordhausen to commence his decampment. In any event, Scholz delayed the evacuation as long as possible since the SS-Baubrigade IV was the last of the Mittelbau subcamps to leave its station.

After the remaining prisoners from Günzerode had marched to Ellrich, a group of roughly 1,000 prisoners and their guards set off on April 10, 1945. According to Scholz and survivors, no one was killed on the four-day march through the Harz. The SS-Baubrigade IV, its numbers decimated by escapes, reached Güntersberge on April 14, 1945. There, Scholz issued to all prisoners, who asked for it, a “Release from Protective Custody” form. He also formally discharged the SS guards. The SS-Baubrigade IV was thus dissolved. Most of the prisoners left. Scholz and a handful of SS men with a convoy of about 20 prisoners surrendered the next day to the Americans.

If one takes into consideration only the SS-Baubrigade IV prisoners forced to march, then the estimate by Joachim Neander that 50 of the 1,000 prisoners died in the Harz, immediately after the liberation, appears to be realistic. Compared with other marches in this region, the march of SS-Baubrigade IV had by far the lowest death rate. However, if one takes into account those approximately 300 Jewish or sick prisoners whom Scholz is said to have handed over to Transport Brauny and who then were massacred at Gardelegen, then every fourth prisoner died. There is no doubt that Scholz behaved comparatively correctly with the remaining prisoners; whether that was out of conviction or consideration of his impending imprisonment may be left aside. Of note is that amid the chaos in the last days of the war, it was possible to hand to the Allies alive a large group of prisoners, even if this was knowingly done only in exceptional cases.

SOURCES See especially Manfred Bornemann, Geheimprojekt Mittelbau. Vom zentralen Ollager des Deutschen Reiches zur grussten Raketenfabrik im Zweiten Weltkrieg (Bonn: Bernard & Graefe Verlag, 1994); Arbeitsgemeinschaft Spurensuche in der Südharzregion, ed., Der Bau der Helmetalbahn. Ein Bericht von der Eisenbahngeschichte, den KZ-Häftlingslagern und der Zwangsarbeit im Südbau in den Jahren 1944–1945 sowie den Evakuierungsmassnahmen im April 1945 (Duderstadt: Verlag Mecke Druck, 2000); and Joachim Neander, “Das Konzentrationslager ‘Mittelbau’ in der Endphase der nationalsozialistischen Diktatur. Zur Geschichte des letzten im ’Dritten Reich’ gegründeten selbständigen Konzentrationslagers unter besonderer Berücksichtigung seiner Auflösungsphase” (Ph.D. diss., Bremen University, 1996)—these have all rendered outstanding service to research the SS-Baubrigade IV in the Harz. Karola Fings’s Krieg, Gesellschaft und KZ. Himmlers SS-Baubrigaden (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005) concentrates on the particular situation of the SS-Baubrigade within the context of the Mittelbau concentration camp. These works also contain references to the postwar report of Erich Scholz and reports of survivors, which, in part, are held by the AG-MD. Here are also kept copies of transport lists from Warsaw (Buchenwald Concentration Camp No. 36, Mittelbau Concentration Camp, No. 9). Jens-Christian Wagner, Produktion des Todes. Das KZ Mittelbau-Dora (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2000), has also made use of the records of the early Dora Trials at NARA. The BA-L (IV 406 AR-Z 69/72) holds the files of the inquiry into the SS-Baubrigade IV. Of importance are, moreover, the sources held by THStA-W (NS 4 Buchenwald, KZ Buchenwald and Prisons).

NOTES

6. Hiddesen De-Nazification Court, April 2, 1948, ibid.
7. August 18, September 17, October 3, 1944, THStA-W, NS 4 Buchenwald Nr. 136a.
8. See the text that accompanies his drawing of the Bürgergarten Inn, 1986, printed in ”Der Bau der Helmetalbahn, der Zwangsarbeiten der III. und IV. SS-Baubrigade, die KZ-Aussenlager Mackenrode, Nüxei, Osterhagen und Wieda
The SS-Baubrigade II, which was stationed in Berlin starting in April 1944, had a subcamp located in Ferch (County Potsdam-Mittelmark). It is mentioned in a list of the guards of the SS-Baubrigade II as of January 10, 1945. SS-Unterscharführer Erich Schmidt is listed as the only guard. Apparently, Schmidt remained in Berlin even after the SS-Baubrigade II, including his detachment, was transferred to Nürnberg on February 25, 1945.

Perhaps the SS-Baubrigade II prisoners were assigned to a camp of the SS-Construction Management, which is believed to have existed with 180 prisoners in Ferch in the summer of 1944.

**Sources** As investigations by the ZdL in 1973 (IV 406 AR 596/73), held at BA-L, were inconclusive, no additional information is available on this subcamp.

Karola Fings
trans. Stephen Pallavicini

**Notes**

1. SS-BB II, January 10, 1945, RGVA, Moscow, 1367/1/14, pp. 32–36.
2. Ibid., March 30, 1945, p. 36.

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**GÜNZERODE (BUCHENWALD, SACHSENHAUSEN, AND MITTELBAU) (SS-BB IV)**

From the summer of 1944 until April 1945, in the small village of Günzerode in the Harz Mountains, there existed a subcamp of the SS-Baubrigade IV stationed in Ellrich. While the administration and kitchen for the construction brigade were located in Ellrich, up to 800 prisoners were quartered in Günzerode to be deployed for the construction of a new railway line. This so-called Helme Valley Railway (Helmetalbahn) was a subsidiary line designed to relieve the traffic on the western line from Nordhausen to Osterhagen.

The camp was probably constructed in the middle of July 1944. René Morel, a survivor of the camp, stated in 1998:

Fifty-four years ago I was in Günzerode on the construction ground of the strategic railway line. . . . It was very heavy forced labor carried out with picks and shovels. I arrived in Günzerode on July 15 and stayed there for one hundred and twenty-four days. There were six hundred prisoners—about two hundred French, two hundred Russians, two hundred Poles, a few Czechs, and one Greek. We slept in three-level bunk beds on a sheep farm in the southern part of the village. It had been fixed up to be a small concentration camp. There were no barracks. We consisted of five work squads, each of one hundred or two hundred prisoners, and a detachment of twenty prisoners, who worked as electricians. . . . The Construction Brigade was constantly reinforced by further prisoner transports. A large number of prisoners died from diseases or mistreatment and the ranks had to be replenished.

The conditions of the Günzerode subcamp were clearly worse than those in Ellrich. This, in part, is due to lack of medical care and also the inferior food supply. In addition, there was the heavy and debilitating work. Morel, who was 16 when he was arrested, made a statement about the work conditions: “We walked [to work] and as we did not pass through any villages we did not have to march. . . . We rose at 5.00 am; work began at 6.00 am. . . . In the autumn of 1944 it rained every day. The Helmetal flooded until November, and therefore our clothes were always wet. As the machines got dirtier and dirtier they also ceased to function properly. I cut open my shoes as my feet were always bleeding; I was still growing.”

The Günzerode camp commander was an SS-Hauptscharführer. The remaining guards consisted of a few SS men and Luftwaffe soldiers. Unlike at Ellrich, where a German Communist as the camp elder had tried to improve conditions to the level of being somewhat bearable, survivors comment only negatively about the prisoner-functionaries in Günzerode. Morel describes a Communist from Mainz as brutal. Paul Dubois also reports on corrupt prisoner-functionaries in Günzerode, “It is obvious that these pillars of the Nazi regime, despite the fact that they had been arrested, acted like bandits and lived like princes, well fed, while we died from hunger and cold.”

Little is known about deaths in the Günzerode camp. This is due to the lack of research and poor documentation. It is known that immediately after liberation survivors accused Ulrich Holz, born on March 22, 1922, in Altenfliess, of murdering the Polish prisoner Edward Sokolowski. A witness describes the crime as follows: “On February 15, 1945, the prisoner fled our Günzerode subcamp. He was discovered the next day in our barn at the Flaries mill near Günzerode. The prisoner, who knelt before SS-Oberscharführer Holz with raised hands, was shot in the head by him from above (Proof: the confirmed entry wound) at a distance of about three paces. Neither had the prisoner resisted his capture nor had he tried to escape. It is noticed, as a description of Holz, that he had already previously refused to sign a notice that prisoners were no longer to be beaten.”
The camp in Günzerode was gradually dissolved between March 23 and April 10, 1945, by transferring prisoner groups to Ellrich. There, at noon on that last day, the SS-Baubrigade IV began the evacuation march.

Investigations into Holz commenced in the 1970s but were halted on October 26, 1973, by the Limburg State Court, on the basis that there was insufficient evidence for a conviction.\(^5\)

**NOTES**


2. Ibid., p. 95.


**HAMBURG (NEUENGAMME) (SS-BB II)**

Between July 25 and August 3, 1943, the Royal Air Force and the U.S. Air Force reduced the city of Hamburg to rubble during four nighttime and two daylight bombing raids. In barely a week, 34,000 people were killed, which was almost as many as had been killed to date by aerial warfare in the whole of Germany. Another 125,000 were injured, and more than half of all the homes in Hamburg were destroyed.\(^1\) On August 7, following this series of attacks, which are known in the literature as “Operation Gomorrah,” the majority of the SS-Baubrigade II was transferred from Bremen to Hamburg for cleanup operations.\(^2\) Hamburg remained the main center of operations of the SS-Baubrigade II until it was transferred to Berlin in April 1944. The Bremen camp was administered as a subcamp.

Once in Hamburg, the construction brigade was reinforced so that, in August, 930 prisoners could be deployed. The prisoners came, in part from the Wilhelmshaven subcamp, directly from Neuengamme, or from a bomb explosives squad stationed at the Fuhlsbüttel prison.\(^3\) The SS commander was at first Gerhard Weigel. He was replaced in March 1944 by Johann Karger (see Bremen (SS-BB II)). The SS guards were reinforced with local police assistants.

The SS-Baubrigade II was stationed in the “Dead Zone,” which encompassed parts of the heavily destroyed city areas of Hammerbrook, Hamm-South, and Rothenburgsort, and which, in accordance with the instructions of Hamburger Gauleiter Karl Kaufmann, had been cordoned off.\(^4\) The largest part of the construction brigade was temporarily accommodated in a bunker at Süderstrasse 301. For a few weeks the construction brigade used the enclosed swimming baths at the corner of Süderstrasse and Heidenkampsweg as additional accommodations. The prisoners were fed at the swimming baths and left from there for work. In the evening, they returned first of all to the baths where they were fed and roll call took place. The bunker in Süderstrasse was where the prisoners slept.\(^5\)

At a later date, the whole construction brigade was quartered in former classrooms on the first floor of the elementary school at Brackdamm 14/16.\(^6\) The move appears to have taken place during November 1943, as the pastor at the Stephan-Kempe-Church in the Dead Zone, Heinrich Dahnlos, made the following note on November 29, 1943: “The entire area around the Stephan-Kempe-Church is still sealed off until today. Not a soul lives in the area other than the political and criminal prisoners who are quartered in the school on Brackdamm and who store their supplies of vegetables in the public shelter underneath the church.”

The first task of the SS-Baubrigade II was to seal off the areas declared as part of the Dead Zone. According to a report of the SS-Business Administration Main Office
(WVHA), the prisoners erected a 650-meter (711-yard) wall and 1,900 meters (2,078 yards) of barbed wire to block the streets. The prisoners’ work is recorded in three photographs, which were probably taken at the request of the Police Commissioner. Signs indicated that the restricted area could only be entered with written permission from the police.

Unlike in other cities, the Hamburg building administration did not direct the use of the prisoners but was merely occupied with allocating accommodations for them. This is due to the particular situation in Hamburg following the mass attacks. Police Commissioner Hans Kehrl had requested 450 concentration camp prisoners from Neuengamme during the first attack, in order to deploy them for the especially unpleasant work of retrieving corpses and the dangerous task of removing unexploded bombs. As the city administration failed to retrieve corpses, the Repair Service of the Air Raid Protection Police assumed this task. The prisoners of the SS-Baubrigade II were also part of the Chief of Police’s “Auxiliary Force.” They are said to have been deployed in accordance with instructions of the Air Raid Protection Police.

Once the prisoners sealed the Dead Zone, they were initially occupied with the essential task of recovering corpses, which were present in their thousands in the burned-out area. In the summer heat, the prisoners recovered the already bloated corpses, pulled them from the canals, sorted the body parts, and laid them out to be taken away. This was horrible work. According to Pawel Wasiljewitsch Pawlenko, their “hair stood on end.” There is a series of photos that records this work. It shows the SS and Police guards supervising the work from a proper distance. The recovery of bodies remained the main task of the construction brigade for a long time. According to reports of the WVHA, by the end of September 1943 the prisoners had buried a third of the bomb victims of Hamburg. In January 1944, the Repair Service was still looking for more than 5,000 bodies under the rubble. Some 57 recovery squads were deployed to recover the bodies. The prisoners of the SS-Baubrigade II formed 37 of these squads. One month later, 40 of the 45 squads consisted of concentration camp prisoners. One detachment, initially consisting of 20 but later 80 prisoners, worked at the Ohlsdorf Cemetery and either dug mass graves or unloaded and transported the bodies that came from the city.

In addition, recovery detachments were also used to secure building material and also supplies such as items of furniture and clothing and items of value. The resultant corruption and misappropriation came to the attention of the Berlin authorities. In the course of time, according to one survivor, 48 railway carriages, filled with cars, radios, typewriters, clothes, alcohol, furs, and other objects, were moved illegally to Berlin from Hamburg by the SS-Baubrigade II. This cannot have been the only case of private racketeering, but it is an example of robbery on a grand scale, protected at the highest level. A note in a report, which was sent by Hans Kammler (Head of Amt C of the WHVA) to Heinrich Himmler in April 1944, supports this conclusion. There it is stated: “Some of the valuable items recovered from the destroyed houses and factories have been made available in the Neuengamme concentration camp to the Central Building Administration and Amt W I.”

The deployment of the construction brigade in Hamburg meant for the Neuengamme concentration camp prisoners a partial breakdown of their isolation. A report of the Neuengamme camp association states: “Many of the Neuengamme prisoners’ connections with the Hamburg population originate also from the period 1943/44. During this time different resistance groups kept contact with the anti-Fascist groups within the camp. The prisoners of war and the forced laborers, above all, made contacts. Leaflets arrived at the camp, assistance was organized, news was exchanged—without which organized resistance would not have been possible.” It was possible for individual prisoners from the construction brigade to escape. Thus, in April 1944, the camp elder, Karl W., thanks to the help of a guard and a resistance group consisting of workers from Blohm & Voss, was able to flee.

There are limited details on the number of deaths in the camp of the SS-Baubrigade II in Hamburg. In the death lists of the Neuengamme infirmary, there are 4 entries for the period from August 1943 to April 1944, which referred to the SS-Baubrigade II in Hamburg. According to this list, 23-year-old Pole Ryszard Nowak was executed there on October 1, 1943. Another Pole, Franciszek Kubiak, died from a fractured skull in November. In addition, a German and Belgian prisoner died, respectively, in December 1943 and March 1944. When compared with other camps, 4 deaths in a detachment that at least in August 1943 consisted of around 930 and for the first quarter of 1944 had an average of 772 prisoners is a small number. It is true that the “death books” are in general not a reliable source, but the numbers are supported by statements of former prisoners. The Kapos were for the most part political prisoners who “properly did their duty.” The ability to obtain supplies from the rubble was also of considerable significance for the prisoners.

After the war, several prisoners accused SS members of the construction brigade of throwing gas bombs into the shelters with the aim of killing and robbing the occupants. Due to these accusations, preliminary proceedings were commenced in 1948 against Johann Karger in Hamburg. The results are not known as the files were destroyed by the Hamburg State Prosecutor before the Central Office of State Justice Administrations (ZdL) became interested in the SS-Baubrigade II. Gerhard Weigel was also never the subject of any legal proceedings. In Hamburg, there is nothing that commemorates the prisoners of the SS-Baubrigade II.

**Sources** Despite the comparatively good primary sources, it was only relatively late that the Hamburg SS-Baubrigade II became the subject of research; see Karola Fings, *Krieg, Gesellschaft und KZ: Himmlers SS-Baubrigaden* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005). Previously, a few photographs and documents as part of an exhibition had been shown in Neuengamme and printed in Ulrich Bauche et al., eds., *Arbeit und Vernichtung. Das Konzentrationslager Neuengamme 1938–1945.*

It is true that there is no complete collection of sources, but contemporary documents are infrequently to be found in the Sta-HH, above all in the collections Baudeputation (321-2), Baubehörde I (321-3-1), Architect Gutschow (322-3), Polizeibehörde (331-I), and Senatskanzlei (131-2, 131-3). The WVHA Reports on the construction brigade are held by the BA-B (NS 19/14). Of particular significance are the judicial files of the BA-L. (IV 406 AR 245/69) and the reports of former prisoners in the archives of the AG-NG and the FGNS-H (Hans Schwarz Archive).


NOTES

2. SS-WVHA, November 9, 1943, BA-B, NS 19/14, pp. 26–27.
4. Senatskanzlei, Protokoll, August 11 and 12, 1943, Sta-HH, 131-2/B 3; Architect Gutschow, minutes of a meeting held on August 9 and 11, 1943, ibid., 322-3/B 8.
9. P 52.858, P 52.859, P. 52860, Sta-HH, 731-6, I/18 A 1 27.

HESDIN (BUCHENWALD) (SS-BB V)

A subcamp of the SS-Bau Brigade V stationed in Doullens existed in Hesdin, a small village in the northwest French region Pas-de-Calais, from March 1944 until probably August 1944. The camp housed between 500 and 600 prisoners who were to build a base for the V weapons (Vergeltungswaffe). They were accommodated in a Napoleonic cavalry barracks, La Frézelière, which was surrounded by a high wall and barbed wire. From here, work detachments were sent to an Organisation Todt (OT) camp in Berguenes and a camp in the vicinity of Mimoyecques.

A few details of the camp history are known, thanks to the memoirs of Tomasz Kiryłłow. Kiryłłow, as a 17-year-old, was forcibly removed from White Russia for forced labor and, following an act of sabotage in a factory, was first transferred to a work education camp (Arbeitserziehungslager). From there he was then transported to Buchenwald. He was part of the second transport of the SS-Bau Brigade V, which in March 1944 was sent to France via Cologne. As with many other prisoners of the SS-Bau Brigade V, he hoped to be able to escape there. He wrote the following about the departure from Cologne: “The screaming SS men drove us into the goods wagons. As usual there was very little space. Nevertheless, we were in good humour—we were travelling to France, the land of our dreams.”

In fact, the situation for the prisoners in France was significantly better than in Germany, because the population there openly showed their sympathy to the prisoners. On their arrival in Hesdin, during the march to the barracks, the population’s support was obvious. Upon seeing them, someone yelled: “They are indeed thin, these unfortunate.” They had heard that they were political prisoners, brought them food. Kiryłłow wrote, “After work we returned along...
Rue Farée. It seemed that in this street every inhabitant was our friend. Food packages were secretly thrown from windows and doors.\(^3\)

The prisoners worked mostly in the surrounding forests, where they built bunkers and shelters. A smaller detachment was busy in a mechanical workshop in Hesdin, working with lathes and repairing vehicles. Kiryłłow described the work done in the forest as follows: “The sweat ran down my face. Above me stood an SS man. I loaded the barrow as quickly as I could, but the SS man was not satisfied. He asked me. ‘Can’t you work?’ Obviously he did not like me. . . . Before the departure from Buchenwald I weighed forty-eight kilos [106 pounds]. The barrow laden with soil weighed definitely more than that. It was only my will that kept me on my feet.” Kiryłłow was spared, but a little later the same SS man shot his friend Piotr Majczenko.

In addition to the daily struggle for survival, the prisoners were mainly occupied with how to make contact with the French resistance and organize an escape. After a few prisoners had already escaped, the controls in the camp were tightened. The SS examined the prisoners for smuggled civilian clothes or searched for secret messages written in French. Once, when a note was found on a prisoner during a search on which was written in French a plea for food, the SS men beat the man to death. The camp elder, Heinz Schäfer, a Communist prisoner, was punished by the camp commander, by being sent to a bomb search detachment. According to the Buchenwald concentration camp “Death Book,” Schäfer died on May 28, 1944, in Hesdin when a dud detonated.\(^4\)

By this time, Kiryłłow had already escaped. He had managed to make contact with the commander of the resistance group Francs-Tireurs et Partisans Français in Blangy-sur-Ternoise, Marcel Huleux. In the following weeks the group tried to help more prisoners escape from the camp. After the withdrawal of the SS-Baubrigade V from northwest France, Kiryłłow remained with the partisans in the country around Hesdin.

Sometime in August 1944, the subcamp was dissolved, and the prisoners, probably via Doullens, arrived back in Germany. They were distributed among various Buchenwald camps in the Harz Mountains. In October 1944, they were taken over by the newly built Mittelbau concentration camp.

**Sources**

Only a few statements recorded in investigation proceedings, which are kept in the BA-L (IV AR-Z 57/67 and 410 AR 63/77), provide information about this camp. Jens-Christian Wagner has collected other widely distributed bits of information on this camp in his monograph on the Mittelbau concentration camp: _Produktion des Todes. Das KZ Mittelbau-Dora_ (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2001).

Karola Fings

trans. Stephen Pallavicini

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**Notes**

2. Ibid., p. 127.
3. Ibid., p. 146.
4. Ibid., p. 134.
the city, in the trade fair area of Cologne Deutz at the Rhine, opposite the cathedral. The prisoners began with the construction of their quarters in the northeast corner on the first floor of the Congress Hall (Kongresshalle), the present-day Rhine-Hall (Rheinsaal). On the ground floor were the canteen and a changing room. The premises immediately in front of the hall was fenced off and used as a roll-call parade ground. The only entrance to the camp was in the vicinity of the trade fair tower. At the entrance was a guard house. The SS guards patrolled outside the fence with dogs. The SS guards and camp administration were quartered in the trade fair tower and the neighboring buildings.

By the beginning of November 1942, the number of prisoners had been increased to 1,000. By March 1943, due to deaths, the transport of sick prisoners to Buchenwald, and the transfer of prisoners to other camps, the number of prisoners had dropped to 531. In the summer of 1943, Cologne was the subject of renewed large Allied air attacks. Thereafter, Himmler, following an agreement with Albert Speer, ordered that the construction brigades in the Rhineland be doubled in size. By July 1943, the SS-Baubrigade III had more than 1,000 prisoners at its disposal. Between September 1942 and May 1944, all in all around 6,000 prisoners went through the camps of the SS-Baubrigade III.

The commander of the Construction Brigade III Köln was Karl Wilhelm Völknr, who was born on February 26, 1898, in Quedlinburg, in the Harz Mountains, had worked as a master plumber, and joined the Nazi Party (NSDAP) and the SS in 1932. Völknr, who had been decorated as an aviator several times during World War I, was called up to the Luftwaffe in August 1939. He was dismissed from service and joined an SS-Death’s Head Unit and transferred in January 1940 to an SS-Guard Bataillon at the Buchenwald concentration camp. He was promoted on January 30, 1943, to SS-Obersturmführer, receiving the status equal to a commander of a construction brigade. Former prisoner Toni Fleischhauer described Völknr as follows: “He was not inclined to personally commit acts of violence. On the contrary, he was usually happy to warmly greet each prisoner. When he was drunk, he showed sentimentally accentuated comradeship. . . . To me his strongest characteristic was his pronounced desire to have possessions. He understood his function as incorporating the possibility to enrich himself. So he tried to please his superiors. That meant that he supplied, according to demand, presents or dead people.”

On average, 30 SS men were assigned to guard the approximately 1,000 prisoners. The largest part of the guards consisted of local police. In November 1943, 910 prisoners worked on each Sunday in Cologne guarded by 3 SS guards and 90 policemen.

Daily, the prisoners were tortured by the SS men, especially during the first three months. Alexander Malofejew wrote: “They beat the prisoners and they succeeded to suppress their human dignity to such an extent that they paid no regard to age or nationality (I am thinking here of the German prisoners). You were beaten because you did not pay sufficient attention to the SS or simply because wounds in your face should not heal, because you walked too slowly in the camp, because you spoke German, because you did not speak German, because you worked too slowly, etc.”

It was only with an increased deployment of older policemen and auxiliary police forces that, according to former prisoners’ reports, the terror receded. The worsening military situation changed the guards’ mentality; as Askold Kuro notes, “They [the policemen] became human only after Stalingrad and when Köln lay in ashes.”

Also, the internal power structure was of considerable significance for the prisoners’ conditions of survival. During the first five months, there was a power struggle between a corrupt clique of prisoner-functionaries and political prisoners. Alfred Müller, the camp elder from Buchenwald sent to Construction Brigade III Köln, called by the prisoners “Bloody Müller,” was found hung in December 1942. It was not possible to clarify whether this was a targeted resistance act, suicide, or murder by another “criminal” Kapo. In February 1943, camp leader Völknr, under pressure from political prisoners, transferred the rest of the disliked Kapos to Neuenegame, which resulted in a marked drop of the death rate. Most of the deaths in the Construction Brigade III Köln camp from this time were the result of delayed explosions of bombs, bomb attacks, or work accidents.

The city office of the Head of Emergency Measures (Leiter der Sofortmassnahmen) located in the Building Administrations of the hall was fenced off and used as a roll-call parade ground. The premises immediately in front of the congress hall (Kongresshalle), the present-day Rhine-Hall (Rheinsaal). On the ground floor were the canteen and a changing room. The premises immediately in front of the hall was fenced off and used as a roll-call parade ground. The only entrance to the camp was in the vicinity of the trade fair tower. At the entrance was a guard house. The SS guards patrolled outside the fence with dogs. The SS guards and camp administration were quartered in the trade fair tower and the neighboring buildings.
bombs.

The Administration Main Office (WVHA) reports, around 8,000 of the SS-Baubrigade III eliminated, according to SS-Businessple, the detachments worked from March to September 1943 to work in the dangerous “bomb disposal squads.” For example, the detachments worked from March to September 1943 in Elberfeld-Barmen, Essen, Bochum, Dortmund, Aachen, Jülich, Mönchengladbach, Krefeld, Wesel, Gelsenkirchen, Bottrop, Mülheim an der Ruhr, Hagen, Witten, and Schwelm. Between July 1943 and March 1944, the demolition squads of the SS-Baubrigade III eliminated, according to SS-Business Administration Main Office (WVHA) reports, around 8,000 bombs. Most of the time, after their mission, the prisoners returned to the camp of the construction brigade. Over a longer period, bomb disposal squads were established in Bochum, Dortmund, and Düsseldorf.

The level of illness among the prisoners was permanently high. This was due to the inadequate diet and the physically and mentally demanding work. For medical care, there was only an inadequately equipped infirmary with 12 beds for the prisoners. At the same time, the prisoners had already arrived half-starved and ill from Buchenwald. Alozy Wasilewski provides an example—he was 180 centimeters (71 inches) tall but weighed only 56 kilograms (123 pounds). By transporting off selected prisoners, the SS-Baubrigade III was able to maintain productivity. The selections were done by SS-Oberscharführer Gustav Schmidt from Buchenwald and a contract doctor, SS-Untersturmführer Erich Möllenhoff, from Cologne. Between September 1942 and February 1944, more than 400 prisoners declared unfit to work were transferred to Buchenwald and replaced with other prisoners. In addition, there were transfers to Buchenwald as disciplinary measures, for example, when prisoners attempted to make contact with the civilian population. From the prisoners’ point of view, the subcamp was distinguished from the main camp in that the terrain of rubble offered better escape opportunities to the work detachments. It also appears that support especially from forced laborers and opponents of the regime, albeit only a few, was relatively high in the Cologne area.

From April 1943 the Cologne State Police used the camp of the SS-Baubrigade III to hold so-called work education prisoners (Arbeitserziehungsbäfllinge). Some of the prisoners had been arrested on political grounds and were held there by the Gestapo until a “Protective Custody Order” was issued. The largest group of Arbeitserziehungslager (AEL) prisoners were Poles or Soviets who spent a few weeks with the construction brigade and were then again released to their jobs. Several hundred Gestapo prisoners, marked with a white stripe on the exterior of their clothing, were incarcerated with the construction brigade. On May 8, 1944, a few days before the SS-Baubrigade III was transferred to the Harz Mountains, there were still 287 concentration camp prisoners and 576 Gestapo prisoners in the camp.

In May 1944, the withdrawal of the construction brigade from Cologne began, despite the protests of the Gau Administration and the City Administration. The majority of the prisoners were assigned to the SS-Baubrigade V. On May 10, 287 prisoners from Construction Brigade III Köln and 131 prisoners from the Duisburg subcamp were transported to Wieda in the Harz. Other subcamps of the Buchenwald concentration camp remained: the bomb disposal squad at Kalkum, the detachment Napolé at Bensberg, the German Earth and Stone Works (DEST) factory at Essen and Düsseldorf, as well as camp “Berta” at Rheinmetall-Borsig.

None of those responsible for the Construction Brigade III Köln camp were ever put before a German court for crimes committed there. In the 1960s, a few of them were living undetected in Cologne and obviously without any fear of the judiciary: such as Karl Völkner, Erich Möllenhoff, or Josef Grohó. Following prior investigations by the Central Office of State Justice Administrations (ZdL), the Cologne State Prosecutor began a systematic investigation in 1968. In 1975, however, the investigation ceased.

The existence of the subcamp first came to the attention of the people of Cologne in the 1980s because of the committed efforts of a number of individuals. Since 1993, a memorial stone, erected on the banks of the Rhine at Deutz, commemorates the SS-Baubrigade III. Since 1990, the city of Cologne, in recognition of the responsibility it had for the deployment of concentration camp prisoners, has conducted a program enabling survivors of forced labor to visit the city.

SOURCES Karola Fings’s Messelager Köln. Ein KZ-Aussenlager im Zentrum der Stadt (Cologne: Emons, 1996) provides a monograph about Construction Brigade III Köln. In comparison with other SS-Baubrigaden, there is sufficient documentation on Construction Brigade III Köln. In addition to contemporaneous sources in the THStA-W (NS 4 Buchenwald and Prisons) as well as the investigation files of the BA-L (IV 406 AR 85/67, IV 429 AR 1304/67) and NWHStA-(D) (Ger. Rep. 118/1174-1190, 1138-1349), the most important sources are around 30 interviews with survivors of the camp, which are kept in the NS-Dok.

NOTES
1. Heinrich Himmler, September 18, 1942, BA-B, NS 19/14, p. 136; report on numbers, September 21, 1942, THStA-W, NS 4 Buchenwald Nr. 146; statutory declaration
4. BDC/SSO, RS, in BA-B; and denazification court proceedings against Völkner, BA-K, Z 42 V 3772.
10. WVHA, November 9, 1943, BA-B, NS 19/14, p. 28.
11. WVHA, November 9, 1943, February 16, 1944, April 29, 1944, ibid., pp. 29, 35–36, 42.
15. Ibid., pp. 77–78.
16. KL Buchenwald, Prisoner Office, June 23, 1944, in NWStA-(D), Court Reports 118/1176.

KORTEMARK AND PROVEN, BELGIUM
[NEUENGAMME, BUCHENWALD]
[SS-BB I]
The SS-Baubrigade I was stationed in Kortemark and Proven, Belgium, for barely five weeks, from July 28 until September 2, 1944. When it became necessary to withdraw the SS-Baubrigade I from Alderney, due to the Allied landing in Normandy, the prisoners were to construct launching pads for V-1 rockets in Belgium. The responsible Wehrmacht Field Construction unit organized the necessary accommodations in the planned operational area in Flanders, north of Poperinge between Diksmuide and Kortemark.1

Of the original 1,000 prisoners of the SS-Baubrigade I, only 570 made it to Belgium. Two camps were constructed to hold the prisoners: the main camp at Kortemark held about 350 prisoners in a school in the suburb of Markhove, and a group of around 220 prisoners were sent to Proven near Ypres.

Due to this change, the construction brigade was now under the command of the Buchenwald concentration camp; on August 5, 1944, there followed the administratively required rewriting of the prisoner numbers.2 The assumption of responsibility by Buchenwald made sense so far as the work of the SS-Baubrigade I corresponded to that of SS-Baubrigade V. Its SS commander, Gerhard Weigel, instructed the SS-Baubrigade I in the works in Belgium.

With the stationing in Belgium the SS were confronted with a totally new situation. For the first time they and the SS-Baubrigade I were operating in hostile territory. The hostile attitude of the French population, attacks by paratroopers, and the fact that none of the prisoners who escaped were recaptured showed that maintaining control over the camp was much more difficult. In Belgium, the SS were confronted not only with a population openly helping the prisoners but also with armed attempts to help prisoners escape.

When the train reached Belgium, the prisoners found full sympathy on the part of the population. Willi Kreuzberg stated: “Everyone waved and greeted them! The Belgians quickly grasped who we were. Cigarettes were thrown to us. The SS became anxious and pushed those back who could be seen from the windows. We were not intimidated. We felt, that whoever managed to escape here would be accepted and hidden.”3 The contrast to the situation in Germany was almost unbelievable for the prisoners. Helmut Koeller remembered: “We prisoners in Flanders had perhaps a life; it was the best of all times in the concentration camp! The Belgian people brought us prisoners everything; tobacco in abundance (many of us had hoarded whole pillows of it!), bread and fruit, sweets, sugar, milk, etc. In addition, the Belgian Red Cross brought us three times a week sweets, fruit and tobacco!”4

Since the supply lines broke down due to acts of sabotage, the workload of the prisoners was to a certain extent bearable. Targeted acts of sabotage, destruction from air raids, and the advance of the Allied forces caused 10 of the 12 landing ramps built by the prisoners never to become operational. Belgian farmers, who supplied the water needed to set the concrete at the sites and who were overwhelmingly part of the Belgian resistance, also helped prisoners to escape. The brazenness with which the escapes were organized almost on a daily basis was a clear indication to the SS that they were operating in enemy territory. Once a detachment with three prisoners and two Wehrmacht guards drove with a truck to a building site, a car followed them, fired at them, but returned unsuccessfully. The former prisoner Heinrich Dick described how, from a 10-man detachment that worked at a building site in Popering, no one was left:

Once we delivered cement on a lorry to a building site six Russians escaped. The SS guard ran after them, fired at them, but returned unsuccessfully. He then shot the remaining three Russians with a pistol. I was the only survivor of ten men . . .
Hoegelow (chief of the SS-guards) learned of this incident shortly thereafter, when we returned to the camp. We were not permitted to go out the next day because the guards were searching for the escapees. They did not capture any, but one of the guards was missing. He was found in the evening—shot with his dog. Hoegelow then said that those who saw the incident would be taken away. Since I was the only survivor it could only have meant me. I therefore fled the camp the next day together with a Russian.

The prisoner losses for the few weeks in Belgium were enormous. When the construction brigade was forced to withdraw due to the advancing Allied forces, there were around 130 prisoners missing. Most of them must have escaped since there were only 8 registered deaths for that period. Many prisoners fled on the day on which they were to be transferred. Under no circumstances were they going to be transported to Germany in view of the imminent liberation. On the morning of September 1, 1944, a group of 39 prisoners overran the SS post inside the walled-in schoolyard in Markhove and fled in different directions. Several prisoners were shot, but most of them indeed succeeded in escaping.

The transport of the SS-Baubrigade I that followed was marked by the simultaneous retreat of German troops, the parallel flight of German civilians, and direct war activities—all through a landscape in which ammunition and food depots had been blown up and were burning, as well as bridges and railroad tracks that had been destroyed. The SS, now extremely nervous, fought with all available means through the war zone. As with the retreat from Alderney, here, too, the SS troupe had to make forced stops because of destroyed or captured areas that had to be circumvented.

Via Ghent and near Brussels, the train reached, after four days since departure, the Dutch border town of Budel. There the train was derailed since the partisans had destroyed the tracks. Wittwer, the SS Labor Service leader of the construction brigade Commander Georg Braun, and Chief of Guards Hoegelow forced civilians to search for a new locomotive and the prisoners to lay bypass railroad tracks. Wittwer returned with several captured Dutch men, who were interrogated by Braun and Hoegelow. Six of them were shot on the spot.

On September 6, 1944, at about 12:30 P.M., the train reached the German border. The former prisoner Helmut Knoeller described the suddenly changed situation: “Here in Germany was a completely different picture: The civilian population cheered the soldiers.” After another four days, the SS-Construction Brigade I, comprising 441 prisoners, arrived at its new destination, Sollstedt in Thüringen.

Among the escapees from Kortemark was Robert Prokop who had reached England via France, where he had joined a Czech Brigade. He returned to Kortemark with the Czech Brigade and learned that during an escape 15 prisoners had been killed and that the SS had buried them in a ditch alongside the road. The victims were later reburied in a mass grave at the local cemetery.

After the war, not one of the responsible SS leaders was the subject of judicial proceedings for crimes committed in Kortemark. Investigations against Braun and Hoegelow for the shooting of Dutch civilians in Budel ended without results.

**NOTES**

2. See the Certificate of the ITS for Lang, BA-L, 410 AR 63/77; Buchenwald Concentration Camp, Head of Administration, September 26, 1944, ITS Archive, ISD-Technical Documents-Buchenwald File Nr. 184, pp. 100–111.
4. Helmut Knoeller, October 27, 1944, AG-NG, Nr. 1274.
5. Ibid.
6. Interview with Heinrich Dick, BA-L, 410 AR 63/77, pp. 219–220.
7. See the registration lists of SS-Construction Brigade Prisoners with numbers commencing at 88000 from August 3, 1944, to September 1, 1944, THStA-W, NS 4 Buchenwald, Nr. 136a.
9. Helmut Knoeller, October 27, 1944, AG-NG, Nr. 1274.

**MACKENRODE (BUCHENWALD, MITTELBAU, AND SACHSENHAUSEN) [SS-BB III]**

Between July 1944 and April 1945, Mackenrode, a small village in the Harz Mountains, was the site of a subcamp of the SS-Baubrigade III, which was stationed in Wieda. The prisoners were assigned to construct the 22-kilometer-long (13.7-mile-long) Helme Valley Railway; a railway stretch from Osterhagen to Nordhausen, thereby relieving the existing railway from Nordhausen to the west. On July 21, 1944, the
first 150 prisoners were housed in a barracks camp not far from the village near present-day Federal Road (Bundesstrasse) 243. On July 30, another 150 prisoners occupied the barracks. The camp that consisted of three barracks located on Peterswiese was fenced in and had four guard towers. Mackenrode, with up to 475 prisoners, was the largest subcamp of SS-Baubrigade III. SS-Oberscharführer Walter Dotzauer was the camp commander. Directly opposite the entrance to the camp was a barrack for the guards, who were overwhelmingly soldiers from the Luftwaffe.

Aime Bonifas, who on September 2, 1944, was transferred from the external camp Laura via Dora to Mackenrode, described the peculiar closeness of the prison camp to the village as follows: “The camp was right next to the village of Mackenrode. We can recognize all the houses and the high tower of the Evangelic-Lutheran Church. The sight of the church in the days that followed was often a puzzle. It is not for me to judge and I do not know who congregated in the church, but how can one talk about heaven when you are so close to such injustices.” He wrote the following about the reaction of the local population: “Our construction sites were in several villages. The few locals who were seen on our way showed only contempt for us. Once a young girl spat on us.”

In order to construct the railway, the prisoners had to undertake heavy earthmoving work and clearing, mostly without the assistance of machinery or horses. The various work detachments had to walk several kilometers to the work sites. Work was often done on Sundays. Conditions in the camp deteriorated with the onset of winter. The prisoners waded through snow and mud, often without shoes, with torn clothes, without sufficient food, and without any hygienic care. From February 1945, a 150-strong prisoner detachment worked in Tettenborn; from there the existing railway line was to be connected by a branch line to the Helme Valley Railway. It is not clear whether a permanent camp had been set up for the duration of several weeks.

There are only a few reports of instances of death or acts of violence against the prisoners in the camp. An Italian prisoner, who was a stoker on a locomotive, was doused with boiling water during an accident in November 1944. He was taken to the infirmary in Wieda, where he died. In February 1945, it is said that the Belgian Josef Fruyt was beaten to death in the camp for stealing potatoes. From a report to the SS-Führungsstab (Leadership Staff) B 13, dated February 6, 1945, it is evident that two days earlier 10 prisoners from Mackenrode had been detailed for construction work, but the foreman changed the orders and had the prisoners load potatoes at a farm instead. It was here that the prisoners, including Fruyt, were said to have stolen potatoes.

On April 6, 1945, the prisoners were taken on foot from Mackenrode to Wieda, where on April 7, 1945, the evacuation march of the SS-Baubrigade III began.

Six victims of the Mackenrode camp—a Frenchman, a Belgian, two Poles, and two prisoners from the Soviet Union—were buried in the village cemetery. The bodies were exhumed after the war and reburied in Nordhausen.

**SOURCES**


**NOTES**


2. Ibid., p. 135.


**NÜRNBERG (SACHSENHAUSEN)**

[AKA SS-Baubrigade (E) (SS-BB II)]

The SS-Baubrigade II, last stationed in Berlin, in the middle of February 1945 was transformed into an SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade. Prisoners from the camps in Müggelheim and Friedrich-Krause-Ufer were gathered together in Berlin-Köpenick. They, together with other prisoners from a subcamp of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in Berlin-Lichterfelde, had a strength of 504 men.

The prisoners were put on a train in Köpenick, which, as the SS-Baubrigade (E), left the capital city on February 25, 1945. From February 14, 1945, the brigade was under the command of SS-Obersturmführer Karl Raab, who was born on January 6, 1895, in Atzgersdorf near Vienna. The guards, numbering between 60 and 70 men, were SS men deployed in Berlin. The destination of the construction brigade was the destroyed Nürnberg railway station, where cleanup work was to be done. As the train entered the station, the prisoners experienced a heavy bombing raid. Wenzel W. described this in his memoirs in 1957: “We prisoners experienced this attack in closed railway goods wagons. Only a few prisoners survived.”

On March 12, 1945, following a large bombing raid on the city, around 30 starving prisoners set off on a search for food. As a deterrent, the SS instigated a horrible spectacle. Accord-
ing to a report from 1946, the prisoners were forced “to kneel with their foreheads on the ground for several hours during cold weather in fear of being shot if they moved.” For theft, 3 of the prisoners were hanged from a railway wagon. According to the statement of a survivor, a prisoner did the hanging. Willy K. described the execution in March 1947 as follows: “Unfortunately one of our prisoners assumed the repulsive role as executioner for a bottle of alcohol and cigarettes. The prisoner, a German, was lynched by the other prisoners in Landshut after the liberation.”

Landshut was the last destination of the construction brigade, which arrived there via Regensburg, in the middle March 1945. At night the train was shunted to Ahrain and during the day the construction brigade traveled to the Landshut Railway Station for cleaning-up work.

For the last months of the war, there are scarcely any sources, and reliable information about the 2. SS-Baubrigade (E) is not available. Details on the number of transfers of prisoners in the main camp or on escaped or dead prisoners are not possible, but it can be assumed that in the confusion of the last weeks of the war many prisoners were able to escape. A guard said in 1973: “The constant bombing raids and attacks by low flying fighters caused us to suffer losses. Prisoners and guards were killed or injured. . . . Because of the air raid alarms we only worked at night. Many prisoners used this as an opportunity to disappear.”

Almost a month later, on April 27, some of the prisoners of the 2. SS-Baubrigade II (E) set off on foot from the Bavarian town of Landshut in several columns in the direction of Wasserburg. It is said that some of the prisoners remained with the train or, after the dissolution of the columns, returned to the train. On the march, the columns gradually broke up. On the way, a group of prisoners stayed in a barn, and several groups fled. Also, the SS disappeared. Survivors report that those not capable of marching were shot. Raab was last seen with the construction brigade on April 29, 1945. The remaining SS men fled from the approaching Americans on May 1. During the following night, the columns were freed. Another column is said to have been taken to Graz.

Shortly after the liberation, a few prisoners returned to Landshut. They found the construction brigade’s train had been burned out. Many survivors of the 2. SS-Baubrigade (E) were marked for the rest of their lives by the many years they had spent in the concentration camps. Georg M. wrote the following in 1949: “After the entry of the Yanks I and many of my comrades from many nations celebrated in Landshut a reunion. We stayed there for six weeks recovering. I then made my way home. But I discovered that I no longer had a home. In September 1945, I lay down and almost forgot to get up. From this time my health is broken.”

The State Prosecutor at the State Court in Nürnberg-Fürth investigated the hanging of three prisoners at the Nürnberg Railway Station but terminated the investigations on January 20, 1969. Later investigations by the Central Office of State Justice Administrations (ZdL) on crimes committed by those in charge of the 2. SS-Baubrigade (E) did not result in a trial.

**NÜXEI (BUCHENWALD, MITTELBAU, AND SACHSENHAUSEN) (SS-BB III)**

Between May 1944 and April 1945, the SS-Baubrigade III, based in Wieda, had a subcamp in the Harz Mountains in the village of Nüxei, which consisted of only a few houses. The prisoners were to build a 22-kilometer-long (13.7-mile-long) railway line, designed to relieve the existing line between Osterhagen and Nordhausen. Probably in the middle of May 1944, 100 prisoners began fitting up a barn on a farm in Nüxei as accommodations for a camp. The SS confiscated a meadow after 2 prisoners escaped and had the camp constructed next to present-day Federal Road (Bundesstrasse) 243. An area of about 50 meters×50 meters (164 feet×164 feet) was fenced in and furnished with guard towers and searchlights. The quarters of the guards were in the immediate vicinity of the camp.

The camp is unusual because of its proximity to the village population. Wilhelm Walter, the owner of the farm, wrote in 1972:

One Sunday morning three trucks with about one hundred “Zebras” [concentration camp inmates in striped prisoner clothing] appeared on my farm. The guards seized my barn for use as a camp. . . . Immediately a mezzanine floor was constructed in
my barn to create two sleeping levels. The guards (Luftwaffe soldiers) were accommodated in the local pub and in two rooms of one of my worker’s cottages. Once the beds etc. had been put in place, the camp was occupied by about three hundred prisoners. . . .

Given the small area it was impossible to keep the prisoners separated from the German population and from the forced laborers.1

After Karl Völker, the SS camp commander of the SS-Baubrigade III, was relieved from his post in the summer of 1944, the prisoners in the Wieda and Nüxei camps were transported away and replaced with 300 new prisoners from the Buchenwald subcamp Dora. At the same time, conditions in the camp got worse. Walter reported on this as follows: “Everything changed on the evening of July 20. When the prisoners returned from work they were not allowed back into the camp. . . . All the prisoners were marched off in the direction of Wieda on the same evening. The Luftwaffe guards were immediately withdrawn. The new prisoners appeared the next day under the most severe guard of the SS.”

One of the new prisoners was Albert van Dijk, born in the Netherlands in 1924, who has described the Nüxei camp in detail in his memoirs. He wrote the following about the work: “At first we thought that we had come to a rest camp, but we soon found out that we had made a mistake. . . . The railway had to be built at an unimaginable pace, and large soil excavation was necessary which had to be done with primitive tools. . . . Soil was taken away in wheelbarrows on the run. The prisoners collapsed under the load of the railway ties and rails, which they had to carry. They were pulled up and continued to carry their load groaning. But the foremen demanded even more; the pace of work was increased excessively.”

Work on the railway ceased between the beginning of January and the middle of February 1945 because of low temperatures. During this period, the prisoners from Nüxei worked in two large underground installations in Woffleben, lengthening the grueling daily routine considerably.

The columns from the tunnel construction site marched in when we, who worked on the ramp or in the workshops, had already been standing and waiting for hours on the roll call square. We ate standing—in snow and frost. We slept without blankets; many prisoners lay on the bare floor as the stronger prisoners had taken the straw sacks from the weaker ones to use them as cover. The bread rations were constantly reduced; the small portions of margarine ceased; the soup was made from frozen and rotten rutabagas. Worn out shoes and clothes were not replaced and frostbite was very common. Hardly a day did pass without someone dying.

Marcel Orset, a survivor, remembered the horrors of the last winter during the war: “Nüxei, was a slow struggle against death; I have terrible memories of the winter, frozen feet, a serious leg injury; the danger of being transported away, the destruction, the dead comrades. The work? Not as brutal as in Osterhagen. Life in the camp? A lot of misery. In comparison to the hell in Osterhagen and if it had been summer one could have survived.”

Although the camp and surrounding community lived close together, it did not mean that the local population developed empathy for the prisoners and contributed something to improve the situation. On the contrary, it seemed that the situation worsened—the lack of sympathy for the starving prisoners, the pursuit of self-interest, and the missing political insight into the conditions of the concentration camp community helped in part to worsen the situation.

Van Dijk recalls a peculiar incident that occurred at Christmas in 1944. On the roll-call square Walter and representatives of the Mackenrode (Hohenstein) church had placed a large fir tree and had set a basket of presents at its base. The church choir arrived at the camp and sang Christmas carols. The would-be benefactors resented it when only the German Kapos joined in the singing. According to van Dijk:

As they refused to sing, the prisoners, as punishment, stood for longer than two hours almost like columns of ice around the Christmas tree with the barest of clothing in the frost. It was not even allowed to stamp your feet. The members of the church choir left to their houses, to the warm hearth. They took the basket with the little packages bickering about the incorrigible prisoners. Candlelight streamed from the window of the farmer’s house and happy children’s voices could be heard. The hands of the clock on Mackenroder church tower moved to twelve. Christmas had begun.

Van Dijk describes an event that the farmer Walter left out of his report. A starving prisoner had caught a chicken that had entered the camp through the barbed-wire fence. He and a Russian prisoner were caught killing it. According to van Dijk, Walter, after the evening roll call, entered the camp in a rage and demanded punishment. A Kapo broke the wrist bones of the Russian, thrashed van Dijk, and crushed one of his fingers. Van Dijk was put on public display with a sign saying: “I am a chicken thief.”

On April 5, 1945, the prisoners were taken on foot from Nüxei to Wieda, where the evacuation march of the SS-Baubrigade III began on April 7.

Further research on Nüxei can be based on the primary and secondary sources provided for the Wieda subcamp.

NOTES
2. Ibid., p. 127.
4. Ibid., p. 73.
6. Ibid., pp. 72–73.

OSNABRÜCK (NEUENGAMME) [SS-BB II]

The SS-Baubrigade II was formed in October 1942 in the Neuengamme concentration camp with 1,000 prisoners; 250 of them formed a subcamp in Osnabrück, which stayed there until May 1943. The decision to send a labor detail to Osnabrück also to remove debris from bomb damage was made on relatively short notice. The city mayor, Erich Gärtner, may have had influence on the allocation of concentration camp prisoners, as in his capacity as head of both Emergency Measures (Leiter der Sofortmassnahmen) and Air Defense, he was responsible for all matters of removal of debris after bombing raids.

The prisoners of the SS-Baubrigade II arrived at Osnabrück no later than October 17, 1942, for on this day the first death is documented. In the first few months of 1943 there was no further large bombing raid on Osnabrück. Therefore, the prisoners were withdrawn in May 1943, probably at the beginning of the month, and transferred to Bremen, Wilhelmshaven, and later Hamburg, despite the protests of the mayor.

The labor detail occupied the Overberg School in a residential district of Osnabrück on the street of the same name. The gymnasium located between the two wings of the building served as the prisoners’ accommodation. Looking from the street, the left wing had been destroyed by a direct hit of a bomb, and only its basement could be used. Here were the bath of the school, the storeroom, and the kitchen, in which students were taught cooking. In the basement of the right wing were the boiler room, the prisoners’ kitchen, an infirmary, a small workroom, and a windowless partition. On the ground floor of the right wing were the quarters for the SS and the police reservists. The schoolyard was used for roll calls.

Of all the construction brigade camps, the Osnabrück camp had the highest death rate; 86 prisoners died between October 1942 and March 1943 and are buried in the Heger cemetery—that is, within five months, one-third of the prisoners died. Responsible for the atrocious conditions was primarily the camp leader, who, together with a corrupt clique of prisoner-functionaries, terrorized the remaining prisoners as well as the surrounding community, which did not intervene despite the visibly dramatic conditions in the camp.

Initially, the camp commander in Osnabrück was SS-Hauptscharführer Brinkmann. He was replaced in November 1942 by SS-Oberscharführer Walter Döring. Döring, born on March 1, 1906, in Eisenach, already had a career of several years as an SS man and as a concentration camp supervisor. From 1934, the trained butcher served as a member of the SS in Weimar, was then transferred to the SS barracks at the castle Lichtenburg in Prettin for disciplinary reasons, and from there went to the Buchenwald concentration camp in June 1937. In January 1941, he was sent to the Neuengamme concentration camp first as block and then as roll-call leader. Shortly before being ordered to Osnabrück, Döring is alleged to have been involved in the killing of a Soviet prisoner of war (POW). One of Döring’s closest confidants within the camp community was the first Kapo, Wilhelm Leers. Leers was born in 1903 in Cologne. In February 1940, he was sent by the Criminal Investigation Department of the Police in Cologne as a “professional criminal” to Neuengamme. In Neuengamme, Leers revealed himself as a sadist, and this accounts for the criticism by political prisoners of his selection for Osnabrück. Of the remaining Kapos destined for Osnabrück, all of whom were citizens of the Reich, there were two political prisoners, Ernst Bonhoff and Fritz Bringmann, sent as orderlies. The remaining prisoners of the labor detail transported to Osnabrück were mostly Soviet citizens, but a few Poles, Yugoslavs, and Dutch are also mentioned.

From January 1943, the unit of guards, besides a handful of SS men, consisted mostly of local auxiliary police, who as a rule were either self-employed or worked in the service sector, for example, as waiters or barkeepers, and the majority of them were born in the 1880s or 1890s. It is possible to conclude from the surviving personnel files that the police reservists, once they started “guarding prisoners,” performed their duties without any noteworthy incident. There are no instances documented of frequent absences due to illness, of applications for transfer, or of disciplinary proceedings.

The “Regime of Terror” established by Döring and Leers included the embezzlement of food on a grand scale, so that within a few weeks most of the prisoners lost weight in a “terrifying manner.” Iwan Andrejewitsch Slipatschenko desperately searched in the rubble for food to survive: “I could have eaten the sole of a shoe if it had been attractively packed. Goodness knows what I ate.” In addition to the hunger, lack of clothing and the high pace of work were the main reasons for the prisoners’ visible deterioration. With Döring’s arrival

VOLUME I: PART B
in Osnabrück, the pace of work was increased, and rations were again reduced.  

Of the 250 prisoners, around 100 had physically wasted away by the end of 1942. On Döring’s instructions, no more than 10 sick were allowed in the inadequate infirmary. When the prisoner orderlies brought up the untenable conditions with Döring, he demanded that they kill the sick with injections of gasoline, which they steadfastly refused despite mistreatment by Döring.  

As Döring wanted to get rid of the sick, he sent them to work where they were forced to work until they collapsed. Then they were doused with water and left lying in the cold until the prisoners returned to the camp. Bringmann wrote the following about this “treatment”: “The majority did not survive until the return to the camp and died during the course of the day. The others got very rarely something to eat in the evening, but the cold water treatment was continued until they also met their fate.”  

Leers also abused the prisoners with great brutality both on Döring’s command and without. Once he chased a sick Soviet prisoner to work, beating him again and again, and when he was finally too weak to go, he hung him in the prisoners’ quarters with his hands tied behind his back. Here he mistreated the helpless prisoner until he was unconscious—a torture that the prisoner did not survive.  

The 86 prisoners whose deaths are recorded in the Osnabrück camp were except for 1 all of Soviet nationality. One can conclude that the small “layer of leadership” in the camp consisting of German prisoners, which with a few exceptions belonged to Leers’s clique, knew how to ensure their survival by means of brutality and corruption. The only possibility for the Soviet prisoners was to try and escape. Only a few were able to escape, and those caught had to expect to be shot. In at least two cases, Döring personally murdered the recaptured prisoners.  

Not only the guards but also the local inhabitants were daily witnesses to the brutal treatment of the prisoners. The school janitor, Fritz L., remained at his position, and the cooking courses, headed by the teacher Agnes W., continued for various groups of students. The violence that was meted out to the prisoners was visible. Agnes W. reported in 1950: “The schoolyard was open and the neighborhood children played there. They must have seen that the prisoners were treated badly, and they must have told their parents for the mothers complained to the SS or the Kapos. I was told by a woman, whose name I no longer remember, that she received the following reply: ‘If the children are not hard yet, then they will have to become that way.’”  

The prisoners worked daily at several locations right in the middle of the city. The population could see that many of the prisoners were “completely run down, exhausted, and lacking any strength,” collapsing while they labored. They were also witnesses to the mistreatment meted out at the work sites. In 1950, a police reservist described the situation with the following words: “The prisoners were badly mistreated on the building sites. I saw countless cases. The so-called SS foremen and the Kapos committed the acts. The prisoners were beaten on the head with wooden bars, so that they collapsed covered with blood and sometimes could not continue working for a considerable time.”  

Comparing the change in the death rate over time with reports by surviving prisoners, it becomes clear that the systematic resistance by anti-Fascist and Communist prisoners finally led to an improvement in the conditions of the camp. Both Bringmann and Bonhoft as well as George Merten, who was deliberately sent in December 1942 from Neuengamme to Osnabrück, were instrumental in dismantling the power structure in the camp. With high personal risk, they resisted the instructions of Döring and repeatedly criticized his commands. Finally, they used the opportunity during his absence on leave at the beginning of March 1943 to draw the attention of the main camp to the intolerable conditions by pointing out the low efficiency of the camp. They systematically tried to weaken the front of the corrupt and brutal Kapos, fighting back against Leers in quite dangerous conflicts for months. Döring was replaced in March 1943 by an SS-Hauptscharführer Gehrs (possibly spelled Gerds or Geerds); Leers fled in April 1943 from the enraged fellow prisoners.  

The Hamburg State Court sentenced Döring to prison for life in 1951; on appeal the sentence was reduced to two years. He was charged again in the middle of the 1950s and sentenced to a term of eight years in a penitentiary. Leers had been sentenced to death by a British military court as early as 1946, but the sentence was commuted, and in 1954 he was released from prison. Both town doctors, who issued the falsified death certificates, were questioned in the 1950s but never prosecuted. Nothing at the Overberg School commemorates the infamous subcamp.

**SOURCES** The history of the Osnabrück construction brigade camp was given particular attention in a study of the SS-Construction Brigades: Karola Fings, *Krieg, Gesellschaft und KZ: Himmlers SS-Baubrigaden* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005). Before that, it had been mentioned with a marginal comment in an extremely apologetic city history, which covered up the responsibility of the city of Osnabrück for the camp and the extent of the crimes: Karl Külling, *Osnabrück 1933–1945. Stadt im Dritten Reich* (Osnabrück: H.Th. Wenner, 1980), p. 149. Relatively early a survivor of the camp published important witness reports: Fritz Bringmann, *Häftlinge in der 2. SS-Baubrigade in Osnabrück* (Frankfurt am Main: Röderberg-Verlag, 1981). Sources are to be found in the ASt-Os and the NStA-Os, Dep. 3 b XV and Dep. 3 b XIX, of which a few extracts have been published in an early volume on the Osnabrück camp: Ursula Fisser-Blömer, “Zwangsarbeit in Osnabrück. SS-Baubrigade, Kriegsgefangenen- und ‘Arbeitserziehungslager,’” *Antifa-Be-Os* 6 (1982): 23–29. Also relevant are the judicial files held by the BA-L, IV 406 AR 245/69, IV 406 AR 221/74, as well as the documents in the AG-NG (Interviews and Reports Nr. 141, 150, 153, 1576, 1602) and the FZG (Archive Hans Schwarz Totenbücher des KZ Neuengamme).
Osterhagen is a small village in the Harz Mountains. Between July 1944 and April 1945, one of the three subcamps of the SS-Baubrigade III, stationed in Wieda, was located in Osterhagen. The prisoners were to construct a 22-kilometer-long (13.7-mile-long) railway designed to relieve the railway line between Osterhagen and Nordhausen. The camp, which had previously been a brickworks, lay to the southeast of Osterhagen at the bottom of a valley. It consisted of three barracks and was surrounded by a fence with watchtowers. From July 5, 1944, 300 prisoners were detained there.

Osterhagen was the most notorious of all the SS-Baubrigade III camps. Aimé Bonifas, who was transferred from the Laura subcamp via Dora to Mackenrode on September 2, 1944, and arrived in Osterhagen on December 25, 1944, after a short stay in Wieda, described his transport to this much-feared camp in his memoirs:

The lorry carried us away quickly, I have no idea from which of the Wieda branch camps . . . [guard towers] loomed suddenly in a sweeping desolate landscape, a name which we could not believe to be true, which we dared not speak, which kept our mouths clamped tightly shut: Osterhagen, the infamous punishment camp. I was there, to this hellish camp, simply because numbers had to be kept up, because this beast had to continue consuming . . . A real death hole, not a tree in sight, icy desolation, an area of despair. It was enough to make one howl . . . I was more than used to the faces of prisoners, but here, more than anywhere else, I was shaken by their expressions, as if they were hunted animals. They bore the stamp of never-ending suffering.

The Osterhagen camp was visibly more badly equipped than all the other camps of the SS-Baubrigade III. The hygienic conditions were particularly appalling. There was no water supply, and the filthy water brought in by truck was never sufficient. The prisoners had to wash in the open air in the icy cold. The clay surface of the camp was not sealed, with the water supply, and the filthy water brought in by truck was never sufficient. The prisoners had to wash in the open air in the icy cold. The clay surface of the camp was not sealed, with the result that the prisoners were completely filthy when it rained. Disease and epidemics were widespread. According to Bonifas, “the hygienic conditions in Osterhagen are so deplorable that we were completely covered in lice. It was a real plague. Large lice, with a black cross, that quickly multiplied, ran about everywhere and laid their eggs in the tiniest folds of our clothes . . . They sucked the last little bit of life out of us. . . . We were the dead waiting to be called. Many comrades died because they were quite literally eaten by the lice.”

This, the most isolated of the SS-Baubrigade III camps, was commanded by SS-Hauptscharführer Franz Choina, described as a most brutal man. Georges Pieper, the camp elder and Kapo in the SS-Baubrigade III office in Wieda, described Choina shortly after the liberation as follows: “The Osterhagen Camp under the command of Choina was particularly infamous. He had the prisoners work in complete darkness and once the food was distributed the prisoners had to eat it cold. Warm soup was delivered in a lorry in the middle of the day and was distributed at 10 p.m. The prisoners in the Osterhagen camp were also beaten more than elsewhere. It was only in the rarest of cases that sick prisoners were taken to Wieda for treatment—it was rather the case that they had to work until they dropped dead.”

VOLUME I: PART B
According to Bonifas, the “law of the jungle” ruled in Osterhagen. Choina had insured the support of particularly corrupt prisoner-functionaries who tormented, humiliated, robbed, and beat the prisoners at every available opportunity. Each time the prisoners returned to the camp, there was a punishment roll call: “Each evening when you arrived at the block the green Kapo pulled out an exercise book in which he had written the numbers of the prisoners who had not worked hard enough during the day. It was often French men, mostly sick and at the end of their strength. Each was beaten five or ten times with a rubber truncheon and sometimes their soup was taken away from them. There was no quicker way to the crematorium.”

Under the Kapos’ blows, often without shoes, and in ripped clothing, the undernourished prisoners had to perform heavy manual labor. When bad weather stopped work on the railway from the beginning of January to the middle of February, the prisoners were taken in open railway wagons each morning at 4 A.M. from Osterhagen to Niedersachsenwerfen, 20 kilometers (12.4 miles) away. Here they had to do heavy transport work—an additional strain that resulted in many deaths before work resumed on the railway line. The longer the winter lasted, with temperatures down to minus 20 degrees Celsius (minus 4 degrees Fahrenheit), the more prisoners died. “The end of the winter in Osterhagen was a nightmare. On March 2, [1945,] my work detail had to unload soil from the wagons and shovel against the wind which was particularly strong. The temperature was very low. On this day alone six of our comrades collapsed from exhaustion, five of them French. . . . Again the dead flooded the camp. People died everywhere at any time, day and night, often without a glance or a word or a handshake with a friend.”

The prisoners’ corpses were brought to Dora and from March 1945 to the Erich subcamp in Ellrich. A few of the dead are said to have been buried in a mass grave in the Osterhagen cemetery from where after the war they were returned to their places of origin. Three corpses are said to have been exhumed from the campgrounds in the summer of 1945.

The camp was dissolved on April 6, 1945. The prisoners marched to Wieda, from where the evacuation march began a day later.

**SOURCES** Numerous reports and documents on Osterhagen are contained in AgSSüHR, ed., *Der Bau der Helmetalbahn. Ein Bericht von der Eisenbahngeschichte, den KZ-Häftlingslagern und der Zwangsarbeit im Südarb in den Jahren 1944–45 sowie den Evakuierungsmaßnahmen im April 1945* (Duderstadt: Verlag Mecke Druck, 2000). In addition to the report by Aimé Bonifas, *Haftling 20.801. Ein Zeugnis über die faschistischen Konzentrationslager* (Berlin: Union-Verlag, 1983), the Wieda subcamp’s primary and secondary sources are the starting points for further research on Osterhagen.

**NOTES**

2. Ibid., pp. 158–159.
5. Ibid., p. 166.

**ROUEN (BUCHENWALD) (SS-BB V)**

The SS-Baubrigade V based in Doullens had a subcamp in Rouen, about 97 kilometers (60 miles) to the northwest of Paris, between April and probably August 1944. A former World War I prisoner-of-war (POW) camp, located at a racetrack, served as the prisoners’ accommodation. The approximately 500 prisoners lived in barracks of corrugated iron, known as Hindenburg Huts. The task of the SS-Baubrigade V was to construct launching pads for the V-1 and V-2 rockets. From Rouen, labor details were sent to the military airport at Montdidier and to Amiens.

Zygmunt P., who managed to flee during a bombing raid on April 25, 1944, said the following about Rouen: “Our accommodations in Rouen were the so-called ‘Corrugated Iron Barrels.’ In one such ‘barrel’ were fifty prisoners. There were no beds and we slept on the concrete foundation that was covered with dirty, rotten straw. We were driven to work by trucks to the shore of the English Channel which was sixty kilometers [37.3 miles] away. There we had to repair the defense facilities destroyed by Allied air raids. Air-defense soldiers guarded us; their supervision was easier to bear, as they did not mistreat or abuse us while we worked.”

The camp commander was SS-Obersturmführer Stahmer. After the war, he was accused by survivors of having caused the deaths of prisoners. He was said to have ordered the prisoners to continue working during bombing raids. Indeed, on April 23 and 25, 1944, 14 prisoners of the SS-Baubrigade V died in Rouen as a result of an air raid.

Camp elder Friedrich B. testified in a postwar investigation about the murder of a Polish prisoner. The man was injured on the upper arm during a bombing raid and because of the bombing could not be taken to a hospital. The prisoner orderly cared for him for a few days in the poorly equipped prisoner infirmary. When the arm swelled more and more, they pretended that the prisoner would be taken to a hospital, and he was put on a truck. Friedrich B. continues the story: “I heard a shot and was told to strike him from the list. He had been shot. I saw how he was thrown from the truck.”

In May or June 1944, a detail of the SS-Baubrigade V attacked a Wehrmacht post, and a mass breakout ensued. Hans Kammler, head of Amtsgruppe C of the SS-Business Administration Main Office (WVHA), and Gerhard Weigel, head of the SS-Baubrigade V, noted in a report to Heinrich Himmler: “As a result of the situation (invasion, air raids, etc.) the prisoners were very unwilling to work and undisciplined. In particular, measures had to be taken against the Polish prisoners as in several instances they incited the other prisoners to refuse to work and in the majority of cases they were the...
instigators of escape attempts and above all, of the large surprise attack on the Wehrmacht post."

The attack on the Wehrmacht post could have happened in the Rouen camp. Karl J. has reported about a similar incident: “I remember just now that a labor detail of Russian prisoners attacked the guards wearing black collar tabs (soldiers of the Luftwaffe Construction Company) and fled. I do not know how many escaped. Nothing happened to the soldiers—they were just tied up. One of the escaped prisoners received serious injuries on the run in an exchange of fire with a Wehrmacht captain when a bullet grazed his head.”

Former prisoner Walter St. has reported that after a mass escape the SS in Rouen ordered a roll call of the prisoners, selected a few at random, and shot them.7

The Rouen subcamp was dissolved no later than August 1944 and transferred to the Harz Mountains via Doullens and Lille. The prisoners were distributed to various Buchenwald subcamps over which the newly formed Mittelbau concentration camp took control in October 1944.

**SOURCES**

There are only a few documents and memoirs that provide information about the Rouen subcamp—especially BA-L, IV 406 AR-Z 207/73. Further research could be based on the primary and secondary sources for the Doullens subcamp.

Karola Fings

trans. Stephen Pallavicini

**NOTES**


3. SS-BB V (Feldpost-Nr. 15566), October 9, 1944, TThStA-W, NS 4 Buchenwald Nr. 54.


5. SS-WVHA, July 29, 1944, BA-B, NS 19/14, p. 55.


**SOLLSTEDT (MITTELBAU, BUCHENWALD, and SACHSENHAUSEN) (SS-BB I)**

The SS-Baubrigade I was stationed in Sollstedt, a town in Thüringen, between September 10, 1944, and April 5, 1945. It once numbered 1,000 prisoners, but by the time it reached Sollstedt after service in the Rhineland, on the Channel Islands, and in Belgium, it only had 441 prisoners.1 In October 1944, this unit came under the administration of the Mittelbau concentration camp, and the prisoners were assigned numbers from the 100000 series.2 The assumption of control by Sachsenhausen in January 1945 did not change the relationship with Mittelbau as the main camp. At the end of the war, the strength of the construction brigade was again almost 1,000 prisoners because of transports from Mittelbau. In Sollstedt, the prisoners had to improve the tunnels of a potash shaft mine and pack and store items of clothing for the SS-Business Administration Main Office (WVHA), Amt B (Truppenwirtschaft), and for the Luftwaffe Clothing Office Bielefeld. The prisoners were accommodated in a barracks camp located at the bottom of a valley near the shaft. They had to construct the three to five barracks themselves. The food for the camp was brought from Mittelbau. One work detail of the brigade worked in another potash shaft mine near Hainboltshausen until April 1945. At the end of 1944, the SS-Construction Brigade I established a subcamp in Hohlstedt.

The former power struggles between the different prisoner groups broke out again in Sollstedt. The dreaded Adolf Fehrenbacher assumed the role of camp elder during the transport from Alderney. In the memories of survivors, Sollstedt stands out as a place of murder of Jewish and Wehrmacht prisoners. For the first time, a larger group of Jewish prisoners, almost exclusively from Poland but also including a few Frenchmen and Hungarians, was transferred to the SS-Baubrigade I on March 21, 1945. This group, in particular, was subject to mistreatment by Fehrenbacher and by the commander of the guards, Otto Högelow.3

From December 1944 a larger group of Sonderabteilung Wehrmacht (Special Detachment Wehrmacht, SAW) prisoners were part of the construction brigade. The SAW men were without exception soldiers who, after having been subjected to various disciplinary measures by military courts, were found not fit to serve in a Wehrmacht punishment battalion. Such cases could be sent by the military to the police or the Gestapo for incarceration in a concentration camp for a limited time. As “Transitory Prisoners II,” such soldiers, if they had not been condemned to death, were sent to Buchenwald from August 1944 and from November to the Mittelbau concentration camp. An SS-Baubrigade I list named “Transitory Prisoners II (SAW) detained here” and dated March 1, 1945, shows 296 persons in this group.4

At least 34 deaths occurred in Sollstedt up to the middle of April 1945. Several handwritten entries give the deaths as occurring between April 5 and 13, 1945. Survivors hold the commander of the construction brigade, Georg Braun, responsible for the deaths. It is alleged that, on his orders, SAW members were forced to “run the gauntlet” as punishment for infractions. He forced these men with the words “I want to see blood” to run between the camp prisoners who were lined up in two rows and had them beaten to death; some were said to have been shot after the chase.5

In February 1945, the SS-Baubrigade I in Sollstedt, without changing its location or status, took on the tasks of a railway construction brigade. On February 10, 1945, Gerhard Weigel, the “Inspekteur sämtlicher Baubrigaden” (Inspector of Selected Construction Brigades), assigned SS-Commander Braun to the Reichsbahn (German National Railways) Directorate at Halle-Northeim. The main task remained that of

VOLUME I: PART B
storing items in the mines. During an inspection of Sollstedt on February 10, 1945, Weigel praised the “good progress” of storing clothes and equipment for several divisions of the Waffen-SS.6

Shootings, mass escapes, and aimless transports throughout the German Reich characterized the evacuation. On April 5, 1945, the Sollstedt prisoners were forced to march 72.4 kilometers (45 miles) in 24 hours to the Hohlstedt subcamp. During the march, prisoners who were unable to continue are said to have been shot. At midday on April 7, 1945, around 900 prisoners were loaded onto a train at the Wahlhausen Railway Station.7

At first, the train headed north and reached Berlin-Grunewald on April 10, 1945, where it is reported to have received an order to head to Norway. Near Wittenberge on the Elbe, the transport had to retreat in front of Soviet troops. It was here at the latest that SS-Commander Braun might have received the Kammler order he mentioned in 1952 that the SS-Baubrigade I was to go to Steyr. It is possible that the construction brigade now became a railway construction brigade and was given a new order. SS-Oberscharführer Högelow stated in 1952 that the construction brigade in Hohlstedt “was reassigned again and this time as a Railway Replenishment Construction Unit” and was deployed as such until the whole transport dissolved.8

The train altered direction and traveled via Pirna and Prague to Pilsen, which, according to a record of a former prisoner, it reached on April 21, 1945. After a further journey, lasting a week, the construction brigade reached Steyr on April 28, 1945. At least 20 prisoners died on the journey or were shot when they sought cover under a railway wagon during a bombing raid. The train was reportedly used by more than 160 prisoners to escape and was subjected several times to bombing attacks. It is not possible to determine how many prisoners reached Steyr. From Steyr they were transferred to the Mauthausen subcamp Steyr-Münchholz. Two days after reaching Mauthausen, on May 5, 1945, American tanks freed the camp.

After the war, the commanders of the SS-Baubrigade I escaped criminal punishment. Because of his membership in the SS, Högelow was imprisoned in Esterwegen until 1949; subsequently kept in detention for trial, he was released in 1951. Later investigations against him were fruitless. The Freiburg State Court sentenced Fehrenbacher in 1955 to a term of seven years in a penitentiary.9

### SOURCES


The most important sources are the investigative files at BA-L, 404 AR-Z 57/67 and 410 AR 63/77. Karola Fings trans. Stephen Pallavicini

### NOTES

2. See the report of the Dutch Searching Service from August 1948, AG-NG, Nr. 6.4.90.
4. SVG, TR 184.600/21.
5. See the “Geständnis Högelows” written by prisoners dated May 1945, BA-L, IV 404 AR-Z 57/67, pp. 128–130.
7. See Helmut Knöller’s report, AG-NG, Nr. 1317.

### Spreenhagen (Sachsenhausen) [SS-BB II]

For a short time at the end of 1944, the SS-Baubrigade II stationed in Berlin since April 1944 had a subcamp in Spreenhagen (County Oder-Spree). A list of the guards of the SS-Baubrigade II of January 1945 mentions this subcamp for the first time; SS-Rottenführer Wilhelm Kopiska is listed as its commander.1 A report to the Kommandantur of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, dated January 25, 1945, includes a note that the Spreenhagen labor detachment was reassigned to the SS-Construction Management in Bad Saarow (County Oder-Spree) on January 1, 1945.2

As the Sachsenhausen subcamp Ketschendorf in Fürstenwalde (County Oder-Spree) maintained a construction site among other places also at Spreenhagen, it is likely that the prisoners of the SS-Baubrigade II had to work there too.3 The SS-Construction Management organizations “Reich Nord” and “Kurmark” maintained several sites at Bad Saarow, where prisoners of a Sachsenhausen subcamp located in Bad Saarow had to work.4 Therefore, it is also possible that the prisoners of the construction brigades were transferred there in January 1945.

### SOURCES

Reviewing the records of the investigations by the ZdL about the Berlin camps of the SS-Baubrigade II held at BA-L (IV 406 AR 594-596/73) did not yield any further information.

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### NOTES

1. SS-BB II, January 1, 1945, RGVA, 1367/1/14, pp. 32–41.
2. Ibid., p. 41.
4. Ibid., 2:239.

**ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CAMPS AND GHETTOS, 1933–1945**
The SS-Baubrigade III was based in Wieda, a small village in the Harz Mountains, from May 1944 to April 1945. The location put it in the radius of the Mittelbau concentration camp complex then being established.

Hans Kammler, head of Amtsgruppe C (Construction) in the SS-Business Administration Main Office (WVHA), was responsible for establishing this camp. After the sites for assembling the long-distance A4 (Aggregat 4) rocket (the later V-2) were bombed, Albert Speer, Adolf Hitler, and Heinrich Himmler decided in mid-August 1943 to push for the enlargement, “with the heavy utilization” of concentration camp prisoners, of an underground facility in the Harz Mountains. Himmler appointed Kammler to carry out the construction. The whole project was coordinated under the so-called Mittelwerk GmbH, established in September 1943.

Kammler wanted to use the SS construction brigades to build a new rail line so the existing Osterhagen to Nordhausen line could be used exclusively for armaments industry transportation. The Mittelwerk GmbH entrusted management and construction of the rail line to the Deutsche Reichsbahn (German Railways), which in turn revived an older plan to build a 22-kilometer-long (13.7-mile-long) track (called the “Helmetalbahn”) south of the existing line and through the Helme valley. The Berlin company Tiefbau AG Julius Berger undertook the major excavation work.

The construction of Helmetalbahn dominated the prisoners’ life until the end of the war. SS-Baubrigade III was assigned the westernmost of the three construction zones, the section from Osterhagen to Mackenrode. The administration for this section was in Mackenrode, and the SS-Baubrigade III established three subcamps along this part of the line: at Osterhagen, Nüxei, and Mackenrode.

After the Cologne camp with its remaining 311 prisoners of the SS-BB III was dismantled, and the Wieda camp was set up, the brigade began its work on May 16, 1944. Then 700 prisoners from the Buchenwald concentration camp joined them on June 7, 1944. An empty clubhouse of a marksmen’s association formed the center of the camp in Wieda. Around it were other buildings that served as the brigade’s administrative offices, a kitchen, a laundry, and an infirmary, and the grounds were fenced in and outfitted with watchtowers. On average, about 100 prisoners were housed here. Living conditions in this auxiliary camp generally were better than in the subcamps, especially as Wieda had the central kitchen. In addition, inmates here did not have to do exhausting construction work but, instead, either remained in the camp, built barracks in Niedersachswherfen, worked for private persons, or were set to work in or by the communal administration.

Brigade guards lived in barracks built for them close to the camp. Unlike in Cologne, where police and auxiliaries had been recruited, here the SS relied on Luftwaffe soldiers, in any case available because the Luftwaffe was having difficulties with its supply lines. They came under the command of the SS as of September 1, 1944. In January 1945, the SS-Baubrigade III guards included an SS leader, 42 SS noncommissioned officers, and 132 SS men. The integration of the Wieda camp into the system of camps centered on Mittelbau meant death loomed more sharply over the prisoners. A small infirmary was set up in Wieda for minor cases, while other cases were sent to the Buchenwald auxiliary camp Dora or, starting in May 1944, to the Ellrich-Juliushütte camp that became part of Mittelbau and after January 1945 to the Boelcke-Kaserne. After June 1944, all transports to and from the construction brigade went through Mittelbau, without exception. As of July 1944, the guard details came under the control of the “SS-Standort Mittelbau”; and by October 1944, the construction brigades in the Harz came under the control of what had become the independent Mittelbau concentration camp. The transfer of control in January 1945 to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp was pro forma.

In the first few weeks, a surprisingly strong interaction developed between the Wieda camp and the surrounding community. Soldiers serving as guards played soccer with the prisoners on the sports field, and it is said that after the game they all marched singing through the village. One female villager reported: “In the first weeks after the camp was set up, it was like the annual fair. After work, in the evenings, the prisoners sat in the cleared area in front of the marksmen’s tent, and some of them, especially the Gypsies, had instruments, mandolins or guitars, and made music. Many villagers, both young and old, stopped on the main street in front of the barbed-wire fence to listen in.”

This apparent lack of discipline in the camp resulted in the dismissal, in June 1944, of Karl Völker as leader of the construction brigade. He had been in command since September 1942 and was now transferred to the Flossenbürg concentration camp. Until July 20, 1944, a certain SS-Oberscharführer Freys, who had been at the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria, temporarily replaced him. SS-Obersturmführer Fritz Behrens replaced him in turn.

Following Behrens’ appointment, conditions in the camp deteriorated, and prisoners were replaced. On July 27, 1944, groups of prisoners from SS-Baubrigade III were taken away to Dora from the sites where they were working. Two days later, around 1,000 new prisoners from Dora filled the four camps. With this ruthless replacement, relationships that had developed over the course of a year and a half between at least some of the prisoners were broken. Paul Rassinier, who learned about the SS-Baubrigade III while in the Dora infirmary, accurately remarked that “in less than two months, Wieda became as hard and inhumane as Dora.” Behrens remained the leader of SS-Baubrigade III until just before the end of the war but was replaced in early April 1945 by SS-Untersturmführer Karl Merkle.

Some 16 deaths are registered as having occurred up to the time the brigade came under the control of Mittelbau. During the summer, the living conditions deteriorated rapidly, so
that by the end of August 1944, 300 prisoners incapable of working were taken away to the Ellrich-Juliushütte camp. The main reason for prisoner exhaustion lay in the heavy construction work demanded of them; the pace of work dictated by Kammler and the Armaments Ministry was also repeatedly increased. According to Georges Pieper, camp elder (Lagerältester) and Kapo in the construction brigade’s office and hence a good source, death rates increased markedly in the winter of 1944–1945: he recalls 74 prisoners dying between December 30, 1944, and April 7, 1945. In early 1945, the SS-Baubrigade III received Jewish prisoners for the first time: about 200 of them were transferred from Dora, though by the end of March they were transferred to the SS-Baubrigade IV.

For the most part the railway line was double-tracked, and many bridges and sections were already finished when work had to stop at the end of March 1945 due to the advancing Allied forces. In a report prepared after the war by the building department of the Reichsbahn office in Kassel, the mass use of prisoners received only scant mention: “In 1944/45, a new rail line for goods traffic from Osterhagen to Nordhausen was built to relieve the Northeim to Nordhausen line, length about thirty kilometers [18.6 miles]. . . Several thousand men (prisoners and concentration camp inmates) worked on it. Work stopped at the end of the war due to the American advance.”

On April 5, 1945, the prisoners from the Nüxei and Mackenrode subcamps were taken to Wieda, and the next day, so were the prisoners from the Osterhagen subcamp. On April 7, 1,135 prisoners were marched, in a northwesterly direction, through the Harz Mountains. A train took those who were ill, numbering somewhat more than 300.

On April 9, 1945, SS-Baubrigade III, now reassembled, left the Wernigerode railroad station in a single train: camp leader Merkle had by now disappeared. The train made it as far as Letzlingen, a village north of Magdeburg at about the same latitude as Berlin. About 900 prisoners were able to flee during a bombing raid, though during the course of the day, 200 were recaptured and returned to the train by SS guards. The SS then forced these 200 on a march at whose end, on April 24, 1945, 50 prisoners remained to be liberated. Some in this group were able to escape en route, but most had collapsed dead by the wayside or had been shot.

A second group of around 600 prisoners who had been recaptured near Letzlingen was marched in a southeasterly direction. Here, too, there were mass escapes and shootings, whereby civilians and men from the German Home Guard (Volkssturm) particularly distinguished themselves. Around 500 prisoners of this group were liberated near Burgstall on April 14, 1945. The ill, who remained behind on the train at Letzlingen, were probably the victims of the infamous massacre at Gardelegen. According to estimates by historian Joachim Neander, of the 1,135 prisoners who left Wieda, only about 700 lived long enough to experience liberation.

**Sources**


Sources are scattered, although the aforementioned literature provides initial guidance. Important collections of sources can be found at the THStA-W (NS 4 Buchenwald, KZ Buchenwald and Haftanstalten). The AG-MD holds copies of the transport lists from Warsaw (KL Buchenwald Nr. 36, KL Mittelbau Nr. 9), reports from survivors, and some of the files of the local building administration at Mackenrode. The investigation files of the NWHSStA-(D) (Gerichte Rep.: 118/1174-1190, 1338-1349) are also of relevance, as are the holdings at the ZdL (IV 406 AR 85/67, IV 429 AR 1304/67) at BA-L.

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**Notes**

Prisoners from the Bremen-based SS-Baubrigade II often worked in Wilhelmshaven in 1943, and a subcamp as well as a bomb search detail existed there for a time.

Initially, this strategically important harbor city was to receive 500 prisoners, as a massive area bombing on the night of September 14, 1942, had caused more damage than all of the previous attacks. In early October 1942, Walter Temp, the city’s director of construction and head of its construction administration since May 1939, began the relevant negotiations. The Naval Station detail received permission to house the prisoners at Bredewarden, a work camp of the naval garrison.

November 3, 1942, saw the heaviest attack to date on Wilhelmshaven. Bremen’s Senator Fischer, as Deputy Reich Defense Commissar, again offered Wilhelmshaven 500 prisoners from the SS-Baubrigade II, and Temp wanted to make them available for cleanup work to the Naval director’s office and to the dockyards. But he was unable to recruit the necessary guards, as neither the Naval Station nor the city commandant wanted to make the needed forces available. In pleading tones, Temp wrote to the police president on November 12, 1942: “I am thus forced to draw to your attention that because of this failure, the possibility of removing or cleaning up the bomb damage in Wilhelmshaven appears to be threatened, and that in a manner that is almost irresponsible. . . . It is therefore requested that the police make available sixty guards for the prisoners in ‘protective custody,’ possibly augmented by Luftwaffe and SS men.” But the police president could not help either. When four construction companies then occupied the quarters that had been proposed, the possibility of using the prisoners was regarded, at least for the time being, as a dead issue.

Wilhelmshaven only received a detachment of the SS-Baubrigade II in the spring of 1943, although the exact date it began its work is unknown. However, it likely began in the wake of the U.S. Army Air Forces offensive that had repeatedly carried out daylight air raids against Wilhelmshaven, starting on January 27, 1943. The city was so heavily bombed on March 22 that for the first time the district leader painted a picture of the downfall of Wilhelmshaven. It is therefore likely that the 175-strong prisoner detachment, whose existence in Wilhelmshaven until August 7, 1943, is confirmed, was sent to the city after this March attack. It was recalled to Bremen on August 8, 1943, as the larger part of SS-Baubrigade II then was to be transferred to Hamburg.

It has not been possible to determine in which building the prisoners in Wilhelmshaven were housed. A former prisoner stated that the camp was located at the navy harbor, but he himself was only in Wilhelmshaven in the fall of 1943.

After the Wilhelmshaven camp was disbanded in August 1943, prisoners from the construction brigade did return to Wilhelmshaven as members of bomb detection squads. Since February 1943, there had been considerable problems with unexploded ordinance. From September 29 to October 21, 1943, and again from November 5 to December 22, 1943, 30 prisoners were sent each time to the city to do the dangerous work of disarming and removing unexploded bombs.

There is scarcely any information about the conditions prisoners faced: no survivors’ reports from the SS-Baubrigade II refer to Wilhelmshaven details. Eyewitness Wenzel W. mentions Wilhelmshaven simply as a location where they were deployed. Only Pawel Wasiljewitsch Pawlenko reports on working in the Wilhelmshaven bomb detection squad. According to him, the sites were cordoned off, and prisoners had to disarm the bombs themselves. In his time there, eight prisoners were killed while doing this dangerous work. However, none of the prisoners in this commando are listed by name in the Neuengamme death registers.

**SOURCES**


There are very few relevant primary sources. In addition to the above-mentioned reports of former prisoners, an exchange of letters exists in the ASt-Wil (#600/6), and there are a few references in a file from the RFSS (BA-B, NS 19/14). Other references may be found in ZdL (at BA-L), AG-NG, and FGNS-H.
1400 SS-Baubrigaden and SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigaden

NOTES

2. Letter, November 2, 1942; and File Note, November 5, 1942, in ibid.
5. SS-WVHA, February 14, 1944, in BA-B, NS 19/14, p. 34.

WUPPERTAL (BUCHENWALD) (SS-BB IV)

Between August 1943 and May 1944 the SS-Baubrigade IV consisting of prisoners from the Buchenwald concentration camp, was stationed in Wuppertal. The first 50 prisoners reached the city on August 24, 1943. Gradually the prisoner numbers were increased—at first to 100 on September 9, then to 400 on October 13, and to 592, the highest number, at the end of November.

The decision to establish this SS construction brigade was said to be that of Albert Speer. A Royal Air Force offensive against the Ruhr, which started in the spring of 1943, resulted in a marked reduction in armaments production. Wuppertal, on the edge of the Ruhr, had largely avoided the large air raids until 1943, although major attacks on the districts of Barmen (May 29, 1943) and Elberfeld (June 25, 1943) had caused considerable destruction. The SS-Baubrigade IV was to carry out "reconstruction in the Ruhr industrial area." A report by the SS-Business Administration Main Office (WVHA), dated February 14, 1944, states: "The SS-Baubrigade IV is being deployed in rescue operations and opening up the main streets for transport. The rubble caused by buildings which collapsed due to rain and frost is being removed. Excavation and repair of the destroyed gas and water conduits is taking place. The work is continuing so as to, in the first instance, create accommodations for workers in the Ruhr."

The head of the Office for Emergency Measures in Wuppertal, the city’s building councilor Hermann Kell, and SS-Standartenführer Kurt Benn coordinated the operation. Senior Administration Officer Benn as head of the Action Staff Wuppertal City Administration and as member of the Action Staff of the District had good connections to the special staffs of the police, Nazi Party, and mayor. The construction of the camp lasted until September 1943. Benn could give all offices directions to remove bomb damage, and he directed workers to particular sites for the removal of rubble. During this time the prisoners were already working for the city administration.

The SS-BB IV was accommodated at Königshöher Weg 7, a Catholic school in the Elberfeld district of Arrenberg, whose buildings had been destroyed in the summer of 1943. The advance detachment of 50 prisoners first had to establish quarters at Königshöher Weg. An inspection report prepared by the Buchenwald concentration camp doctor in September 1943 states the following: "The Wuppertal subcamp was occupied on August 24, 1943. The prisoners have been accommodated in a school, which has been badly damaged by bombs, but whose renovation is taking place with all available means. Prisoners as well as troops are accommodated provisionally in the not yet renovated school classrooms. Washing and bathing facilities are provisional and are in the process of being installed. The toilets are adequate. A kitchen is not available at this time. Food for the prisoners is cooked in two field kitchens."

The leader of the SS-Baubrigade IV was at first SS-Obersturmführer Arthur Knaust, an engineer, born on June 26, 1909, in Güsten (Sachsen-Anhalt). He was replaced in October 1943 by SS-Obersturmführer Dietrich. Otto Diembt, promoted to SS-Obersturmführer on January 30, 1945, commanded the brigade from December 1943 to February 1945. Diembt was born on March 18, 1907, in Bad Flinsberg. From 1926 to 1939 he worked as a bookkeeper in his hometown. He took part in the French campaign. After that he was a member of the SS-Fourth Death's Head Unit in the Buchenwald concentration camp. After a six-month training course in Dachau and the SS-Junior School in Braunschweig, he was sent to the SS-Baubrigade. The guards consisted primarily of police from the 6th Police District, who were based in the nearby Arrenberg Strasse. In the school yard there was a barracks for the guards.

The SS-Baubrigade IV in Wuppertal has not been widely researched. Survivors after the war stated unanimously that there was no mistreatment or violent deaths. In fact, of the 600 prisoners, there is only 1 documented death in February 1944. To a large extent this can be attributed to the behavior of Diembt, who after the war received an unusually positive certification from several prisoners. Richard O. said the following about him in 1971:

Otto Diembt is probably the only camp leader, who I met during my almost ten-year imprisonment who has deservedly earned that we former prisoners stand up for him and with good conscience. When I, a former protective custody camp prisoner, make such a statement for an SS officer and camp commandant, I do so as a moral duty and with gratitude, because we were treated decently by him and above all we have him to thank for our lives. Hundreds of Poles, Russians, French, Czechs, Romanians, Hungarians, and Greeks can confirm at any time that Otto Diembt always treated us prisoners as humans.

According to the former prisoner Josef Sch., Diembt had always treated him "tactfully and correctly" and that he had never forgotten that "human beings stood in front of him."
Another prisoner, Theodor E., shortly after the war raised his voice for Diembt and stated that Diembt had constantly discussed with the prisoners of the SS-Baubrigade IV the work, work hours, the prisoners’ wishes, and the food supply. Theodor E. stated that Diembt, after assuming his position in Wuppertal, had first ensured that the prisoners from midday on Saturday did not have to work for the rest of the weekend and individually were even allowed to leave the camp. This freedom was only taken away when a directive was received from the Buchenwald camp commandant. Contemporary documents confirm this. Apparently, until the middle of January 1944, the prisoners had to do much less work than elsewhere. On Saturdays there was less work than on weekdays. Until May 1944, there was as a rule no work on Sundays. Diembt had to change this practice at the beginning of 1944—a conference on January 18, 1944, determined that “immediately work on Saturdays shall be for the same length of time as on the other weekdays.”

Wuppertal had a particularly favorable prisoner structure and a relatively good supply of food. The German prisoners, who were the prisoner-functionaries, were for the most part political prisoners who did not encourage favoritism. While the supply of food appeared to have been poor, it improved over a longer period when the large detachment was deployed to the heavily destroyed slaughterhouses in Elberfeld. Richard O. stated: “After six weeks we were close to starvation. Then 250 men were deployed to the slaughterhouse. . . . We were there about a year. We recovered and were even able to get some of the food to the prisoners in the camp with the result that not one of the prisoners had to suffer from hunger. From the butchers we received sausages and meat.”

There were also many contacts with the resistance organization and the “Eastern workers” (Ostarbeitern), who were in the surrounding forced labor camps. The prisoners Karl Possögel, Sergej Selkin, and Dimitrij Maksimov formed a resistance group that was to prepare an armed resistance. Possögel described. On a Sunday, 50 prisoners, guarded by an SS guard, demonstrated in the city. Possögel stated that in April 1945:

One Sunday the prisoners carried out a regular demonstration in Wuppertal. The police were off duty on Sundays, and so one Sunday a Kommando of approximately fifty prisoners went to work under their Blockführer alone. After doing two hours’ work the prisoners in their convicts’ clothes and with shaven heads marched off into the center of Elberfeld. For about two hours they went in disciplined formation through the streets singing their camp songs, and with the Blockführer following two hundred yards in the rear, so that people would not think he belonged to the procession. No action was taken against the prisoners on their return to the camp.

Although in Wuppertal there was 1 death, it should not be forgotten that between August 1943 and May 1944, 58 prisoners were returned to Buchenwald. What happened to a large transport in the middle of December 1943 is not known, as neither names nor prisoner numbers have survived. Possibly this transport followed a selection either shortly before or after the camp leader was changed and in which prisoners who were sick or who had fallen out of favor were transported away. What happened to 29 prisoners can be explained: after an average stay of three months in Buchenwald, 7 had died, 3 stayed in the camp until it was liberated, 11 were transferred to other Buchenwald subcamps, and 3 were released. There is no information as to what happened to 5 prisoners; 7 prisoners died after they were transferred to Buchenwald, including 5 who were transferred there while Diembt was the camp leader.

The dissolution of the camp began in Wuppertal on May 7, 1944. The SS-Baubrigade IV was sent to Ellrich, a village in the Harz Mountains.

NOTES
1. KL Buchenwald (Lagerarzt), September 6, 1943, THStA-W, KZ Buchenwald Nr. 9, p. 290.
2. The numbers are recorded in ibid., NS 4 Buchenwald Nr. 136a.
3. SS-WVHA Amt C, February 14, 1944, BA-B, NS 19/14, p. 36.
SS-BAUBRIGADEN AND SS-EISENBAHNBAUBRIGADEN

4. Stadt Wuppertal (Wasserwerke), November 12, 1943; and Stadt Wuppertal (Gaswerk), November 22, 1943, AS-W, S XV 23.

5. KL Buchenwald, Forderungsnachweis, September 1943, ITS Sachdokumenten-Ordnerv Buchenwald Nr. 51, p. 320.

6. Buchenwald Concentration Camp (Camp Doctor), September 6, 1943, in THStAW, KZ Buchenwald Nr. 9, p. 290.

B. SC BAUBRIGADEN AND SS-EISENBAHNBAUBRIGADEN

7. BDC/SSO, in BA.


9. See Karl Possögel, April 30, 1945, NARA, RG 338, 000-50-009 (Buchenwald-Case), Box 442, Folder 2, as well as statement by four other former prisoners in ZdL, IV 406 AR-Z 69/72, pp. 96–98, 179, 265, 287.


14. See the lists in THStA-W, NS 4 Buchenwald Nr. 230, pp. 18, 38, 51, 81.


19. Research on these cases is based on THStA-W, NS 4 Buchenwald Nr. 136a, and compared with the database "Fluchten" (Escapes) in the AG-B.

20. Karl Possögel, April 30, 1945, NARA, RG 338, 000-50-009 (Buchenwald-Case), Box 442, Folder 2.

21. The transfers were compiled from information in THStA-W, NS 4 Buchenwald Nr. 136a; and research was conducted in AG-B by Harry Stein.

22. THStA-W, NS 4 Buchenwald Nr. 230, p. 81.

SS-EISENBAHNBAUBRIGADE V (OSNABRÜCK) (BUCHENWALD, MITTELBAU, AND SACHSENHAUSEN)

The SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade V (SS-EBB V) was the first of eight SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigaden that the SS-Business Administration Main Office (WHVA) established in the late summer of 1944 as mobile concentration camp prisoner detachments. As a rule, each of these "concentration camps on rails" consisted of 504 prisoners plus guards. Their primary task was to repair the destroyed German railroad network. The trains, which were up to 50 railroad cars long, were refitted in the factories of the concentration camps in the SS's own Deutsche Ausrüstungswerke GmbH (DAW). About half of the railroad cars housed the prisoners. In addition, there were railroad cars for the kitchen, infirmary, equipment, commandant's office, and accommodation for the guards. Most of the trains carried a Wehrmacht anti-aircraft detachment with two four-barreled anti-aircraft guns as protection against bombing attacks.

The SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade originated from the Buchenwald SS-Baubrigade V, which in September 1944 was transferred from Normandy to the Harz Mountains. The prisoners, who at first were distributed to various subcamps, were gathered together in Sangerhausen and on October 5, 1944, shipped to Osnabrück. The SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade was allocated 180 prisoners, who were sent from Buchenwald and the Mittelbau concentration camp to Heringen. This group was destined for the planned SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade III. However, in the end, it was not formed. Administratively, the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade was originally part of the newly independent Mittelbau concentration camp from the end of October 1944 and was taken over by the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in January 1945.

The leader of the SS-EBB V was SS-Obersturmführer Helmut Landau, who was born on February 8, 1906, in Krefeld. Landau, an architect, joined the Nazi Party in 1931 and from April 1940 was part of the WVHA (Office C-Construction). In March 1944, he was ordered to the general staff of the SS-Baubrigade V and in the middle of October 1944 took command of the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade. In December 1944, there were 62 guards. The largest number of the guards was railroad men, who were assigned for short periods to SS battalions in the concentration camps and then assigned to the railroad brigades. Most of them were born in the 1890s, and they were almost without exception of low SS rank; 21 names of transferred railroad men to the SS-EBB are known.

The trains of the construction brigades were mostly stationed on sidings near train stations, so that the prisoners could reach their work location quickly. The SS-EBB V was quartered at the Osnabrück switching yard; a smaller detachment was based in Hasbergen. The SS-EBB works stood clearly in the context of the deployment of the V weapons.

Heavy physical labor was the main work for the railroad construction brigades: filling bomb craters, removing destroyed railroad tracks, and laying them anew. In Osnabrück there was also a "city detachment" that stayed to clean up the city. This detachment was popular among the prisoners as it was notable for relatively correct prisoner foremen and SS guards and because it was possible to obtain additional food. This was also the case for the "construction field command" of the construction brigade, whose prisoners built temporary accommodations for SS people in an allotment garden. The deployment of the prisoners in the city can be traced back to
the initiative of Osnabrück mayor Erich Gärtner, who even endeavored to be assigned the coordination of the prisoner deployments.3

From the autumn of 1944, SS-Sturmbannführer Weigel was the Inspector of All Construction Brigades (Inspekteur sämtlicher Baubrigaden) in the WHVA. He reported to Hans Kammler (WHVA, Amtsgruppe C) after an inspection of the SS-Baubrigaden on February 12 and 13, 1945: “The performance of the SS-BB [Baubrigaden] is exemplary. According to the commanders, the Organisation Todt [OT], which is also deployed there, has not reached the same standard.”

This high performance was extracted from the weak prisoners only through terror. Survivors of the SS-EBB V reported that during their 10 hours of work they had barely a five-minute-long break. They were not even allowed to go to the toilet. Instead, there was a saying: “Work, don’t shit.” A survivor stated the following about the conditions of the prisoners in Osnabrück: “Just about all the prisoners were sick. Many were only skin and bones; others could barely stand on their legs. Everyone had to work. Now and then I saw that in the evenings a prisoner was carried back to the railroad car. When it was going really poorly for someone he could stay in the infirmary car.”

At the end of 1944, the SS-EBB V comprised 410 prisoners.13 Due to the lack of sources, it is difficult to determine what happened with the remaining prisoners. Probably some had been selected as “incapable of work” and sent to the nearest concentration camp, Neuenegamme, and not to their assigned camp. Another Rottenführer was accused of shooting four Russians on May 1, 1945. Outside of Flensburg, the prisoners were loaded onto the damaged ship Rheinfels, crammed in with other prisoners from Stutthof and Neuenegamme. On May 3, 1945, all the SS guards left their posts, and on May 5 the prisoners were liberated. While the German prisoners were taken to a recuperation camp in Flensburg, the Swedish Red Cross made a ship available to take the foreign survivors to Malmö.22

None of those responsible for crimes committed in the SS-EBBs were convicted. Landau was able to successfully conceal his role as SS leader of the Baubrigade and was sentenced to three years’ prison solely for being a member of the SS.23 Anton Schettler, who was born on October 10, 1910, in Pestovac, and was charged with shooting the recaptured Soviet prisoner, was declared dead, with the result that no proceedings were opened against him.

SOURCES The SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade V first became a subject of research in connection with a dissertation about all of the SS-Baubrigaden, published by Karola Fings, Krieg, Gesellschaft, und KZ. Himmlers SS-Baubrigaden (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005). This is partly due to the fact that there are few contemporary sources, so the outline of the Eisenbahnbaubrigade V can only be reconstructed by combining widely disparate sources.

Especially important primary sources are the archives of former ZdL (now BA-L), which contains copies of contemporary sources, especially statements from the survivors (IV 406 AR-Z 18/73, IV 406 AR-Z 227/73). There is also some relevant documentation in CChIdK. A published witness testimony is Jørgen H. P. Barfod, Helvede har mange Navne: En Beretning om Koncentrationslejre og Fangler, hvor der sad Danesere 1940–1945 (Copenhagen: Forlaget Zac, 1969).

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VOLUME I: PART B
SS-EISENBAHNBAUBRIGADE VI [AKA SS-
BAUBRIGADE VI (E)] (BUCHENWALD,
MITTELBAU, AND SACHSENHAUSEN)

The SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade VI (SS-EBB VI), one of eight mobile "concentration camps on rails," was first established as the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade I at the Buchenwald concentration camp. On September 12, 1944, 504 prisoners stood ready to be transported at the Buchenwald Railway Station. At the beginning of November 1944, the unit was renamed. Until then it had been listed under various names (also “Mittelbau/VIth SS Construction Brigade”; “1st SS Railroad Train, Construction Brigade 6”). On October 28, 1944, the newly independent concentration camp Mittelbau took over the 514 prisoners of the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade VI. On January 1, 1945, it was taken over by the Sachsenhausen concentration camp along with all other SS-Baubrigaden.

The command of the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade VI was assigned to Walter Fikeis, born in Vienna on June 7, 1914. Fikeis, an Austrian engineer, had been a member of the SA since 1932 and with his appointment as camp commander was promoted to SS-Obersturmführer. Since 1942, he had worked in the SS-Main Office for Budget and Buildings. Before 1944, he was at first a member of the Central Construction Administration of the Higher-SS and Police Leader (HSSPF), Caucasus, and subsequently was with the Central Construction Administration “Reich Süd” in Dachau. The guard included 65 SS members, about half of whom belonged to the SS-Business Administration Main Office (WWHA) Amtsgruppe C and the other half to Amtsgruppe D. Among them was a major group of older railroad men who had been drafted into the SS battalions of the concentration camps. Hans R., a former senior Reichsbahn official, stated at the beginning of the 1970s that in November 1944, pursuant to a decree of the Reich Ministry of Transport, the Nürnberg Railway Administration registered him as a "railway construction expert" with the Waffen-SS. Accordingly, on November 24, 1944, he received training in the Dachau concentration camp and, with 15 other railway officials, was dispatched to the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade VI.

At first the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade VI also had a functional relationship with the armaments and rocket center being established in the Harz Mountains. Its destination was Cologne, where the railway station “KölN-Eifeltor,” an important traffic connection for the transport of V weapons (Vergeltungswaffe) to the southwest, had been heavily destroyed. On September 12, 1944, the prisoners were loaded onto a ready construction train at the Weimar railway freight station. That same evening, the train departed and the next day reached the railroad station Berga-Kelbra near Nordhausen. The construction brigade remained there until September; at times the prisoners worked in Sangerhausen, where they had to dig trenches for the laying of telephone cables. On October 1, 1944, the SS-EBB VI left Berga-Kelbra. But it first pulled up in Bingerbrück (near Bingen on the Rhine River), where it arrived on October 2, 1944. The repair and construction of the road tracks on the right side of the Rhine, which also provided an important connection to the Saar River and France. Only on November 1, 1944, did the construction brigade finally arrive in Cologne. Because of the constant bombing raids on that city, the construction brigade stayed in a tunnel near Brühl. From there, the prisoners were taken daily by railroad to work at the Köln-Eifeltor railway station.

In a 1998 interview, Iwan Wassiljewitsch Werenitsch describes the work of the prisoners: “The station was always being bombed. Our main work was as follows: rebuild the
ties, seal, screw down, that is, build new tracks.”

At the end of 1944, 465 prisoners were still counted in the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade VI, although up to that point at least an additional 61 prisoners had been transferred to the construction brigade. Presumably the largest portion of the approximately 100 missing prisoners managed to escape. In the fall of 1944 the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade, which operated in areas difficult to guard, belonged to a group of sub-camps that offered particularly good opportunities for escape. For this reason, the resistance movement in Buchenwald took care that specially endangered prisoners were located in such camps. In September 1944, it put several Soviet prisoners on the list of transports for the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade VII so that they could escape. It also managed to dispatch there two “escape point coordinators.”

Already during the night of departure on October 1–2, 1943, 23 prisoners in a train car near Kassel had forced open the doors and escaped. The furious SS officers thereupon threatened as punishment to send every tenth prisoner to Mittelbau or to string him up on the gallows—not the least because the SS leaders were threatened with disciplinary proceedings if there were high numbers of escapes. Proceedings were initiated against Fikeis for failure of the guard in the field and for the negligent release of prisoners—which, however, remained pending until the end of the war.

This escape was part of a controversial decision among the prisoners. Alexander Agafonow, then a prisoner in the SS-EBB VI, writes:

A bold and, in my opinion, rash escape: in the center of Germany, near Kassel, surrounded by a fanatic populace cowed by terror, quick acting youngsters of the Hitler Youth and then escaped prisoners in striped inmates’ clothing! At the first attempt to get hold of clothing or food the populace will raise the alarm and the chase will begin. No, I thought, the chances for the escapees are equal to nil. Only obsessed brave or men driven to despair act this way. Gustav and Ernst had been urged to risk the escape only near Köln, in no case earlier.

In fact, the conditions for escape in Cologne were favorable. In November 1944, the SS-EBB VI was located only 21 kilometers (13 miles) away from the Allies; the battles could be heard.11 Furthermore, it was easily possible to escape during the confusion caused by bombing raids. Often, the SS could not determine definitely whether the prisoners had escaped or had been dismembered beyond recognition during a raid. Therefore, those that remained behind were spared the threatened punishment actions. A young Russian who was helped by forced laborers from his hometown made the first successful escape in Cologne. Agafonow, too, was able to flee later during a bombing raid and was helped by female workers from the East located in a camp nearby.12

Because of the difficult transport conditions at the end of 1944, hardly any transports of individual prisoners to the political department of the concentration camps were carried out any more as punishment. Instead, a car of the SS-EBB VI was converted into a prison, in which, for instance, Russians were jailed who had been caught looting and were to be transferred from Bingerbrück to the Gestapo in Mainz. Also, often at random, forced laborers were impressed into the SS-Baubrigade. Thus, after 2 Russians had escaped during an air-raid alarm at the beginning of March 1945, Fikeis simply arrested 4 Italian workers who from then on had to stay with the construction brigade. However, large prisoner transports took place until the last days of the war. In the spring of 1945, SS-EBB VI sent 76 inmates to Buchenwald, for which in return it received 100 inmates.

At this point the SS-EBB VI was already in retreat. Despite the quickly approaching Western Allies, the construction brigade was transferred as late as February 9, 1945, from Cologne to Zündorf on the right side of the Rhine. Work was now performed on the Gremberg railway station, until on March 1 the train traveled on to Triosdorf. On March 8, 1945, one day after American troops crossed the Rhine over the bridge at Remagen, the redeployment began toward the East. The train advanced only a kilometer (0.6 miles) at a time and reached Nordhausen on March 11, which made the prisoners fear the worst. However, the train continued moving and reached Freital via Dresden. There, until April 8, cleanup work was resumed. On April 23, the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade VI reached Passau via Dresden, Chemnitz, Plauen, and Pilsen and, five days later, Salzburg, where on May 4, 1945, the prisoners were liberated.

After the war, Fikeis was presumed missing. An investigation that only was initiated in the 1970s was abandoned in 1973.

**NOTES**

1. Buchenwald concentration camp, handwritten notice, n.d., ITS, Sachdokumenten-Ordner Buchenwald 47, p. 51;
SS-BAUBRIGADE VII (AKA SS-BAUBRIGADE VII (E)) (AUSCHWITZ, BUCHENWALD, MITTELBAU, AND SACHSENHAUSEN)

The SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade VII (also known as SS-Baubrigade VII (E)) was formed in September 1944 with 505 prisoners as the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade II in the Auschwitz concentration camp. The task of the railroad construction brigade, a mobile concentration camp, was the repair of railroad lines. It was to have been transferred to Buchenwald by November 3, 1944. On October 20, 1944, the railroad construction brigade was renamed, and on October 28, 1944, the newly independent Mittelbau concentration camp took over the 498 prisoners. The assumption of control by the Sachsenhausen concentration camp on January 1, 1945, was, as with most of the SS-Baubrigaden, merely a formality.

On September 18, 1944, the train carrying 505 prisoners left Auschwitz and reached Karlsruhe on September 26, 1944. Karlsruhe appears not to have been the planned destination but was chosen because, according to former prisoners, large-scale attacks on Karlsruhe began on the day the train arrived in the city. The train was parked on a railroad track near the newly constructed autobahn bridge at the Karlsruhe-Durlach junction. At first, the construction train stood in the Prague tunnel, a railroad tunnel to the north of the main railroad station, with guards posted at either end. The prisoners could move within the tunnel before they were locked in the wagons after evening roll call. Other trains traveling through the tunnel during an air-raid alarm ran over 3 prisoners on October 30, 1944. As a result, the train was removed from the tunnel a few days later. The tunnel remained a refuge from the air raids, and sometimes the prisoners had to seek refuge there several times a night.

Kurt Schäfer, an engineering graduate born on June 8, 1911, in Karlsruhe, was commander of the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade VII. He had been a member of the Nazi Party (NSDAP) since 1931. Schäfer was ordered to Amtsgruppe C of the SS-Business Administration Main Office (WVHA) and was probably active in Auschwitz when he took over the construction brigade. What was unusual was that Schäfer’s wife and four-year-old daughter traveled with the concentration camp train. While Schäfer was not incriminated by survivors, his deputy is alleged to have been especially brutal. For example, he forced prisoners to hop like frogs and kicked them at the same time. Once he is alleged to have shot a prisoner tortured in this way.

Nevertheless, the SS-EBB VII has been described by survivors as an “oasis among the concentration camps.” Ryszard Krosnowski and Aleksander Miziewicz wrote the following:

Naturally there was heavy labor, poor food, and some of the SS men treated us inhumanely. But in comparison to the conditions that prevailed in the last months of the war in other concentration camps, the construction train was bearable. The reason for this was probably—besides the difference to the classic concentration camp—the type of work, which allowed food to be organized, as well as the guards who supervised the prisoners. At the beginning, the SS men who guarded the construction train had been pulled from the front and had not gone through camp training. They didn’t know about how things worked in the other concentration camps, and to a certain extent behaved decently.

The comparatively low level of brutality in this subcamp, in addition to the already mentioned reasons, is based on the rather unique composition of the prisoners. They consisted almost without exception of Poles (three-quarters) and Russians (a quarter). There was no group of German prisoners to take control, and until the end of 1944, as for all construction brigades, there were no Jewish prisoners. These two groups worked hard to maintain solidarity.
The daily routine for the construction brigade ran as follows: Wake at 5:30 A.M., leave for work at 7:00 A.M., half an hour for lunch, workday ends at 5:00 P.M. After the evening roll call at 7:00 P.M., the prisoners were shut in the container cars. The brigade worked until 2:00 P.M. on Sundays.10

Since the original files of the SS-EBB VII have survived, it is possible to reconstruct a relatively accurate profile of this construction brigade.11 Of the 505 prisoners who left Auschwitz on September 18, 1944, 107 were listed as permanently or temporarily absent by April 1, 1945. The largest group, 38 prisoners, was transferred to Auschwitz (3 prisoners), Mittelbau (19), or Sachsenhausen (16) because they were physically weak; 36 had escaped; 10 had been handed over by the SS for punishment—7 to the Gestapo and 3 to the Leonberg subcamp. Temporarily, 11 prisoners were held in hospitals; 12 men died, at least 8 by train accidents or during bombing raids, 1 from poisoning; 2 prisoners were shot by members of the SS. In the same time period, there were 54 arrivals from other camps (4 from Mittelbau, 49 from Buchenwald, and 1 from the SS-EBB VIII); 4 came back from the Gestapo, 7 from the hospital, and another 7 were recaptured after their escape. On April 1, 1945, the day of the evacuation preparation, there were 470 prisoners in the SS-EBB VII. Compared to the prevailing terrible conditions in the main camps at this time, the death rate of 12 prisoners among 569 prisoners is relatively low. However, this does not take into account the fate of the prisoners transferred back to the main camps.

Schäfer did not transfer the prisoners back to the main camp for punishment but to the local police stations in Karlsruhe or Stuttgart, for example, when the prisoners were caught with food taken from the rubble. There was usually an additional entry in the records that a prisoner had refused to work, stirred up trouble, or was planning to escape. In the last few weeks of the war, the Stuttgart Gestapo no longer wanted this responsibility. The prisoners were handed back to the construction brigade. As a result, Schäfer introduced other punishment measures. A container car was stripped down to serve as a “Bunker” prison, in which prisoners were locked up for disobedience, contact with civilians, escape attempts, or other supposed infractions. In addition, Schäfer sent prisoners to the Konzentrationslager (KL) Leonberg, a subcamp of the Natzweiler concentration camp in the vicinity of Stuttgart.12

On February 20, 1945, Gerhard Weigel, since autumn 1944 Inspector of All Construction Brigades in the WVHA, ordered “special measures for work-shy foreigners” following a visit to Stuttgart. In connection with the SD and Gestapo, there was to be erected within the SS-EBB VII a “Work Education Camp for Foreigners in Empty Railroad Wagons.”13 A few days later, on February 23, 1945, the Stuttgart Gestapo transferred the first “education prisoner.” Up to 30 forced laborers were transferred to the construction brigade. The education prisoners were provided with the same living and work conditions (as the rest of the brigade); however, they could be let go after a short period of time.14

According to the accounts of survivors, the evacuation of at least a part of the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade VII was unusual. After receiving the order to leave from Stuttgart authorities, SS-Obersturmführer Schäfer decided to divide the train into two parts because of the poor transport situation. The first transport left the city on April 2, 1945, in the direction of Friedrichshafen and, according to a statement of a survivor, arrived in Aulendorf, north of Ravensburg on the upper reaches of Lake Constance.15 This group was evidently driven on a forced march, where some prisoners were killed.16

The second transport with about 200 prisoners left Stuttgart on April 3, 1945, under the command of Schäfer, also in a southerly direction. Three days later it arrived at Biberach. Because of the nearby French troops, everything was in disarray, and the SS men had to fear that they would soon be imprisoned. In this situation, according to two survivors, the prisoners recommended to Schäfer that in case Biberbach was captured, he should disguise himself as an officer in the Wehrmacht, and they would give him a character reference. In exchange, Schäfer would give the construction brigade over to the French. With the exception of two SS men, Schäfer thereupon dismissed all of the guards. The prisoners continued to work in Biberach until April 23, and Schäfer continued to maintain the appearance of a functioning concentration camp.

After an order to evacuate, the train started out on April 23, 1945, with a new locomotive. Near Bad Schussenried the prisoners, now in unlocked container cars, overwhelmed the locomotive engineer and were thus freed. The German troops had already left Schussenried, and the French soldiers, after giving the prisoners weapons, continued their advance. In the now-leaderless city, the prisoners acted as an occupation administration until a proper military administration could be installed. Survivors Krosnowski and Miziewicz wrote about the last days in Schussenried: “Two months after liberation the little town came permanently under French military occupation—and the prisoners, once they had regained their strength and become used to their freedom, dispersed, each to meet his own fate.”17

After 1945, Schäfer became a prisoner of the French but was not prosecuted because of his activities in the SS-EBB VII. Preliminary proceedings started in the Federal Republic of Germany were halted in 1972. In Schussenried the memory of the “Polish Train” remains alive. A collection of contemporaneous reports includes the following: “The people of Schussenried at first did not know what was happening. In the first few days there were hardly any French in Schussenried. The Poles seized the opportunity and took command. No one dared do anything against the Poles.”18 The people of Schussenried reluctantly accepted that “the Poles” had been given the official city halls as accommodation by the French occupying administration. Nine of the freed prisoners died in Schussenried as a result of their imprisonment in the concentration camps. There is no memorial to these victims on their gravestones.

**Sources** Records on the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade VII are comparatively extensive. Ryszard Krosnowski took documents
with him when he escaped and gave them to Polish forced laborers in Stuttgart for safekeeping. From there, they reached the Polish Red Cross and the Auschwitz Memorial (APMO, D-Au-I-3, Microfilm Nr. 1960, fol. 1–80). Copies of the documents can be found in the BA-B, Bestandergänzungsfilm Nr. 72205. In addition, the files of the above-mentioned investigation at BA-L (IV 406 AR-Z 150/72) as well as the reports of the survivors Ryszard Kronowski and Aleksander Miziewicz (“7. SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade,” HvA 5[1962]) are important sources. The door of “Haus Silber,” the former Gestapo prison in Stuttgart on Dorotheen Strasse, still has the writing of a former prisoner of the 7th Construction Brigade—“Capo Michat, 7. SS-Baubrigady K. L. Auschwitz Gef.-Nr. 162262 Polak Radom Zeromskiego”—documented by Roland Müller, Stuttgart zur Zeit des Nationalsozialismus (Stuttgart: Theiss, 1988), p. 628. Further sources have been made available in a dissertation on the SS-Construction Brigades: Karola Fings, Die Kommunen, der Krieg und die Konzentrationslager. Himmlers SS-Baubrigaden (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2004).

Karola Fings

trans. Stephen Pallavicini

NOTES


5. Kurt Schäfer, born June 8, 1911, BA-B, BDC/RS, SSO.


9. Ibid., p. 46–56; prisoners’ list with 488 names, BA-B, Bestandergänzungsfilm 72205; APMO, D-Au-I-3, p. 5–13 (369 Poles, 116 Russians, 1 Norwegian, 1 Lithuanian, and 1 stateless person).


11. For the following, APMO, D-Au-I-3, pp. 1–80.


SS-EISENBAHNBAUBRIGADE VIII (SACHSENHAUSEN AND MITTELBAU)

The SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade VIII (SS-EBB VIII), consisting of 504 prisoners, was formed on November 20, 1944, in Sachsenhausen. A few days later the prisoners were taken over by the Mittelbau concentration camp under the numbers 100504 to 101006 [sic]. As with all other SS construction brigades, from January 1945 it formed part of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. The prisoners were overwhelmingly Polish and Russian, but there were also French, Germans, Dutch, Italians, Yugoslavians, and Latvians.

Along with the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade VII, the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade VIII was ordered to repair railroad tracks near Stuttgart. The Stuttgart rail network, as well as the city itself, had been severely damaged during continued bombing raids. The Daimler-Benz, Robert Bosch, and Heinkel-Hirth plants, important for fighter production, had already dispersed some of their production facilities, but the attacks endangered the many remaining plants important to the Luftwaffe, as well as the military supplies that were sent through Stuttgart. In September and October, additional attacks resulted in the collapse of traffic around the main railroad station as well as at many stations in the suburbs. The SS-EBB VIII was sent to Stuttgart-Cannstatt where a destroyed train tunnel was to be repaired and a sidetrack laid down. The prisoners of this construction brigade at times also worked on the Stuttgart Castle and its park.

In December 1944, the construction brigade was transferred from Stuttgart to Offenburg. The Offenburg supply railroad station was located on the upper Rhine River on the Basel-Mannheim route. As a transshipment center, it was an important location due to the strategically important trade with Switzerland and Italy. On November 27, 1944, the train station was the target of a large attack, which paralyzed the transport system on the right bank of the Rhine. The SS-EBB VIII reached Offenburg on December 20, 1944.

SS-Obersturmführer Walter Becker, an architect, was in command of the construction brigade until the end of the year. He was born on September 24, 1892, in Mannheim and had joined the SA in 1929 and the SS in 1932. Starting in April 1940, he was part of what became Amtsgruppe C “Construction” of the SS-Business Administration Main Office (VVHA). From 1940, he was head of construction in Breslau, and later in Posen and Nikolajewsk. Becker was followed on January 1, 1945, by SS-Obersturmführer Herbert Zoeger, a businessman born on October 14, 1901, in Fröbeln (Silesia). Until his appointment with the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade VIII, Zoeger had no full-time function within the SS. Survivors agreed that Becker was a “very bad man,” and under his
leadership, hunger and terror ruled. It is alleged that in Stuttgart he personally shot a prisoner after a roll call. He is said to have volunteered for frontline service and was therefore replaced by Zoeger.9 Zoeger, on the other hand, is overwhelmingly described as humane. In total, the SS guards numbered 73 men, including a number of former railroad men, most born in the 1890s and almost without exception all with a low SS rank.10

The SS-EBB VIII was stationed in Offenburg on a track between a school and an inn, in clear view of the local residents. On the initiative of the city mayor, the prisoners were later transferred to a former “Camp for Workers from the East.” The mayor was not concerned that the prisoners could be the victims of air raids but rather that the long train could draw the attention of the Allied bomber pilots to the city.11 The train itself remained at the freight station.

Between February 21 and 23, 1945, Gerhard Weigel, the “Inspector of All Construction Brigades” in the WVHA, visited Offenburg. He reported to Berlin: “General inspection of the work at the large shunting yard. The work of the 8th SS-Construction Brigade is particularly noteworthy as within a short time through traffic—above all supplies for front line troops—is rolling at night. I ordered night work. This, however, can only be done under difficult conditions because heavy and constant artillery from Strasburg disrupts the work. The losses suffered by the 8th SS-Construction Brigade and the 10th SS-Construction Brigade are considerable.”12

Included in the “heavy losses” were 10 prisoners who, according to survivors, were killed during bombing raids. On February 15, 1945, the construction train at the freight railroad yard was hit and almost completely burned up.13 Weigel thereupon ordered that the construction brigade should move to Darmstadt to rebuild the train. The SS-EBB VIII remained in Darmstadt for just two weeks and was then deployed in the suburb of Erhausen.14

In the middle of March 1945, the construction brigade moved with stops for cleanup work through Halle, Plauen, Pilsen, and Passau to Freilassing near Salzburg. It could not go any further, as Salzburg was about to fall. In his denazification proceedings in 1947, Zoeger stated that in the middle of April he received orders from Berlin to shoot the prisoners when he could not advance any further. He decided that on May 2, 1945, when he could not get in contact with a superior, to take responsibility for releasing the prisoners himself.15 Survivors stated that on this day Zoeger delivered a speech and declared that he would release them on his honor as a German officer. Details of the release were then negotiated with a group of prisoners.16 According to a survivor, five Soviet prisoners then tried to escape, whereupon the SS opened fire and shot one of them.17 Zoeger dismissed the SS guards in the direction of Salzburg, distributed to the prisoners official release passes, and received in return a declaration testifying in his favor from many of the prisoners. On the night of May 2–3, 1945, the train, with the help of German railroad employees traveled to Bergen near Traunstein. There, according to a survivor, all the prisoners of the SS-EBB VIII, “including those driven to the very depths of human existence,” were set free.18

Two survivors independently stated that the number of prisoners freed in Bergen was 216; a third put the number at 262. On January 1, 1945, the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade VIII consisted of 416 prisoners.19 What had happened to the remaining prisoners? According to a survivor—who did office work, probably working in the administration—at least 80 prisoners had been sent to Sachsenhausen, Dachau, or other camps; around 15 had died during bombing raids or because of illness; and 100 had escaped.20 Zoeger himself stated in 1972 that in Halle he sent two railroad cars full of the sick in the direction of Sachsenhausen because a military hospital had refused to take custody of them, and Zoeger did not want to travel with the sick anymore. Furthermore, according to the recollections of another prisoner, some prisoners—possibly in Passau—were transferred to the SS-Baubrigade XI and traveled with it to Ebensee.21 In addition to the above-mentioned shooting of 5 prisoners, 3 prisoners were believed to have been shot in Offenburg—a prisoner who had reached down to grab a cigarette butt, a mentally disturbed prisoner, and a recaptured escapee.

The SS camp leader, Becker, heavily incriminated by statements of survivors, stated in 1947 in a Nürnberg internment camp that as an architect he did not have an opportunity to be “politically active.”22 By the time the Ludwigsburg State Prosecutor’s Office investigated the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade VIII in the 1970s, Becker had already died. In order to credibly defend himself in front of the court during his hearing, Zoeger claimed to have experienced an inner change after taking over the construction brigade. He stated that what remained of his belief in the National Socialist leadership collapsed on the day that he first saw the prisoners. It is true that up until this time Zoeger had not had professional contact with the concentration camp system. The certificate that the prisoners gave him on May 2, 1945, the day of their release, was helpful. The text of the declaration, signed by 14 Polish and Soviet prisoners, read: “On January 1, 1945, Herr Herbert Zoeger took command of the SS-EBB VIII, which consisted of Polish and Russian political prisoners. The entire time up until the present day Herr Zoeger did all that he could to improve our living conditions and protect our health and lives. With our own free will we sign this document with gratitude.”23 Preliminary proceedings started by the Regional Court in Offenburg were discontinued in 1974.

**Sources**

There is nothing at the Offenburg Railroad Station to memorialize the prisoners of the SS-EBB VIII. Bernd Boll, “Konzentrationslager auf Schienen. Eisenbahnbaubrigaden der SS in Offenburg 1944/45,” *Ortenau* 73(1993): 481–485, relied mostly on the files held by the BA-L (IV 406 AR-Z 171/73) and on the inspection report of Gerhard Weigel at the BA-B (NS 19/771), but he also found some papers in the AS-OG (NL Rombach; 18-2-16 Plans). Scattered single sources on the SS-EBB VIII were found in a dissertation on the SS construction brigades: Karola Fings, *Die Kommunen,*
NOTES

1. BA-L, IV 406 AR-Z 171/73, p. 43.
7. Walter Becker, born September 24, 1892, BA-B, BDC/ RS, SSO.
8. Herbert Zoeger, born October 14, 1901, in ibid., BDC/ PK, RS, SSO.
10. SS-EBB VIII, January 15, 1945, RGVA, 1361/1/14, pp. 15–16.
22. Personnel fi le Walter Becker, ibid., p. 185.
23. Declaration signed by several unnamed prisoners, May 2, 1945, ibid., p. 476.

SS-EISENBAHNBAUBRIGADE IX
[SACHSENHAUSEN]

The first volume of the Catalogue of Camps and Prisons in Germany and German-Occupied Territories Sept. 1st, 1939–May 8th, 1945 of the International Tracing Service (ITS), edited in July 1945 in Arolsen, contains the following reference to the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade IX (SS-EBB IX): “CC Kdo. of Sachsenhausen, established around the end of Nov. forty-four, of fi ve hundred pris., this Baubrigade was employed in railway repair work in Stuttgart until end of Dec. Work was continued in Offenburg near Strasbourg, until end of Febr. 45, then the brigade moved to Darmstadt and, half an hour before the Allied troops entered Darmstadt, via Frankfurt/M., Würzburg, Nürnberg, Regensburg, Pilsen, Salzburg, and Linz, to Ebensee (Netherlands Red Cross).”

Based on this source, researchers, including state prosecutors, assumed that SS-EBB IX had actually existed. However, a recent investigation indicates that the creation of this construction brigade was planned but never actually carried out.

The basis for this conjecture is that for the SS-EBB IX in contrast to the rest of the SS construction brigades—not one contemporary source has been found. Even though the Dutch report suggests that the fl es of this construction brigade were completely burned at the end of February 1945 in Darmstadt during an attack on the administration car of the construction brigade, it is still remarkable that neither prisoner lists are available from the ITS, nor are there variation reports, kept in electronic format, in the AG-S that contain any reference to the SS-EBB IX. According to the Dutch report, up to 250 prisoners of this construction brigade are said to have been killed in bombing raids. However, the documents kept at the cemeteries in Stuttgart, Offenburg, and Darmstadt, the supposed sites of the brigade’s deployment, contain no reference to victims of the SS-EBB IX.

Gerhard Weigel, the “Inspector of All Construction Brigades” in the SS-Business Administration Main Office (WVHA), visited Offenburg between February 21 and 23, 1945, the period in which the SS-EBB IX was said to have been stationed in Offenburg. He mentioned the SS-Baubrigaden VIII and X but not IX. In addition, the supposed evacuation goal, the Mauthausen Ebensee subcamp, has no record of the brigade—unlike the SS-Baubrigaden XI and XII. The AG-M likewise does not hold any documents on the SS-EBB IX.

Bernd Boll based his assertion that the SS-EBB IX was in Offenburg on diary entries of the mayor who wrote about “two long trains with concentration camp prisoners” on December 25, 1944. This does allow for the possibility that two construction brigades were stationed in Offenburg at that time. However, the construction brigade trains were, owing to their length of up to 50 railroad cars, often parked in two rows on different tracks, so this cannot be seen as sufficient evidence for the existence of the SS-EBB IX. Inquiries by the Central Office of State Justice Administrations (ZdL) have revealed no further evidence about the SS-EBB IX to date. The name of a single SS officer for the brigade cannot be ascertained.

A comparison of lists of names eventually supplied an explanation. Five of six known Dutchmen who, after the war, were regarded as missing from the SS-EBB IX, or who—as survivors of the SS-EBB IX—were considered by the Ludwigsburg State Prosecutor as possible witnesses, are to be...
found on the prisoners lists for the SS-EBB VIII from January 1, 1945. As the sites the survivors mentioned and the details of their activities correspond to those of the SS-EBB VIII, one can now assume that the survivors’ statements, which until now have been attributed to the SS-EBB IX, should be attributed to the SS-EBB VIII.

NOTES


**SS-EISENBAHNBAUBRIGADE X (BUCHENWALD AND SACHSENHAUSEN)**

The SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade X (SS-EBB X) was the only SS construction brigade that was made up of Jewish prisoners. It was established in December 1944 with 504 prisoners from the Buchenwald concentration camp and sent on January 2, 1945, to Offenburg to repair the railroad infrastructure there. Three days later, as with the other SS construction brigades, it came under the control of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. The train was stationed in the heavily damaged Offenburg train station, an important transportation center in the Southwest. In contrast to the prisoners of the SS-Baubrigade VIII, who arrived in Offenburg about two weeks earlier and who were housed in a former labor camp, the prisoners of the SS-EBB X had to live in the railroad cars.

The head of SS-EBB X was SS-Obersturmführer Ludwig Petz, who was born on June 9, 1912, in Munich. He was an architect and since 1938 had worked full-time at various SS construction sites. Beginning in November 1941, he was a member of the Construction Inspectorate “Balkan,” part of the Higher-SS and Police Leader’s (HSSPF) office in Serbia. On October 15, 1944, he was appointed head of the SS-EBB X. The guards consisted almost exclusively of railroad employees who were called up for a short time in accordance with an October 29, 1944, agreement between the German Ministry of Transport and the Waffen-SS. After a four-week training course in the Dachau concentration camp, they were assigned to the railroad construction brigade. The 60 railroad men were mostly around 45 years old. The eldest was born in 1884 and the youngest in 1905.

Except for 11 prisoners, the SS-EBB X comprised Hungarian Jews as well as a smaller group of Polish and Czech Jews. The use of Jewish prisoners in a construction brigade was later stopped—whether by Heinrich Himmler personally or the SS-Business Administration Main Office (WVHA) cannot be ascertained. It was expressly ordered that only “Aryan” prisoners could be used in the construction brigades. Instructions for a transport of prisoners to the SS-Baubrigade XII in Buchenwald in February 1945 stated that “two hundred Aryans” were to be made available.

One of these functionaries, Josef D., described the construction train as follows:

The Eisenbahnbaubrigade consisted of a staff of SS men (ca. six men, ca. forty to fifty SS guards, ca. twelve Kapos, and ca. five hundred Jewish prisoners). A special train was assembled at the train station at Buchenwald for them, which consisted of approximately fifty to sixty cars. The prisoners were put in cattle cars. The guards were billeted in a simple passenger car. The staff was in well-equipped saloon cars. In addition, there was a car for tools and supplies and for the prisoners’ kitchen. The SS staff and guards had special cooking facilities. The car for us Kapos was equipped with wooden bunks and wood shavings. There were twelve of us in the car. The Jewish prisoners, on the other hand, were cramped together and had to sleep two or three to a wooden bunk without a straw bag. The wooden bunks were double-storied. There were a good forty to fifty prisoners in a car.

At any one time, groups of 98 Jewish prisoners and 2 prisoner-functionaries were put to cleanup work on the Offenburg railroad facilities. A survivor reported as follows:

“The work conditions on the construction train were very poor. The food was miserable. Many prisoners were in a terrible condition; they had hernias and other illnesses. The equipment was poor. The prisoners had to do work on the
rails with their bare hands." What made conditions worse was that the prisoners had no protection during the bombing raids. In the beginning they sought protection in the surrounding compound. Then this was forbidden, according to Gerhard M.: “This type of self-protection was banned by a railroad official from Offenburg. When fighters attacked we had to seek cover under the railroad cars. However, as the cars were the targets we suffered heavy losses.”

At the beginning of March 1945 the SS-EBB X was withdrawn from Offenburg. From March 7 to March 25, 1945, the train stood on a railroad line between Leutershausen-Wiedersbach and Schalkhausen. The prisoners had to repair railroad facilities at Ansbach, 5 kilometers (3.1 miles) away. From April 2, 1945, the train was stationed in a patch of forest about 10 kilometers (6.2 miles) from Ansbach, in the direction of Munich.

A former non-Jewish prisoner stated that for the Jewish prisoners “it was not possible to speak favorably about most of the guards.” Jewish survivors have not mentioned any unusual brutality by the guards. The reports on the prisoner-functionaries do not give a clear picture. Two prisoner-functionaries are accused specifically of mistreatment, and others are said to have disapproved of mistreatment and in part prevented it.

One Jewish survivor found particularly demeaning the punishment meted out to six prisoners in the SS-EBB X for stealing food—they were whipped in Offenburg at the beginning of March 1945. He recalls that they were at first threatened that they would be shot or hanged. Finally they were whipped by a Kapo. The next day they were whipped again, and finally they had to drop their trousers and thank the “SS leadership.” A former prisoner-functionary said that he had personally interceded with Petz on behalf of the prisoners and prevented them from being shot.

So far as the available numbers can determine, it appears that the death rate in the SS-EBB X was not higher than in other railroad construction brigades. Of the 504 prisoners, 414 reached the evacuation destination. According to survivors, 20 or 30 prisoners were exchanged for other prisoners from Sachsenhausen. Altogether the survivors mention up to 40 dead from bombing raids and around another 20 deaths; 4 murder victims are mentioned: 1 or 2 prisoners are said to have been shot in Offenburg for misappropriating food—a Polish Jew was beaten to death in Ansbach, and another was hanged. During the relatively short period of time between March 8 and April 2, 1945, there were 17 victims, according to the diary of a former prisoner. However, the causes of death were not named.

On April 2, 1945, the construction brigade left Ansbach and passed through Fürth and Nürnberg. After April 14, 1945, the train was stuck in Undorf near Regensburg—a destroyed bridge prevented it from moving. Rumors circulated among the prisoners that they were all to be shot in a forest. An SS guard is supposed to have said that Himmler ordered that all of the prisoners on the construction trains were to be blown up with hand grenades. According to one survivor, only about 10 SS men stated that they would carry out this order. Petz is supposed to have distanced himself from those plans. As the train was no longer operational, Petz finally had the prisoners start walking on April 19. They marched mostly at night due to bombing raids.

Apparently a few prisoners were shot on the march, but the numbers are uncertain. Former prisoner-functionaries have stated that there was a shooting detachment that shot prisoners who could not march any further. On the other hand, a Jewish survivor has stated that no more than five or six prisoners were shot on the march. On April 27, 1945, the aforementioned 414 prisoners reached the Dachau concentration camp, where on April 29, 1945, they were liberated.

Petz and his closest colleagues ran off near Moosburg, after going two-thirds of the way. By the time the Central Office of State Justice Administrations (ZdL) in Ludwigsburg investigated the SS-EBB X, Petz had died. The Regensburg police, which in 1974 questioned 125 people in various locations about the concentration camp prisoners, stated the following after the lack of cooperation from the local population: “It is not possible to state whether the interviewees in fact could no longer remember as in several places we were confronted with a lack of understanding and an unwillingness to cooperate. The people today did not want to have anything to do with what happened. Besides, many were afraid that they could be prosecuted for looting the construction train. Probably almost all of the interviewees looted the train.” In 1975, the more-than-1,000-page comprehensive file was closed with a recommendation that it not be reopened.

**SOURCES** The SS-Eisenbahnbaubriggade X was first written about in an essay on the use of Offenburg as a marshaling area: Bernd Boll, “Konzentrationslager auf Schienen. Eisenbahnbaubrigaden der SS in Offenburg 1944/45,” *Ortenau* 73 (1993): 480–514. In consideration of the special situation of the Jewish prisoners in the SS construction brigades, a dissertation was dedicated almost 10 years later and has since been published as Karola Fings, *Krieg, Gesellschaft, und KZ: Himmlers SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigaden* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005). For the dissertation, other widely scattered sources, almost all of which have been mentioned in this essay, were used.

The most important primary sources are the judicial files at ZdL (IV 406 AR-Z 254/72), now BA-L, with additional documentation in THStA-W, BA-B, CChIdK, and NARA.

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**NOTES**


SS-EISENBAHNBAUBRIGADE XI (NEUENGAMME AND SACHSENHAUSEN)

The establishment of the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade XI (SS-EBB XI) was planned since November 1944. The railroad construction brigade left the Neuengamme concentration camp for the first time on February 13, 1945, with 504 prisoners and the SS security detail, which had almost been completely destroyed on December 4–5, 1944, and where the railroad stations were severely damaged by Allied bombing attacks on an almost daily basis. As with all east-west transport, which had almost been completely destroyed in Soest, the prisoners were taken to a barn on the Schulze-Lohöfer farm near Bad Sassendorf.

Franz Heider, an engineer born on September 13, 1910, in Steinach in Thuringia, was the leader of the SS-EBB XI until March 1945. Although Heider had been a member of the Nazi Party and the SS since 1931, it was only with this appointment that he reached the rank of SS-Untersturmführer. He had been denied promotions for two years because in 1943 he did not take the shortest route on an assignment. Heider had been a member of the SS-Business Administration Main Office (WVHA) since 1942 and was the head of the SS-Construction Inspectorate “Balkan” in Serbia with the Higher-SS and Police Leader (HSSPF) from July 1942 until its retreat in October 1944. Survivors described Heider as “bearable.” According to the camp elder (Lagerältester), Adolf K., he banned the beating of prisoners. Heider himself stated that he was reassigned from the construction brigade in March 1945 to construct airfields in southern Germany and the neighboring regions of Austria. According to a report from the camp elder, with Heider’s successor, Kurt Wittwer, came “for the first time the famous methods of the SS into the brigade.” SS-Oberscharführer Wittwer was born on May 4, 1912, in Berlin and brought with him two years in the SS-Baubrigade I, where he was infamous among the prisoners. Wittwer and another SS-Hauptscharführer, along with two Kapos, are alleged in particular to have brutally abused prisoners who attempted to escape.

Most of the prisoners came from the Soviet Union and Poland. But there were also prisoners from Denmark, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Among the German prisoners, who were the construction brigade's prisoner-functionaries, there appears to have been great rivalry. It was also reported that in Benninghausen a German Kapo beat to death Dutchman Jan Derk Bunink, who was born on January 7, 1926, in Zwolle.

The SS security detachment numbered 85 men in total, most of whom were old railroad employees who were temporarily posted to SS-EBB XI. Among them was Edmund P. who at a denazification court in Regensburg in 1947 tried to create the impression that he had nothing to do with the concentration camp prisoners:

I am a career railroad man and was forcibly called up to the Waffen-SS on December 28, 1944. I was trained in the so-called SS Training Camp [Übungslager] Dachau. There I was trained as an infantryman for about six weeks. Finally, I and other railroad men were sent to a fourteen day course at the Dachau Railroad Station. On March 10, 1945, we were transferred to the Eisenbahnbaubrigade XI at Soest, Westphalia. We were immediately sent in to repair destroyed railroad stations. I was the Eisenbahn-Rottenführer and supervised the repair work. I did not watch prisoners, who were totally occupied with work. In addition there were no assaults on the prisoners.
Survivors’ reports show a completely different picture of conditions in the SS-EBB XI. At war’s end, only 206 prisoners reached the evacuation destination. In Soest, the prisoners were mostly exposed to the massive bombing raids because they either had to continue working or were not allowed to seek protection in bunkers. A former prisoner had the following to say about the bombardments: “In the morning the guys would repair the tracks and in the afternoon the Tommies [the British] came and blew it all up again.” An attack on Soest on February 28, 1945, killed 33 prisoners of the SS-EBB XI; 31 were wounded, and 33 prisoners were counted as incinerated or missing.

At the beginning of March 1945, about 30 additional prisoners died from poisoning because the guards did nothing to help them. According to a survivor, who as the detachment clerk recorded the deaths in SS-EBB XI, a railroad car with methyl alcohol was broken open in the freight yard. A large group of prisoners consumed the alcohol and soon showed symptoms of poisoning such as vomiting, diarrhea, and delirium. Because the prisoners were left to themselves, Heinrich L. stated that 24 died during the day at the railroad site and an additional 6 in camp.8

A survivor has stated that as a result of the poor rations only 100 to 120 prisoners were in a position to march out to work. Another survivor has stated that despite some food handouts from the population that prisoners died daily from epidemics or undernourishment.9 Up until the last days of the war, prisoners who could no longer work were selected and replaced with new workers. For example, on March 19, 1945, 128 sick and wounded prisoners were sent to Buchenwald,10 in exchange for 100 Soviet prisoners who had departed Buchenwald on March 13, 1945.11

Due to the lack of sources, it is not possible to determine an exact number of victims of the SS-EBB XI. However, extrapolating from the death rates for various nationalities leads one to the conclusion that the death rate was relatively high. Of the 36 Danes in the brigade, 14 died—in contrast to the SS-EBB V, where all 35 Danes survived the war;12 3 of the Danes were victims of bombing raids, but the majority, 10 Danes, died during the evacuation. Of the 51 Dutch, 22 were repatriated, 21 died, and 8 were listed as missing.13

The evacuation march of the SS-EBB XI, which began on April 4, 1945, was the worst in comparison to that of other railroad construction brigades. About 30 sick and wounded prisoners and five Kapos remained in Bad Sassendorf. Prisoners who could no longer walk were shot on the three-day march via Lippstadt and Paderborn to Höxter, where a train was waiting them. On April 7, a transport with sick prisoners was sent from Halle to Sachsenhausen. The remaining prisoners left Halle on April 15 and retreated, sometimes on foot and sometimes on a train, over Chemnitz and Plauen to Pilsen (Plzen). The prisoners tried to escape if a favorable opportunity presented itself. A few succeeded. There was another selection in Pilsen. A transport with sick prisoners went to Dachau, while a small group marched to Dachau. Again, prisoners were left dead or dying along the way. The column did not reach Dachau but was liberated in Anzing. (Survivors named the place “Anzingen.” There is an Anzing near Dorfen, to the west of Munich, and an Anzing nearer Munich. Which location is meant is not known. Both are situated on the same railroad line.) The main transport of the SS-EBB XI traveled from Pilsen to the Mauthausen/Ebensee subcamp, where on May 4, 1945, the remaining 206 prisoners were registered.

The victims of the Soest railroad construction brigade are buried in a plot at the cemetery in Bad Sassendorf.

SOURCES

In addition, a chronicle of the railroad man Wilhelm Trockel (Ar-St, Sj 61) was valuable, as it contained some information about the “concentration camp train.” In particular, materials from the AG-NG (Ng 6.4.91; Erinnerungsbericht Nr. 518), AG-S (IV 26), CChIdK, and FGNS-H (13-7-5-5) are noteworthy. A Danish publication describes in detail the living conditions of the prisoners and provides a detailed sketch of the evacuation route: Jørgen H.P. Barfod, Helvede bør mange Navne. En Beregning om Koncentrationdele og Fang- sler, hvor der sad Danskere 1940–1945 (Copenhagen: Forlaget Zac, 1969).

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NOTES
2. BA-BL, BDC/RS, SSO Franz Heider, born September 13, 1910.
4. BA-BL, BDC/RS Kurt Wittwer, born May 4, 1912.
5. SS-EBB XI, March 20, 1945, CChIdK, 1361/1/4, pp. 64–70.
The SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade XII (SS-EBB XII), consisting of 504 prisoners, was established in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. The majority of the prisoners were Soviets and Poles, but there were also French, Dutch, Czechs, Yugoslavs, Spaniards, Italians, and Hungarians. A few German prisoners were included as prisoner-functionaries. The task of the railroad construction brigade was to build and refurbish railroad lines for the Ardennes offensive, the last large German offensive in the West.

On Christmas Eve, December 24, 1944, the construction brigade left the camp and remained in Lahnstein, near Koblenz, until January 8, 1945. Then it was transferred about 50 kilometers (31 miles) up the Rhine to Bad Kreuznach, where it remained for almost two months. In Bad Kreuznach the train was stationed on the “Red Ley,” a gorge on the Nahe River. Prisoners and guards lived on the 50 cars of the train, which was provided with a supply car, a kitchen car, and a tool car. At the beginning of March 1945, the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade XII was sent to Grossen-Buseck via Mainz and Frankfurt am Main. The prisoners had to work at the nearby railroad station at Giessen, which had almost been destroyed.

The prisoners were put to work at the request of the Mainz Railroad Directorate. This is confirmed in a report by SS-Sturmbannführer Gerhard Weigel, who had been the “Instructor of All Construction Brigades” (Inspekteur sämtlicher Baubrigaden) in the SS-Business Administration Main Office (WVHA) since the autumn of 1944. On February 17, 1945, Weigel inspected the construction brigade and held talks with SS-Hauptsturmführer Rudolf Goetze and the vice-president of the Mainz Railroad Directorate, Dr. Schrag, as well as senior railroad officials Steiseneuter and Dr. Kampf. On March 2, 1945, he reported to Hans Kammler, the head of Office Group C of the SS-WVHA: “There are no particular complaints at the SS-BB [Baubrigade] XII. According to the statements by the Mainz Railroad Directorate, their deployment is very worthwhile.”

Goetze was the head of the SS-EBB XII. He was born on March 9, 1908, in Berlin and was a doctor of engineering. Goetze joined the SS in 1933 and before his assignment with the construction brigade had worked on SS construction projects. After the war Goetze tried to play down his actions in the construction brigade. The infamous Gustav Sorge, a long-serving SS man in the construction camps, supported him. Sorge was a longtime SS member and was very familiar with the concentration camp system. He got the nickname “Iron Gustav” due to his brutality in street and hall fighting against political opponents in 1931–1932. Sorge organized the creation of the construction brigade in Sachsenhausen and was appointed as the brigade’s leader but had to resign after getting wounded in Lahnstein. Along with a handful of SS who belonged to the Leadership Staff, the guard detachment consisted of 70 SS men born in the 1890s. The overwhelming majority of these men, as with the other SS construction brigades, were former railroad workers called up to the SS for a short period of time.

One of these railroad workers, Otto Stumpf from Bad Kreuznach, said the following after the war on his recruitment:

As a railroad worker I was ordered to Sachsenhausen on December 14, 1944. There, several thousand colleagues waited on their coming, difficult lot. It was all the more sad for there were only older men, between the age of forty-five and sixty, almost none of whom were party members. There were even comrades there that could hardly speak German as they came from Poland or Czechoslovakia . . . . Coming back to Sachsenhausen, I must say that it was not possible for me to get a glimpse of the concentration camp there, or to speak with anyone on the inside. Its condition first gave me cause to think that everything was not quite right with the camp. After the construction train was ready, I had the opportunity to speak with the prisoners personally about the woeful circumstances in the concentration camp. After every answer one could see the joy that they possessed, that they could now leave this camp.

The conditions in the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade XII were marked by undernourishment and violence, like the other concentration camps; 37 victims of the railroad construction brigade were buried in the Jewish cemetery between Bad Kreuznach and Bretzenheim. Hunger, strict isolation, and a special brutality by the SS and Kapos, led by Sorge and the Kapo Otto Dümpelmann, stand out as the causes of the deaths. The above-mentioned guard added the following: “The SS staff was mostly young men who had not served at the front. Their sole task was hand-in-hand with the Kapos to torture us and the prisoners and to pilfer supplies and money from the construction train.”

Survivors have reported many violent deaths. A drunken SS man is said to have shot the Kapo Fiete Leistner in Bad Kreuznach. Among the victims in Grossen-Buseck, where the construction brigade was stationed during the beginning of March and where 11 dead prisoners were registered...
between March 12, and March 24, 1945, was a victim of an execution.\textsuperscript{10} The prisoner had escaped during a bombing raid on March 18, 1945, but was quickly caught in some nearby houses. An SS leader gave the order to hang this man. The hanging was justified on the basis that the man was wearing civilian clothes and therefore had “looted.” Otto Dümpelmann carried out the execution. Dümpelmann was a former Luftwaffe soldier who was sent to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp because of numerous disciplinary punishments. Because of his healthy condition, he was known by the nickname “Fat Otto.”

On April 10, 1962, during its proceedings against Dümpelmann, the Giessen jury court stated that the following events occurred:

In the meantime it was early afternoon and the prisoners had to step in front of the burned wagon. The SS also assembled. The prisoner was brought forward and after a short statement on the fate of looters the prisoner had to step onto the wagon’s running board, where the accused put the rope, tied to the wagon’s lamp holder, around his neck. The prisoner then had to jump or he was pushed. The rope broke. He was lifted, lifeless, from the ground, possibly by prisoners commanded to do so. The accuser took his belt off, attached it to the lamp holder, and then set the noose around the throat of the victim, and left him hanging in the noose.\textsuperscript{11}

The SS-EBB XII also transported large numbers of prisoners during the last days of the war. A total of 156 sick and weakened prisoners are said to have been sent to the Buchenwald concentration camp.\textsuperscript{12} In return, 200 new prisoners arrived from Buchenwald at the beginning of March 1945.\textsuperscript{13}

The SS-EBB XII left Grossen-Buseck on March 23, 1945, and traveled to Eisenach via Alsfeld and Bad Hersfeld. Here the train had to be evacuated, and the prisoners marched on foot to Erfurt. On April 1, 1945, the train headed to Dresden via Leipzig. It remained there for a few days and then headed for Linz via Pilsen (Plzen). Here, according to the statement of a railroad man, about 300 prisoners were released on the initiative of the railroad workers.\textsuperscript{14} The construction train with 214 prisoners reached the Mauthausen subcamp of Ebensee on May 4, 1945.

After 1945, no one from the leadership group of the SS was brought to justice for crimes committed while in the railroad construction brigade. Sorge was convicted in 1959 of a number of murders committed in other camps and sentenced to life in prison. Only the murder committed by the Kapo Dümpelmann was punished. Dümpelmann was sentenced to two and a half years in prison in 1962 as an accessory to homicide.


**NOTES**


3. The Inspector of SS Workers at the Front and SS Construction Brigades, March 2, 1945, BA, NS 19/771.

4. Rudolf Goetze, born March 13, 1908, in ibid., BDC/RS, SSO.


6. SS-EBB XII, January 30, 1945, CChIdK, 1361/1/14, 31.


8. Ibid.


10. Rudolf Gost, in AVVN-D, Schriftwechsel zu Bad Kreuznach.


13. Arbeitsstatistik Buchenwald, February 24, 1945, in TNS-StrA-W, NS 4 Buchenwald Nr. 135; and File Notes, March 1, 1945, in ibid., KZ Buchenwald Nr. 4, Bd. 7/1, p. 74.

On January 18, 1945, the last SS construction brigade was formed at the Dachau concentration camp. Consisting of 504 prisoners, the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade XIII (SS-EBB XIII) first worked until the end of January in Bavarian Reichertshofen. As with all of the other construction brigades, the SS-EBB XIII was administered after January 1945 by the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. The prisoner group was very heterogeneous, consisting of over 100 Soviets and large groups of Germans, French, Poles, Italians, Belgians, Yugoslavians, and Czechs. In addition, seven other nationalities were listed on the transport list.

The SS-EBB XIII was assigned to the Erfurt Railroad Directorate and worked from February 1945 on the two railroad lines heading southwest to Frankfurt am Main and Koblenz. It operated simultaneously at four different locations: two larger groups worked at Aumeau near Limburg, building a siding at the Ennerich Tunnel, as well as at the Limburg railroad station, which was an important railroad junction with lines heading to all parts of Germany. Detachments of the SS-EBB XIII were sent for short periods of time to Fulda and Mücke, on the stretch between Giessen and Bad Hersfeld.

At the various locations it was the rule that segments of the train were put on branch lines. In Limburg, the three train sections were parked next to each other at the railroad station and were surrounded by a cordon of guards. It was from this “camp” that the prisoners were led to work. Another part of the train stood at the Weilburg railroad station on the “Plattenkaue” on branch lines. From there the prisoners were led daily to work on the railroad lines Runkel-Aumenau and Ennerich-Eschhofen.

Bernhard Kuiper was the leader of the SS-EBB XIII. He was born on August 30, 1907, in the East Frisian town of Möhlenwarf. Kuiper was an architect who had built concentration camps since 1934. At first he worked at Esterwegen, then at the Berlin concentration camp “Columbia,” and finally in Sachsenhausen. From 1940 he was a member of the SS Main Office for Budget and Buildings (Hauptamt Haushalt und Bauten, HHB). His professional advancement was closely connected with his membership in National Socialist organizations. He joined the Nazi Party in April 1933 and the SS in October 1934. From May 1937 to August 1939, he was part of the SS-Sicherheitsdienst. When the SS-Obersturmführer took over the SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade XIII on November 15, 1944, he was directly pulled away from the advancing Red Army with the SS-Economic Unit “Russia South” and sent back into Germany. In addition to other, mostly unnamed SS members, the guards consisted of a large group of old railway men. The railroad men were temporarily recruited into the SS and took about a four-week course in Dachau.

Gerhard Weigel, the Inspector of All Construction Brigades (Inspekteur sämtlicher Baubrigaden) in the SS-Business Administration Main Office (WVHA), inspected the SS-EBB XIII and the places where it worked on February 11, 1945. He had a discussion with the president of the Erfurt Railroad Directorate, Dr. Reabes, and praised the “very good results” that the construction brigade had achieved “despite the short period that it had been at work.” At the same time he declared the construction train to be a “model train.” In Weigel’s opinion, this train, which had been put together in Dachau by the SS-owned Deutsche Ausrüstungswerke GmbH (German Equipment Works, DAW) using experience gained from previous trains, set an exemplary standard for hygiene and other matters.

Nevertheless, the conditions in the SS-EBB XIII were by no means “exemplary.” Many prisoners died from hunger and illness, were killed in bombing raids, or were shot. In the very early days of the construction brigade, there was an outbreak of typhoid. As a result, several prisoners were sent back to Dachau on January, 30 1945, where some of them died. In Aumenau alone, 14 prisoners were killed in bombing raids.

After the war, survivors accused the roll-call leader, Hans Penkowski, of being responsible for numerous prisoner deaths. Penkowski is alleged to have shot five prisoners or given the order to shoot them in a forest near Limburg in February 1945. He has also been accused of the murder of a Romanian prisoner. A survivor stated that Penkowski had the nickname Machine Pistol (Maschinengewehle) because he had the custom of shooting aimlessly at prisoners. He died during a bombing raid on March 21, 1945. Several prisoners have stated that prisoners were shot in Limburg in the camp area “like rabbits.” The SS are said to have shot at prisoners trying to escape or those who were not quick enough to get out from under cover once the bombing raids were over. It was reported that a Russian prisoner, who had attempted to escape and was recaptured, was forced to wear a sign that said “I am here again.” After this humiliation, it is said that the Kapos beat him to death.

Due to the paucity of sources, it is not possible to determine the exact numbers of those killed in the SS-EBB XIII. Data from the International Tracing Service (ITS) put the number of Belgians at over 15; 8 of these prisoners—more than half—did not live past liberation. In February 1945, 2 died from unknown reasons, 3 died in Dachau, and 3 died in Buchenwald.

On March 4, 1945, 77 prisoners were chosen in Buchenwald and sent to the SS-EBB XIII. Three days later the following entry was entered in the Work Statistics: “The SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade XIII is dissolved and all the prisoners have been put on the transport ‘Desert.’” At this point, signs of the dissolution of the construction brigade were already evident. In the middle of March, the different prisoner groups at the various locations were sent to the Mücke train station, some on foot and some by train. About 230 prisoners marched from there to Wetzlar. During the march, exhausted and fleeing prisoners are said to have been shot. From Wetzlar, the prisoners were taken in a train in open cars to Buchenwald. There, 185 prisoners of the SS-EBB XIII were registered. It would seem that not all prisoners arrived
simultaneously at Wetzlar, as U.S. troops caught up with a
group of marching prisoners at the end of March in the Wetz-
lar environs and freed them.

As with other construction brigade leaders, the former SS-
Obersturmführer Bernhard Kuiper hid his responsibility for
the SS construction brigade. In a denazification proceeding
in 1948, he was successful in portraying his activities as an
architect in the SS as being forced. Although there were state-
ments that Kuiper had “emphasized his role as a member of
the SS and SD during the Hitler regime” and had ruthlessly
represented the interests of the Nazi Party, the court accepted
Kuiper’s own statements. As was usual in denazification pro-
cedings, Kuiper was asked what he knew about concentra-
tion camps, Jewish persecution, and the situation of forced
laborers, both male and female. He denied having an inner
understanding of the concentration camp system. He said: “I
knew that the prisoners had to work, but I did not know in
detail what they did. . . . I knew things which were relevant to
the construction sector. Otherwise it was impossible to hear
anything. I thought that life in the concentration camps was
not pleasant. What the disciplinary punishments were in the
camp, I cannot say.”

Kuiper concealed that he was the responsible leader of the
SS-EBB XIII. For the relevant period he admitted to have
worked at the Erfurt Railroad Directorate. In a detailed biog-
raphy, which he wrote in January 1946 while interned in
Neueneggamme, he even suggested resistance system: “In the
spring of 1945 I was given my last post as part of the Waffen-
SS. It was with the Erfurt Railroad Directorate as a member
of the staff of the construction detail. I worked with the rail-
road engineers, in a democratic sense and as a result of their
requests engaged in difficult negotiations with the military
commander at Schleiz/Southeast Thuringia toward the end
of April which prevented 250 railroad workers from being
called up to the Volkssturm.”

The prosecutors for the Central Office of State Justice
Administrations (ZdL) in Ludwigsburg saw through Kuiper’s
tactical maneuvers, as in the 1970s they were busy with the
events in the SS-EBB XIII and in conjunction with which
they questioned Kuiper. However, it was already too late for a
successful investigation. Many witnesses had already died or
could not exactly remember about the happenings of the con-
struction brigade due to the elapsed time. The State Prosecu-
tor’s Office at the State Court in Limburg closed the
proceedings on March 20, 1974.

SOURCES The SS-Eisenbahnbaubrigade XIII was first men-
tioned in a published dissertation on SS construction bri-
gades, Karola Fings, Krieg, Gesellschaft, and KZ: Himmlers
SS-Baubrigaden (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005).
The dissertation refers to the sparse and widely held
sources, almost all of which are referred to in this article. The
most important source is the investigation files of the ZdL
(IV 406 AR-Z 33/74) at BA-L. Additional archival sources can
be found in BA-B, BA-K, AG-B, and ITS.

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NOTES
1. KL Dachau Transportliste, January 18, 1945, BA-L,
ZdL IV 406 AR-Z 33/74, pp. 53–64.
4. BA-B, BDC/PK, RS, SSO Bernhard Kuiper, born Au-
gust 30, 1907; BA-K, Z 42 III/1526.
5. “Im Zuge der Verlagerungsaktion beim SS-
Wirtschafts-’Russland-Süd’ freigewordene SS-Führer,” n.d.,
in ZdL IV 406 AR-Z 33/74, p. 79.
6. Der Inspekteur der SS-Frontarbeiter und SS-
Baubrigaden, March 2, 1945, BA, NS 19/771.
7. ITS, Bescheinigungen über belgische Häftlinge, in
ZdL IV 406 AR-Z 33/74, pp. 393–397.
8. Hubert A., August 30, 1972, in ibid., p. 117; and Sta.
Ludwigsburg, January 25, 1974, in ibid., p. 454.
12. ITS Bescheinigungen über belgische Häftlinge, in
ibid., pp. 393–397.
13. KL Buchenwald, Arbeitsstatistik, March 4 and 7, 1945,
in THStA-W, NS 4 Buchenwald Nr. 135.
14. Entry Note, April 1, 1945, in ibid., KZ Buchenwald
Nr. 4, Bd. 7/1, p. 10; “Nach Buchenwald wegen Feindnähe
15. Protokoll Spruchgerichtsverfahren, October 29, 1948,
BA-K, Z 42 III/1526.
16. Lebenslauf Kuiper, January 29, 1948, in ibid.