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SLAVE LABOR

in Nazi Concentration Camps

MARC BUGGELN

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Translated by
PAUL COHEN

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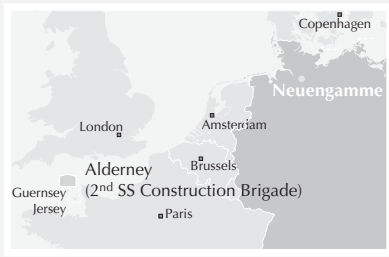
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List of Abbreviations





AFA	Akkumulatoren Fabrik AG
AG	Aktiengesellschaft (roughly equivalent to plc)
DRZW	<i>Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg</i>
DZW	<i>Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg</i>
GBA	Generalbevollmächtigter für den Arbeitseinsatz (General Plenipotentiary for Labor Deployment)
GmbH	Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung (limited company)
HGW	Hermann Göring Werke
HSSPF	Höherer SS- und Polizeiführer (higher SS leader and police chief)
I.G. Farben	Interessengemeinschaft Farbenindustrie AG
IKL	Inspektion der Konzentrationslager (Inspectorate of the Concentration Camps)
IMT	International Military Tribunal
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers' Party, otherwise known as Nazi Party)
OKH	Oberkommando des Heeres (Army High Command)
OKM	Oberkommando der Kriegsmarine (Naval High Command)
OKW	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (Supreme Command of the Armed Forces)
OT	Organisation Todt (Todt Organization)
RGI	Reichsgruppe Industrie
RM	Reichsmark
RMRuK	Reichsministerium für Rüstung und Kriegsproduktion (Ministry of Armaments and War Production)
RSHA	Reichssicherheitshauptamt (Reich Security Head Office)
RWiM	Reichswirtschaftsministerium (Ministry of the Economy)
SA	Sturmabteilung
SS	Schutzstaffel
StA	Staatsarchiv (state archive)
Stalag	Stammlager (main camp for POWs)
USSBS	United States Strategic Bombing Survey
WVHA	Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt (Economics and Administration Department)

Archives List

ADMS	Archiv des Danneil-Museums Salzwedel
AGD	Archiv der KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau
AGN	Archiv der KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme
AGS	Archiv der KZ-Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen
AHB	Archiv der Handelskammer Bremen
AHK	Archiv der Handelskammer Hamburg
ASS	Archiv der Stiftung für Sozialgeschichte Bremen
AYV	Archiv der Gedenkstätte Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, Israel
BAB	Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde
BAB/BDC	Bundesarchiv Berlin, Bestand ehemaliges Berlin Document Center
BAB/SAPMO	Bundesarchiv Berlin, Stiftung Archiv der Parteien- und Massenorganisationen der DDR
BAK	Bundesarchiv Koblenz
BA-MA	Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg
BA-ZA DH	Bundesarchiv-Zwischenarchiv Dahlwitz-Hoppegarten
BStU	Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik
FZH	Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte Hamburg
HStAH	Niedersächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Hannover
IWM	Imperial War Museum, London, UK
LAB	Landesarchiv Berlin
LHAB	Landeshauptarchiv Brandenburg in Potsdam
LHASA/W	Landeshauptarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt Magdeburg, Außenstelle Wernigerode
PRO	The National Archives, Public Record Office, Kew/London, UK
SDAG	Schriftgut und Dokumentenarchiv der Drägerwerk AG
StaB	Staatsarchiv Bremen
StadtAW	Stadtarchiv Wilhelmshaven
StadtAL	Stadtarchiv Lüneburg
StaHH	Staatsarchiv Hamburg
StaO	Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv Osnabrück
StaN	Staatsarchiv Nürnberg
WASL	Deutsche Dienststelle für die Benachrichtigung der nächsten Angehörigen von Gefallenen der ehemaligen deutschen Wehrmacht
ZStL	Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen Ludwigsburg



Neuengamme concentration camp

-  main camp
-  subcamp
-  location with a number of camps
-  "evacuation camp"





Introduction

500 foreign female concentration camp prisoners, political, and criminal. Adjacent barracks camp, 11 guards, 17,000 m barbed wire, 380 Volts, tripwire. . . . The German foremen should be replaced by prisoners because the inmate overseers take a tougher line. Work performance is highly satisfactory. Productivity is higher than with the same number of German workers because work hours are longer and absenteeism is lower. . . . The gentlemen are of the opinion that the conditions sound harsher than they actually are.¹

Hamburg, summer 1944. The armaments industry in the northern German port city had just recovered from the devastating air raids of Operation Gomorrah and was gearing up to boost Germany's production of military hardware one last time. In order to achieve the targeted increase in production, the Germans planned to use thousands of concentration camp prisoners, whose transfer from Auschwitz to Hamburg had been approved. This prompted Rudolf Blohm and high-ranking employees at his huge shipyards to consult with the production managers at the Drägerwerke, a top gas mask manufacturer in the Third Reich, on their experience with using concentration camp prisoners. During a tour of the subcamp on the premises of the Drägerwerke, the industrialists had positive things to say about the work performed by the inmates. Aside from the ostensibly reassuring comment that "the conditions sound harsher than they actually are," the visit revealed that the confrontation between the entrepreneurs and the SS on the one side and the concentration camp forced laborers on the other was a matter of life and death for the detainees. The fence surrounding the camp had a lethal level of voltage. All means available were used to prevent escapes; the only alternatives for the prisoners were to work or die.

Whether these prisoners even had this choice—or whether it was in fact a case of to work *and* die—is a question that historians have grappled with right from the start. Already during the first postwar trials, Allied prosecutors made reference to the contemporary Nazi principle of "extermination through labor" to convince the tribunals of the unique criminal character of the concentration camp system. Although there is widespread agreement among researchers today that German industrialists were not primarily motivated by a desire to save concentration camp

¹ Report by an employee of Blohm & Voss concerning the tour of the Drägerwerke on August 29, 1944, in: StaHH, 621–1 Blohm & Voss 23, Vol. 17. In the margin of the document are handwritten comments by shipyard owner Rudolf Blohm that indicate that he was present during the visit.

inmates, other aspects of this issue remain hotly debated. Was the principle of “extermination through labor” characteristic of all uses of inmate labor, or did the individual situations of the detainees vary according to random and local factors? Were the motives of the SS and the entrepreneurs diametrically opposed or were there common interests? Are their motives accurately described by the parameters of extermination and labor?

This book examines the use of concentration camp inmates in the German war economy. Their use will first be explored for the entire concentration camp system, thus paving the way for an in-depth study based on the subcamp system of the Neuengamme concentration camp, which was located in the city of Hamburg. Leading industries, government agencies, and individuals were instrumental in establishing the subcamp system. What role did they play in establishing, maintaining, and closing the subcamps of the Neuengamme concentration camp? What concrete interests did each group have? How was it possible to reconcile the use of inmates with the group’s individual traditions and customs?

By the end of the war, there were 85 subcamps associated with the Neuengamme complex, which had been established primarily for key military-industrial projects. Neuengamme played a key role in early attempts to use prisoner labor for the armaments industry. Indeed, it was one of the first concentration camps to dispatch mobile construction brigades to clear rubble, rescue survivors, and engage in salvage operations in large German cities devastated by Allied bombing raids.

In 1944, an increasing number of German companies and government agencies became interested in using concentration camp inmate labor as the retreat of the Wehrmacht from the occupied territories resulted in a dwindling supply of civilian forced laborers. From the main camp in Neuengamme, there soon existed a network of subcamps that extended across nearly all of northern Germany. The main camp became a center for the selection and transport of prisoners who were fit to work, and it became a camp for the sick and the dying who were ravaged by the harsh labor conditions in the camps. Of the 50,000 inmates who were detained in the Neuengamme complex² in 1944, roughly 40,000 of them—including 13,000 female inmates—were housed in the subcamps and used as forced laborers.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE FACTORS RELATED TO THE LIVING AND WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE SUBCAMPS

One of the focal points of the present work is the question of the concrete and diverse living and working conditions of prisoners in the subcamps. After making an initial comparison of the individual subcamps based on their mortality rates, it immediately became clear that there existed significant differences. Whereas hardly

² The term complex will be used in this text to designate the combination of the main camp and the subcamps.

anyone died at the Lütjenburg subcamp, where the inmates worked in the highly specialized production of gyrocompasses for V2 rockets, hundreds of inmates perished within an extremely short period of time digging antitank ditches in Husum on the German North Sea coast.³

A systematic comparison of the different subcamps revealed the factors that determined the conditions of life in the camps and were a matter of life and death for the detainees. Directly comparing mortality rates in the subcamps is a highly important means of evaluation for my study as this data provides the best gauge for assessing the inmates' chances of survival in the subcamps. The original goal was to develop a typology of the various subcamps. However, the resulting analysis revealed that it was not possible to classify the subcamps into a limited number of categories due to a wide range of factors that influenced conditions in a variety of ways. Instead, the factors that affect life and survival are analyzed and weighed up in a systematic comparison.

Such a comparison runs the risk of rating the inmates' ordeals on a scale of suffering, while making light of the experiences of prisoners in comparatively better subcamps.⁴ This should be avoided at all costs. Suffering is always subjective, and it is not up to this study to assess the extent of the personal suffering of each individual subcamp prisoner. The comparative analysis conducted here aims to assess each inmate's chances of survival in each individual subcamp and explores the reasons behind the differences in the mortality rates. This analysis is largely supported by many survivors' accounts, which are characterized by a very precise view of the specific differences between the individual camps. By contrast, other former inmates generally relate their experiences in different camps as equally gruesome. Both points of view are legitimate. The differences examined in the present study are of a relatively minor nature. There were only very few subcamps in which inmates were so adequately nourished, for example, that at the end of the war they could have eaten a normal meal without becoming severely ill or dying.

My initial hypothesis for this comparison was that the type of work that the prisoners performed had a decisive impact on their chances of survival. This was in line with the research conducted by Florian Freund and Bertrand Perz, who were able to demonstrate for the Mauthausen subcamp system that camps with inmates working in industrial production had an annual mortality rate of approximately 5 percent, while the mortality rate in construction camps was around 30 percent.⁵ It turns out, however, that such a clear-cut difference between construction and production camps did not exist for the Neuengamme subcamps. This led to the development of a more detailed breakdown of the types of work performed. Moreover, the comparative research conducted to date does not take into account the fact that the mortality rates in the women's subcamps were considerably lower than in the men's subcamps.

All of this prompted the creation of an analytical framework that encompasses numerous factors (the inmates' gender, the size of the subcamp, the priority of the

³ Benz/Distel (eds), *Ort*, Vol. 5, pp. 477–80; Bästlein, *KZ Husum*.

⁴ Reemtsma, *Vertrauen*, p. 341.

⁵ Freund, "Mauthausen," p. 272; Perz, "Arbeitseinsatz."

work performed, the perpetrators' actions, the individual composition of the guard details, etc.), which are weighted to determine the prisoners' chances of survival.

PERPETRATORS AND ACTS OF VIOLENCE

One of the main goals of my work is to take a closer look at the various perpetrators and their actions. I examined the perpetrators in the camps as well as the industrialists and bureaucrats who planned the utilization of labor. In the process, a connection was made between each individual field of work, biographical backgrounds, and concrete practices. In addition, my methodology relies on praxeological approaches to describe the perpetrators' behavior.⁶

The first studies of the concentration camp SS tended to describe the perpetrators as a barbaric horde, constantly capable of engaging in acts of wanton brutality.⁷ Wolfgang Sofsky, however, emphasizes that the majority of the SS men in the camps exercised violence in a routine manner, which triggered hardly any strong emotions among the guards, nor was it sadistic in nature.⁸ Likewise, when differentiating between various types of perpetrators, Gerhard Paul and Klaus-Michael Mallmann place great importance on the question of the perpetrators' motives.⁹ The motivation of the perpetrators is undoubtedly a key aspect of perpetrator research. Within the scope of this study, however, another area of focus has been selected. The point of departure here is the question of which individuals in which positions were likely to engage in which actions. For instance, the behavior of an SS officer occasionally changed decisively when he was promoted from the position of roll call leader to camp commander.

The SS was an all-male military organization that saw itself as a racial and ideological elite. Right from the founding of the organization in 1925, the history of the SS was closely associated with the glorification and use of violence. With the formation of the SS Death's Head Units (*SS-Totenkopfverbände*), which were established in 1934 specifically to guard the concentration camps, these tendencies were intensified and perpetuated by a highly organized military training in carrying out acts of violence. The Dachau system, introduced in 1934 by the first inspector of the concentration camps, Theodor Eicke, was widely adopted for the training of camp guards and served as a guideline of sorts until the end of the war. This training relied on a dual approach: squad leaders used drills in brutality to break the wills of the SS men, while the recruits were taught right from the start to beat and torture concentration camp inmates.

The men trained in Eicke's "school of violence" remained in leading positions at most concentration camps until the end of the war. Max Pauly, the commandant of

⁶ Bourdieu, *Outline*, pp. 72–158; Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*; Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*; Lüdtkke (ed.), *History of Everyday Life*; Bonnell/Hunt (eds), *Beyond the Cultural Turn*; Spiegel (ed.), *Practicing History*; Reichardt, "Praxeologische Geschichtswissenschaft"; Reichardt, "Praxeologie."

⁷ Kogon, *SS-Staat*, pp. 352–5.

⁸ Sofsky, *Order*, pp. 97–116.

⁹ Paul/Mallmann, "Sozialisation."

Neuengamme, was a so-called “old fighter” (*Alter Kämpfer*)¹⁰ and had already been assigned to the concentration camp for quite some time. A number of the department heads under Pauly in the main camp also had many years of socialization within the concentration camp system.

This certainly could not be said of all the subcamp commanders, though. Many of them had not become part of the concentration camp system until after the war began. At the majority of the Neuengamme subcamps, only a small number of long-serving and experienced SS men were deployed in late 1944. The majority of the guards in the subcamps were no longer SS men from the German Reich. Starting in 1941, these guards were increasingly supplemented or replaced by ethnic German SS men, so-called *Volksdeutsche*, who were primarily drafted from Southeastern Europe. By 1944, even this supplementary source of manpower was no longer sufficient, and the majority of camp guards were now Wehrmacht soldiers, members of the *Volkssturm*,¹¹ customs agents, police officers, and railroad men—along with female overseers in the women’s camps.

The constantly changing composition of the guard staff is essential to the analysis of the situation in the camps. How did the newly arriving groups react to the brutality of the SS guards? Did a camaraderie of violence predominate, or was there an overriding sense that things should be done “by the book”?

One of the chief aims of my study is to analyze and describe the possible courses of action available to the SS and the other guards—and to some extent to the inmates. The concept of “possible courses of action” (*Handlungsoptionen*) implies, however, that the acting individual has a certain degree of freedom of choice. In principle, I assume that this freedom was available to the SS and other guards at the concentration camps, whereas it was of an extremely limited nature for the prisoners.¹²

Spatially speaking, concentration camps were highly limited areas, and there was a high degree of mutual social control. Nevertheless, there were cases in which guards used their positions to the benefit of inmates. It is important to keep in mind that in most cases concentration camp guards were not actually compelled to use excessive force, but merely generally allowed to do so. There were very few situations—for example, when prisoners escaped—in which guards could expect to be punished if they refrained from violence.

Although the main focus of the analysis is on direct physical violence, it would be inappropriate here to reduce the concept of violence to physical violence, as is generally accepted in Germany in accordance with the theories of the late sociologist Heinrich Popitz. Popitz defined violence as follows: “Violence is an action of power leading to intentional physical injury of others.”¹³ However, in addition to being beaten, kicked, hung, etc., prisoners in the concentration camps were subject

¹⁰ *Alter Kämpfer* = a member of the Nazi “old guard,” i.e. an individual who joined the NSDAP before Hitler seized power in 1933.

¹¹ *Volkssturm* = a German national militia formed during the final months of the war.

¹² For further reading on the term *Handlungsoption*, see: Lüdtke, “Fehlgreifen.”

¹³ Popitz, *Phänomene*, p. 73; Sofsky, *Traktat*; Trotha, *Soziologie*; Nedelmann, “Gewaltsoziologie.” The study of violence still varies markedly from country to country, leading to considerable barriers

to other types of violence.¹⁴ The high mortality rates in the camps cannot be explained without introducing a more comprehensive definition of violence, which addresses the structural nature of a system that provides inadequate food, clothing, and shelter.

The nutritional situation is one example of a type of violence in the camps. The severe hunger experienced in many subcamps did not reach its culmination until foodstuffs were stolen by the SS and prisoner functionaries. At the same time, the systematic starvation of prisoners was the calculated result of the meager rations approved by the Reich Ministry of Food and Agriculture. The majority of the inmates in the subcamps died of hunger and disease. Nonetheless, the constant threat of violence was necessary to prevent inmates from escaping or acquiring food. The phenomenon of starvation in concentration camps shows that it is inappropriate to limit the definition of violence in accordance with Popitz's theories. Instead, it is necessary to examine more closely the connections between direct physical violence and structural violence.¹⁵

INMATE SOCIETY, SURVIVAL TECHNIQUES, AND ORAL HISTORY

Prisoners in the subcamps of the Neuengamme concentration camp were forced to endure scarcity and subjugation. The SS denied the prisoners sufficient access to vital essentials, above all food. They then used the severely weakened inmates for slave labor, which led to further exhaustion and debilitation. The will to survive prompted the prisoners to develop survival strategies and techniques.¹⁶ Generally speaking, the greater the deprivations and the more debilitating the slave labor, the greater the decline in the inmates' chances of survival. Furthermore, it can be assumed that the poorer the conditions in a subcamp, the more fiercely inmates fought for food and clothing to survive. This book examines their living conditions and survival strategies, both from a structural and an individual perspective.

Over the years, researchers have made several attempts to identify approaches that enhanced the inmates' likelihood of surviving. The most impressive effort to date was made by Terrence Des Pres, who describes a type of individual called the "successful survivor," i.e. someone who left behind all traditional moral values and

among the perceptions of Anglo-American, French, and German researchers. Similar approaches are taken by: Collins, *Violence*; Bourke, *Intimate History*; Wieviorka, *Violence*.

¹⁴ For examples of what the Popitz-oriented school of thought defines as violent actions, see: Trotha, *Soziologie*, p. 26. For sound arguments against an overly restrictive definition of physical violence, see: Scheper-Hughes/Bourgois, "Making Sense."

¹⁵ There is, however, legitimate criticism of Johan Galtung's definition of structural violence, which is as follows: "Violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations" (Galtung, "Violence," p. 168). This definition is too broad. Nevertheless, Galtung's stance that refusing to meet essential needs can constitute an act of violence is accurate and helpful to an analysis of the concentration camps.

¹⁶ For a similar analysis, see: Botz, "Binnenstrukturen."

was able to adapt to the world of the concentration camp.¹⁷ In the present work, however, the assumption is that there was no *single* approach that worked, but rather a wide range of survival strategies, whose chances of success largely depended on the conditions in each individual subcamp.

Eyewitness accounts and interviews are a key source of information for this research. In the archives of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial alone there are nearly 1,000 interviews and testimonies that deal with life in one or several of the subcamps. These are unique sources. When it comes to issues that also involve social relationships and emotions, it is essential to take into consideration the subjective nature of such experiences. Only by examining the first-hand accounts of survivors is it possible to shed light on the processes of adapting to an inhuman world and the survival strategies developed there.¹⁸ In that sense, oral histories are more than just an additional source; they make it possible to ask further questions and provide appropriate answers.¹⁹

Since the days of the initial oral history projects, the methodological debate has deepened considerably. Nevertheless, many key issues have by no means been clarified. It is of particular importance to note that the range of available source materials for research in the field of concentration camps is not representative. Only the survivors were able to tell their stories.²⁰ Furthermore, the reporting individuals write or speak in the knowledge of how the story will end. The surviving inmates are fully aware of the dimension of the mass murder, and they speak from the perspective of survival.²¹

On a general level, there is the issue of the reality reference of interviews and testimonies. Today, most researchers agree that these oral histories do not offer a historical portrayal of events, which, it should be noted, no other source can provide either. It is imperative for the survivors of the camps, but also for all other contemporary witnesses, to give meaning to their own real-life experiences and construct their memories accordingly. What's more, recent research shows that human memory does not function as a storage device, but rather that memories are generated in an ongoing creative process.²²

Ulrike Jureit in particular has indicated that she is rather skeptical of the reality reference of accounts by contemporary witnesses.²³ In recent years, a number of empirical studies of the history of concentration camps have concurred with her views. For instance, Jens-Christian Wagner and Hans Ellger argue that it is only marginally possible or useful to verify the testimonies by survivors due to the constructive character of their statements.²⁴ By contrast, Christopher Browning and Hermann Kaienburg contend that a verification of statements is possible based on source comparisons.²⁵ What is surprising about these studies, though, is that

¹⁷ Des Pres, *The Survivor*. ¹⁸ Pollak, *Grenzen*, p. 106.

¹⁹ Niethammer, *Fragen*; Perks/Thomson (eds), *Oral History*.

²⁰ Pollak, *Grenzen*, p. 107; White, "Marking absences."

²¹ Young, *Beschreiben des Holocausts*, p. 58.

²² Jureit, *Konstruktion*, p. 6; Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, chapter 2.

²³ Jureit, *Erinnerungsmuster*. ²⁴ Wagner, *Produktion*, p. 33; Ellger, *Zwangsarbeit*, p. 23.

²⁵ Browning, *Collected Memories*; Kaienburg, *Vernichtung*, p. 21.

only minor differences can be found in the way researchers deal with accounts by contemporary witnesses. Even Wagner and Ellger use quotations from such accounts as if they actually could represent the past.

The present study takes a pragmatic approach that deals productively with the issue of a reality reference. The personal accounts are viewed both as individual constructions by the survivors—in which real-life experiences are processed—and as proof of the actual events that transpired in the camps. The key issue of the concrete events that occurred in the camps will be discussed from diverse perspectives that are not rated in advance on a scale of reality references. A critical historical description, which takes seriously the views of the victims and endeavors to report on the conditions in the camps and the crimes that were committed there, must also rely upon testimonies and interviews as a source. Indeed—and this is one of the goals of my research—that is the only way that an integrated history of the subcamps can be written in line with the work of Saul Friedländer.²⁶

In view of this, an attempt will be made to portray the accounts in their real-life dimension while demonstrating the constructive processes of memory. Consequently, I interpret four accounts by survivors in Chapter 6 in a comprehensive manner and examine these oral histories within the overall context of their life stories. The primary objective here is to use real-life perspectives to lend greater depth and breadth to the systematic and structural analysis of the subcamps.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1 provides background information on the establishment of the subcamps throughout the entire concentration camp system. First, it focuses on the similarities and differences between the diverse concentration camp systems. Second, it analyzes the close connection between the development of the concentration camp system and the course taken by the war. Chapter 2 traces the negotiations between the various groups of actors who were responsible for establishing the subcamps of the Neuengamme concentration camp in northern Germany. Chapter 3 outlines the structural conditions that basically applied to all subcamps, with only minor exceptions.

Chapters 4 through 6 constitute the heart of the work. Chapter 4 systematically compares conditions in the various subcamps of the Neuengamme concentration camp. The mortality rates in each of the camps serve as the main benchmark here. Chapter 5 examines the prisoner populations in the subcamps and the collective and individual survival strategies of the detainees. The first section of the chapter analyzes the conditions in the subcamps. Subsequently, a total of four accounts and interviews with survivors are analyzed. These oral histories provide individual narratives of life in one of the subcamps. In Chapter 6 the focus is on acts of violence and perpetrators. The first section describes and systematically analyzes the

²⁶ Friedländer, "Integrierte Geschichte."

acts of violence committed in the subcamps, while the second section illustrates the different groups of perpetrators based on their areas of responsibility and the diverse factors that led them to become concentration camp guards. Chapter 7 examines the behavior of the local German population that came into contact with the prisoners in the subcamps. Chapter 8 describes the evacuation of the Neuengamme concentration camp and its subcamps.

The present book is based on two German publications. Chapter 1 is an excerpt from a study of the subcamp system,²⁷ while the remaining chapters are from the published version of my dissertation.²⁸ All chapters have been abridged for this publication. Likewise, all chapters were updated in accordance with the latest findings in the literature.

²⁷ Buggeln, *System*.

²⁸ Buggeln, *Arbeit und Gewalt*.

1

Slave Labor in the Nazi Concentration Camps, 1941–45

In 1942, the Nazis systematically began to use concentration camp prisoners as slave labor to drive the German war economy. During the course of World War II, the number of prisoners rose dramatically as the SS strove to make more manpower available. At the same time, the Germans were constantly building new subcamps and, by 1944, the vast majority of the inmates in most concentration camp complexes were detained in these satellite facilities and no longer in the main camps. There is widespread agreement among researchers today concerning these events. Nevertheless, due to the widely dispersed nature of research publications in this field, there are very few comprehensive overviews of the overall development of the subcamps.¹ Consequently, the dimensions of the system, and the importance of the use of concentration camp prisoners in the war economy, still remain very unclear.² Fortunately, our ability to comprehend the extent of this network has vastly improved, primarily thanks to the publication of two multi-volume reference works on the concentration camp system: *Der Ort des Terrors* and *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945*.³ In addition, the first comparative works on the subcamp systems of individual concentration camps have now been published.⁴

According to the encyclopedia *Der Ort des Terrors*, researchers have documented the existence of 23 main concentration camps and a total of 1,154 subcamps under the direction of the SS Economic and Administrative Main Office (*SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt*, or WVHA), starting from the beginning of the war. Listed according to their number of subcamps, the main camps were as follows: Stutthof (210), Dachau (152), Buchenwald (136), Gross-Rosen (100), Sachsenhausen (85), Neuengamme (83), Flossenbürg (83), Natzweiler (52), Auschwitz (47), Mauthausen (45), Mittelbau-Dora (39), Ravensbrück (31), Hinzert (29), Vaivara (21), Kauen (17), Riga (16), Herzogenbusch (13), Lublin/Majdanek (6), Plaszow (6), Bergen-Belsen (3), and without subcamps: Niederhagen/Wewelsburg, Arbeitsdorf, and Warsaw. Jens-Christian Wagner has estimated that there were 260 main

¹ The best overviews of the development of the subcamp system are currently: Orth, *System*, pp. 162–98 and pp. 237–55; Wagner, *Produktion*, pp. 43–118.

² As demonstrated, for example, by the overview of the concentration camp system 1941–44 with its many errors and discrepancies with regard to the development of the subcamps in: Blatman, *Death Marches*, pp. 17–50.

³ Benz/Distel (eds), *Ort*, 9 vols; Megargee (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Camps*, vol. 1.

⁴ Buggeln, *Arbeit und Gewalt*; Schalm, *Überleben*; Adam, *Arbeiterfrage*; Rudorff, *Frauen*.

concentration camps and subcamps in late 1943, roughly 600 in July 1944, and more than 730 in January 1945, whereas Nikolaus Wachsmann recently calculated, based on the German encyclopedia, that there were 557 subcamps in January 1945.⁵ The sheer number of subcamps, however, does little to convey the economic importance of the individual complexes. For instance, the largest subcamp system (Stutthof) was comparatively unimportant from an economic point of view because the majority of the facilities were small camps where inmates manufactured products that were of only marginal importance to the war effort. The most economically important complex was the southern subcamp network associated with the camps in Dachau, Flossenbürg, and Mauthausen.

This chapter is intended to provide an overview of this extensive system of subcamps, including a close examination of camp populations and mortality rates, and a more precise analysis of certain economic areas that were of key importance to the system's development. Furthermore, it explores the differences between the individual concentration camp complexes, which often primarily reflect the subcamps' varying degrees of economic importance. This analysis also focuses on the close connection between slave labor using concentration camp inmates and civilian forced labor.⁶ I shall also assess to what extent the commonly used phrase "extermination through labor" or Daniel Blatman's suggested use of the term "genocide" are fitting descriptions for the subcamp system.⁷

Donald Bloxham recently stressed that the Holocaust research conducted to date has largely overlooked the importance of the war and German aspirations to become a superpower.⁸ One could level similar criticism at the research that has been conducted on the concentration camp system. What's more, Bloxham argues against interpreting the Nazi state first and foremost as a "racial state,"⁹ and underscoring racism as the system's one and only guiding principle: "It is important to conceive of the German state less as a racist polity with an implacable desire for genocide on principle, and more as an utterly ruthless great power concerned with the control and solidity of its sphere of interest, in the form of its wartime alliance."¹⁰ The relationship between racist ideology, the desire for territorial expansion, and ad hoc policies dictated by the course of the war is an essential issue, not only for this chapter, but for the entire book.

⁵ Wagner, "Work," p. 135; Wachsmann, *History*, ch. 9. This largely hinges, of course, on whether smaller camps have been regarded as independent subcamps or as subdivisions of other subcamps. In this book every camp will be called a subcamp where a group of concentration camp prisoners was kept by the SS outside the main camp for at least a few days, but generally indefinitely, yet still remained under the authority of the commandant of the main camp. By its own estimates, the SS had some 500 subcamps in January 1945. This number comes from a statement explaining an application for a promotion for Gerhard Maurer, in: BAB/BDC Gerhard Maurer. I would like to thank Stefan Hördler for pointing out the existence of this document.

⁶ For general information on forced labor: Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers*; Spoerer, *Zwangsarbeit*.

⁷ Blatman, *Death Marches*.

⁸ Bloxham, *Final Solution*. For a similar analysis, see: Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*.

⁹ Cf. Burleigh/Wippermann, *Racial State*.

¹⁰ Bloxham, "Holocaust in kontinentaler Perspektive," p. 238.

CONCENTRATION CAMPS BEFORE THE WAR

From the moment the Nazis seized power, the camps played a central role, and maintained their importance—albeit with evolving functions—until the fall of the Third Reich. The legal basis for the establishment of the camps was the “Decree of the Reich President for the Protection of People and State,” issued on 28 February 1933, commonly known as the “Reichstag Fire Decree.” This declared a civil state of emergency in the German Reich, enabling the detention of political opponents without trial. The Nazi leadership and local Nazi cadres used this law to send political opponents to concentration camps, mainly targeting communists, Social Democrats, and labor union activists. In the beginning, there were approximately 100 concentration camps. Many of them were established in abandoned factories, prisons, workhouses, country estates, castles, schools, barracks, and even on a ship. The diversity of architecture was matched by the diversity of administrative structures. Various organizations built camps, including the SS, the SA, the Gestapo, and several local state ministries. According to Nikolaus Wachsmann, between 150,000 and 200,000 people were subjected to temporary detention without trial in the year 1933.¹¹

Starting in mid-1934, these so-called “preventative detention camps” (*Schutzhaftlager*) fell increasingly under the centralized control of the SS. In July 1934, Himmler appointed Theodor Eicke as the head of Germany’s Concentration Camp Inspectorate (*Inspektion der Konzentrationslager*, or IKL). Eicke, the Dachau camp commandant, had already established a system of discipline and punishment in 1933 that would be emulated by all other concentration camps.¹² Many political prisoners were eventually released, having been successfully silenced by brute terror. By 1935, there were only five concentration camps left, with around 4,000 inmates, and it was unclear whether any more camps would be needed.

At Himmler’s insistence, however, Hitler eventually decided in 1936 to build new camps, which would focus more on interning opponents who had been defined as either “racial” or “antisocial” enemies of the state. The newly built facilities at Sachsenhausen (in September 1936) and Buchenwald (in July 1937) would become the models for future camps. After these new camps were opened, the prisoner population gradually rose again, so that by the start of the war, the concentration camps held about 21,000 inmates.¹³

Labor in concentration camps before 1938

As early as 1933, the system of discipline and punishment established by Eicke at Dachau included compulsory labor for all inmates, a requirement that the SS later extended to all other concentration camps. The prevailing notion in the literature is that Eicke’s use of forced labor was mainly intended to torment the inmates. However, even during this early phase, there were already other motivations for

¹¹ Wachsmann, “Dynamics,” p. 18.

¹² Orth, *System*, pp. 26–33.

¹³ Wachsmann, “Dynamics”; Orth, *System*, pp. 23–66.

using forced labor in the camps. For the SS, one of the main reasons was financial. Local states were asking the Reich government to share the costs of this “preventative detention” because these internments had been ordered by the Reich itself. Yet the Reich Interior Ministry would finance this parallel penal system only under certain conditions, including a demand that costs be reduced through inmate labor.¹⁴ A second possible motive was Himmler’s desire to establish his own empire. Until 1933, the SS did not own any significant buildings or properties, nor did it have its own supply systems. By acquiring the huge industrial site at Dachau and building its own workshops—which were to supply the needs of not only the camp, but also the SS troops—Himmler was able to lay the first cornerstone of his SS empire. Furthermore, the use of inmate labor at Dachau allowed the SS to publicly claim that “socially useless people” were being put to “useful work,” a point often emphasized in German media reports at the time.

Thus, in addition to making the prisoners suffer, the SS introduced forced labor at Dachau in a bid to become a major economic and political player. During the early years at Dachau, the camp’s labor system developed a two-tiered structure. One tier involved heavy, sometimes meaningless labor, which was mainly aimed at terrorizing the detainees. The other tier involved doing useful work for the SS, under much better conditions, which led to the creation of an extensive workshop system and the expansion of the Dachau camp.

The development of SS business enterprises since 1938

It was only in 1937, when full employment had largely been achieved in the Reich, that the SS received increasing demands to use prisoners, not only for developing its own camps and workshops, but also for the benefit of the state. The SS responded by collaborating with Albert Speer, who had become head of the General Construction Inspectorate for the Reich Capital on 30 January 1937, under the orders of Hitler, with sole responsibility for redesigning Berlin. However, due to the accelerating military build-up and the shortage of labor and construction materials, Speer’s projects were threatened with failure from day one. Himmler offered to help, suggesting that inmate labor be used to supply Speer with granite and bricks. Over the course of 1937/38, Speer and Himmler came to an agreement. Thanks to this cooperative effort, Himmler and Eicke were able to silence most criticism of the concentration camps, and also ensure that the SS maintained control over the camp labor force.¹⁵

On April 29, 1938, the German Earth and Stone Works, known by its German abbreviation DESt, was founded by Arthur Ahrens and Dr. Walter Salpeter, who both had the SS rank of *Sturmabführer* and would together play the role of official proprietors. However, the DESt was under the *de facto* control of Himmler and his chief administrator Oswald Pohl. Shortly after its founding, the DESt signed a contract with the General Construction Inspectorate on June 30, 1938, in

¹⁴ Pingel, *Häftlinge*, p. 35.

¹⁵ Schulte, *Zwangsarbeit*, pp. 111–14.

which Speer guaranteed the purchase of 120 million bricks per annum for ten years, with the SS receiving an advance payment of RM 9.5 million. On July 6, 1938, there was a ground-breaking ceremony for what was planned to be the world's largest brickyard at the time, located in Oranienburg, just 2 kilometers from the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. A new main camp had also been established by May 1938 in Bavaria at Flossenbürg, where inmates mainly did quarry work at the nearby granite pits. Austria was chosen for another concentration camp, also at a location mainly selected for its proximity to nearby quarries, with the first inmates arriving at Mauthausen in August 1938. Soon after their arrival, the prisoners were put to work in the camp's quarries. In late 1939, the SS began construction of a subcamp in nearby Gusen, where the detainees were also to do quarry work. In late August 1938, the DESt acquired an old brickyard in the Hamburg district of Neuengamme, thus beginning the first phase of a new concentration camp for Germany's northwest region, which had been in the planning for three years.

Hence, the large main camps were located either on the rural outskirts of cities (such as at Dachau, Sachsenhausen, Neuengamme, and Buchenwald), or in relatively remote rural regions (such as at Ravensbrück, Mauthausen, and Flossenbürg). With three of the camps (Mauthausen, Flossenbürg, and Neuengamme), economic factors played a key role in the process of selecting a location. Work at the quarries and in the brickyards was backbreaking, and even though inmate labor had increased in economic value with the growth of SS business enterprises after 1938, and business projects had become more important for concentration camps, this did nothing to improve conditions for the prisoners.

EXPANSION OF THE SUBCAMP SYSTEM UNTIL THE SUMMER OF 1943

Initial collaborations between industry and the SS

As early as 1940/41, industrial companies and other organizations such as the Wehrmacht made initial attempts to use concentration camp prisoners as a source of labor.¹⁶ By far the most noteworthy example of this was when I.G. Farben endeavored to acquire inmates from Auschwitz to work at its new Buna plant. Despite the project's enormous prestige, it by no means enjoyed the unconditional support of the SS. The driving force for the collaboration was more Hermann Göring than Heinrich Himmler. No subcamp was built for I.G. Farben in 1941. Instead, the prisoners had to travel every day between the construction site and the main camp. Hence, this was essentially a work brigade from the Auschwitz concentration camp. In late 1941, this collaboration was on the verge of failing because, in the eyes of the SS, the settlement plans in Eastern Europe were more important.¹⁷ By the turn of the year 1941/42, the SS assumed that it had more than

¹⁶ Benz/Distel (eds), *Ort*, vol. 3, pp. 205–6; for the Neuengamme concentration camp, see ch. 2.

¹⁷ Schmaltz, "Die IG Farbenindustrie."

enough prisoners for the labor required to pursue these settlement plans. Consequently, it was at this point in time that the SS engaged in the most prolific murdering spree of the Third Reich's concentration camps in the early part of the war, i.e. until 1944.¹⁸

This system changed when Germany lost strategic battles against the Soviet Union. The concentration camp system became a part of these changes, which affected the entire war economy. By the end of 1941, Germany's leaders realized that it was imperative that they reorganize armaments production if they still hoped to have a chance of winning the war. The Blitzkrieg,¹⁹ which had proved so successful earlier in the war, had failed before the gates of Moscow. The new warfare concept combined the attempt to exponentially increase industrial output based on Fordist mass production methods with the ultra-radical plans of National Socialist and imperialist ideology.²⁰

There was widespread agreement that the necessary increase in armaments production required a centralization of authority. As the new Reichsminister for armaments and war production, it was Albert Speer's job to achieve these goals.²¹ Securing a sufficient labor pool presented a major problem. Indeed, instead of releasing soldiers from the front to work in armaments production, as was planned until November 1941, the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, or OKW) now focused on "reforming and replenishing powerful offensive units."²² This decision made it clear that the German armaments industry would immediately face a dramatic shortage of workers.

As early as the fall of 1941, certain segments of the Nazi leadership felt that the Reich Ministry of Labor could not meet the growing demands.²³ Finally, Fritz Sauckel, Gauleiter of Thuringia, was appointed general plenipotentiary for the employment of labor (GBA) in March 1942.²⁴ Sauckel's stated objective was to recruit massive numbers of foreign workers for the German armaments industry within an extremely short period. This policy turned out to be highly successful. During the first eight months of his campaign, Sauckel reported that he had brought 2.7 million workers into the Reich, including 1.37 million Soviet forced laborers, 417,000 prisoners of war, 291,000 Poles from the so-called General-gouvernement, and 168,000 French.²⁵

Integrating concentration camps into the labor recruitment drive

The increasing use of concentration camp prisoners in the armaments industry went hand in hand with the establishment of Sauckel's agency. In January and

¹⁸ This was Aktion 14f13 (the murder of sick prisoners) and Aktion 14f14 (the murder of Soviet POWs). Both programs were abandoned as prisoner labor became more important for the SS: Hördler, *Ordnung*, pp. 97–116.

¹⁹ Toozé, *Wages*, pp. 368–95 and 429–60.

²⁰ Toozé, *Wages*, p. 550.

²¹ Eichholtz, *Kriegswirtschaft*, vol. 2, pp. 25–36.

²² Thomas, *Geschichte*, p. 479.

²³ Eichholtz, "Vorgeschichte."

²⁴ Eichholtz, "Vorgeschichte"; Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers*, pp. 161–2.

²⁵ For information on these figures, see: Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers*, p. 192.

February 1942, the SS still had no clear approach when responding to initiatives by private companies and the Wehrmacht. During this period, the SS was primarily preoccupied with its own settlement projects.²⁶ It was not until Speer and Sauckel were appointed that the SS realized that it was in danger of being relieved of its command over the prisoners. When the two administrations under Pohl were merged to create the SS-WVHA on February 1, there were initially no plans to incorporate the IKL into the new agency. It was not until March 4 that Himmler told Pohl over the phone that he had decided to include the IKL in the WVHA because he had heard at the Führer's headquarters of the possibility of the appointment of a general plenipotentiary for the employment of labor.²⁷

On March 16, 1942, the IKL became Office Group D of the SS-WVHA. The former director of the IKL, Richard Glücks, was appointed to head up the new department, and the majority of his top staff members were transferred to the new organization. At first glance, just about everything seemed unchanged, at least from an organizational perspective. Nonetheless, Pohl had effectively managed to place the IKL under his authority, and could now give direct instructions to the concentration camp inspectors. All in all, Office Group D represented only a comparatively small part of the WVHA apparatus. While the WVHA employed some 1,500 people during its heyday, only roughly 100 of these employees worked for Office Group D.²⁸ During the course of the war, it was above all Department D II (labor deployment) that gained importance under the direction of its dynamic director, 34-year-old SS-Sturmbannführer Gerhard Maurer, who became Glücks's deputy in November 1943.²⁹

To maintain his authority over the use of concentration camp prisoners as a workforce, Himmler rapidly sought to forge agreements with the new strongman of the armaments industry, Albert Speer. In fact, on the day that the IKL was incorporated into the WVHA, Glücks met with Speer's key staff members (Karl-Otto Saur and Walther Schieber) to negotiate the use of inmates in the armaments industry. The position of the SS in the negotiations was comparatively strong at this point in time, so the SS made the following demands: "In accordance with an order by the Reichsführer SS, all production must remain within the camps."³⁰ This demand remained unchallenged, and it was confirmed three days later during a meeting with the Führer that briefly touched on the use of prisoner labor in the main camps of Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, Neuengamme, Auschwitz, and Ravensbrück.³¹

For a long time, most historians assumed that the SS subsequently strove to manage on their own the armaments production facilities that had been transferred

²⁶ Allen, *Business of Genocide*, pp. 148–58; Schulte, *Zwangsarbeit*, p. 212.

²⁷ Schulte, *Zwangsarbeit*, pp. 200–1.

²⁸ Georg, *Unternehmungen*, p. 33; Naasner, *Machtzentren*, p. 258; Schulte, *Zwangsarbeit*, p. 206.

²⁹ For information on Maurer: Allen, *Business of Genocide*, pp. 182–90; Schulte, *Zwangsarbeit*, pp. 389–92.

³⁰ Staatsarchiv Nürnberg (StAN), NO-2468.

³¹ Boelcke (ed.), *Deutschlands Rüstung*, p. 79.

to the camps.³² Nevertheless, the following was noted in the minutes of the meeting: “There is agreement that the manufacturing facilities transferred to the concentration camps shall be run by the corresponding company, both in terms of production and business administration.”³³ Contrary to this agreement, however, over the following months the SS tried repeatedly to bring up the topic of taking over armaments production plants. For the most part, such ideas had to be shelved. One should therefore take with a grain of salt the theory that the Reichsführer-SS acquired “an increasing appetite for greater influence over the production transferred to the concentration camps.”³⁴ Over the following months, the joint objective of the SS and the Armaments Ministry was to transfer armaments production operations to the main camps. The attempts in the main camps of Buchenwald and Neuengamme were largely failures, whereas the Siemens production facility at the Ravensbrück concentration camp came closest to the expectations of the company and the SS.³⁵

Although research conducted to date has acknowledged that increasing attempts were made to transfer production to the main camps from March to September 1942, Himmler’s order that “all production must remain within the camps” had been largely ignored.³⁶ Until recently, many researchers thought that as early as 1942 the concentration camp system had been transformed into an armaments complex with a network of subcamps. Recent studies have shown, however, that this transformation only gradually began in 1943 and accelerated in the spring of 1944.³⁷ Nevertheless, based on the existence of 82 subcamps, some of these studies also convey the impression that a massive expansion had already occurred in 1942.³⁸ Himmler’s order of March 1942 and the existence of up to 82 subcamps do not constitute a contradiction, because the prisoners in these facilities performed construction work or provided services for the SS. In most cases, there were fewer than 100 inmates in these subcamps.³⁹

In fact, there were only very few subcamps where work was done to serve the armaments industry. An estimated 5,000 concentration camp prisoners were deployed in construction projects for the armaments industry in September 1942. One hundred and fifty worked in mining and no more than 1,500 prisoners were directly used for armaments production. Therefore, of the approximately 110,000 prisoners in the entire concentration camp system in September 1942,

³² An example: Janssen, *Ministerium*, pp. 97–8; Kaienburg, *Vernichtung*, pp. 237–8; DRZW, vol. 6, p. 784.

³³ StAN, NO-2468, along with Schieber’s order issued on March 17, 1942, in: BAB, NS 19/755. A completely divergent interpretation of this document, leaving out this sentence, is developed by Kaienburg, *Vernichtung*, p. 237.

³⁴ Schulte, *Zwangsarbeit*, p. 215.

³⁵ Allen, *Business of Genocide*, pp. 190–206; Kaienburg, *Vernichtung*, pp. 240–1; Strebel, *Ravensbrück*, pp. 384–418; Roth, “Zwangsarbeit.”

³⁶ The only exception is Schulte, *Zwangsarbeit*, p. 220.

³⁷ Orth, *System*, p. 180; Wagner, *Produktion*, p. 64; Schulte, *Zwangsarbeit*, pp. 392–400.

³⁸ Orth, *System*, p. 180; Sofsky, “An der Grenze,” p. 1143, although they both speak of “only” 82 subcamps.

³⁹ For a more detailed explanation: Buggeln, *System*, pp. 18–19.

only about 5 percent had been assigned to projects that supported the armaments industry in the broadest sense of the term. In fact, only slightly more than 1 percent of the prisoners were directly involved in armaments production. As these figures show, there was no widespread involvement of concentration camp prisoners in armaments production in 1942.

Setting a new course within the concentration camp system

Incorporating the IKL into the WVHA triggered fundamental changes within the concentration camp system. Now that Pohl had gained complete authority over the concentration camps, he focused his attention on weeding out the bad apples under his command. During the summer, Pohl relieved one-third of his commandants of their duties, citing incompetence, usually in connection with alcoholism and corruption.⁴⁰ Managerial and entrepreneurial knowledge were only marginally important qualifications. Instead, Pohl tended to appoint individuals whose résumés mirrored his own career in administration and the military. At the same time, Pohl and Glücks—along with the new head of Department D II, Gerhard Maurer—made efforts to modify conditions within the concentration camps to meet the needs of armaments production.⁴¹ Pohl described the main thrust of the changes in a letter to Himmler in late April 1942:

The focus has shifted to the economics side. . . . This realization leads to measures that are required to gradually transform the concentration camps from their former uniquely political form to an organization that can meet the economic challenges.⁴²

The letter included an order issued by Pohl to the commandants concerning the following changes: the prisoners' working hours were now to be completely determined by the demands of the work, time-consuming roll calls and long routes to work were to be reduced, and the guarding of the prisoners was to be made more flexible. Himmler's response to Pohl's proposals reveals that the Reichsführer SS harbored reservations about fundamentally changing the rationale behind the concentration camp system:

I think, however, that it must be stressed that there is no change in the issue of reviewing prison terms, or in the purpose of re-educating those who can be re-educated in the concentration camps. Otherwise one might get the idea that we arrest people . . . to recruit workers.⁴³

Indeed, both propagandistic exigencies and Himmler's general attitude stood in the way of reorienting the system to meet industrial and commercial interests. What's more, Pohl issued orders in an attempt to navigate the charged arena between economic, security, and penal interests. Up until September 1942, Pohl tried to

⁴⁰ Orth, *Konzentrationslager-SS*, pp. 206–10; Wachsmann, *History*, ch. 8.

⁴¹ For information on Pohl's career and the personnel of the Office Group: Wachsmann, *History*, ch. 8.

⁴² Letter from Pohl to Himmler dated April 30, 1942, in: StAN, R-129.

⁴³ Letter from Himmler to Pohl dated May 29, 1942, in: StAN, NO-719.

resolve these contradictions by increasingly focusing the prisoners' labor on more productive activities, although he did little to ensure that the conditions of detention were improved.

The majority of his orders were aimed at assigning the prisoners to more effective tasks and extending their working hours. For instance, already in February he introduced a new regulation stipulating that no more than 10 percent of the entire camp population could be used for internal camp labor.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the prisoners' daily working time was increased to 11 hours in late March,⁴⁵ and Sunday was declared a half workday in June.⁴⁶ Accordingly, from the summer of 1942 onwards, the inmates worked 72 hours a week—a pace that the German Labor Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*, DAF) and German industry said could not be sustained even by free German workers. The security concerns of the SS also stood in the way of a productive use of prisoner labor. For instance, in an effort to enhance security, Pohl ordered that prisoners must be transferred to another workplace after no longer than six months.⁴⁷ This demand ran contrary to all requests made by plant managers at SS production operations. In fact, private industrial companies later often applied to the SS for permission to keep the same prisoners on a permanent basis, and in most cases they were allowed to do so. From the spring to the fall of 1942, the SS policy was to exploit the prisoners to the limits of human endurance, as exemplified by Pohl's instructions to the camp commandants on April 30, 1942: "The camp commandant is solely responsible for the deployment of labor. The work must be exhausting, in the true sense of the word, to achieve maximum productivity. . . . The working hours are not tied to any limits."⁴⁸

In addition to this murderous pace of work, the deteriorating nutritional situation had a massive impact on the prisoners' health. The weekly ration per detainee had already been reduced on January 1, and this was followed by a dramatic reduction in mid-May 1942.⁴⁹ In 1942, the combination of this rapidly increasing pace of work and reduced rations led to the highest mortality rates thus far in the concentration camps. According to statistics that Glücks sent to the concentration camp physicians, from July to November 1942 alone 75,545 prisoners died, 9,015 of whom had been executed.⁵⁰ On the whole, one could essentially say that "extermination through labor" was practiced throughout the entire concentration camp system, particularly during the second half of 1942. Yet the particularly high mortality rates of the year 1942 can only be attributed to a

⁴⁴ Letter from Glücks to the commandants dated February 12, 1942, in: BAB, NS 4/Na 6, vol. 9.

⁴⁵ Letter from Glücks to the commandants dated March 31, 1942, in: Długoborski/Piper (eds), *Auschwitz 1940–1945*, vol. 2, p. 156.

⁴⁶ WVHA directive from June 3, 1942, cited in: Długoborski/Piper (eds), *Auschwitz 1940–1945*, vol. 2, p. 157.

⁴⁷ Letter from Pohl to the heads of the WVHA Office Groups dated June 26, 1942, in: StAN, NO-2318.

⁴⁸ Letter from Pohl to the commandants dated April 30, 1942, in: StAN, R-129, reprinted in: IMT, vol. 38, pp. 365–7, here p. 366.

⁴⁹ See ch. 3.

⁵⁰ Letter from Glücks to the garrison physicians dated December 28, 1942, in: StAN, NI-10815.

limited extent to deliberate plans devised by the SS to murder certain inmates or groups of prisoners.⁵¹ Instead, they are primarily due to a combination of adhering to previous practices and placing greater demands on the concentration camp prisoners. To make matters worse, the efforts of the SS to fill the concentration camps led to the transfer of many sick and weakened prisoners from Nazi Germany's prisons to the camps, contributing to numerous epidemics in 1942.

The policy decision of September 1942

After consolidating its position in the spring of 1942, it was clear by summer that the SS no longer had any reason to fear that another organization would supersede its authority over the concentration camp prisoners. Now came the next step. Pohl wrote to Himmler about negotiations with Speer's ministry on September 15:

All participants agreed that the workers in the concentration camps now have to be deployed for large-scale armaments projects. . . . Clearly, however, we can only take over complete armaments projects if we abandon one of our principles: We can no longer narrow-mindedly insist that all manufacturing processes be transferred to our camps.

Once Pohl showed a willingness to drop the demand that all production take place within the camps, the SS and Speer's ministry concluded an agreement on the use of large numbers of concentration camp prisoners for armaments production. Furthermore, Pohl wrote:

If we intend tomorrow to assume responsibility for a complete armaments plant with 5 or 10 or 15 thousand prisoners, it will be impossible to establish such a plant *intra muros*. It must be, as Reichsminister Speer so aptly put it, built from the ground up. . . . Insofar as no vacant production plants are available, armaments plants that have not operated at full capacity due to an insufficient number of workers should be completely emptied and filled 100% with our prisoners.⁵²

During this meeting, Speer made the most comprehensive offer for managing armaments plants that the SS ever received. Not surprisingly, Pohl's letter to Himmler was highly optimistic; after all, he believed that the SS was on the verge of assuming control of key armaments factories. According to Speer, over the following days industry representatives, Generaloberst Friedrich Fromm, and the minister's own right-hand man Karl-Otto Saur convinced him that it would be generally disadvantageous if the SS were to have its own armaments production plants.⁵³ This version of events appears plausible to the extent that it does not exonerate Speer, but in fact makes it clear that he initially had no objections to handing over a number of armaments plants to the SS. At a conference with the Führer that took place on September 20–22, 1942, Speer had changed his opinion and now endeavored to convince Hitler that

⁵¹ With the exception of the two killing campaigns Aktion 14f13 and Aktion 14f14.

⁵² Letter from Pohl to Himmler dated September 16, 1942, in: BAB, NS 19/14, pp. 131–3.

⁵³ Speer, *Sklavenstaat*, pp. 39–41.