



## Background information

### Dehumanisation and self-assertion - Modules for an understanding of realities in the Concentration Camp Buchenwald

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#### 1. Background information photos:

##### 1.1 Gate construction



**Place:** Buchenwald

**Date:** 10/11/37

**Photographer:** Unknown

**Original Caption:** Subject: Photograph of Buchenwald Concentration Camp. Photo 46. The photograph shows the entrance building to the prisoners' camp under construction. Taken on 10/11/37.

**Subject:** View from the *Carachoweg* towards the shell of the almost-completed entrance building. To the left, prisoners are carrying out excavation work in front of the future camp prison building.

**Information on the Source of the Photograph:** The photos of the construction of the Buchenwald camp were taken to document the event by a photographer from the *Kriminalpolizei* (criminal police) in Weimar between 9 July and 10 November 1937. These photos have been held in the archives of the Buchenwald Memorial Site since March 1982.

**Photo Series:** This series includes at least 52 photos. There are at least two other photos thought to belong to this series held by the Lorenz Schmuhl Collection (USHMM).

**Notations:** Stamp on the back: 'Staatliche Kriminalpolizei, Kriminalpolizeistelle Weimar' ('State Criminal Police, Weimar')

**Owner of Original:** Buchenwald Memorial Site Historical Collection



### Building the Camp

"The government of Thuringia had originally provided 26 ha of state forest on the Ettersberg for the establishment of the new concentration camp. This area was increased to 104 ha by means of the enforced sale of forests belonging to the Ettersberg communities of Hottelstedt and Ottstedt a.B., private land and over three ha of forest owned by the Hottelstedt parish. The undeveloped terrain, expanded by additional purchases to 190 ha in the following years, was almost entirely wooded, more than fifty percent of it by high forest that could be processed as construction timber.

The SS built the first barracks on the north side of the mountain even before the first inmates arrived. Late on the morning of July 15, 1937 the first 149 inmate craftsmen arrived on lorries from Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp. This marked the inauguration of the "Konzentrationslager Ettersberg," which the SS filled with inmates from the dissolved concentration camps of Sachsenburg (near Chemnitz) and Lichtenburg in the weeks that followed. Helmut Thiermann describes his arrival as follows:

*"On SS transports of 7/27/1937, 108 inmates were moved from Sachsenburg Concentration Camp to a destination unknown to us. The transport was carried out with the highest degree of surveillance. The lorries were covered with tarps and it was only through the noises on the roads and the ventilation flaps in the tarps that we could guess more than witness the course of the journey. Because of the fact that speaking was not allowed among the inmates, we communicated by means of sign language. When we drove into a densely wooded area (on the far side of Weimar), we knew that we were at our destination.. ...*

*Once we had been counted and turned over to the new camp administration we were taken to our accommodations. They consisted of a crude wooden barrack constructed of pre-fabricated parts and surrounded by a barbed-wire fence. On the first night we shared the barrack with the SS and already the next day, we moved to the actual camp, Block 7. Following our arrival, we received red cloth triangles and two long canvas strips with numbers which we had to sew to our jackets and trousers in precisely designated places. I received number 318. From now on we were mere numbers and nameless beings.*

*We were awakened before daybreak. Following roll call and division into labour detachments we went – closely guarded – to the actual inmates' camp. We completed the construction of a partially built barrack, block 7, and moved into this block the same day."*



The construction began in a great hurry and, as the forest superintendent later asserted, “without the responsible finance ministry or the Ettersburg Forestry Office having been informed in any way.” The SS directed the camp construction project. The first construction phase, which lasted into the second year of the war, comprised the basic structure of the SS area and the “preventive custody camp” and was carried out under the direction of SS Construction Chief Robert Riedl, who had been the “camp architect” of Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp. Driven mercilessly by the SS, the inmates cleared the forest, laid sewage and power lines and built roads and paths. They often worked from the break of day until well past sundown. The material for the paths and foundations was obtained from the nearby quarry, the inmates often transporting it to its prescribed destinations with their bare hands.



It was in this manner that the stretch of road connecting the camp to Weimar – referred to by the inmates as “Blutstraße” (Blood Road) – was also paved. This was a concrete road of over five kilometres in length which the SS had camp inmates construct between mid 1938 and late autumn 1939 to replace the old route leading from the Weimar-Ramsla state road to the camp, where it ended at the intersection with “Caracho Path.” The planning and realisation of this construction project was carried out by a private motorway construction company which had a labour detachment of two hundred inmates at its disposal. Jews who had been transported to the Ettersberg in June 1938 lugged the stones for the sub-base from the quarry to the construction site. The number of casualties was high and gave the road its epithet. In the years that followed, thousands of inmates were driven down this road, frequently arriving at the camp dripping with blood.

The building construction was also carried out entirely by the inmates. In the midst of the SS garrison, which already occupied a central position in the plans, were sixteen so-called “Hundertschaftsgebäude,” (buildings for one company each), the barracks of the SS Totenkopf Regiment Three “Thuringia.” The garrison also comprised casinos, armouries, a troop hospital, shooting ranges and drilling grounds, multiple-vehicle garages and two petrol stations. For the members of the SS and their families, two housing developments were built nearby, containing single and multiple dwellings in the regional style. There was a falcon yard in the old German style and an indoor riding arena. Due to its capacity for accommodating more than an entire regiment, Buchenwald served as one of the major Armed SS bases for the training of SS division replacements. The camp further encompassed a central construction management office of the armed SS as well as a central depot for building materials. In the spring of 1945, the final seat of the Armed SS’s head operations office was housed in the barracks.”

## 1.2 Koch family

**Place:** Buchenwald

**Date:** December 1940

**Photographer:** Unknown

**Original Caption:** The first snow in Buchenwald, December 1940.

**Subject:** Artwin Koch with his parents in front of the camp commander’s building.



**Information on the Source of the Photograph:** This photo belongs to an album assembled by Karl and Ilse Koch between 1938 and 1941 for their son, Artwin. Some of the photos were taken by the Koch family. Karl Koch had the album put together by prisoners in the camp's book-binding workshop. After the photos were selected, a prisoner labelled them and ornamented them with little drawings. The album was used by the American prosecution team as evidence in the Buchenwald Trial which took place in Dachau in 1947. The album is held today in the National Archives in Washington. Copies of these photos were made in November 2004. This photograph was obtained in a higher quality format in autumn 2006 for the 'In Black and White. Photographs from Buchenwald Concentration Camp' exhibition.

**Photo Series:** The original photo-album contained 76 pages, with the photographs attached to only one side of each page. Six pages have been ripped out. There are 232 photographs attached to the remaining 70 pages.

### The Everyday Life of the Command Staff members

"Whereas the composition of the guard units underwent frequent change, the SS members with positions on the command staff settled in for a more permanent stay. Many married and had children or moved their already existing families to the vicinity of the camp. During the first two years of the camp's existence the registrar's office, which opened in Buchenwald in 1939, performed forty-eight SS marriage ceremonies and registered twelve births. In keeping with their ranks, the members of the command staff lived in two housing developments, of which the one directly adjoining the camp – SS Colony I – was reserved for officers. The families, most of them with several children, led a secure life in which inmates were constantly resent as construction workers and servants. All personal contact was, however, strictly prohibited. Commander Koch repeatedly admonished his subordinates to educate their wives on the SS way of life and avoid all familiarity with "enemies of the state." The following excerpts from his orders illustrate the manner in which Koch intervened in the private sphere of his subordinates:

Commander Order No.64, Oct. 12, 1938, signed Koch

"A number of you apparently still do not comprehend the purpose of the Sunday communal meal. The point is not only to make donations to the meal collections but also to practise fellowship with the entire German nation by participating in the communal meal on the appointed days. Outsiders who are incapable of doing so have no business belonging to the Security Echelon and should stuff their fat bellies somewhere else. It goes without saying that the kitchens of the command staff are to prepare communal dishes only on these Sundays. I will either investigate the content of the pots of my married staff members myself or send an agent to do so."

Commander Order No.103, July 1, 1939, signed Koch

"This morning in the Klein-Obringen Colony I ascertained that the children of SS members associate with enemies of the state and possibly still lend them assistance. I expect all SS men to educate their wives in the SS way of life and this atrocious state of affairs, which appears hardly conceivable for an SS man, to be corrected immediately."

Most members of the staff made a clear distinction between their private lives and their concentration camp service, and the worst tormentors led a petit-bourgeois family life just a few kilometres from the camp. As observed by Buchenwald inmate Eugen Kogon in this connection: "Within the SS order, honour, loyalty and a clean family life by no means precluded every form of meanness, treachery and sexual dissipation on relationships to others, and even top classes regarded lower in rank."

The family of the camp Commander Koch distinguished itself from the other SS families only inasmuch as Ilse Koch actively participated in the activities and affairs of her husband and did not limit her role as the partner of a camp commander to the domestic realm. Having completed her school education, Ilse Koch, formerly Köhler (1906-1967), had worked as a saleswoman and typist until 1933. In 1932 she joined the NSDAP. Her



acquaintance with Karl Koch began in 1934 and led to their marriage and move to Buchenwald in 1937. In 1938, in “Haus Buchenwald” (as the commander’s mansion was called), her first child was born. She gave birth to her second a year later and her third in 1940. The Kochs raised their children in the immediate vicinity of the camp; on Sundays they went for a walking the SS zoo directly adjacent to the camp fence.

Ilse Koch took an active part in her husband’s rapid advancement within the SS, which was characterised by ruthlessness, brutality and a pronounced desire to dominate as was closely tied with the development of the concentration camp system. In order to finance his extravagant household, Karl Koch uninhibitedly enriched himself with the property of the inmates and misappropriated a portion of the funds intended for the camp. The reputation for extreme cruelty which he gained as camp commander was also associated with his wife.... Following the war she was compelled to take a share of her responsibility for the crimes which had been committed by her husband, who was shot to death at the end of the war.”



### 1.3 SS theatre

**Place:** Weimar

**Date:** Summer 1943

**Photographer:** Unknown

**Subject:** Members of the SS- motor vehicle training and reserve regiment of the Waffen SS have lined up in front of the Deutsches Nationaltheater (German National Theatre, Weimar) for their swearing-in ceremony.

**Information on the Source of the Photograph:** The photo originates from a photo album assembled by an unknown member of the SS and shows the stages of his training as an SS recruit in Buchenwald in 1943. 29 photos from the album were bought from a salesman in August 2009. Further two photos were bought in December 2009 from an antiquarian.

**Photo Series:** It is not known how many photos the album originally comprised. The Buchenwald Archive holds 31 photos.

**Notations:** Handwritten “2” on the rear side.

**Copyright:** Buchenwald Memorial Site Historical Collection



### A District of Weimar

“Even the earliest plans for the construction project provide evidence that the functions envisioned by the SS for the new facility far exceeded the immediate task of building a concentration camp. They provided for all the features of a military garrison, including civilian quarters for the personnel and their families. The commencement of the project was thus virtually the foundation of a new community, and when Buchenwald was incorporated into Weimar in 1938, the latter gained an SS suburb – albeit 8 km from city limits – whose population of SS and inmates nearly equalled its own in number by the end of the war. The solidly built SS accommodations were constructed to last at least fifty years, an estimation later confirmed by the duration of the contracts concluded for the supply of power. The camp’s incorporation into the regional road network got under way in 1938.

Weimar was the capital of the Free State and NSDAP region of Thuringia. As the city of Goethe and Schiller, it bore permanent significance for the cultural self-image of the German bourgeoisie. A town of civil servants and the middle class, it thrived in the awareness of this heritage and for decades its gates had remained closed to the turbulence of modern society. As the venue of the constituent national assembly, it gave the Weimar republic its name. This circumstance and the conviction that, by virtue of its past glory, Weimar would always remain the centre of German culture gave the city a magical attraction for the opponents of the Weimar Republic quite early on. Weimar was already the site of NSDAP parades and party conventions in the 1920s; it was the place where the Hitler Youth received its name and it served as an arena for warlike consecrations of the Nazi flag.

The first government posts to be held by members of the NSDAP were in the capital of Thuringia, including the office of the minister president from August 1932 on. As the heart of the “NSDAP-Trutzgau Thüringen,” Weimar became a basis of the Nazi movement towards Berlin; more than half of its citizens voted for Hitler in 1933. As the concentration camp was being constructed in Buchenwald, monumental party edifices were going up in the Weimar city centre. The city was thus ideologically prepared for the establishment of the “K.L. Ettersberg.”

The only objections to be raised were those concerning its name. (...) In a letter of July 8, 1937, Camp Commander Karl Koch informed Senior Executive Officer Gommlich of the camp’s new name: “K.L. Buchenwald, Post Weimar.”

...

The business people and tradesmen soon overcame their initial reserve and a wide range of contacts developed between the city and the camp. They resulted from Weimar’s role as the seat of the Land administration, the NSDAP regional administration and the Reichsstathalter.

...

Many circumstances testify to the close relationship between Buchenwald and Weimar. In 1942, the municipal department of works made a futile attempt to obtain a share in the camp’s electricity supply. The German National Theatre of Weimar held several performances for the SS in Buchenwald. In the final phase of the camp’s history, following the air raids of 1944-45, several inmates’ detachments cleared rubble on behalf of the city. There is ample evidence of the public presence of the Totenkopf SS in the town and at political parades. Yet the inmates’ presence in Weimar is also sufficiently documented, whether upon their arrival at the main railway station and further transport to the concentration camp or in the small labour detachments, including the one assigned to the city’ largest industrial operation: from 1942 on, a Buchenwald sub-camp was located at the Fritz-Sauckel Werk of the Wilhelm-Gustloff-NS-Industriestiftung. The camp’s territory did not end at the crossing gate on the Ettersberg, but – even before the entire camp system had emerged with war society – in the middle of the city.



#### 1.4 The Goethe oak

**Place:** Buchenwald

**Date:** June 1944

**Photographer:** Georges Angéli

Born on 12/1/20 in Bordeaux; became a photographer; imprisoned after escaping from the 'Organisation Todt' in May 1943; brought to Buchenwald as a political prisoner in June 1943 (No 14824); worked in the photography department; was liberated and returned to France in April 1945; worked as a photographer from 1946 until his retirement in 1975; lives in Chatelleraut.

**Original Caption:** M: Magasin (Storehouse)

B: Buanderie (Laundry)

A: Arbre de Goëthe (Goethe Oak)

C: Cuisines (Kitchens)

D: Détenus, le dimanche après-midi (Prisoners, on a Sunday afternoon)

**Subject:** Prisoners walking along the camp road. View of the Goethe Oak. Laundry and storage building visible in the background. The prisoners' kitchen building is visible in the right foreground.

**Information on the Source of the Photograph:** From 1943 there were some foreign prisoners working in the photography department. They had limited access to a collection of cameras, one of which Georges Angéli took in June 1944. One Sunday afternoon, as there were no SS in the camp, he secretly took eleven photos. The motive for the taking of these photos, most of which were taken in the Small Camp, was to document and provide testimony for what happened in the camp. Angéli also considered it to be an act of resistance. He hid the original photographs within the camp, so they survived the destruction of the photography department in August 1944. The photos were displayed in small exhibitions organised by the FNDIRP, of which Angéli is a member. The originals were attached to cardboard for these exhibitions. The true meaning and origin of the photos was not publicly known until the 1990s.

**Owner of Original:** Georges Angéli, Chatelleraut

#### The Goethe Oak

On the east side of the camp, between inmate kitchen and laundry, stood an old oak tree. On the terrain maps of the Ettersburg forest, it was marked as the natural monument "Dicke



Eiche" (big oak). When the forest was cleared to construct the camp, the tree was spared by the SS. This decision probably had to do with their liking for the symbolic meaning of oaks and nature protection. Inmates on the other hand reported to each other, that Goethe had met Charlotte von Stein there. For them, the tree was a legend – a piece of unharmed nature – a reminder of the world outside the camp. During the air raid in August 1944 a firebomb hit it. Soon after, the tree was felled.

(Harry Stein, Audioguide der Gedenkstätte Buchenwald, Weimar 2002.)

The rare cultural events – joint music-making events, chess tournaments and theatrical performances organised by individuals or groups – constituted a further means of self-preservation.

Among the inmates there were trained artists and gifted amateurs who attempted to document everyday life in the campo with the means at their disposal. ... On the production of his wooden sculpture "Das letzte Gesicht" (the last face), Bruno Apitz writes:

*"In August 1944 American bombers destroyed the armament plants located just outside the camp. The spreading flames damaged the Goethe oak, a declared natural monument located within the camp.*

*By order of the fascist camp command, the tree was felled and sawed for firewood in the wood yard. I obtained a piece of the wood and hid it in the barrack of my detachment at the time, the pathology facility.*

*In a safe corner of the barrack I then hewed the death mask out of the wood. That was quite risky, for if I had been caught I inevitably would have 'gone up.' That would have meant Bunker ad death. Other inmates from the detachment stood watch as I worked. Another inmate stood beside me and swept up the sawdust as it fell, while others were constantly in readiness to hide the piece of wood and the tools immediately in the event of danger. I worked hastily, and my haste is apparent in the coarse cut."*



### 1.5 The little camp

**Place:** Buchenwald

**Date:** June 1944

**Photographer:** Georges Angéli

Born on 12/1/20 in Bordeaux; became a photographer; imprisoned after escaping from the 'Organisation Todt' in May 1943; brought to Buchenwald as a



political prisoner in June 1943 (No 14824); worked in the photography department; was liberated and returned to France in April 1945; worked as a photographer from 1946 until his retirement in 1975; lives in Chatelleraut.

**Original Caption:** 'Quarantine' in the Small Camp

**Subject:** Prisoners walking along the camp road in front of the latrines and wash-room building in the Small Camp. Blocks 59 and 62 are visible in the background.

**Information on the Source of the Photograph:** From 1943 there were some foreign prisoners working in the photography department. They had limited access to a collection of cameras, one of which Georges Angéli took in June 1944. One Sunday afternoon, as there were no SS in the camp, he secretly took eleven photos. The motive for the taking of these photos, most of which were taken in the Small Camp, was to document and provide testimony for what happened in the camp. Angéli also considered it to be an act of resistance. He hid the original photographs within the camp, so they survived the destruction of the photography department in August 1944. The photos were displayed in small exhibitions organised by the FNDIRP, of which Angéli is a member. The originals were attached to cardboard for these exhibitions. The true meaning and origin of the photos was not publicly known until the 1990s.

**Owner of Original:** Georges Angéli, Chatelleraut

#### The Little Camp

From 1938 on, the creation of special zones repeatedly served to cast the burden of overcrowding onto a smaller group of inmates in order to ensure the camp's continued functionality. The logic of this method corresponded to that of the expulsion of the sick and the weak. Thus it is hardly astonishing that, beginning in 1943, the two functions – that of "quarantine" and that of selection for "labour allocation" – were assigned their own zone in which accommodation was minimised, rations reduced and hygienic conditions abominable: the so-called Little Camp on the northern edge of the barrack town.

The barracks there consisted of windowless Wehrmacht stables 40 metres long and 10 metres wide, rows of three- or four-level sleeping compartments had been installed.

(...)

From 1943 on, all mass transports went through the Little Camp. Initially, the inmates stayed an average of four to six weeks there, and it was solely due to the rapid turnover that the zone was not characterised solely by rampant disease and death any sooner. Beginning of January 1945, however, in view of permanent overcrowding, those were the attributes it took on. The Little Camp left a deeply shocking impression on all who came to Buchenwald. The Dutchman Leo Krok recalls:

*"As we were beaten out of the railroad cars with rifle butts at Buchenwald Station at the break of dawn on January 24, 1944, we were in a miserable condition after the terrible journey. There were three corpses in the car, and two who had lost their minds, in addition to the many who had lost consciousness. ... We finally entered the night, in wooden shoes, descending the high steps of the uniform depot into the dark, into the dirt, into the Little Camp, into Block 58, which was already full to capacity. ... Sixty men to a box, i.e. ten to*



*each set of shelves, only possible if they arranged themselves like sardines in a tin. It was impossible to get undressed. Many decided it would be better to lie on a table or on the floor but that was prohibited after a few days. ... Going out to relieve oneself was agony; the latrine was either frozen over or flooded. It was located downhill from the block and special acrobatic talent was required to reach it. Nevertheless, it was continually full, for nearly everyone suffered from diarrhoea and dysentery. At night you had to grope for a free place with your hands, and then you usually ended up sitting down in another sick person's filth. When water was available, we had to go and wash in the washroom, which was usually quite a distance away, at five o'clock in the morning. Most people avoided going because it was excruciatingly difficult to get through the mud in wooden shoes and nobody, or almost nobody, had a towel. You hardly had the space and time to wash yourself properly anyway. We were yelled at everywhere we went and it took us days to figure out that the washroom attendants and the men on barrack duty, Camp Protection duty, etc. were inmates like us and not, as we had first thought, SS men. There were a few fortunate exceptions."*

The stables were originally intended for fifty horses each. There is evidence of their accommodating as many as 1,960 human being per barrack in Buchenwald. From May to December 1944, there was also a tent camp consisting of five army tents in the Little Camp. (...)

#### **Place of Death: Little Camp**

In December 1944 the SS had the "Little Camp" expanded to comprise seventeen barracks; the tents were taken down. Once the evacuation trains began to arrive, the number of persons accommodated in each stable rarely sank below 1,000. It was nothing unusual for 1,800 to 1,900 inmates to be assigned to a barrack five hundred square metres in size. Whereas the population of the "little Camp" had numbered 6,000 at the beginning of January 1945, it rose to 17,100 by the eve of the evacuation. Hunger, filth, desperate struggles for survival and contagious diseases ruled the slum of the Buchenwald barrack town. (...)

Mass death was the result, a death which claimed some 5,200 victims in less than a hundred days. The corpses of the deceased were thrown out of the barracks by night in order to make room for the living. This number also included the dead from Barrack 61, an epidemic block which had been part of the inmates' infirmary since the beginning of 1945. It was there that, following the arrival of the mass transports from Auschwitz, the SS began killing people with contagious diseases and the so-called "Muselmänner" – who staggered into the camp as skeletons – by means of injections. Jaroslav Bartl, an infirmary nurse at the time, recalls that

*"...the liquidation of inmates by means of injection was transferred from the infirmary to Block 61 of the Little Camp, which had been set up as an infirmary station. ... The [SS] medical orderly Wilhelm killed weak and ill inmates right at the entrance to the barrack – many of those who had been sent to Block 61 on grounds of illness died without ever having seen the barrack."*

Inmates who worked in the infirmary were also involved in these killings. In early 1945, the "Little Camp" – as a cap for the infirm and the dying – was the prime place of death in the Buchenwald complex, followed by the SS tunnel construction projects such as Ohrdruf (SIII), Berga/Elster and Langenstein-Zwieberge. Between the beginning of January and April 11, 1945, 13,969 human beings died in Buchenwald and its sub-camps.

The bodies were cremated until March 1945. After 1943 urns were available only for the mortal remains of deceased "Reich Germans" and a small number of foreign inmates (Norwegians, Danes). Beginning as early as 1943, the SS had the ashes of most of the deceased dumped in the manner of refuse. In February 1945 the crematorium failed to receive its fuel supply; the corpses piled up and the rat population grew. With Himmler's approval, "emergency burials" began in March in mass graves on the south slope of the Ettersberg.



## 1.6 Welcome sign

**Place:** Buchenwald

**Date:** 27/5/45

**Photographer:** Charles W Herr Jr / US Signal Corps

Military service as Private in the 165th Signal Photographic Company in France, Belgium and Germany from June 1942; photographed Buchenwald concentration camp, Weimar and prisoners of the Mehltheuer sub-camp of Flossenbürg in Schwickershausen.

**Original Caption:** 27 May. Soldiers tour of Buchenwald. Tec 5 Jack Levin, Pfc. Miles and Pfc. Bienz with the guide look at a sign of one of the barracks of the political prisoners in the camp. Soldiers are with 46th Armored Infantry Battalion, 5th Armored Division, 9th U.S. Army.

**Subject:** Former prisoner Ernst Neujahr (Prisoner Number 1559), on a tour with US soldiers, outside Block 3 with the inscription 'The German political prisoners welcome their American friends.'

**Information on the Source of the Photograph:** The members of the Signal Photographic Companies worked in a total of eleven special units of the US Army Signal Corps and documented the war in photos and on film. From the beginning of August 1944 they accompanied General Patton's 3rd Army through France, Belgium and Germany. They



mainly photographed the harsh realities of the war and the crimes of National Socialism, as well as military activities. The photographs are kept today in the National Archives, Washington.

**Photo Series:** On 27th May, during one of the so-called 'Soldier tours of Buchenwald' led by former prisoners, Signal Corps photographer Charles W Herr took a series of eleven photographs in the liberated concentration camp.

**Owner of Original:** National Archives, Washington

**Catalogue Number :** 111-SC-26 47 13

**Copyright:** Public domain

### **Resistance and Liberation**

The most effective forms of organisation and resistance activity were developed by groups which had gained experience in resistance before their arrests, i.e. primarily political inmates of various nationalities.

### **Political Prisoners**

The spectrum of Political Prisoners was as wide as the scope of discretion employed by the Gestapo for the imposition of preventive custody. In effect, they were not required to limit this scope as long as the persons or offences they were proceeding against could be defined as "hostile to the state or nation." Political custody might be the consequence of investigation, denunciation or a charge brought by an NSDAP functionary, frequently directed against a rival or unpopular neighbour. (...)

From the outset, the Communists used their superiority in number to assume a dominant position among the political prisoners. Their unconditional belief in a Communist future provided them with a certain degree of stability and created a basis on which they were able to carry on their political activities within the camp, where they organised themselves illegally as a party, trained their members and gained new followers. With Stalinist zeal, they also carried on the struggle against their opponents within the political left wing and among the "deviationists." As the Communist inmate functionaries gained power, the threat faced by persons who held other opinions grew.

In July 1943, after they had succeeded in taking over the most important functions in internal camp administration, they arranged a clandestine meeting of representatives of various Communist parties. In the course of the year 1944 further meetings took place and the circle expanded. The Germans dictated the time and the place. The participants worked on reconciling the differences between the national groups represented in the camp, finding means of taking their various interests into account, coordinating aid operations and taking measures to integrate foreign political inmates into camp detachments.

Due to the dominant position of the German Communists in internal camp administration, the group of persons who constituted the illegal International Camp Committee were able to contribute greatly to the avoidance of open conflicts between the national groups and to saving the lives of members of Communist parties and of resistance organisations. At the same time, the committee saw to it that the German Communists were able to remain in inmate offices at a time when Germans accounted for only a very small minority in the camp.

This secret organisation acquired illegal information and began to make preparations and form military groups so as to be in a position to prevent the imminent final massacre by the SS in the event of the NS regime's defeat. The members of the International Camp Committee's military organisation were Dutchmen, Austrians, Germans, Spaniards, Italians, Yugoslavs, Poles, Czechs, Frenchmen, Belgians, Soviet political inmates and prisoners of war, all of whom maintained contact with one another. Thanks to courage and inventiveness, 91 carbines, 1 light machine gun, 20 pistols and 16 German stick hand grenades were obtained as a means of defence if the occasion arose.

The secret Communist organisation concentrated primarily on its own supporters until well into the final year of the war. Whereas in the support committees of the French, Italians and other nations, persons of differing political viewpoints often worked together from the very beginning, it was not until August 1944 that the Social Democrat Hermann Brill gathered



members of various political inmates to form the German “Volksfrontkommittee” (People’s Front Committee).”

### **Liberation from the Outside; Liberation from Within**

“On the first days of April 1945, U.S. Army troops reached the sub-camp at Ohrdruf, whose last remaining inmates had been killed by the SS before their retreat. On April 11, U.S. armoured units advanced towards the SS garrison of Buchenwald. Thomas Geve reports:

*“Towards noon we heard a wailing like we had never heard before. The Germans called it the ‘Tank Alarm Siren.’ The decisive moment had come. We searched the valley below us. On the periphery of the forest we saw a party of greycoats with steel helmets running, SS guards who had retreated with cases of ammunition and machine guns. Later on we saw more of them; they were running faster but only a few of them were armed with rifles. Then the surrounding area was quiet again and the uncertainty dragged on.”*

American troops ended SS rule on the Ettersberg. As inmates recorded in the Camp Report No. One, on the evening of April 11 1945 the first two American tanks approached the quarry from the north at 1 p.m. An hour later, twelve tanks reached the stalls in the northern section of the camp and engaged the SS in heavy combat. At about 2.30 p.m. they overran the SS area. A short time later – at 2.45 – the inmates began an operation to disarm the remaining SS men and take control of the camp. Several inmates, including Otto Roth, proceeded to the camp gate, where Watchtower One was located, meeting no resistance. Otto Roth later reports:

*“...with the support of several electricians, a ladder was brought there in order to climb up Watchtower One. The SS had already cleared the watchtower; only one SS Oberscharführer retreated from the detention call building in the direction of the stable. Immediately following the occupation of the main gate, the camp senior Hans Eiden followed and raised the white flag on the tower. The central loudspeaker system was put back into operation and in a short address the entire camp was informed that the control of the camp had been taken over by the International Committee.*

*The group standing ready at the south-western corner of the camp forcibly opened the entry gate between Towers Two and Three and was able to take the SS man withdrawing from the detention call building as their first prisoner.*

*In front of the main gate there stood a member of the Wehrmacht, armed with a Carbine 98 and six ammunition pouches on his belt. Comrade Roth summoned him to surrender his weapon and ammunition. After he refused, his rifle and ammunition were taken from him on the spot. The soldier then retreated towards the east.”*

(...)

In the course of the hours that followed, the inmates took seventy-eight fleeing members of the SS prisoner. On the same afternoon, Lieutenant Emmanuel Desard of the U.S. Army, who along with Sergeant Paul Bodot was one of the first members of the Allied forces to enter the camp, transferred the administration of the camp and the responsibility for the 21,000 survivors to Camp Senior One, Hans Eiden. At about the same time, a reconnaissance troop of the Sixth Armored Car Division of the Third U.S. Army was present in the camp.

(...)

A camp committee took charge of the camp, which was still a battlefield. (...) During the days that passed until the Americans assumed the administration of the camp on April 13, the fundamental structures for order and provisions were maintained and first-aid measures commenced, being of vital importance for the majority of the inmates. Hundreds still died within the first few days. By April 16, 1945, there were 20,000 of the approximately 21,000 persons liberated on April 11 left in the camp.”



## 2. Background information

### objects:

#### 2.1 The bowl

##### 1. Looking for Traces

After intensive research in the Archive of the Buchenwald Memorial, many traces of the bowl stay enigmatic. From the potential prisoner numbers – considering they were allocating more than once – as well as the carved in and marked in names, no fully coherent story can be told. There are only fragments and attempts at an explanation. This might also be due to the fact that the traces on the bowl are not necessarily connected to the Buchenwald Concentration Camp. The lack of a bigger story hints rather that the bowl was brought to Buchenwald by one of their owners. This was often the case, as a bowl was a valuable personal possession, which facilitated the supply of food and was thus often the key to survival. Possibly, the bowl had been on an odyssey of different countries and camps, before arriving in Buchenwald with its owner. A potential, if fragmentary scenario about the bowl's story and its previous owners can be developed from three traces, which could be connected. There's the name "Dimitrenko", the potential prisoner number "70879" and the name "Godart".

The identification "Dimitrenko" seems to be one of the first on the bowl. It seems weaker, timeworn and is overlain by the large "G" - the first letter of the name "Godart" – who must have been the owner of the bowl at a later time. In contrast to the other traces on the bowl – names or potential prisoner numbers –, which lead to several people, we find the name "Dimitrenko" only once in the archive of the Buchenwald Memorial and is thus a very important key in our research. He may have brought the bowl with him from the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp. That's where his transport to Buchenwald came from on February 6, 1945. He was registered as a "political Russian" and was – if we believe the information on his prisoner index card – a 23 year old farm labourer. The entrance lists of February 6 1945 register apart from Nikolaj Dimitrenko a certain Raymond Gravelle from France. He had been questioned in Frankfurt/Main and was then deported to Buchenwald, and allocated to the category "Police". He was assigned the prisoner number "70879", which we can find on the bowl. After their arrival, Nikolaj Dimitrenko and Raymond Gravelle were placed in barrack 17, a transition block. It is possible, they met here. Maybe Nikolaj Dimitrenko passed the bowl on to Raymond Gravelle, when he was transported back to Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp on 1 March 1945, after not even a month on the Buchenwald Concentration Camp. Raymond Gravelle survived Buchenwald. Still, there must have been another user of the bowl – by the name of "Godart". As it happens, a man called André Godart did arrive in Buchenwald Concentration Camp on 13 March 1945 as a "political Frenchman". According to the information on his index card, he was a 37 year old peasant. Did Raymond Gravelle and André Godart know each other? Did Raymond Gravelle pass his bowl on to André Godart, or were they sharing it? The latter is more likely; in March 1945 bowls are scarce goods. We do not know how Raymond Gravelle and André



Godart might have met. They were both French and spoke the same language, but their blocks were far apart. Raymond Gravelle was at that point in block 10, André Godart in Block 31. It is hard to believe that they would have shared a bowl across this distance. The ending of this possible scenario is incoherent. It is unclear how the further traces on the bowl can fit into the events. For example, the potential prisoner number “65077” was allocated twice in the Buchenwald Concentration Camp. But when Nikolaj Dimitrenko arrived in the camp, no one with that number was there anymore. Could it be from a different camp? The Identification “BL54” might hint at the Block 54, the infirmary in the Little Camp. Neither do we know, what the letters “WH” signify. They might be initials; but these were so frequent, that we will never find the matching person.

## 2. Understanding the Role of the Object in the Camp Society.

A bowl was supposed to be part of every inmate’s basic possessions at the Buchenwald Concentration Camp. He should be supplied with one right at his arrival. But the reality was different: people who survived Buchenwald Concentration Camp consistently mention in their testimonies that there was a shortage of bowls in the Camp, not every inmate had his own one. This was especially true for the times when the camp was desperately cramped: for example the time before liberation in April 1945. The lack of bowls was grievous for the inmates, as they constantly struggled with hunger and the bowls were an important part of the food supply. Without a bowl, it might be impossible to get any food. Unless they found other ways. It might have been possible to acquire a bowl on the black market, at an excessively high price. Maybe, they found an old can in the rubbish, which would have been much smaller than the bowls, but could have served as a replacement. Maybe they were lucky and found a comrade willing to share his bowl, maybe with more than one person – which would also have increased the hazard of infection. Often, bowls got stolen. People who owned a bowl were therefore especially careful. They were wearing them close to their bodies, attached with a string or a cable, worn around the waist like a belt. They sometimes kept them attached over night, or used them as a pillow when they slept. A carved or marked in name, a draft or something similar often designated them as someone’s personal property. On the one hand, this might have protected from theft, on the other hand it also gave the object an personal and emotional value, it lost its status as a mass product and expressed the individuality of the owner. This might also be a reason, why people took their bowls with them when they were transferred from one camp to another – even though it was officially a property of the camp. The bowls also had more functions in this camp society of needs: It could be used as a collecting vessel for rain water, against thirst; as a washing bowl in the morning or evening; or especially as a chamber pot for those ill with dysentery – with the dreadful consequence that epidemics could spread quickly. For many inmates it was possibly the most important object during their time in the camp.

## 3. Examples from Witness’s Reports about Buchenwald

### Siegfried Oppenheimer: Collected Rainwater from the Bowl.

Siegfried Oppenheimer was arrested in November 1938 and deported to Buchenwald Concentration Camp. As a so-called “Pogrom Jew”, he was cooped up in a Jewish special camp with almost 10000 fellow citizens. He remembers the conditions of the confinement:

“When we arrived, we did not get any food or drink on Friday and on Shabbat. Finally on Sunday noon, we had “food reception” on the mustering ground. Potatoes and Goulash. I was disgusted by the goulash, so I took potatoes “without”, twice. When I snatched some potatoes for the third time, there was some goulash sauce with them. I poured it away. It was my luck. The goulash was either made from fat meat of a whale, or the used meat was off. Some suspected that they had put castor oil into the cooked goulash. A diarrhea epidemic started to spread amongst those who had eaten the goulash, worse than you could imagine.

And there was no water! That we did not have any running water in our emergency barracks, is unsurprising. But even elsewhere, we did not have any water, for eight of ten days, neither to drink, nor to wash. I think on Wednesday, or Thursday, heaven had mercy on us, it rained. With our bowls, that were first common goods, and then also served as wash bowls as well, we collected the raindrops from the water gutter. They were delicious



drops, even though they tasted of tar, as the barracks were roofed with tar board. Some industrious people were even collecting some water for sale. As beverages were constantly sought-after, it was paid well.”

#### **Erich Altman: “Amongst 80 people, there were but 20 dishes”**

Erich Altmann – a German Jew, who emigrated to France in 1933 – was arrested in summer 1942 and deported to Auschwitz Concentration Camp via the transition camp Drancy. From there, he reaches Buchenwald Concentration Camp in January 1945 on one of the clearing marches. In his recollections “In the face of death. 3 years in German Concentration Camps. Auschwitz – Buchenwald – Oranienburg” he writes about his imprisonment in Buchenwald:

“The food distribution was a special problem. The food was brought in 50-litre-tubs. The kitchen was about 10 minutes walk from the barrack. When the soup arrived, it was already cold. And then the distribution started. The room elder had to determine the number of people. Amongst 80 people, there were but 20 dishes. One always had to wait until the other had finished and watch, how, with gusto, they licked the rest of the soup with their fingers or their lips. The distribution happened under the controlling eyes of all parties, and god forbid, if anyone got any less than another! This could cause true battles. [...]

During the food distribution, everyone had to stay on their pallets. The food was handed over by those on barrack duty. So we were sitting squeezed together, with our legs pulled close like in a cage, and were quickly swallowing down our food. There were no knives to cut the bread. They had taken everything from us, even spoons and knives. We drank the soup directly from the bowl. But cutting the bread was a problem. Finally, you were able to get a spoon with a sharpened handle, which you could then use as a knife, in exchange for a piece of bread. Things like that, you could get on the latrine. This was a sheer market place. You could buy anything in exchange for some bread or cigarettes.”

#### **Samuel Graumann: The Bowl as a Chamber Pot.**

Samuel Graumann was arrested as Jewish in September 1939 in Vienna and deported to the Buchenwald Concentration Camp. There, he was cooped up in the Jewish-Polish special camp. In his Autobiography “Deported. A Viennese Jew reports” he remembers:

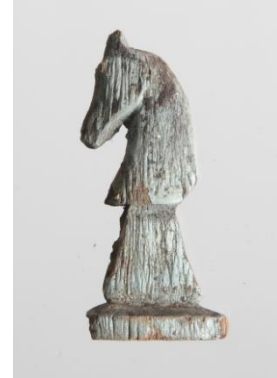
“Everyone carried, attached to their trousers, guarded like a sanctuary, a rusty, dented metal bowl for their food. The old people, who were too weak because of their dysentery, and could climb down from their bunk bed on second or third level, unstrapped their bowls and defecated in it. The next day, they had to eat their soup from the same bowl.”

#### **Paul Le Goupil: The can from the trash as an unequal replacement for the bowl.**

Paul Le Goupil was arrested in October 1943 as a member of the French Résistance. In May 1944 he was transported from Auschwitz Concentration Camp to Buchenwald. He told the story of his deportation in his “Memories of a Norman”. He reports about the Buchenwald Concentration Camp:

“As we slept completely clothed, we just had to get up. I was lucky to own a red enamel plate, which I used as a pillow at night. The inmates who did not have any plates used cans which they had found in the trash. [...]

Around ten o’clock “volunteers” for the bread distribution were searched and then appointed. In contrast to the soup, there were few volunteers for this, as for bread, there was no hope for seconds, and you had to wait outside the kitchen door for hours. When the call for the soup distribution came, around 11 o’clock, Russians and Poles rushed to the front. The soup was distributed around 12.30, 12 o’clock. Those, who only had cans, were waiting for a friend to lend them their dishes, so as they would get enough – the ladle contained a litre, if it wasn’t dented or ground down. The plates were so valuable, that most of the lucky owners had drilled a hole in the rim of their plate, and put it around their necks, like the sign of a country constable.”



## 2.2 The chess piece.

### 1. Understanding the Role of the Object in the Camp Environment

The Buchenwald Memorial found on its grounds chess figures made of wood, china, plastic or other material. Some were industrially made, some by hand. Survivors of the Buchenwald Concentration Camp report that chess figures were moulded with bread, carved from wood or fabricated in the carpenter's workshop of the camp. They tell us about chess matches, chess competitions and about secret meetings of members of the illegal camp committee, who came together under the pretence of playing chess.

But not all inmates had access to the world of chess. Generally, it was reserved to those with a privileged standing in the camp hierarchy. The "privileged" could design their spare time with diverse cultural activities: they might read a book, give lectures, play a chess match or talk to each other. For inmates who had to fight for their daily survival, the situation was different. They often did not have the force to take part in the cultural activities in the camp, let alone organising them. Often, they lived in overcrowded barracks. Their cramped confines and the deprivation contaminated human interactions. Conflict and ruthlessness were integral parts of their daily lives. But playing chess, larger simultaneous



displays or chess tournaments require cooperation. Thus chess players mostly met in barracks with a pleasant and more open atmosphere. People from different nations could congregate there for a game of chess and seek distraction from the camp life. Paul Martin Neurath was in Buchenwald Concentration Camp from September 1938 to May 1939 as a Jewish-political prisoner. Later he wrote his doctoral thesis “The Community of Terror. Views from the Inside of the Concentration Camps Dachau and Buchenwald” About the difficulty of an “intellectual survival” in the camp. Because meaningful and demanding activities were rare, a game of chess played an important role: as intellectual training and mental self-assertion it could fill an important void. Unlike many other games whose strategy is easily deciphered, a chess match remains a strategic challenge. A chess player never stops learning, discovering new tricks and manoeuvres. The novelist Stefan Zweig writes his book “The Royal Game” (also “Chess Story”; “Schachnovelle” in the original German), published in 1943:

“Where is the start and where the end [of the chess game]: every child can learn the first rules, every dilettante can have a go, but still there is something about this unchangeably narrow square, creating a special sort of master, incomparable to anyone else, people with a gift specifically for chess, a particular genius, with visions, patience and technique like mathematicians, poets, musicians, just arranged and linked differently.”

So who should be surprised that the trade unionist Albert Kayser, when he arrived in Buchenwald on the 23 December 1943, was carrying a chess board with him? Is the game of infinite variations, strategic thinking, technique and fantasy not virtually made to oppose the void of the inmate’s life/imprisonment? Albert Kayser’s chess board is registered amongst his belongings. We do not know whether he, who worked in the commando effect chamber himself, had access to it.

## 2. Examples from Witness’s Reports about Buchenwald

### Dionisius Polanský: International Chess Olympics

The Czech Dionisius Polanský was arrested in September 1939 in Prague and deported to the Buchenwald Concentration Camp. There, he was registered as a “political prisoner”. In an account, written after his time in Buchenwald, he writes about the chess matches in the camp:

“Playing chess was a welcome opportunity to overcome the depression arising from the uncertainty about our fate. It kept inmates occupied in different ways: with the production of the figures, the training of interested newcomers, with lectures about the history, theory and practice of chess, with the organisation of tournaments and finally Olympic games.

The first one was held in 1940 in the protectorate-barracks and of course differed widely but in name from the world Olympic games. They were preceded by matches in individual rooms, which divided the participants into classes according to the qualifying games. Of course we played without clock and the matches were not recorded.

The pieces were fabricated with bread, and later with wood, and were sometimes highly artistic carved work. When some protectorate prisoners were transferred into protective custody and worked in the workshops, as did all of them later, they manufactured more accomplished figurines on the lathe. The chess game was a part of cultural life, which developed in the rooms of our barrack. It was of more importance than it appeared on the face of it or than was initially appreciated.

It especially brought different elements closer together: the worker with the intellectual, old and young, people with different political views, as they had formed in the bourgeois republic. The most convenient circumstance was however, that several “kibitzer” could assemble around the players to discuss something that should remain secret, without this conversation attracting the attention of an outsider. An SS man could enter the barrack anytime. He would have noticed a lecture or a song, but a game of chess never aroused suspicion.

In 1940, the first Olympic games were organised, the second in 1942, the third in 1944. By this time, it had become possible, even necessary, to make it truly international Olympics – with Russians, Frenchmen, Belgians, Dutchmen, Poles, Italians, Czechs and other peoples participating.



The game of chess in itself had declined in importance at that stage. Although we sang the chess song of Buchenwald at the opening, which I authored, the main purpose of the Olympics was political conspiracy. The results of the games were published on big boards in front of the barracks. The outsiders could of course not know that comrade Hršel whose name appeared on these boards too, had not participated in the tournament, but was using the Olympics to meet other members of the international camp committee.↵ ↵  
The international motto of chess friends “gens una summa”, we are one people, was under these circumstances especially meaningful. Thus, in Buchenwald, playing chess contributed to the cooperation between the peoples and to international solidarity.”

**Jean-Baptist Feilen: The chess game as a present.**

Jean-Baptist Feilen was detained in several Concentration Camps as a German Communist, from 1937 in Buchenwald. He reports about the Chess game in the camp:  
“... During the first terms of the existence of the work-commando inmates’ clothing rooms, Comrade Karl Unverricht, who was a highly gifted woodworker, created a delightful chess game with a kitchen knife. He gave this chess game to me, as a present. With this game, we conducted many a chess contest with interested companions in other barracks. These games made us forget the hard life in Buchenwald...”

**Stanisław Taubenschlag: Chess Match against the tired Master.**

Stanisław Taubenschlag was transferred as “Polish Jew” from Auschwitz to Buchenwald in March 1943. In his memoirs about his deportation story, he writes about the chess game in Buchenwald concentration camp:

“Sometimes, the SS was looking for other sorts of “diversion” than the killing and torturing of inmates. One day, they announced that there would be a chess contest in barrack 21 – first in the individual blocks, then for the whole camp. The Germans sent one single player, who had been German champion before the war, into the finals. He challenged 20 competitors simultaneously on 20 chess boards. In our barrack – no idea why? – I was sent to the contest. I did not want to break ranks. I assumed that I had no chance of winning. After much persuasion through my colleagues, I sat down at the chess board. And a miracle happened. I was the only one to win in the first round, and to tie in the second one. I suppose the champion was tired and made mistakes. This made me the hero of the camp for the day. The colleagues were happy, even the Germans congratulated me.”



### 2.3 The factory tag

#### 1. Attempt to Situate the Gustloff Tags within the Meaning of Organisation and Control of Forced Labour in the Gustloff factory.

There are not enough hints in the witness testimonies and historic sources to understand exactly, how the tags were used in the Gustloff factory. The use of “control tags” was itself not unusual. They were common in other big factories and in the mining industry: the miner had to hand over his control tag when he went underground and only got it back when leaving the mine. This way, it was ensured that no one was left behind underground. The control tag system facilitated here the organisation of work and served as security measure. This aspect of security did not play a role in the Gustloff factory, as the forced labourers were cheap workslaves. The tag system aimed at the effective organisation of work processes and the control of the forced labourers. There were mainly two reasons for this: the effective organisation was for the SS and the factory management a measure to produce weapons to support the war effort; on the other hand they mistrusted the labourers. Many of them were from Russia, France or Poland and had no interest in producing weapons for a war against their own countries.

There is a series of references which help us reconstruct, how the hall tag was used in the Gustloff factory. Important for this is an order, issued on the 31. May 1944 over loud speakers in the Gustloff factory II. It survived as a transcript and says:

“Hall tags have been issued to the inmates working in the Gustloff factories, which have to be worn constantly. If the work is carried out bare-chested, then the tags have to be worn on the trousers. In any case, the tag has to be worn in a manner which makes it clearly visible at all times.”

This announcement suggests that each forced labourer possessed a hall tag and had to use it as an identifier. The control personnel could thus easily tell, whether a labourer was in his workhall or whether he had left it without permission. This assumption is supported by a statement by Erich Haase, who was working in the Gustloff factory II as a political prisoner. He reports in a witness testimony, that everyone who wanted to leave the work hall needed a written approval of the capo or the hall clerk. The rules which the camp commander Hermann Pister decreed in 1943 for the Gustloff factories indicate that the forced labourers were heavily restricted in their mobility. It says:

“No inmate may leave his workplace without signing off with their overseer, Kapo or foreman. Conversations while working are forbidden. Every movement during the working hours has to be conducted at a rapid pace.”

Many witnesses report how they managed despite the strict controls to break out of the tight rules and to defend some of their free space. For this, they risked a lot – possibly their lives.



## 2. Examples from Witness's Reports about Buchenwald

### Robert Leibbrand: How the Illegal Camp Committee Influenced which Inmates Had to Work in the Gustloff Factories.

Robert Leibbrand was deported to the Concentration Camp Buchenwald in September 1939, after having been imprisoned in several different camps. He became a member of the illegal resistance committee. In April 1943, he became commando writer in the Gustloff Factory II. In this position, he could influence, which inmates were chosen to work in the Factory. He reports:

“The allocation of prisoners to the work commandos of the arms factories were realised by the camp command. Each inmate had to state their profession when they arrived at the camp, and corresponding to these declarations, which were hardly ever verified, they were placed in the work commandos, according to the professions the factories had requested. Of course there were a lot of complaints by the factories, about the insufficient qualifications of the allocated inmates. And the camp command then organised, especially for the factories that were not located in the camp area, so-called interviews, where civil workers of these factories examined the inmates about their work skills. They showed them a simple work sketch, gave them a calliper or a micrometer screw. – all this was very superficial of course. We convinced the management of the Gustloff factory that it would be more practical for them, if the selection of the inmates by the work statistic department would be handled in cooperation with me. So the company issued their requests to the head of assignments: we need this many lathe operators, cutters, assemblers, toolmakers and so on. The camp commando's head of assignment, who was much too lazy, to look after this himself, handed this request to the inmates of the work statistics department, which then proposed him suitable candidates. Thus, we had the opportunity to cooperate with political organisations of different nations, to get those comrades in the factories, who we, for political reasons, wanted to stay in the main camp area, under good working conditions. If someone did not have the technical skills, we briefed and prepared them. But of course this only worked, if the management at least got some skilled workers. And of course we could not choose simply those we thought reliable, because then we would quickly have gotten discovered.”

### Paul Le Goupil: Tight Schedule for the Work Commando of the Gustloff Factory II

Paul Le Goupil was arrested in October 1943 as a member of the French Résistance. In May 1944 he was transferred from the Auschwitz Concentration Camp to Buchenwald. There, he had to work in the Gustloff Factory II. He wrote about his working day in his book “Memories of a Norman”:

At six o'clock, the speaker on the tower gave the order for deployment. The musicians of the brass orchestra, in red trousers, blue jackets with cords and berets, marched through the gate first, playing a march. [...], and then, without stopping to play, positioned themselves on the right of the tower. The commandos marched lock-step past them, one after the other: “1, 2, 3, 4 ... 1, 2, 3, 4 ... !” [...]. It was always the same order: first the factories Gustloff and Mibau, hall after hall, then the digger commandos, then the railway commando and other external detachments. We quickly left the camp, across the Caracho Path, then saluted in front of the golden eagle on the street. Then we arrived at the big crossroads, which led to the train station, the factories and the military barracks, with its signpost of painted wood. Around six thirty, we arrived at Hall 4, and were counted again. As soon as the night shift had left the factory, around quarter to seven, we entered the workshop and placed ourselves in front of our machines. At seven, with a siren signal, we started with our work, which ended at half past five, interrupted by a half an hour of lunchbreak. [...]

When we returned to the camp in the evening, we often met the night shift. After the salute at the eagle and at the tower, we returned in reverse order – still in the rhythm of the music – to the camp. The band marched back into the camp behind the last commando. After we were dismissed, we started running to our barracks, because we tried to eat the soup before the mustering call, while it was still hot; but unfortunately it was often too late.”

**Pierre Julitte: “Be careful. The guy before you was hanged.”**



Pierre Julitte was arrested as a member of the French Résistance and deported to Buchenwald Concentration Camp on 4 December 1943. There, he had to work for the arms factory Mittel-Bau, which was producing on the terrain of the Gustloff Factory II. He processed his memories and wrote a book. He writes about his first day:

„The tall man in the blue overalls was on his way back toward them. He spoke to Alain in German. When he realized that Alain had not understood him, he muttered an oath, then shouted an order, addressed to no one in particular.

A deportee who served as his interpreter came running from somewhere in the shop.

“Are you an engineer?” he demanded, speaking to Alain.

“One could say that-“

“What’s that supposed to mean? Everyone who came in this morning is an engineer.”

“Then why are you asking me the question?” Alain asked.

“It’s not me that’s asking, it’s the meister.”

“Tell him that I am an engineer, but that I can do whatever he wants me to.”

“You seem to want to make trouble. I can tell you right now that it’s not a good idea in here.”

“You misunderstood me-“

The meister interrupted them, speaking rapidly in German.

“Follow me,” the interpreter said.

Alain was led to a dilapidated piece of machinery and given instructions. His work consisted simply of piercing holes in little plates of stamped iron,

The foreman watched him work for a moment before he walked away, shrugging his shoulders and spitting on the floor.

Alain’s neighbour, who was operating a lathe and had apparently paid no attention to him until now, glanced at him out of the corner of his eye and murmured, “The guy who had your job before was hanged.”

“What did he do?”

“He had broken his drill, and when he went to get a new one, the warehouse keeper made a mistake. He gave him one for four and a half millimeters instead of four. For the next several hours, without realizing that he was doing it, he was making holes that were too large.”

“And he was hanged for that?”

“Yes. The meister accused him of sabotage, and the S.S. took him away. From what I heard later, he was executed the next morning in the courtyard of the crematorium.”

“He was Russian, and the warehouse keeper is German.”



## 2.4 The leather cross

### Understanding the Leather Cross in the Context of the Camp



The small Leather Cross is one of the few artefacts found hinting at religious life in Buchenwald Concentration Camp. Apart from a few exceptions it was forbidden to practice faith in the Camp. If anyone was discovered, they faced imprisonment in the arrest cells – maybe even execution. But still, there are reports of survivors telling us about improvised religious life in the Concentration Camp Buchenwald. Some might have continued their relationship with God purely in their thoughts. Others met at secret religious gatherings in their free time. This was provided that they found the strength and belonged to a circle of insiders who trusted each other. Everyone who knew something could become dangerous to them. The Catholic priest Leonard Steinwender who was imprisoned in the Concentration Camp Buchenwald from November 1938 to November 1940, wrote about this in his memoirs:

“Considering the set-up of the camp, we always had to be wary of our fellow inmates. There were always informers who were hoping to better their situation by showing off [...]. We didn’t have a choice but to look for a hidden corner behind a barrack or in the forest and to alternate in the places of our gatherings. So we sat in the sunshine around some tree trunk or stood in the rain or a snow storm under the trees and held our Sunday ceremonies. Of course there were always some companions standing guard [...].”

There were only simple means to arrange the religious gatherings. There were no sacred writings or items, which give a religious space its dignity and can create a shared atmosphere. People therefore learned verses from the Bible by heart; sacred items were provisionally crafted by hand.

Holding on to their faith could give people now strength and hope for their own survival. For some it was religious duty; maybe a form of resistance, because they did not want their faith – which was important to them and part of them – taken away from them. For others, who had been religious in their lives before the camp, this security got lost completely in the camp\_ The brutalisation of humans, the suffering and mass death let them doubt the existence of God or completely renounce their faith.

### **Władysław Koźdoń: “Every day my doubts about the good God grew.”**

Władysław Koźdoń was arrested when he was seventeen and brought to Buchenwald in October 1939 as a “political Pole”. In his book “...ich kann dich nicht vergessen. Erinnerungen an Buchenwald” (I cannot forget you. Memories of Buchenwald) he wrote:

“A boy, who had arrived on that train from Radom, sat down next to me in the ‘Pole School’. He was one year older than me and had visited the Secondary School before the war as well. We quickly found things to talk about, had similar interests and became friends quickly. His name was Stanisław Raikiewicz.

Stanisław told me, that he had met Fritz Wolff in the Little Camp, who had been camp senior/leader there. Wolff took him into his care. When he became the barrack leader in the ‘Chaplain’s Block’, the barrack of the military chaplains, he appointed Stanisław to barrack duty.

There, I visited him, even though it was forbidden to enter the fenced off part. I wanted to see how he was housed there, and I was curious to see the chaplains. I associated some vague hope with them, since I had grown up in a religious Catholic family. Up to my seventeenth birthday, it wouldn’t have occurred to me to depart from this belief. Priests were considered the personification of the Holy Church, we had the highest respect for them.

Maybe the priests can help us, I thought. At least they could talk to us, give us the strength to get through this. When we were still in the Little Camp, Jehovah’s Witnesses had come to us to give solace. Of course they also tried to convert us to their faith. They even risked to contract dysentery for it. I expected the same commitment, at the least, from the representatives of the Catholic Church.

I got desperately disappointed. The military chaplains were far from helping their fellow inmates, or fighting for their salvation. As members of the Polish Army, they were officers. They had lost their status of prisoners of war, when they arrived in the Concentration Camp. But still, they enjoyed some privileges. They were allowed to write and receive letters. They were not forced to shave their hair. Above all, they did not have to work. But they did not use this free time to help the people around them. Instead, they were arguing about who could give orders to whom. They had not even understood, that not the highest insignia



were going to help them in the Concentration Camp. They did not give a damn about the Church and other people's faith!

Daily I saw atrocities which remained unatoned. Every day, my doubts about the good God, whom my parents and the priest of Chwałowice had told me about, grew. The Almighty God, about whom we had sung to the sound of the organ. How could I still believe, when these priests didn't believe in what they were preaching."

#### **Leonard Steinwender: The Camp Altar**

The priest Leonard Steinwender was arrested in November 1938 because of his Christian resistance and brought to the Concentration Camp Buchenwald. 1946 he published the book "Christus im Konzentrationslager" (Christ in the Concentration Camp) where he described scenes of religious life in Buchenwald. He wrote down the following memory:

"Good comradeship meant that one inmate happily gave another a sign of his attention. A communist wanted to surprise me, when he found a little something on a street in the camp, which he had no use for. As it looked to him like a religious item, he gave it to me and said: "I don't know what to do with this junk, maybe it means something to you." To my surprise and delight, he gave me a little relic from the coffin of Saint Brother Konrad of Altötting. There was no doubt about its authenticity. I could not understand how this small valuable sacred item had gotten to Buchenwald. At our next religious gathering, on the following Sunday, I told my companions: "We now have an altar, consecrated to a patron who holds his protective hand over our home country." We had this relic with us at every ceremony, it was a substitute for altar and house of prayer. There couldn't have been an easier and simpler visible sign for our Sunday Mass, but still we felt a breath of grace coming from it – as if we were standing in the sacred site in Altötting, where people come on pilgrimages from afar.

Chance brought it to us by, and chance solved the secret of its origin. There were three rich gypsies from Berlin in our barrack. Father, son and son-in-law. All three were devout Catholics. The old Petermann never cut a up a loaf of bread without having made the sign of the cross over it three times in front of all the other inmates. By chance, we happened to mention the Brother Konrad relic in the course of a conversation. Very excitedly, the little gypsy asked who had it. When I showed it to him, he flung his arms around my neck and was overjoyed to see it in my handy. Now we learned its story. All three of them together had driven in their own car to the beatification of Brother Konrad in Altötting. As a valuable souvenir of this elating ceremony they took with them this small relic, which they carried with them at all times and sneaked into the camp with them. I happily restored them their property, which he readily placed at our disposal every Sunday and every festive day, when we, underneath some tree or in some hiding place, needed our Brother-Konrad Altar."



## 2.5 The pipe

### 1. Understanding the Role of the Object in the Camp Environment Smoking in Buchenwald Concentration Camp

More pipe's mouthpieces, pipe heads, cigarette holders, cigarette and tobacco cases were found at excavations. These found objects, as well as many witness's testimonies reveal that smoking was not uncommon and of great importance in Buchenwald Concentration Camp. This is unsurprising. Smoking gains a special importance in extreme situations such as life in a concentration camp. The tobacco contains nicotine, which abates hunger, relieves pressure, comforts and calms down. Smoking a pipe, cigarette or cigar can help getting away from everyday worries and make us forget our surroundings for a while. Smoking and the rituals around it, often shared with others, may for many have been the only luxury in the camp. And maybe a shared pipe can enable recollections about life before the camp or dreams about the most beautiful woman in the world.

For some, tobacco might have been a banality of everyday life in the camp, for others it was a rare commodity. Tobacco supplies in the camp, rules of the inmate hierarchy as well as personal contacts mainly determined which variety of tobacco was smoked and how much each inmate had at his disposal. There was exclusive Oriental tobacco, the tobacco of privileged inmates, French Caporal cigarettes, which are nowadays named Gauloises, or the strong Machorka, the so-called common people's tobacco from Poland or the Soviet Union. Machorka was smoked by Polish and Soviet Prisoners of War, but was also traded on the black market and thus reached a wider scope. Dr. Alfons Goldschmidt, a traveller to Russia, described Machorka in his diary:

"There is some Russian Forrest in it or Russian meadow, Russian landscape in any case. [...] It is tobacco for men. It knocks you over, you have to get used to it."

The ways to obtain tobacco products varied: There was a weekly ration of tobacco, which was never constant and which completely excluded those who were arrested as Jews. There was also the sale of tobacco in the inmates' canteen, overpriced up to 300 percent. There was the black market, the delivery of red-cross-parcels with tobacco products, or



national and political solidarity communities which provided the likeminded or the weak with tobacco. Those who were excluded from these possibilities may have found a substitute in dried leaves or nettles.

The significance of tobacco as a drug, and at the same time as a rare commodity in the camp, opened many doors for abuse in its trading. Tobacco became a further means of control for those in power, as the promise of additional tobacco rations could corrupt people, turn them into violent offenders, even murderers.

## 2. Examples from Witness's Reports about Buchenwald

### **Jorge Semprún: A shared cigarette of friendship in the latrine of the Little Camp.**

Jorge Semprún was arrested in September 1943 as a member of the French Résistance and a Communist and was deported to Buchenwald Concentration Camp at the end of January 1944. He wrote several books about the experience of his imprisonment. In his novel "Literature or Life", he writes:

"Yet despite the mephitic vapour and pestilential odor that constantly clung to the building, the latrines of the Little Camp were a convivial place, a kind of refuge where you could meet your compatriots, friends from your neighbourhood or the underground; it was a spot to share news, a few shreds of tobacco, memories, laughter, a bit of hope – some life, in short. In the Little Camp, the revolting latrines were a place of freedom: the SS and the Kapos naturally shunned the building and its nauseating stench, thus making the area of Buchenwald where one felt most free of the tyranny inherent in the very operation of the concentration-camp world.

By day, during working hours, the latrines were used only by invalids or those in the quarantine blocks who were too ill to work. Later, however, between the evening roll call and curfew, the latrines became not just a privy, but a marketplace of hopes and illusions, a souk where the most unusual things could be traded for a slice of black bread or a few butts of makhorka tobacco, an agora for the exchange of words: the currency of a discourse of fraternity, of resistance.

And so it was in the latrine building that I met some of my best friends in the quarantine camp: Serge Miller, Yves Darriet, Claude Francis-Boeuf, for example. We were all in the same block, number 62, having arrived together during the mass deportations of January 1944 that emptied the French prisons and the camp at Compiègne. Following a rather revealing military tradition, these two successive operations were given poetic code names, Meerscham and Frühlingwind: "Sea Foam" and "Spring Wind."

In the haggard crowd of Block 62, liable to every kind of forced labor, disoriented by the shocking reality of life in Buchenwald, with its absolutely inexplicable but absolutely compulsive rules, we were unable to recognize one another, to discover the common ties binding us to the same cultural and moral universe. It was in the collective latrines, in this unhealthy atmosphere reeking of urine, shit, feverish sweat, and acrid makhorka, that we found one another, literally brought together by huddling around the same cigarette butt, sharing the same caustic attitude as well, the same combative and fraternal curiosity about the chances of our survival.

Or, more likely, the death we would share.

It was there, one memorable night, that Barriet and I, taking delicious drags on the same cigarette end, discovered a mutual taste for jazz and poetry."

### **Christian Pineau: Vanishing Point and Suicide: The full food ration in exchange for tobacco**

Christian Pineau was arrested as a member of the French Resistance and deported to Buchenwald Concentration Camp in Mai 1943. In his second memorial volume "The simple truth, 1940-45", he writes:

"With money, we can buy tobacco, if you can call the cropped roots from Poland that, which do not remotely smell like corporal. But the few francs we had when we arrived in the camp were taken from us and we cannot get our rations. In principle at least – more than a third of us gets some old, faded Mark-notes from their bags and straw mattresses, pays cash in hand and then gets a precious brimming bag from the people on barrack duty. Our comrade had rushed to the black market on the latrine, to swap their biscuits, sardine tins, bread



rations and their margarine. For a loaf of bread, you can get five or six Marks. The tins do not sell that well, Russians and Poles are sceptical about these white metal boxes, because they do not know what's inside. A rate is adapted for each product and a novice has no business questioning it. If the bargaining process takes too long, then he is pushed in the ditch, and no one is interested in getting him out again.

Poupelloz's son sold – to the despair of his father – everything he owned. Wide-eyed and with shaking hands, he rolls the tobacco roots in small bits of newspaper, slowly licks the side of the cigarette and then asks someone on barrack duty, who has an old lighter for those who make him presents, for a light. When he starts to smoke, his face, which looks a little dull and foolish, lightens up, so that I can understand this sort of suicide. In this state he has no chance of returning to France. Of course we were hopeful, when we heard about the Russian offensive on the camp radio, but we – if everything goes well – will have to spend our Winter in Buchenwald. With his swollen neck, the edema on his ankle and his haggard body, he will not hold out. He must know that, while he's forgetting about himself. You have to see him, how he is bearing his burden, while we go to the quarry. You could stay, that it only stays on his shoulder through some mysterious, magnetic phenomenon.[...] Poupelloz's son stays upright and bears the blows. You could say, that he invites them, that is how much his weakness stirs the instincts of these brutal guys. Nothing affects him anymore. After his return, he lights his cigarette and restarts with his dream, just where he left off. Poor Poupelloz, he will die!"

#### **Karl Stojka : “But his pain was my survival” or The Stolen Cigarette Holder**

Karl Stojka was arrested in March 1943 as a “gypsy”, when he was eleven years old and deported to Auschwitz Concentration Camp. An excerpt from his Memories “Home in the whole world. The life and roaming of the gypsy Karl Stojka” is reproduced in the reader “The Voices of Buchenwald.” He reports:

“Buchenwald was hell on Earth. To survive, especially as a child, you had to become brutal and vile. It did not count for anything that you were a child.

Once, I was observing a man in Buchenwald for weeks, who fondly polished a cigarette holder everyday. It was probably the last thing he still had from his life before, but all I saw in it, was a valuable barter object. When it became clear to me, how valuable this cigarette holder was, I ran to the quarter of the political prisoners and arranged to receive on red-cross package in exchange for the holder. Then I stole the holder from the man, or rather, I dashed past him, got it into my hand. He did not even try to resist or to run after me, but when I looked back, I saw that he was crying. But his pain was my survival, and I did want to live. In the red-cross package, which I got for it, were all the splendours in the world, Biscuits, sausages, corned beef, sardines and chocolate, enough to survive for some weeks.”

#### **Josef Schlappe: The insidious rewarding system: One human life for a package of tobacco.**

Josef Schlappe was deported to Buchenwald Concentration Camp as a Communist in November 1938. There, he became a member of the illegal camp committee. After the liberation of the camp, he was interviewed by the Intelligence Team of the American Army, which was charged with interviewing survivors, collecting findings about the camp and their documentation. He told them:

“In summer 1940 six to eight Jewish comrades in the Jewish stone-carrying detail were regularly driven across the sentry line and shot. The chief murderer was the SS sentry Zepp, who received three days of special leave for each prisoner he shot. Zepp had made a regular “contract” with some of the more criminal kapos, who had to drive the unfortunate victims to him.

The kapos who drove the prisoners to the line were Vogel (political), Herzog (Foreign Legion), Strenzel (Foreign Legion), and Gross (a Jewish professional criminal). Of these only Strenzel is still alive today. Vogel and Gross were executed in camp by their fellow prisoners. After his release from camp, Herzog was killed by another prisoner who recognized him. These four kapos received a package of tobacco for each victim they drove to the murderer Zepp.”



### 3. Background information: music

#### 3.1 Das Buchenwaldlied – The Buchenwald Song

The Buchenwaldlied was the “Lagerlied” (Camp song) of the Concentration Camp. Lagerlieder were very common in the concentration camps (there was one in Esterwegen, Theresienstadt, Dachau ...) The “Buchenwaldlied” was sung while marching to and from work. The “idea” of songs for marching came from the military, to sing and march with the same rhythm to establish discipline and order in groups.

The Buchenwaldlied was composed in 1938 following an order of the commander of the concentration camp Arthur Rödl. He offered a prize for the best song (10 German Mark). Fritz Löhner-Beda and Hermann Leopoldi won the prize – but they never got any money. Fritz Löhner-Beda wrote the text for the Buchenwaldlied. He was born as Fritz Löwy in the Czech Republic. He studied law at the University of Vienna and became a famous librettist of operas, operettas and hit songs (“Schlager”). He was the librettist of Franz Lehar’s operetta “Land des Lächelns” (The Land of Smiles). Fritz Löhner-Beda was the vice-president of the Austrian writers’ association and president of the Viennese Jewish football club “Hakoah”.

In March 1938 he was arrested and deported to Dachau Concentration camp, and from September 1938 to 1942 arrested in Buchenwald. In the Concentration Camp, he participated in many small art performances for the other inmates. In 1938, he wrote the lyrics for the Buchenwald song, which Hermann Leopoldi then set to music. He was beaten by an SS man in Auschwitz-Monowitz in 1942 and died as a result.

Hermann Leopoldi was an Austrian composer and comedian, he wrote the music for the Buchenwaldlied. After graduating from school in 1904, he started working as a pianist. From 1914 to 1918, he was drafted to military service. He started to compose music, perform in cabarets and record his songs. In 1937 he got a silver decoration of merit to the Republic of Austria. Because he was Jewish according to the Nazis’ Nuremberg Laws, he was arrested in April 1938, deported to Dachau Concentration Camp, and from there to Buchenwald, in August 1938. He was an inmate in Buchenwald from August 1938 to February 1939

At the start of February 1939, Leopoldi was released from the Concentration Camp Buchenwald. He went to Vienna, obtained all the necessary papers for his departure – and emigrated to the United States in early March 1939. He arrived in New York on 20. März 1939 and started a second career, with concerts and record deals.

In 1947 he returned to his native city Vienna, starting his career anew. He died of a heart attack in 1959.

#### How can we understand the Buchenwaldlied?

Lagerlieder are examples for the contrast of the two-sided nature of formal and informal of music in concentration camps:

For the SS, the Lagerlieder were a means of control and power, felt by the inmates as terror and abasement

For the prisoners, it could at the same time be a means of resistance and sign for cultural-spiritual opposition (see especially the line “We will say yes to life, for the day will come when we are free!”)

#### Buchenwaldlied

When the day awakens, ere the sun smiles,



The gangs march out to the day's toils  
 Into the breaking dawn.  
 And the forest is black and the heavens red,  
 In our sacks we carry a piece of bread  
 And in our hearts, in our hearts – sorrow  
 O Buchenwald, I cannot forget you,  
 For you are my fate.  
 How who has left you, he alone can measure  
 How wonderful freedom is!  
 ,O Buchenwald, we do not whine and wail,  
 And whatever our fate,  
 ,We will say yes to life,  
 For the day will come when we are free!  
 And my blood is hot and my sweetheart far away,  
 And the wind sings softly, and I love her so.  
 If only, yes, if only she stays true!  
 And the stones are hard, but our stride is firm,  
 we carry our picks and spades.  
 And in our hearts, in our hearts – love.  
 O Buchenwald, I cannot forget you...  
 And the night is short and the day so long,  
 Yet a song rings out that was sung at home:  
 We won't be robbed of our courage!  
 Keep in Step, comrade, and don't lose heart  
 For in our blood we carry the will to live  
 And in our hearts, in our hearts – faith.  
 O Buchenwald, I cannot forget you...

#### **Place: Appellplatz (Mustering Ground)**

“Entering the former camp, you first arrive at the Mustering Ground. Today, it is part of a wide open plain, allowing a view of the Thuringian mountain range. The mustering ground used to be a closed square. Day after day, up to twenty thousand inmates paraded here at dawn to be counted. In the evening, after ten or more hours of forced labour, this procedure was repeated. Between the remainder of the old asphalt surface, there are a few isolated white travertine stones, which marked the zone for the parade. The stones, as far as still visible, show the real purpose of the mustering: Marching, lining up, forming up in blocks, taking off the caps, stand endlessly or sing for hours. This system was part of the programme for human debasement. To refuse this drill was deadly. The inmates had to stand facing the gatehouse, with a heavy machine gun on its balustrade. Before their eyes were the small windows of the camp prison from where they sometimes heard sounds of torture. Half naked men were publicly flogged, fellow inmates were hanged on the gallows. On the former mustering ground is now a memorial for all the inmates of the Buchenwald concentration camp.”

### **3.2 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Eine Kleine Nachtmusik KV 525**

Serenade No. 13 for strings in G major, 1787

There are four sources about “Eine kleine Nachtmusik” being played in Buchenwald, in different barracks at different times.

We know about three string quartets in Buchenwald:

1. The “Jewish” string quartet was formed in 1939/40 in the Jewish Barrack, it was illegal. It was initiated by Rudi Arndt, who had been a member of the Young Communist League in Berlin. He died in 1940.



When they played “Eine kleine Nachtmusik” the first time it was illegal, and they were punished by the SS near the gate, because they had “disgraced German music” by playing Mozart.

#### 2. The “French” string quartet

Maurice Hévitt was a famous French violinist, he formed the string quartet in 1944/45, after he arrived in Buchenwald. He had been the first violinist of the “Capet-Quartet”, which was very famous in France.

The violist was a Czech baritone, the Cello player was a famous Czech performer from Ostrava, the double bass player was from near Pilsen, in former Czechoslovakia.

3. The “Czech” string quartet was founded in 1942, in the time when Vlastimil Louda (1st violin) reorganised the “Lagerkapelle”. The Czech players mainly used their own instruments (the SS permitted them to keep them). The players changed in 1944 (Polak was released and Kuca left the string quartet). In 1944, Jaroslav Pekelský, a famous Czech violinist, was deported from Theresienstadt to Buchenwald and inherited the position of the first violinist of the quartet.

The Czech quartet was probably official from the very start.

On 1st August 1943 the double-string-quartet played “Eine kleine Nachtmusik” at a concert in the “Kinobaracke”

#### What concerts were there?

From 1st August 1943 to 31st December 1944, 27 concerts took place in the “Cinema Barrack”. SS men too attended these concerts, which were organised by the inmates. The concerts included music, plays, sketches, folkloristic dances.

#### Why did the SS allow the prisoners to play and listen to string quartets?

in the 2nd half of the World War II, the number of prisoners rose because many people were imprisoned following the occupation of territory in eastern Europe.

The SS was not able to fill all the positions in the camps by their own, they relied on some prisoners’ cooperation, too. (Funktionshäftlinge = prisoners with special functions)

More self-autonomy reduced the omnipotence of the SS

It was thus easier to organise music-activities and get some instruments from the “Effektenkammer” (chamber of effects) or the “Lagerkapelle”

More prisoners were used in armament industries as their manpower was needed.

The SS allowed more “cultural activities” in the camps since 1942/43, to raise the inmates’ working morale.

Music was generally legal in Buchenwald, when it was not obviously part of a resistance movement (such as workers’ songs), and as long as the authority of the SS was not compromised.

One of the places “Eine Kleine Nachtmusik” was being performed was at a Christmas performance in 1943 in the Camp hospital, the “Häftlingskrankenbau”

#### Places: The Camp hospital

“Because of the hard labour, the hunger and the constant water deficiency, there were many sick people in the camp. Most people were suffering from vermin, tuberculosis or open wounds. Many suffered from illnesses due to various shortages. But only those who were at the end of their strength or enjoyed a privileged position, dared to go to the camp hospital. Nobody could know whether they would die there or be saved. The killing of sick people had been part of an everyday routine since 1941. Even in the years before, the motto of the SS had to be taken seriously: “There are only healthy and dead people In this camp.” It is said to have been coined by the first camp commander, at the start of the camp time. The establishment of the hospital took several years, as the SS doctors showed little interest in it. It always lacked medicine, bandaging material and equipment. In the end it consisted of six, partly massive and badly equipped barracks, which is mainly due to the commitment of the carers – mostly political prisoners without medical training. Only later the SS allowed inmate doctors to practice medicine there. The park-like surrounding of the sick-



and operating barracks was thus until the end a deceptive Idyll, covering selection, suffering and death.”

### 3.3 In the mood, Glenn Miller

There was a Jazzcombo in the Buchenwald Concentration Camp called “Rhythmus” (rhythm). The group formed in summer 1943 with 14 musicians. The instruments came partly from the “Wertsachenlager” (chamber of effects), were received from the wife of a Czech prisoner, who sent instruments to the camp, or were borrowed from the Lagerkapelle (a work commando of prisoners). The band rehearsed in the “Kleines Lager” (little camp), because the SS did not go there often – the combo was illegal.

When some SS men found out about the combo, they were proud. The combo was allowed to play at the concerts, which was on 25.12.1943/1/2.1. 1944 (programme „Kopf hoch!“ – Chin up!). They then also had to play for visits of SS men from other camps.

Mostly they played in the barracks for smaller groups, because they understood it as more intimate.

The musicians in the group were mostly Czech, but there were also French, Danish, American, Dutch, Belgian, Russian and German members.

They played songs by Duke Ellington, Glenn Miller, Cole Porter, W.C.Handy, I. Berlin, Louis Armstrong, Artie Shaw, Fats Walter.

They also played arrangements composed by inmates (one of them, Jiří Žák, composed „Der eiserne Besen“, set to the words by Czech poet and singer Jaroslav Bartl, who was also an inmate in Buchenwald) and by the Czech composers Ježek, Leppold Korbař, they played musical versions on Vítězslav Nezval and Heinrich Heine (1 song)

**Why was it officially forbidden to play jazz?**

In Nazi propaganda, jazz stood for a “Jewish-American conspiracy”. Jazz was thus seen as a means to infiltrate the German nation with American thoughts and culture, with a view to destroy the German race

**Why was it allowed to play jazz in concentration camps?**

The Nazi-propagandists have always had the problem, that jazz was too popular to keep it away from the Germans: many Germans loved to dance swing. So the Nazi-leaders tried to create a “German” style of jazz and to ban special “American” elements from jazz. But Germans, especially in the big cities and young people still loved jazz. Because of this the SS-leaders were happy to have some jazz musicians in the camps.

**Places: The Little Camp**

Entirely overgrown with trees and coppice, the area beyond the last row of barracks was all but forgotten for many decades. The extensive clearance work and archaeological excavations carried out in the early '90s uncovered only isolated traces of buildings, pathways and the foundations of a large latrine. They testify today to the crude and makeshift manner in which the so-called Little Camp was built. The order for its establishment as a quarantine area came from high levels in 1942. Within mere weeks, the SS had twelve windowless army stables put up on the tamped loam soil — each of them forty meters long and just under ten meters wide. In the interior, to the left and right of a narrow aisle, rows of shelf-like boxes made of raw wood extended down the entire length of the structure. The lowest bunk level was right over the ground, the fourth and highest just under the ceiling. Each of these stables was originally intended for some fifty horses. In Buchenwald an average of one thousand, sometimes nearly two thousand, human beings were forced to live in each of them. In 1944, even these accommodations no longer sufficed, and five large tents were erected.

Separated from the Main Camp by a barbed-wire fence, the Little Camp served as a quarantine and a reservoir for forced labour. After only a few weeks, most of the inmates were sent on to one of the external camps. Yet even their short stay was a shock. Hunger, dirt, desperate struggles for survival dominated life in this slum of the Buchenwald barrack town. At the beginning of 1945, the Little Camp, now containing way more than ten thousand inmates, became a place where people were sent to die. Thousands of totally debilitated Jews, arriving in endless trains from the East, were crammed into the stables by the SS. In the period of less than one hundred days before liberation, more than five thousand persons died here.



## 4. Background information: Commander's orders

### 4.1 Information about SS - The SS Totenkopf Squadrons

In 1937-38 the SS had two barracked squadrons under its control: SS Totenkopf units large enough to be defined as full regiments at the concentration camps Dachau, Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen, and the SS Disposal Troops. For the SS Totenkopf Regiment Three "Thüringen," which formed the "guard block" of Buchenwald Concentration Camp from the autumn of 1937 until September 1, 1939, duty in the camp was part of the training. Until 1939, service was carried out on the basis of voluntary registration and commitment for four to twelve years. The officers of the SS Totenkopf Regiments viewed themselves as representing the elite of the SS, and the selection of new recruits was made according to rigorous standards during the initial stages. However these were relaxed once the war had begun. Originally, members were obliged to own German citizenship and a certificate of one hundred years of pure-bloodedness," and had to be at least 1,72m tall, young and healthy. The average age of the majority of the men was therefore considerably below the full legal age of twenty-one. Between June 23 and July 8, 1938, 25 inmates were shot dead whilst attempting to escape in Buchenwald, Dachau and Sachsenhausen. Among the SS executioners, four were 16 years of age, six were 17, eight were 18 and five were 19.

The hard drill to which they subjected themselves was intended to fulfill two fundamental purposes in addition to basic military training: firstly, it was to strengthen the consciousness of being a member of an elite corps and the feeling of racial superiority. To enforce these ideals, all non-official interaction with inmates were strictly prohibited and punished. Secondly, the members of the SS were to be taught to act violently and cold-bloodedly towards their "inferiors," who were to be combated in the call of political duty.  
(...)

Their heroic self-image as "political soldiers" stood in sharp contrast to the banal military routines, the boorish demagoguery, the comradeship and the cruelties that constituted their everyday lives. Anti-Semitism played a leading role. The training agenda included lectures on this subject. In October 1940, for example, by order of the commander, the NS propaganda film "Jud Süß," was to be viewed by the Buchenwald guard units "as a collective."



Shortly before the war began, the SS members designated to serve as “police reinforcements” were called to the concentration camps, thus providing the “K.L. Verstärkung” (concentration camp reinforcement). The SS Totenkopf Regiment “Thüringen” (later part of the Armed SS division “Totenkopf”) joined the Wehrmacht (German armed forces) in the invasion of Poland and was already subjecting the civilian population to severe brutality in the first days of the war. In its place, the guard battalion raised from the concentration camp reinforcement took charge of the entire surveillance of the camp on September 1, 1939. Because of the fact that men under thirty could not be recruited for concentration camp service during the war, the age structure of the guard units underwent a distinct change. During the war years, men from the guard units and command staff were pulled from camp service to reinforce the front units of the Armed SS, which meant that all able-bodied younger men were called away. After the war began, they were replaced mainly by General SS members over thirty years of age, some even over forty. From 1942 on, seriously war-disabled SS men were also sent to the guard units with increasing frequency. When they were too disabled even to carry out guard duty, they were given administrative positions.

As the war continued, the guard units were also increasingly reinforced with Ukrainian and Latvian auxiliary units as well as SS volunteers from the German minorities in Hungary and Romania. The fluctuation within the concentration camp units was nevertheless so great that in the final year of the war Himmler ruled that service in the camps was to be regarded as “front service.” Dogs trained to attack inmates played an increasing role in the surveillance of the camps. Due to the growing number of sub-camps, the SS could no longer meet the demand for guard units with its own reserves. In July 1944, 2,735 members of the air force were therefore transferred to the Buchenwald guard battalion, integrated into the SS and charged with the surveillance of the sub-camps. In some cases, commanders of the guard battalion rose further up in the SS hierarchy and two of them – Otto Förschner and Richard Baer – even eventually became concentration camp commanders.



## 4.2 Information about SS - Training of SS men

### Instruction about the duties and obligations of the sentinel

#### I. Basics about sentinel duty in the concentration camp.

Question: You are drafted for sentinel duty in a concentration camp. What actually is a "concentration camp"?

("To concentrate" means to collect/assemble, to hold something together around one focus point.)

Answer: A concentration Camp is a "Collection camp".

Question: What elements are being collected in this camp?

Answer: Criminals, antisocials, the sexually abnormal, public enemies, slackers/idlers, thieves, those held for security reasons, the politically unreliable, those detrimental to the people, and others.

Question: What's your opinion of/about this sort of people?

Answer: They are very dangerous, harm the general public, the people and the fatherland.

Question: What would happen, if all these people were at large/on the loose?

Answer: It would be possible for them to continue exercising their detrimental, pernicious influence.

(...)

#### V. Relationship to the inmates

Question: What is the official relation between the sentinel and the inmate?

Answer: The sentinel is the supervisor of the inmate.

Question: What does this statement mean in particular?

Answer: The inmates have to approach the sentinel with respect.

(...)

Question: What do you have to assume if a member of the SS addresses an inmate informally with "du" (you)?

Answer: The conjecture seems likely that he places himself on the same level as this public enemy.

Question: The experience taught us that the inmates try to ingratiate themselves with the guards with all sorts of small services and complaisance. How do we react to that?

Answer: This sort of complaisance is to be refused in any case/at any rate.

Question: What do the inmates want to achieve with these offerings?

Answer: They are trying to bribe the sentinel and expect a service in return.



Question: What do they particularly want?

Answer: They want to induce the sentinels to smuggle their uncensored postal items to the outside.

Question: Through whom are they often trying to achieve the same?

Answer: Through civilian persons, women and children, whom they encounter.

Question: What do the sentinels therefore have to look out for strictly?

Answer: It has to be avoided that inmates get in contact with civilians.

Question: What else would be effected by following this order strictly?

Answer: It will be prevented that inmates secretly receive any objects, food products, smoking products, notifications, or mail from the outside.

Question: What does a sentinel prove, if he nevertheless enters into such a closer connection with an inmate?

Answer: He proves that he is not worthy of being an SS man, that he abases himself to a public enemy and that he belongs in a concentration camp himself.

Question: The fact that the sentinel is the supervisor of the inmate does not only encompass a right, but also a duty. Which duty does this right impose on the SS man?

Answer: He has to be an example for the inmate.

Question: How does this manifest itself?

Answer: The sentinel is not allowed to stand about in negligent posture, cannot lean against things, carry his rifle carelessly, put his hand on the muzzle or let himself go in any other way.

Question: What does the inmate have to feel?

Answer: That the sentinel is the proponent of a better world-view, an impeccable political conviction and a higher moral mindset, who he can model himself on, in his endeavour to become a useful member of the community again.