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WGL Donau

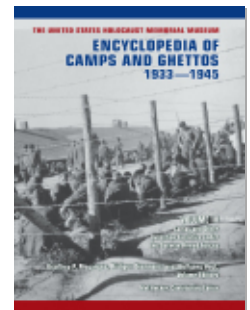
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Peter Lutz Kalmbach

Trans. Sezin Elze and Geoffrey P. Megargee.

## WEHRMACHTGEFANGENENLAGER (WGL) DONAU

Alongside the eight German military prisons (*Wehrmachtgefängnisse*, WG), there was also an equivalent institution, WGL Donau, which existed from mid-1941 to September or October 1942. The camp does not appear to have had the status of a reception facility (*Auffangstelle*); it received its prisoners solely through transfers from the military prisons. This status explains its absence from the enforcement plan of September 10, 1941.<sup>1</sup>

The postal address of the Commander of WGL Donau was Leipheim 2, Günzburg (Donau), Fliegerhorst (map 4f).<sup>2</sup> One of the three prisoners’ units of the camp was also located in Fliegerhorst Leipheim, east of Ulm. The other two units were located in Regensburg and in the nearby town of Obertraubling.

Before the establishment of WGL Donau, there was already a military prisoners’ unit from WG Germersheim in Leipheim, and a unit from WG Torgau-Fort Zinna was located in Obertraubling.<sup>3</sup> The literature on Obertraubling Airport describes the “conversion of a Luftwaffe base into an

aircraft factory” beginning in December 1940 and the arrival of “around 2,200 soldiers from the Defense District (*Wehrkreis*) penal company stationed in Grafenwöhr.”<sup>4</sup> In fact, the penal unit stationed in Grafenwöhr, Sonderabteilung XIII, a disciplinary “educational unit,” comprised only about 100–200 men (outside of the regular staff), who were only temporarily stationed in Obertraubling. The 2,200 men who arrived on December 4, 1940, belonged instead to the military prisoners’ unit (*Wehrmachtgefangenenabteilung*, WGA) Obertraubling of WG Torgau-Fort Zinna.<sup>5</sup> They were quartered at the airport in barracks surrounded by barbed wire.<sup>6</sup> It is not known when the military prisoners’ unit in Leipheim from WG Germersheim arrived. Its strength was at least 1,000 men. After the arrival of a third military prisoners’ unit in the area of Regensburg-Obertraubling, the three units were consolidated into the independent WGL Donau in mid-1941.

The establishment of WGL Donau (as was the case with its predecessor organizations) was closely connected with the needs of the German military aircraft industry. There were important military airfields in both Leipheim and Obertraubling, on which the Messerschmitt company established factories in 1940 for the production of military aircraft. Messerschmitt had manufactured the Me 108 and Me 109 fighters in Regensburg since 1938. In the branch factories at Obertraubling and Leipheim, which were under the Augsburg branch of Messerschmitt, the Me 321 “Gigant” cargo glider and the motorized version, the Me 323, were built; later, the Me 262 jet fighter was built in Leipheim and the rocket-powered Me 163 fighter was built in Obertraubling.<sup>7</sup> The importance of these projects to the OKW is reflected in the May 10, 1941, order that military prisoners who had served their sentence or who had been granted “front probation” be retained in the prisoners’ units at Obertraubling and Leipheim to continue to work for the arms industry.<sup>8</sup> Possibly, military prisoners from the Luftwaffe were preferentially selected. Such selections could explain why some sources incorrectly refer to “soldiers from a Luftwaffe penal battalion.”<sup>9</sup>

A total of just under 5,000 prisoners passed through WGL Donau. By the end of 1941, there were 4,000 military prisoners working alongside 8,000 civilian laborers in the Messerschmitt factory in Regensburg, the second-largest aircraft factory in Europe. Whether the latter participated in the sabotage actions in the Regensburg factory that were investigated by the Gestapo is not known.<sup>10</sup>

WGL Donau controlled a so-called penal camp unit (*Straflagerabteilung*), as did the eight military prisons. As was the case at the military prisons, such as WG Glatz, for example, these units were used for “custody” of prisoners who were classified as “irredeemable.” Those who were considered “pests, criminal types, [and] carriers of hostile spirits” had to endure the harshest conditions of confinement.<sup>11</sup> They were, therefore, considered “protected,” while they would actually begin serving their sentences after the war. The penal camp unit in WGL Donau held at least 270 men as of March 1,

1942.<sup>12</sup> Compared with the eight military prisons, this total is the second highest. Apparently, the living and working conditions in the camp offered sufficient leeway to realize the demand for the hardest imprisonment.

After the Wehrmacht's offensive stalled at the gates of Moscow, in the winter of 1941, the Nazi leadership saw a "reorganization of enforcement" as unavoidable; the result was the "Führer-Order" of April 2, 1942.<sup>13</sup> This "reorganization" had especially grave consequences for WGL Donau until its dissolution in the early fall of 1942. Hitler's order reemphasized that the "probationary potential of the Eastern Front . . . must be utilized more than it has been to this point."<sup>14</sup> As early as February 12, 1942, the OKW ordered the military prisons, as well as WGL Donau, to "immediately *evaluate* [emphasis in original] once again" whether their prisoners could be recommended "for a commutation of their sentence to probation in their own units or a unit of the regular Army or in the Probationary Units [*Bewährungsgruppe*]."<sup>15</sup> The Wehrmacht judges who were tasked with making these recommendations were cautioned that due to the "completely changed situation . . . commutation of punishment is only to be granted if it is somehow justifiable."<sup>16</sup> The number of prisoners from Regensburg, Obertraubling, and Leipheim who were sent to front probation in the "normal" combat units or in the battalions of Probationary Unit 500 is unknown. Provisions for probation on the "battlefield," as was the case in May 1941 (see above), were barely still in question.

The Führer-Order of April 2, 1942, also included prisoners for whom front probation was out of the question: "In the future some of the condemned will not be able to be deployed (or deployed immediately) to the fighting troops. For those unstable elements, it is necessary to remove the incentive for them to withdraw themselves from the front line through prison sentences by hardening the conditions of imprisonment. For this purpose immediate field prisoners' detachments are to be drawn up, which are to be used in the operational area, if possible in the area where the fighting troops are deployed, for the hardest labor and under the most dangerous circumstances."<sup>17</sup> The implementation of Hitler's order resulted in the large-scale transfer of the military penal system to the front in the field penal battalions (*Feldstrafgefangenen-Abteilungen*, FStGA), as they were later known, and in the field penal camps (*Feldstraflager*). The latter were responsible for those previously held in "custody" in the penal camp units.

When the establishment of the first two field penal camps was ordered on April 13, 1942, WGL Donau had to transfer the 270 men in the penal camp unit to WG Torgau-Brückenkopf, where Feldstraflager II was to be formed. The former penal camp unit prisoners were to be transferred beginning on June 1 via WG Torgau-Fort Zinna, which thereafter had to collect "all remaining penal camp inmates" and was given sole responsibility for the field penal camps.<sup>18</sup>

On April 14, 1942, the order was given for the establishment of the first three FStGAs. WGL Donau was to send 50 prisoners to FStGA 3, who were to be temporarily kept in

WG Anklam. This order was connected to an additional order to report the number of "those prisoners who were to be sent to the FStGAs" by May 5.<sup>19</sup> Thereafter, such reports were created monthly. On the basis of these reports, the respective general at the OKH coordinated the creation of additional field penal battalions and the organization of special transports for those prisoners.

To move the "emphasis of enforcement" from "the military prisons to the field penal battalions and field penal camps" and to increase the potential for use of "front probation," it was essential to have quick and uninterrupted access to the prisoners.<sup>20</sup> In order to secure this access, the OKW made decisive choices about the use of Wehrmacht prisoners in industries unrelated to the Wehrmacht, as had been practiced up to that time. The resulting measures would lead to the dissolution of WGL Donau. It was decided that, beginning on August 15, 1942, Wehrmacht prisoners would "no longer be sent to work outside of the Wehrmacht."<sup>21</sup> Of the 18,000 men who had been sent to work in industrial concerns outside the Wehrmacht by that time, 7,350 were withdrawn by October 1, 1942: "The 7,350 men should be sent to probationary units, field penal battalions, and field penal camps."<sup>22</sup> In the intervening time, the removal of all Wehrmacht prisoners working in war-related businesses outside the Wehrmacht was planned; they were to be replaced by foreign forced laborers, prisoners of war, and concentration camp inmates.

A temporary reprieve from the October 1, 1942 order to send prisoners to probationary and field penal units was granted for those working in the "petroleum industry," which was deemed to be particularly important to the war effort. Here, "transfers to field penal battalions . . . for the time being will only be allowed" if "competent replacements can be sent from less-important operations." Departures "through criminal proceedings, commutation of sentences to probation" and "transfers to field penal camps" should be delayed, at least "for the time being" "until it is possible to replace them with transfers of prisoners from less-important operations."<sup>23</sup> The Messerschmitt factories in which the prisoners from WGL Donau worked were included among these "less-important operations."

The departure of military prisoners from Leipheim and Regensburg-Obertraubling was so rigorously carried out that the production of the Me 323 in Leipheim ceased on September 26, 1942, because the 1,307 concentration camp prisoners requested by Messerschmitt had not arrived. In Obertraubling, the transfer of 4,100 Soviet prisoners of war was requested in compensation for the military prisoners. However, only between 2,200 and 2,750 men arrived for the planned "Russian camp."<sup>24</sup> In view of these negative effects on aircraft production, it is also noteworthy that the former inmates of WGL Donau were transferred to the field units with some delay. Some of them were subsequently sent to perform excavations at the Wildflecken zum Einatz training ground, where WG Germersheim had previously had a military prisoners' unit. Others were temporarily employed at the exercise ground in Klagenfurt.<sup>25</sup>

It is unclear whether executions took place at the sites of WGL Donau, as was the case at the eight military prisons. Fritz Wüllner writes that executions did take place at Leiphem but does not provide any evidence.<sup>26</sup> In the database of cards in the former Zentralnachweistelle of the Bundesarchiv, which document death sentences issued by military courts, there is a record of one death sentence handed down against Kanonier Stephan Schein by the court of the 465th Division in 1944; however, there is no indication whether, and, if so, where and when, this sentence was carried out.<sup>27</sup>

**SOURCES** Primary source information about WGL Donau is located in BA-MA (RL 21/90) and BArch PA.

Additional information about WGL Donau can be found in the following publications: Helmut Halter, *Stadt unterm Hakenkreuz: Kommunalpolitik in Regensburg während der NS-Zeit* (Regensburg: Universitätsverlag Regensburg, 1994); Peter Schmol, *Messerschmitt-Giganten und der Fliegerhorst Regensburg-Obertraubling 1936–1945* (Regensburg: Buchverlag, 2002), pp. 24–27; Heike Wolter, “Wenn der Krieg um 11 Uhr aus ist, seid ihr um 10 Uhr alle tot!” in *Sterben und Überleben im KZ-Außenlager Obertraubling*, ed. Heike Wolter (Salzburg: Riedenburg, 2011); Fritz Wüllner, *Die NS-Militärjustiz und das Elend der Geschichtsschreibung: Ein grundlegender Forschungsbericht*, 2nd ed. (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1997).

Hans-Peter Klausch  
Trans. Dallas Michelbacher

## NOTES

1. Allgemeine Heeresmitteilungen (AHM) 1941, hg. vom Oberkommando des Heeres, Berlin 1941 (8.), Nr. 895 (OKW, 10.9.1941, 54 f 10 Str 1929/41 AHA/Ag H Str [II]) mit Anlage, pp. 470, 494.

2. Der Chef der Heeresrüstung und Befehlshaber des Ersatzheeres Az. 54 HR IV b/1 183/42 vom 31.1.1942, reproduced in Wüllner, *Die NS-Militärjustiz*, p. 824.

3. Both were named in Der Chef der Heeresrüstung und Befehlshaber des Ersatzheeres Az. 54 HR IV a 662/41 vom 13.5.1941, reproduced in *Ibid.*, pp. 821–823.

4. Halter, *Stadt unterm Hakenkreuz*, p. 330; Wolter, “Wenn der Krieg um 11 Uhr aus ist,” pp. 24, 26.

5. Schmol, *Messerschmitt-Giganten*, p. 16.

6. See the camp plan as of July 1941 in Gabriele Vilsmeier, “Der Flugplatz Obertraubling,” in *Neutraubling 1951–1976: Beiträge zur Geschichte einer bayerischen Vertriebenengemeinde*, ed. Josef Fendl (Neutraubling: IG Werbung, 1976), p. 30. See also report of the former Angehörigen der Wehrmachtgefangenenabteilung Obertraubling cited in Karl-Heinz Hoffmann, “Wehrmachtgefängnis Torgau-Fort Zinna,” in *Am Eismeer verschollen: Erinnerungen aus der Haftzeit in faschistischen Strafgefangenenlagern in Nordnorwegen* (Berlin: Dietz, 1988), pp. 30–35.

7. See, in reference to the named aircraft types, Hans J. Ebert, Johann B. Kaiser, and Klaus Peters, *Willy Messerschmitt—Pionier der Luftfahrt und des Leichtbaues: Eine Biographie* (Bonn: Bernard & Graefe, 1992), pp. 220–269.

8. See Norbert Haase, “Gefähr für die Manneszucht”: *Verweigerung und Widerstand im Spiegel der Spruchfähigkeit von*

*Marinegerichten in Wilhelmshaven (1939–1945)* (Hannover: Hahnische Buchhandlung, 1996), p. 251.

9. Schmol, *Messerschmitt-Giganten*, p. 26.

10. See Wolfgang Schumann und Karl Drechsler, eds., *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, vol. 2 (Berlin, 1975), p. 233.

11. Der Chef der Heeresrüstung und Befehlshaber des Ersatzheeres Az. 54 HR VI 317/40 vom 6.5.1940, BA-MA, RH 14/30, Bl. 34.

12. OKW 54 e 10 Feldstr.Lag.-AHA/Ag/Str I/II Str 929/42 vom 14.4.1942, BA-MA, H 20/497. For penal camp custody, see **Feldstraflagern I–III**.

13. Der Führer und Oberste Befehlshaber der Wehrmacht 14 a 16 Beih. 1 WR (I 3/4) Nr. 634/42 vom 2.4.1942, BA-MA, H 20/497.

14. *Ibid.*

15. OKW 54 e 10 Strafauss. AHA/Ag/H Str II Str 385/42 vom 12.2.1942, BA-MA, RH 14/31, Bl. 157.

16. Chef H Rüst u. BdE 14 c HR IV b/1 212/42 vom 14.3.1942, BA-MA, RH 14/31, Bl. 157.

17. Der Führer und Oberste Befehlshaber der Wehrmacht 14 a 16 Beih. 1 WR (I 3/4) Nr. 634/42 vom 2.4.1942, BA-MA, H 20/497.

18. OKW 54 e 10 Feldstr.Lag.-AHA/Ag/H/Str.I/II Str. 929/42 vom 13.4.1942, BA-MA, H 20/497.

19. OKW 54 e 10 Feldstr.Gef.Abt. – AHA/Ag/H Str. I/II Str. 1041/42 vom 14.4.1942, BA-MA, H 20/497.

20. Der Chef des OKW 14 n 16 Beih. 1 WR (I 3/4) 634/42 vom 10.6.1942, BA-MA, RH 14/31, Bl. 139.

21. Der Reichsminister für Bewaffnung und Munition. Rüstungsamt Az. 1k35 (Q2p) Rü Ind (Ib) Nr. 3599/42 g vom 1.9.1942, BA-MA, RW 19/954, Bl. 7.

22. KTB Chef Wi Amt vom 12.9.1942, BA-MA, RW 19/169, Bl. 93.

23. Der Reichsminister für Bewaffnung und Munition. Rüstungsamt Az. 1k35 (Q2p) Rü Ind (Ib) Nr. 3599/42 g vom 1.9.1942, BA-MA, RW 19/954, Bl. 7.

24. See Halter, *Stadt unterm Hakenkreuz*, p. 330; Fabian Sachenbacher, “Die Vorgeschichte. Der Fliegerhorst Obertraubling,” in *Sterben und Überleben im KZ-Außenlager Obertraubling*, ed. Heike Wolter (Salzburg: Riedenburg, 2011), p. 24; Schmol, *Messerschmitt-Giganten*, pp. 78–80; Vilsmeier, “Der Flugplatz Obertraubling,” pp. 32, 34.

25. See Schmol, *Messerschmitt-Giganten*, p. 80. The transfer from Obertraubling to Wildflecken is also mentioned in the curriculum vitae of Fritz D. from July 3, 1946, reproduced in Jörg Kammler, *Ich habe die Metzzelei satt und laufe über . . . Kasseler Soldaten zwischen Verweigerung und Widerstand (1939–1945): Eine Dokumentation*, 2nd ed. (Fuldabrück: Hesse, 1985), p. 34.

26. See Wüllner, *Die NS-Militärjustiz*, p. 818.

27. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei, Bl. 436.

## WEHRMACHTGEFÄNGNIS (WG) ANKLAM

WG Anklam was mentioned in official documentation as early as November 1938, albeit with the additional designation “Zwischenunterkunft Glatz” (today Kłodzko, Poland).<sup>1</sup> The provisional unit in Glatz became necessary because the prison in Anklam, which had originally been intended as a