

"Erziehung" ins Massengrab - Die Geschichte des

"Arbeitserziehungslagers Nordmark", Kiel-Russee 1944-1945

by

Dr. Detlef Korte

Translation by Alexander van Gorp

The Arbeitserziehungslager

The first Arbeitserziehungslager was built shortly after the start of the war in the south-western part of the Reich. Since 1938 a large number of workers of the Organization Todt had been occupied with the building of the Westwall and a highway. Understandably the work did not progress at a pace which was to the satisfaction of the planners, with the result that in October 1939 the "*SS-Sonderlager*" (SS special camp) Hinzert was established along with several subsidiary police detention camps. It was here that the 21-day "*Erziehungshaft*" (education imprisonment), formerly completed in police prisons, was executed. Judging from post-war statements by the first Hinzert commandant these detention facilities had been necessary because many of the workers assigned to the project by the employment offices were found to have an "aversion to work". It had become necessary to "educate" these "habitual drinkers" and notorious "layabouts" in Hinzert and its *Außenkommandos*" (subsidiary camps.) It appears that the Hinzert

model had proven itself as Todt himself later stated that only this form of short-term "education detention" had made the completion of the Westwall possible.

The establishment of special Arbeitserziehungslager (AEL) was quickly taken up in other parts of the Reich as well. It was probably in April or May 1940 that the Bremen Gestapo, with the approval of the *RSHA* (Reich Security Headquarters) arranged to have an AEL built in Farge which was initially used primarily for German "*Bummelanten*" (loafers) who had been arrested by the Bremen Gestapo in consultation with the management of armament producers. Mid-April 1940 several barracks in Berlin-Wuhlheide were transferred from railway management to the Gestapo in Berlin. These buildings also served as detention centers for "*Arbeitsvertragsbrüchige*" (workers in breach of labor contracts) and for Gestapo prisoners awaiting trial, and as centers for transfer to concentration camps.

By the mid-40's the AEL were also being used to put pressure on another group of people, namely the more than 200,000 Polish workers in the Reich. This is evident from a communiqué of June 7, 1940, from the *SS-Reichsführer* (Supreme SS-Commander) to all heads of district offices. In it Himmler requested to be informed of the number of *Straflager* (prison camps) for Polish workers and the experience with these camps. The problem would urgently require uniform regulations.

Berlin was not the only place where up to this point uncertainty existed with respect to the existing *Straflager* for Polish workers. Also, on June 7, 1940, the *Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer* (*HSSPF*) (Senior Head of the SS and Police) in defense district XI, Jeckeln, turned to the Braunschweig State ministry. He had heard from discussions with district heads in the Braunschweig area "that some sort of *Straflager* for unwilling Polish workers had been established in certain areas. In some cases places with especially heavy work had been selected for this purpose"¹ Jeckeln also requested further information about the existing camps and the experience with them, since "this matter requires uniform regulations."

In the summer of 1940 Jeckeln was transferred to the Ruhr area where he took over the office of *HSSPF West*. On August 8 he took part in a conference in Münster, attended by representatives of the mining sector, *Gauleitungen* (Nazi administrative districts) and defense. The subject for discussion was the work performance of Poles employed in coal mining. *Gauamtleiter* (District Head) Klein complained about the lack of interest, disinclination to work, lack of discipline and a tendency toward insubordination. The performance of Polish workers tended to be as much as 35% less than that of German workers, whose performance was also increasingly diminishing. Klein demanded "drastic education measures."

Supported by experiences from former defense district XI, Jeckeln suggested "to establish *Zwangsläger* (forced labor camps) for Poles, intended for temporary detention of those elements who do not complete their work quota or otherwise commit disciplinary offenses."² At a subsequent meeting on August 16, Jeckeln's recommendation was approved, at which time also the "bad part of the German work force" was included as potential detainees.

By the end of the same month, at the construction site of the Versedam, the "*Arbeits- und Erziehungslager* (labor and education camp) Hunswinkel near Lüdenscheid" became operational. The construction firm Hochtief AG Lüdenscheid had made some barracks available, in return receiving the prisoners as laborers. The guard contingent consisted of members of the police force under the command of the crime secretary of the Gestapo regional headquarters Dortmund.

On December 12 the management of camp Hunswinkel wrote a progress report. Up to that point 517 "education prisoners" had been processed through the camp. In view of the existing conditions at Hunswinkel, this achievement was considered "extremely good". The report made mention of the highest demands on the physical condition and health of the prisoners; the working conditions were said to be "worse than difficult." Germans still accounted for the greater number of prisoners (457). Thirty nine were Poles, the remainder were citizens of other countries.

The large percentage of Germans in Hunswinkel could be considered an exception, even at this point, the second half of 1940. AEL Hallendorf-Watenstedt, in Jeckeln's former command area, had been established primarily to serve as a detention center for "unwilling Polish workers" while still "having them available for the *Arbeitseinsatz* (labor deployment) [at the Hermann Göring Werke.]" A report about AEL Breitenau, which had been established in the summer of 1940, contains the following:

"On the instructions of the Secret State Police Kassel, an *Arbeitserziehungslager* for police prisoners was established. **This camp is to be seen as a preliminary stage of a concentration camp.** Although for the most part Poles and Jews will be housed here, Germans and other foreigners will also be among them. The basis for detention is mainly refusal to work, leaving the workplace and offenses against the community."³

On April 1, 1941, in a letter to all government ministers and Gestapo regional headquarters, among others, Himmler dealt with the consequences which the 21-day "*Arbeitserziehungsdetention*" in police prisons had on Poles. For those incarcerated because of work refusal and insubordination, the "purpose of incarceration" was said not to have been achieved through simple imprisonment and detention in a police prison. Himmler therefore ordered more severe prison conditions such as the limiting of food rations.

As latest to this point, a special punishment which was already in use in certain parts of the Reich, was suggested by the Reichsführer: the admission to an "*Arbeitserziehungslager*". In his communiqué he further announced that, with respect to the establishment of *Arbeitserziehungslager* a special decree would soon be issued.

The decree of May 28, 1941

The decree, announced in early April 1941, was officially made public a mere eight weeks later, on May 28, 1941, to relevant offices (Gestapo headquarters, commanders and inspectors of the

security police and security service, and others.) It shows that it was still not known in Berlin how many AEL already existed in the Reich. Instructions were given to report by June 15 all camps already in existence.

The decree contained 13 points and six lay-outs. Thus any misunderstandings about the operation of the AEL which were to be established, would be removed.

Himmler justified his order on the basis of increasing breaches of labor contracts by foreigners and other workers in industries of importance to defense and the national economy. In the interest of the defense capabilities of the German people this deplorable state of affairs had to be opposed by all means: "Workers who refuse work or otherwise endanger work morale and who have to be placed in police custody for the maintenance of order and security, are to be placed together in special *Arbeitserziehungslager* and kept there for regular work assignment. The *Arbeitserziehungslager* are exclusively intended for the detention of those who refuse to work or problematic elements whose conduct is equivalent to labor sabotage. The incarceration pursues an educational purpose and is not intended to be punishment."⁴

The establishment of an *Arbeitserziehungslager* required the approval of the *RSHA*. Within the Reich applications had to be submitted through the inspectors of the security police and security service (*SD*) (*IdS*.) In the occupied territories the commanders of the security police and *SD* (*BdS*) were responsible. In their applications the *IdS* and *BdS* had to indicate to the *RSHA* why it was necessary to establish an AEL within their respective territories and how its operation (facilities, care, capacity, labor deployment, etc.) would be organized. The actual responsibility of the camp rested with one or more Gestapo regional headquarters selected by the *IdS/BdS*. The Gestapo also supplied guards. The initiative for the establishment of these camps therefore originated with intermediate authorities (*IdS* and *BdS*), and not with the highest ones as was the case for concentration camps.

The AEL inmates were required to perform heavy labor in order to keep them focused on their anti-social behavior. They were made subject to controlled work providing a deterrent and a warning to others. The daily hours of work in an AEL were not allowed to be less than ten and not more than twelve. Work on Sundays and holidays was permitted. Daily "wages" of 50 Reichspfennigs were prescribed from which the prisoners could buy personal needs (stamps, razor blades, toothpaste, etc.) to a maximum of 2 Reichsmark per week. The remaining money was to be paid at the time of discharge. The former prisoner was expected to use this money to pay the transportation expenses to his place of residence or work. In the camp "free sickness and accident care" was supposed to be provided.

AEL prisoners were to be made available as workers, to armament industries in particular. The company was expected to pay the minimum wage for untrained workers plus a surcharge of 15% for accident and social insurance contributions. In case of difficulty in the procurement of raw materials the employer also had to provide work clothes, if possible. For prisoners whose keep was not included, these costs had to be paid to the Gestapo who kept back the proceeds, after

subtracting daily wages of 50 Pfennig. When prisoner upkeep was required, the money would go to the responsible agent after deduction of 3,50 Reichsmark per day, which went to the Gestapo for the prisoner's "housing and care". All remaining costs for the operation of the Arbeitserziehungslager were borne by the Reich treasury.

The AEL had the character of a police prison. They were *not* meant to be like concentration camps. The detention period was limited to 56 days. Should the "education goal" not have been achieved at the conclusion of the this period, the Gestapo department which had been responsible for the arrest, then had to apply for imposition of "*Schutzhaft*" (protective custody) and consequently the transfer to a concentration camp.

Additional regulations

On December 12, 1941, the Supreme Commander of the SS, apparently because of various abuses of the AEL, considered it necessary to refer once more to the basic regulations of May and to further elaborate on and change some issues. Once more Himmler pointed out that the AEL had to serve only as detention facilities for "workers who were in breach of labor contracts." Other prisoners, especially "*Schutzhäftlinge*" (prisoners in protective custody), were not to be admitted.

In future disabled prisoners were no longer to receive compensation and *IdS/BdS* could decide that Poles and Jews would not be paid any wages. Also, on December 12, 1941, camp regulations were issued. Under these regulations physical action against prisoners was prohibited. The camp management could impose the following punishment:

- Warning;
- Withdrawal of privileges;
- Withdrawal of warm morning and evening meals up to four consecutive times;
- Withdrawal of warm mid-day meals up to three consecutive times;
- Withdrawal of warm meals up to three times daily, every second day;
- Withdrawal of bedding up to three consecutive times;
- Special work assignments up to five days; the total hours of work could not exceed 16 hours for such assignments.

Even after this camp directive Polish prisoners were in an especially poor position: "Should further measures be required for *Polish prisoners*, the Head of the State police headquarters in charge of the business operation of the camp, can then further arrange such measures ... on his own initiative". ⁵

"Special treatment" (execution) can obviously not be understood to be part of these "further measures". Up to a few months before the end of the war such decisions were reserved for the more senior departments.

The decree of May 28, 1941, remained in effect in its entirety from December 12 of that year until the end of the war.

Arbeitserziehungslager and "Ausländerpolitik" (politics relating to foreigners)

Although the AEL was considered an instrument of repression against all workers in the Reich and occupied territories, they primarily punished foreigners, especially Polish and Soviet citizens.

The Polish forced laborers, at their arrival in the Reich, would be read "instructions" which included an undisguised threat: "Anyone found to be negligent in work ... will receive forced labor in the Arbeitserziehungslager". In a directive of the **RFSS** (Supreme Commander SS) of February 20, 1942, with respect to the deployment of workers from the former Soviet territory, immediate intervention by the Gestapo and "as a rule admission to an Arbeitserziehungslager" was ordered. Workers from the Baltic States were also read instructions which stated: "Those who stop working, who incite other workers, who leave the workplace without authorization, etc., receive forced labor in the Arbeitserziehungslager." ⁶ Such threats at the start of employment never existed for German workers during the entire war.

Foreigners, in particular Polish and Soviet citizens, represented the larger portion of the prisoners in AEL. In camp Grosbeeren by Berlin the proportion of East-Europeans represented at one time 80%. In camp Wulheide by Berlin Germans represented approximately 15%, East-Europeans 52% and West-Europeans 33% of the prisoners. AEL Bremen-Farge was also mostly populated by foreigners, as was the case for camp Lahde by Minden.

The AEL were considered *the* instrument to suppress any resistance by foreigners. By 1942 it had become customary with some individual Gestapo department headquarters in the Reich and the occupied territories, to conduct regular conferences in larger companies with representatives of the Gestapo, labor trustees and company management, on which occasions "labor contract breach" by foreigners was discussed and immediate corrective measures taken. This functioned as a deterrent to such extent that Himmler instructed all Gestapo department headquarters to adopt these proceedings. One year later Himmler again pointed to this practice. Such conferences should as a rule be carried on right to the start of the week. "Loafers" should immediately be warned or arrested and punishment applied for which as "more a severe measure" the admission to an AEL was suggested. The Gestapo in Prague had already achieved good results with such action, contributing significantly to an increase of labor discipline.

Arbeitserziehungslager in the Großdeutschen Reich

1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945

Frauenburg	Breitenau	Bentheim	Blechhammer	Aachen-Burtscheid	Affoldern	Augsburg
Hinzert	Berlin-Wuhlheide	Brückendorf	Bräz	Blachstädt	Ahaus	Bad Eilsen
	Bremen-Farge	Essen-Mülheim	Dortmund	Groß-Kunzendorf	Alsdorf	
	Hallendorf-Watenstedt	Etzenhofen	Frankfurt-Heddernheim	Hamburg-Wilhelmsburg	Bad Godesberg	
	Hunswinkel	Grodziec	Gladbeck-Zweckel	Kraut	Bonn	
	Liebenau	Hägerwelle	Großbeeren	Lahde	Essen-Königsstr.	
	Schwetig	Hohenbruch	Heydebreck	Leitzkau	Fehrbellin	
		Kniebis-Ruhenstein	Hohensalza	Rieneck	Hönnetal	
		Litzmannstadt	Innsbruck-Reichenau	St.Dionysen	Kiel-Hassee	
		Niederganingen	Karlsruhe	Schörghenhub	Köln-Deutz	
		Oberlanzendorf	Lenzingen	Spergau	Köln-Müngersdorf	
		Ober Leutensdorf	Mielau		Kranichfeld	
		Oberndorf-Aistaig	München-Moosbach		Lippendorf	
		Oldenburg	Niederbühl		Magdeburg	
		Recklinghausen	Ostrowo		Marl-Hüls	
		Reichenfeld	Rattwitz		München-Berg	
		Reigersfeld	Römhild		Ohrbeck	
		Soldau	St.Wendel		Peres-Böhlen	
		Unna	Wildfelde		Priesteritz	
		Unterlüss			Radeberg	
					Rudersberg	

In part the years refer to the first mention of the relevant AEL in the appropriate records. Together with three other AEL (Moosbierbaum, Niklasdorf and Tetschen) whose years of origin are unknown, the total number comes to 85 camps.

In the "Protectorate Böhmen and Mähren" an AEL was built near Mährisch-Ostrau in April 1941. Because the enthusiasm for work among Czechs declined considerably, extensive admissions to AEL took place. Shortly thereafter four AEL were established in the "Protectorate". The employment office in Prague noted at year's end: "In industries from which workers had to be admitted to the camp, peace and order now exist throughout". The employment office requested an additional AEL, exclusively for women.

The "Advantages" of Arbeitserziehungslager

Apart from the aspect of serving as instruments of repression, the AEL had other advantages as well for the rulers of the National-Socialist regime.

With an AEL in its territory a Gestapo department had additional and urgently needed prison space. Also, the admission to an AEL was not an event with a lot of red tape in comparison to the imposition of protective custody and admission to a concentration camp. While in the latter case the presentation of reasons and the supply of various forms involved a lot of paperwork, the admission to an AEL was limited to a simple memorandum from the responsible Gestapo office. No review of documents with respect to the AEL prisoner by a higher authority was possible since none were kept in Berlin. Thus the Gestapo could also admit other prisoners and "loafers" to its AEL and furthermore keep these within its own area. This way a Gestapo chief could run his AEL as a "private" concentration camp, to be used to incarcerate persons he did not approve of. It appears that such abuse was by no means an exception. The frequent clarifications by the *RSHA*, by which only loafers could be admitted to AEL, can not otherwise be explained.

The AEL were also advantageous to industry management and other "employers". On the one hand, anyone who had been reported by them was quickly and effectively punished and, if the "education" had not cost him his life, he was usually returned to his work place after maximum two months where, because of his poor physical condition, he served as an example to all other workers at the plant. On the other hand, his work contribution during a time of spectacular labor shortage was missed for only a relative short span of time. Albeit commonly with considerably less work capacity, his contribution was again available to the work process. The punished worker was never lost for ever in a concentration from which only in exceptional cases discharges were granted during the war

Some firms even managed to achieve an "ideal" arrangement by using punishment to optimum advantage as a factor in their economic planning. They arranged to have AEL established on or nearby the plant allowing them to have the alleged poor work performance of its loafers still available during AEL-detainment. This is how "*Straflager 21*" (later "Arbeitserziehungslager") Hallendorf was fitted in with the Hermann Göring Werke. The inmates had to perform especially dirty, heavy, dangerous and unhealthy labor (such as the processing of slag.)

The illustrated advantages of Arbeitserziehungslager appear to have proven themselves in such a

way that, as the war progressed, more and more inspectors/commanders of the security police and SD decided to request from the RSHA and AEL for their area since, according to official accounts, the number of arrests of workers in breach of labor contract rose sharply in the Reich as well as in the occupied territories as the war progressed. For the month of June 1941, 6,357 cases were reported; one year later 12,623. In June 1944, the year with the greatest amount of new construction of Arbeitserziehungslager, the number was 44,799. Of the detainees 62% were foreigners.

Footnotes

1. "dass in einigen Gebieten für arbeitsunwilligen Polen eine Art Straflager eingerichtet worden ist. Teilweise wurden Arbeitsstellen mit besonderer Schwerarbeit für diesen Zweck ausgesucht"
2. "für die Polen Zwangslager einzurichten, die für eine zeitliche Unterbringung solcher Elemente bestimmt sind, die ihr Arneitspensum nicht erledigen oder sonst gegen die Disziplin verstoßen".
3. "Im Sommer 1940 wurde im Auftrag der Geheimen Staatspolizei Kassel ein Arbeitserziehungslager für Schutzhäftlinge ... eingerichtet. *Dieses Lager ist als Vorstufe eines Konzentrationslagers anzusehen.* Untergebracht werden größtenteils Polen und Juden, außerdem befinden sich auch Deutsche und sonstige Ausländer dazwischen. Der Grund der Unterbringung ist größtenteils Arbeitsverweigerung, Verlassen der Arbeitsstellen und Verstöße gegen die Volksgemeinschaft."
4. "Arbeitskräfte, die die Arbeit verweigern oder in sonstiger Weise die Arbeitsmoral gefährden und zur Aufrechterhaltung der Ordnung und Sicherheit in polizeilichen Gewahrsam genommen werden müssen, sind in besonderen *Arbeitserziehungslagern* zusammenzufassen und dort zu geregelter Arbeit anzuhalten. Die Arbeitserziehungslager sind ausschließlich zur Aufnahme von Arbeitsverweigerern und arbeitsunlustigen Elementen, deren Verhalten einer Arbeitssabotage gleichkommt, bestimmt. Die Einweisung verfolgt einen Erziehungszweck, sie gilt nicht als Strafmaßnahme."
5. "Sind bei *Polen* weitergehende Maßnahmen notwendig, so kann der Leiter der Staatspolizei(leit) stelle, die das Lager wirtschaftlich betreut, diese Maßnahme ... in eigener Verantwortung anordnen."
6. "Wer die Arbeit niederlegt, andere Arbeiter aufhetzt, die Arbeitsstelle eigenmächtig verläßt usw. erhält Zwangarbeit im Arbeitserziehungslager."

Abbreviations

AEL - Arbeitserziehungslager (Workers Educational Camp)

BdS - Befehlhaber der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD (Commander of the Security Police and Security Service)

Gestapo - Geheime Staatspolizei (Secret State Police)

HSSPF - Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer (Superior Head of SS and Police)

IdS - Inspekteur der Sicherheitspolizei (Inspector of the Security Police)

RFSS - Reichsführer SS (Supreme Commander SS)

RSHA - Reichssicherheitsamt (Reich Security Headquarters)

SD - Sicherheitsdienst (Security Service)