

The KZ-Außenlager (subcamp) at the Night-Fighter Airbase Hailfingen/Tailfingen

Translation by Christof Baumann

On August 17th, 1938, the *Reichsminister für Luftfahrt* (Reich Air Ministry) decreed the construction of a military airfield (*Einsatzhafen I*)¹ within the boundaries of the townships of Tailfingen, Hailfingen and Bondorf.² The undeveloped terrain there was suitable as it was flat, hardly ever had fog, and had the strategical advantage of being relatively close to the French border. When the forest that covered part of the 86 hectares (212.5 acres) had been cleared, the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (Reich Labour Service) levelled the terrain and started to build a runway which was 1200 metres (0.75 miles) long and 80 metres (262 ft) wide.

Before a part of the 1st Group of *Nachtjagdgeschwader 6* (Night-Fighter Wing), 1./NJG 6, was stationed at Hailfingen in May 1944,³ the *Luftwaffe* (German Air Force) used the site as an alternate airfield and as an *Einsatzhafen* (airbase) respectively. When attacks by allied aircraft increased, the *Luftgaukommando VII* (territorial air command) wanted better protection for the air base and its night-fighter aircraft. Until March 1944

1 An airbase only for starts and landings with an asphalted airstrip.

2 The base was named „Hailfingen“ because the command was within the boundary of Hailfingen.

3 The squadron's reconnaissance aircraft stayed at Echterdingen initially. Diary of 1./NJG 6, BA-MA, RL 10 542.

it planned two taxiways and alternate runways respectively, splinterproof blast pens and some smaller hangars.⁴ The *Organisation Todt (OT)* managed the construction work which was carried out by different companies. The manpower used by *Luftwaffe* and the building firms consisted of various groups of prisoners of war (POW) and forced labourers who were housed at the airfield.

The *OT*-camp consisted of four barrack-buildings on the northern side of the airbase. Next to it was a hangar with a fence around it: some 350 forced labourers who had been deported from Athens (→ Tabarowski) and afterwards 600 Jewish *KZ*-prisoners were put up there between September and November 1944. Another camp with a barbed-wire fence had been set up probably as early as 1942 for some 100 Soviet POWs who were forced to work in the quarries surrounding the airbase. Another two barracks accommodated POWs from France and civilian workers from Belgium, who could move around comparatively freely. From January 1945, some 300 British Army personnel from India arrived. They had been taken prisoner in Northern Africa and were provided for relatively well by the Red Cross. Italian volunteers of the *Wehrmacht* (German Army) worked on the airfield as well; they had uniforms but no weapons. For a short period there was also a group of Hungarian soldiers retreating with the *Wehrmacht*.

The *KZ*-Außenlager

On September 13th, 1944, the Tübingen branch of the *OT* managing the Hailfingen building site applied via the Natzweiler command to the *WVHA* (Administration and Economy Main Office of the SS) in Oranienburg for 600 *KZ*-prisoners to be mustered. The *OT* demanded 150 “*Häftlings-Facharbeiter*” (prisoner-craftsmen). This number should be made up of 40 bricklayers, 20 cabinetmakers, 70 carpenters, 20 metal workers and mechanics. It also demanded 450 “*Häftlings-Hilfsarbeiter*”: prisoners as unskilled labourers. The deployment of these prisoners was declared urgent as it contributed directly to the defence of the *Reich*, food and shelter would be taken care of by the *OT*. On September 25th, 1944, the *SS-WVHA* approved the detachment of prisoners and the usual “tariff” of 6 RM (*Reichsmark*) per day for a prisoner-craftsman and 4 RM for an unskilled prisoner was fixed.⁵

4 BA-MA, RL 19 215.

5 IST, Sachdokumente M 3 Hailfingen. Page 63, application of the *OT* construction management Tübingen, Hailfingen building site, dated „13. 9. 1944“.

The following day Natzweiler concentration camp allocated Hailfingen Airbase by special instruction to the 7. *Wachkompanie* (guard company) of the 1. *Wachsturmbann* (SS Guard Battalion).⁶ SS-*Unterscharführer* (corporal) Eugen Witzig became commandant of the subsidiary concentration camp at Hailfingen airbase. He had been a member of staff at the commandant's office at Natzweiler concentration camp.⁷

On November 17th, 1944, the SS at KZ Stutthof near Danzig assembled 600 Jewish prisoners for transport; they had been classified as fit to work. It is probable that the transport consisted of 1200 prisoners and that half of them were brought to the subcamp Echterdingen.⁸ The majority of these prisoners had left Auschwitz with a transport on October 10th, 1944 and had arrived at Stutthof October 28th, 1944.⁹ The administration of KZ Natzweiler enrolled these prisoners' names in the central list of numbers, *Nummernbuch Nr. 6*, allocating them consecutive numbers from 40 448 up to 41 047.¹⁰ By mid-March 1945, when the camp had already been broken up, the date of death of prisoners was still registered in this *Nummernbuch*.

According to the *Nummernbuch*, there were Jewish prisoners from at least 15 different countries: 260 Polish, 128 Hungarians, 47 French, 33 Latvians, 27 Dutch, 24 *Reichsdeutsche* (Germans and Austrians), 20 Greeks, 19 Italians, 12 Lithuanians, seven Belgians, three Czechs, three Slovaks and three Romanians, two Turks, one Bulgarian, and eight stateless persons. The nationality of three persons is illegible. The prisoners had come to Auschwitz via – among others – the following assembly camps: Fossoli (Italy), Drancy (France), Mechelen (Belgium) and Westerbork (Netherlands). According to the *Nummernbuch* they were between 15 and 60 years old. However, some of them had stated a false age as they had been afraid of getting murdered immediately (→ Billauer). The social background and biographies were just as different as the nationalities: there was a veteran of the Spanish Civil War (Emanuel Mink), a member of the British Expeditionary Force (Wald), members of the Résistance (Mink, Minkowski, Bily), of the Dutch resistance (Koekkoek), and so on. Some of the prisoners had five years in ghetto, labour and concentration camps behind them when they came to Hailfingen, others had just been deported to Auschwitz in the summer of 1944. Among those were the prisoners who had come from Fossoli or with the last transports that had left Drancy. On November 19th,

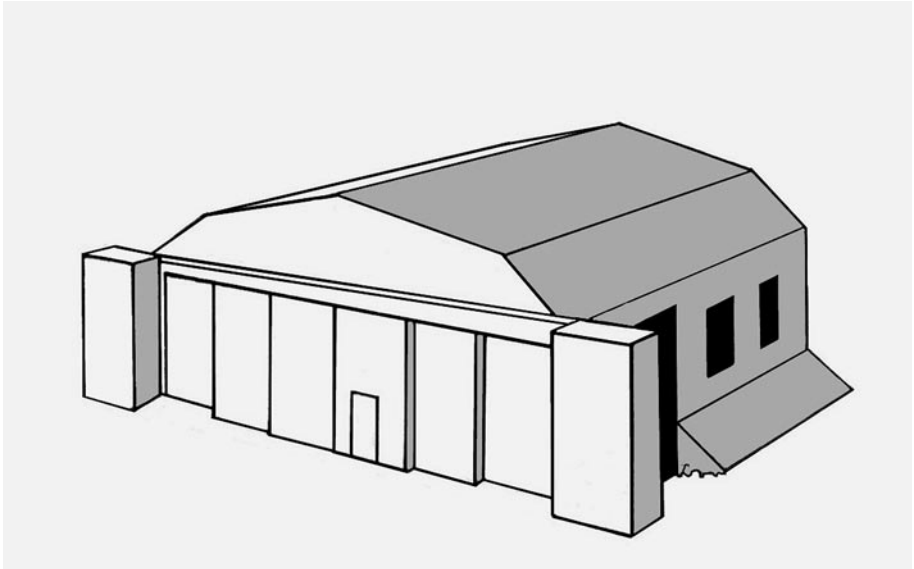
6 BArchB, NS4 Na/13, Sonderbefehl vom 26. 9. 1944.

7 BArchL, courtpapers of Landgericht Hechingen, Ordner 23, Bl. 5030.

8 Faltin, *Im Angesicht des Todes*, S. 31.

9 Transport list Auschwitz-Stutthof and prisoners' personnel files. Museum Stutthof Archives.

10 ITS/Arch/KL Natzweiler, Ordner 12.



Hangar

Zeichnung: Klaus Philippscheck

1944,¹¹ the group arrived at Nebringen station in goods waggons and was marched off to the airfield.

Every day after roll call, the prisoners were divided into labour bataillons. Foremen of the *OT* and of the building firms supervised them. The guards at Hailfingen concentration camp consisted almost exclusively of members of the *Luftwaffe* who had become unable to do service at the front. The treatment the prisoners received from these men differed extremely. There were also a few *Landeschützen* (members of the Home Defence) who were on duty mainly during the day. Work was done in quarries of which some had been set up for the construction of the airbase (→ Kornblit, Arbeiter). The stones and gravel were used to improve the runway and to build the taxiways. For the westbound taxiway a small forest had to be cleared. Trees had to be felled to build the hangars. On top of this, prisoners had to remove dud bombs (→ Ciechanower).

Initially the prisoners slept on the floor of the hangar which had been mulched with straw. Some 60 or 70 roosts more were on a suspended ceiling. There was next to no sanitation, a latrine pit north of the hangar served for a toilet, and the

11 Breuer, Les miracles.

hangar itself was infested with vermin. Alimentation was absolutely insufficient and there was no medical care whatsoever. Prisoners who were ill or unable to work were mistreated, some of them were bludgeoned to death. Several prisoners were shot. The surgeon major in charge, Dr. Rothe, usually stated fictitious causes such as pneumonia or poor circulation of the blood in his death notes. In three cases, however, he did state bullet wounds.¹² Yet most of the victims died of hard labour, under-nourishment, the cold and diseases. The first of the victims was Max Steinhardt who died on November 21st, 1944.

Sometimes the prisoners would get something to eat from the villagers of Öschelbronn, Bondorf and Reusten, where they passed through on their way to work.

In the crematorium of the *Unter den Linden* cemetery in Reutlingen, 99 bodies from the Hailfingen camp were cremated between November 21st, 1944 and January 5th, 1945, the day the crematorium closed.¹³ Moreover, the *Nummernbuch* lists the date of death of 15 prisoners more between December 4th and December 9th, 1944. They were cremated at *Ebershaldenfriedhof*, a cemetery in Esslingen.¹⁴ In the mass grave that was discovered on June 2nd, 1945, the remains of 72 or 73 dead bodies were found. On three of them, the Auschwitz registration tattoo was still legible. They have been identified as Anton Schwarz, A 17 404, died January 31st, 1945; Ernst Lebowicz, 65 194, died February 7th, 1945; and Sabi Vintourero (Winturero), A 12 058, died February 8th, 1945.

There is no evidence that prisoners other than Marion Kornblit, who escaped in February 1945, were able to flee from the camp. As the Allies approached, work was cancelled and the base was abandoned. One transport went to Vaihingen/Enz. At least 48 of the 111 prisoners who were brought there on February 13th, 1945, died in the weeks between then and April 4th, 1945. The SS sent prisoners who they considered fit for transportation from Vaihingen/Enz to Dachau-Allach, just a few days before the liberation of the camp. And from there, many prisoners were sent on death marches (Staltach→ Bajnerman, Baum, Billauer, Friedmann, Reich).

12 Jakob Diamantstein, died December 11th, 1944: shot in the stomach; Henri Lortnoi/Portnoi: also died December 11th, 1944: shot in the head. Testimony by witness Ajzyk Bajnermann provides evidence that a Ukrainian guard named Mischa shot Szydlowiec-born Abraham Sternschuss (Sztarnschuss) on December 13th, 1944, because he had left the column in order to pick up an apple. In the death note the cause of death is stated as „shot in the stomach“.

13 StadtA Reutlingen, Friedhofsverwaltung Nr. 304, Einäscherungsverzeichnis für Schutzhäftlinge; Rechnungen der Friedhofsverwaltung an die Oberbauleitung der OT Balingen, Abschnitt Hailfingen K.Z.-Lager, ebenda (List of cremated prisoners in protective custody, bills to be paid by the OT).

14 Document of the cemetery administration Esslingen (*FHV 206*): „15 unidentified bodies from Hailfingen ... 13. 12. 1944 ... collective urn grave 5 ...“ (crematorium of *Ebershaldenfriedhof* cemetery).

One last transport left Hailfingen on February 14th, 1945. 296 prisoners who had remained in Hailfingen were deported to Dautmergen; it is verified that nine of them died there.¹⁵ If these numbers, which have been quoted by Eric Breuer¹⁶, are correct then approximately 190 prisoners lost their lives in Hailfingen.¹⁷ Another 84 prisoners are known to have died in camps to which they were brought before the liberation. The date and place of death of 267 prisoners are known today. It must be assumed, however, that the actual number of victims is much higher. The fates of 200 prisoners are still unaccounted for. We know of 124 Jewish prisoners who survived. Probably less than half of the 600 prisoners saw the day of the Allied liberation, perhaps only a quarter of them. In the very last days of the war the death marches from Dautmergen and Dachau-Allach respectively claimed many victims who were left by the roadside and never listed. An unknown number of prisoners was relocated from Dautmergen to the camp for the dying at Bergen-Belsen in March 1945 (→ Ciechanower). They were more or less left to take care for themselves there; the death toll was so high at Bergen-Belsen that the camp's capacities did not suffice for the number of bodies that needed to be removed. Survivors were liberated in different places, e.g. in Ostrach near Saulgau (→ Fiszel), in Landsberg (→ Jack Spicer), in Sigmaringen (→ Abraham Stuttman), in Altshausen (→ Piasek, Wasserman) and in Staltach (→ Bajnerman, Baum, Billauer, Friedmann, Reich).

Trials

From 1947 to 1949 the Court of the First Instance of the French High-Command in Germany for the Conviction of War Crimes held proceedings in Rastatt against some of the persons held responsible for the crimes that had been committed at Hailfingen. Only three persons were accused: Karl Bäuerle, a foreman of the *OT*, → Abraham Stuttmann who had been *Lagerältester* (senior camp prisoner), and → Leo Kac, *Stubendienst*, i. e. a prisoner who cleaned out rooms. Stuttmann and Kac had been incriminated by fellow ex-prisoners. Despite some controversy Stuttmann was sentenced to two years and six months in prison by the Court of the First Instance,

15 AMAC, Nat 68/3 quoted after Steegmann, Struthof, p. 137, the deaths at Dautmergen were not listed before March 12th, 1945 (in Schömberg).

16 Breuer, *Les Miracles*.

17 Whether there were more prisoners like Meir Kalmanowicz who had not been listed in the *Nummernbuch* and who would need to be added to the 600 remains unclear.

Kac got one year. Karl Bäuerle was sentenced to ten years in jail. The judgement of the appeal court reconfirmed these sentences on November 17th, 1949.

As from 1967 the *Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Gewaltverbrechen* (Central Office of the Administration of Justice of the Federal States for the Solution of Nazi Felony) investigated against Bruno Störzer, Karl Bäuerle, Mischa as well as Leo Kac and others whose name was hitherto unknown, for murder in the Hailfingen subsidiary camp of KZ Natzweiler. Of the survivors of KZ Hailfingen, who by then lived in countries all over world, 25 were heard as witnesses.¹⁸ The proceedings were stayed as after the sentences in the Rastatt trials, German courts according to article 3 of the *Überleitungsvertrag* (Protocol on the Termination of the Occupation Régime in the Federal Republic of Germany) no longer had jurisdiction. Also, the investigators held the view that the guards could not be identified any more.

Selective Memory

On June 1st, 1945, two of the survivors (→ Marion Kornblit, Israel Arbeiter) showed French soldiers the mass grave on the site of the airbase. It was opened the following day. The male population of Oberndorf and Hailfingen as well as all citizens of Bondorf and Tailfingen had to walk to the airfield and dig out the bodies there, the men from Tailfingen had to open the mass grave; some of them were abused by French soldiers in the process. One man with a heart condition died of exhaustion, another one died of the blows he had been dealt some days later. The women from Tailfingen had to dig a grave on Tailfingen's cemetery, to which the bodies were transferred. The French ordered a wooden cross for the cemetery with the inscription: "Here rest 72 unknown KZ-prisoners".

Locals were always eager to emphasise that "one had not known", and the concentration camp was hushed up for decades after 1945, yet local memory had always been aware of the history of the camp. However, this memory was overlaid with the memory of the French and the events at the mass grave. These were exploited repeatedly to distract from the *Nazi* crimes or to play them down.

The former airfield was only interesting as far as its future use was concerned. Twice – in the late 1960ies and in 1972/73 – it was discussed as a possible site for a major airport, *Großflughafen Stuttgart II*. Relatives of → Ignac Klein put a memorial stone next to the wooden cross on the cemetery at Tailfingen in the mid-1960ies. After a well

18 BArchL, B 162/4349. Bl. 401 and Bl. 392.



Landebahn 1969

Manfred Grohe

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founded scientific essay on the subsidiary concentration camp had been published in 1978,¹⁹ the first activities and events followed in 1982. The *DKP* (German Communist Party) Tübingen put up a wooden sign at the end of the runway saying: “Here was the Concentration Camp Hailfingen-Natzweiler Alsace. Hundreds of KZ-prisoners who were ill-treated and murdered here warn us. No more fascism. No more war.” Like the events mentioned above this sign was met with strict denial by parts of the population and was besmeared several times. In 1985 the “*Förderverein zur Errichtung eines Mahnmals für die Opfer des Konzentrationslagers Hailfingen/Tailfingen*” (Society for the Construction of a Memorial for the Victims of the Concentration Camp Hailfingen/Tailfingen) was founded, and a year later the townships of Rottenburg and Gäufelden

19 Walther-Becker, *Das Lager Hailfingen*.

and the *Israelitische Religionsgemeinschaft Württemberg* (Jewish Religious Community Württemberg) unveiled a memorial stone on the cemetery in Tailfingen. As the society also considered commemoration important on the site itself, an information board was put up there. This was besmeared as well. The township of Gäufelden presented aerial photos taken by the Allies and a reconstructed plan of the airbase in an exhibition in late 2001. In 2002 the Böblingen-Herrenberg-Tübingen branch of the society *Gegen Vergessen – Für Demokratie* (Against Oblivion – For Democracy, *GV/FD*) began to account for the past of the *KZ Außenlager Tailfingen/Hailfingen*. A thorough documentation of the history of both airbase and camp was published in 2007.²⁰ Also in 2007, *GV/FD* published the autobiography of Mordechai Ciechanower, one of the survivors, which had been translated from Hebrew.²¹ It also published the memoirs of Marga Griesbach, née Steinhardt, the daughter of the first victim of the camp.²² Multimedia teaching material was put together, which in autumn 2007 was made accessible via the website of the *Kreismedienzentrum* (County Media Center) Böblingen (www.zeitreise-bb.de). Johannes Kuhn from Herrenberg and *GV/FD* made a documentary film of 60 minutes, “*Geschützter Grünbestand*” (protected green stock), which was first shown on April 7th, 2006. The St. Meinrad-Gymnasium (grammar school) Rottenburg started a project called “*Gedenkpfad*” (walk of remembrance) in 2007/2008. Gäufelden borough council has resolved an exhibition in Tailfingen city hall which is being put together and will ready by summer 2009. Also in 2009, the city of Rottenburg will put up a memorial on the site of the airbase to commemorate the Jewish victims.

Traces in the Landscape

A demolition team of the German Army destroyed the runway on April 6th/7th, 1945. On April 9th, 1945, Allied fighters bombed the airfield. On April 18th, 1945, it was seized by troops of the 2nd French Army Corps which had been moving forward from Nagold via Mötzingen and Bondorf. In spite of all the destruction the Allied Air Command planned to put the airfield back into operation, but with a longer runway. The building company Kirchhoff worked on behalf of the French Air Force at the airfield until the beginning of 1946.²³ Although it once covered 160 hectares, there is hardly anything

20 Wein/Mall/Roth, Spuren.

21 Ciechanower, *Der Dachdecker*.

22 Marga Griesbach, „... ich kann immer noch das Elend spüren ...“

23 Ortsarchiv Rottenburg-Wendelsheim, C 160-1 nr.351 (AZ 9400).

left to see of the airfield today. The buildings were dismantled and brought away in February/March, 1946. The rail track that led from Nebringen station to the airfield was removed when a new through road, the B 14, was built in 1959. The site of the hangar is now the Tailfingen sports-club. What used to be the runway, which had been destroyed and later repaired, is now overgrown. Since the 1980ies it is a nature reserve (Geschützter Grünbestand, protected green stock). There are very few traces left: next to the overgrown runway there are remains of a repair-hangar east of the motorway within the Reusten boundaries and the remains of another hangar on a furlong called "Keßlers Hölzle" in Öschelbronn. In compliance with § 2 of the Denkmalschutzgesetz (Law for the Protection of Historic Buildings and Monuments) the remnants of the airbase have been declared archeological and cultural relics, 2007 on the boundaries of Tailfingen, 2008 on the boundaries of Hailfingen.