

»HASAG Leipzig« Concentration Camp Subcamp

The largest women's
subcamp of the Buchenwald
concentration camp



**LEIPZIG NAZI
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MEMORIAL**

**GEDENKSTÄTTE
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The aerial photograph taken by the US Airforce on 10 April 1945 shows the HASAG factory premises in Leipzig. In the top left part of the photo, you can see the subcamp and the building at Kamenzer Straße 12 adjacent to the road. (Aerial photo database Dr. Carls GmbH/Leipzig Nazi Forced Labour Memorial)

The »HASAG Leipzig« Concentration Camp Subcamp

The Hugo Schneider Aktiengesellschaft (HASAG), headquartered in Leipzig, was one of the largest armaments companies in the German Reich during World War II. The company owned large factories in Germany and occupied Poland, where it used thousands of Jewish men and women, civilian forced labourers, prisoners of war and internees of concentration camps to manufacture ammunition and anti-tank warheads.

By October 1943, the company already had a workforce of over 60,000, with well over half of these being civilian forced labourers and prisoners of war. Along with the relocation of production from Poland to Germany and the increased production of anti-tank weapons, in the summer of 1944 HASAG began setting up several subcamps.

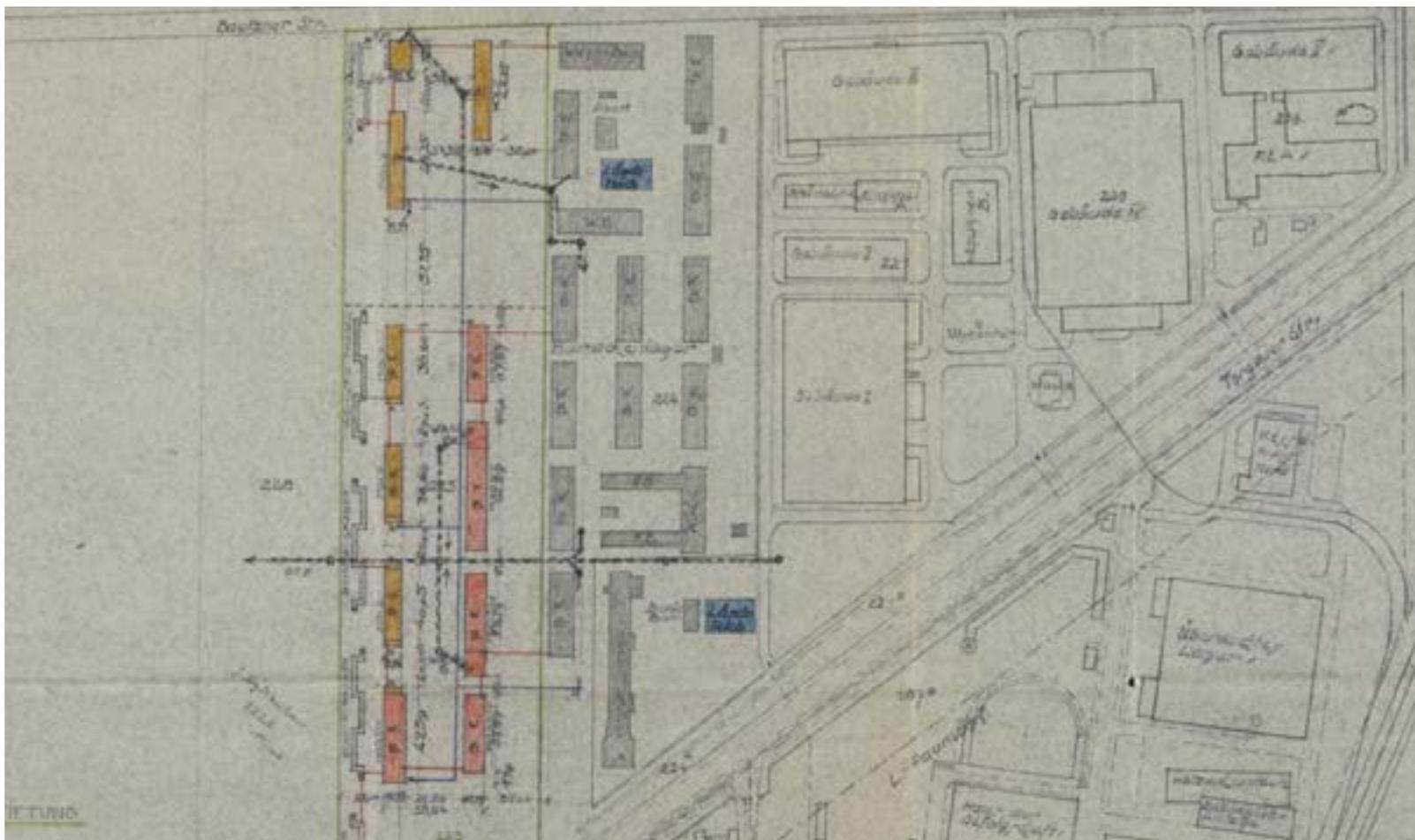
During this process, the first Buchenwald concentration camp women's subcamp was established in June 1944 on the site of Kamenzer Straße 10 and 12 (then Bautzner Straße) in the Schönefeld district of Leipzig. Within five months, the »HASAG Leipzig« subcamp became the largest women's subcamp of Buchenwald Concentration Camp, with over 5,000 internees.

In addition to the women's camp, a separated enclosed barracks camp was set up in the autumn of 1944 to house nearly 700 men. The French, Italian, Polish and Hungarian Jews interned in the men's camp were mainly used to test the ammunition manufactured in the HASAG factories.

In the summer and autumn of 1944, HASAG set up additional subcamps at the production sites in Taucha, Altenburg, Meuselwitz, Schlieben, Colditz and Flößberg. More than 14,500 female and male concentration camp internees were forced to manufacture armaments for HASAG.

Camp grounds and accommodation

The excerpt from the site plan from the HASAG construction office dated 28 July 1944 shows the layout of the »HASAG Leipzig« subcamp with the newly planned barracks. (Saxon State Archives, Leipzig State Archives, collection 20869, Thügina GmbH Leipzig, No. 25)



The »HASAG Leipzig« subcamp was located in the area of the so-called Nordwerk (»North Plant«) of the Leipzig HASAG site, between Torgauer Straße and what was then Bautzner Straße. The camp consisted of several barracks and a two-story

solid stone building with a basement. This building at Kamenzer Straße 12, which still exists today, was erected in 1940 as HASAG's »Camp Building J«. However, it was only used for its originally intended purpose to a limited extent: As early as

1941, it was used to house Polish civilian forced labourers who had previously been forced to work in the factories run by HASAG in the General Government. In the summer of 1944, the building and the barracks next to it were converted into

the »HASAG Leipzig« concentration camp subcamp.

The building housed both the living quarters for the female prisoners and the functional departments of the camp. The

high-ceilinged halls or rooms of the factory building were divided into 23 »blocks« with half-height partition walls, which in turn were equipped with narrow, multi-level wooden plank bunk-beds. According to eyewitness accounts, some of the »blocks« also had tables and benches. Up to 600 women were accommodated in a large »block« and 200 in each of the smaller ones. The ground floor of the building housed the sick bay, the typing room and the camp's kitchen and canteen. The washing area and air-raid shelters were located in the basement. According to survivors, the basement also housed chambers known as »bunkers«. These small, segregated cells, which were only big enough to stand or sit in, were where the female prisoners were locked up for punishment.

»At the camp gate there was a sign saying »Schutzhaftlager« (protective custody camp). The building, which was several storeys high, and the open area intended for roll calls were surrounded by a double electric fence and a number of watchtowers, which were constantly manned by members of the SS. Apart from the building, there were also a few separate and fenced-off barracks, called »Drugie Pole« (other field) by the prisoners, in which some Polish and Hungarian Jewish women were housed.«

Concentration camp internees were also housed in the adjacent barracks. As early as 1942/1943, a complex of 12–15 barracks, a guard barracks and a U-shaped kitchen and dining barracks had been built next to the factory premises to accommodate civilian forced labourers. After setting up the concentration camp subcamp, HASAG enlarged this barrack camp by a further ten barracks in the autumn of 1944. It is very likely that the men's camp was also located in this newly expanded part of the camp.

The camp grounds were surrounded by a barbed wire fence and watchtowers manned by SS guards. Holocaust survivor Felicja Karay, who had to work for HASAG in Leipzig as a concentration camp internee, describes the camp grounds as follows:

Everyday life of the female internees of the subcamp

On 9 June 1944, the first 800 women from Ravensbrück concentration camp arrived at the »HASAG Leipzig« subcamp. At first, these were mainly »political« Polish women who had previously been held at the Majdanek concentration camp. Later on, it was predominantly women from the Soviet Union, France and Poland who were sent to the camp.

At the beginning of August, more than 1,200 Polish Jewish women arrived in Leipzig-Schönefeld, some of them accompanied by small children. HASAG had arranged for these women to be brought to Leipzig for forced labour from the disbanded company-owned forced labour camp in Skarżysko-Kamienna in the General Government. In total, there were women

of 28 different nationalities in the Leipzig camp; one third of whom were Jewish.

From the camp, the prisoners had to walk in convoy to the main HASAG factory which was about 1 km away. Along the way, they were watched over by concentration camp guards and SS guards with dogs. Under extremely difficult conditions, the women worked 12-hour shifts in HASAG's armament production, mainly in the manufacture of ammunition and grenades.

Survivor Suzanne Orts, who had been arrested in France for belonging to the Résistance and deported to Germany, gave an account of her work at the HASAG factory in Leipzig:

»12 hours of work, one week during the daytime, one week at night; Sundays are for rest. On top of that, there is always the roll call ceremony in the morning and evening. Wake up at 4 am. We manufacture 4-kilo anti-aircraft grenades. (...) We do the finishing: the base, the acid bath, the electrolysis. Last stage: Together with a fellow worker, we grease them before they are stacked in a cart. (...) All that 200, 300, 400 times a day. The pace is accelerated. The projectiles are piling up. The foreman yells. The SS supervisor beats us - under such conditions it's easy to learn how to do the job.«

Violence, standing roll call for hours, hunger, illness and exhaustion were all typical of everyday life in the camp. Many of the women were mistreated by the guards, and at least 18 women died in the »HASAG Leipzig« camp. Death was ever-present due to the regular selection procedures: sick and pregnant women were deported to Auschwitz or transferred to other concentration camps. More than 500 prisoners, considered »unfit for work«, were sent on death transports to the con-

centration camps Auschwitz, Ravensbrück and Bergen-Belsen - including 25 children.

However, despite the dangers, the women also resisted, for example through acts of sabotage, according to the testimonies of eyewitnesses. In addition, a variety of cultural activities flourished in the camp, which were tolerated by the camp regime. There were theatre performances as well as dance and singing evenings.

Felicja Karay:

»We didn't have any guns or hand grenades to start an uprising. Our resistance took on a different form: In each camp and in each national group, the women helped each other and nurtured their respective cultures and traditions. We sang together, organised literary evenings - from which sometimes completely new female poets emerged - or competitions to see who could write the best satire on the evil block elder.«



Identity card of Felicja Karay, née Schächter, from 1947 (Leipzig Nazi Forced Labour Memorial)

Guards

From the beginning, the camp was run by SS-Obersturmführer Wolfgang Plaul, who had already been active in the concentration camp system since 1933 and had been 2nd in command of the Buchenwald protective custody camp before moving to Leipzig. Plaul, who was remembered by the prisoners for his extreme brutality and victimisation, absconded during the death march in April 1945. No reliable information exists about his whereabouts; there are only indications that he was sentenced to death by a Soviet military tribunal.

The camp commander was in charge of 25 SS-Untersführer, 87 SS men and over 60

female concentration camp guards. Some of the guards were recruited from the German workforce of the HASAG factories and had to complete a training course at the Ravensbrück concentration camp before they could start work. They would patrol the accommodation and guard the women on their way to the factory and at work. If the guards felt that the internees were careless at work or refused to comply, they punished them with beatings, withdrawal of food or standing roll call. The head guard, who took her orders from the camp commander, had extensive disciplinary powers and inflicted severe punishments herself.

As the contemporary witness Alina Paradowskja later recounted:

»I also still remember the name of Kommandoführerin Heber. She was a guard. She was of medium height, blond, with long hair tied back in a bun, average build, about 30 years old. One day, shortly after I had finished working in the factory, around the middle of July 1944, this SS guard gave me a severe beating because I had broken two files while working on the lathe.«



The photos show former concentration camp guards employed at the »HASAG Leipzig« subcamp. The passport photos and handwritten notes are part of a compilation of 103 pictures that Erika Buchmann, a survivor of Ravensbrück concentration camp, had made as part of an investigation by the Ludwigsburg civilian court. (Ravensbrück Remembrance and Memorial Site/ Brandenburg Memorials Foundation, collection Bu 40/900)

The two head guards Käthe Heber and Elisabeth Saretzki went into hiding in April 1945 and could not be traced by the criminal investigation authorities. injured, sick or pregnant, but equally of beatings and victimisation by the German foremen.

The relationship between the internees and the German workers at HASAG was ambivalent and is described differently by the survivors: there are reports of assistance, especially when the women were

Death marches and liberation

Between 6 and 14 April 1945, the SS cleared the Buchenwald subcamps in the Leipzig area. They wanted to prevent the prisoners from being liberated by the advancing Allies. On 13 April, the SS sent the »HASAG Leipzig« subcamp prisoners on so-called death marches heading east. Those who tried to escape or were too weak to keep up were shot by the guards.

Most of the death march convoys from the Leipzig subcamps passed through the small town of Wurzen, 30 km west of Leipzig, and were finally liberated in the area around the town of Riesa in early May 1945.

Only weak and sick prisoners were left behind in the »HASAG Leipzig« subcamp. They were liberated with the invasion of the US Army on 18 April 1945. In the Concentration Camp Situation Report of 21 April 1945, it is stated that of the original almost 5,000 female concentration camp internees, 232 remained in the camp, who were in poor health and had to be looked after by US Army doctors. Moreover, there was hardly any food or medicine, and the barracks and infirmary were overcrowded.

Marianna-Helena Morawska:

»At the beginning of April 1945, we were moved out of the camp and marched off in different directions. Most of the female prisoners perished on the way, as those who were too weak to walk were killed by the SS men accompanying us. I also saw SS men shooting at women who had left the convoy to get potatoes from the open potato clamps.«

How the camp grounds were used in the post-war period



Liberated concentration camp prisoners from Leipzig in Wurzen, May 1945 (Leipzig Nazi Forced Labour Memorial)

During 1945, the HASAG factory site was seized by the Soviet occupation forces. The subcamp's barracks were taken down, the factory was cleared and most of the buildings were demolished and blown up - however, the building in Kamenzer Straße 12 remained.

As part of the land reform in the Soviet occupation zone, the city of Leipzig acquired ownership of parts of the site. On the site where the subcamp's accommodation barracks were originally situated, an allotment area called »Einheit« was established at the end of the 1940s; however, it only existed on this spot for a short period of time. By 1950, the Leipzig economic administration had already assigned the area of the former HASAG North Plant to the VVB

ABUS Halle (Association of Publicly Owned Enterprises for Equipping the Mining and Heavy Industries) as building land. The steel construction enterprise planned to build a factory in Leipzig for the construction of conveyor systems, for which the allotment area »Einheit« had to be cleared. In 1951, the 35-hectare site was handed over to VEB ABUS Halle and from April 1952 to VEB ABUS Conveyor Plant Leipzig.

The company had the former subcamp main building in Kamenzer Straße 12 cleared and renovated and then used it as an administrative building.



Front of the building at Kamenzer Straße 12, 1950 (Private)

Present-day use of the site and remembrance



Sign and memorial plaque at Kamenzer Straße 10, an initiative of the group *Remembrance March in Memory of the Concentration Camp Subcamp and the Victims of the Death Marches*, 2012 (Leipzig Nazi Forced Labour Memorial)

Today, the building in the north-east of Leipzig is privately owned. We know from various debates held in the city council and from the Saxon Report on the Protection of the Constitution 2018 that the building, which was once a central part of the »HASAG Leipzig« concentration camp subcamp, now serves as a meeting place for militant right-wing extremists. This current use of the building makes it very difficult to ensure a fitting remembrance. The memorial plaque and sign commemorating the concentration camp subcamp and the victims of the death marches have been destroyed at regular intervals in the past.

In December 2019, the *Ladenschluss - Aktionsbündnis gegen Neonazis* (a coalition for action against neo-Nazis), supported by 34 civil society initiatives, associations and organisations as well as three members of the Saxon state parliament, called on the mayor of the city of Leipzig in an open letter to take action against the right-wing extremist centre at Kamenzer Straße 10 and 12 and to establish a memorial site on the premises. In a city council resolution of 28 May 2020, the city of Leipzig recognised that the building complex at Kamenzer Straße 10 and 12 is of special historical significance as a former forced labour camp of HASAG and the largest women's

subcamp of Buchenwald concentration camp, while at the same time condemning its current use by neo-Nazis. The corresponding motion submitted by the parliamentary group *Die Linke* also provides for a commemorative plaque to be erected on the premises by the city of Leipzig.

A more in-depth examination and discussion of this site, which was once home to the »HASAG Leipzig« subcamp, the largest women's subcamp of the Buchenwald concentration camp, is long overdue. The site should be suitably and permanently incorporated into Leipzig's list of significant historical places.

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