

The Bunker Complex in the Mühldorfer Hart

An Arms Race and Human Suffering

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During the last years of World War II, the Allied bombing of Nazi Germany increased to such a point that German industries critical to the war effort were being destroyed. Among the favorite targets of the Allies were German aircraft factories, especially the ones producing defensive fighter aircraft. The worsening war situation led the *Reichministerium für Rüstungs und Kriegsproduktion* (Ministry of Arms and War Production) in cooperation with the *Reichsluftfahrtministerium* (Reich Aviation Ministry) to move factories to central and southern Germany where more concentrated protection could be offered and the completion of wonder weapons, among them the Messerschmitt Me-262 jetfighter, could be finished without a great deal of interruption. Twenty-seven major aircraft factories were broken up into 300 little workshops and distributed throughout central and southern Germany. They were hidden in street- and train tunnels as well as in mountains. Naturally, this led to supply problems in both the delivery of raw materials and the deliverance of the final product. To solve this problem, it was decided to centralize aircraft production into six specially constructed, half-submerged (in earth) bunkers.

First, however, suitable sites had to be found. There were four major considerations. Firstly, the selected area was to be rich in gravel that could be used for construction purposes. Second, the chosen site was ideally to have a nearby water supply (also for construction purposes). Third, a heavily forested area was preferred as it could offer a natural camouflage against enemy aerial activity. The last consideration called for a suitably located train station for supply reasons.

The following sites were deemed suitable and selected: Landsberg am Lech (in which three factories were to be built, the former Sudetenland, a site in the Rhineland and the a forest in Mühldorf am Inn.

The Allied invasion of Normandy in early June of 1944 caused a change in plans, and as a result, the Germans focused on finishing only two bunkers: Landsberg and Mühldorf. The conditions around Mühldorf were especially ideal for the project.

With the increased activity of Allied bombing, the Germans were forced to concentrate on fighter aircraft. All factories that were still producing bombers were ordered to immediately begin production of defensive fighter aircraft. All across Germany, aircraft factories began retooling and switching their production to fighter aircraft. This became known as the *Jägerprogramm*.

Under the *Jägerprogramm* plan, it was envisioned that the bunker in Mühldorf, once completed, would produce over 900 of the new Messerschmitt Me-262 jetfighter per month. To ensure this figure, the production of various Me-262 parts were to be divided amongst local workshops within the region. For example, the bunker in Mettenheim was tasked with producing the engines and airframes while the final production and assembly would take place in the Landsberg bunker. From there, the aircraft could use the makeshift runway to take off and fly to their destination.

OVERVIEW: ORGANIZATION AND WORKFORCE

Germany's civil and military engineering group, the *Organization Todt*, planned and organized the project from their headquarters in Berlin. For reasons of secrecy, the project was called "Weingut I" and various *Organization Todt* offices in Ampfing, Mettenheim and in Ecksberg began handling local affairs in regards to the project. Various firms were hired among them *Polensky & Zöllner*.

Polensky & Zöllner, founded in 1880, specialized in the construction of towering and underground steel and cement projects. During the construction of the *Innwerkkanal* from 1919-1924 in Mühldorf, they funded the firm *Zweigwerk Mühldorf*. From 1933-1942, *Polensky & Zöllner* was heavily involved in the construction of *Autobahns* and obtained permission in 1935 to begin construction on the *Innkraftwerk* in Gars. *Polensky & Zöllner* also built the *Großglockner Passstraße*, worked on the *Tauernkraftwerk Kaprun* and put up many parts of the *Deutschen Alpenstraße*. At the beginning of World War II, *Polensky & Zöllner* was ordered into the occupied territories to begin construction on streets, bridges, fortresses, airfields, submarine bunkers, ports and various other structures needed by the German Army.

Polensky & Zöllner recalled 200 of its workers and equipment from various parts of occupied Europe to aid in the construction of the bunker. The division of *Polensky & Zöllner* that took care of the bunker was called *Bautrupp 773*. Manager of the "Weingut I" project was *Polensky & Zöllner* Chief engineer Gickeleiter. 70-80% of *Polensky &*

Zöllner construction capacity was routed to aiding the fighter program. The firm was also ordered to expand the following train stations: Kraiburg, Ampfing and Jettenbach.

Strangely, there was no formal contract awarded to *Polensky & Zöllner*, despite the firm's request for one. *Polensky & Zöllner* also sent a construction bill to the *Organization Todt* for 25,867,592 Reichsmark near the end of the war. The *Organization Todt*, however, refused to pay (probably due to the worsening war situation).

A project of this scale required a large workforce. At the beginning of 1942, the Germans had forcefully recruited millions of people from occupied territories to work as laborers in the German armament industry. The man in charge of this was Fritz Sauckel, *Generalbevollmächtigten für den Arbeitseinsatz*. Alone the bunker in the Mettenheim would require at least 8,000 workers. The *Organization Todt* supplied the engineers, management and master chiefs while the majority of the 10,000 laborers were composed of prisoners of war and concentration camp inmates from Dachau.

To further mask the operation, the *Organization Todt* went as far and organized their tasks with the appropriate firms and the SS and even set their "payment". Concentration camp inmates were classified as *Hilfsarbeiter* (laborers) and were being "paid" 60 Pfennigs an hour. The payment of the inmates was to be done at the end of each month. In reality, the inmates never saw the money. Dr. Edith Raim, a respected researcher at the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte* in Munich, has mentioned the following facts:

"At the end of the war, prisoners of war had worked a total of 322,513 hours. They had cost the firm Polensky & Zöllner an estimated 193,507.80 Reichsmark. Concentration camp inmates worked a total of 2,831,974 hours and were supposed to receive 1,699,184.40 Reichsmark as payment, which never materialized."

The final responsibility for the decision to use slave labor lies with Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS and SS-Obergruppenführer Pohl, head of the SS-WVHA (SS-Wirtschafts- und Verwaltungshauptamt). SS troops and *Organization Todt* employees guarded inmates on the grounds. Makeshift barracks and tents were created on site to house the prisoners. The camps Waldlager 1,2 and 3 were located near the state road *Mühldorf-Werk Kraiburg* and housed the forced laborers. The living spaces of concentration camp inmates were allocated to the concentration camps Mettenheim, Waldlager 5/6, Mittergars and Obertaufkirchen-Thalham. Russian prisoners-of-war were housed in barracks located in Mettenheim and in Ampfing.

