

Women's Labor Camp (FAL) Liebau

September 1944 – May 1945

Eran Mor

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTER'S DEGREE

University of Haifa
Faculty of Humanities
Department of General History

March, 2023

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By: Eran Mor

Supervised by: Professor Stefan Ihrig

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(Chairperson of Master's studies Committee)

In memory of my dear mother, Alice Schoenfeld (Aliza Mor), a survivor of World War II concentration camps, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Liebau Camp. She survived the Holocaust horrors, remaining for the rest of her life with the memories of her parents, Avraham (Bumi) Schoenfeld, Mili Nussbaum and family members, selected to be murdered in front of her eyes on the ramp in Auschwitz-Birkenau. She started her life anew in the Jewish State, raising a large family, children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. She passed away on April 11, 2016, on her 88th birthday. It is said that only the truly righteous die on their birthday. May her memory be blessed.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Stefan Ihrig, of the Department of General History, Haifa University, for the supervision, for his good advice on the direction, the content of my thesis just before I started and for his support during my research by providing comments and guidance on the content and form of the written thesis.

Thanks to the archive team at the Yad Vashem library in Jerusalem for their assistance in finding the relevant testimonies in the archive and those found in other libraries.

Thanks to the team at Gross-Rosen Museum in Rogoźnica and the archive in Wałbrzych Poland for their support during my visit and afterword assistance with valuable information.

Thanks to Mr. Marian Gabrowski, Polish historian who thoroughly researched the construction of an airfield by prisoners of Liebau Camp and helped me find data and documents in the Polish language about the town of Liebau and its surroundings before and during World War II.

Thanks to Mr. Steven Vitto at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) information center for his support, during my visit, in documents relating to Liebau Camp.

Thanks to Mrs. Katya Skarzhinsky for her in-depth observation of the content of my thesis, far beyond language and document editing, and for the good comments I received from her.

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the history of one camp, the Liebau Women's Labor Camp, established in the last year of World War II, in Upper Silesia, today southwestern Poland, as part of the Gross-Rosen labor camp network. The study focused on the events in the camp, which was established as a source of forced labor for three armament factories in the town of Liebau. In my research I have examined the testimonies of thirty-nine camp survivors. I have combined the data with existing knowledge about the conduct of the war in its last year. The research seeks to produce a detailed history of the events in the camp and sets them against the background history leading up to the defeat of Nazi Germany. It thus contributes to the research of the Holocaust, and the occurrences toward the end of the war.

Post-war events in Poland prevented an in-depth study of Nazi Germany's policies concerning operation of forced labor camps and Nazi regime attitude to the extermination policy within the framework of the "Final Solution." Little information has been gleaned from the trials of SS guards held in Poland in 1945-6 and from documents found in Nazi Germany-era archives, particularly in the archives of the Gross-Rosen camp. The process of collecting the testimonies on which the research is based took place decades after the liberation of the camp, from the mid- 1990s until the first decade of 2000. The paucity of testimonies and the long time that had passed since the events necessitate a conservative and selective approach towards what is said. Accordingly, the information provided was carefully examined by cross-referencing testimonies and verifying them against historical known evidence. Most of the prisoners in the camp were deported from Hungary between May and July 1944 as the Red Army was fighting in central Ukraine and was about to occupy

eastern Hungary within months. Several dozen prisoners were deported from Holland and France in the last transports from these countries.

My research suggests that a set of conditions, unique to the place and period in question, was a major factor in the prisoner's physical survival until camp's liberation on the last day of the war in Europe despite the mental burden they experienced during their imprisonment time, and years later. On the one hand, the inmates were deported at a late date and, therefore, were in better physical condition compared to longtime prisoners. On the other hand, the prisoners in the camp underwent a sharp and sudden change in their living conditions, which hindered their mental ability to cope with the difficult conditions in the camp, especially from the beginning of 1945. This difficulty was especially noticeable in prisoners who were directly expelled from a well-established and functional family home.

My research distinguishes between two periods. The first spans the second half of 1944 when Nazi Germany, though retreating on all fronts, still maintained activity in the concentration camps and manufacturing plants. The second period lasts from January 1945 until the surrender of Nazi Germany. This was the time the regime's disintegration and weakening control over vast parts of its territory, including the camps and the factories, for which they had been established. When the camp was liberated, four hundred and eighty-nine of the five hundred prisoners who managed to survive returned to their homes, many of them physically and mentally injured

Abbreviations

DoB	Dates of Birth
FAL	FrauenArbeitsLager – Women Labor Camp
Gr Ro or GR	Gross Rosen
ITS	International Tracing Services - the Arolsen Archives
KAL or KL	KonzentrationsLager – Concentration camp
Kdo	Kommando controlled KL
POW	Prisoner Of War
RAD	ReichsArbeitsDienst –Reich Labor Service
RIF	“Rein Judisches Fett – Pure Jewish Fat
RSHA	Reichssicherheitshauptamt – Reich Security Main Office
SS	Schutzstaffel – Protection Squadron
USCSF	USC Shoah Foundation (Video History)
USHMM	US Holocaust Memorial Museum (Washington DC)
VHA	Visual History Archive® – USC Shoah Foundation
WVHA	Wirtschafts und Verwaltungshauptamt <i>SS</i> Main Economic and Administrative Office
YVA	Yad Vashem Archive

1. Introduction

This is the first and comprehensive study based on testimonies by Jewish women, survivors of the women's forced labor, Liebau camp, a sub-camp, under KL Gross-Rosen. The study completes a missing chapter in the history of the Holocaust. The personal evidence are the first and foremost in dealing with the holocaust. Just the larger "forest" picture already exists in the literature, in my thesis I am adding and matching the pictures of the "trees" – the personal testimonies which are the outcome of the big picture and the personal reflections thereof. Yehuda Bauer said that: "without micro-history there is no macro-history. He who remains only in micro-history is lost because he is left to engage in detail. Do not only deal with trees, but you should also deal with the forest. Both the trees and the forest."¹

From the spring of 1944, companies in Lower Silesia, the Sudeten territory, Lusatia, and east Brandenburg established hundred subcamps – among them 45 camps for prisoners as part of the comprehensive exploitation of concentration camp prisoners by the German armaments industry.² In the thesis I reconstruct the events and the lives of Liebau Camp, and I will situate them to see where and how the history of this camp matches and fit into the main events of the war. Liebau Camp was a small women's labor camp in Silesia in the Sudeten Mountains at the German town of Liebau, today Polish Lubawka in south-western Poland. The camp was established in July 1944 and five hundred women, mostly of Hungarian origin, were transferred there from mid-September.³ The camp was liberated on May 8, 1945, just hours before the surrender of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II

¹ Dalia Ofer and Dina Porat, "Interview with Professor Yehuda Bauer," *Moreshet – Journal for the study of the Holocaust and Antisemitism* 16, no. 100 (2019): 27.

² Andrea Rudorff, "Reimagining the 'Gray Zone': Female Prisoner Functionaries in the Gross-Rosen Subcamps, 1944-45," in *Lessons and Legacies XIV*, ed. Tim Cole and Simone Gigliotti (Evanston, Illinois, USA: Northwestern University Press, 2021), 24.

³ In some documents I found reference to 550 prisoners. This is because a transport of fifty prisoners was attributed to Liebau at the beginning of November 1944. According to the testimonies, there were only two transports to the camp, two hundred Hungarian women on 19th September and another three hundred prisoners of various nationalities in early October. ITS's prisoners list refers to only the first two transports. In their trial the SS guards also testified about 500 prisoners in the camp.

in Europe. I will show that the history of the camp reflects and expresses the global dynamics that took place in the last year of the war, detailing them down to individual cases and events derived from the human diversity of the inmates in the camp, the course of the war during its final year, and the local geography of the camp over the high mountains.

I found two previous works at the University of Haifa that dealt with the study of specific concentration and labor camps in the region. Zehava Mualem studied the Annaberg, Blechhammer, Gleiwitz, Markstädt and Women labor camp Neustadt camps mainly through survivor testimonies.⁴ Ert Karni studied the Weisswasser camp and the Oranienburg camp to which Jewish women inmates were transferred in March 1945.⁵ The two thesis expand the database on labor camps in Silesia in the last years of the war.

The inmates in the camp, most of them aged 16-24, were mostly Hungarian speaking, born in Hungary, eastern Slovakia, and northeastern Romania. There was a group of women from Western Europe, the Netherlands, Belgium and France, and a small group of Polish women who were deported to Auschwitz after the liquidation of the Lodz ghetto. Since the testimonies are mostly personal and subjective, they are presented as flashbacks of personal experiences and not as a dated sequence of events. In order to produce such a sequence, I have superimposed the testimonies onto a foundation of known facts and events from the literature.

Sources of Data

Bella Gutterman's book mentions the fact that the camp existed as a sub-camp, yet no further details are provided about what was happening in the camp.⁶ She wrote:

⁴ Zehava Mualem, "The History of the Jews in Forced Labor Camps in Upper Eastern Silesia, Lower Silesia and Sudetenland: 1940 – 1945 (Hebrew)" (Haifa University, 2020).

⁵ Art Karni, "Jewish women in forced labor camps in Reich Territory in the final stages of World War II, 1944-1945 (Hebrew)" (Haifa University, 2007).

⁶ Bella Gutterman, *A Narrow Bridge to Life: Jewish Forced Labor and Survival in the Gross-Rosen Camp System, 1940-1945*, book, trans. IBRT (New York, Oxford: Berghahn books, 2008), 112–15.

“A scholar who is interested in researching the lives of the Jewish prisoners in the Gross-Rosen camps must settle for meager source materials: a few lines in “Pages of testimony,” an isolated paragraph, a poem. The insignificant quantity of memoir literature and testimonies poses a threat to research efforts. Nevertheless, the testimonies and documents that are to be found in the archives in Poland, the Czech Republic, Germany, and Israel provide enough information to form a rather complete picture of what happened to the Jews in the Gross-Rosen network and to present findings about the fate of the survivors. Additional testimonies add the important perspective into their inner life and feelings and complement the information that is available from other sources”⁷

I will examine whether there are differences of views on the events between witnesses who came from a different culture and a different family situation. Is there a difference in looking at and understanding events between an Orthodox observant and a woman who comes from a secular home and even assimilates. Is there a difference between someone who comes from a poor home versus a rich one. Does the size of the family and the role of the prisoner in that family cell, before the deportation, affect the way of seeing the events. In addition, I will examine the level of awareness of the prisoners for events beyond their daily lives, such as the management of the camp, the relations between the SS staff, the factory owners, and the foreign and civilian workers. I will also examine the female prisoners' awareness regarding the situation of the war in Europe. Survivor testimonies should be read with a critical eye. The camps were not always a good observation point to get to know them. Primo Levi wrote on this point:

.... “The witnesses were mired in an unending process of self-defense and desperate attempt to avoid beating and punishment.... Often, they didn’t know the camp commander and their own supervisor’s name. ...The memories which lie

⁷ Ibid., 3.

within us are not carved in stone, not only do they tend to become erased as the years go by, but often they change or even increase by incorporating extraneous features. Judges know it very well: it almost never happens that two eyewitnesses of the same event describe it in the same way and with the same words.⁸ ... War survivor memories may be altered. It has been noticed, for instance, that many of them tend unconsciously to filter memory.”⁹

I studied thirty-nine testimonies as recorded from women survivors of Liebau Camp. The list of testimonies is provided in appendix C. Most testimonies were taken later than 1994, and they concentrated more on subjective personal experiences that painted the image of the individual “tree” in the forest rather than the image of the “forest”. Through the testimonies I gathered from camp’s survivors and in accordance with the historical background from the literature, my study examines the events at the Liebau labor camp during the last eight months of World War II in Europe and the impact of camp routines on the lives of the inmates. I am looking for the assumptions of the Nazi regime at the time of the establishment of the camp, were they fulfilled, and what led to the survival of four hundred and eighty-nine out of five hundred inmates.

The Final Solution and the Need for Slave Labor

Examining evidence from a relatively small labor camp raises fundamental questions about how the Third Reich was run in general, the needs of the Reich economy during the last year of the war, and the simultaneous management of the mass murder process derived from Nazi ideology. The camp was built at the summer of 1944, while Allied forces were liberating France and Western European countries and the Red Army was advancing in Ukraine, eastern Hungary, and Romania. The decision-making processes in Nazi Germany by a leader whose sanity at this stage was in doubt, and by a ruling elite of decision-makers who

⁸ Primo Levi, *The Drowned And The Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal, Fifth (London: Michael Joseph, 1988), 11.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

knew well their fate after the defeat, lead to bizarre decisions and actions that seep down to the management of a small camp, and of the three factories for which it was established for.

Nazi Germany turned Jews into slaves and imprisoned them in an extensive network of forced labor camps that spread throughout Europe. Their employment heralded no change to the overall "final solution" plan – it was the needs of the German economy and the continued war effort that dictated the need to employ Jews in jobs for the benefit of the German military effort. This was, therefore, merely a phase in the process of extermination.¹⁰ The ideological goal of extermination remained paramount right up to 1945, despite the demands of the war economy. The unchanging exterminatory mindset of the SS was more pragmatically incarnated in the concept of "extermination through labor". This meant that some prisoners in the concentration camp system were exploited as forced laborers in order to meet economic targets, while at the same time many others were murdered for ideological reasons, even though their labor was urgently needed.¹¹ In retrospect, it seems that the perpetual possibility of the great Nazi solution, to annihilate the Jewish race, which on the part of its totalitarian integrity was a utopian solution that did not address all derived aspects, justified and required making compromises and setting priorities such as the use of Jewish forced labor.¹² In the study I will examine the aspects of preserving the lives of female prisoners as a productive force against the Nazi extermination ideology. How this is reflected in the daily attitude of the SS staff and the management of the factories towards the female prisoners. Additionally, I will examine the events in the camp towards the end of the war and what was done towards the liberation of the camp.

¹⁰ Mualem, "The History of the Jews in Forced Labor Camps in Upper Eastern Silesia, Lower Silesia and Sudetenland: 1940 – 1945 (Hebrew)," 8.

¹¹ Jens-Christian Wagner, "Work and Extermination in the Concentration Camps," in *Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany: The New History*, ed. Jane Caplan and Nikolaus Wachsmann (New York: Routledge - London :, 2010), 127.

¹² Goetz Ali, "Resettlement of Jews: Reflections on the political developments that preceded the Holocaust (Hebrew)," in *Nazi Extermination Policy, 1939-1945*, ed. Herbert Ulrich and Dvid Bankir (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2001), 70.

Women's Camp – An Open Question

A question to be addressed is the reason for the use of female labor in the labor camps in general and particularly in the Liebau camp. During the last quarter of 1942, deportation trains from the West were stopped tens of kilometers before Auschwitz at the Cosel station, and healthy and strong men aged 15-50 were unloaded from them for infrastructure work. The women continued their way to extermination in Auschwitz.¹³ These men detainees were transported directly from Cosel to labor camps in Upper Silesia such as Annaberg and Blechhammer.¹⁴ At that time labor camps didn't demand women labor.

In contrast, in the summer of 1944, priority was given to employing women.¹⁵ In the Liebau camp, from the three factories, two were more suited to the physical ability of men. At the Laske factory, the inmates were forced to unload heavy timber from a train or truck and transport them through processing machines. Also, the process of adding ironwork to the ammunition crates required continuous work with a heavy hammer, hard physical exertion. At the Nordland factory, the inmates were engaged in transporting and connecting heavy metal parts and assembling them to the caterpillar of Panzer tanks. In 1942-3, labor camps for Polish Jewish women were established, mainly in the field of textiles, initially as low-wage workers, and later as forced labor. Although there were jobs that required physical strength one can understand the rationale behind the intention not to involve forced labor men and women in the same workspace. I will discuss several opinions and reasons for establishing a labor camp for women in the last year of the war.

¹³ Susanne Barth, "Revisiting the 'Cosel Period': A Fresh Perspective on the Stopping of Western Deportation Trains En Route to Auschwitz, 1942–1943," *Shofar (West Lafayette, Ind.)* 39, no. 2 (June 1, 2021): 32–61.

¹⁴ Mualem, "The History of the Jews in Forced Labor Camps in Upper Eastern Silesia, Lower Silesia and Sudetenland: 1940 – 1945 (Hebrew)," 40, 76.

¹⁵ Isabell Sprenger, "Aufseherinnen in den Frauenaußenlagern des Konzentrationslagers Groß-Rosen (German)," *Workshop history (German)*, vol. 12 (Hamburg, 1995), 23.

Life at Liebau Camp

The women in the camp experienced two transitions. The first is traumatic – the departure from a functioning family home to the horrors of the camp in Birkenau. The second move to the labor camp seemed to them a relief, but the result was a complex way of life, for eight months, until the day of liberation. I will examine the daily life of the inmates. In the first place, the support of their spirit and body through the fight against hunger and cold, the poor medical care and the personal hygiene which they were required to observe. I will examine support between prisoners, especially closed relatives who stayed together in the camp. I will examine the internal connections between the groups of prisoners and whether it was a deliberate policy of the SS to maintain a separation between the groups for fear of rebellion.

In prisoner groups, a natural leadership layer is created which in turn is privileged by the authorities. In the camps founded towards the end of the war, a leadership layer did not naturally form. In the testimonies of the prisoners, I will look for a reference to the camp elder, her attitude towards the inmates and her control, as a mediator, between the prisoners and the camp authorities. In addition, I will look in the testimonies for evidence about privileged inmates, how they managed to get the privileges and what was their attitude and behavior towards the other prisoners.

The complementary side to the life of the prisoners in the camp was the headquarters staff and especially the SS soldier guards who were hastily recruited in preparation for the operation of the camp. They were recruited without sufficient training and were responsible for the daily close contact with the prisoners at work and in the camp. Testimonies from SS guards who became prisoners in Poland after the war constitute another source of information, although its reliability must be doubted about the routine of camp life and the relationships and discipline imposed on the prisoners.

Life in the camp was divided into two main periods. Until the end of 1944, the camp was operating according to the plans for which it was established. From January 1945, the disintegration of Nazi Germany was felt in the camp, the work in the factories is logistically

affected and interrupted, and hunger increases due to further cuts in food rations. I will describe in the study the changes that the camp inmates underwent until the day of liberation, the events leading up to the liberation, and the liberation process. In survivors' testimonies there is ample space for the events on their way back to their homes, but this is an extensive topic and I will refer to it just briefly.

The Structure of the Thesis

For the purpose of creating the narrative of the camp with the highest possible reliability, I tried to rely on cross-referenced facts, on events described by several witnesses and on events based on general information I found in other documents. In places where there was doubt about a certain event, but I found it important to note its existence, I noted in a comment that the event does not have enough support and its existence may be in doubt.

Chapter 2 provides historical background on the development of forced labor during World War II, the factors, and reasons behind the creation of the camps, the organizational affiliation of the camps and the share of responsibility for their operation. I discuss the employment of women in the last year of the war and its causes, and briefly describe the background to the late deportation of Jewry to extermination from Hungary and from Western Europe shortly before liberation of these territories.

Chapter 3 describes the history of the Gross Rosen camps and add details about the German town of Liebau and its close region, Kamieniogora. I will address the life in a small and remote border town before the rise of Nazism, in the period until the beginning of World War II and the impact of the war on this remote border area.

Chapter 4, testimonies that I collected for the period up to the end of 1944 are presents. I briefly summarized the place of origin of some of the survivors, the process they went through with the transfer from the concentration camps and ghettos in their home countries to the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp, the transfer to the labor camp in

Liebau, and the work at the factories. From September to December 1944, the camp operated in a regulated and organized manner, mainly because the work routine in the production plants was maintained.

Chapter 5 presents testimonies from the beginning of 1945 until the day of liberation, and few testimonies regarding the fate of the survivors after the liberation and their way back home from where they had been deported.

The **Discussion Chapter** addresses the information I gathered and a response to questions I posed.

Appendix A is an area map with the Camp location marked.

Appendix B shows the structure of the Gross-Rosen camp's cluster.

Appendix C is a list of names and additional details about the survivor's testimonies used in the thesis.

Appendix D is a list of victims, Jewish inmates who died during their sojourn in the camp or immediately after the liberation. They were buried in the cemetery in the nearby town.

Appendix E includes photos which I have taken during my visit at the site and additional old photos locating camp and factories positions.

Appendix F is an old photo of the Kurt Laska furniture factory.

Appendix G provides a list of terms in the German language used by the survivors, in their testimonies, with a short explanation of the meaning of each term. I saw the importance of continuing to use these terms in the thesis as they were common among the survivors and as they were used by them at the time of giving the testimonies.

Appendix H is a list of positions for self-administration, within the inmates at the camp.

Appendix I Shows the way the to the airport construction site.

Appendix J shows Latest Nazi controlled area – as taken from a display at the USHMM.

2. Historical Background-The Nazi Camp and Labor System

Forced Laborers in the Nazi Industry at the Beginning of World War II

The Third Reich did not invent forced labor for captives. It has long been central to traditional conceptions of prisons and workhouses, a useful organizing principal for keeping inmates occupied and driving down the cost of detention.¹⁶ In early 1933, local states asked the Reich to share the costs of “preventative detention,” as these internments had been ordered by the Reich itself. But the Reich Interior Minister would only finance this parallel penal system under certain conditions, including a demand that costs be reduced through inmate labor.¹⁷

In early 1943, the Allied Forces commenced a heavy aerial offensive on German industrial plants. The escalating losses of the Wehrmacht, the need to mobilize civilian armament workers to replenish the dwindling army ranks, and the Allied bombardment forced the German industrial enterprises to redeploy. To offset the damage caused by the bombings, the authorities subjected the armament industry to a sweeping reorganization. Among other things, plants in hazardous areas were ordered to relocate to safer areas within the Reich.¹⁸

A network of slave labor in SS “satellites” of the major concentration camps did not really begin to spread throughout Germany until late 1943 and early 1944. After this point, scarcely any German factory of importance failed to apply for a contingent of concentration camp prisoners.¹⁹ SS related businessmen can neither be described as ideologically motivated nor as misfits of the depression, but simply very ruthless entrepreneurs who, quite

¹⁶ Nikolaus Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, First edit (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 157–58.

¹⁷ Marc Buggeln, “Forced Labour in Nazi Concentration Camps,” in *Global Convict Labour*, ed. Christian Giusepp De Vito and Alex Lichtenstein (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2015), 336.

¹⁸ Gutterman, *A Narrow Bridge to Life: Jewish Forced Labor and Survival in the Gross-Rosen Camp System, 1940-1945*, 97.

¹⁹ Robert Lewis Koehl, *The Black Corps : The Structure and Power Struggles of the Nazi SS* (Madison, Wis, USA: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 170.

clear-eyed, saw opportunities for profit in the exploitation of concentration camp labor and were forced to share these opportunities with the SS.²⁰

Until the beginning of 1944, many Jewish inmates were transferred to extermination and labor camps, workshops where they had worked subsequently closing. From early 1944, the main labor camps were transferred to the responsibility of the SS in Berlin. New labor camps were opened under the supervision of the main camps, Auschwitz, and Gross-Rosen.²¹ Starting in October 1944, the Minister of Armaments and War Production, Albert Speer, Hitler's friend, and confidant, took over from the SS in employing the prisoners, and from that time the number of labor camps grew at an increasing rate.²²

Speer appealed in September 1944 to Himmler: "foreign workers were becoming quite scarce, and concentration camp inmates were now sorely needed". For him, humans were no more than numbers. Hungarian Jews, whose use, he said, offended his Aryan sensibilities, were nevertheless good workers, and he wanted them brought to Germany where their capabilities could be properly employed, he measured them with his precise, impersonal mind solely by their performance.²³

It is not possible to cite exact data on the quantitative distribution of various forms of work. Gudrun Schwarz lists a total of 1,202 external subcamps.²⁴ The listing provides an approximate picture but employs the undifferentiated collective category of "industry". Deployment of labor in "industry," however, usually did not mean work in industrial

²⁰ Michael Thad Allen, "The Business of Genocide – The SS, Slavery, and the Concentration Camps," in *Business and Industry in Nazi Germany.*, ed. Francis R. Huener. and Nicosia; Jonathan (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004), 81–82.

²¹ Wolf Gruner, *Jewish Forced Labor under the Nazis: Economic Needs and Racial Aims, 1938-1944*, trans. Kathleen M. Dell'orto, *Cambridge University Press* (New York: Cambridge University Press & USHMM, 2006), 224–28.

²² Marc Buggeln, "Building to Death: Prisoner Forced Labour in the German War Economy — The Neuengamme Subcamps, 1942—1945," *European History Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (October 25, 2009): 613, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265691409342658>.

²³ Eugene Davidson, "The War Plant and Forced Labor," in *The Trial of the Germans : An Account of the Twenty-Two Defendants before the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg*, 1st ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), 499.

²⁴ Gudrun Schwarz, *Die national sozialistischen Lager* (Frankfurt: Frankfurt am Main, 1990), 146–99.

production per se, but rather in cleanup operations or construction. The extent of labor deployed in mechanized production was limited and should not be overestimated.²⁵

Forced labor ended where it began – in Germany, with the exploitation of Hungarian Jews and concentration camp prisoners in underground construction and factories for war production. At the zenith of Jewish forced labor, more than one million Jewish men and women, many of them elderly or minors, toiled for the German economy across occupied Europe.²⁶ Many companies were able to continue uninterruptedly exploiting their forced laborers as concentration camp prisoners. Nevertheless, for economic reasons, the camps often offered the inmates a better chance of survival than did the cities.²⁷ Austrian historians Bertrand Perz,²⁸ and Florian Freund,²⁹ argued that the type of work in which prisoners engaged was significant to their ability to survive: outdoor work versus working inside a factory, as well as working with wood products instead of being in contact with metal products in times of extreme cold, to name some examples.³⁰

Slave labor in the Third Reich had become a business of genocide. Slavery was directly tied to the Holocaust and could not have functioned without the constant influx and “liquidation” of prisoners. The SS maintained its camps in a constant state of deterioration. Sanitation was poor at best, the food supply miserable. That the National Socialist state managed industrial work in tandem with murder, that was just as industrialized, remains part of the abiding uniqueness of the Holocaust.³¹ In 1944, more than eight million foreign forced laborers were employed within the German war economy inside the Reich. The principal characteristic of this employment of foreigners was the contradiction between the

²⁵ Wolfgang Sofsky, *The Order of Terror The Concentration Camp*, trans. William Templer, Princeton New Jersey, 1996th ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 325, Note #2 for Ch 16.

²⁶ Gruner, *Jewish Forced Labor under the Nazis: Economic Needs and Racial Aims, 1938-1944*, IX.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 228–29.

²⁸ Bertrand. Perz, *Projekt Quarz: Steyr-Daimler-Puch und das Konzentrationslager Melk* (Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1991).

²⁹ Florian. Freund, *Arbeitslager Zement : das Konzentrationslager Ebensee und die Raketenrüstung* (Wien: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1989).

³⁰ Buggeln, “Building to Death: Prisoner Forced Labour in the German War Economy — The Neuengamme Subcamps, 1942—1945,” 609.

³¹ Thad Allen, “The Business of Genocide – The SS, Slavery, and the Concentration Camps,” 99–100.

economic interest in exploiting as many foreigners as possible and the ideological principles of National Socialism, which sought to protect the “Volk” from mixing with “foreign blood.” From this contradiction there developed a rigidly hierarchical racist system for the treatment of forced laborers. Without the use of foreign labor, the agricultural and industrial production of Germany would have collapsed in 1942 at the latest. German war economy therefore had no choice but to depend on the employment of millions of forced laborers.³²

At the beginning of November 1944, the RSHA issued a decree permitting individual Gestapo offices to order and carry out executions of foreign workers – initially only Eastern workers and Poles, later Western workers as well.³³ From testimonies of survivors of Liebau Camp we learn about the presence of foreign workers at the factories. They lived in town and had certain rights to travel throughout the Reich. They ran independent households and received food stamps from the factories. These foreign workers assisted the inmates of the camp by providing information on the progress of the war, in transferring food items and in keeping the inmates safe where possible. It was the foreign workers who prevented the SS from blowing up the camp prior to its liberation, and assisted the inmates in self-organizing after liberation, even accompanying some of the liberated prisoners on their way back home.

Dispersal of Industrial Centers to Remote Areas

The massive concentration of Germany's capital goods industries in the Ruhr, and, to a lesser degree, in Silesia was a problem of geography. The productive capacity was not properly distributed to withstand allied bombing. The effect of heavy bombing of its means of communication was to bring this fundamental geographical problem into the foreground once more. However, it can be said that of an equal importance with the results of bombing

³² Ulrich Herbert, “Forced Laborers in the Third Reich: An Overview,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 58, no. 58 (2000): 193.

³³ Ulrich Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany under the Third Reich*, ed. William Templer (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1997), 361–62.

were the chronic labor shortages, and the decline in vital raw material supplies as the Allies physically re-occupied territories on which German production had by then depended.³⁴

From the summer of 1942 onward, a dispersal of industrial plants took place, especially of armament plants and the manufacture of aircraft.³⁵ It forced the Germans to move dozens of large industrial facilities from major cities to hundreds of small factories in remote areas, where the German war economy could either use German women workforce or depend on the employment of millions of forced laborers.³⁶ During the Nuremberg trials, the International Military Tribunal proceeded on the premise that National Socialist foreigner policy had been founded on a “program of slave labor,” which had required the deportation of more than five million persons for the purpose of forced labor, many of whom had to endure terrible cruelty and suffering.³⁷ Camps were erected near major industrial plants, mainly the armament industry. The inmates in the camp faced a simple choice: either work or die.

In the spring of 1944 at the latest, a network of such labor camps was deployed throughout the German Reich heralding the last step in the Nazi Party's concentration camp enterprise.³⁸ I have discovered that the rapid change in labor camps need and construction created verity of numbers for the amounts of camps, quoted in the literature, especially in 1944-5. Buggeln quote of six hundred and sixty two satellite camps contradictory to Wachmann with only Five hundred and sixty. In other books the number is even above seven hundred. Clearly there were hundreds of camps.

The production of weapons generally did not begin its overall decline until December 1944. But its collapse was terribly sudden. The production of many types of weapons was halved between December 1944 and January 1945.³⁹ For that reason I chose to

³⁴ Alan S. Milward, *The German Economy at War* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2015), 165.

³⁵ Adolf Galland, *The First and the Last (Hebrew)* (Tel Aviv: Marachot IDF, 1978), 119.

³⁶ Herbert, “Forced Laborers in the Third Reich: An Overview,” 193.

³⁷ Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany under the Third Reich*, 3.

³⁸ Buggeln, “Building to Death: Prisoner Forced Labour in the German War Economy — The Neuengamme Subcamps, 1942—1945,” 607–8.

³⁹ Milward, *The German Economy at War*, 163.

separate the collection of testimonies in my thesis into two periods, with the time of change being January 1945. I will show that there was a change in the living conditions in the camp and in the course of work in the factories starting from the beginning of 1945.

The workforce was mainly composed of concentration camp prisoners, alongside foreign forced workers, and POWs. While the working conditions in the camps within armaments factories (which included, incidentally, most the women's satellite camps) were often comparatively bearable. Other labor camps for building projects were effectively death camps. Three kinds of selections were carried out in the main camps: first, prisoners were inspected for their ability to work during rollcall and in the barracks – a camp selection. Second, selections were carried out in the prisoner sick bays with the intention of reducing the number of sick inmates. Third, selections took place as the work columns left the camps in the morning.⁴⁰

The overall productivity of prisoners fell far behind the expectation of the SS and the industry. Compared with that of regular German workers, their productivity reached an estimated half in industrial production, even less in construction. Once all the overheads were deducted, Jewish forced labor often proved to be no cheaper than free German labor. The decisive factor here was that forced laborers were immediately available, allowing state and private companies to take on additional armament orders and building projects.⁴¹

Employment of Women

By early August 1944 there were 145,000 women in concentration camps, and women accounted for 38.3 percent of all internees in the camps under WVHA. Their numbers increased gradually as the war continued. By mid-January 1945, 202,674 of the 714,211 camp inmates (28.4 percent) were women.⁴² The experience of women differed in some ways from

⁴⁰ Wagner, "Work and Extermination in the Concentration Camps," 137–39.

⁴¹ Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, 452.

⁴² Gutterman, *A Narrow Bridge to Life: Jewish Forced Labor and Survival in the Gross-Rosen Camp System, 1940-1945*, 161.

that of men. Indeed, women faced unique dangers and humiliations, and at the same time drew on their own unique resources for day-to-day survival.⁴³ Before the war, the great majority of inmates at concentration camps were males. From 1937 to 1939, there existed in Lichtenburg a small concentration camp for women, through which some 1,400 female inmates passed. It was only in May 1939 that the SS opened the central concentration camp for women at Ravensbrück, which soon rivalled major men's camps in size.⁴⁴

With labor shortages increasing as the war expanded, women were also assigned to labor details in satellite camps in larger numbers. SS statistics show that a permanent population of women internees existed there from September 1944 until liberation in May 1945.⁴⁵ It was shown at Ravensbrück that inmate mortality among women was relatively low. A partial explanation is that women showed greater ingenuity in many things directly concerning the simple preservation of life, such as nursing sick inmates, refashioning clothing from discarded items, and stretching limited food supplies. Traditional homemaking skills taught to women effectively lowered their vulnerability to death and disease, despite the obviously inadequate lavatory and sanitary facilities.⁴⁶

Pre-war training in the domestic crafts – sewing, food preparation, personal hygiene – placed women in a better position in camp situations where a torn uniform meant death and where a properly treated dirty potato peel could mean the difference between starvation and another day's survival.⁴⁷ When I checked the background of testimony givers in my thesis, I can add that this was particularly relevant for those women who had run a household before the war. School age inmates who came from wealthy urban homes with few children

⁴³ Sybil Milton, "Women and the Holocaust: The Case of German and German-Jewish Women," in *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, ed. Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, and Marion Kaplan (New York: New York : Monthly Review Press, 1984), 297.

⁴⁴ Buggeln, "Forced Labour in Nazi Concentration Camps," 335.

⁴⁵ Milton, "Women and the Holocaust: The Case of German and German-Jewish Women," 310.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 308.

⁴⁷ Judith Tydor Baumel-Schwartz, *Double Jeopardy: Gender and the Holocaust*, Parkes-Wiener Series on Jewish Studies (London, Portland Or.: Vallentine Mitchell, 1998), 26–27.

in the family did not possess the sewing and cooking skills of inmates originating from poorer homes or even orphanages.

Women appear to have been more resilient than men, both physically and psychologically, to malnutrition and starvation. They were less vulnerable to the effect of short-term starvation and famine. Women also shared and pooled their limited resources better than men did. In the camps, they swapped recipes and ways of extending limited quantities of food. Women better maintained their cleanliness and appearance. The locals who worked in the factory with Jewish prisoners were more inclined to help the women. Female inmates were involved in local "barter", engaged in sewing and services for the camp's wealthy in exchange for food, and developed social relationships, including romantic relationships.⁴⁸

The sexually homogenous environment created a microcosm of unique gender interaction in which women's leadership and mutual assistance grew and flourished in the face of adversity and crisis. Similarly, in many cases, women's spiritual resistance occurred with little, if any, masculine input, a rare situation in patriarchal religious societies.⁴⁹ By the end of 1942 there were two types of labor camps: SS camps, established near large ghettos and administered by the SS authorities, and factory camps established by private German companies and enterprises and administered by the "factory guard" (*Werkschutz*), which reported directly to company management. In the SS camps, as in the concentration camps, men and women were housed in separate quarters. In factory camps, however, men's and women's quarters were built in the same area without fences or partitions. Women were often assigned to the most arduous "male" tasks because the private companies had to pay

⁴⁸ Felicja Karay, "Forced labor of Jewish women in the National Socialist regime," *Beshvil HaZikaron (Hebrew)* October, no. 16 (1996): 15–16, Since Liebau camp was a women's labor camp I looked for sources in the literature as to why women were employed in jobs that required greater physical capacity or in other words why the SS and factory owners preferred to employ women. The answer I found in Felicja Karay's article is the most obvious but I have found a similar references in other sources that deal with the subject. See Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman – *Women in the Holocaust*, (Yale, 1998)

⁴⁹ Baumel-Schwartz, *Double Jeopardy : Gender and the Holocaust*, 25.

the SS for the laborers, they "leased" – and they were charged less for women.⁵⁰ The factories in occupied Poland paid twenty percent less for a female worker than for a male worker.⁵¹

Additionally, since the end of 1941 thousands of Jewish women had been trained for massive deployment at flax spinning mills in Silesia and the Sudetenland where they were to take over the second shifts. Later, more than ten women's camps operated in Silesia in the vicinity of textile mills.⁵² Factory camps were run by local guards who were subordinate to the SS commander and the police in the area. In these camps the living and working conditions of men and women were the same, including the imposition of hard physical labor on women.⁵³

From 1941 to mid-1943, the rest of the Jewish population, men, and women, were transferred to camps, where a policy of "extermination through labor" was pursued. Eighty percent of the women prisoners in the Gross-Rosen sub-camps in the Sudetenland were aged fourteen to twenty-nine, since the SS authorities regarded this age group the most likely to be productive on the job.⁵⁴ (On the age distribution in Liebau Camp, see below). I find the survival of women of childbearing age to be contrary to the Nazi regime's intention to commit genocide and eliminate the Jewish race. The survival of these women was an important and significant contribution to the renewal of the Jewish people after the Holocaust.

⁵⁰ Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman, *Women in the Holocaust*, Yell University Press (Binghamton, New York, 1998), 268.

⁵¹ Felicja Karay, "Women in the Forced -Labor Camps," in *Women in the Holocaust*, ed. Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman (New Haven, New York: Yale University Press, 1998), 285.

⁵² Gruner, *Jewish Forced Labor under the Nazis: Economic Needs and Racial Aims, 1938-1944*, 225.

⁵³ Karay, "Forced labor of Jewish women in the National Socialist regime," 15–16.

⁵⁴ Gutterman, *A Narrow Bridge to Life: Jewish Forced Labor and Survival in the Gross-Rosen Camp System, 1940-1945*, 112.

Staffing of SS and Wehrmacht Guards

I found a certain symmetry between the Nazi regime attitude toward the German woman and the treatment of the Jewish women during the war. German women, during the 1930s, whose duty was to raise Aryan children, were taken during the war for tasks required by the regime, among other things as guards in the concentration camps. Several historians acknowledge and discuss the involvement of some women in National Socialism, as political functionaries, wives of Nazi officials, workers, or concentration-camp guards.⁵⁵ With the proclamation by Hitler of total war, German men aged sixteen to sixty-five and women from seventeen to fifty years old had to register for work.⁵⁶

The staffing of SS personnel changed almost beyond recognition in 1944, with tens of thousands of new recruits joining the organization. SS demand for personnel was huge. All the new satellite camps had to be staffed, and what was more, they required proportionally more guards than the main camps because of interior security installations. The competition for manpower was more intense than ever in 1944, and the KL system was still losing some of its younger sentries to frontline service.⁵⁷ As more and more Jewish women were detained during 1942-43, SS managers dispatched German women as guards to all the main camps in eastern Europe and to many satellite camps as well. It was, however, rare to see a woman in a SS uniform command a man in a SS uniform.⁵⁸

Many of the guards were not members of the Nazi party and were recruited by and under the responsibility of the factory owners, including the conversion of German workers in the factory to guard positions. Service as SS guards was accompanied by improved conditions such as exemption from work, improved housing, and a higher salary than that of a worker. By early 1945, more than half of the male KL personnel were former soldiers, most of whom served as sentries, and who now came into closer contact with prisoners than

⁵⁵ Ann Taylor Allen, "The Holocaust and the Modernization of Gender: A Historiographical Essay," *Central European History* 30, no. 3 (1997): 356.

⁵⁶ Davidson, "The War Plant and Forced Labor," 494.

⁵⁷ Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, 467.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 364.

before. Most of the soldiers had been reservists, only recently called up for active duty. On average, they were in their forties or fifties – some prisoners called them “grandpas” – and they often struggled with the physical demands of the KL.⁵⁹ SS guards were responsible for reporting, supervising, and managing inmate residences, making arrests, supervising the kitchens, escorting inmates to work and running rollcalls. They terrified the inmates and often harassed them.

Deportation of Jews to Auschwitz and to the Labor Camps

Even as the German Army was withdrawing on all fronts, the SS continued and even accelerated its “final solution” plan. In Hungary, as the Red Army approached, the decision to deport the Jews was justified by the fear of them supporting the advancing Bolsheviks, a move that would be understood by the public.⁶⁰ The Jewish population in Hungary, which stood at around 445,000 in 1938, was greatly expanded by the annexation of territory from Czechoslovakia in November 1938 and March 1939, and from Romania in August 1940. These land transfers added over 320,000 Jews to the Hungarian Jewish population, battered by successive waves of anti-Semitic legislation.⁶¹ Some of the deported Hungarian Jews were imprisoned for twelve month – most of which time they spent doing forced labor. At the same time, forced labor camps populations were the largest groups to survive the Holocaust among Hungarian Jews.⁶²

By July 1944, with the liberation of Paris only weeks away, arrests and deportations of Jews in France were in their final stages. In acts of unthinkable inhumanity, between 21-25 July, Gestapo officials carried out night-time raids on eight, out of a total of eleven, Children’s Homes in the capital. Almost all the children arrested in these late July raids

⁵⁹ Ibid., 468.

⁶⁰ Randolph L. Braham and Nathaniel Katzburg, *History of the Holocaust: HUNGARY (Hebrew)* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1992), 247–48.

⁶¹ David Cesarani, *Final Solution: The Fate of the Jews 1933-1949* (London: Macmillan, 2016), 702–3.

⁶² Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide : The Holocaust in Hungary*, Columbia University Press, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 1142–46.

made up the final convoy of 1300 to depart Drancy for Auschwitz on 31st July.⁶³ The last deportation train from the Westerbork concentration camp in the Netherlands left on 3rd September, as Allied forces advanced into Belgium and southern Holland.⁶⁴ Most of the deportees were murdered in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Only a small number were sent to work at the labor camps.

Summer 1944: the Birkenau Killing Apparatus and Source of Slave Labor

Albert Speer, Minister of Armaments and War Production in Nazi Germany, acting on behalf of his own technocracy, took what labor he could from whatever source, and was gratified by the good performance of concentration camp workers in his factories. In fact, he would have wanted more of them. He urged that they be adequately fed and rewarded for their performance.⁶⁵

Here I come to the question of why the Nazis conducted genocide on one hand, while effectively creating a racial upgrade by filtering out the weak and the sick by sending them to their death and keeping alive the strongest, healthiest, and better-looking, fertile aged women. In practice, the Nazi regime accelerated, on the ethnics' groups to be exterminated, the work of Darwin's "Natural Means of Selection." In cases where women's work was required and preferred, in the armaments industry, the regime was forced to select young, healthy prisoners who were sent to extermination and transfer them to labor camps, and by that, their chances of survival increased. The need to select healthy and strong prisoners for labor stemmed from the SS's desire to utilize the camp labor force most efficiently while providing minimal health services and hygienic conditions. Since factory owners had to finance the maintenance of the camps, they preferred to keep them at as low an expense

⁶³ Stephanie Hesz-Wood, "A Spatial History of Drancy: Architecture, Appropriation and Memory," in *Beyond Camps and Forced Labour* (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2020), 289, and in Fernande Chenin testimony, "USCSF" (1995) (2) 20:17-22:17.

⁶⁴ Rose (Gelder) De_Liema Testimony, "USCSF VHA 02072" (1995), (3) 03:31-09:04; Anita Mayer testimony, "USCSF" (1996) (2) 0:44.

⁶⁵ Davidson, "The War Plant and Forced Labor," 495.

level as possible. SS leaders viewed these conditions as consistent with the "extermination through labor" agenda.

Health and Hygiene at the Concentration Camps

Doctor Shaul Shasha researched the medical and health realities in Nazi concentration camps. I found the research consistent with the reality and conditions described by camp's survivors. The salient features of the camps were severe overcrowding and extremely poor environmental and sanitary conditions. The clothing was poor and did not protect against harsh weather conditions. Furthermore, clothing was not replaced, causing hygiene problems. The most prominent morbidity in the camps was famine, which indirectly contributed to another type of morbidity. Its symptoms were unfamiliar to medical personnel and were therefore described under various nicknames. Its main manifestations were sharp weight loss, the phenomenon of "Muselman," edema, anemia, menopause in women, decreased function of the immune system and many other symptoms. Exhaustion due to hunger was recognized as an illness for the purposes of treatment, hospitalization, or exemption from hard work. Occasionally, a SS doctor would run an inspection, chiefly for selection purposes. During the inspections there was severe abuse of prisoners.⁶⁶

I have found several testimonies of exhaustion from hunger, cold, and hard work, especially in the last weeks leading up to liberation. They referred to the nearness of the end of life. Becker & Bock defined *Muselmänner* were a constitutive part of the social structure of prisoner societies.⁶⁷ In my opinion, at Liebau Camp, which was only active for eight months, mutual support was maintained among the inmates, which apparently did not lead to the withdrawal of individuals from the camp's morale group and their individual seclusion as *Muselman*.

⁶⁶ Shaul M Shasha, "Medicine in the concentration camps of the Third Reich (Hebrew)," *Harefuah (hebrew)* 144, no. 4 (2005): 292–94.

⁶⁷ Michael Becker and Dennis Bock, "Rethinking the *Muselmänn* in Nazi Concentration Camps and Ghettos: History, Social Life, and Representation," *The Journal of Holocaust Research* 34, no. 3 (2020): 156.

Living in Labor Camps

After the occupation of Poland in 1940-42, forced laborers and the Slavic population of occupied Poland were viewed as low-cost available labor force for the Nazi occupation regime. In the early years of the war, these workers received a minimum wage for their work, were allowed to receive mail and packages, kept personal clothing items, and were given reasonable accommodation near the factory where they were employed. They were given food and living conditions that enabled them to be employed for long periods of time, up to several years. As the war progressed and as the strategic and economic situation of Nazi Germany deteriorated, the German army retreated on all fronts and required additional manpower, there was a shortage of basic commodities and food was distributed to Nazi German citizens in rations. In the last year of the war, when Liebau Camp was established, Nazi Germany was unable to continue to provide living conditions to workers, where even German workers, under the “Total War” policy, were no longer provided proper food and accommodation. Certainly, populations at the bottom of the food chain were foreign workers, Slavic nationals, and at the very rock bottom – Jewish inmates in concentration camps. In the last year of the war, when in Nazi Germany there was a growing sense of approaching doom, confidence in the ability to control the occupied population weakened – the same ability that had existed only two or three years earlier. As a result, SS authorities took repressive measures to prevent possible local rebellion. It was achieved through weakening the prisoners and clouding their mental state by hard physical work, reduced food rations, poor hygienic conditions, and poor medical care.

3. Historical Background – Gross Rosen Camps and Liebau Camp

The women's camp in the then German town of Liebau was established in the summer of 1944 for the purpose of supplying labor forces to the local factories that were engaged in the production of the needs of the German army, away from cities in mainland Germany, that were bombed by the Allies. The camp was one of seven camps in the Parschnitz camp cluster which was subordinated as an SS-Sonderkommando unit to the main camp in Gross Rosen. In this chapter I will describe the nature of the camps subjected to Gross Rosen, the conduct of activity in the camps during the last year of the war and the connections between them. As a background for the construction of the women's camp in Liebau, I will describe the town itself and the events in it before the outbreak of the war, during the war, in the eight months period during the operation of the camp and finally the first year after the war.

Gross Rosen and the Labor Camps

It is no coincidence that the concentration camps established from 1937-1938 were situated near high-value quarries and that a large part of prisoner labor consisted of work in these quarries, notably the Flossenburg, Mauthausen, Gross-Rosen and Natzweiler concentration camps, all founded between 1938 and 1940. Located south of the town of Gross-Rosen in Lower Silesia (in today's Rogoźnica, Poland), the camp was established in the summer of 1940 as a labor sub-camp of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp.⁶⁸ On 1st May 1941 Gross-Rosen became an independent camp.⁶⁹

As the Germans' need for armaments grew, Gross-Rosen also expanded. Arms factories were built, seventy sub-camps were ultimately added, and the number of prisoners swelled. From October 1943 until January 1945, 57,550 Jews, including 26,000 women, were brought to the camp. They were mostly from Poland and Hungary. Fifteen sub-camps were set aside for between six to seven thousand women prisoners. Prisoners, all of them Jewish,

⁶⁸ Wagner, "Work and Extermination in the Concentration Camps," 130.

⁶⁹ Gross-Rosen, "Gross-Rosen Museum – Rogoźnica Poland" (Rogoźnica, Poland, 2022), Display board #7.

arrived at Gross Rosen from March 1944 and were directed to its labor camps. Women's transports from Hungary and the Lodz Ghetto had initially been directed to Auschwitz-Birkenau and there underwent selection. Young, healthy women were quarantined for a week or longer, and then transferred directly to Gross-Rosen's Women Labor Camps while their names were transferred to the Gross-Rosen headquarters for registration.⁷⁰ Each prisoner was assigned with a Gross-Rosen personal number, different from the tattooed arm number.

Gross-Rosen Camps

In 1944, the commander of Gross-Rosen was ordered to establish new labor camps quickly. These facilities were to receive thousands of Jews who had been brought to Auschwitz-Birkenau from Hungary and the Lodz Ghetto. The establishment of sub-camps continued apace even during the last months of the war. Since the Germans had no time to evacuate all the camps, the Gross-Rosen camps were among the last to be liberated, on 8-9 May 1945.⁷¹ The camps were of various sizes: they could hold anywhere from several dozen prisoners to thousands. Due to allied bombardments, the rules forbade the establishment of camps for more than thousand prisoners near urban centers, industrial plants, or army camps. In practice, however, more and more prisoners were packed into barracks to save on construction and upkeep expenses.⁷² According to data from January 1945, nine hundred SS guards served in the Gross-Rosen camps network supervising 25,927 inmates, which is indeed a high ratio, indicating the goal to maintain strict discipline.⁷³

⁷⁰ Karni Ert and Sara Bender, "Jewish Women in Forced Labor Camps in Reich Territory in the Final Stages Of World War II, 1944-1945 (Hebrew)" (University of Haifa, 2007), 13–14.

⁷¹ Gutterman, *A Narrow Bridge to Life: Jewish Forced Labor and Survival in the Gross-Rosen Camp System, 1940-1945*, 6.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 96.

⁷³ Art Karni, "Jewish women in forced labor camps in Reich Territory in the final stages of World War II, 1944-1945 (Hebrew)," 15–17.

Out of three thousand women who served as SS uniformed and supervisory guards, between 1933 and 1945, four hundred and ninety were assigned to the Gross-Rosen network.⁷⁴ The transfer of responsibility for the camps from Organization Schmelt to the Gross-Rosen administration produced a radical change in labor relations with the factories that employed prisoners. Enterprises that wanted to continue to use prisoner labor now had to meet all the conditions that were set down by the WVHA. Since the camps were small, near one another, yet rather remote from the main camp, it was decided to establish a headquarters in the area. This headquarters would centralize control and supervision of the use of prisoner labor in the local enterprises and make sure that the SS would not be deprived of its share in the profits. The Trautenau Headquarters and central administration of the Gross-Rosen affiliates were up and running by early April 1944 at the latest.⁷⁵

When Gross-Rosen took over the administration of the camps from Organization Schmelt there were thirty women's camps officially defined as Women Labor Camps. Since spring 1944 in KL Gross-Rosen's subcamps net there were women prisoners, only Jewish.⁷⁶ There were two groups of women's camps, fifteen camps that were transferred from Organization Schmelt and annexed to Gross-Rosen with five thousand women – a number that climbed to eight thousand five hundred during 1944-45. The second group included new camps established for women from Hungary, Slovakia, Lodz, and Plaszow. These women prisoners were sent to the labor camp system only after passing selection at Auschwitz-Birkenau.⁷⁷ Liebau Camp was included in the second group. Gross-Rosen was one of several concentration camps that had a large proportion of women. In the late 1944 and the spring of 1945, one third of the inmates in the Gross-Rosen system were female. The total number of women's camps in the Gross-Rosen system in early 1945 is believed to have been

⁷⁴ Milton, "Women and the Holocaust: The Case of German and German-Jewish Women," 308.

⁷⁵ Gutterman, *A Narrow Bridge to Life: Jewish Forced Labor and Survival in the Gross-Rosen Camp System, 1940-1945*, 111–12.

⁷⁶ Gross-Rosen, "Gross Rosen Archiwum – Wałbrzych Poland" (Wałbrzych Poland, 2022), Display board #32.

⁷⁷ Gutterman, *A Narrow Bridge to Life: Jewish Forced Labor and Survival in the Gross-Rosen Camp System, 1940-1945*, 162.

forty-one. Confirmed and complete information exists about only twenty-eight, which held 19,500 women.⁷⁸

Why Were Women Selected for Labor Camps?

In discussing camp social life and prisoner behavior, it is important that we avoid falling into the widespread assumption that the well-documented experiences of male inmates, which reflect their specific experience in the main camps, are universal.⁷⁹ Women in the Holocaust suffered differently than did men. The status of men in the Holocaust underwent a complete and dramatic change, especially the status of the authoritative father. In Jewish societies during the Holocaust, the father was left helpless in the face of his family. Such helplessness always leads to the effacement of traditional gender roles in the family. As a result, the woman very often assumes at home, the family leadership role, simply for lack of choice.⁸⁰ While at the camp, women were able to use that experience for their survival under the camp harsh conditions. Despite their young age, many of the inmates assisted in the family home in caring for the family unit and therefore presented a relatively mature approach to mutual assistance. At home they learned to cook, sew, and maintain important hygienic rules. However, in addition to the men's dangers, women at the camps were exposed by vulnerability to rape, humiliation, and sexual exploitation not to mention pregnancy, abortion, and fear for one's children.⁸¹

I have examined the question why the Nazis elected to send women to labor camps, especially camps where there was no advantage to women's labor over men's labor. Mason studied the Germans' attitude, in the labor market, towards German and non-German women, from the early 1920s to the end of World War II. Throughout that period, the regime

⁷⁸ Ibid., 161–63.

⁷⁹ Rudorff, "Reimagining the 'Gray Zone': Female Prisoner Functionaries in the Gross-Rosen Subcamps, 1944-45," 22.

⁸⁰ Ofer and Porat, "Interview with Professor Yehuda Bauer," 25.

⁸¹ Zoë Waxman, *Women in the Holocaust: A Feminist History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 5.

was aware of the women's role in the nation, in maintaining its existence and especially in the continuity of the race.

In 1925, the fall in the birth-rate in Germany provoked a major ideological onslaught from the extreme right in which many of the themes of later Nazi policies were clearly prefigured. Social scientists saw the prospect of imminent demographic disaster. From 1933, the Nazi regime had a more clearly defined and more self-conscious attitude towards women than perhaps any other modern government. Some important welfare reforms were enacted, and the political leaders clearly regarded women as a special category among their subjects. The Nazi regime's policies towards women were in fact policies towards the family, policies addressing the entire population. All racialist movements which take the biological, pseudo-scientific elements in their ideologies seriously are bound to attach particular importance to the women's procreative role. In June 1933, for example, Wilhelm Frick (Nazi Minister of the Interior) called on middle-class women to be sensible of their duty to the race and to produce large numbers of healthy and intelligent children.⁸²

Since the Nazi regime and its ideology recognized and promoted the position and role of the German woman in maintaining the existence of the race, conversely the "final solution" plan against the Jewish race could logically be expected to give priority to the extermination of women, especially young women of reproductive age. The question is what could have been the logic that guided the Nazi regime in its choice to keep young women alive and send them to labor camps, especially those where men's work was preferred.

⁸² Timothy W. Mason and Jane. Caplan, "Women In Germany, 1925-1940. Family, Welfare and Work," in *Nazism, Fascism and the Working Class*, ed. Jane Caplan, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 147-57.

The Town of Liebau

Liebau was a border town inhabited during the world wars by between 4,500 and 5,500 inhabitants of German origin. The town suffered from poverty and unemployment in the 1920s. The sources of livelihood were simple and primitive summer agriculture, small textile factories and tourism. The population was quite a typical small-town community for those times. Most of the population only possessed elementary education, and the local economy and local or state administration did not offer many jobs for white-collar workers. Low profitability of production in the area resulted from the natural conditions of the Sudeten region, but also from the poorly developed communication network in rural areas, which made it difficult to sell products at more profitable prices.⁸³

Liebau town experienced economic development under the Nazi regime. Around 1937 German Reich Labor Service camp (Reichsarbeitsdienst - RAD), probably for girls, established in Liebau. After graduation, the young women were directed to jobs in agriculture and in the local industry.⁸⁴ The economic situation and living conditions in 1938 were far improved. At the beginning of 1938, the former Hesse furniture factory reopened.⁸⁵ It became the Kurt Laske factory where Liebau Camp inmates worked from September 1944.

After 1933, the basic social activity seemed to be presence at rallies held at the markets or the stadium, participation in various fundraisers and Nazi charity campaigns. The domination of nationalism leads to the fact that even religious holidays lost their universal, Christian character, becoming "German Christmas" or "German Easter" in their propagandistic essence.⁸⁶ During the late 1930s, the nearby German University of Wrocław was one of the first institutions of higher education to be "Aryanized", without any

⁸³ Małgorzata Ruchniewicz and Przemysław Wiszewski, "The Age of Extremes' – in Lubawka and Its Vicinity (1914-1989) (Polish)," in *History next to. Local Past Studies Volume 14* (Wrocław University, 2019), 75, <http://www.bibliotekacyfrowa.pl/publication/102955>.

⁸⁴ Marian Gabrowski, *Obóz RAD w Krzeszowie (Polish) RAD camp in Krzeszów*, First (Poland: Published by Author's own effort, 2020), 37.

⁸⁵ Ruchniewicz and Wiszewski, "The Age of Extremes' – in Lubawka and Its Vicinity (1914-1989) (Polish)," 96–99.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

significant resistance.⁸⁷ The developing prosperity of the town and its surroundings lasted but a short time after the beginning of World War II. Soon this new affluence gave way to wartime economy, associated with strict rationing.⁸⁸ During the war the population increased, due to the relocation of companies and private persons from German heartlands in search of a safe haven, away from the frequent bombings of the larger cities. On the other hand, several hundred men left town upon being drafted into the German army.⁸⁹ Third Reich authorities, avoiding the possibility of German women employment, tried to fill the need for hands to work in war conditions with the use of forced and slave labor. Forced laborers, prisoners and POWs from conquered countries, representatives of the conquered nations, including Poles and citizens of the USSR, were directed to this area as well. A certain number of French POWs were also employed in production for the German army.⁹⁰

During World War II the inhabitants' provincial peripheries such as the Central Sudetes were only partially aware of the extent of the German catastrophe. The clamor of propaganda made every effort to extinguish doubts as to the outcome of the war until the very end. In the spring of 1945, the locals were partially aware of the upcoming defeat.⁹¹ As the Red Army occupied these areas by the time of Germany's unconditional surrender, they were under the illusion that the Germans would be able to remain in their positions. On the very first night the Soviets drove the inhabitants into fear and terror. Women were subjected to mass rape, and the soldiers committed looting and robberies of local property while also commandeering horses and cattle for their needs.⁹²

In the early post-war years, the most notable process was that of migration. In Lower Silesia alone, under difficult conditions, at least 4-5 million people were displaced or relocated. This included the removal of the existing German populace and refugees and the

⁸⁷ Łukasz Machaj and Tomasz Scheffler, "The Research of Wrocławian Academics on Anti-Semitism and Holocaust in the Studies on Fascism and Hitlerite Crimes," *Politeja*, no. 14 (2010): 571.

⁸⁸ Ruchniewicz and Wiszewski, "'The Age of Extremes' – in Lubawka and Its Vicinity (1914-1989) (Polish)," 101.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 69–71.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁹¹ See Appendix J

⁹² Ruchniewicz and Wiszewski, "'The Age of Extremes' – in Lubawka and Its Vicinity (1914-1989) (Polish)," 117–18.

settlement of Polish people arriving from different parts of Poland.⁹³ The German town of Liebau became Polish Lubawka. I found a short article about Jewish cultural life in Lubawka in March 1947.⁹⁴ This was apparently agricultural training for young survivors who left the place during 1947.

The Establishment of the Women's Labor – Liebau Camp

Just as the balance of concentration camps tilted eastward from 1942, it swung back westward in 1944 as the Red Army gained ground.⁹⁵ Liebau Camp established near the town of Liebau – in July 1944 and places its population by prisoners in mid-September.⁹⁶ The camp was administratively subordinated to the Gross-Rosen main camp. Since the production plants did not have an administrative mechanism for controlling the lives of the forced laborers, the labor camps were subordinated to satellite camps or Subcamps (Außenlager).⁹⁷ A regional headquarters was established at the Parschnitz subcamp as “SS command Trautenau”.⁹⁸ That Sonderkommando oversaw Liebau and six other labor camps in the vicinity, (Appendix B).⁹⁹ The ITS archives indicate the Liebau camp with the following marking:¹⁰⁰

*LIEBAU in Schlesien, First mention July 1944, Liberation May 8, 1945 –
Kdo KL Gr Ro:*

Nordland GmbH – Herstellung von panzerketten (Manufacture of armored chains)

Firma Kurt Laske – Möbelfabrik (Furniture factory)

⁹³ Ibid., 125.

⁹⁴ Ghetto Fighters' House Archive, “Jewish Cultural Life Unit in Lubawka,” *Nowe Zycie*, March 15, 1947, 6.

⁹⁵ Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, 455.

⁹⁶ International Tracing Services ITS, *Register of Places of detention under the Riechsfuhror-SS* (Bad Arolsen: ITS, 1979), 140.

⁹⁷ Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, 5.

⁹⁸ Barbara Sawicka, “Liebau (Lubawka),” in *Der Ort des Terrors Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager. Band 6, Natzweiler, Groß-Rosen, Stutthof*, ed. Wolfgang Benz and Barbara Distel, trans. Andrea Rudorff (München: CHbook, 2007), 380.

⁹⁹ Gutterman, *A Narrow Bridge to Life: Jewish Forced Labor and Survival in the Gross-Rosen Camp System, 1940-1945*, 110–12.

¹⁰⁰ ITS, *Register of Places of detention under the Riechsfuhror-SS*, 140.

Firma Heinz Wendt, Maschinentabrik – Herstellung von flugzeugbestandteilen –
(Manufacture of aircraft components)

Reichsbahn – Flugplatzbau, Landwirtschaftliche Arbeiten – (flight platform construction,
Agricultural work)

At Liebau Camp, the three factory owners chose to employ only women. This was also the case in most of the other labor camps in the areas that were under the rule of the Trautenau camp Sonderkommando.¹⁰¹ The Parschnitz-Trautenau labor camp cluster within the Gross-Rosen camp network were all women's and all industrial. However, from late February 1945, as raw material and food supplies ran short and finished products were no longer collected from the factories, the inmates were transferred to outdoor work, digging trenches, and preparing the area for the construction of an airfield.¹⁰²

Female guards were employed in the camp itself.¹⁰³ The head guard was probably Charlotte Kraft. She treated the prisoners unkindly but was not violent. In the last few weeks, she was replaced by the former head warden from Breslau-Hundsfeld, Camp commander Emma Kowa from Bavaria, who was sadistic and often beat the prisoner women.¹⁰⁴ The barrack commander was Gertrud Kolberg from the Breslau (Wroclaw) area. Another sixteen overseers are known by names.¹⁰⁵ SS guard Gertrud Telke listed few of the Guards: "Marta Zimmer, Ingeborg Wich, Marta Grimpe and Maria Adolph – All mistreated the inmates."¹⁰⁶ Gertruda Charf listed additional SS guards names: „Anni Meisel, Froni Idaschewski, Anni Hoffmann, Annelise Schulz, and Stephan Wbzystkie."¹⁰⁷ In her trial Hedwig Schmidt named Maria Cimo, Magdalena Keil and Erna Pohl. She testified: "I was

¹⁰¹ Geoffrey P Megargee et al., *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933-1945, Vol. I*, ed. Geoffrey P. Megargee, USHMM, 1st Editio (Bloomington and Indianapolis: INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2018), 776.

¹⁰² Thad Allen, "The Business of Genocide – The SS, Slavery, and the Concentration Camps," 82 ,is about Food shortage at Gross Rosen camp in 1944. And see also: Sara Tabak Testimony, "YVA O.3, 10084, 3564605" (2) 05:24 - 06:35. Anita Mayer testimony, "USCSF VHA 19044" (1996) (3) 24:39-25:04.

¹⁰³ Eran Mor, "Translation of Gertrud Scharf SS Guard Trial, Kamienagora Court Akt 105/46 April 8, 1946" (Kamieniogora Poland, 2022).

¹⁰⁴ Megargee et al., *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933-1945, Vol. I*, 762.

¹⁰⁵ Sawicka, "Liebau (Lubawka)," 381.

¹⁰⁶ Eran Mor, "Translation of Gertrud Telke SS Guard Trial, Kamienagora Court Akt 106/46 April 8, 1946" (Kamieniogora Poland, 2022), 9.

¹⁰⁷ Mor, "Translation of Gertrud Scharf SS Guard Trial, Kamienagora Court Akt 105/46 April 8, 1946," 8.

assigned to one of the senior supervisors and assisting her with her duties in order to learn what to do.” Ingeborg Wich and Marta Grimpe were arrested by the Soviets in May 1945.”¹⁰⁸ From reading the testimonies of the four SS guards there is a significant similarity between the testimonies. It is possible that they agreed on a unified testimony while they were in detention, especially placing the blame for torture and mistreatment on guards who were not in detention and apparently managed to escape. The only witness in the four trials was Helena Rzymowska, the camp doctor, who continued to live in town. Her testimony was also the same as the one given by the former SS guards and gave support to the four of them which led to their acquittal.¹⁰⁹

I found the history of a small women's labor camp important for building a better understanding of the labor camp system in Nazi Germany in the last year of the war. Dina Porat wrote: “Although the name of the largest and most terrible concentration camps is known around the world and is used as a synonym for nightmare and evil, these camps were not thoroughly investigated, much less were their sub-camps investigated. And there is a degree of contradiction – or perhaps, of reconciliation – between these camps being, on the one hand, a symbol, and on the other – only a few scholars have ever dared to touch them.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Eran Mor, “Translation of Hedwig Schmidt SS Guard Trial, Kamienagora Court Akt 107/46 April 8, 1946” (Kamieniogora Poland, 2022), 5, 9.

¹⁰⁹ Mor, “Translation of Gertrud Telke SS Guard Trial, Kamienagora Court Akt 106/46 April 8, 1946,” 24.

¹¹⁰ Dina Porat, Introduction in Bella Guttermann book *"A narrow bridge to life: Jewish forced labor and survival in the Gross-Rosen camp system, 1940-1945 (Hebrew)*, 7.

4. Second Half of 1944

In this chapter, I will discuss testimonies from survivors relating to the first three and a half months in the camp until the end of 1944. During this period, despite the withdrawal of the German Army on all fronts, the administrative apparatus in Nazi Germany still functioned and so did Liebau Camp with the women prisoners there, as well as the three factories for which the camp established. This chapter discuss a routine of life in contrast to the next chapter in which the process of disintegration of the camp routine in parallel to a change in the day-to-day life of the prisoners, will be described.

About Liebau Camp

Liebau Camp was a women's camp, part of the Gross-Rosen camps' cluster. According to original German records (transport rosters), as well as postwar trial records of female Liebau staff members, the first transport was sent to the camp on 19 September 1944. It carried two hundred women – all Hungarian Jews – who had been sent to Liebau Camp from the Birkenau concentration camp. The entire transport was divided into three groups and assigned to work at three local companies. They were given Gross-Rosen numbers 59801 to 60000. In mid-October 1944, another transport of nearly three hundred women arrived from Auschwitz.¹¹¹ These were two hundred Hungarian Jewish women, twelve from France, fourteen from Belgium, fifty-two from the Netherlands and twenty-two from Poland.¹¹² They were given Gross-Rosen numbers 74101 to 74400.¹¹³ The total population of Liebau Camp amounted to approximately Five hundred prisoners.¹¹⁴ To save administration costs

¹¹¹ Mor, "Translation of Hedwig Schmidt SS Guard Trial, Kamienagora Court Akt 107/46 April 8, 1946," 5, In her testimony she supports the number of 500 female prisoners.

¹¹² Sawicka, "Liebau (Lubawka)," 380.

¹¹³ Gross-Rosen, "Gross Rosen Archiwum – Wałbrzych Poland", During a visit to the Wałbrzych archive on April 29, 2022, I found a list of Liebau Camp inmates, their names, the number of the Gross-Rosen camp of each inmate and for most of them, the factory where they worked.

¹¹⁴ According to USHMM – "*Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933-1945*", additional fifty women were sent to Liebau in late October with Gross-Rosen numbers 76131-76180. The Gross Rosen Archive found no connection between these numbers and Liebau Camp. I also checked with the archives of the USHMM in Washington and they also have no such records.

and effort, labor camps were clustered under one sub-administration. SS-Sonderkommando Trautenau based at Parschnitz in the Sudeten oversaw seven labor camps (Appendix B). Most women prisoners at these cluster were employed in textile production for military use. At two camps, Liebau Camp one of them, they worked for the armament production.¹¹⁵

The Deportation to Auschwitz and the Transfer to Liebau Camp

The population of inmates at Liebau Camp comprised women only, most of them of Hungarian origin. They lived in their homes until March 1944 and were deported to Auschwitz in May-July that year. They came from a fully or partially functioning family homes, arrived with large families, and found themselves, after the difficult journey in cattle cars, face to face with the Mengele selection.¹¹⁶ They stayed for several months at Birkenau, suffering starvation, abuse, bereavement, and humiliation, and were eventually transferred to the labor camps.

These women suffered deep mental shock as a result of separation from their loved ones and family members – a trial for which they had not been prepared. In an instant, they found themselves within a harsh and humiliating reality where they were either completely alone or in the company of women their own age from their cities. Kathleen Hay remembered: “We stepped out of the train cars into ‘high human density pressure. Remember Mangala with his finger to the right or left. Most of the young people went to the right because in 1944 the Nazis lacked working hands.”¹¹⁷

In August 1944, Rachel Goldberg was among two hundred women who were selected and quarantined for several weeks.¹¹⁸ The Nazis sought to isolate, by searching for spots on the abdomen, women infected with typhoid fever. Kathleen Hay witnessed women

¹¹⁵ Ert and Bender, “Jewish Women in Forced Labor Camps in Reich Territory in the Final Stages Of World War II, 1944-1945 (Hebrew),” 14.

¹¹⁶ Alice Mor Testimony, “USCSF VHA 27444” 20:00.

¹¹⁷ Kathleen Hay Testimony, “USHMM RG-50.583.0076”, 46:20.

¹¹⁸ Rachel Goldberger Testimony, “YVA O.3, 5374890”, 01:56:00.

who had the spots, they were taken out of the barracks and never returned.¹¹⁹ I assume that the SS were waiting for the residence area at Liebau Camp and the factories to be ready to accept the inmates. On the second day of Rosh Hashanah, 19 September 1944, another selection was carried out. Frida Herman realized that being assigned for labor could save her life.¹²⁰ Serena Pikkell added: “Inmates took care to make themselves look as presentable as they could, and carefully chose which rows to stand in during the selection in order to be taken to work. It was every woman for herself.”¹²¹

The backgrounds of the inmates vary most widely. Some came from cities, others from smaller towns or villages. Most of them were Hungarian, Slovak-Hungarian, or Romanian-Hungarian; however, there also were some Polish, German, French, Belgian and Dutch Jews among the labor camp inmates. Some of them came from affluent families, others from poor ones. Among them were Orthodox Jews, women of Conservative leanings, others were almost fully assimilated. Since these women were being sent for labor – hard physical labor – they were all young, ages fifteen and up. Only a handful of the inmates were above the age of forty.

I have analyzed the list of prisoners in the ITS database and found DoB for 498 women in the camp. The oldest one was 52 years old. All 22 inmates above 40 were from the Netherlands. I found differences in the testimonies of two or even three years in the age of the witness compared to the one registered in the ITS. I can assume that the prisoners gave older ages in order not to be sent to the gas chambers and to be selected for labor. For the women from Western Europe, the dates were more accurate, apparently, they were recorded before the transport to Auschwitz. As can be seen from Table 1, seventy-eight percent of the inmates were under the age of thirty, most of them, sixty-two percent, under the age of twenty-five.

¹¹⁹ Hay Testimony, “USHMM RG-50.583.0076”, 09:54.

¹²⁰ Frida Herman Testimony, “YVA O.3, 3700469”, 42:50-43:54.

¹²¹ Serena Pikkell Testimony, “USCSF VHA 04887” (1995), (4) 15:03.

Table 1 - ITS Ages of Liebau inmates at the beginning of 1945.¹²²

Age	45<	40-45	35-40	30-35	25-30	20-25	15-20
	6	16	41	49	80	191	115

Vera Kon's (nee Grosz) sister was selected at Auschwitz for labor and Vera jumped into the column to join her sister. She testified that "In time of a rollcall, Mengele came to select sick women who did not look well. We pinched our cheeks to look healthier. Mangala took me out of line because I was thin. I ran back, joined my sister without him seeing and that is how I survived."¹²³ The Germans at Auschwitz did not prevent this even though they noticed and had every opportunity to stop it.¹²⁴ The three Grosz sisters were sent together to Liebau Camp, worked at Kurt Laska factory, and survived.¹²⁵

Before leaving Auschwitz, Kathleen Hay and the selected inmates were taken to the showers – for the first time since arriving at the camp.¹²⁶ After shower, five SS women soldiers marched them toward a cattle train, where they were told they were being transferred for work. Rose Weissman received a number, hanging around her neck – not the same as her arm number.¹²⁷ Upon arrival at Liebau town railway station the same five SS guards were waiting for them. They said that if the inmates will behave well, everything would be fine. The SS arranged the group in rows of five and walked them about two kilometers to the camp that was located out of town. The main building at the camp, a brick building, was new. According to Frida Josephs their entry was delayed by one day. The next day they were divided between three factories and went to work.¹²⁸ New shoes or socks were not provided to Yehudit Poplinger. It was cold and snowy, and she did not get another garment."¹²⁹ However, according to other women testimonies, they were given a coat.

¹²² Eran Mor, "List of Imates at Liebau Camp" (Wałbrzych Poland & USHMM: ITS, 2022).

¹²³ Vera Kon Testimony, "YVA O.3, 7560854", (2) 40:42.

¹²⁴ Herman Testimony, "YVA O.3, 3700469" 43:20; Sarah Yunitsman Testimony, "USCSF" (3) 29:40-(4) 06:29 (4) 13:31.

¹²⁵ Kon Testimony, "YVA O.3, 7560854", (2) 42:10-43:24.

¹²⁶ Hay Testimony, "USHMM RG-50.583.0076", (2) 09:54.

¹²⁷ Rose Weissman Testimony, "USCSF VHA 18569", (3) 00:49.

¹²⁸ Herman Testimony, "YVA O.3, 3700469", 43:50-47:00; Judith Marmor Testimony, "YVA O.3, 7814221" (2004), (3) 47:53; Frida Herman Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5262289", 1:18:37; Goldberger Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5374890" 1:56:00; Weissman Testimony, "USCSF", (3) 15:06; Josephs Testimony, "USCSF", (6) 10:37.

¹²⁹ Yehudit Poplinger Testimony, "YVA O.3, V.T. 5907" (YVA, 2006), (2) 03:56.

Using their Auschwitz-Birkenau experience, Vera Kon and Judith Marmor perceived the new conditions as an arrival in heaven, they entered a building, made of bricks. It was recently and hastily built, with no paint on the outside or inside. In the rooms there were new beds, each inmate was given two blankets, a towel, and a set of utensils: an enamel cup, a spoon, and a plate. They were the first transport to arrive and were housed in the brick building. The three hundred women who came later were housed in makeshift barracks across the road, which were already in place when the first group arrived.¹³⁰ Prior to the arrival of the inmates in Liebau, the barracks were disinfected and the cracks in the walls were stuffed with newspapers – dating 19 September and onwards. From these newspapers, Inge Meyer Kamp learned that the American troops had landed in Arnhem, and that the Netherlands were about to be liberated.¹³¹

In October 1944, in Auschwitz, three hundred women were selected to be sent to Liebau. On the way they received a whole loaf of bread and realized it was allocated to them for a long journey.¹³² Elona Kraus, Edith Neuvirth, Annie De Levie and Inge Meyer Kamp, changed out their old lice-infested clothes, received warmer garments, and been sent to Liebau Camp.¹³³ The passengers on the train were exclusively women, Edith Grunberger realized that most of them were under twenty-three years old.¹³⁴ They traveled for one day in a cattle freight train, with SS escorts. They were hoping either for some change for the better – or for death, not caring much which it would be. Upon arrival, Sara Yunitsman did

¹³⁰ Kon Testimony, “YVA O.3, 7560854”, (2) 42:10-42:44; Judith Marmor Testimony, “YVA O.3, 7814221” (2004) (3) 47:53-50:57.

¹³¹ Inge Salomon Meyer_Kamp, *I ricordi di Inge e dei suoi figli Rolf e Nico Kamp (Italian)*, ed. Maria Pia Bernicchia (Milano: Proedi Editore, 2007), 38.

¹³² Judith Adler Testimony, “USCSF VHA 13433”, (4) 06:00.

¹³³ Elona Kraus Testimony, “YVA O.3, 12517157” (2016), 1:20:44; Edith Neuvirth Testimony, “USCSF” (3)23:54; Elona Kraus Testimony, “YVA O.3, 12517157” (2016), 1:20:44; Edith Neuvirth Testimony, “USCSF” (3)23:54; Annie De Levie Dairy, “YVA O.3, 11683284,” 1986, 45; Meyer Kamp, “I ricordi di Inge e dei suoi figli Rolf e Nico Kamp (Italian).”.

¹³⁴ Edith Grunberger Testimony, “USCSF VHA 00266” (1994), (2) 24:20.

not undergo disinfection but was immediately transferred to her room.¹³⁵ When they arrived in the end of October, the weather was already very cold.¹³⁶

From the train station, Sara Tabak marched with the group through the town of Liebau where the townsfolk were surprised to see Jews with shaven heads, dressed in rags and without horns, as the Jews were described in Nazi propaganda.”¹³⁷ Renée Firestone added, “A supervisor at the factory told me that the townspeople said that now they understood what a Jew looked like. He has a shaved head and wears a rug. In accordance with the propaganda, they asked where the horns of the Jews were hidden.”¹³⁸ Fernande Chenin stayed in a room with ten women from France. They arrived on the October transport and joined a room with thirty women – Dutch, French and Polish. At that barrack was a young Polish girl, the youngest in the camp. Upon arrival to Liebau, Fernande worked on the construction of the kitchen together with two Frenchmen, apparently forced laborers and not prisoners of war.”¹³⁹

Forced Labor and the Factories

The main feature of the inmate’s labor was the systematic overburdening of the worker, without any chance to regenerate their strength. The workers were exposed to a ruinous regime of physical exploitation that quickly drained all their energy reserves.¹⁴⁰ Most prisoners had known only one main reason for working – fear. Since forced labor was primarily about punishment, not productivity, the camp SS had not seen any real reason to rewarding diligent prisoners: Why offer carrots if one could use stick.¹⁴¹ As I will show, the productivity in all three Liebau factories was incredibly low, in contrast to the armaments

¹³⁵ Sarah Yunitsman Testimony, “USCSF VHA 39294”, (3) 29:40-(4) 09:21.

¹³⁶ Sonja Waitzner Testimony, “USCSF VHA 14429” (1996), (4) 01:51-05:24; Anita Mayer testimony, “USCSF” (1996) (3) 21:56-23:00.

¹³⁷ Tabak Testimony, “YVA O.3, 10084, 3564605” 57:26,.

¹³⁸ Renée Firestone Testimony, “USCSF VHA 00151” (1994), (2) 20:52.

¹³⁹ Fernande Chenin Testimony, “USCSF VHA 02072” (1995), (3) 11:10-11:42, (3) 17:06-18:20.

¹⁴⁰ Sofsky, *The Order of Terror The Concentration Camp*, 186.

¹⁴¹ Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, 411.

industry in the USA, England and Russia – where there were motivated workers. In the Liebau factories there was negative motivation at all levels: the prisoners, the technical and foreign workers, and even the SS guards who were forced to draft, to be the evil face of the regime vis-a-vis the prisoners and to attend the long shifts of the prisoners.¹⁴²

From the testimonies I have concluded that the production processes in the three factories at Liebau were formulated prior to the arrival of the inmates in the camp. The women of the first transport were divided between the three factories – fifty women being assigned to each one.¹⁴³ The rest of the inmates were assigned to other jobs such as collecting the harvest in the nearby fields, working in the kitchen, and assisting in the medical clinic.¹⁴⁴ During the first few days in Liebau, there was no employment for some of the October transport. Sarah Yunitsman was accordingly put to “proactive” work – hauling heavy rocks from one place to another and then back again. “We suffered from the cold more than from hunger. Soon after, civilians from the factories came and selected workers.”¹⁴⁵ Bertha Haberfeld and her sisters did not speak Yiddish and therefore had difficulty understanding instructions in German. When they worked in collecting produce in the fields, they tried to hide some in their pockets. The SS guard noticed them and grabbed it away. Eating in the field was impossible as they had no cooking implements.¹⁴⁶ Sonja Waitzner was sent to work twelve-hour shifts outdoors, until in November the fields disappeared under thick snow; from then on, Sonja was transferred to work at the Nordland factory.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Mor, “Translation of Gertrud Telke SS Guard Trial, Kamienagora Court Akt 106/46 April 8, 1946,” 13–14.

¹⁴³ Tabak Testimony, “YVA O.3, 10084, 3564605”, 57:26.

¹⁴⁴ Chaya Berger Testimony, “YVA O.3, 3564021” (1996), 58:10.

¹⁴⁵ Yunitsman Testimony, “USCSF VHA 39294”, (4) 13:24.

¹⁴⁶ Bertha Haberfeld Testimony, “Fortunoff VA (Yale)” 16:05, 29:44.

¹⁴⁷ Waitzner Testimony, “USCSF VHA 14429”, (4) 01:51-05:24,.

Kurt Laske Factory

In the town history I found that “Near the camp there was a former Laski furniture factory” (Appendix F).¹⁴⁸ It was converted to the Kurt Laske factory, where ammunition crates were manufactured, at some point in time before September 1944. The Kurt Laske factory was owned and run by German citizens. I have found fourteen testimonies of survivors who worked there, day or night shifts, always for twelve hours straight. On their way to and from the factory, a walk of several hundred meters, they were escorted by armed guards. Before and after work, the inmates underwent a rollcall.¹⁴⁹ At lunch break they went from the factory to the camp to eat soup and returned to work until six in the evening. The distance between the Kurt Laske factory and the camp was short and it was not difficult to walk between them, except for the need to walk in the snow.¹⁵⁰

When a truck or a train with raw material arrived, six women were taken out to unload it, while some were assigned to the same routine task most of the time.¹⁵¹ There were two chambers: in one, incoming timber was heated in order to be dried, and in the other the timber was cut into planks.¹⁵² Some inmates cut the boards, some assembled the crates. The work was done mostly with machines. Some worked in permanent positions and others in occasional jobs like hauling wooden boards and transporting coal.¹⁵³

The machines at the factory were designed for operation by men. Edith Grunberger was forced to lift heavy and wet wooden beams. The workers lifted the pallets, fed them into the machines, and took out the planks at the other end – a task that entailed hard physical labor. Non-Jewish inspector showed Frida Herman how to make two-centimeter-thick pallets, shave the boards, fill holes in the wood with glue, and insert fillers with a

¹⁴⁸ Ruchniewicz and Wiszewski, “‘The Age of Extremes’ – in Lubawka and Its Vicinity (1914-1989) (Polish),” 13.

¹⁴⁹ Alice Mor Testimony, “YVA O.3, 3561928” (Yad Vashem, 1994), 1:24:47-1:28:05.

¹⁵⁰ Miriam Avraham Testimony, “YVA O.3, 5087729”, 1:42:17.

¹⁵¹ Kon Testimony, “YVA O.3, 7560854”, (2) 44:36-45:36; Weissman Testimony, “USCSF” (3) 16:05-17:04; Josephs Testimony, “USCSF” (6) 14:30.

¹⁵² Edith Neuvirth Testimony, “USCSF VHA 38107”, (3) 25:20-26:19.

¹⁵³ Avraham Testimony, “YVA O.3, 5087729”, 1:41:24.

hammer.”¹⁵⁴ Frida Herman and a friend worked on a machine that attached crate bottoms with nails. The machine, weighing several kilograms, was heavy to carry for twelve hours. They assembled hundreds of crates per day.¹⁵⁵ Very few positions did not entail hard physical work, and these too became difficult due to the increasing weakness and starvation.¹⁵⁶ Helena Silberman worked on arranging the armaments in the crate and adding hinges onto the crate for the purpose of closing it with nails.¹⁵⁷ Aliza Mor worked, with ten women, in the assembly of field beds for the German army. They drilled holes, knocked in nails, connected the parts, sawed, and painted. All the work was performed standing up.¹⁵⁸ They did not work awfully hard and didn't have to deal with cold metal parts which caused their hands to freeze and also caused black dirt to stick to their hands. Their chief difficulty was working weak from hunger.¹⁵⁹

SS women stood guard. Vera Kon have seen no men other than the old Wehrmacht Camp Commander.¹⁶⁰ In every type of work there was an older German master, who treated them with better respect, brought them some food including slices of bread with margarine. If a machine stopped, a worker had to call, with the permission of a German supervisor, for a Czech, French or Polish prisoner to attend to the machine.¹⁶¹ French workers were also stationed in the Laske company. They lived in town, and had access to local newspapers and news, even if censored, of what had happened at the front which they passed to the inmates.¹⁶² Working conditions were difficult. An SS guard, when in a bad mood, demanded the convening of five women to the bathroom at a time. A nicer overseer accompanied each one separately.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁴ Grunberger Testimony, “USCSF VHA 00266”, 1:57:06-1:59:59; Farkas Testimony, “USCSF” (3) 13:10.

¹⁵⁵ Herman Testimony, “YVA O.3, 3700469”, 50:06.

¹⁵⁶ Hay Testimony, “USHMM RG-50.583.0076”, (2) 17:19.

¹⁵⁷ Helena Silberman Testimony, “USCSF VHA 24075” (1996), (2) 03:13.

¹⁵⁸ Mor Testimony, “USCSF VHA 27444”, (2) 23:51 - There is no other testimony about the production of field beds.

¹⁵⁹ Mor Testimony, “YVA O.3, 3561928”, 1:33:39.

¹⁶⁰ Kon Testimony, “YVA O.3, 7560854”, (2) 42:44-43:24.

¹⁶¹ Goldberger Testimony, “YVA O.3, 5374890”, 1:57:06-1:59:59; Josephs Testimony, “USCSF”, (6) 13:58; Weissman Testimony, “USCSF”, (3) 19:47.

¹⁶² Sawicka, “Liebau (Lubawka),” 382.

¹⁶³ Weissman Testimony, “USCSF VHA 18569”, (3) 16:05-17:04.

According to Eliza Mor the Laske workers were somewhat better off because they had access to bathing facilities at the factory and therefore suffered less from lice.¹⁶⁴ In her area, they worked as long as the supervisor was in attendance. When she left, they stopped and gathered to talk. In turns, one of them stood guard. When the supervisor or the ‘Meister’ returned, she warned in Hungarian that “the fox had arrived,” and then they all went back to their working stations until she went out to inspect another workplace.”¹⁶⁵

Nordland Factory

The Nordland factory may have been moved from the Allied-bombed areas to the Sudetenland. I found documents indicating the existence of other Nordland factories throughout the third Reich, but I was unable to find documents that refer to the one in Liebau and to its exact location which I made some assumptions about (see appendix E). I have found fifteen testimonies of survivors who worked there. They worked on the production of tank tracks and snow chains for combat vehicles. Ella Dimtstein saw only Jewish women on the production floor.¹⁶⁶ They worked day shifts for two weeks and night shifts for the following two weeks, each shift twelve hours long.¹⁶⁷ At night they ate a bowl of soup at the factory.¹⁶⁸ The factory was at a longer distance from the camp. They walked about an hour to and from the factory every day.¹⁶⁹ Edith Grunberger walked to work through the guard gate escorted by a male and a female SS soldier. Edith testified that although they were very tired, on the way back they were forced to carry coal, offloaded by train at the factory, for the camp kitchen.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁴ Mor Testimony, “YVA O.3, 3561928”, 1:24:47-1:28:05; Farkas Testimony, “USCSF” (3) 10:44, It is not clear whether she meant facilities at the factory itself or the residence of the factory workers.

¹⁶⁵ Mor Testimony, “USCSF VHA 27444”, (2) 21:19.

¹⁶⁶ Ela Diamatstein Testimony, “YVA O.3, 5747617”, (2) 23:30.

¹⁶⁷ Neli (Weis) Shpitz testimony, “YVA O.3, 4026865”, 58:29-59:00; Meyer Kamp, I ricordi di Inge e dei suoi figli Rolf e Nico Kamp (Italian), 39.

¹⁶⁸ Diamatstein Testimony, “YVA O.3, 5747617”, (2) 15:51-18:00.

¹⁶⁹ Judith Marmor Testimony, “YVA O.3, 7814221” (2004), (3) 49:32; Lefkowitz Testimony, “USCSF” (3) 26:58.

¹⁷⁰ Grunberger Testimony, “USCSF VHA 00266”, (2) 24:54-25:10.

The inmates were forced to perform demanding work such as loading heavy finished goods onto trains.¹⁷¹ Eight women inmates would pull a heavy big chain. They cut chain links to a size marked on paper and joined them up by welding.¹⁷² Fernande Chenin assembled links of snow chains around a fixture using large pliers.¹⁷³ Rose De Liema worked on a foot-operated machine for inserting small rings to prevent slippage and skidding in the snow into the chain links. This product was shipped to the Eastern front where the Germans were fighting the advancing Red Army. Rose De Liema, with small group of inmates, tried to sabotage the product as much as possible by installing four rings on one side and six on the other rather than five each side.”¹⁷⁴ Judith Adler was glad to learn, from the French workers, that an entire shipment had been bombed and damaged. She did not specify their source.¹⁷⁵ A group of Dutch women worked together at Nordland and lived together in the camp (Anna, Lini, Bloema Emden,¹⁷⁶ Lydia, Matty, Rosie and Rosa). They regarded themselves in the testimonies as “upper-class” relative to other inmates. In my opinion, the term “upper-class” shows the view of the Dutch women prisoners who were arrogant towards the Hungarians.

Annie De Levie was working on an electric machine that connected a sequence of rings to snow chains. Deliberately we sabotaged the sequence of rings. One day, the factory manager was informed that his chains were blowing up tires in the snow. Military personnel accompanied by the Gestapo were sent to inspect the products. They found the defective rings and threatened the prisoners with death penalty. Gestapo questioning of other women who were not privy to the secret partnership revealed nothing.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷¹ Mayer testimony, “USCSF VHA 19044”, (3) 23:30.

¹⁷² Toby Reinstein Testimony, “USCSF VHA 54343” (1998), 54:46-56:19; Marmor Testimony, “YVA O.3, 7814221” (3) 54:21-58:44.

¹⁷³ Chenin Testimony, “USCSF VHA 02072”, (3) 15:56.

¹⁷⁴ De_Liema Testimony, “USCSF VHA 02072”, (3) 20:13.

¹⁷⁵ Adler Testimony, “USCSF VHA 13433”, (4) 06:59-07:23, Did not specify where and when the shipment was bombed.

¹⁷⁶ Bloeme Emden_Evers Testimony, “USCSF USMCM-ENG RG-50.582.0012” (1995), (The only record I found of her is in USHMM – Photograph Number: 44938).

¹⁷⁷ Annie De_Levie Testimony, “Dairy, YVA O.3, 11683284,” 1986, 46–52.

Inge Mayer Kamp testifies to a case where a shipment of broken chains was returned for repair and her group was punished in an particularly lengthy rollcall. A warden nicknamed Miki, who was always decent towards Mayer Kamp's group, told the group in the most serious tone she could, that if it happened again the inmates would be executed, but the tone of her speech sounded neither severe nor threatening. Miki was later replaced by two female SS guards, in uniforms and boots and with hand grenades hanging from their belts, who looked like men and were utterly sadistic. One of them was Belgian. They harassed the inmates frequently. Mayer Kamp and the other Dutch inmates had to be extra careful in what they said to one another since the Belgian SS guard understood Dutch."¹⁷⁸

Maschinenfabrik Heinz Wendt Factory

I have found four testimonies of survivors who worked at Wendt – an aircraft parts factory. There were ten simple machines there, producing screw-level parts in a rather monotonous process. Alona Kraus saw the SS guards patrolling regularly between the workstations.¹⁷⁹ The factory was heated and had an advantage in the cold Sudetenland winter. Chaya Berger testifies: “On Wendt we were supervised by an older Wehrmacht male soldier, who displayed a more humane attitude and advised us to wait patiently for liberation and not get ourselves into trouble by “starting nonsense.”¹⁸⁰

The factory operated twenty-four hours a day, in two shifts, day and night, six to six. Some groups worked only during the day and others alternated between shifts.¹⁸¹ At her workstation, Sara Tabak was addressed by number and never by name. For the day shifts, she got up at five in the morning, went through a rollcall and arrived at the factory at six to

¹⁷⁸ Meyer_Kamp, *I ricordi di Inge e dei suoi figli Rolf e Nico Kamp (Italian)*, 40–41.

¹⁷⁹ Kraus Testimony, “YVA O.3, 12517157”, 1:36:18.

¹⁸⁰ Berger Testimony, “YVA O.3, 3564021”, 01:07:07-01:08:13.

¹⁸¹ Poplinger Testimony, “YVA O.3, V.T. 5907”, (2) 05:50-07:14.

start work. Lunch was served during a break at the factory. She started walking back only at six in the evening and went through another rollcall.”¹⁸²

In the trial of the SS guard Gertrud Scharfe, she testified that she had worked at the Wendt factory in the town of Liebau before she was drafted into the SS. It is not clear how long she had worked there as a laborer – probably for about two years until autumn 1944.¹⁸³ There were male workers, prisoners, Dutch and Italians, who lived in town, received food stamps, and had lunch at the factory. Judith Poplinger testified that the inmates found newspapers and food items that the foreigners had left in the bathrooms for them. Going to the bathroom required an escort by SS guards. They gathered group of five inmates at the door to save up escort trips.”¹⁸⁴

Life at Liebau Camp

While organizing the factories for the prisoner’s labor, an accommodation site was built for them not far from the three workplaces.¹⁸⁵ The inmates found the camp ready, they were not involved in its construction and establishment. Former soldier quarters in a brick building were used, supplemented with a makeshift movable wooden barrack on the other side of a road.¹⁸⁶ Male foreign workers, Poles, Czechs, Italians, Dutch, anti-regime German deportees, and French prisoners of war were already in town. Since these workers were employed by factory owners, I conclude that they prepared the camp facilities from July 1944 until the inmates’ arrival there.

Sara Tabak saw that the camp building was new, hastily built recently. Frida Josephs was with the first group who arrived at the camp. They found that the buildings looked new

¹⁸² Tabak Testimony, “YVA O.3, 10084, 3564605”, 50:48-54:11.

¹⁸³ Mor, “Translation of Gertrud Scharf SS Guard Trial, Kamienagora Court Akt 105/46 April 8, 1946.”

¹⁸⁴ Poplinger Testimony, “YVA O.3, V.T. 5907”, (2) 04:21-05:32; Kraus Testimony, “YVA O.3, 12517157”, 1:28:12.

¹⁸⁵ Ruchniewicz and Wiszewsk, “‘The Age of Extremes’ – in Lubawka and Its Vicinity (1914-1989) (Polish),” 13.

¹⁸⁶ The road separating the main building from the movable barracks, to which the testimonies refers, apparently does not exist in 2022. Mickiewiczza Street passes in front of the two brick buildings and separated the residential areas of the camp from the factories. (see Appendix E)

and under construction that had not yet been completed.¹⁸⁷ There were no people's houses around. The camp was placed in an uninhabited area."¹⁸⁸ It was built on the outskirts of the town and away from the eyes of the local town residents.¹⁸⁹ Across the fence Sara Yunitsman saw a school for boys of the Hitler Youth (Appendix E), kids around the age of ten. They spat and threw stones at the inmates as they passed by, shouting "Schmutzige Juden" (dirty Jews) at them.¹⁹⁰

Compared to Auschwitz, living conditions were relatively decent. Fernande Chenin understood that as far as their work was required, they would not be killed.¹⁹¹ Compared to Auschwitz, Rose de Lima found Liebau to be paradise. There were better living conditions, bunk beds, better hygienic conditions, even though there was no soap anywhere. The food was also bad, the kitchen women took the good parts, but still better than in Auschwitz.¹⁹² Frida Herman testifies: "There were fewer threatening rollcalls, and the prisoners were not executed. The barbed wire fence around the camp was not electrified. The camp commander was a Wehrmacht man, who did not make a particular point of being mean to the prisoners or abusing them."¹⁹³

Miriam Avraham and Judith Marmor describe the camp as they found it upon their arrival: "The movable barracks were brought shortly before we arrived at the camp and were already in place when the first group arrived. One brick building housed the SS guards and a second brick building with eight rooms was designated for women prisoners (Appendix E). Those living in the main building never went over to the barracks' side until liberation. On one of the movable barracks lived the Jewish Camp Elder and her assistants."

The two camps were separated from each other, with a fence around each and a gate in

¹⁸⁷ Frida Josephs Testimony, "USCSF VHA 26297" (1997), (6) 10:37.

¹⁸⁸ Tabak Testimony, "YVA O.3, 10084, 3564605", (2) 02:49.

¹⁸⁹ Yunitsman Testimony, "USCSF VHA 39294", (4) 09:00.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, (4) 10:08.

¹⁹¹ Chenin Testimony, "USCSF VHA 02072", (3) 08:48, (3) 11:10, (3) 21:24; Poplinger Testimony, "YVA O.3, V.T. 5907" (2) 03:34; Mor Testimony, "USCSF" (2) 21:03, (3) 01:13.

¹⁹² De_Liema Testimony, "USCSF VHA 02072" (3) 22:51-23:16.

¹⁹³ Herman Testimony, "YVA O.3, 3700469", 51:41-53:00.

between.”¹⁹⁴ For meals, Toby Reinstein and the other inmates on the barracks side, were marched to the main building side of the camp.¹⁹⁵

Two hundred and fifty women were on one side of the camp, in the brick building, thirty-six inmates to a room. The rooms had large windows.¹⁹⁶ Sara Tabak lived on the other side, a large empty lot on which soldiers' moveable barracks have been erected.¹⁹⁷ In each barrack there were 18-20 inmates in two-level bunk beds arranged in three rows.¹⁹⁸ When Frieda Josephs entered the barracks, they were new, with tiled floors, running water, and a small heating iron stove.¹⁹⁹ The SS guard, Hedwig Schmidt, testified in her trial that the wooden barracks were moderately heated and that the main building rooms were warmer.²⁰⁰

“Rose Weissman was given a bed and a blanket, a coat for the winter and shoes with wooden soles. Upon arrival at the camp, she was given a sweater, and later when it got cold, a coat. She got a spoon and a plate for food. She worked and slept wearing the same clothes all the times at Liebau. She bathed in cold water from the taps in the sink and without soap and towel. She and her roommates were full of lice.”²⁰¹ Sara Tabak had her own bed, two blankets and pillows stuffed with straw. There were inmates that chose to sleep two to a bed (especially sisters), in order to enjoy two blankets.²⁰²

Yolan Lefkowitz was in a group of thirty Hungarian women in one room disconnected from the other inmates. They were a closed group from deportation from Auschwitz until liberation at Liebau.²⁰³ The Polish, Toby Reinstein, was housed with the

¹⁹⁴ Avraham Testimony, “YVA O.3, 5087729”, 1:39:09-1:39:25; Marmor Testimony, “YVA O.3, 7814221”, (3) 46:15.

¹⁹⁵ Reinstein Testimony, “USCSF VHA 54343”, 56:40.

¹⁹⁶ Frida Herman Testimony, “YVA O.3, 5262289”, 1:18:40; Reinstein Testimony, “USCSF”, 51:31-53:06; Goldberger Testimony, “YVA O.3, 5374890”, (2) 19:20; Grunberger Testimony, “USCSF”, (2) 24:31.

¹⁹⁷ Tabak Testimony, “YVA O.3, 10084, 3564605”, (2) 02:49.

¹⁹⁸ Mor Testimony, “USCSF VHA 27444”, (2) 20:47; Marmor Testimony, “YVA O.3, 7814221.” (3) 46:15; Yunitsman Testimony, “USCSF” (4) 08:17; Poplinger Testimony, “YVA O.3, V.T. 5907” (2) 03:47. If 300 inmates lived in the barracks, 18-20 to a room, it comes to fifteen barracks, plus four special-purpose barracks, probably about twenty barracks and not thirty-two.

¹⁹⁹ Josephs Testimony, “USCSF VHA 26297”, (6) 10:50.

²⁰⁰ Mor, “Translation of Hedwig Schmidt SS Guard Trial, Kamienagora Court Akt 107/46 April 8, 1946,” 9.

²⁰¹ Weissman Testimony, “USCSF VHA 18569”, (3) 13:16- 14:49.

²⁰² Avraham Testimony, “YVA O.3, 5087729”, 01:40:00; Weiss Testimony, “USCSF” (4) 15:31.

²⁰³ Yolan Lefkowitz Testimony, “USCSF VHA 33299” (1997), (3) 15:54, (3) 25:38.

non-Hungarian women. They were placed in one room – twenty-two Polish and ten French women. One of the French women was an immigrant from Russia.²⁰⁴ The living conditions of all Five hundred women inmates in the camp were approximately the same, they ate the same food, departed, and returned to the factories at the same time. Two of the factories were in close vicinity of the camp. The Nordland factory was further from the camp and according to Judith Marmor, it was placed outside the town and the road to it did not pass there either.²⁰⁵ The German SS guards lived near the camp fence (Appendix E). The factory masters who supervised them lived outside in the nearby town.²⁰⁶

There was a large shower room with only cold water, which the women could enter freely.²⁰⁷ There was a latrine hut outside the barracks, with four seat openings. At night, Judit Adler did not go out there because Germans were patrolling with dogs between the barracks. For toilets she had to use a bowl inside the barrack.²⁰⁸ Since the barracks were heated occasionally, they sometimes managed to warm up potatoes.²⁰⁹ In Judith Adler's room, stolen potatoes were heated even though it was forbidden, and camp elder checks were occasionally run. As in her room, the prisoners were organized in small groups and distributed stolen potatoes only among several close friends.²¹⁰ On the barracks' side, in Aliza Mor's room, they had a small coal iron stove, but it was not used for lack of coal. Sometimes someone managed to steal some coal from a factory, warming the frozen space a little, but it was obviously dangerous, smoke coming from the hut was forbidden. They had to place a guard on duty."²¹¹

During the first few months, Sara Tabak received clothes from the extermination camps, a coat and underwear, but no bras. She mentioned cases of women identifying items

²⁰⁴ Reinstein Testimony, "USCSF VHA 54343", 56:40.

²⁰⁵ Marmor Testimony, "YVA O.3, 7814221", (3) 53:20, I was not able to find the exact location of the Nordland factory.

²⁰⁶ Kraus Testimony, "YVA O.3, 12517157", 01:42:46.

²⁰⁷ Yunitsman Testimony, "USCSF VHA 39294", (4) 25:00-25:22.

²⁰⁸ Adler Testimony, "USCSF VHA 13433", (3) 20:14-20:53.

²⁰⁹ Hay Testimony, "USHMM RG-50.583.0076", (2) 19:35.

²¹⁰ Adler Testimony, "USCSF VHA 13433", (4) 12:22.

²¹¹ Mor Testimony, "USCSF VHA 27444", (2) 26:00.

of clothing that had belonged to their family members.”²¹² Until the end of 1944, Yolan Lefkowitz had wooden shoes without stockings. Towards Christmas, the manager at the Nordland factory provided her and her teammates with two large baskets of stockings.²¹³ Throughout Elona Kraus time at Liebau, she wore a long silk evening gown, and a large man’s coat which kept her warm. She found a low black shoe and a high brown shoe, and thus she walked the whole period in Liebau and thus clad she came back home to Hungary.”²¹⁴ Anne De Levie used empty bags and metal rings from the factory to make underwear for herself and her sister.²¹⁵ Neli Shpitz’s sister was with her at the camp and was regularly ill with a severe cough. She suffered from inadequate clothing in winter. Neli Shpitz tied an empty cement sack under her dress to shield her from the wind.²¹⁶

Food

All inmates were given the same food: coffee in the morning, and muddy soup with some potatoes and some vegetables, with a piece of bread during work for lunch. In the evening they received a loaf of bread, 250 gram each, and a stick of margarine which was very precisely divided between four women.²¹⁷ The Heinz Wendt workers did not receive food at work; they only ate at the camp before and after work. Arriving at the barracks they were exhausted.²¹⁸

Rose De_Liema knew that the kitchen women used to take the better part of the meal for themselves before it was distributed.²¹⁹ Judit Adler testifies about inmates who volunteered to work in the kitchen cutting firewood, and in this way were able to collect

²¹² Tabak Testimony, “YVA O.3, 10084, 3564605”, 57:26; Goldberger Testimony, “YVA O.3, 5374890”, (2) 05:27.

²¹³ Lefkowitz Testimony, “USCSF VHA 33299”, (3) 22:54.

²¹⁴ Kraus Testimony, “YVA O.3, 12517157”, 01:41:06.

²¹⁵ De_Levie Testimony, “Dairy, YVA O.3, 11683284,” 44.

²¹⁶ Shpitz testimony, “YVA O.3, 4026865”, 59:57-01:00:25; Yunitsman Testimony, “USCSF”, (4) 11:43.

²¹⁷ Margaret Farkas Testimony, “USCSF VHA 35025” (1997), (3) 13:55; Herman Testimony, “YVA O.3, 5262289”, 01:20:45; Chenin testimony, “USCSF”, (3) 13:37.

²¹⁸ Tabak Testimony, “YVA O.3, 10084, 3564605”, 51:15.

²¹⁹ De_Liema Testimony, “USCSF VHA 02072”, (3) 23:30.

food scraps, including discarded potato peels. When they were sent to fetch groceries from a nearby town, they managed to hide potatoes in their coat pockets. Later, probably in the end of 1944, food rations were tightened.²²⁰ While meals were served, Sara Yunitsman witnessed daring inmates who would try to stand in the food line twice and receive a second portion, perhaps at the expense of others. When caught, they were beaten by the SS guards.”²²¹ Elona Kraus testified that in Auschwitz, bromine was added to the food to obscure and numb our senses. In Liebau she thinks, there probably was bromine in the food but in reduced amounts so that we could still function.²²² The historian Hanna Yablonka doubted that bromine was used at all.²²³

Neli Shpitz was a strong and pragmatic woman and made it her goal to save her sick sister. She testifies: ” I volunteered to chop wood in the kitchen so I could steal food. From the kitchen, bones were thrown out after being used to make soup for five hundred inmates. We collected these bones and with a hammer we broke these and removed bone marrow. I spread it on my sick sister’s bread, and also sharing it with some friends. Myself, I did not eat because I cared more for my sister. Other inmates later told me they survived because I had managed to steal food for them.”²²⁴ I found a reference and confirmation of these events in the testimony of Sarah Yunitsman.²²⁵ Edith Neuwirth was sick and weak. She was occasionally helped by a friend from her town by sharing some of her rations and providing her with pieces of stolen potatoes.²²⁶ Food was served at the main building side – lunch for the night shift or dinner for the day shift.²²⁷

²²⁰ Adler Testimony, “USCSF VHA 13433”, (4) 11:10; Avraham Testimony, “YVA O.3, 5087729”, 01:42:57-, 01:49:15.

²²¹ Yunitsman Testimony, “USCSF VHA 39294”, (4) 15:16.

²²² Kraus Testimony, “YVA O.3, 12517157”, 01:34:56.

²²³ Julia SkodovA, *Tri Roky bez Mena (Three Years Without Name)*, trans. Avri Fisher (Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 2022), Note 8, Historian, Professor Hanna Yablonka, the editor for the book added a note: In most cases, the menstrual cycle stopped in the first days or weeks after entering a concentration camp due to the severe shock on the one hand and the poor nutritional conditions on the other. Many women thought that their menstrual cycle had stopped because the Nazis had put certain substances in their diets. After the war this hypothesis was not substantiated, but in many of the testimonies and autobiographical literature it appears time and again.

²²⁴ Shpitz testimony, “YVA O.3, 4026865”, 1:02:48-1:04:28, 1:08:03.

²²⁵ Yunitsman Testimony, “USCSF VHA 39294”, (4) 15:16., (4) 19:35.

²²⁶ Neuwirth Testimony, “USCSF VHA 38107”, (3) 27:46.

²²⁷ Adler Testimony, “USCSF VHA 13433”, (4) 06:55; Tabak Testimony, “YVA O.3, 10084, 3564605”, 54:49.

At Christmas one of the officers took out food scraps from the kitchen for his dog in a red bucket. He stood with one leg inside the heated room. Neli Shpitz stole the bucket with the dog's food and luckily, the dog did not bark; Then she brought the bucket to the women' room and threw the empty bucket into the latrine. The officer searched for the bucket as proof of theft; put the inmates outside in the snow for three hours with beatings, but no one reported on her.²²⁸ Sara Yunitsman added: "The dog ration contained good, hot, and delicious food – meat, potatoes and groats. Twenty women ate from the dog's bucket."²²⁹

Although the inmates sometimes managed to steal potatoes, in most cases Aliza Mor was not able to cook them. they sliced it thinly (if they had a knife – a rare commodity!) and ate it on the bread. If there was a little salt it made a big difference. On rare occasions they also ate beets, the main goal being to fill the stomach.²³⁰ Ela Diamatstein stated that she and her sister utilized the food they received correctly, maintained their strength, and weighed fifty kilograms at liberation, which was considered a good and healthy weight among survivors.²³¹ It is possible that they received assistance from another source that she did not mention in her testimony.

When a truck with red beets or potatoes arrived, Yehudit Poplinger with others was called to unload it. They always managed to steal something but were very scared and ate the food uncooked and unheated. Raw potato on a slice of bread was a delicacy. Women who worked outside the camp brought vegetables. In Poplinger room they had an oven with a limited amount of charcoal, and they boiled the vegetables in water and ate from it.²³² On Sundays some jam, sugar and milk were provided.²³³ Serena Pikkell and Rachel Goldberger testified: "On Sundays, inmates from the three factories saw each other if they were not called up for camp work. They were given a plate of boiled potatoes with the peel, and an

²²⁸ Shpitz testimony, "YVA O.3, 4026865", 01:02:04.

²²⁹ Yunitsman Testimony, "USCSF VHA 39294" (4) 18:22-20:30.

²³⁰ Mor Testimony, "YVA O.3, 3561928", 01:3643.

²³¹ Diamatstein Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5747617" (2) 23:30.

²³² Poplinger Testimony, "YVA O.3, V.T. 5907", (2) 14:22.

²³³ Sawicka, "Liebau (Lubawka)," 382.

enamel cup with sauce and shreds of meat, a piece of margarine and cheese, some honey and jam.”²³⁴

Medical Treatment, Health, and Hygiene at the Camp

At Liebau camp, one of the rooms in the main building was designated as a clinic, or rather an infirmary room without proper equipment or medications. An inmate from Judith Marmor town in Romania, who had taken a Scouts Medic course, was taken to work at the clinic for several weeks until a Russian Jewish doctor arrived at the camp.²³⁵ The only non-Jewish Polish woman among the prisoners was a doctor, Helena Ryłto, assigned to the camp infirmary.²³⁶ She had probably been brought to the camp specially.²³⁷ According to one testimony the Russian Jewish doctor ran the main building clinic and helped prevent the blowing up of the camp by SS guards on the eve of liberation.²³⁸ Rachel Goldberger testified that she was able to choose which of the doctors to contact and she preferred to go to Helena Ryłto.²³⁹

At the Liebau Camp, due to prolonged starvation, the women were on the verge of collapse, including several cases of complete collapse and recovery.²⁴⁰ For survival, they made every effort to maintain cleanliness and hygiene. They suffered from fleas and lice from the very beginning; Rose Weissman had to wear the same set of clothes from September 1944 until Liberation in May 1945 and even further. Her dress was full of lice

²³⁴ Pikkell Testimony, “USCSF VHA 04887”, (3) 11:10-11:42, (3) 17:06-18:20, (4) 16:52; Goldberger Testimony, “YVA O.3, 5374890”, (2) 20:34-21:05.

²³⁵ Marmor Testimony, “YVA O.3, 7814221”, (3) 51:39.

²³⁶ Ruchniewicz and Wiszewsk, “‘The Age of Extremes’ – in Lubawka and Its Vicinity (1914-1989) (Polish),” 65.

²³⁷ Mor, “Translation of Gertrud Scharf SS Guard Trial, Kamienagora Court Akt 105/46 April 8, 1946”, , In the trial mentioned Helena Rzymowska was a witness to the SS guards trail, she was a Doctor and served at the camp. After the war she stayed in Liebau..

²³⁸ P. Megargee Geoffrey, *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945, Vol. III, The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* (INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2018), 761–62., Ruchniewicz and Wiszewsk, “‘Age of Extremes’,” 65, Marmor Testimony, “YVA O.3, 7814221.”(3) 51:39., Avraham Testimony, “YVA O.3, 5087729” ,1:39:09.

²³⁹ Goldberger Testimony, “YVA O.3, 5374890”, (2) 15:50-16:20.

²⁴⁰ Hay Testimony, “USHMM RG-50.583.0076”, 08:00.

hiding in the seams, with no possibility of washing it.²⁴¹ The inmates were punished if lice were found on their body or in their hair. In Thea Aschkenase's room the women examined each other and removed lice.²⁴² In Aliza Mor's barracks, cleanliness was strictly kept, and lice were kept at bay.²⁴³ Bertha Haberfeld and her three sisters suffered from fleas in the Płaszów camp. When they arrived at the barracks in Liebau, they kept clean, made sure to shower daily.²⁴⁴

Margaret Farkas's barrack was kept clean. in the neighbor's barrack hygiene was not strictly maintained, fleas and lice were all over.²⁴⁵ They entered the wooden boards of the barracks and could not be gotten rid of.²⁴⁶ When Ela Diamatstein, arrived in Liebau, she received blankets full of lice.²⁴⁷ In some of the barracks, when the sun came out, a lot of fleas came off the boards.²⁴⁸ In the evening at the barracks, the inmates tried to take out the lice, remove lice eggs with their fingernails and kill them, but the next day it all came back.²⁴⁹ Elona Kraus said that on the day of liberation she was removing lice eggs from her clothes while through a high window, she saw the Germans running away from the camp.²⁵⁰ The lice got into their clothing and under their skin, causing sores and severe itching that looked like chicken pox. On Sundays they laundered their dresses but still could not get rid of the lice. While washing their clothes, they wrapped themselves in their blankets. Some of the inmates did not shower at all during their time at Liebau. On one of his visits to the camp, Mengele brought black anti-lice ointment that helped heal the wounds and itching but the lice did not go away. They would not admit they suffered from lice out of fear. As

²⁴¹ Weissman Testimony, "USCSF VHA 18569", (3) 14:25.

²⁴² Thea Aschkenase Testimony, "USCSF VHA 38084" (1998), (4) 26:41.

²⁴³ Mor Testimony, "YVA O.3, 3561928", 01:29:30-01:30:16.

²⁴⁴ Haberfeld Testimony, "Fortunoff VA (Yale)"30:15-31:00.

²⁴⁵ Farkas Testimony, "USCSF VHA 35025", (3) 18:16-19:25.

²⁴⁶ Weissman Testimony, "USCSF VHA 18569", (3) 13:39.

²⁴⁷ Diamatstein Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5747617", (2) 1800-18:53.

²⁴⁸ De_Levie Testimony, "Dairy, YVA O.3, 11683284," 44-45.

²⁴⁹ Herman Testimony, "YVA O.3, 3700469", 50:38.

²⁵⁰ Kraus Testimony, "YVA O.3, 12517157", 1:53:17-1:54:33.

long as they displayed good health and an ability to work, they knew they were safe.²⁵¹ When some of the survivors arrived home, months after liberation, they were still suffering from lice picked up at the camp.

Every morning, at an early hour, the SS were awakened the women with three whistles. Yolan Lefkowitz quickly jumped up at the first whistle and went to the shower and toilet. It was very cold and there were icicles hanging down from the windows. She had enough time to wash herself. She did this every day and felt more alert during the day.²⁵² Yolan Lefkowitz came from a Hasidic family with seven brothers and sisters and was an important aid with the house works for the family. Realized the importance of maintaining hygiene and cleanliness.

Jewish Room Leader (**Stubealteste**), in Yolan Lefkowitz room, decided to conduct a "flea operation". All the women had to stand in a line, undress and check the seams of their clothes, where the parasites tended to nest the most. When found, the fleas were crushed or burned with a hot wire on the small iron stove in the barrack (which was sometimes secretly lit), causing a horrible odor.²⁵³ However, some women testified that they avoided lice in their barracks through frequent access to bathing and maintaining sanitary and hygienic conditions. They managed to get rid of the lice and there were no cases of typhus among them.²⁵⁴

Even years later, when Inge Meyer Kamp sees a black dot, she thinks it is a flea or a louse. Everything was so dirty! They could not rinse ... the pipes were frozen, and no water came out of the taps. It seems impossible, but they got used to it. Cleaning the latrines in the middle of winter, the excrement was frozen, and the inmates had to scrape everything off with bare hands. They could only wash their hands with snow to clean them a little."²⁵⁵ At

²⁵¹ Grunberger Testimony, "USCSF VHA 00266", (3) 08:17.

²⁵² Lefkowitz Testimony, "USCSF VHA 33299", (3) 26:20-26:33.

²⁵³ Mor Testimony, "YVA O.3, 3561928" 1:30:16-1:31:14, 1:31:33-1:32:32.

²⁵⁴ Farkas Testimony, "USCSF VHA 35025", (3) 18:16-19:44.

²⁵⁵ Meyer_Kamp, *I ricordi di Inge e dei suoi figli Rolf e Nico Kamp (Italian)*, 38–39, Meir Kemp, in her book, sometimes tends to overemphasize the reality in the camp. In other testimonies it was said that the showers were well available and there were female inmates who made sure to shower every morning before going to work.

the Kurt Laske factory, Piry Weiss's hands remained greasy at the end of the shift. She was not provided with soap or a hand wash towel. The foreign workers, Poles, or Czechs, sometimes slipped ends and pieces of soap to the inmates.²⁵⁶

The bathrooms had a long fountain fixture in the center and toilet holes along the wall on both sides. In Judith Marmor's room they used a bowl in which they heated water every evening that was enough for four women to bathe until the lights went out. In her room they were thirty women, thus, each had a bath once a week."²⁵⁷ On Sundays when Elona Kraus did not work, She and her roommates also heated water and showered, and had the opportunity to wash the only dress they had.²⁵⁸

Rachel Goldberger contracted gastric poisoning while at Auschwitz, from which she suffered throughout the stay in Liebau. She had no lice even though she bathed without soap. With the help of wood surplus from the Kurt Laske factory, they operated the barracks iron stove and heated water in four enamel bowls. Once a week they received laundry powder and two pairs of underwear, jumpsuits but no bras. They were also allowed to wash their armpits with soap. the soap bore an inscription – "RIF" ("Rein Judisches Fett" – Pure Jewish Fat).²⁵⁹ In her testimony, Ela Diamatstein mentions "soap from Jews from Auschwitz" without further explanation.²⁶⁰ I could not find other evidence about RIF soap, there is no evidence for its existence, certainly not on an industrial scale. It is likely that the legend of the soap was common among prisoners of ghettos and camps.²⁶¹

There were cases in Auschwitz where women were tempted with food and forced to have sex, which led to pregnancy. The inmates at Liebau underwent "gynecological" tests for pregnancy. During the examination, the women appeared naked with her underpants in her hand, lying on a kitchen table with her legs spread and her knees raised in front of the

²⁵⁶ Piry Weiss Testimony, "USCSF VHA 25098" (1996) (4) 16:50.

²⁵⁷ Marmor Testimony, "YVA O.3, 7814221", (4) 16:31-18:03.

²⁵⁸ Kraus Testimony, "YVA O.3, 12517157", 01:42:46.

²⁵⁹ Goldberger Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5374890", 01:55:30-(2) 03:48.

²⁶⁰ Diamatstein Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5747617", (2) 19:33.

²⁶¹ Joachim Neander, "Seife aus judenfett: Zur wirkungsgeschichte einer zeitgenössischen sage," article, *Fabula* 46, no. 3-4 (2005): 247.

other inmates and without any privacy. A gynecologist occasionally came to perform pregnancy checks. In most cases a Hungarian prisoner performed the test, claiming to be a doctor, examining without gloves and without water, one woman after the other. Many women contracted infections or protracted bleeding. Two women were found pregnant, a Frenchwoman Suzanne Kawitzky and a Dutch woman, Helena Haagenaar, who was caught pregnant in her sixth-to-seventh month. They were transferred to the Gross-Rosen Camp, apparently for extermination. The inmates knew about the pregnancies and were expecting the baby to arrive.²⁶² Most of the time at Liebau Camp women did not get menstruation as it disappeared due to malnutrition and constant fear.²⁶³

The Inmates' Morale

The cold was very severe, especially when the women worked outdoors, and the hunger was bothersome. I found evidence of organizing free time activities, especially among the Dutch, while others reported despair and exhaustion. Sara Yunitsman, Aliza Mor (and others) testifies: “We reached a state of severe exhaustion and suicidal thoughts. For most of us, there was no social activity at the camp – fatigued to the utmost. We talked a little, laid down exhausted on our beds. After work we sat inside and mostly talked about food, which we called “cooking in fantasy.”²⁶⁴ Anita Meir testified: “I had grown indifferent to my fate back at Auschwitz. Grief and fear drained my humanity, and then the human emotion also disappeared.”²⁶⁵

A group of inmates from the Netherlands had their own ways of encouraging one another. One of them was Ronnie Goldstein-Van Cleef who was a friend of Anne Frank's

²⁶² Adler Testimony, “USCSF VHA 13433”, (4) 05:39., (4) 10:08-10:36. I found the names of the evacuees in the ITS lists.

²⁶³ Chenin Testimony, “USCSF VHA 02072”, (3) 12:50.

²⁶⁴ Yunitsman Testimony, “USCSF VHA 39294”, (4) 23:31; Mor Testimony, “USCSF”, (2) 21:19; Mor testimony, “YVA O.3, 3561928”, 01:29:30-01:30:16; Kraus Testimony, “YVA O.3, 12517157”, 01:39:04; Poplinger Testimony, “YVA O.3, V.T. 5907”, (2) 11:45; Waitzner testimony, “USCSF”, (4) 02:23-04:21.

²⁶⁵ Mayer testimony, “USCSF VHA 19044”, (3) 14:02.

family. She had been sent to Auschwitz with Anne and was separated from her when Ronnie deported to Liebau with a group of women from the Nederland. In a book she wrote about her Holocaust experiences, she describes the life of the group of Dutch women in Liebau Camp: “We wrote a musical and an operetta, in which we all performed. And we had great fun, although we always had someone on the lookout, since it was a small camp, and we did not want the female SS guard to learn about it. Those were some wild moments filled with laughter. They plotted minor sabotage of products at the factory, talked about food, about their experiences with men, their plans for the future; they taught each another ballet, tap dancing and French and they also repaired their clothes themselves. Thus, they stayed busy with little time to rest.”²⁶⁶

As Frida Josephs recalled: “I was in a group of forty women, most of them upper-class women with a high intellectual and educational background. We sat up and talked to one another when it was difficult to fall asleep at night.”²⁶⁷ Judith Adler kept her faith in God: “My strong faith in God helped me to believe that we will get to see the day of liberation. My secular sister, Berta, sank into pessimism and apathy and hoped that a bomb would fall on us. Inspired by my faith, I was able to strengthen my sister as well.”²⁶⁸

The SS Guards

Female German guards in the service of the SS oversaw the camp. The SS guards (or Supervisor – female wardens) were simple women who had been recruited by the local Labor Office (Arbeitsamt) shortly before the camp’s establishment. They were taken to Gross-Rosen, where they were assigned to guard duty in the ranks of the SS. I found in the Gross Rosen archive copies of the trial of SS guards Gertrud Scharf, Gertrud Telke, Hedwig Schmidt and Arne Pohl. The trials took place in Poland in 1946. Apparently, since the end

²⁶⁶ Ronnie Goldstein-Van Cleef, “Anne Frank: The Last Seven Months,” in *Anne Frank*, ed. Willy Lindwer, trans. Alison Meersschaert, English (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991), 196.

²⁶⁷ Josephs Testimony, “USCSF VHA 26297” (6) 13:08-(6) 17:29,.

²⁶⁸ Adler Testimony, “USCSF VHA 13433”, (4) 14:32.

of the war, the accused were held in custody in Poland pending a trial.²⁶⁹ They were local women who worked in the local factories and were recruited in the summer of 1944 to serve as guards in the local camp. They were the lowest level in the SS hierarchy in Liebau camp and according to their claim, in court, they were not allowed to carry weapons.²⁷⁰ In the trials of the four female SS guards that I found, they gave testimonies that seemed too coordinated. All four claimed that they treated the inmates fairly. Each of them mentioned the names of other female SS-guards who were not present in Poland at the time of the trial, accusing them of mistreated the prisoners.²⁷¹

The SS Guard's duties included escorting the prisoners to their workplaces, watching over them during work, making sure they did not talk or slack off during work, and escorting them back to the camp twelve hours later. Afterwards the guards went off duty until the next day. Every three or four weeks, there would be Sunday guard duty. On Sundays there were rollcalls, which were conducted by the camp commander and block commander. The SS Guards filed reports with the camp commander on improper behavior by prisoners, and the camp commander would mete out bodily punishments. The guards at the Camp were dressed in SS uniforms.²⁷²

Gertrud Telke testified in her trial: "A guard's duties included most of all making sure no prisoner escaped and preventing prisoners from talking during work. The mistreatment of prisoners consisted in hitting them with one's hand, cutting their hair and making them stand outside for some time, Thirty to forty-five minutes. She claimed that only the camp and block commandants cut the hair of prisoners, and only they made them stand outside for a long time."²⁷³ This is not in agreement with prisoners' testimonies about local initiatives of the SS guards.

²⁶⁹ Mor, "Translation of Gertrud Telke SS Guard Trial, Kamienagora Court Akt 106/46 April 8, 1946."

²⁷⁰ Eran Mor, "Translation of Arne Pohl SS Guard Trial, Kamienagora Court Akt 107/46 April 8, 1946" (Kamienagora Poland, 2022).

²⁷¹ Mor, "Translation of Hedwig Schmidt SS Guard Trial, Kamienagora Court Akt 107/46 April 8, 1946," 14.

²⁷² Megargee et al., *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933-1945, Vol. I*, 761-62.

²⁷³ Mor, "Translation of Gertrud Telke SS Guard Trial, Kamienagora Court Akt 106/46 April 8, 1946," 14.

Above the female SS soldiers there was direct supervision by a German female SS officer, and above her was a male officer, the Camp Commander. Frida Josephs testified that the female officer oversaw the rollcalls and would arrive with her French poodle dog. She spoke with love and courtesy to the dog and in a cruel tone to the inmates, giving off a conflicted air of a dual personality. German officers were not supposed to make direct contact with the inmates – their job was to make sure there were no escapes, and anyway there was nowhere to run.²⁷⁴ Among the German SS, Renée Firestone reported about a cruel, short, fat, ugly villain female SS warden, "Kommandoführer," that harassed the inmates badly. She caught three inmates hiding while working at the Nordland factory. They were tied up outside and cold water was poured over them. The SS guards applied severe deterrence and threat regarding intentional damage to the products.²⁷⁵

Ronnie Goldstein-Van Cleef compared this to Auschwitz: "In Liebau camp, the regime was much more moderate. In the beginning, the SS Guards were very friendly. They asked us what it had been like in Auschwitz, and we told them how terrible it had been for us. But that only lasted for about a week. Then the SS Guards were ordered not to be so nice to us and to hit us."²⁷⁶ The SS made sure the inmates did not receive food beyond their allowance. They reacted most harshly to theft. At Christmas Rose Weissman was sent to fetch bread from the town. She stole a loaf, hid it under her coat and later shared it with friends, three sisters, one of whom was ill. An inmate from another group snitched on her. The SS commander arrived with a menacing-looking dog and beat her severely.²⁷⁷ Someone implicated on Chaya Berger for stealing two potatoes, although in fact she was too afraid to do it. The SS stripped her and whipped her on the back. She was interrogated about where she hid the two potatoes that she never stole. Decades later, she still carries scars on her skin and suffer back pains from that beating.²⁷⁸ A short, fat, evil and sadistic SS soldier decided

²⁷⁴ Josephs Testimony, "USCSF VHA 26297", (6) 11:16-12:06.

²⁷⁵ Firestone Testimony, "USCSF VHA 00151", (2) 23:16.

²⁷⁶ Goldstein-Van Cleef, "Anne Frank: The Last Seven Months," 196.

²⁷⁷ Weissman Testimony, "USCSF VHA 18569", (3) 20:26-22:03.

²⁷⁸ Berger Testimony, "YVA O.3, 3564021", 01:05:55-01:06:30.

that Frida Herman's sister while smiling, was laughing at her, and she slapped her hard on her face."²⁷⁹

SS guards forced Yolán Lefkowitz and three others to stand in the yard while they ate in front of them, laughing at the inmate's food rations. The prisoners responded by telling jokes and laughing among themselves, which embarrassed the guards who let them go. The guards took offence, realized that we were laughing at them and took away the blankets in which we were wrapped. After a few minutes they realized they had gotten themselves embarrassed instead, entered the barracks, and returned the blankets.²⁸⁰ I conclude from the testimonies of the inmates that the SS guards had greater freedom of action than they claimed in the trial and there were some who used to abuse and mistreat the prisoners.

SS Supervision

From the testimonies it can be learned that the prisoners have some freedom left for local initiatives such as stealing food and coal, cooking potatoes in the rooms, and sneaking off to sleep while working. The low motivation of the factory supervisors, most of whom were foreign workers or prisoners of war, to cooperate with the economic interests of the factory owners probably contributed to this. Even in the residential area, which the SS guards were afraid to enter for fear of disease, a supportive and not too tight supervision of the prisoners was made possible by the Jewish camp alder and her staff.

At the Kurt Laska and Norland factories workers, I find that the supervision over the prisoners at work was not tight and they found the option to rest, to stop work, and in Norland they also sabotaged products. The explanation for this apparently stems from a lack of manpower among the SS guards who were required to work long shifts together with the prisoners. Likewise, the professionalism of the SS guards who themselves worked in the

²⁷⁹ Herman Testimony, "YVA O.3, 3700469", 51:48-52:08.

²⁸⁰ Lefkowitz Testimony, "USCSF VHA 33299", (3) 27:32-28:17., (4) 01:20.

factories until mid-1944, came from a relatively inferior socio-economic stratum and underwent rapid training as SS guards, was not high. In addition, the foremen and foreign workers at the factories did not sympathize with the Nazi regime, they knew about the retreats on all fronts and the approaching end of the war and therefore allowed themselves to turn a blind eye to the actions of the workers. On the other hand, the inmates lived under constant threat of punishment and executions which affected their freedom of action and the boldness of their actions.

Block Elders and the Prisoners Hierarchy

On camps, established in the early 1940s and existed for several years, a hierarchy of prisoners was created to manage their lives and routine in the harsh conditions of the camps. Ert Karni pointed out that the behavior of Jewish camp managers, in charge of the prisoners in the camps, ranged over a very broad spectrum, and that in fact, the differences in their behavior stemmed from their character, personality, and the conditions in which they performed their duties.²⁸¹ In the camps established in 1940-2 under the Schmelt organization, the camp elders were prisoners who managed to establish a position of influence between the Nazi camp command and the prisoners. They were privileged, in many cases they brought their family members to the camp and lived in improved conditions. By their behavior they decisively influenced the fate of the prisoners. Zehava Mualem describes four different types of camp elders in four Schmelt camps in Silesia.²⁸² Of notice is Karl Demerer, camp elder in Blechhammer. By using his perfect German, he established an internal management system for the Jewish prisoners while providing them the best support

²⁸¹ Art Karni, "Jewish women in forced labor camps in Reich Territory in the final stages of World War II, 1944-1945 (Hebrew)," 54.

²⁸² Mualem, "The History of the Jews in Forced Labor Camps in Upper Eastern Silesia, Lower Silesia and Sudetenland: 1940 – 1945 (Hebrew)," 45, 82–89, 119–21, 166.

possible.²⁸³ Camp Elder held even more sway as SS inspections became less frequent owing to the lack of staff and fear of disease. Above all, their roles were required in the labor camps, where experienced veteran inmates were indispensable to the largely inexperienced SS staff.²⁸⁴

Between March and September 1944, thirteen women's camps under Organization Schmelt were converted into the Gross-Rosen labor camps organization. At that time, the SS already gained experience in allocating functional positions among the inmates, for the purpose of creating a functional and command bridge between the inmates and the SS headquarters in the camp.²⁸⁵ At the newer camps, established after September 1944, the deportees lacked the experience to serve as functionaries. In most cases, SS officers recruited women inmates who could speak German and who appeared tough and able to assert themselves.²⁸⁶ Many of them realized that they were unable to fulfill the task.²⁸⁷

In the camps established in the fall of 1944, the SS placed a camp elder with experience from another camp.²⁸⁸ Melanie Zimmerman appointed camp elder to the Liebau camp and according to the testimonies did not become privileged. In the ITS list she is listed as Hungarian, born 6th September 1913, which means she was older than the average age of the other prisoners. Her Gross Rosen number 60000 means that she was the last to join the first transport to Liebau, perhaps specially brought from other camp. She was mentioned as helping the prisoners and as having presented a strong stance against the SS command in the camp.

²⁸³ Heinrich Demerer, *Als Kind in NS-Konzentrationslagern : Aufzeichnungen*, ed. Verena Walter, USHMM DS13 (Berlin: Metropol, 2009); and Heinrich Demerer, 'Olam shalem karas be-tokhi : hitbagrut ba-mahanot uve-tsa'adot ha-mayet, trans. Shira Miron (Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 2020).

²⁸⁴ Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, 513.

²⁸⁵ Gross-Rosen, "Gross-Rosen Museum – Rogoźnica Poland", Display board #40.

²⁸⁶ Andrea Rudorff, *Frauen in den Aussenlagern des Konzentrationslager Gross-Rosenn (German)* (Berlin: Metropol-Verl, 2014), 251.

²⁸⁷ Rudorff, "Reimagining the 'Gray Zone': Female Prisoner Functionaries in the Gross-Rosen Subcamps, 1944-45," 24–25.

²⁸⁸ Art Karni, "Jewish women in forced labor camps in Reich Territory in the final stages of World War II, 1944-1945 (Hebrew)," 52–54, The case of Weisswasser camp.

Prisoners were appointed to special positions by SS guards and sometimes volunteered of their own free will. The Camp Elder enforced discipline, carried out punishments and largely dictated the climate of the internal regime at the camp. Some advocated for the prisoners vis-à-vis the camp administration, and some augmented the cruelty of the SS towards the prisoners.²⁸⁹ I assume that two Camp Elders were appointed for both sides of the Liebau Camp. There also seems to have been another Camp Elder who was cruel to the inmates. Since Liebau was a labor camp and not an extermination camp, it is clear from the testimonies that there was a give-and-take relationship between the inmates and the SS guards, with the Camp Elder acting as mediator.

SS guards apprehended inmates who stole potatoes. Ela Diamatstein testified that the Lagerführer ordered Camp Elder to cut their hair as punishment, considered severe as their hair had just grown out a little after being shaved off at Auschwitz. Camp Elder said she could not do so and asked the Lagerführer to cut [the hair] herself instead. The Lagerführer cut a little from each one and left.²⁹⁰ In different case, Judit Adler testifies about other Camp Elder who found an inmate on the toilet and gave her a painful blow for no reason. There were heating stoves in the rooms on which stolen potatoes were heated although it was forbidden, and there were Camp Elder checks in the rooms to make sure the prisoners were not cooking on the heating stoves.²⁹¹ On yet another case, Rachel Grunberger testifies that a prisoner was caught stealing. The Camp Elder took everyone out for a rollcall and in front of everyone she shaved off the thief's hair.²⁹²

I have not found any direct evidence on inmates' mistreatment by Melanie Zimmerman. I can assume, from several testimonies, that she was able to demand from the camp command an improvement in their treatment of the prisoners. Testimonies about the cruelty of the camp elder, including punishment and searching for cooking in the rooms

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 18, and see Appendix H.

²⁹⁰ Diamatstein Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5747617", (3) 01:52.

²⁹¹ Adler Testimony, "USCSF VHA 13433", (3) 20:14, (4) 12:22.

²⁹² Grunberger Testimony, "USCSF VHA 00266", (3) 09:15.

came from the side of the barracks and it is possible that this is attributed to another Elder on the barracks side.²⁹³

Unexpected Kindness Among Germans

The inmates in the camp and in the factories were in contact with people who showed a degree of humanity and treated them with some respect. They received sympathetic treatment from the foreign workers in the factories, some of them from the same country as some of the women, and from the foremen in the factories, who were of non-German nationalities. According to the testimonies, even among the Nazi camp staff, from the commander to the junior SS guards, there were manifestations of humanity, and all this under a strict prohibition on the part of the SS to make verbal or physical contact with the inmates. It is possible that some of the reports of a respectful relationship resulted from the inmates' buying favors in unspecified ways.

There was an older SS woman at Liebau camp, who would enter Frida Herman's quarters on Sundays and sing songs with inmates. She encouraged them to be good. She was not cruel and did not beat inmates."²⁹⁴ At Christmas (December 1944) the Kommandoführer, a Wehrmacht officer, came to speak with the prisoners and spoke nicely. Edith Goldberger testifies that he said: "Ladies, I hope that next year you will be home, with God's help." He gave each prisoner hundred grams of lard. Observant inmates debated between religious practice and physical need and decided to eat."²⁹⁵

Inmates at Nordland, at every opportunity, left work and approached the heater. Yolán Lefkowitz was afraid of the SS guards and did not leave her position at all. She won the appreciation of the director, her foreman, a German civilian called Mr. Notland. He invited her, with SS approval, for supper at his office. He prepared the best meal he could. He was also kind and courteous to the other inmates.²⁹⁶ A German foreman at the Wendt

²⁹³ Mor Testimony, "USCSF VHA 27444", (2) 26:00.

²⁹⁴ Herman Testimony, "YVA O.3, 3700469", 51:41-53:00.

²⁹⁵ Goldberger Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5374890", (2) 21:24-22:19.

²⁹⁶ Lefkowitz Testimony, "USCSF VHA 33299", (3) 23:21-24:02, (4) 02:17.

factory communicated with Yehudit Poplinger and others with the help of their Yiddish. He occasionally left food items like a glass of semolina or a sandwich for Yehudit, which she hid in her underwear to bring to her sister (Ibolya) and friends."²⁹⁷

Ela Diamatstein and four other women were working around a table at Nordland. Their forewoman, Mrs. Spitz, was kind, she gave each of them a pair of four-color socks, and occasionally smuggled some food."²⁹⁸ An elderly German master who supervised Miriam Avraham and other workers at the Kurt Laske factory noticed that one inmate had torn her shoes; he took them from her and brought them back repaired. Although he was limited in food rations, he bothered to steal for them slices of bread. The slices were very thin, and, in this way, they realized that even among the civilians, food was not in abundance.²⁹⁹

Privileges at the Camp

The inmates in the camp were certainly not uniform and there were some who enjoyed certain privileges. Although there is no clear evidence of a privileged inmate, there are testimonies from which it can be concluded that there were those who received personal benefits. Testimonies of Liebau Camp survivors do not contain information about special privileges and certainly no evidence of sexual intercourse.³⁰⁰ It had largely been the preserve of a few privileged prisoners. There were cases where inmates engaged in relationships with guards, in exchange for food and other privileges, although this carried considerable risks, not just for the prisoner but for the SS serviceman as well.³⁰¹ Additionally, the Nazis saw

²⁹⁷ Poplinger Testimony, "YVA O.3, V.T. 5907", (2) 05:50-07:14.

²⁹⁸ Diamatstein Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5747617", (2) 14:10.

²⁹⁹ Avraham Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5087729", 01:47:35.

³⁰⁰ Jessica R. Anderson Hughes, "Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the Concentration Camp Brothel" (New Jersey, 2011), 232.

³⁰¹ Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, 355, 366.

Jewish women both as sexual objects and as a biological danger, as it is women's wombs that bear future generations.³⁰²

In their book "How Did You Survive," Esther Dror and Ruth Linn wrote: "Whether it was observed directly or by imagination, the possibility that Jewish women were sexually exploited during the Holocaust became a well-known epic by writers after the war. ... Writers like Yitzhak Sade, Ka-Tsetnik and Lustig are not the only ones who believed (and perhaps even knew) that women who 'returned' from 'there' paid for their survival with their bodies and their souls."³⁰³ I gathered, from the testimonies, hints about possible relationships between prisoners and female guards with lesbian tendencies and in addition possible, not necessarily sexual, relationships with men in the camp and factories.

With Miriam Avraham, at the camp was a Jewish inmate named Rozi. She came from her village in Romania and grew up at a lower-class family and was allegedly a prostitute. There were lesbian SS guards and Rozi agreed to have sexual relations with one. Rozi was given a favorable job in the kitchen and treated the other prisoners with arrogance and cruelty. She threw, rather than served, pieces of bread from the kitchen and said to the prisoners: "Eat pigs." After the war, Miriam and Rozi returned to the village. Miriam's and other spouses took severe revenge on Rozi.³⁰⁴ Miriam Avraham did not provide further details regarding the type of revenge, but I can assume that it was related to some type of sexual revenge. I was not able to find any reference to prostitution in the testimonies other than Miriam Avraham's testimony about Rozi.

Thea Aschkenase (nee Obarzanek) was born in Munich, Germany and was deported to Auschwitz from Italy. She received special treatment thanks to her command of the German language in the Bavarian dialect as a mother tongue. A lesbian SS guard tried to

³⁰² Nomi Levenkron, "Death and the Maidens - 'Prostitution,' Rape, and Sexual Slavery during World War II," in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust*, ed. Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochelle G. Saidel (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2010), 3.

³⁰³ Esther Dror and Ruth Linn, *How Did You Survive (Hebrew)*, ed. Giora Rozen, Digital (Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House Ltd, 2016) Digital edition-23/414.

³⁰⁴ Avraham Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5087729", 01:48:30-01:51:24, 2:09:20.

lure her into contact and sent her to work peeling potatoes in the kitchen. Back then she did not know and did not understand lesbian behavior. This was her occupation throughout her time at Liebau Camp. Thea's mother was transferred to Liebau with her, and they both were to work at the Nordland factory. When Thea was transferred to work in the kitchen, her mother (Adela Obarzanek) was released from work. After Thea understood the SS guard intentions, she kept distance from her and nothing happened, even though Thea continued to work in the kitchen. Thea managed to steal potato peels and sometimes potatoes and bring them to the barracks."³⁰⁵

Working at the Nordland factory there was a Jewish inmate, Vera, from Belarus, who would get some food, potatoes, or a sandwich every day. She came from a different country and social background than the other inmates and did not participate with their way of life in the camp. Ela Diamatstein and the other women were not sure she could be trusted. After liberation Vera requested some survivors to confirm to the Soviets that she was a partner in fate along with all the other inmates.³⁰⁶ SS guard Scharf Gertrud, during her trial, testified that camp commandant named Karp had a prisoner named Alice in an apartment next to the camp offices. The commandant replacing her did not continue to keep Alice there.³⁰⁷

The end of 1944

During the Christmas period of the end of 1944, the activities at Camp Liebau were regular and ongoing. The factories were working at full speed, raw materials were coming in and finished goods were being supplied to the fighting Nazi army. In the testimonies from the Christmas period, I found no indications of the effect of the withdrawal of the Wehrmacht on all fronts on the routine of camp life. On the contrary, it is mentioned in the testimonies that camp commander calmed down the prisoners with a conciliatory speech and even

³⁰⁵ Aschkenase Testimony, "USCSF VHA 38084", (4) 23:01-25:56.

³⁰⁶ Diamatstein Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5747617", (2)23:30.

³⁰⁷ Mor, "Translation of Gertrud Scharf SS Guard Trial, Kamienagora Court Akt 105/46 April 8, 1946."

distributed improved food rations for the new year. Only from mid-January 1945, when the death marches began and the main concentration camps were about to be evacuated, the change was also felt in the Liebau camp due to irregular work in the factories and a decrease in the food ration for the prisoners.

5. The Last Months of Liebau Camp

From the beginning of 1945, there was a major change: food rations were reduced, the attitude of the SS guards changed (for the worse) and the inmates received more and more information about the impending defeat of Nazi Germany and the promise of liberation. In the winter and spring months of early 1945, World War II came to an end. On May 8, Nazi Germany surrendered to the Allies and on the same day the Red Army liberated Liebau Camp. Until that day, the camp continued to function as a concentration camp. Camp management, wardens, foreign workers, and many of the camp inmates were aware of the desperate situation of Nazi Germany, defeat on all fronts, famine across the country and damage to supply routes. Yet in early 1945 the three factories around Liebau Camp tried to keep up their work routine. This chapter describes the last 127 days of Liebau Camp as a forced labor camp, and the processes the inmates in the camp underwent as a result of the changes in the state of war and its impact on Nazi Germany controlled territories. The liberation of the camp by the Red Army, the first period of freedom and the departure back home will also be described.

By Christmas eve 1944, which some of the inmates mentioned in their testimonies, most of them had been imprisoned for more than six months, all the testimonies providers spent several difficult months at Auschwitz-Birkenau, where they were forever separated from parents, family members and a few of them from children. The move to the labor camp in Liebau was a change for the better in terms of living conditions, but could not alleviate the recent trauma, mental shock, humiliation, and nagging hunger that got worse as time progressed towards liberation. Most Gross-Rosen subcamps and main camps had been evacuated before liberation. Only Thirty-five subcamps, Liebau one of them, avoided the horrors of the death marches and were liberated on site.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁸ KL Gross-Rosen Muzeum, "Exhibition Files" (Rogoźnica, Poland, 2005) Display #47 – Evacuation.

The inmates' detailed testimonies reflected their hard struggle in the cold winter in the Sudeten Mountains, the hard work in inhumane conditions, constant hunger, while food rations continued to shrink, poor medical care, but above all, the determination of these young women to survive and continue their young lives. From the testimonies one can also understand the actions made by the SS guards, Wehrmacht soldiers, foreign workers, and their reaction to the impending defeat of Nazi Germany.

Families and Friends at the Camp

By January 1945, living conditions hardened and camp inmates' chances of survival worsened. A considerable number of sister pairs survived Liebau Camp. I found testimonies about assistance between inmates, mostly between a healthy sister and her weak or ill one.³⁰⁹ There were fights between friends and sisters about unequal cutting of the bread portion. Elona Kraus sister-in-law, Ilosh, saw that Elona is losing weight. She deliberately gave Elona a larger portion. There was also help between old friends from the same city. Yehudit Poplinger was encouraged by her sister Ibolya. She believes that the close relation between them gave her strength and helped them both survive. They supported and helped each other to overcome moments of despair, by strengthening and encouraging one another.³¹⁰

Neli Shpitz (nee Wiess or Vies) younger sister Julianna was weak. The two sisters transported to Liebau and worked in the same factory. Neli volunteered to do the hard work assigned to her sick sister who was thereby given relief. Neli could obtain food by stealing from the camp kitchen mainly for her sister and for the Szanto sisters. She recounted: "We arrived in Auschwitz five sisters, three were sent to work and I stayed with my sick sister Julianna. When we were sent to Liebau I decided to protect and save my sister. I went out with a friend to steal food at night. We passed between the light beams of the searchlight.

³⁰⁹ Adler Testimony, "USCSF VHA 13433" (4) 06:00.

³¹⁰ Poplinger Testimony, "YVA O.3, V.T. 5907", (2) 15:15; Kraus Testimony, "YVA O.3, 12517157", 01:37:15; Lefkowitz Testimony, "USCSF VHA 33299", (4) 08:13-09:42.

We broke a window and stole potatoes.”³¹¹ Sarah Yunitsman (nee Szanto) gave corroborating testimony about this.³¹² Wiess and Szanto sisters survived.³¹³

Edith Neuvirth was not strong enough for her tasks: ” We arranged work groups and I worked outside unloading timber from a train. A stronger member of the team helped me at work. I survived the work due to the assistance of a fellow woman who would help me sneak into the (very) warm heating chamber where I was able to take a nap. That fellow women were from my sister’s town. I did not really know her. She realized that if she does not help me, I probably would not have survived.”³¹⁴ Berta Haberfeld stayed at Liebau Camp with two sisters one of them deaf-mute, who could not hear nor understood oral instructions. She was provided close support from her two sisters and all sisters survived.³¹⁵

Health services towards the end of the war

In 1945, mass exterminations were almost completely stopped, and prisoners were evacuated on death marches. In the absence of manpower replacements, the camp authorities were forced to preserve the existing workforce, all by lacking measures that could not be improved due to the economic collapse of Nazi Germany.³¹⁶ The SS sought to separate and conceal women prisoners from the citizens of the town of Liebau, who could not see them going back and forth between the camp and the factories. Therefor sick inmates were not sent to be hospitalized at the nearby town’s medical facilities.³¹⁷ On 13 March 1945, upon Germany withdrawal from Auschwitz and Gross-Rosen, Josef Mengele led an SS commission inspection at Liebau Camp. Mengele promised that the infirmary would be

³¹¹ Shpitz testimony, “YVA O.3, 4026865”, 58:29-01:03:13.

³¹² Yunitsman Testimony, “USCSF VHA 39294”, (4) 12:58.

³¹³ Ibid. (4) 19:35; Shpitz testimony, “YVA O.3, 4026865” 59:57-1:08:03.

³¹⁴ Neuvirth Testimony, “USCSF” (3)23:54-26:19, The name of the “fellow woman” was not mentioned in the testimony.

³¹⁵ Haberfeld Testimony, “Fortunoff VA (Yale)”, 09:32-10:09, 17:15, 32:33.

³¹⁶ Karay, “Forced labor of Jewish women in the National Socialist regime,” 15–16.

³¹⁷ Lefkowitz Testimony, “USCSF VHA 33299”, (4) 03:52.

better equipped with medicines, but this had no consequences. According to Meyer Kamp testimony, he did not stay long and left without making any "selections."³¹⁸

Frida Herman required to obtain a work permit from a supervisor in order to consult a physician. When she sought treatment at the camp clinic (Reviere) she usually was rejected if her body temperature did not exceed thirty-nine degrees Celsius. At work she suffered severe pain and could not continue. A German-speaking woman approached the German foreman (Arbeitsführer) and asked for a two-day relief for Frida. He replied that there is no substitute for an intelligent worker like her. Frida's leg swelled up and the other inmates had to keep carrying her to work. Only when her body temperature rose to thirty-nine degrees, was she taken to the Rivier. The Jewish doctor recommended that she be hospitalized, but the German inspector on the spot objected. Frida stayed sitting on a chair. During the night, a diphtheria patient died, and Frida was put to bed in her place.³¹⁹ Her leg was full of pus. Due to a lack of suitable equipment, the doctor had difficulty opening the abscess and burst into tears. Frida's condition turned into pneumonia, and she remained hospitalized until the day of liberation.³²⁰

An inmate who broke her arm was refused treatment by a doctor in town.³²¹ Only after liberation, Fernande Chenin and other survivors went to the city clinic and brought casting and other medical supplies.³²² Rachel Goldberger felt heart palpitations but chose not to go to the Jewish doctor, "the Russian," because she was a "Klafta" (Yiddish for wicked, critical, and selfish woman). Instead, she went to the non-Jewish doctor at the camp, "the Polish," who forbade her to work night shifts."³²³

³¹⁸ Meyer_Kamp, *I ricordi di Inge e dei suoi figli Rolf e Nico Kamp (Italian)*, 42; Grunberger Testimony, "USCSF" (1994) (2) 26:22-26:56; Adler Testimony, "USCSF", (4) 05:39, (4) 10:36; Kon testimony, "YVA O.3, 7560854" (2) 47:05-48:10.

³¹⁹ Frida Herman apparently refers to the deceased Eva Braune who died a few days before liberation. The testimony mentions the mother Erzebet Braune who was sitting by her bed when she died of diphtheria.

³²⁰ Herman Testimony, "YVA O.3, 3700469", 53:07-57:00.

³²¹ Herman Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5262289", 1:25:25-1:26:30.

³²² Chenin Testimony, "USCSF VHA 02072", (3) 20:41-21:02.

³²³ Goldberger Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5374890", (2) 15:50-16:20; She refers to the Polish doctor Helena Ryłto.

Between January and April 1945, monthly dental treatments for the inmates began, which was carried out by an inmate dentist, Margit Steinberg, from Women Labor Camp Bernsdorf.³²⁴ When Yehudit Poplinger suffered from a toothache, the clinic staff extracted the teeth without anesthesia. When other woman suffered from a toothache, the clinic staff extracted four teeth, including healthy ones. Instead of medical treatment or drugs such as anti-inflammatories, they only gave painkillers, there was nothing better than that. When Poplinger had small injury, a cut in the finger, she preferred, out of fear, not to go to the clinic. There were rumors that inmates did not return from the clinic or got sick while visiting there. instead, she self-treated the wound with herbs and kept on working.”³²⁵

Rose Weissman worked at the Kurt Laske factory. When a truck with raw materials arrived, six female inmates were called to unload the truck and remove large, heavy wooden boards from it. The work was hard, and Rose felt damage to her body, legs and back for the rest of her life.³²⁶ During a rollcall at the end of April, Anita Mayer was standing in the front row and the Camp Elder noticed the condition of her hands. She asked a doctor to examine Anita’s hands and Anita received compresses made with basic medicines and was sent for a day of rest.³²⁷

The night shift workers suffered from rest disorders as their sleep was interrupted by the meal in the middle of the day. Chief medical problems among the inmates were vitamin deficiencies and hunger-induced issues, mainly weakness.³²⁸ There were inmates who suffered deep wounds and large furuncles all over their bodies that were later identified as a vitamin deficiency.³²⁹ At liberation, following nearly a year of starvation, which became

³²⁴ Sawicka, “Liebau (Lubawka),” 382, AMGR, 6734/1-3/DP.

³²⁵ Poplinger Testimony, “YVA O.3, V.T. 5907”, (2) 16:10-17:53.

³²⁶ Weissman Testimony, “USCSF VHA 18569”, (3) 16:05-17:04.

³²⁷ Mayer testimony, “USCSF VHA 19044” (3) 24:39-25:04 (3) 26:33-27:51.

³²⁸ De_Liema Testimony, “USCSF VHA 02072”, (4) 04:56; Marmor Testimony, “YVA O.3, 7814221” (2004), (3) 01:00:36-(4) 00:57; Tabak Testimony, “YVA O.3, 10084, 3564605”, (2) 05:24-06:35.

³²⁹ Mor Testimony, “YVA O.3, 3561928”, 01:31:33-01:32:32.

extreme from March 1945 onwards, inmates weighed around 40 kg or less and suffered from hunger-related diseases.³³⁰

Connections with the Outside World

There were foreign forced laborers and prisoners of war at Liebau before the women prisoners arrived, apparently, they had worked setting up the camp.³³¹ Foreign workers provided the best channel of contact for the inmates with the outside world, especially in the challenging times during the final few months before liberation. They lived in rented apartments in town and were under curfew after 8-9 p.m.³³² There was a strict ban on any outside contact made by inmates, as well as on talking with strangers.³³³ There were Poles, French, Czechs, Italian and German political prisoners (Häftlinge) in Liebau town and in the factories. Upon liberation Edith Grunberger discovered that foreign workers who did not speak German were Italian partisans who had been imprisoned as war criminals.³³⁴ Some foreign nationals tried to contact Judith Marmor while working.³³⁵ Yehudit Poplinger never got to meet the local owners of the factories who actually paid the SS for the prisoners' labor. Inmates' connection with the factory managements was through the foreign workers.³³⁶

The French laborers were free to travel within Germany, Berlin included. One of them brought the French survivor, Fernande Chenin, a message from Berlin, about her brother's death. She met French workers in the factory, one of them escorted the prisoners to the airfield construction site and told Fernande on 15th April that US President Roosevelt had passed away (12th April 1945). At the Nordland factory there were French and Ukrainian workers. One of the French workers was Jean Bouchard (nicknamed Kino). He realized that

³³⁰ Shaul M Shasha, "Medicine in the concentration camps of the Third Reich," Harefuah (Hebrew) 144, no. 4 (2005): 291-301.

³³¹ Weiss Testimony, "USCSF VHA 25098", (4) 15:50; Kon Testimony, "YVA O.3, 7560854", (2) 39:17-40:42.

³³² Marmor Testimony, "YVA O.3, 7814221", (4) 20:00.

³³³ Hay Testimony, "USHMM RG-50.583.0076", (2) 14:30.

³³⁴ Grunberger Testimony, "USCSF VHA 00266", (2) 28:14-28:52.

³³⁵ Marmor Testimony, "YVA O.3, 7814221", (4) 28:40.

³³⁶ Poplinger Testimony, "YVA O.3, V.T. 5907", 38:19.

Fernande is French, but he was not allowed to talk with her. He used to sing songs in French changing the lyrics to messages about the status of the war or about food he was hiding in various corners around the factory. The French passed a basket of food, and on its side, they wrote a message about the Soviets' advancing.³³⁷ The German / Dutch survivor Anita Mayer testifies: "Five young foreigners who lived in the city, three from France and two from the Netherlands were put to forced labor at the local factories. They passed information to us about the state of the war by talking loudly among themselves while working at the factory."³³⁸

The SS punished inmates for any attempt to contact the foreigners by shaving off their hair and by beatings.³³⁹ Frida Josephs reported about a pair of fine shoes, with a wooden sole and a cotton lining, that a French foreign worker brought to a French-speaking prisoner. She did not dare go out to work with them but once she went out for dinner with the shoes and the Jewish camp elder saw her and reported to the Germans. The SS lined up, for hours at night, all 500 inmates and tried to interrogate who own the shoes, until one inmate whistled. At six in the morning SS men and woman took out the female inmates of Frida Joseph's barracks and beat them with a whip in order to investigate who they got the shoes from, but none of them spoke, which angered the Germans even further.³⁴⁰

Czech foreigners worked on a machine in opposite to Piry Weiss, in the Wendt factory. She heard two of them claim that she understood their conversation and it made her blush. One of the Czechs tried to make a verbal contact with her. One day a Czech secretly gave her soap to wash her hands and she thanked him in Czech. Since then, every time he came to take care of her machine he tried to speak but she was afraid to answer because the SS guard was watching. When she went to the bathroom, an SS guard accompanied her and questioned her about what they were talking about. The SS slapped her hard on her face,

³³⁷ Chenin Testimony, "USCSF VHA 02072", (3) 17:06-18:20., (4) 06:11.

³³⁸ Mayer testimony, "USCSF VHA 19044" (4) 05:42-06:21.

³³⁹ Adler Testimony, "USCSF VHA 13433", (3) 28:35, (4) 08:03; Goldberger Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5374890" (2) 18:00; Kon testimony, "YVA O.3, 7560854" (2) 48:50.

³⁴⁰ Josephs Testimony, "USCSF VHA 26297", (6) 18:21-21:37.

again and again, while threatening to report to the camp commandant and that Piry would be executed that evening. When she returned to her position, the Czech saw the traces of the beating and asked which of the guards did it. He then threatened the SS guard to report on her after the upcoming liberation.³⁴¹

Most communication with the male workers was in German.³⁴² Many of the inmates knew that Nazi Germany was in retreat, that the Soviets were approaching from the east, and heard about the Allied invasion of Europe although they did not know its precise nature and status.³⁴³ The inmates received fragments of newspaper that were either smuggled by the foreign workers or a wrap of food packages bought from the town, which they translated in the evening at the camp. They learned that liberation was coming.³⁴⁴ Women who spoke French or English contacted the POWs and heard about the situation at the war front.³⁴⁵

French and Dutch, prisoners of war and political detainees worked in Nordland. Judith Marmor's sister (Maria Heydber) who spoke good French, contacted the French and they tried to help as much as they could. At Nordland there was an oven. The French cooked potatoes on it and left it where the prisoners could find them. If a machine stopped, the workers asked the SS guard to call a Frenchman and then they had a chance to exchange information. That is how they learned that the Soviets and the Allies were approaching. Maria's shoes were worn out, a Dutch worker brought her replacement shoes in a box.³⁴⁶

Two of the SS guards in the Kurt Laske factory were lesbians, preoccupied with themselves. They ignored Rachel Goldberger and the other workers at Kurt Laska to such a degree that the inmates were able to maintain better contact with the non-Jewish workers, Czech and Polish."³⁴⁷ Toward the liberation there was a change in the attitude of the Germans workers, particularly those who had never been mean towards the inmates all

³⁴¹ Weiss Testimony, "USCSF VHA 25098", (4) 16:35-20:20.

³⁴² Ibid., (4) 25:14.

³⁴³ Hay Testimony, "USHMM RG-50.583.0076", (2) 04:00; Herman Testimony, "YVA O.3, 3700469", 01:00:32.

³⁴⁴ Mor Testimony, "USCSF VHA 27444", (2) 28:28-28:50.

³⁴⁵ Neuvirth Testimony, "USCSF VHA 38107", (3) 28:23-29:46; Goldberger Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5374890", 01:59:59.

³⁴⁶ Marmor Testimony, "YVA O.3, 7814221", (3) 54:21-58:44; Probably the testimony by Frida Josephs above.

³⁴⁷ Goldberger Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5374890", (2) 10:00.

along. The workers at the Laske factory, on a night shift, used to sneak out to sleep on the piles of boards. The civil overseer discovered them but refrained from complaining.³⁴⁸ In their change of attitude the owner's sister handed socks out to the workers, not new but in good condition. Those who had leg or foot wounds were given bandages. Some of those women who had no injuries in the feet or legs remained without socks.³⁴⁹

A French prisoner of war fell in love with an inmate who had been married before her deportation to Auschwitz. The French and his friends tried to help Miriam Avraham and others at Kurt Laske, despite the severe restrictions, including passing on messages about the state of the war by carrying a basket with written messages on its side."³⁵⁰ The Polish and Czech workers treated the inmates well and fairly, and after the liberation kept them safe from the Red Army soldiers. Older SS men served in the camp (perhaps recruited as part of "total war" program).³⁵¹ Most of them were kind to the inmates, provided them with socks and stole food for them. A Jewish worker at the Laske factory became ill with diphtheria and needed medicine that was not available at the camp. Her fellow inmates wrote a note requesting medicine and handed it to a Polish worker. He purchased the medicine for her in town, brought it to the factory, and her life was saved.³⁵²

Mortality

Over the camp's eight months of existence, two women deported back to Auschwitz due to exhaustion in October 1944. Two women deported due to pregnancy during 1945.³⁵³ Their fate is unknown. Eleven women prisoners of the camp died due to illnesses and

³⁴⁸ Kon Testimony, "YVA O.3, 7560854", 44:36-45:36; Hay Testimony, "USHMM RG-50.583.0076", (2) 17:19.

³⁴⁹ Goldberger Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5374890", (2) 05:27; Yunitsman Testimony, "USCSF", (4) 14:54-16:08; Lefkowitz Testimony, "USCSF", (3) 22:01-22:54; Diamatstein Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5747617", (2) 14:10.

³⁵⁰ Avraham Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5087729", 01:47:13.

³⁵¹ Peter Longerich, *Joseph Goebbels: A Biography (Hebrew)*, trans. Yachin Ona and Aveia Ona-Baruchi (Modi'in Region: Kinneret Zmora-Bitan Dvir, 2018), 483-86.

³⁵² Poplinger Testimony, "YVA O.3, V.T. 5907", (2) 08:34-09:16.

³⁵³ Sawicka, "Liebau (Lubawka)," 382.

exhaustion.³⁵⁴ Five of them were reportedly Hungarian and two Dutch women. Their bodies were buried in coffins next to the Catholic cemetery in Liebau (Appendix D).³⁵⁵ Serena Pickel testified that two women died in the camp and four more were in such poor health on the day of liberation that they probably would not survive. She did not mention names or dates and I could not match those numbers to actual names.³⁵⁶

I found evidence of six women who were expelled from Liebau camp during its activity. Erzsebet Lebovits (GR# 59807) and Gisella Schaeffer (GR# 59901), both Hungarians from the 19 September 1944 transport, were deported (perhaps to Ravensbrück) on October 26 due to severe exhaustion and inability to work. Frenchwoman Susanne Kawitzky (GR# 74284) was sent to the Kratzau camp on 29 December 1944 and Dutchwoman Helena Haagenaar (GR# 74365) was deported apparently in connection with Mengele's visit on 13 March 1945. Both women were deported because they were found to be pregnant.³⁵⁷ Dutchwoman Hadassa Abraham (GR# 74344) died 21st December 1944. Olga Strauszman from Budapest (GR# 74251) died 3rd February 1945. Both are reported dead on ITS records, but they are not buried in Lubawka cemetery, and their burial place is unknown.

A mother, Erzebet Braune and her daughter, Eva, were in the camp. Frida Herman witnessed Eva death just prior to liberation. Her death was also reported by Sara Yunitsman.³⁵⁸ I found in ITS list of Liebau inmates that the two deceased, both Hungarian, who died a few days before liberation, were in the camp together with their mothers. Valeria Fried, 19, was with her mother Margit, 47. Eva Braune, 18, was with her mother Erzebet, 45. Frieda Herman, in her testimony about the hospitalization in the camp infirmary, days before the liberation, was an eyewitness of the death of Eva Braune from diphtheria. Her

³⁵⁴ Mor, "List of Imates at Liebau Camp."

³⁵⁵ Megargee et al., *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933-1945, Vol. I*, 761–62.

³⁵⁶ Pikkell Testimony, "USCSF VHA 04887", (4) 21:09.

³⁵⁷ Sawicka, "Liebau (Lubawka)," 382.

³⁵⁸ Yunitsman Testimony, "USCSF VHA 39294", (4) 27:06.

mother and sister were sitting next to her. The following morning Frieda Herman took her camp infirmary bed.³⁵⁹

When Frida Josephs arrived in Liebau Camp in October, she saw the corpse of a woman on the table. volunteers were being sought for a funeral procession and she volunteered. Frida witnessed six inmate deaths at the camp, most of them from diphtheria. She did accompany all of them for burial. After the liberation, she found a carpenter who put a mark on each grave with the name of the person buried there – an undertaking of which she is justly proud.³⁶⁰

Anita Mayer testified about the burial of a close friend: Theta Cohen suffered from tuberculosis. She could not continue working and was employed cutting old phone books into toilet paper. Eventually she passed away in the early spring. Anita and Six other Jewish inmates were allowed to go out to bury her. They received a coffin from the Kurt Laske factory and were given neat and full clothing for the purpose of being seen in town (it is not clear where that outfit came from) in order that town residents would not recognize them as Labor Camp inmates. They were accompanied by an SS woman soldier.³⁶¹ I found the name “Cohen Tet” on the collective grave in Lubawka. According to camp documentation she passed away on 2nd March 1945.

Anne De Levie worked at Nordland. She testified that in November she saw four bodies of women hanging from a tree and swaying in the wind. A Gestapo man warned the prisoners that this was the punishment for those who would not agree to work.”³⁶² There are no other testimonies about a simultaneous hanging of four inmates. The documented dates of inmate’s deaths do not show a case of four dead in one short period of time.

³⁵⁹ Herman Testimony, “YVA O.3, 3700469”, 53:07-57:00.

³⁶⁰ Josephs Testimony, “USCSF”, (6) 08:23-10:14; Frida Joseps (Rosner) (GRs # 74201) arrived at Liebau Camp in mid October. She probably saw one corpse, that of Jarlota Moskowitz who died in October 29. There were death cases a month before and a month after. See appendix D.

³⁶¹ Mayer testimony, “USCSF VHA 19044”, (4) 00:21-03:38.

³⁶² De_Levie Testimony, “Dairy, YVA O.3, 11683284,” 42–43.

There is no evidence of suicide in Camp Libau. Women who fell ill did not survive in some cases.³⁶³ Edith Grunberger testified that there were many cases of suicide by hanging in the shower room.³⁶⁴ There are no further evidence to that. It is difficult to know whether a death in the camp was due to illness, suicide or general despair brought on by the health and mental condition that led to the relinquishment of the struggle for life. Camp survivors, the testimony givers, had difficulty determining the causes of death of their peers and the health and mental condition of the deceased prior to their deaths.

According to Spoerer and Fleischhacker, the death rate in the labor camps was the lowest within the KLMs during the last year of the war, to which mainly Hungarian male and prisoners were deported. For Slave laborer there was an average of eleven percent prisoner mortality, but it includes the victims of the death marches in the last months of the war. In labor camps that were established at the end of the war and did not participate in death marches, ninety-eight percent of the prisoners survived, as in the case of Liebau Camp.³⁶⁵ However extreme cases were reported such as in Bautzen Camp in Saxony (established in October 1944) only two hundred of the six hundred prisoners lived to witness liberation day.³⁶⁶

I have visited the Lubawka cemetery and found a well preserved and maintained collective grave of seven Liebau Camp victims. (See appendix D). The tombstone on the grave does not include the names of the deceased Hadassa Avraham and Olga Strauszman. Their burial place or the reason why they were not commemorated on the tombstone is unknown. The community in the town of Lubawka prepared a site at the edge of the Catholic cemetery where tombstones were erected for Soviet soldiers who were buried in the town at the time of its liberation, as well as a mass grave tombstone for the deceased Jewish

³⁶³ Poplinger Testimony, "YVA O.3, V.T. 5907", (2) 16:04.

³⁶⁴ Grunberger Testimony, "USCSF VHA 00266", (2) 25:16.

³⁶⁵ Mark Spoerer and Jochen Fleischhacker, "Forced Laborers in Nazi Germany: Categories, Numbers, and Survivors," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 33, no. 2 (2002): 194–97, Tables 7 and 8.

³⁶⁶ Guterman, *A Narrow Bridge to Life: Jewish Forced Labor and Survival in the Gross-Rosen Camp System, 1940-1945*, 147.

women who died in Liebau Camp. Locals told me that the Jewish women's tomb was built and renovated by the Jewish community in Poland, the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland or by the nearby community in Wroclaw. I could not find further information.

Toward Liberation and Cessation of Work in the Factories

At the beginning of 1945, the front approached the Sudeten region, the Red Army advanced in Poland and in Germany. The move of the front in the east and west did not allow a death march to take place, and after three days of waiting, the women were returned to the camp and their routine continued, mostly in self-initiated work whose purpose was to continue to exhaust the inmates. Apparently, despite their inability to employ the inmates, the SS saw importance in their continued attrition.

At the beginning of 1945, the factories accumulated finished products that could not be sent to the front. About March 1945, work in the factories slowed down or stopped completely. Yehudit Poplinger testified that due to transportation difficulties in the region, the food shortage in the entire region has worsened.³⁶⁷ Toby Reinstein and the other prisoners were not aware of this. The food of the prisoners was a slice of bread and soup with flour, many became weak and sick and could not go to work.”³⁶⁸ On the other hand the SS understood that the area was besieged by the Red Army and there was nowhere to take the prisoners on a death march.³⁶⁹ In February 1945 Liebau Camp inmates were prepared for evacuation. Alizah Mor felt she would not survive it; the weather was very cold and for most inmates, shoes were not suitable for walking. As we stood in the field at the rollcall plaza ready to set off, the camp commander ordered us to return to our rooms.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁷ Poplinger Testimony, “YVA O.3, V.T. 5907”, (2) 10:15.

³⁶⁸ Reinstein Testimony, “USCSF VHA 54343”, 57:01-59:23.

³⁶⁹ Farkas Testimony, “USCSF VHA 35025”, (3) 24:19; Mor Testimony, “USCSF” (2) 26:22-27:09, (3) 01:00.

³⁷⁰ Mor Testimony, “YVA O.3, 3561928” 1:44:41.

With the end of the war in sight and the impending liberation, Frida Josephs was in a group of inmates at Nordland who planned minor sabotage to the production process by picking up screws and inserting them into the machines. Ten women who were not involved in the conspiracy were angry that they had been suspended from work while the machine was being repaired. They were employed for days transporting heavy packages, from one corner of the factory to the other.³⁷¹ Edith Neuvirth group was sent to do pointless work, moving snow from one spot to another. It was very cold; they were working from morning to evening with frozen hands and feet through all the hours of daylight.³⁷²

Sara Yunitsman was with a group of workers taken to collect potatoes in a field five kilometers from the camp. They walked single-file and were threatened that anyone who goes far from the group or would attempt to eat potatoes during picking would be shot dead on the spot.³⁷³ It is probably since the SS were in desperate need for supply of food and were increasingly insecure about losing the upcoming end of the war. The Laske factory continued to partially work until the day of liberation.³⁷⁴ In the months before the liberation, work in the Heinz Wendt factory slowed down, the German foreman fled, and the workers were sent to dig trenches for soldiers.³⁷⁵

The snow began to melt and the labor requirement in the factories decreased, it was decided to use the available labor to build an airfield near Lipienica, six kilometers away from Liebau camp.³⁷⁶ It is possible that the construction of the airfield was aimed at providing raw materials and foodstuffs and transporting finished goods with the help of transport planes when land transport and trains were no longer available to Nazi Germany.

The Polish historian Marian Gabrowski investigated the objectives for the construction of

³⁷¹ Josephs Testimony, "USCSF VHA 26297", (6) 13:43-16:07.

³⁷² Neuvirth Testimony, "USCSF VHA 38107", (4) 01:03; Sara Tabak Testimony, "YVA O.3, 10084, 3564605", (2) 08:40; Weissman Testimony, "USCSF", (3) 11:14; Farkas Testimony, "USCSF", (3) 17:35; Avraham Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5087729", 01:51:24-01:53:20; Berger Testimony, "YVA O.3, 3564021", 01:04:16.

³⁷³ Yunitsman Testimony, "USCSF VHA 39294", (4) 16:40-17:17.

³⁷⁴ Kon Testimony, "YVA O.3, 7560854", (2) 50:08; Goldberger Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5374890", (2) 11:00-11:52; Mor testimony, "YVA O.3, 3561928", 01:45:56.

³⁷⁵ Poplinger Testimony, "YVA O.3, V.T. 5907" (2) 12:53.

³⁷⁶ Meyer_Kamp, *I ricordi di Inge e dei suoi figli Rolf e Nico Kamp (Italian)*, 43.

the airport and raised several interesting hypotheses such as the construction of a test field for the development of new airplanes, conducted during the end of the war. However, the construction of the field was not completed and after the war there were no traces left of the work that the inmates did there during the spring months of 1945.³⁷⁷

In March-April 1945, Fernande Chenin, Neli Shpitz and others were sent out for area excavation and construction of an airfield. On their way they were climbing and descending a hill while escorted by Wehrmacht troops (Appendix I). they walked back and forth every day in the freezing cold and strong winds in the open, lightly dressed, hungry and exhausted, while food rations continued to be reduced.³⁷⁸ Meyer Kamp, Sara Tabak and Judith Marmor testified: “We were forced to work with frozen hands digging foundations for the airfield. We were only women working there. We received coffee once a day, no bread, and no food. We had no choice but to eat grass and suck small pieces of wood just to have something in the mouths.”³⁷⁹

Toby Reinstein, Judith Marmor, Anita Mayer, Sara Tabak and Edith Grunberger, worked digging and clearing stones, trying to straighten a hilly area. They were engaged in three types of work: one group was cutting the grass-covered turf into cubes. A second group was moving the cubes two hundred meters aside. Finally, the third group collected stones from the vacated area and piled them on the side of the field. Large rocks were blown up with dynamite and they had to clear the stones. The work looked pointless, and they made no real progress there. On the way back and forth they were forced to sing. There was no snow on the way, but the condition of their shoes was critical and made it difficult to walk. They were cruelly supervised by male SS soldiers who did not let them rest forcing them with beatings and shouting, to continue working. Their hands froze and they could not feel

³⁷⁷ Marian Gabrowski, *Śladami Zapomnianego Lotniskaw Lipienicy (Polish) – The forgotten airport in Lipienica*, 2nd Editio (Polkowice: Nakładem Własnym Autora (Author’s own effort), 2018).

³⁷⁸ Chenin Testimony, “USCSF VHA 02072”, (3) 08:21, (3) 16:05-16:40; Grunberger Testimony, “USCSF”, (2) 28:14-28:52; Farkas Testimony, “USCSF”, (3) 14:08; Poplinger Testimony, “YVA O.3, V.T. 5907”, (2) 10:15; Shpitz testimony, “YVA O.3, 4026865”, 01:04:28; Kraus Testimony, “YVA O.3, 12517157”, 01:44:31.

³⁷⁹ Meyer_Kamp, *I ricordi di Inge e dei suoi figli Rolf e Nico Kamp (Italian)*, 38; Tabak Testimony, “YVA O.3, 10084, 3564605”, 59:00; Marmor Testimony, “YVA O.3, 7814221”, (4) 19:05.

the digging tools they were holding. Half of the group who worked outside became ill and could not go to work. Under extreme hunger, poor physical conditions, and useless work at a high level of difficulty, some of the inmates were prone to suicidal thoughts. Near the airport construction site, passed the railway from Liebau to Lipienica. Sara Tabak testified about a suicidal plan to go to the toilet while a train is approaching and lose her life under its wheels. Luckily, the airfield construction work did not last too long. They only worked there for few weeks.³⁸⁰

Elona Kraus tells about the last days of outdoor work: "A few days before liberation, the hunger became so severe that one day while working at the airfield Elona Kraus heard a whistle sound, calling to come and get coffee. One of the workers started running to the neighboring village (probably Lipienica, where the airfield works were constructed). Elona and nine other inmates ran after her. The Germans fired after them but did not hit anyone. The women entered a house where a family was eating breakfast. "Without asking, we all received sandwiches from the family. An SS woman soldier caught up with the woman who started running first and beat her until she lost consciousness. We poured water on her and then we all returned to the camp. On the way to the camp the ten of us marched in the lead. At the camp we were brought into a room at gunpoint and ordered to raise our hands and explain our actions. We explained that the famine was very severe, and we were hungry, although we all knew there was nowhere to run." The declared punishment was shaving off their hair. However, the SS woman soldier settled it with just a slap. After that incident, the inmates did not go back to work at the airfield anymore."³⁸¹

By late April 1945, the despair was common for the inmates and the SS guards. According to testimonies I found in the SS guards trail documents, they were not capable to follow the orders that came from Berlin, and they were aware of the difficult situation of

³⁸⁰ Reinstein Testimony, "USCSF VHA 54343", 57:17-58:11; Marmor Testimony, "YVA O.3, 7814221", (4) 00:57-15:11; Mayer testimony, "USCSF VHA 19044", (3) 24:15; Tabak Testimony, "YVA O.3, 10084, 3564605", (2) 03:02-04:10; Grunberger Testimony, "USCSF VHA 00266", 57:17-58:11.

³⁸¹ Kraus Testimony, "YVA O.3, 12517157" 1:45:17-1:47:40 1:51:46-1:52:22.

Nazi Germany. I conclude that after the incident at the airport site, the camp commander realized the pointlessness of continuing the activity and the work at the airport site was stopped. At that time, during a rollcall, the camp commander hinted that the front was not too far. She said that the mayor of Liebau town (a German) asked her to evacuate the camp and that she had refused and saying they would wait for the end and for liberation.³⁸² Edith Neuvirth testified that in the month before liberation there was a feeling that the SS were trying to soften their attitude towards Liebau camp prisoners.³⁸³ Women who accompanied Germans to buy groceries in the nearby town managed to bring back fragments of newspapers.³⁸⁴ They knew that the front was approaching but did not yet hear the sounds of a war.³⁸⁵

Shortly prior to liberation a Soviet plane passed by overhead, dropping leaflets in Russian, that encouraged them to hold on as the Red Army would soon be arriving.³⁸⁶ Cannon shelling from the frontlines began to be heard in the Liebau camp. A French POWs at Kurt Laske whispered to Sarah Yunitsman that the Red Army is approaching and were already in Northern Silesia and East Germany.³⁸⁷ In the last few days in the camp, they no longer received food.³⁸⁸ The inmates continued to lose weight and grew very weak.³⁸⁹ They were forbidden to leave their dorms. Prior to liberation and after the slowdown of the factories, heating was stopped at the factories and in the residences, as there was no firewood or coal.³⁹⁰ At that time, they were informed that Hitler had committed suicide.³⁹¹

³⁸² Kon Testimony, "YVA O.3, 7560854", (2) 44:36-46:27.

³⁸³ Neuvirth Testimony, "USCSF VHA 38107", (4) 02:10.

³⁸⁴ Tabak Testimony, "YVA O.3, 10084, 3564605", (2) 06:35-07:10.

³⁸⁵ Skodova, *Tri Roky bez Mena (Three Years Without Name)*, 196. Mention is made of the newspaper *Oberschlesische Zeitung*, a daily newspaper published in Upper Silesia, a stronghold of the German population. The newspaper's editorial staff sat in Katowice. The newspaper contained filtered news about what was happening at the front.

³⁸⁶ Goldberger Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5374890", (2) 23:56.

³⁸⁷ Yunitsman Testimony, "USCSF VHA 39294", (4) 25:00-25:22.

³⁸⁸ Berger Testimony, "YVA O.3, 3564021", 01:12:22.

³⁸⁹ Mayer testimony, "USCSF VHA 19044", (4) 05:00-05:15.

³⁹⁰ Tabak Testimony, "YVA O.3, 10084, 3564605", 58:09; Kraus Testimony, "YVA O.3, 12517157" 1:29:11.

³⁹¹ De_Liema Testimony, "USCSF VHA 02072", (3) 21:27-22:23.

On Saturday, May 6th, just two days prior to liberation, Rose De_Liema was working on the airfield. The prisoners were told to return to the barracks. The French laborer Kino passed by on a bicycle singing “peace-peace.” De_Liema testifies that the SS female Commandoführer ordered the soup to be poisoned that day (it is not clear what the source of her information is) but fortunately the poison was not supplied on time. The commander invited two inmates to her office and tried to convince them of her positive attitude toward the Jewish inmates in the camp. This was her preparation for the arrival of the Soviets.³⁹² During the night before the liberation Renée Firestone heard the thunder of cannons and saw “Stalin’s candles”, Soviet lighting bombs. She did not know that the war was over and hoped that the Soviets would bomb their factories as well.³⁹³ On May 7th Sara Tabak was called for a rollcall three times in one day. The inmates realized that something unusual was happening because they were not being taken to work. They realized that the factories were shut down by the owners who had fled.³⁹⁴ However Sara Yunitsman testified that the SS guards did not change their behavior, did not attempt to communicate with the prisoners, but did not harass them anymore.³⁹⁵

The Plan to Blow Up the Camp and the Actions of the Blockältester

From the testimonies we learn about the intention of Nazi Germany to destroy all evidence of the existence of the labor camps and the living conditions in them, by poisoning the inmates’ food and by killing the inmates with explosives in the barracks. An order was received from Berlin, in view of the imminent arrival of the Soviets, to annihilate all the prisoners, the evidence of Nazi crimes and of the very existence of the camps. We have no documents to support these orders or the intention. The information and evidence come only from fragments of testimonies given by survivors who witnessed the event. The SS guards,

³⁹² Ibid., (3) 23:30-24:00, (3) 24:21, (3) 24:44.

³⁹³ Firestone Testimony, “USCSF VHA 00151”, (2) 23:50.

³⁹⁴ Tabak Testimony, “YVA O.3, 10084, 3564605”, 55:14-57:00.

³⁹⁵ Yunitsman Testimony, “USCSF VHA 39294”, (4) 27:28.

in their trials, bothered not to mention the order or any intent to obey it or to refuse, even though they were probably aware of the orders given to the camp headquarters.

French POWs worked in the Wendt factory and were guarded by an SS man. Piry Weiss learned that one of the POWs heard from an SS man that the commandant of the women's camp has a stockpile of hand grenades with which she intends to kill all the prisoners before the upcoming liberation. The French organized his fellow POWs to patrol around the camp fence and prevent the Germans from carrying out their plan. The inmates saw the POWs patrolling around the fence and could not understand the reason.³⁹⁶

Inge Meyer Kamp wrote: "At the Nordland factory, the manager sat in a glass office above the area where the prisoners worked. He turned out to be a good person, saving the inmates' lives twice. He was ordered to mix poison in the inmates' food but decided to hide the poison and not use it. Secondly and most importantly, a day before liberation, he protected the inmates from the SS torturers by arranging a resistance group that he had formed with some Dutch forced laborer (*Arbeitseinsatz*) in the factory."³⁹⁷

At the same time, the Block elder received information through a Polish inspector at the Wendt factory about the intentions of the SS to blow up the camp, she cooperated with the inmates to thwart it. Serena Pikkel saw male foreigners march and patrol around the camp preventing the act.³⁹⁸ After liberation it was discovered that the inspector was a Jew who had been passing as Aryan.³⁹⁹ At the same time, French foreign workers passed on the news that the Germans intended to set fire to the inmates' barracks before retreating. It turns out that the French had warned the Germans that if they dared to blow up or burn the camp, they would take revenge on them after liberation.⁴⁰⁰ The Italian prisoners told the inmates, according to Edith Grunberger, that on the final night, prior to liberation, two SS women

³⁹⁶ Weiss Testimony, "USCSF VHA 25098", (4) 22:46-23:43.

³⁹⁷ Meyer_Kamp, *I ricordi di Inge e dei suoi figli Rolf e Nico Kamp (Italian)*, 39.

³⁹⁸ Pikkel Testimony, "USCSF VHA 04887", (4) 17:58-18:54.

³⁹⁹ About Paasing see: María Carla Sánchez and Linda Schlossberg, *Passing* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2001).

⁴⁰⁰ Herman Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5262289", 01:28:37.

soldiers who lived in a building high above the camp planned to throw hand grenades at them.⁴⁰¹ Piry Weiss said that after liberation, survived inmates entered the Camp commander office and found there stock of grenade crates.⁴⁰²

The news of the Germans' intention was passed on to some of the prisoners, Sara Tabak one of them: "We were on the building ground floor. One of the energetic women in the group made an escape plan through the big windows. She planned everything in detail: who would break the window and come out first, and what will be the order of evacuation from the room. An inmate guard was placed to detect the beginning of the arson early."⁴⁰³ Engaging in escape plans occupied them, helped them ward off hunger somewhat, and inspired hope that they would return home soon.⁴⁰⁴

One of the French forced laborers who worked at Nordland was a Jew who had managed to conceal his identity and pass as Aryan. He guarded Judith Marmor and the workers. He offered to watch the camp. In case of emergency, the inmates would open a window and signal three times with the lights. If the SS tried to take them out for a march, he promised to recruit the French and Dutch for a rescue. The connection with the French was probably formed through the Camp Elder, Melanie Zimmerman, who was kind to the prisoners. The deportation did not take place and therefore this plan did not materialize.⁴⁰⁵

Frida Herman was hospitalized in the camp Rivier several days before the liberation. Since the Rivier window looked towards the the SS soldiers building, she witnessed the activity carried out from there and reported it: "In the camp clinic, there was a window overlooking the SS Guards' building. Melanie, the Block alder, entered together with the French-speaking inmate Sarah, who was in contact with the French POWs. Together with the Jewish doctor, they turned off the clinic lights and kept watch on the SS women's

⁴⁰¹ Grunberger Testimony, "USCSF VHA 00266", (3) 10:34.

⁴⁰² Weiss Testimony, "USCSF VHA 25098", (4) 22:46-25:00.

⁴⁰³ Tabak Testimony, "YVA O.3, 10084, 3564605" (2) 08:40-10:33.

⁴⁰⁴ Poplinger Testimony, "YVA O.3, V.T. 5907", (2) 10:57.

⁴⁰⁵ Marmor Testimony, "YVA O.3, 7814221" (4) 20:00.

building, without explaining why. They were looking out for any German move to start blowing up the camp.”⁴⁰⁶

During the last night before liberation the Germans placed machine guns on the roofs and the inmates feared that they intended to slaughter them.⁴⁰⁷ In the end, the Germans apparently had neither time nor opportunity to carry out the massacre and kill the prisoners, and so the inmates of the camp survived.⁴⁰⁸ I can assume that the camp headquarters did not have officers who were trained nor were able to lead an act of mass murder and in addition they knew that they did not have the appropriate manpower to carry out such an act. There is no doubt that the senior officials of the camp headquarters knew about the desperate situation of Nazi Germany, and therefore such an act was, for them, an act of suicide. From the testimonies it appears that SS camp personnel took care to leak the Nazis’ intentions in such a way that a warning would be passed to the inmates as well as to the foreign workers around them, mostly western Europeans, thereby giving the inmates protection through the last days before liberation and preventing the mass slaughter that the camp administrators were not entrusted with.

The Day of Liberation

Liebau Camp was liberated on the last day of the war in Europe, among the last to be liberated. The camp was not large, and it was hidden among the trees.⁴⁰⁹ There is significant variance in the survivors’ testimonies describing the day of liberation which was doubtlessly a highly significant moment in their life. The Germans in the area, including SS personnel in the camp and civilian residents of the nearby towns, knew and understood that

⁴⁰⁶ Herman Testimony, “YVA O.3, 3700469”, 01:01:30. From Appendix E it is possible to understand the proximity of the women’s building to the building of the SS guards. Apparently the clinic was on the side facing the SS quarters and therefore the viewing was from there.

⁴⁰⁷ Adler Testimony, “USCSF VHA 13433”, (4) 08:26.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid. (4) 08:26-08:34.

⁴⁰⁹ Weiss Testimony, “USCSF VHA 25098”, (4) 22:27.

defeat was imminent. Many of the Germans remained in the area until remarkably close to surrender and feared for their fate under Soviet occupation.

The day of liberation was an important day in the life of the camp and almost all the testimonies have a reference to the events of that day. There are differences in the small details between the testimonies, such as when they first realized that the Germans had fled, when did the inmates went out from the residence, whether all the Germans disappeared or whether Wehrmacht soldiers remained in the area and what was the share of the foreign workers that day. The differences between the testimonies do not fundamentally change the description of the events on that day and therefore, despite the differences in the versions, I present them as they were given.

At night the SS fled the camp, and, in the morning of 8th May, Toby Reinstein have seen no guards at the gate. She testified: “we feared that the camp had been booby-trapped with dynamite, and we were afraid to leave because we were still on German soil.”⁴¹⁰ 8th May was a beautiful sunny day.⁴¹¹ The Camp Elder, Melanie, advised Piry Weiss and Sonja Waitzner to be quiet and careful, as something new was happening outside. They started praying and crying because they realized it is probably liberation.”⁴¹² Renée Firestone testified about a French POWs how tied a white flag to a chimney of an oven and walked around the camp shouting “Nazi Kaput.” Some prisoners went out and found that the Nazis had fled at night. They did not know what was happening and feared the return of the Germans.”⁴¹³

French POW entered, and Sara Yunitsman heard him reporting that the Germans had fled and announced: “Women, you are free.”⁴¹⁴ The POWs advised the women to stay on their rooms for fear the Germans would return to retaliate, and for fear of mines. Piry

⁴¹⁰ Reinstein Testimony, “USCSF VHA 54343”, (2) 00:00-03:00.

⁴¹¹ Neuvirth Testimony, “USCSF VHA 38107”, (4) 04:30.

⁴¹² Weiss Testimony, “USCSF VHA 25098”, (4) 24:04-24:50; Waitzner testimony, “USCSF” (1996), (4) 08:35.

⁴¹³ Firestone Testimony, “USCSF VHA 00151”, (2) 25:45.

⁴¹⁴ Yunitsman Testimony, “USCSF VHA 39294”, (4) 29:57-(5) 00:29.

Weiss testified that they stayed at the camp until the entry of the Soviets.⁴¹⁵ On the barracks side Fernande Chenin encountered a woman from the main building side. She entered and said there was no German guard on the tower, no dogs, no one was there, the kitchen was also unmanned and there were no Germans anywhere in the camp.⁴¹⁶ I can assume that the women on the side of the building had a better view of the SS activity, the kitchen, the SS building and the gate and therefore they were the first to realize that the Germans had fled..

In the morning, Renée Firestone was not called to go out for the morning rollcall. She was still afraid to go out until in the afternoon one women went out to the rollcall square, raised her hands, and said: “We are free.”⁴¹⁷ On the barracks side, Rachel Grunberger did not hear the whistle for rollcall. When they went out, they discovered that it was already daylight, yet they did not realize that they had been liberated. Several Germans, Wehrmacht soldiers – not SS, remained in the camp.”⁴¹⁸ At first, Sara Tabak was afraid to go out and just watched what was happening through the window. Later someone dared to go out and found that the German positions were empty. Only then did more women begin to venture out, including leaving the camp through the open gate.⁴¹⁹ Miriam Avraham witnessed the older camp commander, a Wehrmacht officer who was kind to the inmates, returned to the camp without his insignia and without a belt. He opened the gate, and informed the survivors that they were free. He advised them not to leave the camp for several days because there were still snipers in the area. The survivors wandered around the camp for half a day and did not know what to do further.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁵ Weiss Testimony, “USCSF VHA 25098”, (4) 24:50; Reinstein Testimony, “USCSF”, (2) 03:37-05:40; Waitzner testimony, “USCSF” (1996), (4) 08:55.

⁴¹⁶ Chenin Testimony, “USCSF VHA 02072”, (3) 20:12; Adler Testimony, “USCSF”, (4) 10:08; Lefkowitz Testimony, “USCSF”, (4) 08:13-09:42.

⁴¹⁷ Firestone Testimony, “USCSF VHA 00151”, 25:05.

⁴¹⁸ Grunberger Testimony, “USCSF VHA 00266”, (2) 29:27; This contrasts with other testimonies which said that not a single German remained in the camp. Apparently, from additional testimonies, the older Wehrmacht officer, who did not particularly harass the women prisoners, returned to the camp in civilian outfit, after a few days.

⁴¹⁹ Tabak Testimony, “YVA O.3, 10084, 3564605”, (2) 12:00.

⁴²⁰ Avraham Testimony, “YVA O.3, 5087729”, 01:56:22.

Entrance of the Red Army

Then came the Soviets.⁴²¹ Rose Weissman and Piry Weiss have encountered five Red Army soldiers, the first to enter the camp on the barracks side. The soldiers took off their hats and began to sing. An hour later a Soviet platoon arrived. The gate was open. The women hesitated to go out, afraid to pass through a gate that connected the barracks to the main building.⁴²² Toby Reinstein and Renée Firestone testifies that from the barracks side the Soviet soldiers continued and entered to the building side. The women sat quietly in the dorms, not knowing how to react. The soldiers said that we were the first camp where they found living prisoners, and they gave us canned food from a truck they brought with them.⁴²³

The soldiers set up a kitchen and prepared food for the survivors, but the food was too rich in fat, and many suffered from an inability to digest, became ill from the food and the soldiers implored them to eat only a little and slowly.⁴²⁴ New frightening rumors soon began to be heard. It was said that the Red Army soldiers, who abstained from women in all their long days of military service, were now looking for women, and that even women who had lost their female shape and figure and looked very shrunken and miserable could be targeted by them.⁴²⁵

Sara Yunitsman, Renée Firestone, Judit Adler, Serena Pikkell, Elona Kraus, Rose Weissman, Ela Diamatstein testifies about that special day. In the afternoon, a Soviet officer appeared and asked them: "Yibrey?!", one of the women replied, "Da, da." The officer got off the horse and burst into tears. Then they heard a loudspeaker calling in Yiddish: "We are the Red Army; we have come to liberate you". They were asked to go to the rollcall plaza. A young, tall, and handsome Soviet officer on horseback, with a large bleeding scar on his face stood there and spoke Yiddish to them: "We are Red Army soldiers; we have

⁴²¹ Herman Testimony, "YVA O.3, 3700469", 01:01:57-01:03:05.

⁴²² Weissman Testimony, "USCSF VHA 18569", (3) 19:26; Weiss Testimony, "USCSF VHA 25098", (4) 25:31.

⁴²³ Reinstein Testimony, "USCSF VHA 54343", (2) 06:23; Firestone Testimony, "USCSF VHA 00151", (2) 26:35.

⁴²⁴ Weiss Testimony, "USCSF VHA 25098", (4) 26:36-27:00; Tabak Testimony, "YVA O.3, 10084, 3564605", (2) 13:06-14:00; Pikkell Testimony, "USCSF", (4) 21:38.

⁴²⁵ Mor Testimony, "USCSF VHA 27444", (3) 01:38-02:57; Grunberger Testimony, "USCSF", (3) 01:38-02:57.

liberated Lithuania and Poland and found many dead inmates. I am happy to find you alive. In half an hour you will receive bread and boiled potatoes, we will close the camp and Red Army soldiers will guard you, but you are free to do as you wish. I will also take care of you from our soldiers who have been in a war far from home for four years. Stay in the camp and we will bring you food every day.” The food he promised did arrive.⁴²⁶

Piry Weiss testified that the Jewish officer called the survivors “Shvesters,” sisters in Yiddish. He said: “Dear children, now I am one of you, until now everywhere we came we were too late.⁴²⁷ So glad we were able to save you.⁴²⁸ Others were shot before we reached them.⁴²⁹ He told them of the horrors he had seen in Lublin and elsewhere along the way.⁴³⁰ He announced that he had released camp after camp, waved his gun and said he had sworn to God to take revenge on the Germans for what they had done.⁴³¹ Many liberated inmates wept in front of The Soviet Jewish commandant. Ronnie Goldstein-Van Cleef and Thea Aschkenase testifies that survivors gathered and sang the anthem “Hatikva.” The commandant organized them according to their origin and ordered each group to sing the International in their language.”⁴³²

Vera Kon and Edith Grunberger testifies that the commandant entered the clinic and spoke to the patients and staff in Yiddish. He said that he had passed through another camp and was shown a large pit and a Jewish mass grave. He thumped his rifle on the floor and vowed revenge. Then he talked to each of the patients and promised to help. The

⁴²⁶ Yunitsman Testimony, “USCSF VHA 39294”, (5) 00:43-01:12; Firestone Testimony, “USCSF”, (2) 26:35; Adler Testimony, “USCSF”, (4) 09:03-09:23; Pikkell Testimony, “USCSF”, (4) 20:53; Kraus Testimony, “YVA O.3, 12517157”, 01:55:00-01:59:43; Weissman Testimony, “USCSF”, (3) 11:58-12:26; Diamatstein Testimony, “YVA O.3, 5747617”, (2) 21:50.

⁴²⁷ Weiss Testimony, “USCSF VHA 25098”, (4) 25:47-26:16.

⁴²⁸ Waitzner Testimony, “USCSF VHA 14429”, (4) 09:55.

⁴²⁹ Goldberger Testimony, “YVA O.3, 5374890”, (2) 27:09.

⁴³⁰ Chenin Testimony, “USCSF VHA 02072”, (3) 22:31-22:57.

⁴³¹ Neuvirth Testimony, “USCSF VHA 38107”, (4) 04:30; Although Edith Neuvirth testified that she heard from the Jewish officer that the Soviets liberated camp after camp, in other testimonies he said that in other camps they did not manage to save the prisoners and he was happy to find the women alive in Liebau.

⁴³² Goldstein-Van Cleef, “Anne Frank: The Last Seven Months,” 200; Aschkenase testimony, “USCSF VHA 38084”, (4) 26:50-(5) 01:11.

Soviets did not really help them.”⁴³³ Red Army soldiers were placed around the camp and the survivors were advised not to leave the camp for fear of rape and looting by the soldiers.⁴³⁴ The French prisoners of war volunteered to guard the camp and the survivors.⁴³⁵

The commandant promised to return after the liberation of the town of Liebau.⁴³⁶ He asked that they stay in the camp until the Red Army cleans the area and moves on. He came back a few days later and said they could go out.⁴³⁷ German female Wehrmacht soldiers remained in town. A Soviet officer pulled out a gun in front of them and told Rose De_Liema and other women: “You are allowed to do with them as you wish, no one will punish you.” None of the women moved, not the Hungarians, Poles, Germans, or the Dutch who witnessed it.”⁴³⁸

Margaret Farkas and Piry Weiss testifies: “Three SS women, at the town of Liebau, abducted a Russian-speaking and a fluent English-speaking surviving woman, disguised themselves as survivors, and tried to escape under a false identity. When they met Red Army soldiers, The surviving women betrayed the SS women, and they were executed on the spot by the Soviet soldiers.”⁴³⁹ SS women tried to hide in a small forest next to the camp. Yehudit Poplinger and Margaret Farkas were in group of women who caught the SS women, while they begged to keep them safe. Some women offered to drag them to Budapest for trial. Others took the meanest of the SS women, dragged them into the woods, tied them to trees, beat them and cut their hair.”⁴⁴⁰ Those SS guards who showed more humane treatment the survivors hid in the camp and helped protect them from the Soviet soldiers.”⁴⁴¹

⁴³³ Kon Testimony, “YVA O.3, 7560854”, (2) 50:55-51:19, 01:05:41; Grunberger Testimony, “USCSF VHA 00266”, (3) 00:30-01:11.

⁴³⁴ Poplinger Testimony, “YVA O.3, V.T. 5907”, (2) 19:00.

⁴³⁵ Neuvirth Testimony, “USCSF VHA 38107”, (4) 04:49; Waitzner testimony, “USCSF”, (4) 11:19.

⁴³⁶ Firestone Testimony, “USCSF VHA 00151”, (2) 27:09-27:24.

⁴³⁷ Poplinger Testimony, “YVA O.3, V.T. 5907”, (2) 18:46-19:00.

⁴³⁸ De_Liema Testimony, “USCSF VHA 02072”, (3) 24:45-25:32.

⁴³⁹ Farkas Testimony, “USCSF VHA 35025”, (4) 03:31; Weiss Testimony, “USCSF VHA 25098”, (5) 00:00-02:18.

⁴⁴⁰ Poplinger Testimony, “YVA O.3, V.T. 5907”, (2) 08:40, (2) 19:11-20:34.

⁴⁴¹ Farkas Testimony, “USCSF VHA 35025”, (3) 23:30; No names of SS guards were listed in the testimony.

Going Out to Liebau town

The testimonies regarding the first days after the liberation and especially regarding the entry to the town are not conclusive. Some of the testimonies are about staying in the camp according to the instructions of the Jewish officer and the recommendation of the old Wehrmacht officer. Other witnesses report entering the city when the Germans were still loading their belongings onto carts and cars as well as finding a hot stew in an abandoned house. From the evidence it seems that there was disorder in the lives of the survivors during the first days of freedom, there were apparently groups that acted separately and without coordination. I will present here the testimonies as given by the witnesses.

On the morning of the liberation day, many German citizens were fleeing the town with only some of their belongings, leaving behind food, clothing, and furniture. The liberated women were eager to go to the town to search for food, suitable clothing, to wash themselves and to find useful tools such as dinnerware and sewing tools. They wanted to leave the camp immediately upon liberation. Toby Reinstein and Frida Herman went and entered the town and saw German soldiers and citizens fleeing with cars and horse carriages. They heard shots from an unclear direction. Germans fled for fear of the Soviets towards the area occupied by the Americans.⁴⁴²

The Germans emptied the houses but left food in the basements. When Sonja Waitzner and Neli Shpitz got to one of the houses in town, they found a noodle stew still hot and realized that the German residents had left recently. The stew was hot enough, and they were able to break their hunger.”⁴⁴³ In town, Judith Marmor found flour, potatoes and chopped wood for the stoves. The women cooked food for themselves and took hot showers.⁴⁴⁴ In an abandoned house that had belonged to SS man Judit Adler found food and

⁴⁴² Reinstein Testimony, “USCSF VHA 54343”, (2) 07:27, (2) 9:26-10:52, (2) 19:11; Herman Testimony, “YVA O.3, 5262289”, 01:30:20.

⁴⁴³ Waitzner Testimony, “USCSF VHA 14429”, (4) 10:38; Shpitz testimony, “YVA O.3, 4026865”, 01:09:03-01:09:47.

⁴⁴⁴ Marmor Testimony, “YVA O.3, 7814221” (4) 30:07.

clothing. They sewed pants and shirts for themselves out of plain linen.⁴⁴⁵ Some did not touch the food in town for fear of poisoning.”⁴⁴⁶ Piry Weiss found cans and food items and brought large bags of brown sugar to the camp. The women in the camp ate anything that filled their stomachs, including brown sugar with baking soda, and got severe diarrhea and stomach poisoning.”⁴⁴⁷ In other testimonies, the Soviets and the foreign workers provided food to the survivors. I conclude from the testimonies that the first articles of food, such as brown sugar, were brought by the women who left shortly after liberation for the town. Only later did the other food items arrived.

The Red army soldiers closed large areas of the town and prevented Serena Pikkell from entering them in search of food and clothing.”⁴⁴⁸ Women came to a German family in a nearby town and saw that the citizens also had no food supplies other than potatoes.⁴⁴⁹ Throughout the months of famine, the women dreamed of food but upon liberation they had difficulty eating more than two slices of bread.⁴⁵⁰ Many contracted severe diarrhea that lasted for a long time.⁴⁵¹ Survivors who started eating too early developed dysentery and typhus.⁴⁵² Those who maintained controlled eating did not get sick.⁴⁵³ Without any supervision by the camp elder staff and without self-supervision, the camp grew dirty and started to stink.”⁴⁵⁴

The event of breaking the hunger by cooking a horse appears in numerous testimonies of the survivors. The facts surrounding it vary between the testimonies. Apparently, one of the factory owners stole a horse from a German farmer in the area and sent it to the camp. They slaughtered the horse, and using potatoes from the camp kitchen

⁴⁴⁵ Neuvirth Testimony, “USCSF VHA 38107”, (4) 05:28-06:13.

⁴⁴⁶ Adler Testimony, “USCSF VHA 13433”, (4) 10:08.

⁴⁴⁷ Weiss Testimony, “USCSF VHA 25098”, (4) 26:50-(5) 01:11, (5) 04:46-06:12.

⁴⁴⁸ Pikkell Testimony, “USCSF VHA 04887”, (4) 22:44.

⁴⁴⁹ Avraham Testimony, “YVA O.3, 5087729”, 01:56:53-01:58:04.

⁴⁵⁰ Tabak Testimony, “YVA O.3, 10084, 3564605”, (2) 16:00.

⁴⁵¹ Kon Testimony, “YVA O.3, 7560854”, (2) 52:59-53:11.

⁴⁵² Herman Testimony, “YVA O.3, 3700469”, 01:04:24.

⁴⁵³ Shpitz testimony, “YVA O.3, 4026865”, (2) 08:03.

⁴⁵⁴ Kraus Testimony, “YVA O.3, 12517157”, 02:01:47.

they prepared a Goulash for the liberated inmates.⁴⁵⁵ French POWs returned the survivors to the camp after a few days in town and cooked them light food and porridge so that they would not get sick from heavy food.⁴⁵⁶ The Red Cross arrived at the camp only after many days had passed. Dutch forced laborers (it is not clear from the testimonies who these were) tried to get food for them.⁴⁵⁷

Preparing for the Return and the Way Home

Leaving the camp and returning home was a significant move for most of the survivors, therefore it takes a significant place in their testimonies. The camp was liberated in early May yet many of the survivors, especially those traveling east, arrived home only at the end of August 1945.⁴⁵⁸ Only a few survivors left immediately upon liberation.⁴⁵⁹ Most stayed for several weeks to gather strength and recover.⁴⁶⁰ They waited for their body to grow stronger, for a change of clothes, and generally got themselves ready for the journey.⁴⁶¹ They organized themselves in groups of four to thirty women, and left in groups traveling from the camp towards home.⁴⁶² Religious women, Yolan Lefkowitz and Sonja Waitzner, waited at a nearby hotel until after Shavuot on 26th May, before setting off.⁴⁶³

Chaya Berger, Sara Tabak and Judith Marmor received a certificate from the local Red Army commander that they are Jews liberated from a concentration camp. A Russian-speaking survivor approached the local Red Army headquarters and asked for fabric to allow them to sew clothes. Used blankets and sheets from town were also used for sewing

⁴⁵⁵ Marmor Testimony, "YVA O.3, 7814221", (4) 28:40; Mayer testimony, "USCSF VHA 19044", (4) 06:54; Firestone Testimony, "USCSF VHA 00151", (2) 26:57.

⁴⁵⁶ Neuvirth Testimony, "USCSF VHA 38107", (4) 06:36.

⁴⁵⁷ De_Liema Testimony, "USCSF VHA 02072", (3) 25:52.

⁴⁵⁸ Poplinger Testimony, "YVA O.3, V.T. 5907", (2) 21:57.

⁴⁵⁹ Kraus Testimony, "YVA O.3, 12517157", 02:04:19; Pikkell Testimony, "USCSF", (4) 19:16.

⁴⁶⁰ Mayer testimony, "USCSF VHA 19044", (4) 04:00.

⁴⁶¹ Adler Testimony, "USCSF VHA 13433" (4) 10:08, (4) 15:46-17:27.

⁴⁶² Neuvirth Testimony, "USCSF VHA 38107", (4) 06:30; Diamatstein Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5747617", (2) 24:43.

⁴⁶³ Lefkowitz Testimony, "USCSF VHA 33299", (3) 21:22; Waitzner testimony, "USCSF", (4) 11:19.

new clothes. They sewed white pants and blue and white plaid shirts before leaving the camp for home.⁴⁶⁴

Rose De_Liema was within the few who returned west, to the Netherlands, Belgium, and France, they received support and assistance in getting home.⁴⁶⁵ Most of the inmates returned east, the vast majority to Budapest.⁴⁶⁶ Going east they made their way mostly in crowded trains of soldiers returning home, including large groups of Red Army soldiers who posed a danger to them.⁴⁶⁷ They tried to join returning soldiers from Romania, Yugoslavia and Italy and receive support and protection from the Soviets.⁴⁶⁸ Some were escorted by the French POWs from the camp as far as Budapest.⁴⁶⁹ Arriving in major cities like Brno, Prague, Budapest, or Krakow, they were accepted by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee or the Red Cross who helped them with temporary accommodation and the direction to the means of transportation that would bring them back home.⁴⁷⁰ For all of them the trip home was filled with the hope of finding relatives who had survived the Holocaust, for most of them it was devastation when they came home and realized that they had been left alone in the world.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁴ Berger Testimony, "YVA O.3, 3564021", 01:12:37; Tabak Testimony, "YVA O.3, 10084, 3564605", (2) 17:50; Marmor Testimony, "YVA O.3, 7814221", (4) 27:28-31:42.

⁴⁶⁵ De_Liema Testimony, "USCSF VHA 02072", (3) 26:19-26:56, (3) 28:00.

⁴⁶⁶ Weissman Testimony, "USCSF VHA 18569", (3) 23:11-25:12, (3) 27:01-(4) 00:48.

⁴⁶⁷ Firestone Testimony, "USCSF VHA 00151", (2) 29:16.

⁴⁶⁸ Tabak Testimony, "YVA O.3, 10084, 3564605", (2) 19:10-21:30; Berger Testimony, "YVA O.3, 3564021", 01:14:19; Aschkenase testimony, "USCSF", [5] 04:11.

⁴⁶⁹ Hay Testimony, "USHMM RG-50.583.0076", (2) 35:00; Mor Testimony, "USCSF", (3) 03:37; Mayer testimony, "USCSF", (4) 07:21-11:25; Neuvirth Testimony, "USCSF", (4) 08:11-09:25.

⁴⁷⁰ Kon Testimony, "YVA O.3, 7560854", (2) 53:48; Yunitsman Testimony, "USCSF", (5) 01:22-02:44; Marmor Testimony, "YVA O.3, 7814221", (4) 51:21; Chenin testimony, "USCSF", (3) 23:06-24:09; Mor testimony, "YVA O.3, 3561928", 01:48:13; Reinstein Testimony, "USCSF", (2) 09:26-10:52; Mor Testimony, "USCSF", (3) 04:41; Shpitz testimony, "YVA O.3, 4026865", 01:10:30-01:13:00; Herman Testimony, "YVA O.3, 3700469", 01:08:10; Herman Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5262289", 01:32:30-01:36:20.

⁴⁷¹ Haberfeld Testimony, "Fortunoff VA (Yale)", 32:33; Mor Testimony, "USCSF", (3) 01:38-02:57; Mor testimony, "YVA O.3, 3561928", 01:49:30.

6. Discussion

This thesis focuses on the history of one camp, the Liebau Women's Labor Camp, which was established in the last year of World War II, in Upper Silesia, today southwestern Poland, as part of the Gross-Rosen labor camp network. I started the study by collecting background data about World War II labor camps and the Gross-Rosen labor camps cluster, specifically those established from 1944 and on, towards the end of the War. Wherever possible, the facts I extracted from the testimonies were combined and connected with the general information originating mainly from Third Reich documents referring to the camp. In April 2022, during a visit to the site where the camp once stood, I spotted the factories and barracks' remains and was able to reconstruct the camp's plan. I visited the Gross-Rosen Museum in Rogoźnica and the archive in Wałbrzych, Poland. I found additional information about the camp, the inmates and information regarding the ten women who lost their lives while in the camp. The graves of seven of the deceased were renovated as a gravestone and mass grave by the Jewish community in Poland and are next to the catholic cemetery in the town of Lubawka (*Cmentarza Katolickiego w Lubawie*), (Appendix D).

Background History

In the fall of 1943, the Nazi regime began moving facilities and industries away from the bombed cities to underground sites and remote areas. On 5th March 1944, Hitler announced the beginning of a process of relocating “all German industrial plants under the earth.”⁴⁷² By early September 1944, anticipating the loss of further territory, the WVHA ordered to start evacuation of several concentration camps in Western Europe. On 5th September, the SS evacuated Herzogenbusch camp in the Netherland and Natzwweiler in Alsace. Almost six thousand prisoners were evacuated.⁴⁷³ Two weeks later, two hundred prisoners were deported from Birkenau to the new labor camp that was hastily established, visible and

⁴⁷² Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, 448.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 546.

exposed above ground, in Liebau. The entire eight months of activity in Liebau labor camp occurred simultaneously with the disintegration of Nazi Germany and the withdrawal of the German army on all fronts.

In the thesis, I reconstruct the history of Liebau Camp as it emerges from the testimonies of surviving camp female inmates. It is consistent with the limited information about the camp available in the general literature, and more importantly, it is consistent with the well-established narrative of the final year of World War II in Europe. My interest was attracted to this camp since, despite the harsh and inhumane conditions that prevailed in it, despite the hunger, disease, filth, lice, and flea infestations, and regardless of the hard-working circumstances in the factories and the open field, four-hundred-ninety out of the five-hundred female inmates had survived the camp and returned to their homes. However, many of them came back sick and broken, required lengthy medical hospitalizations, and forever carried deep emotional and physical scars. But they survived and managed build families in Israel and around the world. Most of the witnesses provided their testimonies for this research while hugging their grandchildren. More than forty years after the events, these testimonies paint a picture of the inmates' experience and the memories and trauma they were forced to carry with them for the rest of their lives. At the time of writing, I am unable to find any living survivor; and if there are any, they should be in their mid-nineties or older. In my work, I distinguished, gathered, and combined the features these testimonies had in common to produce a coherent account describing the day-to-day life at Liebau Camp from the beginning of its inhabitation in mid-September 1944 until the liberation on the last day of the war in Europe.

Objectivity and Reliability

I studied thirty-nine testimonies as recorded from women survivors of Liebau Camp. The list of testimonies is provided in appendix C. Twenty testimonies are from the USC Shoah Foundation, the University of Southern California Holocaust Research Foundation founded

by Steven Spielberg in 1994. The Foundation established the Visual History Archive® (VHA) and collected testimonies between 1994-1997. I found fourteen testimonies in the Yad Vashem Archive (YVA), which were collected in the early 2000s. One testimony I found at the Fortunoff Archive (Yale University) that was collected in 1983, and one testimony at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). Unfortunately, I was not able to meet face to face with any of the survivors.

Most testimonies were given after 1994, fifty years or more after the camp was liberated. The survivors were in their seventies or eighties, in some cases they did not have full command of the language of the testimony (English or Hebrew). I found contradictions in several cases in the description of identical events, probably Due to different personal attitudes and the long time that had elapsed until the day of giving their testimonies. There were differences in approach and perception of identical events by witnesses that came from different social and economic background. Particularly in the last months before liberation, when the inmates had grown weak, famished, and prone to despair and hopelessness, different women gave different interpretations.

Notable is the description of the day of liberation, specifically the entrance of a Red Army Jewish officer who spoke Yiddish. The officer commanded the camp's liberating unit (a regiment?) and was mentioned in most of the testimonies, including a quote from the words he said upon camp entry, verifying that they were Jewish prisoners. It was a major event that attracted general attention and remained etched in the memory of the survivors. Small facts surrounding that event were reported differently. Only one survivor reported that the officer had a bleeding wound on his face. Several survivors reported that he entered on horseback, others noted a motorcycle, a wheeled vehicle, while others indicated on-foot entry of the entire unit under his command. Neither name nor rank of the officer was ever mentioned in any of the testimonies.

Another example that I found is the reference to the number of deaths in the camp. Data in the literature and archives indicate the names of eight inmates who died in the camp

and two more who died immediately after liberation. Several testimonies depict corpses lying on the table and dead women hanging from a tree at the entrance to the factory. One of the testimonies even mentioned 250 victims in the camp. It is possible that these numbers were given in her evidence for the purpose of reinforcing the message.

Operation of Liebau camp

The testimonies suggest that during the first three months of Liebau Camp's operation, work was conducted in a relatively orderly manner, following the rules of the SS management, and answering the three factories' requirements for labor. I have shown that the camp inmates were on the verge of remaining alive while continued to provide the required work to the factory owners. Liebau camp was established to fulfill the war needs of Nazi Germany but was operated under economic considerations of the SS and the factory owners. Since the Jewish prisoners were destined for extermination, minimal living conditions were provided to support continued daily work in the factories, thereby minimizing the investment in the welfare of the prisoners and maximizing the industrialists' profits.

The population of the camp consisted mostly of Hungarian women who left functioning family homes only a few months before and underwent traumatic hardships, including the loss of relatives before their eyes, the loss of freedom and a radical change in their living conditions. Thanks to their young age and physical strength, they managed to endure the conditions of hunger and the severe cold of the winter in the Sudeten Mountains. The inadequate clothing, the shoes that were difficult to walk in and the poor hygiene throughout the camp were a significant risk to their lives.

I collected lists of the prisoner data (name, the Gross Rosen number, date of birth, place of birth, factory where she worked in Liebau) from the Gross Rosen archive in Walbrzych Poland. I added data from the archive of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum

in Washington, both based on data from ITS.⁴⁷⁴ Upon departure from Auschwitz to Liebau, new serial personal numbers were given to each woman.⁴⁷⁵ These were the Gross-Rosen numbers: 59801-60000 and 74101-74393.⁴⁷⁶ These had no correlation with the Auschwitz tattooed arm numbers which I found in the testimonies, in the range between A-9994 and A-25170. Comparing ITS's inmates list with information given in the testimonies, I found differences mostly in Date of Birth and spelling of names. It is probably due to information given orally and not with the help of certificates. (e.g., the Wiess or Vies sisters were listed as the Kos sisters). From the testimonies we learned that the prisoners were addressed by GR number and not by personal name. I could not find an explanation of how the guards knew the prisoner's number, whether they were marked or wore any markings on their necks. We know that the GR number was not tattooed.

Medical Treatment, Health, and Hygiene at the Camp

I showed that the roll of the medical staff and the camp clinic was to maintain the available workforce of prisoners for the factories for which the camp was established. The policy dictated to the medical staff was to send back to work any woman who could still stand on her feet and to seek unhealthy or pregnant prisoners for evacuation to extermination. This policy proved difficult to implement given the factory owners' demand for labor and the SS's failure to continue providing replacement labor.

Due to the poor living conditions in the camp, the prisoners suffered from diseases that originated from poor nutrition and the exhaustion of the body as a result of the way of life in the camp. Additionally, I have shown that the overcrowding quarters, the clothing that had not been adequately washed and the inability to maintain body cleanliness and hygiene, especially female hygiene, caused the appearance of fleas and lice on the bodies of

⁴⁷⁴ Mor, "List of Inmates at Liebau Camp", copies of docs No. 149190-5, 149298-311 in conformity with the ITS Archives.

⁴⁷⁵ Tabak Testimony, "YVA O.3, 10084, 3564605", 50:48-54:11.

⁴⁷⁶ Megargee et al., *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933-1945, Vol. I*, 761.

the prisoners and in their quarters. I found testimonies of female inmates in the camp who, with the help of maintaining hygiene conditions, were able to maintain themselves and their health as much as possible under the conditions of the camp.

From the testimonies I find that a separation prevailed between the prisoners' rooms. There was a barrack that did not maintain personal cleanliness and hygiene, women did not take care of personal hygiene, did not wash their clothes, and therefore suffered from lice and fleas. In the nearby barrack, the prisoners made sure to wash in a heated bowl, four women every evening, and made sure to wash their only garment every Sunday. That way they kept their room lice free. I also find that the movable barracks were prone to the development of flea nests in the wooden walls. In the brick building, even though there were 32 prisoners in a room, they suffered less lice and fleas than in the barracks where there were only 18 prisoners in the room. It is possible that lice were introduced into the camp through clothing and blankets brought there from other camps. I can conclude from the testimonies that in rooms where hygiene was observed, the prisoners managed to avoid lice and fleas.

Families and Friends at the Camp

It is not easy to deduce from the prisoners' list names how many sisters were sent to the camp together since the lists were organized alphabetically and typical Jewish names are repeated. Even when two inmates have the same last name and they are listed as coming from the same town, they are not necessary sisters. The testimonies suggest a case of three sisters and another of a mother and daughter. In any case, contrary to concentration camps, in Liebau, family members reside in the same room and worked together. Strangely enough, I found that the SS encouraged mutual support of family members, and perhaps girlfriends from the same town, who wanted to stay together. It is possible that the SS saw this as a boost to the morale of the workforce in the factories. Small survival networks, sometimes consisting of no more than a pair of prisoners, were made up of close friends. Many had already known one another before the war. Having a close relative such as a mother,

daughter, or sister, or a close friend from home in the camp led to mutual reinforcement and a desire to survive.

Inmates' Leadership and Morale

I have discussed the camp self-Jewish leadership. In the labor camps that were hastily founded in the last year of the war, leadership was not formed among the camp's inmates, there was no natural selection of strong and influential prisoners to take over and lead the lives of the other prisoners. A lack of leadership like the one that developed in the older labor camps helped Liebau camp authorities, the SS, to separate the prisoners in the work areas and in the living quarters. In addition, the severe cold, the exhaustion, and the sudden mental change that the inmates went through, did not allow them to break the isolation and create a routine of self-leadership and internal hierarchy within the camp among the prisoners.

Liebau Camp was constructed from July 1944, and most of the inmates at the camp had been deported from their home countries a year or less before the end of the war.⁴⁷⁷ Jewish prisoners were not a monolithic collective, being differentiated by countries of origin and culture. Those from Western Europe maintained contact with each other but withdrew from the rest due to difficulties in communicating and a lack of fluency in the camp vernacular. Polish Jews kept to themselves, prompting Jewish prisoners from Hungary and Western Europe to accuse them of treating the newly arrived with disregard and indifference, even though the Polish Jews were the most experienced and longest tenured in the camps.⁴⁷⁸

The evidence I collected showed a loose connection between the groups of prisoners in the camp. Information about the state of the war did not pass between them and the ways to maintain cleanliness and hygiene were also developed separately for each room in the

⁴⁷⁷ ITS, *Register of Places of detention under the Riechsfuhror-SS*, 140.

⁴⁷⁸ Gutterman, *A Narrow Bridge to Life: Jewish Forced Labor and Survival in the Gross-Rosen Camp System, 1940-1945*, 151.

camp. I found in the testimonies that even on Sundays, when most of the prisoners did not work, they seldom went out into the yard because of the intense cold. I can conclude that the camp was separated into two camps. The residents of the brick building did not visit the side of the barracks at all, until the day of liberation. The residents of the barracks went to meals on the side of the brick building every day, but this did not create an opportunity for meetings. I found in the testimonies that prisoners from western Europe were somewhat exposed to information about the war situation through the foreign workers and prisoners of war. Due to social and cultural differences and a language barrier, little information passed to the Hungarian inmates, if at all it was through the minority of French-speaking Hungarian-Romanian prisoners.

I have found that inmates in the camp were grouped according to their living rooms. That division was according to work groups in the factories and sometimes a work group within the factory. They lived in one room in the camp. It was cold outside, and guards were walking around with dogs. Therefore, apart from going out for meals, the toilets, or showers, they stayed in the rooms and close subgroups were formed. There were barracks where apathy and fatigue prevailed in the after-work hours while there were those who organized cultural activities within the possibilities of camp life. There were women who had lost their children at Auschwitz, and they were mentally broken. I found testimonies about women who filled with envy for the birds that were free to fly as they pleased, or willing to swap places with a dog and live in a kennel instead.

I therefore assume that creating subgroups among the prisoners and breaking up the large group helped the SS to prevent information and views transfers between the prisoners and to prevent widespread plans for rebellion and resistance. On the other hand, local sabotage operations were carried out on the products, and the isolation prevented the SS guards from discovering the operations through whistleblowing. I also conclude that there were sub-groups in the rooms that developed local leadership which led to efforts to encourage the spirit of the prisoners and maintain morale. This leadership also formulated

an integrated activity to fight dirt, lice, and diseases. Stealing food and cooking it in secret was limited within certain rooms and was shared by the women sitting in the room or even a subgroup of them. In other rooms where such leadership did not grow, the inmates sank into despair and apathy, in many cases they neglected themselves and their surroundings, did not care to wash their bodies and fight the plague of lice. Some declared themselves to be Muselman. These different patterns of behavior had an important effect on the physical and mental condition of each woman on the day of liberation.

In several testimonies I have found references to mutual assistance among inmates. A group of Dutch and the Belgians prisoners, about sixty women, lived together in the same area and formed a closed and supportive group. Testimonies concerning sisters or relatives who fought hard to help and support a weak or sick inmate by donating food or helping during work hours are particularly notable. The need for mutual assistance was something that the inmates realized while at Auschwitz. After several months spent there, the prisoners recognized the vital importance of mutual help between sisters and other relatives. From some of the testimonies I conclude that older inmates: mothers, aunts, sisters-in-law, and older sisters, gave support to young women whose puberty was interrupted at short notice causing mental shock. Female inmates who came from poor homes or even orphanages, and experienced struggles for existence during their childhood showed better resilience to the conditions at the camp and even helped other prisoners. The life experience that the women, inmates of the camp, brought with them increased their chance of survival in the complicated and difficult living conditions at work and in the residences.

Connections with the Outside World

Because of the Nazis' fear of an organized revolt by the prisoners, the SS guards were under a constant need to exhaust the prisoners. Work masters on the factories floor were Polish, German Häftlinges, Italian, French and Czech, Christian men, with whom the Jewish inmates had limited contact due to the strict discipline imposed by SS guards. As the end of

the war approached and the more the foreign workers and the foremen in the factories knew about it, the more they dared to try to contact the prisoners. Since the condition of the inmates has worsened in recent months due to the extreme cold, a decrease in the food rations, their physical weakness and the wear and tear of the few items of clothing they have, the foreign workers experimented with helping with food, items of clothing and passing on information about the status of the war to encourage the prisoners. Also, some of the SS men who understood correctly what their situation would be after the war began to change their attitude towards the prisoners towards the end of the war. The inmates, for their part, were under threat from the SS guards and were afraid to cooperate with the attempts to help them.

Adaptability and Privileges at the Camp

A connection may be found between the ability of an inmate to obtain benefits and privileges to the origins of their families. Those who reported privileges were generally over the age of twenty, coming from Orthodox or even Hasidic religious homes with a relatively large number of brothers and sisters. For some of them the father of the family was taken from home many months before the deportation, and they were trained to get by through difficulties at home without the chief breadwinner. The French Fernande Chenin grew up in an orphanage. She reported a relatively good adaptability to the labor camp conditions. Beside the “eldest” roles, women prisoners worked in offices, infirmaries, kitchens, and warehouse services (*lagerinendienst*). They were privileged prisoners but had no authority to issue orders to other inmates.⁴⁷⁹ In the Liebau Camp list of inmates, six women out of 495 listed were not associated with any one of the three factories. I assume that those women were assigned to privileged positions at the camp. Possibly, other women were registered in a factory and transferred to privileged work.⁴⁸⁰ One interesting case is that of Thea

⁴⁷⁹ Rudorff, “Reimagining the ‘Gray Zone’: Female Prisoner Functionaries in the Gross-Rosen Subcamps, 1944-45,” 27.

⁴⁸⁰ Mor, “List of Inmates at Liebau Camp.”

Ashkenaz and her mother, Adela Oberzank, who are listed as Nordland workers, but thanks to their command of the German language in the Bavarian dialect as a mother tongue, were transferred, by a lesbian SS woman, to work in the kitchen.⁴⁸¹

SS Guards

In the rapidly changing reality of the last months of the war, there is no longer a clear policy in response to local events as they are local initiatives from the level of the camp commandant to the last SS guards. The commandant of the camp, according to the testimonies, is an older Wehrmacht officer who shows a humane attitude towards the prisoners. SS personnel in lower ranks behaved differentially, each according to his own character and motives. The young SS guards, who were recruited into the SS service hastily and without sufficient training, find it easier and simpler to act harshly towards the prisoners and thus leave themselves on the safer side vis-à-vis the camp command.

Despite the feeling of relief in their living conditions, the SS guards threatened the inmates with unspecified death sentences for deeds of marginal significance such as eating a potato while collecting produce in the field. Due to the humiliation and cumulative trauma from their stay in Birkenau and the period at Liebau Camp, the inmates took these SS threats seriously and feared that the SS would not hesitate to carry them out. There is no evidence of execution by SS personnel although there is evidence of warning shots. In the last weeks, leading up to liberation, evidence has been found of SS operatives passing information, mainly through foreign workers, about intentions and plans to harm the inmates and destroy the camp in order to eliminate evidence ahead of liberation.

In the Gross Rosen archive in Wałbrzych, Poland, I found a transcript of the trial of four SS female guards of the lowest rank. It seems that the testimonies were correlated between them, and with the camp Polish doctor, Helena Rzymowska-Rytko, who stayed in

⁴⁸¹ Aschkenase Testimony, "USCSF VHA 38084", (4) 23:01-25:56.

Lubawka after the war and served as a key witness.⁴⁸² At the trial, the former SS women cleared themselves of charges of abuse, mistreatment and carrying weapons. They all pointed to other SS guards, who either escaped to Germany or been arrested by the Soviets, as those who abused the camp prisoners. In any case, I was able to get significant information about the camp from the SS guards' testimonies that I collected.

Towards the End of the War

At the beginning of 1945, SS official had anticipated the loss of camps in Poland and Czechoslovakia. The SS planned evacuations of camps, hoping to deploy many of the prisoners elsewhere for the war effort. But these plans were often foiled by the size of the task and the speed of the Soviet advance.⁴⁸³ Survivors testimonies about the last months of the war emphasize the events in Liebau camp as a reflection of the overall situation of Nazi Germany during that time period. Hitler's senior officers no longer trust his decisions, Germany retreats on all fronts, industries are forced to flee and hide in remote locations, shortages, and hunger strike everywhere and corruption flourishes. In this situation, one can see from the testimonies the inconsistent response of the commanders of a small labor camp to the major events that affect the course of life in the camp and its surroundings.

Starting from January 1945, when the death marches began, Liebau camp routines were affected, in the residence and in the factories. The process of the collapse of the Nazi regime brought with it poverty, destruction, hunger, hardship, and an increase in corruption in the ranks of the Reich. The material condition of Nazi Germany had a direct impact on the lives of the camp's inmates, on the amounts of food they received, on the poor medical support and the drudgery they were employed in because the work in the factories slowed down. Most of the inmates were cut off from information in the world, information that

⁴⁸² Mor, "Translation of Gertrud Telke SS Guard Trial, Kamienagora Court Akt 106/46 April 8, 1946," 17.

⁴⁸³ Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, 546.

hardly flowed in, and even when it did arrive, it was not effectively distributed. For many of the inmates, the day of liberation came as a complete surprise.

The factory owners, for whom the camp was established, hoped until the last moment to maximize profits from the work of the female slave prisoners, tried to continue the work there as much as they could. Despite severe logistical problems in the operation of the factories, including the supply of food to the entire population, they hoped to continue raking in the profits and continue to operate the factories as much as possible, close to the day of the Soviet liberation. From the testimonies, it appears that the Kurt Laske and Nordland factories continued to work, up to very few days before the Soviet entry, albeit on a very partial scale. Prisoners who were no longer employed in the factories and there was no way to get rid of them, were sent for proactive work such as carrying packages or snow from side to side or being sent to collect agricultural products in the fields after the snow melted. In the last month before liberation, a large group of women was sent to work in the preparation of an airfield, six kilometers away from the camp.⁴⁸⁴ In the last few months in the camp, inmates who were hospitalized in a serious medical condition were not sent for extermination but were hospitalized without adequate medical care.⁴⁸⁵ Unable to replace the drudgery workers, the camp commanders and factory owners hoped that the young prisoners would be recovered and able to return to work in the factories.

The liberation process was complex, returning to a life of freedom in poor physical and mental condition, passing through destroyed and bloody Europe, the survivors had to find their way home to find that most of their loved ones had perished in the Holocaust. Stories of the way back home were an important part of most of the testimonies. Survivors who returned to Western Europe received assistance from various organizations. Their return was relatively quick and their reception in their country was quite organized. The survivors who returned to the east, to Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia, had to find their

⁴⁸⁴ Gabrowski, *Śladami Zapomnianego Lotniskaw Lipienicy (Polish) – The forgotten airport in Lipienica*.

⁴⁸⁵ Herman Testimony, "YVA O.3, 3700469", 53:07-57:00.

way to central cities such as Prague or Budapest where they received limited assistance in terms of support, encouragement and help in reaching their hometown. Homecoming road stories are a subject for research that can stand on its own.

Epilog

In April 2022, I visited Lubawka town and the site of Liebau women labor camp (FAL), the local cemetery and Gross-Rosen camp Museum and Archive. In November 2022, I visited the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC (USHMM). I found historical documents about the labor camps in the Gross-Rosen cluster covering the history of the German town of Liebau that became the Polish town of Lubawka after the war. I also found research carried out by a local Polish historian on the construction of an airfield by Liebau Camp inmates during the final months of the war.

I showed the difficult conditions in which the prisoners were forced to survive and the complex relations with the SS guards at the workplaces and in the residential camp, relations that resulted from the need to preserve the labor force albeit in inhumane conditions. I mentioned that thanks to the young age of the prisoners and the need for their work, four hundred and eighty-nine out of five hundred prisoners were found alive on the day of liberation.

The firm requirement for forced laborers in the last year of World War II took precedence over the Final Solution policy of the Nazi regime. I discussed the question of why women were sent to labor camps with better chances of survival, which allowed women of childbearing age to continue building and increasing the Jewish people, contrary to the extermination intentions of the Nazi regime. The history of women's labor Camp Liebau may be representative for other similar camps established in remote border locations of Nazi Germany for the crumbling German armaments industry and for Nazi Germany in its process of collapse towards the end of World War II.

Annexes

Appendix A – Liebau Camp Location

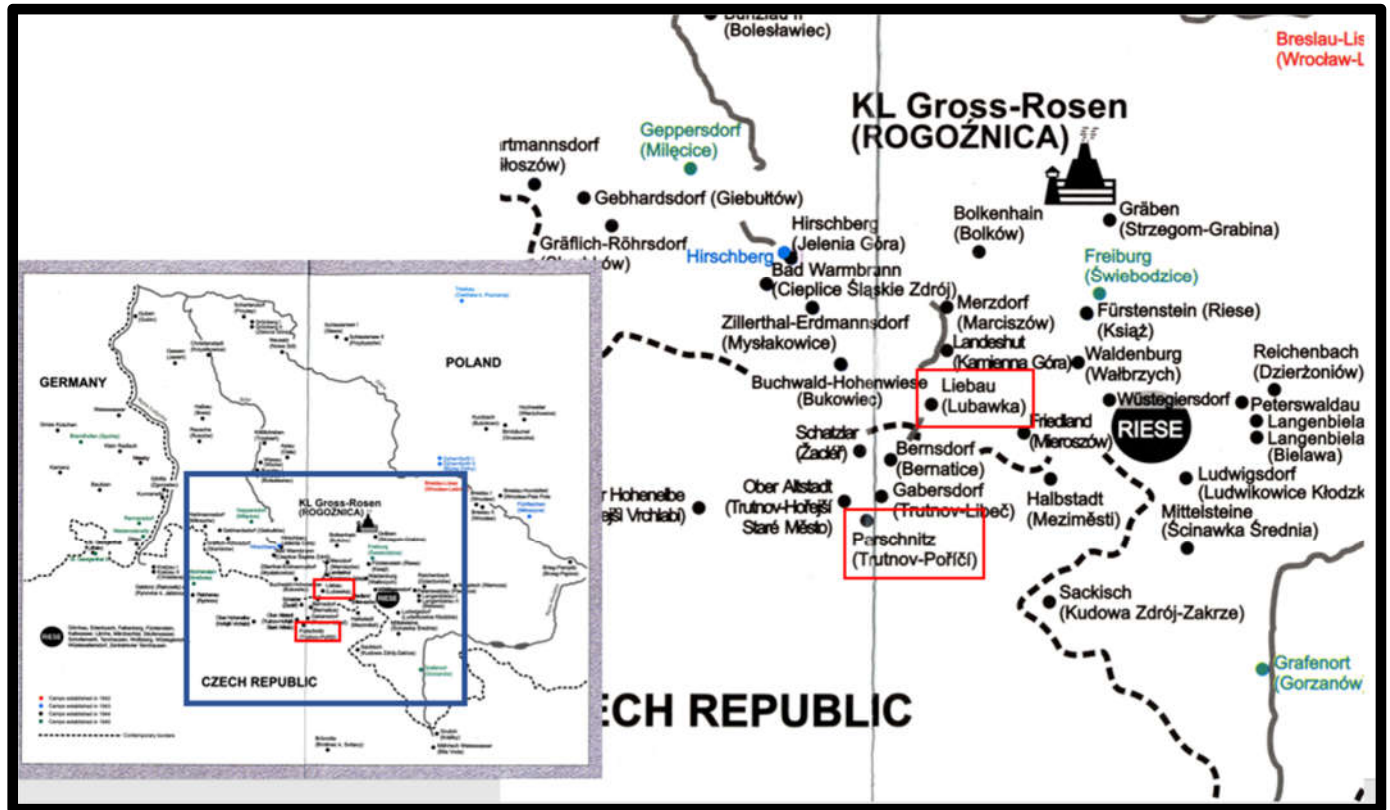
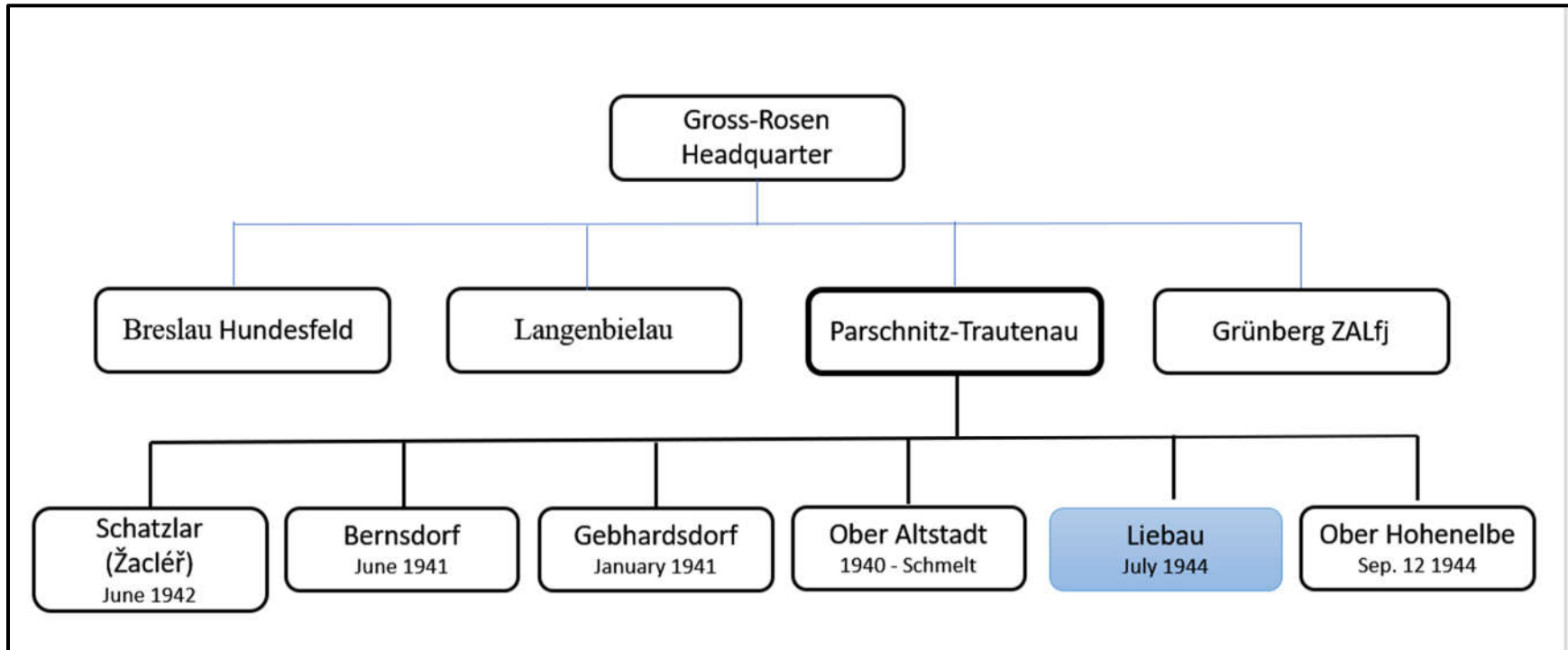


Figure 1 – Map of Liebau Camp and Commando Parschnitz within Gross-Rosen camps.

Source – KL Gross-Rosen Muzeum (Rogoźnica – Poland).⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸⁶ Gross-Rosen, “Gross-Rosen Museum – Rogoźnica Poland”, Museum liflate.

Appendix B – The Gross-Rosen Labor Camps Cluster



Source: *A narrow bridge to life (Hebrew)* ⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁷ Gutterman, *A narrow bridge to life: Jewish forced labor and survival in the Gross-Rosen camp system, 1940-1945 (Hebrew)*, 218, 306.

Appendix C – Testimonies and Sources

Name	Origen	GR #	Born	factory	Source	Testimony Year
Adler (Weinberger) Judit	Hungary	74278	1924	Nordland GmbH	USCSF Eng; VHA 13433	1996
Aschkenase (Obarzanek) Thea	Germany (Italy)	74329	1923	Nordland & Kitchen	USCSF Eng; VHA 38084	1998
Avraham (Shimon) Miriam	Ileanda Mare, Romania	59837	1928	Laske	YVA – HEB - 5087729	2004
Berger (Veis) Chaya-Lea	Kisvarda, Hungary	59871	1928	Wendt	YVA – HEB - 3564021	1996
Chenin (Magalnik) Fernande	France	74287	1927	Nordland & AP	USCSF Eng; VHA 09410	1995
De Levie (Cohen) Anna Annie	Netherlands	74349	1920	Nordland GmbH	YVA - O.33 - 9494 11683284	1986
De Liemaa (Van Gelder) Rose	Netherlands	74360	1921	Nordland & AP	USCSF Eng; VHA 02072	1995
Diamatstein (Vizel) Ela Luci	Spermezeu- Hungary	59958	1927	Nordland GmbH	YVA – HEB - 5747617	2006
Emden-Evers Bloeme	Netherlands	74357	1926	Nordland GmbH	USMCM-ENG, RG- 50.582.0012	1999
Farkas Margaret	Romania (Hungary)	59812	1927	Laske & AP	USCSF Eng; VHA 35025	1997
Firestone (weinfeld) Renée	Hungary	59975	1924	Nordland GmbH	USCSF Eng; VHA 00151	1994
Goldberger (Shtienbacher) Rachel (Iren)	Hungary	59830	1925	Laske	YVA – HEB -5374890	2005
Goldstein-Van Cleef Ronnie (Rozette)	Netherlands	74353	1921	Nordland GmbH	Anne Frank book	1991
Grunberger (Schachnerva) Edith	Hungary	74256	1926	Nordland GmbH	USCSF Eng; VHA 00266	1994
Haberfeld Bertha	Szatmárcseke	59956	1920	Field	Fortunoff (Yale) - 1098958	1983
Hay Kathleen	Hungary - Budapest	74166	1923	Laske	USMCM - ENG, RG- 50.583.0076	1990

Name	Origen	GR #	Born	factory	Source	Testimony Year
Herman (Shimon) Frida	Ileanda, Romania	59836	1926	Laske	YVA – HEB - 5262289 YVA – HEB - 3700469	2004
Joseph (Rosner) Frida	Hungary	74201	1922	Laske	USCSF Eng; VHA 26297	1997
Kon (Gross) Vera	Hungary	74227	1925	Laske	YVA – HEB -7560854	2008
Kraus (Liner) Elona	Budszentmihly	74125	1927	Wendt & AP	YVA – HEB - 12517157	2016
Lefkowitz (Kron) Yolan	Hungary	59930	1920	Nordland GmbH	USCSF Eng; VHA 33299	1997
Marmor (Heilper) Judith Ester Yuci	Targu Mures, Romania	59992	1927	Nordland GmbH	YVA – HEB - 7814221	2009
Mayer (Roos) Anita	Netherlands (Germany)	74385	1925	Nordland GmbH	USCSF Eng; VHA 19044	1996
Mor Schoenfeld Alizah	Hungary	74255	1928	Laske	USCSF HEB; VHA 27444 YVA – HEB - 3561928	1997
Neuvirth (Stegelman) Edith (Yocheved)	Hungary	74203	1925	Laske	USCSF HEB; VHA 38107	1997
Pikkel (Moskovitz) Serena	Hungary	74127	1929	Wendt	USCSF Eng; VHA 04887	1995
Poplinger (Rozental) Yehudit Eudice Ilonka	Targul Lapusului, Romania	59879	1927	Wendt	YVA – HEB - 5907496	2006
Reinstein (Bathel) Toby	Polish		1922	Nordland GmbH	USCSF Eng; VHA 54343	1998
Salomon Meyer Kamp Inge	Netherlands	74369		Nordland GmbH	Book in Italian, Pages 28-49	
Shpitz (Weis) Neli	Czechoslovakia	74260	1923	Nordland GmbH	YVA – HEB - 4026865	2000
Silberman (Kohl) Helena	Romania	59838 ?	1925	Laske	USCSF Eng; VHA 24075	1996
Tabak Sara	Hungary	59885	1928	Wendt+AP	YVA – HEB - 3564605	1996
Waitzner (Friedman) Sonja	Austria -- Belgium	74333	1926	Nordland GmbH	USCSF Eng; VHA 14429	1996
Weiss (Simkovicova) Piry	Hungary	74136	1926	Wendt	USCSF Eng; VHA 25098	1996
Weissman (Ackerman) Rose	Kosino, Hungary	59809	1924	Laske	USCSF Eng; VHA 18569	1996
Yunitsman Sara	Hungary	74253	1927	Laske	USCSF HEB; VHA 39294	1998

Appendix D – Camp Mortality

Surname and Name	Date & Places				Comments	
	Birth	Death	G-Rs #	Factory	Buried	
The Graves of the Jews (Victims of Hitler terror)						
Izak Maria	28-8-1920	5-10-1944	59821	Kurt Laske	Buried in collective grave in Lubawka	collective grave in sector 1a row 1
Moskowitz Jarolta	8-7-1917	29-10-1944	59886	Wendt		
David Regina	18-9-1920	31-12-1944	59896	Wendt		
Merskowits Aranka	10-5-1923	12-2-1945	59910	Nordland		
Cohen Tet or Tetta (Aster)	5-12-1916	2-3-1945	74351	Nordland		
Braune Eva	6-2-1927	14-4-1945	74159	Kurt Laske		
Fried Valeria	31-5-1924	14-4-1945	74324	Nordland		
Abraham Hadassa	18-4-1907	21-12-1944	74344	Nordland	Unknown	
Strauszman Olga	25-5-1923	3-2-1945	74251	Wendt		
Susanne Kawitzky	27-1-1922	29-12-1944	74284	Nordland	Pregnancy	
Nagenaar Helena	7-8-1909	17-3-1945	74365	Nordland		



Figure 2 - The collective grave in Lubawka (Poland) cemetery – April 2022

Sources:

1. Gross Rosen Archiwum in Walbrzych Poland, letter, 11 August 2021.⁴⁸⁸
2. Report by Barbara Sawicka.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁸ SS Command, “Death at Liebau Camp, DN-B.51/26/797” (Gross Rosen Archiwum in Walbrzych Poland, letter, 1945).

⁴⁸⁹ Sawicka, “Liebau (Lubawka),” 383.

Appendix E – The Town of Lubawka (Liebau)

The photos are collection of photos taken by team from the Gross Rosen Archiwum-Wałbrzych Poland,⁴⁹⁰ on two visits in April 2008 and August 2021. I took additional photos during my visit on April 27, 2022.



The yellow building was probably the main brick building where two hundred Hungarian inmates from September transport lived. Had seven rooms, kitchen, and the medical clinic (Rivier).

The red building is probably SS guard residence that was out of the camp fence and next to Kurt Laske and Heinz Wendt factories.⁴⁹¹

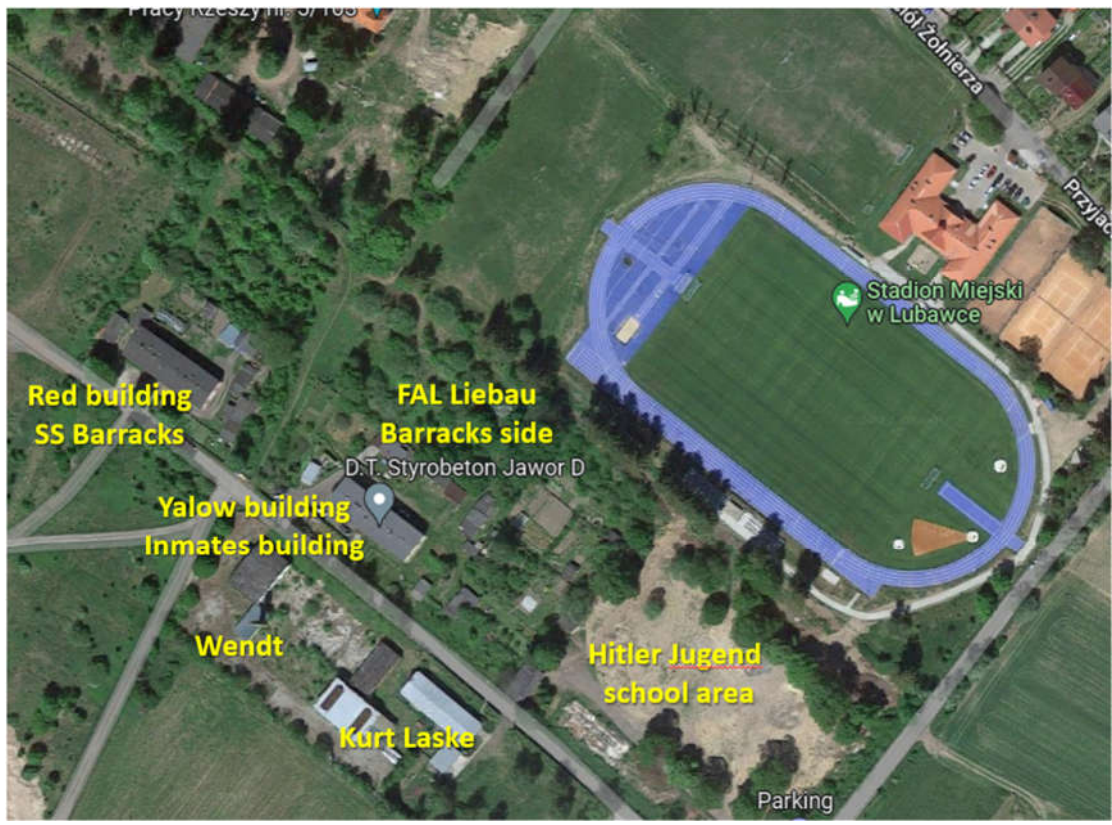


The arched structure is probably a wall left over from the Heinz Wendt airplane parts factory. The chimney is probably from the Kurt Laske factory

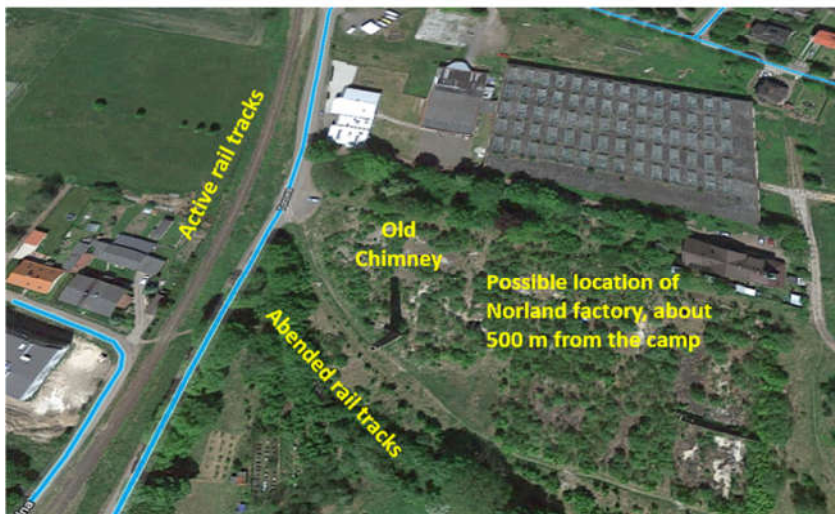
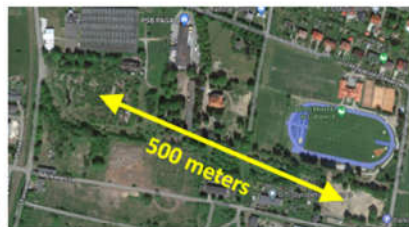
⁴⁹⁰ Gross-Rosen, "Gross Rosen Archiwum – Wałbrzych Poland."

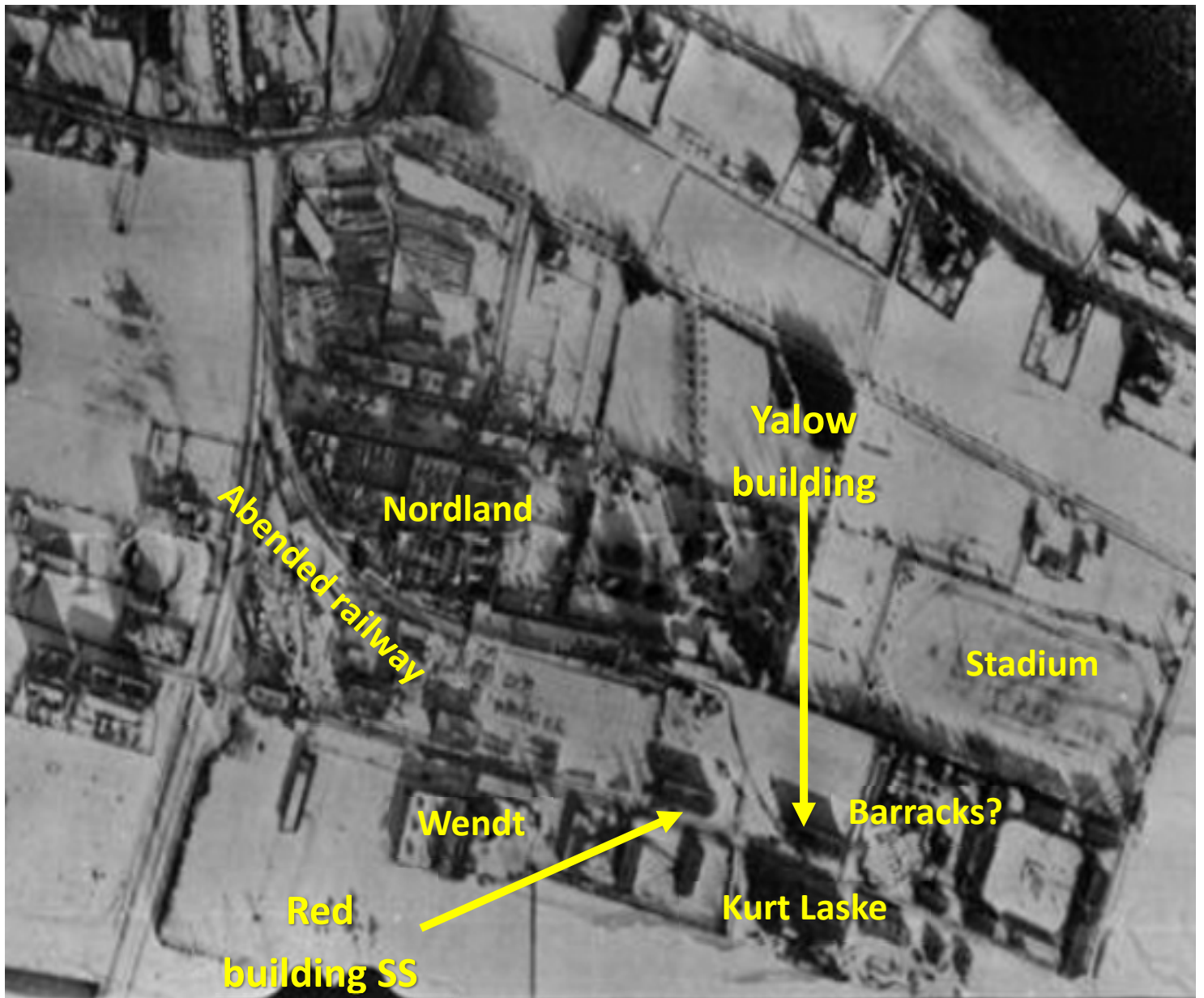
⁴⁹¹ Avraham Testimony, "YVA O.3, 5087729" 1:39:09.

From Google Map 2022



I could not find documentation for the exact location of Nordland factory. Assuming that the inmates did not pass through town and since the factory was next to a railroad, I assume that the short railway line, that is no longer in use brought wagons to the factory and that the chimney next to it belonged to the factory. The approximate location is 500 meters from Liebau camp.





Camp and factories aerial photo dated 11th December 1944

Source: NARA Archive – Poland – GX11690

<http://fotopolska.eu/1136750,foto.html?a=4287.9999656677&b=494.0000686644&c=5>



Liebau town photo - 1937



Source: Marian Gabrowski.⁴⁹²

⁴⁹² Gabrowski, *Śladami Zapomnianego Lotniskaw Lipienicy (Polish) – The forgotten airport in Lipienica*, 45.

Appendix F – Kurt Laske Factory

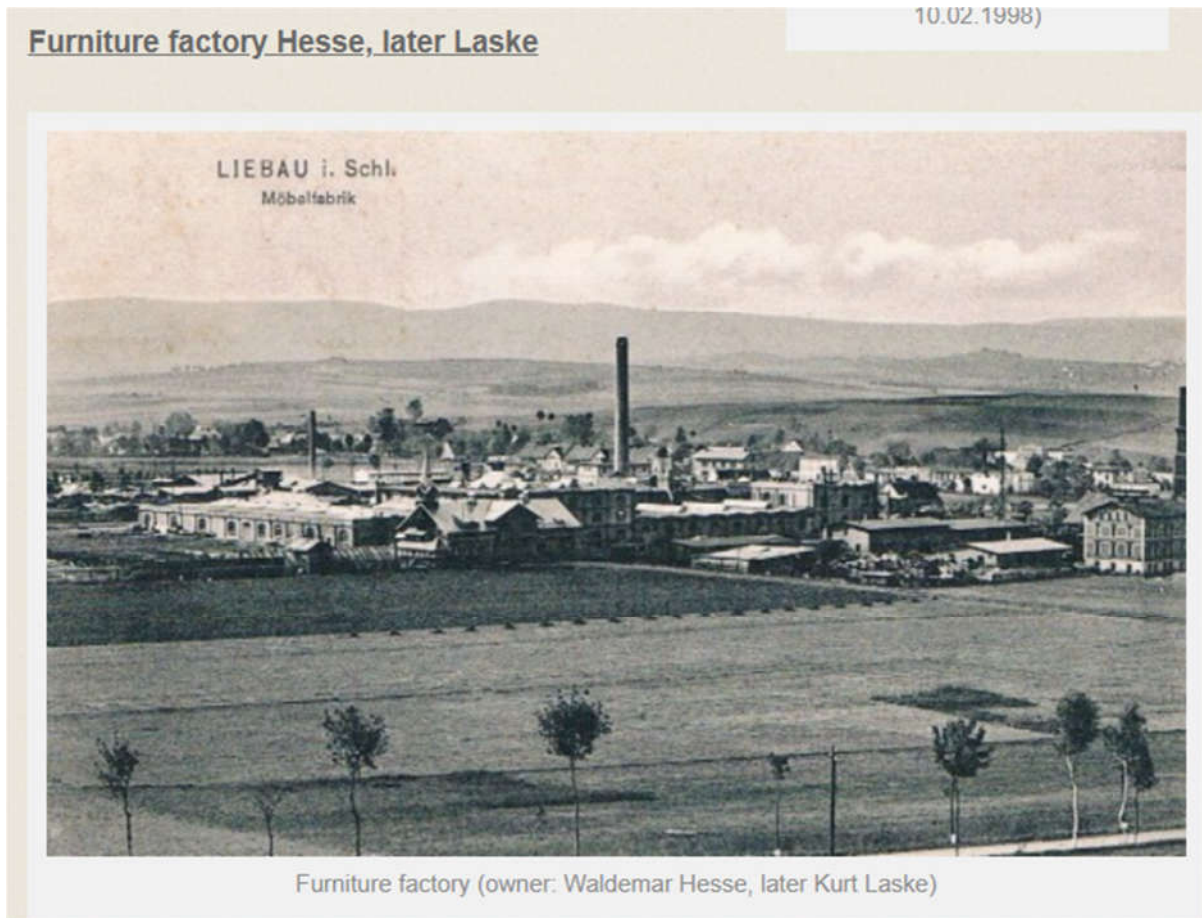
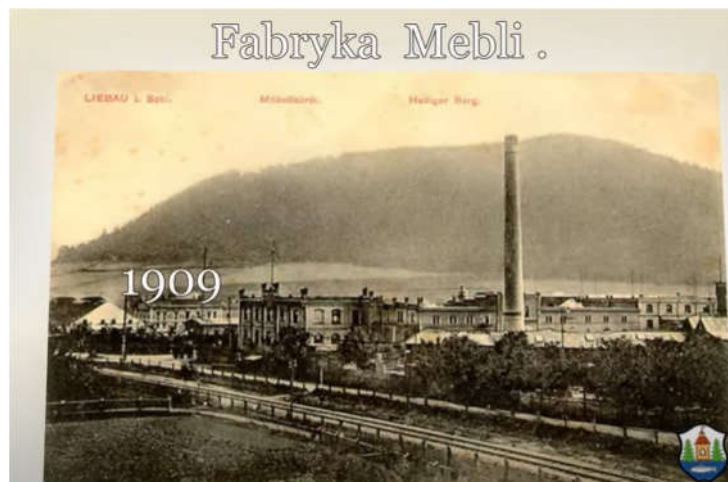


Figure 3 – Kurt Laske before World War II. Source http://www.ak-landeshut.de/?page_id=4234



Appendix G – List of Terms in German

Appell – Rollcall
Appelplatz – Rollcall yard
Arbeitskommando – Labor group
Arbeitsführer – Factory supervisor
Arbeitslager – Labor camp
Aufseherinnen – Overseers, Supervisor (SS)
Blockältester – Block elders (inmate)
Blocksperrre – Detention to the barrack
Commandoführer – Camp commander (SS)
FAL – Frauenarbeitslager – Women Labor Camp
Häftlinge – Prisoners at labor camps
Jewish elder – Judenältester
Lagerführer – (Camp Leader) paramilitary title of the SS, specific to the
Concentration Camp Service
Lagerälteste – Camp leader (Inmate)
Konzentrationslager – Concentration camp
Kommandoführer – supervisor of labor groups
Obermeister – Master supervisor in a factory
OKW – Wehrmacht Headquarters
Pfleger – A therapist, a Jewish doctor in a camp not recognized by his title.
Rassenschande (Racial shame – relations with a Jew)
Reichsarbeitsdienst (RAD) – Reich Labor Service
Revier – camp infirmary⁴⁹³
Sonderkommando – special detachment

⁴⁹³ Every camp had one or more blocks, used for treatment and hospitalization. Revier was a term used in Nazi camp to designate the medical facility for inmates. it was abbreviated from the German word Krankenrevier (infirmary)

Stubenälteste – Barracks leader (Jew)

Totenkopfverbände – Concentration Camp Service

Vernichtungslager – Extermination camp

Vernichtung durch Arbeit – Extermination-through-labor

Werkschutz – factory guard

ZAL – forced-labor camps (Zwangsarbeitslager)

Zhalappell – Rollcall

Zahlappelplatz – Rollcall Plaza

Appendix H: Inmates Self-Administration

Source: Gross-Rosen Museum.⁴⁹⁴

- Lagerälteste (camp elder),
- *Blockältester* (block or barracks leader)
- *Stubenältester* (Room leader)
- Stubendienst – Room inspectors

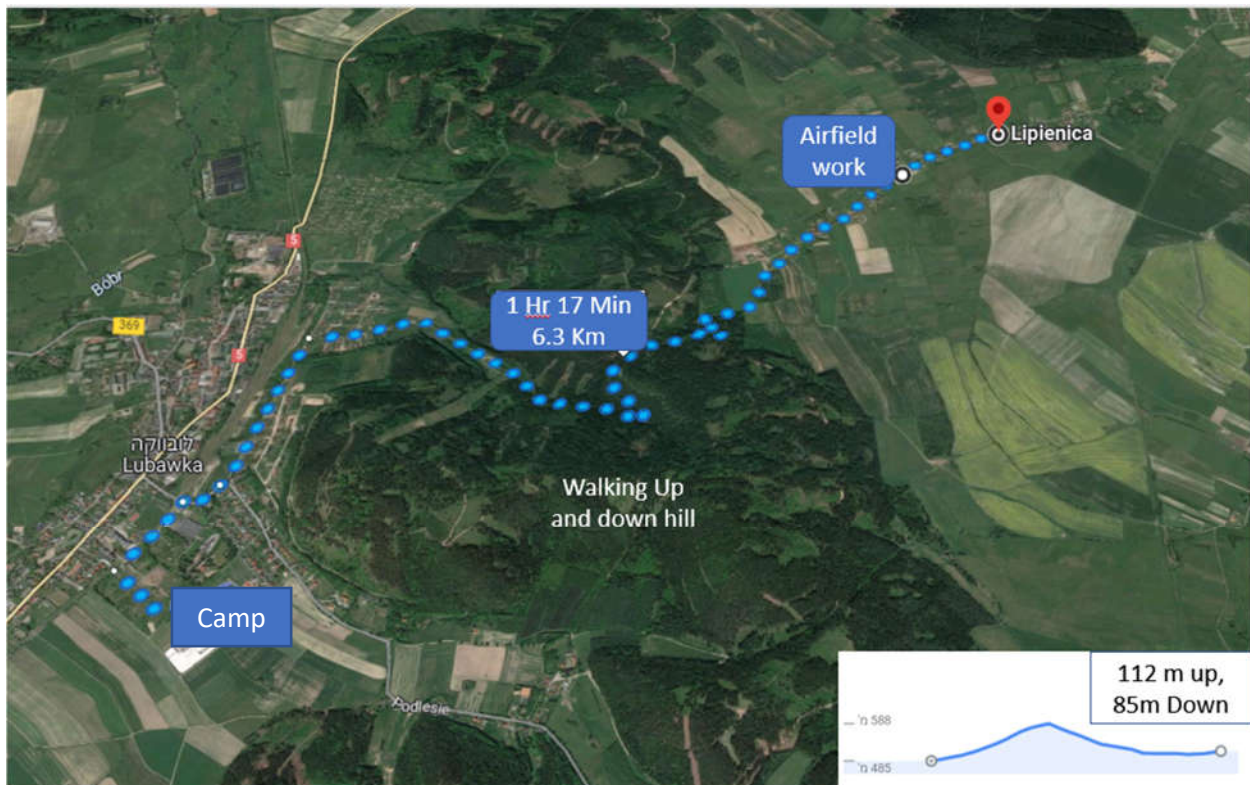
Work crews outside the camp were supervised by a:

- *Vorarbeiter* (foreman), a Kapo, or
- *Oberkapo* (chief Kapo)

⁴⁹⁴ Gross-Rosen, “Gross-Rosen Museum – Rogoźnica Poland” Display board #40.

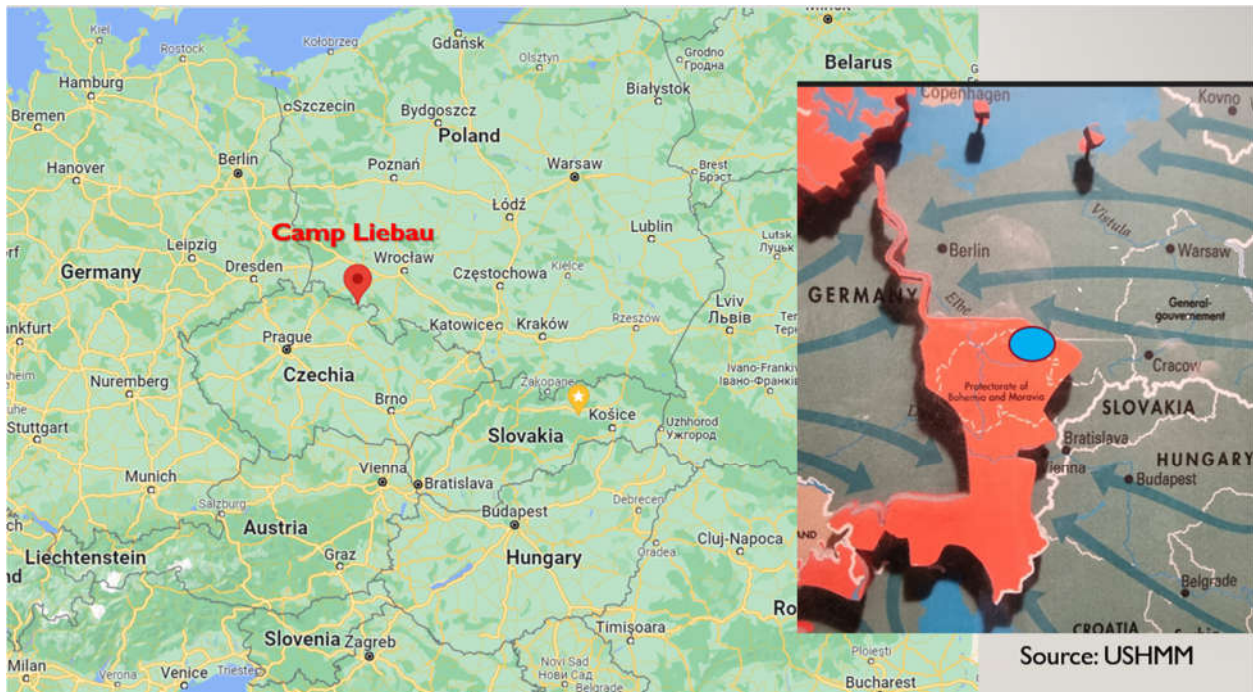
Appendix I: Walking to the Airfield construction site.

Google Map display of the area as of 2023.



During March and April 1945, many of Liebau camp prisoners were forced to walk daily from the camp to the construction site of the airfield. The short way to get there was to climb and descend a hill. The women left in the morning and returned in the afternoon. They worked there until a few days before the liberation.

Appendix J: Latest Nazi Controlled Area



The map above on the right is on display at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. In orange are the areas that remained under the control of Nazi Germany in the last days of the war. Liebau town and camp are marked with a light blue circle. They were within this area.

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מחנה הנשים ליבאו

ספטמבר 1944 – מאי 1945

ערן מור

תקציר

עבודת מחקר זו מתמקדת בהיסטוריה של מחנה אחד, מחנה עבודה לנשים בעיירה "ליבאו" (Liebau), אשר הוקם בשנה האחרונה של מלחמת העולם השנייה, בשלזיה עילית, כיום דרום מערב פולין, כחלק מרשת מחנות העבודה גרוס-רוזן. המחקר מתמקד באירועים במחנה, אשר הוקם כמקור לעובדי כפייה עבור שלושה מפעלי חימוש סמוך לעיירה. במחקר בחנתי את עדויותיהם של שלושים ותשע ניצולות המחנה. את המידע שאספתי מהעדויות שילבתי עם הידע הקיים על התנהלות המלחמה בשנת האחרונה. המחקר מבקש לייצר רצף תרחישי מפורט של האירועים במחנה ומציב אותם על רקע היסטורי קיים המתייחס לשנת המלחמה האחרונה, לקראת תבוסת גרמניה הנאצית. המחקר, בדרך זו, תורם לחקר השואה, ולהבנת ההתרחשויות לקראת סוף מלחמת העולם השנייה.

אירועים בפולין לאחר המלחמה, מנעו ביצוע מחקר מעמיק על מדיניות הפעלת מחנות העבודה בכפייה של גרמניה הנאצית ועל יחס המשטר הנאצי למדיניות ההשמדה במסגרת "הפתרון הסופי". מידע מועט נאסף ממשפטי שומרות ה-SS שנערכו בפולין בשנים 6-1945 וממסמכים שנמצאו בארכיונים של תקופת גרמניה הנאצית, במיוחד בארכיון מחנה גרוס-רוזן. תהליך גביית העדויות מניצולות המחנה, שעליהן מתבסס המחקר, התרחש עשרות שנים לאחר שחרור המחנה, מאמצע שנות ה-90 ועד העשור הראשון של שנת 2000. מיעוט העדויות והזמן הרב שחלף מאז האירועים מחייבים גישה שמרנית וסלקטיבית כלפיהן. לפיכך, המידע שנמסר נבדק בקפידה על ידי הצלבת עדויות וגם אימותן מול מידע היסטורי כללי. רוב האסירות במחנה גורשו מהונגריה בין מאי ליולי 1944 כאשר הצבא האדום נלחם במרכז אוקראינה ועמד לכבוש את מזרח הונגריה תוך חודשים. כמה עשרות אסירות גורשו מהולנד וצרפת בטרנספורטים האחרונים ממדינות אלו.

המחקר מצביע על כך שמערכת תנאים ייחודית למקום ולתקופה המדוברת הייתה גורם מרכזי בהישרדותן הפיזית של האסירות עד לשחרור המחנה ביום האחרון של המלחמה באירופה, למרות העומס הנפשי שחוו במהלך תקופת מאסרן, ושנים רבות לאחר מכן. מצד אחד, האסירות גורשו מביתן במועד מאוחר ועל כן היו במצב פיזי טוב בהשוואה לאסירות ותיקות. מנגד, הן חוו, במהלך שהותן

במחנה, שינוי חד ופתאומי בתנאי חייהן, אשר השפיע על יכולתן המנטלית להתמודד עם התנאים הקשים, בעיקר מתחילת 1945. קושי זה בלט במיוחד אצל אסירות אשר גורשו ישירות מבית משפחה מבוסס ומתפקד.

המחקר מבחין בין שתי תקופות. הראשונה במחצית השנייה של 1944 כאשר גרמניה הנאצית, למרות שנסוגה בכל החזיתות, עדיין הייתה מסוגלת לשמר פעילות שגרתית במחנות הריכוז ובמפעלי הייצור. בתקופה השנייה, החל מינואר 1945 ועד לכניעת גרמניה הנאצית, מתרחש תהליך התפוררות המדינה הנאצית והמשטר ונחלשת השליטה על חלקים שנתרו תחת חסותו, כולל המחנות והמפעלים, שלמענם הוקמו. עם שחרור המחנה חזרו לבתיהם ארבע מאות ותשעים מתוך חמש מאות האסירות שהצליחו לשרוד, רבות מהן פגועות פיזית ונפשית.

מחנה הנשים ליבאו

ספטמבר 1944 – מאי 1945

מאת: ערן מור

בהנחיית: פרופסור שטפן איריש

עבודת גמר מחקרית (תזה) המוגשת כמילוי חלק מהדרישות לקבלת התואר
"מוסמך האוניברסיטה"

אוניברסיטת חיפה

הפקולטה למדעי הרוח

החוג להיסטוריה כללית

מרץ, 2023

מחנה הנשים ליבאו

ספטמבר 1944 – מאי 1945

מאת: ערן מור

עבודת גמר מחקרית (תזה) המוגשת כמילוי חלק מהדרישות לקבלת התואר
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מרץ, 2023