

## B L Ä T T E R

Z U M L A N D

EXTRA



## The Osthofen Concentration Camp Memorial

One of the first National Socialist concentration camps in the Reich was officially set up by Dr. Werner Best, who had been responsible since 13th March 1933 as "State Commissioner for the Police in Hesse", by way of an implementing regulation of the "Reichstag Fire Order" of 1st

May 1933. In the small rural town of Osthofen near Worms, a concentration camp was established for the "People's State of Hesse" (Rhinehesse, Starkenburg, Upper Hesse). Any individuals taken into police custody for political reasons and whose period of detention was to last a week or more were to be taken there.



*Outside view of the Osthofen concentration camp memorial*

## Previous history

Best, who had a PhD in law and who, after the "Seizure of power" in Hesse on 6th March, was initially appointed special commissioner for the Hessian police. From July 1933 he was responsible, as state police chief, and was considered within his party as an expert in combating political opponents and on security issues. As early as the 5th August 1931, at a meeting of leading Hessian National Socialists, including the deputy Gauleiter, Wassung and the Offenbach district leader and economics expert, Wilhelm Schäfer, the then junior barrister, Best had announced his plans as to what measures were to be taken by the NSDAP after a take-over of power. According to the recorded scenario, Best assumed that a communist attempt to topple the government would be thwarted. "In order to rescue the people" armed National Socialist groups would have to seize power and declare a state of emergency. "SA, territorial reserve units etc., "were to be given unlimited executive powers. "Resistance will be punishable by death as a matter of course". Those who did not hand in their weapons within 24 hours were likewise to be shot as well as any members of the public service who took part in strikes or acts of sabotage. For this purpose, military courts were to be set up. Several meetings about this issue took place at the Boxheimer Hof near Bürstadt/ Lampert-heim, not far from Worms, involving the tenant, Richard Wagner. Wilhelm Schäfer handed over the document to the Hessian police. This was an act of vengeance.



Werner Best  
in the mid thirties  
Source: Hessian state  
archive, Darmstadt

Best had forced Schäfer to resign from the Hessian parliament on account of non-disclosed previous convictions and submission of a false doctorate diploma. In the spring of 1933, at the instigation of Best, Wilhelm Schäfer was taken into protective custody. Schäfer was even temporarily accommodated in the Osthofen concentration camp. When Schäfer's body was discovered near Neu-Isenburg in July 1933, Best was linked to the murder. "His ineptitude" in this affair gave his opponent, the Gauleiter Jakob Sprenger, the excuse, in autumn 1933, to dismiss Best from the Hessian police service.

The publication of the text known as the "Boxheim document" after the place where it was produced caused great waves in Hesse and throughout the Reich for a short time. Best was suspended from the state service and proceedings were initiated against him for high treason.

*The "Datterich", a weekly publication for Hesse, published a caricature on 4th December 1931 which dealt critically with the "Boxheim Document."*

*Source: Hessian State Archive, Darmstadt*



However, this was overruled in October 1932 for lack of evidence. Finally, this affair attracted Hitler's attention to the young notary whose further career in the SS was continually advanced.

Immediately after his appointment as Chief of Police in Hesse, Best was able to put his ideas of "fighting opponents" into practice. To do this he could avail himself of the emergency measure overruling essential basic rights, which was quickly passed by the Reich president von Hindenburg on 28th February 1933, the day following the Reichstag's fire. With the legalised restrictions on personal freedom contained in this measure, widespread arrests were made allegedly to "protect people and state".

The wave of arrests that followed throughout the Reich put hundreds of the most well known communist functionaries under lock and key even before the Reichstag elections scheduled for the 5th March. Several functionaries of leftist parties and of the trade unions were, however, also arrested. Finally, this so-called "Reichstag fire order" was used as the excuse to confiscate the Reichstag mandates of the German communist party (KPD) after the elections. The elections, which gave rise to twelve years of dictatorship and tyranny involving violent crimes, the extent of which had been inconceivable up until to that time, can therefore, in no way be described as "free".

The result of the Reichstag election and the "Reichstag fire Order", § 2 of which also permitted intervention in Länder legisla-

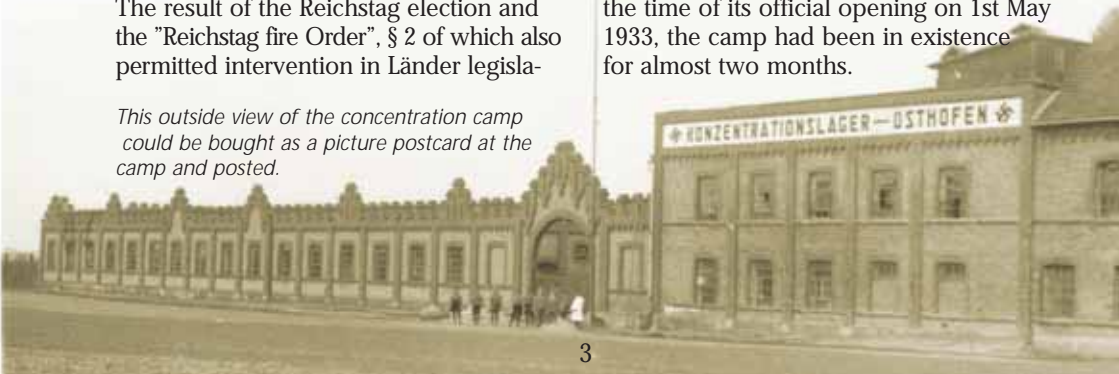
tion, created the bases for the "seizure of power" in Hesse and the takeover by Best of the key positions in the police for "combating opponents" and issues of security.

The establishment of the Osthofen concentration camp  
Why Osthofen? Why did Best decide on the community of just 5000 inhabitants as the site for the only state concentration camp for the entire "People's State of Hesse", with its seat of government in Darmstadt?

Certainly the situation regarding the transport links of the town, positioned as it was on the railway line with direct connection to the main road between Mainz and Worms, was at least acceptable. The proximity to the industrial town of Worms with its high proportion of workers may also have played a part, because the town was, after all, considered as a "red stronghold" before 1933. On the other hand, the fact that the Osthofen NSDAP had already created a fait accompli there at the beginning of March was probably the more decisive factor.

On 6th March, just one day after the Reichstag elections, which had given the NSDAP in Osthofen a distinctly better result compared with the Reich average, at 52.8%, the local protagonists of this party had imprisoned practically the entire SPD parliamentary group without any legal basis, in the now empty, former paper factory. The factory was owned by a Jewish manufacturer from Osthofen. At the time of its official opening on 1st May 1933, the camp had been in existence for almost two months.

*This outside view of the concentration camp could be bought as a picture postcard at the camp and posted.*



At least 250 people, the majority from Osthofen, Worms, Alzey and the surrounding area had already been taken to the concentration camp as early as March and April either on foot or in collective transports on lorries.

Even at the beginning of April 1933 Best, in reply to an enquiry from the Social Democratic "Mainzer Volkszeitung" had his office officially deny knowledge of the existence of a concentration camp in Osthofen. On 20th April, however, he instructed his newly created "central police headquarters" - the independent political police, which had been separated out from the general police and expanded in terms of personnel and their authority - as well as all district offices, to deliver a total of 100 prisoners to Osthofen, according to a set formula. For this campaign of arrests, essentially workers, but no functionaries or "repeat cases" were to be handed over. At the end of the day, these men were intended to be released again only a few days later on 1st May, on the "day of national work and reconciliation", which was stage-managed throughout the Reich

by the National Socialists for propaganda purposes. Thus, the Hessian regional press, which had already been tamed, then celebrated the release of 115 prisoners from the Osthofen concentration camp on 1st May as a "special surprise". Many of them were re-arrested on the 2nd May following the crushing of the trade unions and were transported to Osthofen.

#### Reporting by the press

As early as its weekend edition on 22nd/23rd April 1933, the "Niersteiner Warte" in a well-illustrated whole page article under the heading "Approved school and correctional institution in Osthofen", reported in detail even though heavily glossed over, on the concentration camp. At the beginning of May, at the invitation of the Hessian State Press Office, representatives of the press inspected the Osthofen concentration camp. In the days that followed, the population in all parts of Hesse and beyond were able to read the official version of the meaning and purpose of this camp and of the conditions prevail-

*Alzey, spring 1933: Nazi opponents are transported on lorries accompanied by regular and special police to the nearby Osthofen concentration camp.  
Source: private*



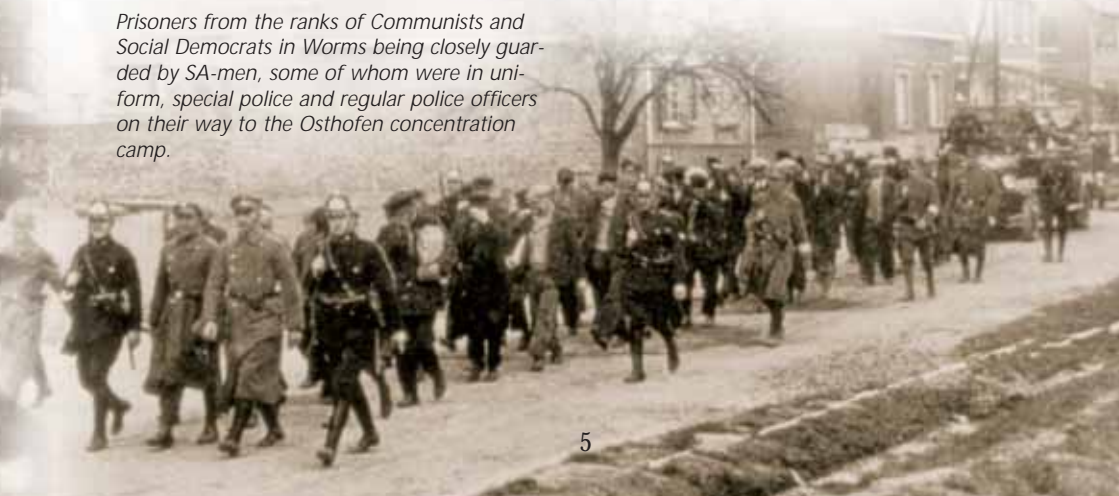
ling there. Press reports followed on a daily basis of raids, house searches, arrests and removals to Osthofen. Even for rail passengers, the existence of the camp was made clearly visible by the huge letters of the inscription on the building. "There (is) still plenty of room in Osthofen" becomes the familiar slogan. Even in his carnival speech at the Mainz carnival on 18th November 1933, Seppel Glückert warned against "the Worms region". In other words, the existence of this early camp was in no way kept secret. On the contrary, the targeted warning and at the same time played down information was intended to prevent the "national comrades" from offering effective resistance at a time when the position of the national socialist dictatorship was still not secure by any means.

Abroad people reacted with consternation to the establishment of concentration camps and the persecution of Jews and political opponents of the national socialists. Worms was given special mention in the international press as a place of particular terror. Osthofen was also mentioned in the "Brown Book of the Reichstag fire and Hitler terror", which was published in August 1933 in Basle. Neither the maltreatment of Carlo Mierendorff in Osthofen, nor the torture suffered by Siegfried Resch on his arrest by the Worms SS, was con-

cealed abroad. The protest notes handed over through the foreign embassies resulted in release in the case of the Worms Jew, Resch, on account of his Polish citizenship. In other cases as with Mierendorff, the protests were rejected by the Germany embassy.

**Camp management and guards**  
By his order of 1st May, Best appointed the Osthofen SS-Sturmabführer, Karl d'Angelo, who had, for a time, been chairman of the local NSDAP group before 1933, as honorary camp commandant and made him answerable to the official supervision of the Worms police station. D'Angelo, who was well acquainted with Best (both had belonged to the Hessian NSDAP group in the state parliament since 1931), had already named himself camp commandant even before his official appointment. Best entrusted the management and calling up of the camp guard from the ranks of the hurriedly sworn in special police to the Worms police station, headed by the police chief, Heinrich Maria Jost. The national socialist had been appointed to this position following the removal from office of his predecessor, the social democrat, Heinrich Maschmeyer. Maschmeyer, apart from losing his job and the financial sacrifices that this involved, had to tolerate countless humiliations as a prisoner at the Osthofen concentration camp.

*Prisoners from the ranks of Communists and Social Democrats in Worms being closely guarded by SA-men, some of whom were in uniform, special police and regular police officers on their way to the Osthofen concentration camp.*



The merchant, Heinz Ritzheimer, a native of Worms and administrative officer of the SS-Sturmabteilung Worms, based in Osthofen also took over the office of administrative officer of the concentration camp on 31st March 1933. For this work he received remuneration of 2 Reichmarks a day with effect from the beginning of July 1933. The rest of the camp guards were paid 50 Pfennigs a day for their services. For those of the SS and SA-men, who were out of a job as a result of the economic crisis or personal insolvency, this would have been an attractive incentive. The SS-Sturmabteilung doctor, Dr. Reinhold Daum, who like Best and d'Angelo represented the NSDAP in the Hessian parliament from 1931 to 1933, was responsible for the medical care of the prisoners in the Osthofen concentration camp. For every sick prisoner on "his sickbay", he could charge 50 Pfennigs. However, it was not possible to talk of adequate medical care. The Worms sports reporter, Richard Kirn, described in detail in the Worms edition of the *Neuer Mainzer Anzeiger*, in 1946 the sufferings of a fellow prisoner, who, in spite of an acute, painful and severe kidney infection, was not treated by the doctor on hand, Dr. Daum. The principal duties of the doctor included signing pre-printed forms, which had to be completed when the prisoners arrived and were discharged. In spite of unmistakable signs of maltreatment, the arriving prisoners were certified as "healthy

and fit for detention" and when they were released, they were then certified as "healthy and fit for work". When they were arrested and during the subsequent interrogations, the Nazi opponents were often brutally beaten. Many prisoners were therefore delivered to the prison with clearly visible signs of maltreatment or returned from the interrogations bearing clear physical marks. Before a state police (Stapo) field office moved into the 1st floor of the concentration camp in December 1933, the prisoners were frequently taken to the SS barracks in Erenburgerstraße in Worms for interrogation or were sent to the Osthofen concentration camp via this much feared address. Where the Technical University is now situated, was the headquarters of the Gestapo field office for Worms. The head of this field office was senior detective sergeant [Kriminalobersekretär] Johann Johannes. The torture that was perpetrated in the cellars was amongst the worst memories of many former prisoners.

In the wake of the political power struggles in Hesse, the Hessian Gauleiter and Reich governor, Jakob Sprenger dismissed the incumbent Prime Minister Ferdinand Werner, Werner Best, who had only been appointed Regional Chief of Police in the summer, as well as almost the entire police management in the autumn of 1933. The office of Police Chief was no longer



*Armed SS guards in front of the concentration camp building. Photo from February 1934  
Source: State Archive, Speyer*

occupied. The restructuring also had an effect on the management of the concentration camp in Osthofen: The SA guards were withdrawn from the guard service. In their place came SS-men from the Offenbach and Darmstadt special and guard detachment. These SS-men in particular, are very often linked by former prisoners to brutal assaults. The management of the camp was placed under the head of the Hessian Staff Office, Otto Löwer, an intimate friend of Sprenger. The Worms lawyer, Philipp Wilhelm Jung took on the position of Werner, who had been demoted from President to Prime Minister in the summer of 1933. In fact, Reich governor Sprenger was the only one who had any say in the matter. Even the ordering of protective custody and the committals to the Osthofen concentration camp were more highly centralised. From March 1934 onwards, only Minister of State Jung and the police station in Darmstadt were responsible for such things. The prisoners who were still committed by district offices and police stations were to be immediately released. However, this new order

probably no longer played such a big role, because the number of prisoners was constantly declining until in July 1934, what had probably been the first concentration camp in Nazi Germany was finally disbanded in the wake of the nationwide centralisation of the concentration camp system.

### The prisoners

Under the Reichstag Fire Order and the provisions issued in the form of an implementing regulation to put protective custody into practice, the members and functionaries of the German Communist Party (KPD) which, whilst not officially banned, had had its structures broken up and were particularly severely affected by mass arrests. Therefore, the majority of prisoners in Osthofen also belonged to this political grouping. However, also severely hit by persecution and arrest were personalities of other leftist parties, who were known in their region, primarily those of the Social Democratic Party, the trade unions, members of the Black Red Gold Imperial Banner (Reichsbanner

*The Reich governor Jakob Sprenger (3rd from left), Minister of State Philipp Wilhelm Jung (4th from left), police inspector Otto Löwer (5th from left) half obscured.*

*Source: Hessian state archive, Darmstadt*



Schwarz Rot Gold), which had been banned since March 1933 and of the Iron Front (Eiserne Front). Amongst the estimated 3000 prisoners, there was also evidence of seven women.

Of the 1600 prisoners in protective custody in Osthofen, whose names are recorded at the Memorial, there were 114 Jews. Many of them were initially arrested for political activities directed against the National Socialist regime. Most belonged to the SPD or the German Communist Party. By the end of August 1933 at the latest, state police chief Best had it publicly announced in Hesse under the heading "Warning to the Jews", that more Jews should be taken into police custody and brought to Osthofen. The Jews were beginning to ignore the "request to keep their distance" by approaching German girls (...). Thereafter the number of Jews in the Osthofen concentration camp rose dramatically. The accusations plucked out of the air and the stereotype reasons given were, in many cases, clearly racist and no longer covered by the original order, which only provided political reasons for imposing protective custody.

Following the voluntary winding up of the Centre Party in July 1933, as the last of the democratic parties, former supporters or members of the Catholic Centre Party were arrested from the summer of 1933 onwards and taken to the Osthofen concentration camp. Also now affected by persecution once the first wave of arrests had died down, were Christians, separatists or supposed separatists, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Sinti and individuals who had been picked up for begging.

Dr. Carlo Mierendorff  
As a strong opponent of National Socialism, the press officer at the Hessian Interior Ministry and SPD member of the Reichstag was first arrested on 7th March

1933 and dismissed from the state service. Following a temporary stay in Switzerland, Gestapo officers arrested Mierendorff on 13th June 1933 at a conspiratorial meeting in Frankfurt am Main and took him to Osthofen on 21st June. "Here is your traitor to the workers!" With these words the Darmstadt SS delivered Mierendorff to Osthofen. During the first night, Mierendorff was so badly beaten and abused that he could hardly move the next day. Even talking was difficult for him. He therefore had to be transferred to the sickbay for several weeks. Following his discharge from sickbay, he became the focal point for his fellow social democratic prisoners. Via a contact person, the trade unionist, Hedwig Bardorf from Worms, he was in contact throughout his time at the concentration



Carlo Mierendorff  
Source: Social  
Democratic archive  
(AdsD)

camp with Emil Henk, who was one of the organisers of socialist resistance in the Heidelberg/Mannheim area. At the beginning of November 1933 he was transferred from Osthofen to the Börgermoor concentration camp in Emsland. Until his discharge in 1938 he had to suffer various other concentration camps. Unbroken by the long period of custody he became involved in German resistance at the beginning of the Second World War. He died on 4th December 1943 during an air raid on Leipzig.

Abused and humiliated  
The accommodation and hygiene conditions in the Osthofen concentration camp were extremely primitive. The prisoners

slept in the factory hall, initially on the bare concrete floor, which was only covered with a thin scattering of straw and later the prisoners made two-tier plank beds, as well as tables and benches. As it became colder, they were given a blanket in addition to their straw mattress. In autumn, they built fireplaces for small stoves, which burnt wood, but in the draughty, damp cold hall, it never got warm. Many prisoners suffered from the cold and succumbed to kidney and bladder infections, some of which lasted a lifetime. In spite of the miserable conditions, no prisoner died at Osthofen. Even so, terror and disregard for any human dignity, beatings, kicks, withholding of food, bans on post and visits and even mock shootings dominated the camp routine of many prisoners. The Jews in particular, but also intellectuals and former state officials vilified as “big shots”, suffered abuse and humiliation. At Yom Kippur, the supreme

Jewish fast day, a Jewish prisoner was beaten and forced to eat pork. At roll call, other Jewish prisoners were sworn at and insulted by the camp commandant and afterwards they had to climb into the stinking sewage pits and scoop out the faecal matter, armed only with food tins. As an additional punishment, after they had done their work, they were not allowed to be issued with any soft soap to clean their clothing or bodies. Deceitful intent lay behind this, as it did behind the paltry sanitary conditions. Three cold taps in the yard and next to them a mound of sand served as the washing facility for the camp, which was occupied by an average of 200 to 300 prisoners.

The former Worms police chief, Maschmeyer, was exposed to the derision of the populace in that he was forced to grind coffee whilst sitting in the road in front of the camp. The former Worms police com-

*This photo originates from a former prisoner at the concentration camp, Hans Rasp. He was photographed by a guard in front of the caretaker's house. The family of the caretaker of the shut-down paper mill continued to live on the site whilst it was a concentration camp.*



missioner, Wilhelm Ruppert, who was almost 2 metres tall, was commanded to sweep the yard bent double, with a broom with a sawn off handle. And Carlo Mierendorff had to spend his days hammering nails straight, which his fellow prisoners had to deliberately bend for the purpose.

The average period of detention at the Osthofen camp was 2 to 6 weeks. At morning roll call, the prisoners were allocated to do work, which was necessary for the running of the camp. For example, they made camp furniture, took on cleaning work or mended and repaired, with the limited means available to them, the items



*The former Worms police chief, Heinrich Maschmeyer. Photo from 1930. Source: State archive, Speyer*

of clothing and shoes of their fellow prisoners. Other prisoners were allocated to various outside details. It was precisely the local national socialists, but in particular the camp commandant, Karl d'Angelo, who benefited from the cheap or even free labour. To a greater extent, prisoners were deployed to work in his Osthofen printing works. One work detail had to carry out building and plastering work in the building housing the office of the local NSDAP headquarters in the Mainzer Straße in Worms. Others were ordered to remove from the Gestapo cellars the blood of their fellow sufferers, who had been interrogated and tormented.

Prisoner solidarity and escape  
Even worse conditions prevailed in the so-called Camp II, which was set up for the enforcement of "aggravated arrest" in the vicinity of the main camp, in an old, empty timber mill. During the very cold winter months, the prisoners accommodated there were transferred to the local court prison in Osthofen. Best imposed aggravated arrest particularly against "repeat offenders".

Where possible, the prisoners attempted to help each other against the terror of the guards. For example, they secretly brought extra food into Camp II to those imprisoned there, who suffered greatly from the meagre food rations. Prisoners, who were the subject of special "attention" from the guards or individual guards, were occasionally suggested to the SS-person responsible for labour allocation, Otto Krebs, for outside work details. This protected them from brutal attacks. Also, there were opportunities to escape when working outside the camp.

The escape of the Jewish lawyer from Mainz, Max Tschornicki, comes to mind. Thanks to the help of his fellow prisoners and his fiancée and the support of Osthofen citizens, he was able to escape from the camp on 3rd July 1933 and flee to the Saarland, which at the time was under

*Shoemaking in the Osthofen concentration camp: press photo of the Niersteiner Warte of 23rd/24th April 1933.*



French administration under a League of Nations mandate. The politically fearless social democratic lawyer had been a thorn in the flesh of the Hessian national socialists long before 1933. In countless political trials, he had courageously defended members of leftwing parties and brought charges against the Nazis for crimes. At the beginning of March 1933 he had criticised the “Reichstag Fire Order” in an article published in the social democratic Mainer Volkszeitung.

Tschornicki's escape took him in 1935 to the South of France following the incorporation of the Saarland into the German Reich. In France, he was discovered by German Gestapo officers and deported via Lyons on 11th August 1944 to the Auschwitz concentration camp. He died on 21st April 1945, just before the end of the war, in a sub-camp of Dachau from the consequences of dysentery and exhaustion.

The former district leader of the German Communist Party, who was well known in Worms, Wilhelm Vogel, will never forget the interrogation methods of Gestapo officer Johannes, to which he had been subjected at the Osthofen concentration camp. These interrogation methods forced him in 1933 to flee the Osthofen concentration camp immediately. He initially escaped to the Saarland. From there he went on to France in 1935. There he joined the Communist Resistance, which from its position in exile, maintained contact with the communists in Germany. When the Spanish Civil War broke out, he fought against the fascist Franco regime. After the defeat of the republican government, he was deported from Spain. He was interned several times but was able to escape. In Morocco he joined the British army in 1944 and finally returned with his unit, via Algiers, Palermo and Naples, to his home town of Worms.



*Willi Vogel's membership ID of the International Brigade.  
Source:  
Morweiser,  
Hermann /  
Ludwigshafen*

## The end of the Osthofen concentration camp

In the wake of the attempted centralisation of the concentration camps, Heinrich Himmler, in May 1934, commissioned Theodor Eicke, Commandant of Dachau concentration camp to take over, reorganise and standardise the existing concentration camps. This was accompanied by the disbanding of most of the smaller camps. The Osthofen concentration camp was disbanded in July 1934 as one of the last early camps. Up to this point, the number of those in protective custody declined severely in the wake of the consolidation of the national socialist dictatorship as everywhere in the German Reich, including Hesse. At the time the concentration camp was closed, there were officially still 84 prisoners from the People's State of Hesse in protective custody. Some, such as Carlo Mierendorff, had in the meantime, been transferred to other camps. With the imposition of a daily reporting obligation, the majority of the prisoners had initially been released. Many of them were arrested, terrorised and abused again. Some of them did not survive the end of the national socialist dictatorship. They died in other concentration camps or in punishment battalions, into which they were forced “on probation”. With respect to the guards of the Osthofen concentration camp, their work in the national socialist state was in no

way completed even after its closure. Many members of the camp guard were allocated other positions within the Hessian police or were taken on by the management of the Dachau concentration camp as guards. Karl d'Angelo was even camp commandant of the protective custody camp there. However, his career there ended abruptly. To the camp commandant, Theodor Eicke, he seemed to be "soft" and therefore totally unsuited for the position of commandant of the protective custody camp. Nevertheless, he was able to pursue a career in Nazi Germany. He advanced to become police chief in Cuxhaven and later in Heilbronn.

A novel: "The Seventh Cross" and the Osthofen concentration camp

In her novel, "The Seventh Cross", first published in the USA in 1942, the Mainz author, Anna Seghers, created a literary monument to the prisoners in Osthofen. She was born Netty Reiling on 19th November 1900, the daughter of the respected Jewish art and antique dealer, Isidor Reiling and his wife, Hedwig. After having briefly been detained by the Gestapo she went into exile to Paris in 1933. Her world famous novel, "The Seventh Cross", was also written there. In it she describes an escape from a fictitious concentration camp called Westhofen. The escape is set in 1937 at a time when the real concentration camp in the neighbouring town of Osthofen had already been closed for three years. Unlike the novel, there were no deaths at the Osthofen concentration camp. On the other hand, Anna Seghers realistically describes how political opponents were treated in Rhineland. From her own experience, she describes the different reactions of the domestic population to the beginnings of National Socialism, its ideology and the arrest of friends and neighbours.

In 1947 Anna Seghers returned to Germany

where she was awarded the Büchner prize for "The Seventh Cross". In 1950 she moved to East Berlin, where she died on 1st June 1983.

Concentration camp – furniture factory – memorial

After the closure of the concentration camp in 1934, the factory complex initially stood empty. At a compulsory auction in October 1936, the married couple, Mrs. and Mrs. Bühne, acquired the land and buildings of the former paper mill in order to move their existing furniture factory there and enable them to expand. The furniture factory of "Hildebrand & Bühner G.m.b.H" was involved in the series production of living room cupboards.

At least 16, mainly Belgian, prisoners of war had to do forced labour there between December 1942 and March 1945.



Wood engraved title by the Mexican, Leopoldo Méndez, for the first German language edition of the novel, "The Seventh Cross" by Anna Seghers, published by El Libro Libre, Mexico, 1942.

Source: Archive of the Academy of Arts Foundation, Berlin

In 1976 Hildebrand & Bühner went bankrupt. The land and buildings were rented out and used by a plastics recycling company amongst others. The fabric of the buildings became more and more dilapidated. The history of the place as a concentration camp was suppressed and forgotten. Only with considerable effort was it finally possible to clear the rubble and reveal the history.

The first to get involved were former prisoners. In 1972 they established a camp association under the leadership of Karl Schreiber from Bickenbach and with the participation of the "Union of Persecutees of the Nazi Regime / Antifascist league" [VVN/BdA]. They initiated the first commemorative ceremonies on site and managed to get permission for a commemorative plaque to be mounted on a outer wall in 1978. In 1979 the first publication about the Osthofen concentration camp appeared, published by the former Buchenwald inmate, Paul Grünewald. At the beginning of the 80s, other comrades-in-arms joined in: the Youth Wing of the German Federation of Trade Unions (DGB) organised three peace trips to Osthofen and the Association for the environment and nature conservation (BUND) petitioned for the building to be scheduled as an ancient monument.

*Emil Leon Thiry, one of the Belgian POWs*  
Source: Ceges-Soma, Brussels

In 1986 under the central control of the Deutscher Zweig des Christlichen Friedensdienstes e.V. [German branch of Youth Action for Peace], based in Frankfurt, together with the Rhineland-Palatinate branch of the DGB, the Association of former camp inmates and the VVN/BdA Rhineland-Palatinate, the "Association for the promotion of the Osthofen project", was founded, which further advanced the idea of a memorial. In 1988 the initial rooms were rented on the site and for the first time, a programme of continuous education was carried out. The Association also raised awareness amongst the

*The Hildebrand and Bühner furniture factory – photo from the 1950s.*  
Source: private



*Carl Schreiber, former prisoner and chairman of the Osthofen Concentration Camp Association, with the commemorative plaque that was fixed to the outer wall in 1978.*

public of the history of the former Osthofen concentration camp by putting on events, such as concerts, lectures, readings and art events.

In 1989 the building was classified as an ancient monument. In 1991 the state of Rhineland-Palatinate acquired the property with the aim of setting up a memorial there. The state government commissioned the Rhineland-Palatinate Centre for Political Education to deal with the content, which developed the memorial in co-operation with the Association. In 1996 an interim permanent exhibition was opened in the first rooms to be renovated.

Since 2002 the “Commemorative work” department and the Rhineland-Palatinate Centre for National Socialist Documentation of the Centre for Political Education have been based at the memorial. With the opening of the permanent exhibition, “Persecution and resistance” in Rhineland-Palatinate 1933-1945“, in May 2004, the development of the Osthofen concentration camp memorial was complete.

*One of a total of three peace trips to Osthofen by the Youth Wing of the DGB and the Association of Former Inmates of the Osthofen Concentration Camp.*



Today, the Rhineland-Palatinate Centre for Political Education and the Osthofen Project Association work hand in hand there.

The permanent exhibition,  
"Persecution and Resistance in  
the Rhineland-Palatinate,  
1933-1945"

At the centre of the exhibition are the two concentration camps of Osthofen and Hinzert. From 1939 to 1945 the latter was situated 30 km from Trier. The exhibition also focuses on the subject of "Persecution and Resistance" in the territory of today's Rhineland-Palatinate. The exhibition provides numerous biographical and geographical-regional features. The collected material handed down from contemporary witnesses, their personal life stories and documents play an important part. Individual biographical information about persecuted individuals illustrates to visitors the merciless national socialist terror. The careers of perpetrators from the region are also presented by means of brief biographies.

The exhibition is made up of information plaques with a large number of written and picture documents. Biographical testi-

monies of victims of the concentration camps and the individuals persecuted by the national socialists are accommodated in display cabinets with pull-out drawers. Films about the national socialist period in Rhineland-Palatinate, which depict the events in Osthofen, Hinzert and other towns in Rhineland-Palatinate, are shown on three large screens in their overall historical context, during the years 1933 to 1945. Special listening points provide additional information.

One room is dedicated to the novel, "The Seventh Cross", by Anna Seghers and to the biography of the author. In a special map room, interactive maps of national socialist history in our region, of the concentration camp system and of the camps in Osthofen and Hinzert can be called up.

Collecting – Researching – Bringing together: Employment opportunities at the Osthofen concentration camp memorial The Rhineland-Palatinate Centre for National Socialist Documentation at the Osthofen concentration camp memorial serves as a place of remembrance, documentation and research, as well as providing an educational insight into the national socialist period for the state of Rhine-



*A look at the permanent exhibition  
Photo: Rudolf J. Uhrig, Osthofen*

land-Palatinate. These functions are of mutual influence. The documentation on the national socialist period in Rhineland-Palatinate is not limited to the two concentration camps of Osthofen and Hinzert. It also covers other regions in the state and is devoted to topics, which are of importance to the regional history during the national socialist period, independently of the concentration camp system.

As the documents concerning the two concentration camps have been largely destroyed or scattered amongst various archives in Germany – and with respect to the Special Hinzert SS camp also amongst foreign archives – obtaining replacement documentation on the two former concentration camps is one of the main tasks facing the documentation department. A further focus of the collection is the national socialist period in today's Rhineland-Palatinate. Apart from the documentary material, a wide variety of media are included in the collection. All collections can be researched in databases and can be inspected in the reading room by prior appointment. A library containing almost 4000 titles on various aspects of National Socialism in the regions of Rhineland-Palatinate can likewise be used.

One of the most important tasks of the Centre for National Socialist Documentation is to stimulate and co-ordinate regional research into the national socialist period in our state and support this by providing a wide variety of material. The National Socialist Documentation Centre therefore has a primary service function for schools and universities, as well as for historians, who are dedicated to local and regional research into National Socialism.

“One visit here replaces ten hours of history lessons” according to one teacher following a visit to the Osthofen concentration camp memorial with his class 10. For many pupils learning at an “authentic location” is a vital experience. The Osthofen concentration camp memorial provides various opportunities for this; during a guided tour (lasting approx. 2.5 – 3 hours) the history of the Osthofen concentration camp is explained to the visitors by a media-aided talk, a guide through the site and a tour of the permanent exhibition. For more in-depth work, project days are offered, which facilitate learning by discovery and are intended to help gain insights into the structures of National Socialism and the persons involved. Documents from the National Socialist Documentation Centre can be opened up

*The grand-daughter, great-granddaughter and great-great-grandson of the former prisoner, Moritz Marx from Flonheim, research his fate at the Rhineland-Palatinate Centre for National Socialist Documentation.*



by the pupils independently under supervision. In this way an in-depth debate about the complex subjects is also encouraged with regard to issues of the present day and the future. The memorial does not offer any firmly prescribed programmes but develops an individual programme in co-operation with teachers and pupils, which takes account of the interests of the group. Different methods are offered, ranging from working with archive material, films and photographs, writing workshops and role play through to creative painting and designing.

For educational work, four seminar rooms with appropriate conference facilities are available. Even for individual visitors, the memorial offers the possibility of in-depth study of the history of the Osthofen concentration camp. Six text panels on the site provide the visitor with information on the happenings and importance of the individual sites for the history of the camp. In addition to the permanent exhibition, individual visitors can also call up additional information about the National Socialist period in Rhineland-Palatinate at the six computer workstations at the “in-depth study station”. The permanent exhibition

is supplemented by temporary, alternating exhibitions on the various aspects of the National Socialist period.

### Art at the memorial

The art works to be found on the premises of the Osthofen concentration camp memorial offer completely different access to the subject-matter. Even without speci-



*“Die Grube” (the Pit) installation by the artist, Fee Fleck*

fic, prior historical knowledge, they enable the site of the former concentration camp to be something that can be experienced and touched. The focal point of the art at the Osthofen concentration camp memorial is the sculpture. As early as 1990, even before the site was renovated and the present memorial set up, the Frankfurt artist, Friedhelm Welge, worked for several weeks at the memorial and, amongst other things, created the sculpture “Sich Windender” (writhing man), which can now be seen at the memorial site.

In the rear section of the hall, where prisoners were accommodated in 1933/34, there is now the artistic installation, “Die Grube” [the Pit] by the Mainz artist Fee Fleck. Here, the artist reappraised the events at Bjelaja-Zerkow in the Ukraine. There, in August 1941, at the rear of the 6th Army, the Jewish inhabitants were shot by Special SS squad 4a and buried in shallow pits. Roughly 90 Jewish children were left without parents and without means of support in an empty building.



*Pupils in the exhibition.*

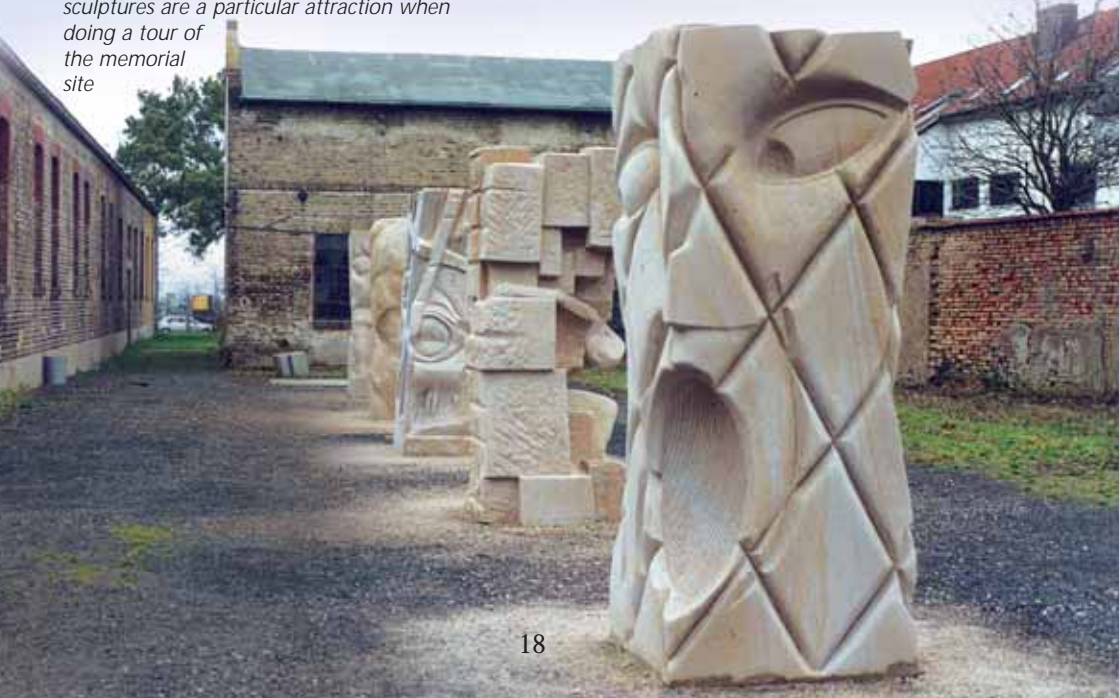
Their whimpering could be heard day and night. An attempt to rescue them failed and so the children, with the approval of the Wehrmacht, were also shot by the SS. The lighting effects, combined with a tape recorded sequence of a witness statement of the goings-on in Bjelaja-Zerkow impressively document the dreadful scale of the National Socialist terror.

In the summer of 2000 at the initiative of the Association and with the help of financial assistance from the Regional Centre for Political Education, the Sculpture Symposium, "Künstler gegen Gewalt" [Artists against violence] was held on the memorial site. The sculptors, Hans-Otto Lohren-  
gel, Bernhard Mathäus, Peter Schilling, Achim Ribbeck and Bernd Kleffel worked for five weeks on five blocks of stone right next to the hall in which the prisoners had to live at the time it was a concentration camp.



*Each sculptor interpreted the set subject of "Violence" in his own way and gave form to the impressions that the place made on him. Almost 2000 people visited the memorial during this period and even today, the five sculptures are a particular attraction when doing a tour of the memorial site*

*About his work, the artist Friedhelm Welge says that it represents both the prisoner, who wants to escape from his suffering, as well as the contemporary, who does not want to know (then or now) and who turns away. However, both fail.*



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**Translation:** Übersetzer-Gemeinschaft Sternheimer, Mannheim

### **Further literature /materials: (selection)**

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- Vor 75 Jahren: „Am Anfang stand die Gewalt...“ Gedenkveranstaltung zur Erinnerung an die Errichtung des Konzentrationslagers Osthofen. Dokumentation. Gedenkarbeit in Rheinland-Pfalz 4. Hrsg. v. der Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Rheinland-Pfalz. Mainz 2008.

## Practical information

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### Opening hours:

Mon., Tues., Thurs., Fri.: 9.00 - 13.00  
hours, 14.00 - 17.00 hours

Wed., 9.00 - 12.00 hours

Weekends and public holidays:  
13.00 - 17.00 hours

Guided tours for groups and school classes by prior arrangement only.

*Outside view of the Osthofen concentration camp 1933.*

**Public guided tours:** every first Sunday in the month, 14.30 hours; meeting point in the Memorial foyer (prior booking not necessary)

### How to find us:

**Railway:** local trains on the Mannheim-Mainz route; at Osthofen station go in a northerly direction (towards Mainz by car) for 3 minutes on the footpath to the Memorial, which is located on the left, behind the railway crossing.

**By car:** Autobahn A 61 Speyer-Cologne, exit Gundersheim-Westhofen/Osthofen, via Westhofen to Osthofen. From here, follow the signs to the memorial.

Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung  
**LPB**  
Rheinland - Pfalz

