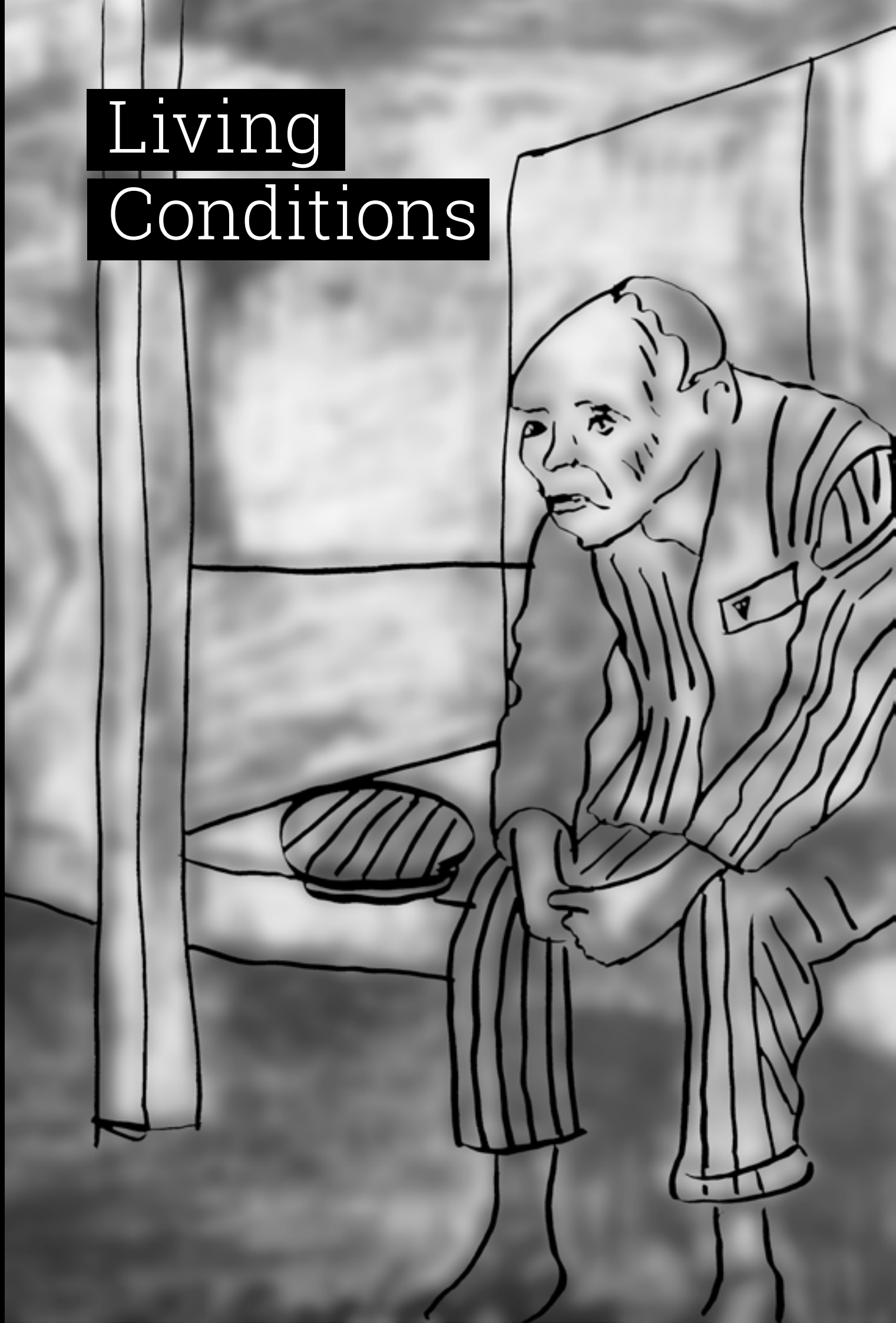


Living Conditions



Lodgings

The camp was set up in a partially destroyed section of the factory. The rooms were on the third, fourth, and fifth floors of Plant I, overlooking the railway station tracks. There were holes in the walls and no glass in the windows. Grids or masonry replaced the window panes. The heating did not work. A couple of stoves were set up on Christmas. The SS had their lodgings right next to the inmates. The inmates were thus subjected to the constant control and tyranny of the guards.

Owing to damages from bombing, part of the roof over the fifth-floor rooms was missing. The inmates referred to this area as the "terrace". It was there that the roll calls took place. The roofed section of the fifth floor was used to store the bodies of dead inmates until they were picked up. Hanging executions also took place there.

The inmates' dormitory was on the fourth floor. It was furnished with double- and triple-tier beds arranged in four rows. There were not enough beds for everyone. Many inmates slept on the floor; others slept two to a bed. As there were hardly any blankets, the inmates lay on sawdust and wood shavings or on bare boards. Owing to the broken windows and ceilings, the dormitory was extremely damp and partially flooded.

The sanitary facilities were also on the fourth floor, and insufficient. They consisted of long, grooved basins with a few faucets, of which only some worked. Warm water was rare. There were neither soap, towels, nor showers. The inmates accordingly had hardly any way of washing themselves. There were also not enough toilets for the number of inmates.

The kitchen, camp officer's lodgings, infirmary, and dining room were on the third floor.

"I have never seen so much dirt, filth, and grime in a single place. The floor was literally covered with 20 to 30 centimetres of stinky, old rags and wood shavings that had been trampled to bits."

Max Loock, inmate functionary (report to the works council, 1946)



View of the building section that housed the concentration camp at the Adlerwerke
Photo: Thomas Altmeyer (2022)

“A dining room—that was exactly what we needed least. Hardly had they taken just a few steps away from the soup cauldron than the comrades had already gulped down their evening soup. The midday soup was distributed in the factory. So they merely stopped by [the dining room] briefly in the evening.”

Janusz Garlicki, concentration camp inmate (autobiographical novel, 2010)

Food

Most of the camp inmates were undernourished. They were often absent from work. The provisions were inadequate, the quality of the food poor. In the morning the inmates received 250 grams of bread and cold black coffee. At midday there was one litre of thin, meatless soup made of potato peels, turnips, or lettuce. The inmates drank it from their bowls right where they got it. In the evening there was either soup again or bread. Margarine, jam, or a slice of cheese or sausage were rare.

There were stocks of meat, sausage, sugar, and salt in the food storeroom. However, the SS guards took this food for themselves. The inmates had to carry their bowls around with them on their backs. If an inmate's bowl was broken or lost, he could not eat. There was no cutlery.

“Every day, baskets of meat chops and schnitzel were brought, which the SS took to the city with them in the evening to feed their whores. They didn't give away just meat that way, but also sausage, and above all sugar, which we never once laid eyes on.”

Max Loock, inmate functionary (report to the works council, 1946)

Clothing

The inmates had already had to turn in their personal belongings on committal to Buchenwald or Dachau. In return they had received camp uniforms, which they also wore in Frankfurt. Everyone had to wear a uniform. It consisted of a shirt, a thin striped summer suit, underpants, wooden clogs, and a cap. The inmates' heads were shaven. The inmate number and triangle were sewn to the uniform. At the Adlerwerke every inmate moreover received a tin factory badge with an engraved number.

Starting in January 1945, some of the newly transferred inmates arrived at the camp in their civilian clothing owing to a shortage of inmates' uniforms.

The clothing wore out fast because there were no means of changing or washing it. A lot of it was torn. In the place of buttons, the inmates used wire or bandages to keep their clothing on. When it was worn out, there was no replacement. Then the inmates used the dirty, louse-infested uniforms of the sick and dead. They were thus exposed to many germs.

“Depending on the type of injury, I had to undress the inmates. They had used cords to tie old rags, blankets, and pieces of cement bags around their emaciated bodies, which were no longer anything but skin and bones. Others had put on the completely dirty jackets of inmates already long dead under their other clothing to protect themselves from the cold.”

Elisabeth Bäuerle, medic at the Adlerwerke
(report to the U.S. military government, 1945)



Inmate jacket of Ryszard Kojer with sewn-on red triangle and the inmate number 107 006

KZ Gedenkstätte Sandhofen e.V. – Marchivum, photo: Horst Ziegenfusz

Filth and disease

There were no means of washing either oneself or one's clothing, nor any clothes to change into. As a result, lice, fleas, and illnesses spread in the camp. The inadequate conditions of the lodgings and the necessity of sharing beds caused disease to spread all the faster. Typical maladies were scabies, oedemas, skin and soft-tissue infections, pneumonia, scarlet fever, and, later, typhus.

The death rate in the Katzbach concentration camp was higher than in other concentration camps. This was due to the poor living and working conditions, mistreatment by the SS, undernourishment, inferior sanitary installations, and inadequate clothing. Owing to physical weakness and lack of medical treatment, infections and injuries that would otherwise have been harmless often led to severe illness and death.

“One day a capo mentioned that an inmate had died after an ulcer had been cut. Some kind of poisoning had probably come about through the use of unclean instruments.”

Josef Wittmann, senior foreman at the Adlerwerke (witness testimony, 1946)

“The lice ate us alive. We chewed our fingernails to keep from scratching ourselves inadvertently. The lice quickly gathered around sores of that kind. You were happy if you found an old bottle. You took off your jacket in the evening and rolled the bottle over it to squash the vermin.”

Władysław Jarocki, concentration camp inmate (interview, 2005)



In commemoration of the inmate doctor Josef Munk, a park in the Gallus district was named after him in 2016. "He was prepared to bear the consequences for his resistance to an inhumane order." (Michael Knorn at the dedication of the park)

Photo: Svenja Cloos (2022)

Infirmary and inmate doctors

At the end of October 1944, an infirmary was set up on the third floor. It was intended to accommodate 20 to 30 inmates. Only some of the beds had straw sacks and blankets. Many inmates therefore had to lie on bare boards. The infirmary was often full beyond capacity, making it necessary for inmates to share a bed.

Four inmate doctors were assigned to care for the inmates: Alfred Schreiber, Louis Courtadon, Jože Gostiša, and Julius Munk. They had been transferred to Frankfurt from the Neuengamme and Dachau concentration camps. Dr Julius Munk was from Vienna. He had fled to

France and there joined the resistance against the German occupation. Munk survived the Katzbach concentration camp but died of typhus in Buchenwald.

The doctors had no chance of healing the inmates' illnesses. The increasing shortage of bandaging material and medicine made treatment more and more difficult. The SS and factory management wanted to get rid of inmates unfit for work as quickly as possible. The latter were to be replaced by new, able inmates. The sick ones were therefore sent either back to Dachau or to so-called "camps for the sick", which soon became "camps for the dying".

Sources

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Władysław Jarocki, interview
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Cover:
Zygmunt Świstak: *I am so cold, hungry and tired ...*, drawing, detail.
The complete drawing is on view on the wall over this book.

Zygmunt Świstak was born in Działdowo (Poland) in 1924 and fought with the Armia Krajowa (AK; Home Army) in the Warsaw Uprising. He lives in Australia.

Source: Zygmunt Świstak