

The neighbourhood



The SS in the neighbourhood

The two SS men Martin Weiss and Jochen Dietrich were often out and about in the Gallus district. They paid regular visits to various businesses in Lahnstrasse, Kleyerstrasse, and Kriegkstrasse, where they shopped for the SS and their own private needs. They also drank and exchanged recipes with people in the neighbourhood.

Weiss and Dietrich made friends with two young women, aged 16 and 18. The four of them often went for walks together. The SS men frequently brought the young women sausages and other food. It was food from the inmates' allotment.



Ravenstein map of Frankfurt a. M. and Offenbach, 1943 edition

Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt am Main, S8 Stpl 1943

Labour assignments in the district

Small groups of concentration camp inmates were assigned to carry out work in the district. They had various tasks. Some assisted Martin Weiss in procuring the food supplies. They had to carry the goods or pull carts. Sometimes they received cigarettes and bread rolls. After air raids, concentration camp inmates were put to work clearing rubble and repairing damages in the homes of Adler employees.

The work of the mine detection detachment was extremely dangerous: The inmates in this detachment had to defuse duds. Outside the factory building, there was a lot of contact to local residents. Some civilians gave the inmates bread; others beat them.

Primarily former factory workers were appointed to serve as auxiliary guards to oversee the work outside the factory. The fitter Franz Noack and the tool-maker Karl Kitz were armed with rifles and tasked with preventing inmates from escaping.

“I didn’t have to request them in writing; I just went to the SS guard unit and requested the men. The SS had already been instructed by the factory administration accordingly and assigned the men to me without further ado. They were usually the same inmates who had worked with me before. During the recruitments, a lot of inmates pushed their way to the front because word had got round that if you went to work with me you often got extra food. The food came from the residents of the houses we worked in.”

Franz Noack, Adlerwerke employee (witness testimony, 1970)



Ackermann field with Ackermann and Bürgermeister Grimm School in background, 1926/27

Institut für Stadtgeschichte, Frankfurt am Main, S7x_14-52-1

Disinfection in the Ackermann School

Between October 1944 and March 1945, the concentration camp inmates had to walk the 1.5 kilometres to the Ackermann School at least three times. The showers there were used for delousing. In 1946, the Polish stoker Czesław Czarnecki recalled that the inmates were subjected to physical abuse by SS men during the procedure. From the inmates he also learned of murders in the camp. Czarnecki provided some of them with clothing.

The delousing procedure was excruciating. In wintertime temperatures, the camp inmates had to undress and immerse themselves in dirty, cold water. Before and afterwards, they had to stand in the cold for hours. Many of them died while waiting. On the way back, the survivors had to carry their dead comrades. Their wet clothing froze and made it painful to walk.

“People stood on the pavements.
They must have seen how we looked,
and that we were carrying corpses.”

Ryszard Olek, concentration camp inmate (interview, 1990)

Escape attempts and escapes

Between September 1944 and March 1945, at least 37 inmates took the risk of trying to escape. Five of them were discovered and murdered. Some were arrested and transferred to other camps. In many cases it is not known what happened to the escapee.

18-year-old Jan Kozłowski's attempt to flee was successful. He got away on 2 February 1945. After an air raid, there was a hole in a wall on the second floor of the factory building. He was able to escape through the hole in the early morning. He ran to an allotment garden, where he burned his inmate uniform and put on other clothing.

He continued on his way, and met a group of Polish forced labourers whom he wanted to join. However, they demanded that he report to the employment office. When he arrived at the office, the policemen standing guard asked him for his papers. As he had none to show, they took him to the Gestapo in Mainz. He gave a false name, so no one realized that he was the Adlerwerke inmate the Frankfurt Gestapo were searching for. He remained in Gestapo custody until his liberation by U.S. troops. Over the course of the intervening weeks, he was transferred from one prison to the next and put to work clearing rubble.

“I worked on the second floor of Plant II. Next to a toilet there was a room in which a partition wall had been destroyed and nothing but a grid covering the hole. I used a wooden clog to bend back the bars of the grid and then slid down a rail on the outside of the wall. It was snowing and very dark. I had wrapped myself up in a blanket so no one could see my striped uniform.”

Jan Kozłowski, concentration camp inmate (interview, 1994)

“The Lahnstrasse public gathered and waited in suspense to see how the action would play out. They soon got their money’s worth. The first to appear was Jochen Dietrich. Then the inmate staggered onto the street. Martin Weiss must have just beaten him. They went to the middle of the street.

The inmate was a young man of about twenty. Weiss hit him in the face with his pistol, then kicked the bleeding man along in front of him. Dietrich tried in vain to calm down his raving friend. Suddenly Martin Weiss shouted ‘Run, you pig!’ He dealt his victim a final mighty blow. Then he shot him in the back of the neck. The inmate made a leap, sank to the ground, and bled to death over a sewer cover. It was like a scene from a surrealistic film, unreal and at the same time extraordinarily realistic.”

Hans Frick (1930–2003), resident (autobiographical novel)

Everyone sees the murder on the street

On the morning of 14 March 1945, loud shots rang through Lahnstrasse. With help from the residents, the SS were searching for two concentration camp inmate escapees: Georgij Lebedenko and Adam Golub.

Lebedenko was soon found, and shot to death immediately. His body was left lying in Kriegkstrasse for quite a time.

That afternoon, Adam Golub was discovered in the cellar of Lahnstrasse 32 by a resident of the building, who reported him. Golub came out of the cellar of his own accord and shouted in German: "Don't shoot!" The guard Martin Weiss killed him with a shot in the back of the neck.

"One day I went down to my cellar storeroom around 5pm to get something. As I was fumbling my way by candlelight I suddenly saw someone lying on the floor in the corner of my cellar room. ... I immediately ran up the stairs and called to Mrs Schlamp, who happened to be in the stairwell: 'Run and get someone, fast; there's someone in my cellar room!'"

Emil Bien, resident (witness testimony, 1946)

"Around that time ... Mrs SCHLAMP suddenly barged in, shortly after Weiss had left my shop ... and shouted: 'We've got him, we've got him, where are the guards?' Then she ran towards the Adlerwerke and came back again the same moment, followed by Weiss and several SS men."

Peter Schwab, resident (witness testimony, 1946)

Sources

Franz Noack, statement, 27 October 1970,
in: HHStAW, 461/37574 , Bl. 1005.

Ryszard Olek, interview
in: Joanna Skibinska: Die letzten Zeugen: Gespräche mit Überlebenden
des Außenlagers "Katzbach" in den Adlerwerken in Frankfurt am Main
(Hanau, 2005), p. 136.

Jan Kozłowski, quoted in: Ernst Kaiser, Michael Knorn:
"Wir lebten und schliefen zwischen den Toten." Rüstungsproduktion,
Zwangsarbeit und Vernichtung in den Frankfurter Adlerwerken
(Frankfurt, 1998), p. 216.

Emil Bien, statement, 28 November 1946,
in: HHStAW, 461/37574, Bl. 111.

Peter Schwab, statement, 22 November 1946,
in: HHStAW, 461/37574, Bl. 95.

Hans Frick: Die blaue Stunde (Munich, 1977), pp. 45f.

Cover:

Zygmunt Świstak: *Inmates in the rubble-clearing detachment*, 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