



Christine Glauning. *Entgrenzung und KZ-System: Das Unternehmen Wüste und das Konzentrationslager in Bisingen 1944/45.* Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2006. 471 S. EUR 24.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-938690-30-7.

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Armament and Terror in the Third Reich

In summer 1944, the Third Reich stood before a problem of resources for the continuation of the war. Especially acute were fuel shortages. The conquest of the Caucasian oil fields had never materialized. Extensive territories occupied during the previous three years in the East were lost. The U.S. bombings of the Ploesti oil refineries in Romania severely damaged one of Nazi Germany's main fuel sources. On August 25th, 1944, Romania (occupied by Soviet forces) declared war on Germany, which meant the loss of Romanian oil. Fuel shortages became especially evident in the course of the Ardennes counter-offensive, which failed to a large degree because the German tanks and planes participating in it ran out of fuel. On August 24th, 1944—that is, the day *before* Romania turned against its former ally, and a few weeks after the Ploesti Romano Americana refinery had been heavily damaged by a U.S. air raid, 1,000 Polish prisoners from Auschwitz were transferred to Bisingen, a new concentration camp near a village of the same name at the feet of Hohenzollern Castle in southern Württemberg. This camp, together with seven more in the same area, was an external camp of the Alsatian concentration camp Natzweiler and part of the armament program code-named *Wüste* (Desert), the purpose of which was to find substitutions for the dwindling fuel reserves of the Third Reich. Christine Glauning's book deals with the concentration camp Bisingen as part of the *Wüste* project. It is organized in a mixed thematic-chronological form. Divided into eight major parts, it treats the history of oil shale mining in Württemberg

from the mid-nineteenth century up to the Nazi period, the internal structure and administration of Natzweiler's external camp system, and Bisingen as part of this system.

Glauning shows how the Württemberg oil shale project, which had been abandoned as entirely unprofitable, received new impetus after 1942 as the Nazis feverishly sought new resources to prolong the war after the failure of the blitzkrieg strategy against Soviet Union and in the face of German reversals on the Eastern Front. The project rose out of personal and institutional power struggles characteristic of the Third Reich. Those interested in realizing the oil shale project, such as Hans-Joachim von Keudener in the Reich Aviation Ministry, knew well how to use these chaotic conditions to their own advantage. Thus, the economically worthless oil shale project became a matter of prestige both for Albert Speer's Armament Ministry and Heinrich Himmler's SS.

Glauning identifies several phases of the oil shale project between 1942 and 1944/45: the first phase began in early 1942 when the failure of the blitzkrieg revealed a need for a switch from a "peacelike war economy" (*friedensähnliche Kriegswirtschaft*) to a full-fledged war economy, based on long-term goals.[1] This phase was characterized by increased armament production and the search for new raw materials essential to the war effort. Hermann Göring's older "Four Year Plan Organization" was eclipsed by Albert Speer's Reich Armament Ministry. Glauning attributes the rise of the oil

shale project to two persons: Walter Scheiber, chief of the armament supplies department in Speer's Ministry, and Hans-Joachim von Krüdenner, head of oil shale at the Ministry of Aviation. Von Krüdenner had already called for development of the Württemberg oil shale deposits in the 1930s. To win out over numerous skeptics, both von Krüdenner and Scheiber won powerful allies in Heinrich Himmler and Oswald Pohl, chief of SS Main Office for Economic Administration (SS-WVHA). The SS was also meant to provide the labor of many thousands of concentration camp inmates for realization of this project.

SS involvement propelled the oil shale project into a new phase. Himmler sought to expand the SS economic empire as a means to enhance his own position within the Third Reich. He viewed the oil shale project as a matter of prestige. The significance Himmler ascribed to the project expressed itself in the foundation of a SS-owned corporation, Deutsche Schieferöl GmbH, at the end of 1943. The last phase of the project's development occurred when it was integrated (under the code name "Desert") into the so-called Geilenberg program, named after the General Commissar for Immediate Measures by the Reich Minister for Armament and War Production, Edmund Geilenberg (appointed to this position on May 30, 1944). Geilenberg was tasked with squeezing out what was still to be had from German industrial capacity. He was especially concerned with finding raw materials after heavy damage caused by Allied air raids. Needs for an increase in arms production also influenced the concentration camp system, whose inmates were seen as the means to realize this goal. In 1942, the number of so-called external camps of main camps both in Germany and in German-occupied countries increased dramatically, as did the number of inmates overall. In 1944, a few years after the Nazis had proclaimed the Reich "free of Jews," Jewish forced laborers from occupied countries were brought into Germany to work at various armament projects.

Glauning shows that the entire camp system underwent an ever-increasing decentralization process, whereby external camps became camps in their own rights. In the case of Natzweiler, the external camps continued to exist long after the main camp was evacuated in the summer 1944; members of the commandant's office staff were distributed between various external camps and thus these camps became autonomous bodies.

Glauning also considers the question of the Wehrmacht's involvement in the concentration camp system.

In the last stages of war, the rising number of both concentration camps and the number of inmates to be guarded had led leaders to supplement camp personnel with Wehrmacht soldiers. In Bisingen, the majority of camp personnel were former Luftwaffe members and Wehrmacht reservists. Glauning thus shows that Wehrmacht soldiers and officers did not serve only in subordinate capacities as camp guards. In Bisingen itself, many central positions within the camp administration were held by Wehrmacht members, rather than the SS's bloc leaders, labor unit leaders, camp physicians, and even the camp commander were Wehrmacht members. Glauning also shows that the presence of more Wehrmacht members did not result in better conditions in the camps. Often (as was the case with Bisingen's camp commander, Johannes Pauli) Wehrmacht members not only achieved levels of brutality instituted by the SS, they surpassed them. Glauning's analysis also incorporates research about the perpetrators, considering their motives and larger behavioral patterns. She focuses on two different people: Pauli, and his immediate superior, Franz-Johann Hoffmann. Although the men came from different backgrounds (Hoffmann was a member of the lower middle-class and SS veteran; Pauli came from a more bourgeois background), Glauning shows that both men underwent a "school" of violence at various stages of their lives and acquired similarly radical fixed images of their supposed enemies.

Changes in camp leadership led to changes in inmate hierarchies. Whereas German criminals were originally appointed to "Kapo" positions, in this later phase, East Europeans and even Jews could be appointed as *Funktionshäftlinge* (inmate-functionaries). This fact did not mean that the Nazis had entirely abandoned racial ideology, and Jewish inmates still were subjected to brutal maltreatment. Neither did the increased need for inmate labor result in better treatment. Leaders' desires to get the most out of prisoners led to drastic increases in mortality rates in Bisingen and in other labor camps. In Bisingen, around 1,200 inmates died between October 1944 and mid-April 1945 as a result of appalling living and working conditions and brutal maltreatment on the part of both camp personnel and factory officials.

Glauning shows that not only SS guards, but representatives of the Organization Todt and private firms as well treated prisoners as slaves, driving them to work using physical and verbal violence; they, too, were responsible for the deaths of thousands of prisoners. At the same time, Glauning shows the inability of SS apparatus to bridge the gap between ideology and prag-

matic requirements. Notwithstanding the fact that in the course of his inspection of Bisingen, Oswald Pohl himself harshly criticized the inhuman conditions in the camp, this did not lead to any noticeable improvement in either living or work conditions. After Pohl's inspection, Bisingen's mortality rates increased dramatically. Between December 1944 and mid-April 1945, 967 prisoners died in Bisingen. Thus contrary to the current trend in German research, which ascribes more importance to economic considerations than to pure ideology in National Socialist policy in various spheres,[3] Glauning maintains that to the very end ideological motives were of great importance.

Glauning sees in the development of the oil shale project an interplay between rationality and irrationality, between pragmatism and ideological dogmatism. Even if the whole project was launched for reasons that had little to do with rationality and pragmatism, people engaged in various stages of the project's development acted out of rational motives, be it the implementation of their research skills or efforts to secure workers or facilities. Glauning destroys the image of concentration camps at the end period of the Third Reich as bodies centrally administered, ruled by SS, and cordoned off from their surroundings. In fact she applies the term "Entgrenzung" (dissolution of boundaries), especially in terms of the relations between the camps and their surroundings. In

Bisingen, villagers came into everyday contact with the camp, whether via the sight of inmates passing through the streets on their way to work, the accommodation of camp personnel, or collaboration in the apprehension of escapees. Glauning also destroys or at least corrects the so-called "Bisingen myth," which portrayed the population of Bisingen as protesting against the inhuman treatment of camp's inmates or even assisting prisoners in various ways.

Glauning's study is well written and easy to read. It provides an interesting, important contribution to both the history of the Nazi armament program and the history of concentration camps in the later stages of the Third Reich.

Notes

[1]. Gerold Ambrosius, "Von Kriegswirtschaft zu Kriegswirtschaft," in *Deutsche Wirtschaftsgeschichte. Ein Jahrtausend im Überblick*, ed. Michael North (Munich: Beck, 2000), 345-346.

[2]. The most striking examples of such studies are: Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde. Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrussland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999) and more recently Götz Aly, *Hitlers Volkstaat. Raub, Rassenkrieg und nationaler Sozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2005).

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