

## Air Raids

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### „Air raid shelter Ostmark”

From the outbreak of war on September 1, 1939, complete blackouts were ordered as preventive measures against possible air raids.<sup>555</sup> Until 1943, however, the „Ostmark” [Nazi designation for Austria] did not suffer from air raids because its territory still lay beyond the range of British and American bomber formations taking off in England. As a result, the „Ostmark” was dubbed the „Luftschutzkeller des Reiches” [air raid shelter of the Reich], an area where armaments production could be set up and increased. With its night-time area bombing operations, Britain’s Royal Air Force (RAF) had already left a trail of destruction across the major German cities. From 1943 onwards, the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) launched precision attacks primarily against armaments targets. Then, in November 1943, following the defeat of German and Italian ground forces in North Africa and Southern Italy, 15th USAAF and 205th Group RAF established the second aerial front. Taking off from the newly constructed airfields in North Africa and subsequently Southern Italy, it was now possible to launch attacks on targets in the „Ostmark”. Primary targets for bombing in Austria were aircraft plants and their sub-contractors. With the very first air raid on the „Flugmotorenwerke Ostmark” [Ostmark Aircraft Engine Works] in Vienna Neustadt on August 13, 1943 the „Ostmark” finally lost its status as the „air raid shelter of the Reich”.<sup>556</sup>

From the fall of 1943, the air raid sirens sounded with increasing frequency in St. Valentin, too. The area was often overflown by Allied bomber formations and reconnaissance aircraft, so that nobody knew whether St. Valentin and the Nibelungenwerk were the actual targets. As St. Valentin was an important railroad junction and home to a major armaments facility, targeted air raids had to be expected at any time. As elsewhere in the „Ostmark” many children and juveniles from bombed-out German cities were quartered in St. Valentin. From their personal accounts, the effects of the air raids were well understood.<sup>557</sup>

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<sup>555</sup> BFSTV, Entry dated 25. October 1939

<sup>556</sup> [http://www.airpower.at/news03/0813\\_luftkrieg\\_ostmark/ziele.htm](http://www.airpower.at/news03/0813_luftkrieg_ostmark/ziele.htm), status 19.12.2008

<sup>557</sup> Anecdotes of Karl Winninger

## Anti-aircraft precautions

From the outbreak of war already, all residential buildings had received long, black curtains or black roller blinds for the blackout. There was strict monitoring to ensure that blackout regulations were observed, with repeat violations being severely punished. All lofts in buildings were cleared and everything flammable removed.<sup>557</sup>

To cover the particularly large windows of Workshops V and VII, large black curtains were fitted that were drawn at dusk. From spring/summer 1943, further precautionary measures were adopted. The original external rendering of the plant and residential buildings was light-colored. From April 1943, however, all workshops and buildings on the plant site, the housing Herzograd and Langenhardt residential developments as well as the camp barracks, were given a dark coating of paint.



The staff home in the Herzograd residential development was painted a darker color in spring or summer 1943. [Doku STV]

The workshop roofs were covered with camouflage netting. On site, at the plant entrance gates, but also directly inside the production and assembly shops, round concrete towers were built as anti-fragmentation bunkers for the fire-watch crews. These „protective cells” were also used by plant security. In the production workshops, blast walls of engineering brick were erected between the costly machines to protect them from the shock waves and fragments caused by high-explosive bombs. On account of the high density of installed machinery in

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By summer 1943, Workshop VI was already completely painted in a darker color. View of the north-west workshop face. [Archive ECS]



Blast walls made of engineering brick were built to protect the highly sensitive gear hobbing machines in Workshop I from shock waves and damage from bomb fragments. [Doku STV]

several production workshops it was necessary to build blast walls around entire machining sections rather than protecting individual machines.<sup>558</sup>

At the plant and in the residential developments, air raid shelters had already been considered and constructed accordingly. New shelters were dug into a hill known as the „Viehdorfer Leit'n" in the St. Valentin suburb of Viehdorf that lay to the south of the plant site. The air raid shelters at the plant could not only be used by the local workforce, but also by the foreign "civil workers", prisoners of war and concentration camp inmates.<sup>559</sup> Also created on-site was accommodation for stationing air raid and plant security personnel, as well as for fire-watch and repair crews.<sup>560</sup>



One of the numerous anti-fragmentation bunkers painted in a dark color. Standing close to this one is at the main plant entrance is a member of the plant security unit in winter 1943/ 1944. [Archive ECS]

A further measure was the construction of seven fire-extinguishing reservoirs that were built as open basins. With a decision dated February 11, 1944 the Baubevollmächtigte der Rüstungsinspektion XVII [Construction Plenipotentiary of Armaments Inspectorate XVII] granted an exception to the prevailing building ban. It was not permitted to fill the basins with fouled water. The water was drained off at regular intervals through gullies and suction ducts before seeping into the ground. Then, the reservoirs were scrubbed and filled again. An eighth reservoir of unknown dimensions was constructed near Workshop IX after it was completed in 1944.<sup>561</sup> Location and dimensions of the fire-extinguishing reservoirs:<sup>562</sup>

<sup>558</sup> MW, Photo Collection; Collection Perz, Nibelungenwerk GmbH: Report on the business year from 1. April to 31. December 1943, Plant construction, a) Buildings

<sup>559</sup> Anecdotes of Gertrude Koppendorfer; AMM, OH/ZP1/445, „Mauthausen Survivors Documentation Project“, Interview with Solomon J. Salat conducted by Elisabeth Pozzi-Thanner on 18. June 2002 in Elizabeth, New Jersey, USA, in English, DVD 1

<sup>560</sup> Collection Perz, Nibelungenwerk GmbH: Report on the business year from 1. April to 31. December 1943, Plant Construction, a) Buildings

<sup>561</sup> BASTV, Decision of the Amstetten District Council, dated 11. March 1944, dated 11. March 1944; MW, Photo Collection and Survey of the historical sites am 31. July 2009

<sup>562</sup> BASTV, Decision of the Amstetten District Council, dated 11. March 1944