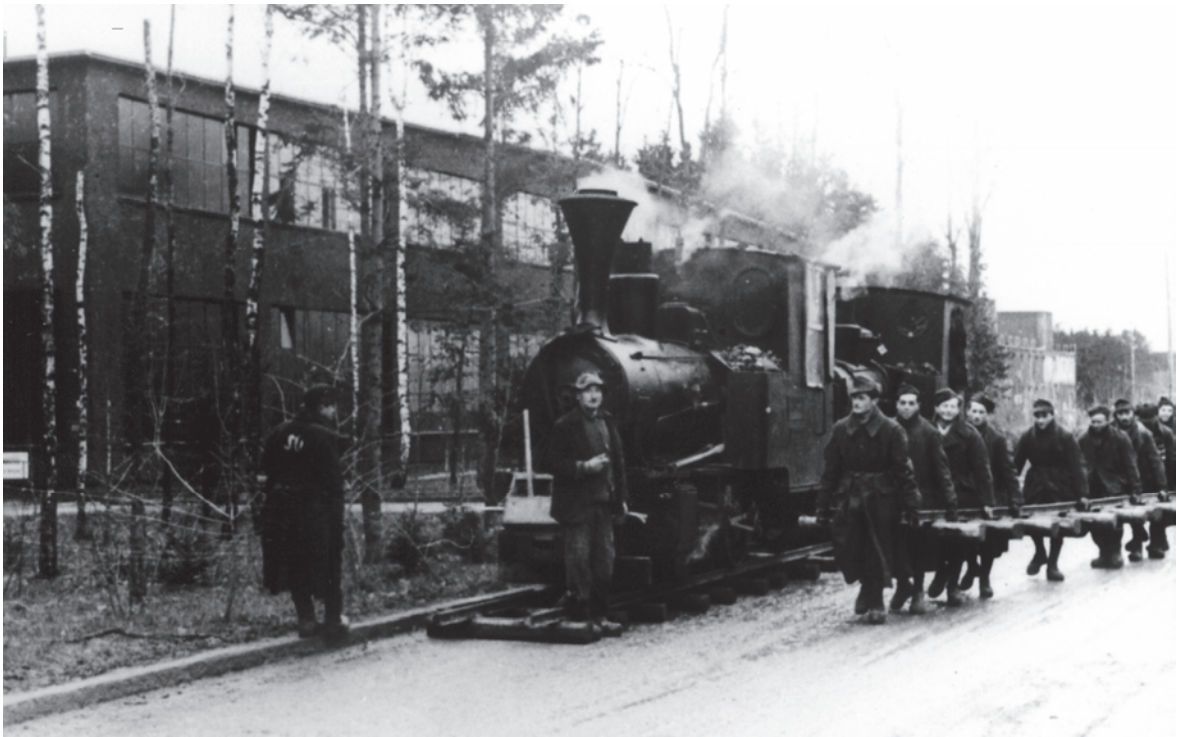


From 1942/1943 onward at the latest, the increases in production that went hand in hand with the expansion of the plant facilities depended on ever greater numbers of foreign workers. Very few of these were properly trained specialists. Mostly, they were simply subjected to a brief training period on the machines they were expected to work on. Despite a modest and constantly declining number of skilled workers and an ever increasing contingent of poorly trained foreign laborers, output levels rose between 1942 and 1944, and was still being maintained up to 1945.<sup>278</sup>

Management of the Nibelungenwerk was fully aware of the fact that they were totally dependent on prisoners of war and foreign civilian workers to maintain production. They were equally indifferent to where those foreigners originated and under what circumstances they were assigned to their tasks. However, in order to maintain their willingness to work and to avoid desertions from the workplace, they ensured acceptable treatment and entertainment within a very tightly staked-out framework.<sup>279</sup>



Russian prisoners of war laying a narrow gage field railtrack in the front of Workshop III. They were forced to wear the letters „SU” on the back of their clothes. These markings can be seen on the prisoner of war at the left. [Archive ECS]

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<sup>278</sup> A detailed study of this topic in the Nibelungenwerk can be found in Andreas Leuchtenmüller's: „Fremdarbeit und nationalsozialistische Armamentwirtschaft [Foreign Labor and National Socialist Armaments Economy].“ A case study on the Nibelungenwerk in St. Valentin 1939 – 1945, Diploma Thesis, Vienna 1992

<sup>279</sup> HF, Specialist consultancy Peter Müller



A prisoner of war guarded by an SS trooper carrying a Steyr sub-machine gun 34(δ), made by Steyr-Daimler-Puch AG. The SS camouflage smock with the pea-dot pattern is not really typical for guard details. [Doku STV]

According to the recollections of contemporary witnesses, the French citizens working at the plant were well treated and could even receive parcels from their home country.<sup>280</sup> They were even allowed to move reasonably freely within the township of St. Valentin itself, whereas the male and female Eastern Workers of the Herzograd Communal Camp were subject to significantly more severe restrictions. Of all the foreigners, it was the Russians who were treated worst, given that the National Socialists considered them to be "sub-humans".<sup>281</sup>

A number of contemporary statement extracts from the situation reports of the St. Valentin gendarmerie station throw light on the forced labor conditions at the Nibelungenwerk. Formulated in the Nazi jargon of the time, these reports were submitted monthly to the district authorities of Amstetten.<sup>282</sup> Report dated March 28, 1942:<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Anecdotes of Gertrude Koppendorfer and Johannes Kreutzer (24. August 2010)

<sup>281</sup> Anecdotes of Karl Winninger, Gertrude Koppendorfer and Johannes Kreutzer (24. August 2010)

<sup>282</sup> AL, Amstetten District Council, 23. January 1939, Circular to all Gendarmerie stations for the attention of the Gendarmerie station commanders and the Gendarmerie Inspectorate Amstetten

<sup>283</sup> AL, Excerpt from the situation report of the Gendarmerie station St. Valentin to the Amstetten District Council dated 28. March 1942, DÖW E 19.829 (BHA 1942/43, I-II, 250)

»Among the foreign workers employed here, at the Nibelungenwerk in particular, there was a recent mass-escape. Primarily it was civilian Poles and Belgians who disappeared from the workplace overnight without permission... In the case of the Belgians, they were all juveniles suffering from homesickness. However, they usually get caught again at the frontier of the Reich and are brought back... Individuals from the Nibelungenwerk breaching their labor contracts are commonly punished by the Gestapo and the Reichstreuhänder der Arbeit [Reich Trustee for Labor] with protective custody... In particular, handing them over to the Gestapo will prove highly effective (those involved are really afraid of this measure) in discouraging other employees from breaking their contracts.«

May 27, 1942:<sup>284</sup>

»Lately, the behavior of the French prisoners of war is creating general dissatisfaction. They are becoming insolent, insubordinate, give themselves airs and, judging by their comments, do not believe in the victory of German arms. Increasingly, they are frequenting taverns, and even visit the public baths. This change in their behavior probably stems from the easing of restrictions... The number of desertions from the workplace has grown to such an extent that 1 official of this station, if he were doing nothing else, would hardly be able to process the number of complaints and search warrants. The reason for the desertions is frequently the strict treatment and controls in the closed camps, mostly at night (checking that the regulations on the moral behavior of the Poles are observed) by the Werkschutz [Plant Security]. Consequently, the Poles make up the largest contingent that is escaping. Thanks to prompt issuing of search warrants, it is frequently possible to arrest many of escapees.«

December 27, 1942:<sup>285</sup>

»The French civilian workers can be classified as work-shy. They are consistently guilty of innumerable breaches of contract infringement such as plundering, absenteeism, deserting the workplace. Consequently, numerous Frenchmen had to be transferred to corrective arrest, some of them even to the labor education camp... Moreover, no property is safe from the French. Wherever they show up, whether in the camps, or in the workplace, theft is common, including series of locker break-ins... Hence, it is totally justified to define the French as

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<sup>284</sup> AL, Excerpt from the situation report of the Gendarmerie station St. Valentin to the Amstetten District Council dated 27. May 1942, DÖW E 19.829 (BHA 1942/43, I-II, 250)

<sup>285</sup> AL, Excerpt from the situation report of the Gendarmerie station St. Valentin to the Amstetten District Council dated 27. December 1942, DÖW E 19.829 (BHA 1942/43, I-II, 250)