

13th COMMEMORATIVE EXCURSION TO ENGERAU

with commemoration ceremony at the
memorial „Panzersperre“ in Berg

Sunday March 24 2013

Departure **7.45 a.m.**

Return **6 p.m.**

Meeting point: 1020 Vienna, Praterstern 1

(in front of the *Jüdisches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung*)

Metro stop „Praterstern“, exit: Heinestraße

Contribution: EUR 12,-

(Scholars, apprentices, students, unemployed free)

Registration by 15 March 2013:

Organizer:

Claudia Kuretsidis-Haider PhD

(Austrian Research Center for Post-War Trials)

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Information and literature:

<http://www.nachkriegsjustiz.at/service/archiv/>

[GedenkfahrtEngerauBericht2012.pdf](http://www.nachkriegsjustiz.at/service/archiv/GedenkfahrtEngerauBericht2012.pdf)

http://www.nachkriegsjustiz.at/ns_verbrechen/juden/

[Kuretsidis_Diss.php](http://www.nachkriegsjustiz.at/ns_verbrechen/juden/Kuretsidis_Diss.php)



Itinerary

9.30 a.m.

Ceremony at the memorial for the Hungarian-Jewish slave laborers at the cemetery in Petržalka (Engerau) / Bratislava, Nábřežna

Program:

Addresses of welcome: H.E. **Josef Markus Wuketich** PhD (Austrian Ambassador in Bratislava), H.E. **Alexander Ben-Zvi** (Israeli Ambassador in Bratislava), **Reinhard Wiemer** (representative of the German embassy in Bratislava), **Igor Skoček** (first secretary at the Slovak embassy in Vienna)

Speeches: **Peter Salner** PhD (President of the Jewish Community in Bratislava), **Ondrej Krajnák** PhD (Director of the Nation's Memory Institute ÚPN, Bratislava) *Historical introduction:* Professor **Szabolcs Szita** PhD (Holocaust Documentation Center of the Hungarian Auschwitz Foundation, Budapest)

Historical witness: **Endre Várnai** (son of one of the murdered Hungarian-Jewish slave labourers)

11 a.m.

Journey to sites of the former Engerau camp in Petržalka

Historical background:

Claudia Kuretsidis-Haider PhD

12.15 p.m.

Ceremony at the Wolfsthal-memorial for Hungarian-Jewish slave laborers who were murdered during the „death march“ from Petržalka (Engerau) to Bad Deutsch-Altenburg

Program:

Address of welcome: Mayor **Gerhard Schödingner**

Historical background: **Claudia Kuretsidis-Haider** PhD

Speech: **Béla Varga** (contemporary witness; Hungarian-Jewish slave laborer during the Nazi-time)

Lunch Break

2.15 p.m.

Commemoration ceremony at the memorial „Panzersperre“ in Berg (Lower Austria)

Location: Preßburger Straße, rest area near the nature playground (junction at the cycle path to Kittsee)

Program:

Address of welcome: Mayor **Georg Hartl**

Presentation of the project „Panzersperre“: secretary of the community **Erich Weintritt**

Historical introduction:

Claudia Kuretsidis-Haider PhD (FStN)

Blessing of the memorial: Pastor **Artur Furman**

Followed by reception



4.30 p.m.



Commemoration ceremony at the Bruck/Leitha cemetery for 155 murdered Hungarian-Jewish slave laborers

Speech: **Irmtraut**

Karlsson PhD (former member of the Austrian parliament)

Return to Vienna

Historical background

When the 2nd WW seemed more and more hopeless, also to the German leaders, they ordered to build a so-called Imperial Defence Line (or South-East-Wall) in the second half of the year 1944, which was meant to enable the Wehrmacht to defend the eastern frontier of the German Reich against the Soviet Army. Along the eastern frontier, of which was then the German Reich (and thus Austria of today), the South-East-Wall reached from Bratislava to the southern border of Styria. Members of the local civilian population as well as members of the Hitler Youth and the *Volkssturm*, foreign labourers and Hungarian Jews were recruited for forced labour. The Jews were put up in forced labour camps. All in all there were twenty such camps along the „Austrian” part of the South-East-Wall. Engerau was the most northern one. Engerau (today Petržalka) is a district of the Slovakian capital Bratislava.

The Engerau-camp

The Jews were put up in barracks but also in farms, barns, stables, and cellars, very close to the resident population. The working and living conditions were quite similar to a concentration camp. Like in other camps along the South-East-Wall the Jews were guarded by members of the SA (most of them from Vienna) as well as by so-called political leaders (officials of the Nazis). The SA guards were subordinated to Edmund Kratky, who was later replaced by Erwin Falkner.

The „deathmarch”

When the Soviet Army approached Engerau in March 1945 the Nazis ordered the transfer of the prisoners to the concentration camp of Mauthausen. They were actually supposed to be transported by train, but due to the confusion at the end of the war that was not possible. That was the reason why the captives were forced to walk on a footmarch from

Engerau via Wolfsthal and Hainburg to Bad Deutsch-Altenburg (which was felt by the victims to be a kind of „hunt of rabbits”, in German *Hasenjagd*). Numerous prisoners, however, were not able to march due to the prevailing conditions in the camp, so they were shot by a special commando on 29 March 1945. In the following night, the majority of the prisoners left the Engerau camp escorted by SA-guards and political leaders. On their way to Bad Deutsch-Altenburg approximately 100 prisoners were shot, killed or died because of exhaustion. The survivors of the evacuation transport were shipped in Bad Deutsch-Altenburg heading for the concentration camp of Mauthausen. When they arrived there after a week, many of them had died either because of starvation or being shot by the guards. A few days later – before the liberation of the concentration camp of Mauthausen–, those, who had not been gassed the days before, were sent on another footmarch to the Gunskirchen camp near Wels in Upper Austria, where the American troops liberated them on 4 May 1945.

The Engerau-trials

Only ten days later, one of the SA-guards reported the horrible crimes committed in Engerau and the following „death-march” to the Austrian police. On 22 June 1945 prosecution in Vienna was called in and started its investigations. At several on-the-spot-investigations five mass graves were found in Engerau containing 512 male bodies and they were buried at the Petržalka cemetery. With his announcement the SA-guard caused the most extensive court case in the history of the Austrian people’s courts (which had the duty to charge Nazi crimes) concerning the number of the trials (6), the number of the convicted (20; out of them 9 death sentences, one life-imprisonment) and the period of time it lasted (from 1945 to 1954). All in all investigations against 72 alleged perpetrators were conducted until the 1990ies.

The Memorial „Panzersperre” in Berg

The construction of the „Southeast wall” involved the building of tank ditches and barriers, which ran throughout the whole community of Berg. In the course of laying water channels for excavation work along Pressburger Street in the summer of 2008, a tank barrier was discovered. Mayor Georg Hartl decided to excavate the tank barrier in order to create a memorial. On the 19th of August 2008 two large cranes lifted the 2 X 2 X 3 meter, 31 ton concrete block to the site of the Arne Karlsson Memorial. In 2011 it was moved to its present location (Pressburger Street, rest area near the nature playground), and in 2012 documentary material was added. Surrounding the site the following topics relating to the end of the Nazi period and the Soviet takeover are depicted:

- The construction of the Southeast wall and the suffering of the field workers (most of them Hungarian Jews);
- the light metal work „Bernhard Berghaus”;
- an aerial blueprint of the light metal workplace: the Arne Karlsson Memorial (Arne Karlsson, member of the Swedish charity „Raedda Barnen Austria”, was shot to death in the course of his humanitarian work by the Soviets);
- the confusion of war, the post-war period and the Soviet occupation.



May this ruin from the Holocaust serve as a warning against the recurrence of such events and the inauguration of permanent peace.
(Mayor Georg Hartl)