

The former concentration camp
in Fort Oberer Kuhberg, Ulm 1933 – 1935

Human dignity is inviolable



Dokumentationszentrum Oberer Kuhberg,
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**The former concentration camp
in Fort Oberer Kuhberg, Ulm (1933–1935)**

Introduction

Welcome to the memorial of the former concentration camp Oberer Kuhberg! This pamphlet is designed to guide the visitor through the buildings of the concentration camp on Kuhberg and to highlight its most important features. Study the route description, go to the selected spot and read the information there. An even better way to visit the concentration camp is to join a guided tour, which takes place every Sunday at 2.30 p.m. Group tours can be organised on weekdays too. Please call 0049-731-21312.

Basic information about concentration camps

1. The history of the concentration camp of Ulm (1933–1935)

The Fort Oberer Kuhberg is part of the Bundesfestung Ulm (a fortress built from 1842 to 1857). It became a concentration camp of the federal state of Württemberg as the successor of the camp Heuberg near Stetten am Kalten Markt in November 1933, the year of the Nazi rise to power. Officially called “Württembergisches Schutzhaftlager Ulm/Donau”, it was one of almost 100 early concentration camps and other “prevention detention” places which were constructed in 1933. The function of these early camps was to break down the convictions and the will of real and suspected political and ideological opponents with terror and to intimidate the rest of the population.

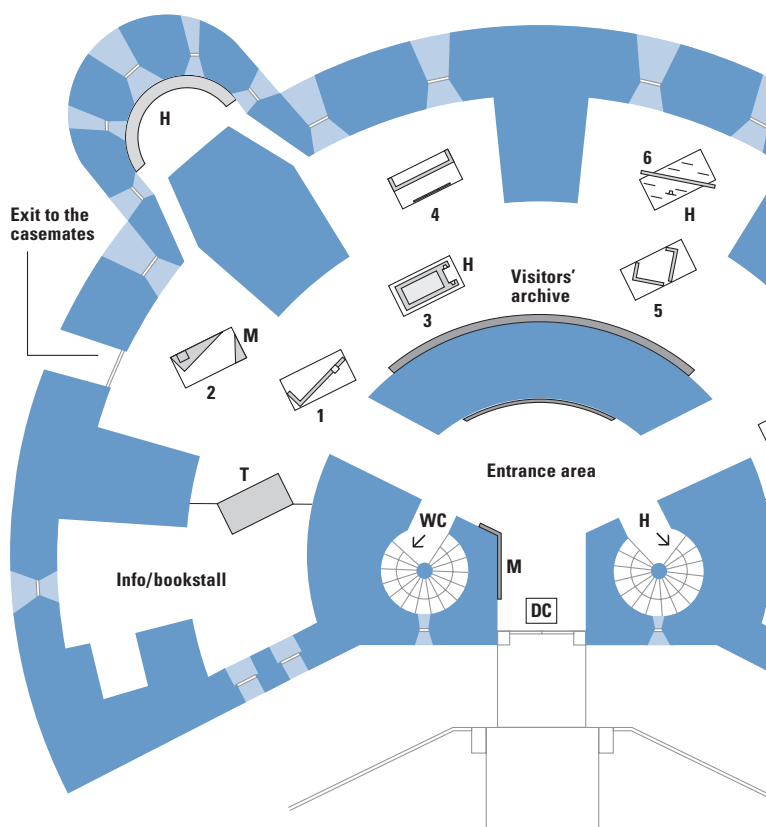
These camps are the beginning of the Nazi system of concentration camps that ended in places like Dachau, Buchenwald, Mauthausen or in the “main camp” of Auschwitz. Approximately 600 prisoners, particularly communists and social democrats and also three Catholic priests, were incarcerated in the concentration camp Oberer Kuhberg. After its closing in July 1935, the remaining prisoners were sent to the Dachau concentration camp.

2. The memorial of the concentration camp

Oberer Kuhberg (DZOK)

The memorial of the concentration camp Oberer Kuhberg (DZOK) has been developed as an idea by the surviving prisoners of concentration camps in Württemberg since 1948. After a long battle, it has been realised as a project of the citizens of Ulm and not as a municipal or state-run authority. After the first permanent exhibition in 1985, a second one followed in June 2001. A sponsoring organisation that comprises more than 400 members today, was founded in 1977. The work of the memorial is mainly supported by the city of Ulm and by the German federal state Baden-Württemberg.

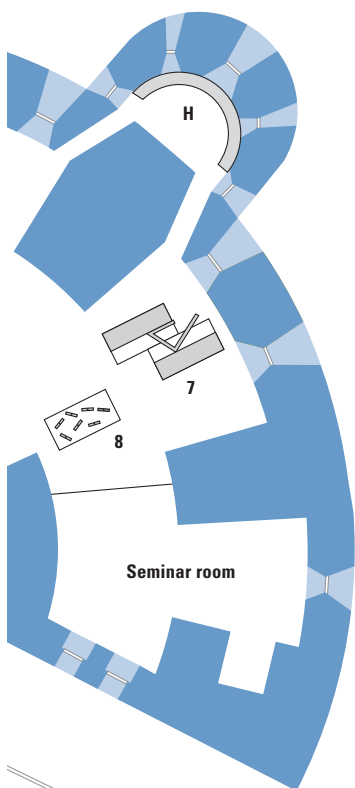
The exhibition in the retreat building of the Fort – ground floor



The exhibition

The entrance area

The visitor enters the memorial through the retreat building of the Fort. During the existence of the concentration camp, the headquarters and the administration were set up there. Decisions about the destiny of the victims were made there too. In the headquarters were the offenders' rooms, but it was also a place where the victims suffered. In this building, offenders and victims confronted each other directly during interrogations. When entering this building, the visitor first sees neon letters: "Human dignity is inviolable" – these words represent Article 1 of the German constitution. They signal that the memorial is not only about the past, but also about the present.



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1 Hitler's rise to power and early concentration camps

This part of the exhibition describes the creation and the function of the early concentration camps in Württemberg and Baden: the concentration camp Heuberg near Stetten am Kalten Markt (March 1933 to November 1933), the concentration camp Oberer Kuhberg Ulm (November 1933 to March 1935) and the "preventive detention department" for women at the police's prison Gotteszell in Schwäbisch Gmünd (March 1933 to January 1934). As part of Hitler's rise to power in Germany, the Nazis began to eliminate all real and suspected opponents through terror in March 1933. Their most important tools to achieve that goal were "preventive detention" and concentration camps. The legal basis of the arrests is the "Verordnung zum Schutz von Volk und Staat" (issued on 28 February 1933 after the burning of the Reichstag) which repeals crucial basic rights of the constitution.



"Article 114, 115, 117, 118, 123, 124 and 153 of the constitution of the German Reich are suspended until further notice. Therefore, restrictions to personal freedom, the right to free statement of opinion – freedom of press, law of association and right of assembly included –, interventions in the privacy of correspondence, the confidentiality of post and the secret of telegraph and telephone, the order to house search and confiscation as well as restrictions to property are admissible also outside the usual legal boundaries."

Article 1 of the "Verordnung des Reichspräsidenten zum Schutz von Volk und Staat", Reichsgesetzblatt, 28 February 1933

2 Reasons for the imprisonment on the Kuhberg

Here you can obtain information about everyday life during imprisonment and about the origins of the prisoners. The prisoners at the concentration camp Oberer Kuhberg were almost all members of the socialist labour movement, particularly officials of the German communist party (KPD) and some prominent social democrats. In addition, three Catholic priests were taken into preventive detention at the beginning of 1934. Those who disapproved of the Nazi regime due to religious or political convictions without being politically organised were also affected. In May 1934 a propaganda campaign against "killjoys, querulous people and moaners" took place. The "preventive detention" became a tool of elimination of all social opposition. The locking up of people of no fixed abode and so-called social misfits refers to social backgrounds.



"...Only once a day we saw daylight and could take in some fresh air. Then we had to move in a circle in the courtyard for half an hour up to one hour under surveillance of the guards of the Storm Troopers while wearing our prisoner clothes. The guards paid close attention that we didn't speak too much. Apart from this "trip" to daylight we were sitting in our humid and cold room during the whole day."

Prisoner of the Kuhberg Otto Grau from Jebenhausen, undated report

3 Self-assertion within the camp rules

In the Nazi ideology the early concentration camps served “re-educational” aims. Therefore everything was done in order to break down the will of the prisoners through despotism, intimidation and mistreatment. One way for the prisoners to maintain their individuality was to use their imagination and intellect in various pursuits. In the big glass cabinet you will find a few original artefacts that bear witness to the opportunities of intellectual self-assertion, e.g. in terms of artistic activity.



“...It was clear that we kept up a pastime. However, one of us always had to keep guard. As soon as the enemy was approaching, board games, card games, the books, woodcarvings and paintings disappeared. To smuggle in the needed materials was a particular skill, and therefore the cells to solitary confinement – we called them bunker – were regularly full...”

Report of the prisoner of Kuhberg Alfred Rieckert from Esslingen, 1945

4 Promise and temptation

After Hitler's rise to power the Nazis intensified their propaganda to an extent never seen before. Nazi state holidays, days of remembrance of the party and "traditional" holidays form the Nazi holiday year and let the people, forced into line, become a visible expression at public demonstrations. May 1st, once an international special day of the work force, was reorganised to a "day of national work". Symbols and slogans of the labour movement like "work and bread" were taken over. The alleged successes of the controlling of the work force should help to win blue-collar workers for the racist people's community. Where the propaganda failed, the regime showed its true face: everyone who tried to evade the elimination of all opposition was threatened through terror.



You can see a historic photograph of the Nazi production at the entrance of the headquarters of the "preventive detention camp of Württemberg in Ulm" on the occasion of 1 May 1934. On the reverse side there is a propagandistic article of the Nazi newspaper "Ulmer Tagblatt" from August 1934 about the background of the creation of the picture. The article informs the public about the concentration camp Oberer Kuhberg.

5 Institutional responsibility and men on guard

This exhibit describes the backgrounds and life stories of the perpetrators of the concentration camp Oberer Kuhberg. As a concentration camp of Württemberg the political police was responsible for the camp of Ulm. The political police belonged to the Ministry of the Interior of Württemberg. After the opening of the Kuhberg camp there were approximately 120 guards and six administration employees. In July 1935, when the camp was closed, only 29 guards remained. This means that in the end there were as many guards as prisoners. The smaller part of the guards belonged to the police force and the bigger part were members of the Storm Troopers (SA) who already had worked as special constables in the concentration camp Heuberg. The commanding officer was Karl Buck who had been in this position already at Heuberg since April 1933.



“...The political police sees its current and future task in investigating and observing the enemies of the Third Reich, but also – if necessary – in fighting them directly and ruthlessly, indifferent towards the forms in which these enemies might appear...”

Hermann Matthei in “Stuttgarter NS-Kurier”, 30 January 1934

6 Continuance of political opposition despite early concentration camps

This exhibit presents different articles of the illegal resistance's press. When being released, the prisoners had to sign a declaration that they would keep quiet about the experiences during their imprisonment. Nevertheless, information about the conditions of imprisonment in the camps reached the public. In a few cases prisoners succeeded in escaping and afterwards emigrating to foreign countries. Such publications show that a number of illegal underground magazines existed. They signify the continuation of a few organisations of the underground labour movement.



"... The silence about Haag, Waibel and Lauterwasser must be broken, Schumacher's release must be forced."

Anton Waibel and Alfred Lauterwasser are the only prisoners of the Kuhberg camp known by name who could initially escape from the concentration camp. The communist Alfred Haag and the social democrat Dr. Kurt Schumacher were the two most prominent prisoners of the concentration camp Oberer Kuhberg. They were kept in solitary confinement in the two dugouts of the artillery above the place of the roll call for a longer period.

7 After the closure of the camp on Kuhberg

The first concentration camps were the beginning of a general increase in camps in Germany and the first stage of a development towards a system of Nazi concentration camps and extermination camps. Hundreds of concentration and labour camps invaded all conquered countries at the beginning of the Second World War in 1939. For some of the prisoners of the camp in Ulm, its closure and their committal into the concentration camp of Dachau marked the beginning of period of years of suffering through Nazi concentration camps, e. g. Buchenwald, Mauthausen, Neuengamme and Auschwitz. Other prisoners, who were initially released, were being arrested again after some time. Not all prisoners experienced the liberation of the camp through the Allied Forces. A number of former Kuhberg prisoners died shortly before the end of the war due to hard forced labour and mistreatment.



Oil painting by Emil Benz:
Prisoners' roll call at
the concentration camp
of Buchenwald

8 The memorial – its history, its future

In 1948 the former concentration camp prisoners of Heuberg, Kuhberg and Welzheim established a union. The struggle for compensation was a focal point as well as the attempt to prosecute those who were responsible. The board of trustees, founded in 1971, and the charitable organisation that arose from the board of trustees in 1977 continue the tradition of remembrance and memory. The memorial, which has been visited by approximately 250,000 people since 1985, illustrates the historical events where they actually took place with the help of concrete examples. The educational mission is given more and more priority. Besides communicating historical knowledge, it is important to learn a lesson from the historical model as well as to arouse political sensitivity for both present and future.



You can see the demonstration of former prisoners of concentration camps in September 1957 that had as its motto "Never again concentration camp Kuhberg". To this day this phrase serves to inspire our activities.

The detention cell

At the entrance of the concentration camp you are standing on thick wooden floor boards which conceal the place where some of the worst of the cruelties committed against the prisoners took place: the detention cell. You will find it by going down one of the two stairways next to the entrance.

Prisoners who were subjected to special punishment from the Nazi thugs were imprisoned here for several days or even weeks on half rations. Up above, the sentries constantly walked in and out, the dirt from their boots falling through the gaps in the floor boards onto the prisoner below – a massive symbolic humiliation.

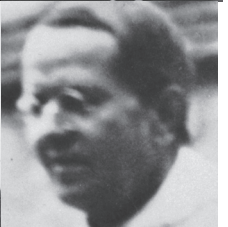
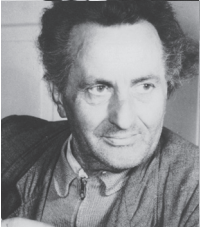
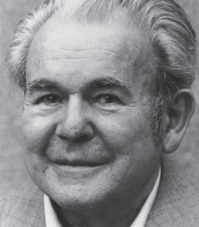
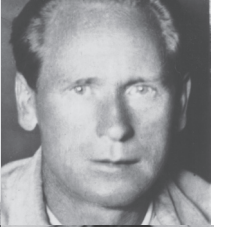
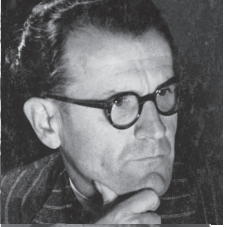
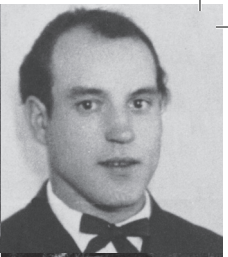
One inmate described how he was forced to sing Nazi songs when he heard one of his tormentors nearby. Another reported that during the winter a motorbike was washed in the entrance above him and the oily water then dripped down onto him and froze in his clothes.

The former camp commander's office

Going up one of the two stairways to the first floor you find yourself in the area of the former camp administration. The vaults were divided into several badly heated rooms where the camp administrators worked. The camp commander, Karl Buck, resided here in a windowless room.

Today there is the chance of understanding the biography of individual prisoners on the basis of a number of richly illustrated albums on the upper floor of the former headquarters. Further albums offer the opportunity to deepen one's knowledge about single topics.

There is also a niche that opens towards the main room where you can commemorate the victims of the Nazi regime in a quiet and dignified atmosphere. This place offers space for individual sorrow but also for ritual gestures.



The outside area

The outside area is only accessible on guided tours. Unfortunately you may not explore this important part of the concentration camp without an official guide. If you would like to visit the outside area, please join a guided tour and read the information provided in English.

The camp buildings are spread all over the area: accommodation for the guards (no. 5 on the plan), the well (13), infirmary (7), special cells (8) and the kitchen (11). The prisoners had to stand for hours in the sun on the parade ground (9) and underwent mock executions and other spiteful arbitrary acts.

The paths are often muddy and slippery. This mud too, was used by the commanding officer in order to torment the prisoners. They were forced to crawl for hours over the ground in military drill fashion. Afterwards, it was quite likely that they had to line up for a clothes inspection. With great difficulty they then had to clean their camp issued uniforms with water from the well and fall-in dripping wet.



Single detention cells

The two most prominent prisoners of the concentration camp Oberer Kuhberg, the social democrat Kurt Schumacher and the communist Alfred Haag, were held in solitary confinement in the two artillery dugouts situated above the parade ground for a longer period of time. The commanding officer of the concentration camp described them as “seducers”, whereas their fellow prisoners, who had to line up at the parade ground several times a day, were regarded as “tempted” people, who should be brought to a “political turning back”. Schumacher tried to defend himself against special harassment by hunger strike. The exact site of these detention cells has been controversial for a long time. On the basis of a filmed walk with Alfred Haag, they could be determined and one of them has been made accessible for visitors.

“Zeppelinbau”

The prisoners of level 1, the level of release, were put up in a case-mate corps located in the middle of the rampart in the inner Fort. The prisoners called this place “Zeppelinbau”. This underground space is connected with the gallery of the west front through a corridor. The concrete steps which are now visible there were installed in the Second World War as the space was used by a company from Ulm in order to produce weapons.

Infirmary

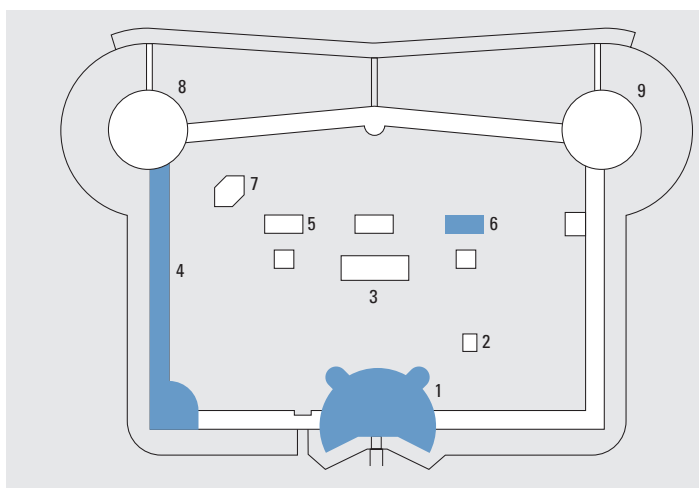
Prisoners who became sick at the concentration camp Oberer Kuhberg were looked after in the infirmary which was located in a former shooting battery. It included six beds. The patients were “taken care of” by medical orderly of the Storm Toopers (SA) and by a young doctor resident in the city of Ulm. According to statements of prisoners he came to the camp one time per week on average. The provision of medical care of the patients, who mainly suffered from gastroduodenal disorders, colds and rheumatism, was principally kept to the administration of tea. Prisoners who had life-threatening illnesses were released to their homes where some of them died shortly after because of the consequences of their imprisonment.

Watchtower of the Storm Troopers

The tower in the south-western corner of the Fort Oberer Kuhberg, the tower of the Storm Troopers, is the space where the guards of the Storm Troopers stayed during their working hours. In the summer of 1934 the commander Karl Buck ordered Willi Riexinger, prisoner of Backnang, to hang the inscription "We will support Hitler even if we have to go through hell" above the entrance. It should show the Storm Troopers' unconditional loyalty to Hitler. This inscription was removed at the end of 1969.

The casemates

The casemates are underground galleries with very thick walls and were constructed for military purposes with loopholes for firing guns.



- 1 Camp commander's office
- 2 Well
- 3 "Zeppelinbau", Parade ground
- 4 Casemates
- 5 Single detention cell Schumacher
- 6 Single detention cell Haag
- 7 Infirmary
- 8 Storm Troopers (day) rooms
- 9 Kitchen and Workshops

The casemates

After the defeat of the Nazi dictatorship, former prisoners of the Kuhberg concentration camp described their experiences. The plaques, which can be read in this passageway, contain extracts from these reports. Before reading the various exhibition plaques, you should look at the prisoners' cells first. Only then you are able to have an idea about the internment conditions which were predominant in the camp.

Here are the translations of the plaques:

Under the stairs

Those walking in front disappear into the darkness, climbing downstairs to the inside. Again we walk through murky rooms and corridors, lit only by flickering candles.

Room 1

As the closed iron doors to the individual casemates were laboriously opened by the SA men, a musty decaying smell forced its way up from the depths of these corridors to the surface.

Room 3, left

When the first prisoners arrived, they first had to remove the icicles from the ceiling.

Room 3, right

A damp, cold cellar room where the water ran down the walls and the clay floor became so soft that you sank ankle deep into the mud.

Room 3 (with the reconstructed table)

At 7 a.m. thin, black chicory coffee (malt coffee was coloured black with chicory extract; English people know this as camp coffee) with black bread. At 12 midday a bowl of stew made of turnips, grits, rice, lentils etc. At 6 p.m. black bread with butter, cheese or black sausage. At 7 p.m. lights out!

Room 4 (with the reconstructed beds)

For the first few nights the prisoners had to sleep on damp straw.

Room 5, left

The guards seldom spoke in a normal tone of voice and what poured forth from them was only a horrible, often unintelligible roar that seemed like the rage of a madman, and, depending on the mood of the political victor, could end in a beating.

Room 5, right

Every day I was chased and beaten by the SA men.

Room 6

Air and light came through the narrow slits in the thick fortress walls so that even on bright days only an evening dimness pervaded the day.

Room 7, left

No more chalk was available for the cleaning of the eating bowls, cutlery and other containers. In Heuberg, we scraped the chalk from the walls in order to clean our dishes.



Room 7, right

Now we used earth, although we still had to be economical with the water when washing up. In spite of the difficulties, everything had to be absolutely tip-top at roll call. To make an objection was more than dangerous.

Room 8

Depressed and with a heart full of melancholy, we often hummed to ourselves those adored melodies from home in the sad stillness of our god-forsaken dungeon.

Room 9, left

While crouching in a deep knee-bend position, my hair was cut. Now shaven like a criminal, I walked along the corridor, through an armour plated door to the locked casemate.

Room 9, right

Twice a week, under the watchful eye of an SA man, the shaving equipment was handed out. He stayed until it was returned. Asked about the purpose of the guard, several showed me the scars of slit arteries.



Room 11, left

Only clothes parcels were allowed, and even the tiniest of extra rations were taken by these thieves and often eaten in front of our very eyes.

Room 11, right

A letter meant sheer bliss, a sign from the outside even if it contained sad news.

Room 13

As long as people could remember there were no humans living in these ghastly holes. First of all, baskets full of skeletons, dead birds and animals had to be taken out.

Room 14

The resistance movement is not only alive in the illegal fight outside, but inside the camp as well.

Room 15 (by the latrines), left

Every morning for all three levels, the water was put into large tin cans (The three levels refer to the group classifying system that operated in the camp. Those prisoners classified in level one had a slightly easier time than inmates in level two or three.) When pouring you had to be careful that the black worms lying at the bottom of the cans did not escape into the drinking or washing bowls.

Room 15, right

Permission for the prisoners to go to the latrines was granted mostly only when it suited the SA sentries. Many inmates later had serious bladder and intestinal illnesses due to these inhuman circumstances.

The latrines

You are now standing by the open latrines which were used by about 60 men, the maximum number who were imprisoned in this corridor. The guards, who had access through the now locked door at the end, often arbitrarily prevented the prisoners from relieving themselves, a loathsome method to rob the inmates of their dignity.

The Kuhberg concentration camp was no work camp. An “extermination through work” did not take place here although the inmates were forced to do pointless heavy manual work and military drill. Amongst other things, they had to lay out paths in the Fort so that the commander, who had a wooden leg, could move around the place with ease.

Above all, the confinement on Kuhberg meant a gnawing boredom for the prisoners. Often, they did not come out of their cells for days on end. Reading, writing and games were forbidden. According to concurring reports from many former prisoners, the worst fear was the uncertainty of the length of their incarceration. None of the inmates had had a court hearing or a sentence passed on them.

**Guest book, souvenir books, donations,
opening times.**

Please write your impressions and thoughts
in our guest book which lies at the entrance.

Souvenir books are available for purchase –
they are on display in a heated room on the
ground floor.

The documentation centre has very limited
funds at its disposal and relies heavily on
donations.

Opening times: Sunday 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. Tours
begin at 2.30 p.m. On weekdays, tours can
be arranged by appointment.

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