

## P7a

### The deportees' origins and fate after Urbès camp closed

(Drawing, Internet)



According to the information of Robert Steegmann in his book - entitled « *Struthof, le KL-Natzweiler et ses kommandos : une nébuleuse concentrationnaire des deux côtés du Rhin, 1941-1945* » / Edition La Nuée Bleue / DNA, 2005 - most of the deportees at Urbès camp were political detainees wearing the red triangle.

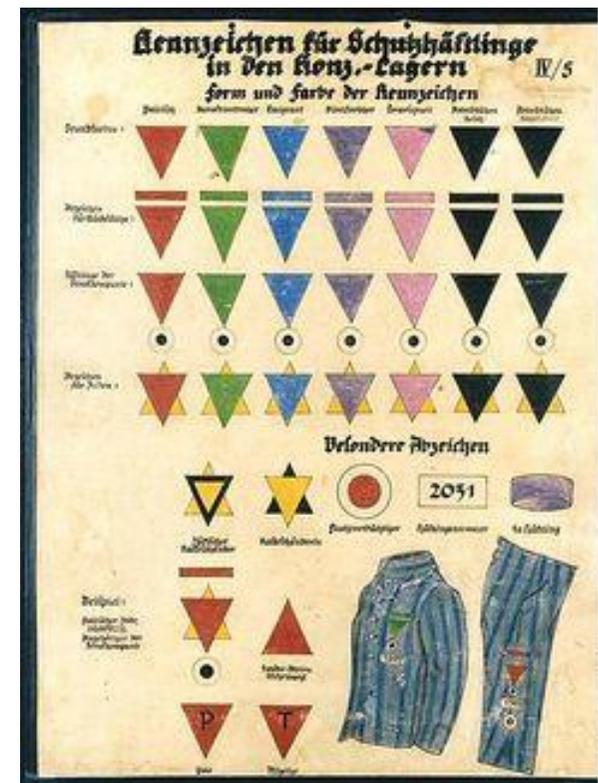
Their nationalities were diverse.

**Convoy of 25<sup>th</sup> March 1944 : 89% of political detainees <sup>(1)</sup>**

Origin of the deportees	Percentage	Number
German	17%	
French	22%	
Greek		9
Luxembourg		5
Italian war prisoners	36%	
Polish	13%	
Soviets	26,3%	
Yugoslavs	5,3%	

(1) These figures may be approximate since the total exceeds 100%.

Document from the Wikipedia Website about nazi camps.



Opening of the main camp Natzweiler-Struthof : May 1941

### Opening of the secondary camp in Urbès

February ? March 1944

25.03.44	29.03.44	6.04.44	6.05.44	Between 22.05 and middle August	25.08.44	Beginning September 44	
[	/	/	/	/	/	/	>
300 deportees	200 deportees	502 deportees	550 deportees	36 deportees	565 Jews	166 Italian war prisoners	
from Dachau	from Dachau	from	from Auschwitz	from Natzweiler	« Daimler-Benz Jews »	from Sindelfingen	
		Lublin /Majdanek			from Flossenbürg		

Nota Bene : other convoys of deportees are mentioned, according to the sources and documents consulted. Transfers took place either by train, or by truck, especially at night, out of sight of the local population. Furthermore, seriously sick prisoners in Urbès were systematically transferred to the main camp Natzweiler-Struthof.

On 6<sup>th</sup> April 1944, arrival of 502 deportees from the Lublin/ Majdanek camp.

On 15<sup>th</sup> May 1944, the camp counted 1436 prisoners.

On 31<sup>st</sup> 1944, there were 1350 men.

On 6<sup>th</sup> May 1944, convoy of 550 men from Auschwitz; among them 302 Polish men, 248 Soviets ; 98% of them were political prisoners called « Ostarbeiter ».

In August 1944, convoy of 50 Soviet women, but this convoy isn't mentioned in any Nazi register or document in relation with Natzweiler-Struthof and its secondary camps. Were they « free workers »? Could they go out free on Sunday and on feast days outside the Urbès camp?

Ernest Gillen only alluded to their presence at the entrance of the tunnel. It was backed up by the testimony of an Alsatian woman, Maria Gié, born Meyer, who explains, that in 1944 she had to work for the Daimler-Benz firm in Colmar, in relation with the STO (forced labour instituted in France by the Nazis).

From July 15<sup>th</sup>, she was sent to Urbès camp with other women from Colmar. At the entrance of the tunnel, these women had to check and to assemble measuring instrument pieces for planes.

But she doesn't give any further details about the origin of the other women, except the fact that they slept outside the camp in a hotel requisitioned by the Nazis in Saint Amarin.

[Source : François Wehrbach's book « *Urbès 1944, un tunnel ferroviaire devait devenir une usine souterraine d'armement de la Luftwaffe* », « *KL-Natzweiler-Block W, Baustelle U* » / Edition Colombier, p 108-111].

Arrival on 25<sup>th</sup> August 1944 of the convoy with 465 Jews from the KL Flossenbürg, Numbers from 33 017 to 33 481. These « Daimler-Benz Jews » or « Produktionshäftlinge » arrived at the camp of Urbès after a long and hard journey.

Indeed after their internment in the ghetto of Rzeszow/Reichshof in Poland, they were sent to Colmar, to Kommando A-10, Daimler-Benz GmbH and shortly after to the camp of Urbès (cf. Robert Steegmann's book, p 70-71).

Origin of the « Daimler-Benz Jews »: 11 German, 9 Soviet, 1 Czech and 444 Polish deportees.

Arrival in September 1944 of 166 Italian war prisoners from the camp of Sindelfingen (near Stuttgart, Germany).

It's difficult to know the exact number of prisoners, because of their regular transports from one camp to the other. Many Nazi documents remained incomplete indeed, or were even destroyed by the Nazis, so as not to leave any traces at the end of the war.

The counting of prisoners even becomes « inhuman, dehumanizing », according to the expression used by Robert Steegmann.

Furthermore, Robert Steegmann explains in his conclusion entitled « the metastasis of evil », that the camp of Natzweiler-Struthof, as well as its secondary camps like Urbès are only « *one element of the Nazis's concentration system, destined (...) to serve the political and economic interests of a totalitarian regime, based on a racial ideology, that has declared war against democracy and basic rights of human beings* ».

From 1942 onwards, the strategy failure of the « Blitzkrieg », as well as the bitter defeat of the Wehrmacht during the battle of Stalingrad caused an important change in the economy of the Third Reich, since the Nazis accelerated the production of weapons and war material, which became more and more deadly.

The vast majority of German men were hired as soldiers in the Wehrmacht. So, the third Reich lacked workforce in war factories. Therefore, the concentration camps became really « a huge workforce pool », which was cheap, even free.

Therefore, we can see, that since 1943 and mostly since 1944, the total number of prisoners in Natzweiler was constantly growing: « *The camp became the central piece of an external network of Kommandos – reaching the number of 70 secondary camps – in the forcefully annexed Alsace-Moselle region and on the right riverside of the Rhine* » (Robert Steegmann, p.410).

« *The movements towards Wesserling-Urbès testify of the increasing number of deportees recruited in the Natzweiler camp in 1944, with convoys from Auschwitz, Lublin and Flossenbürg. Just like Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines, Wesserling-Urbès shows that the economic function of Natzweiler became essential in its participation in war production from the first half of the year 1944 onwards.*

*When Allied troops approached from the West, the urgent and important movements of deportees towards Kommandos to the right riverside of the Rhine allowed to increase this function in the frame of a very singular extermination organisation»,* (Robert Steegmann, p 71-72).

The hard labor around a secret production of diesel engines for DB-605 planes at the camp of Urbès in 1944 exactly corresponds to the increasing and colossal production of arms, war planes, but also of fuel oils within different Kommandos.

These gigantic projects each had a specific name code in relation with the animal world: bird names, like for example « Elster » [magpie] or « Kranich » [crane], concerning the Luftwaffe, and fish names concerning the Nazi navy, like for example « Goldfisch » [carp] or « Brasse » [sea bream]. They were secret and subterranean, but rarely accomplished, because the course of the war and history decided differently.

## The deportees' Fate after the closing of Urbès camp in October 1944

9.08.44	9.09.44	26.09.44	12.10.44	End of Sept/Middle October 44	October 1944
300 prisoners	500 prisoners	500 prisoners	462 Jews	300 prisoners	Evacuation of the machine-tools
to	to	to	« Daimler-Benz Jews »	to the little camp	towards Wiesensteig-
Neckarelz	Neckarelz	Neckarelz	to Sachsenhausen	Schwindratzheim (Alsace)	Göppingen (near Stuttgart) in the motorway tunnel of the Lämmerbuckel

At the arrival of Allied forces and French liberation troops from the west side of the Vosges crossing the Bussang pass, most of the prisoners were urgently evacuated to Neckarelz, Neckargerach and Obrigheim (Baden, Germany) or even to Heppenheim (Hessen, Germany).

The machines were transported towards Wiesensteig, in the south of Göppingen (district of Stuttgart) and hidden in a safe place, in the motorway tunnel of the Lämmerbuckel.

On 9<sup>th</sup> August 1944, departure of the first convoy with 300 prisoners towards Neckarelz. Railroad convoy attacked by Allies near Karlsruhe. According to Arno Huth's indications, more than 100 of them died. One list accounts for 49 deaths, another 58 « non identified » deaths, as well as « missing prisoners ». 58 victims were brought back to Natzweiler.

According to Arno Huth, 200 prisoners from Urbès were transferred to Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines (Alsace) on 15<sup>th</sup> July 1944.

On 9<sup>th</sup> September 1944, departure of the second convoy to Neckarelz with 500 prisoners.

On 26<sup>th</sup> September 1944, departure of the third convoy to Neckarelz with 500 prisoners.

On 12<sup>th</sup> October 1944, the 462 Jewish prisoners were transferred to Sachsenhausen.

In October 1944 return of the Italian war prisoners to the camp of Sindelfingen.

This left no more than 300 prisoners, evacuated middle October 1944 to the short-lived Kommando of Schwindratzheim (North Alsace), itself evacuated shortly afterwards. The whole company was soon transferred to Kamenz in Saxe (East Germany) under the code name « Elster GmbH » [magpie].

In the chapter entitled « Neckar Nazi camps », Robert Steegmann states that on 14<sup>th</sup> August 1944 the « Schutzhaftlagerrapporte » [Nazi registers] indicated 2754 detainees from Natzweiler, 2944 detainees on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1944 and 2841 detainees on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1944.

Were the detainees from Urbès included in these numbers?

[Source : Robert Steegmann, « *Struthof. Le KL-Natzweiler et ses kommandos : une nébuleuse concentrationnaire des deux côtés du Rhin 1941-1945* », edited by La Nuée Bleue, Strasbourg, 2005].

The final estimation of the exact number of deportees in Neckarelz from Alsatian camps, including Urbès, is difficult because of the proliferation of secondary Kommandos, of the increasingly anarchic recording by the Nazis particularly at the end of the war, and because of the hurried evacuation of prisoners due to the advance of Allied Forces.

The camp of Neckarelz was also broken into sub-commandos and the staff of the Kommandatur moved to Guttenbach.



Elementary School in Neckarelz transformed in 1944 by the deportees in dormitories.

Photo from the Internet website of the Memorial in Neckarelz.

Then, in late March 1945, the detainees of the Neckar Valley were transferred to Dachau in several groups, living the horrors of the "death marches".

German historians call this phenomenon, "**Das doppelte Ende des KL-Natzweiler auf beiden Seiten des Rheins** " and "**Die Ostverschiebung des KL-Natzweiler**", which means the "double end" of the Natzweiler camp on each river side of the Rhine and the "jutting out" of the camp towards East.

Thousands of them perished under heavy fire from the Allies or from exhaustion and sickness, while their liberation from the Nazis was so close! (see Testimonies of Ernest Gillen, Zacheusz Pawlak, Tadeus Szwed and of many other detainees at Urbès).

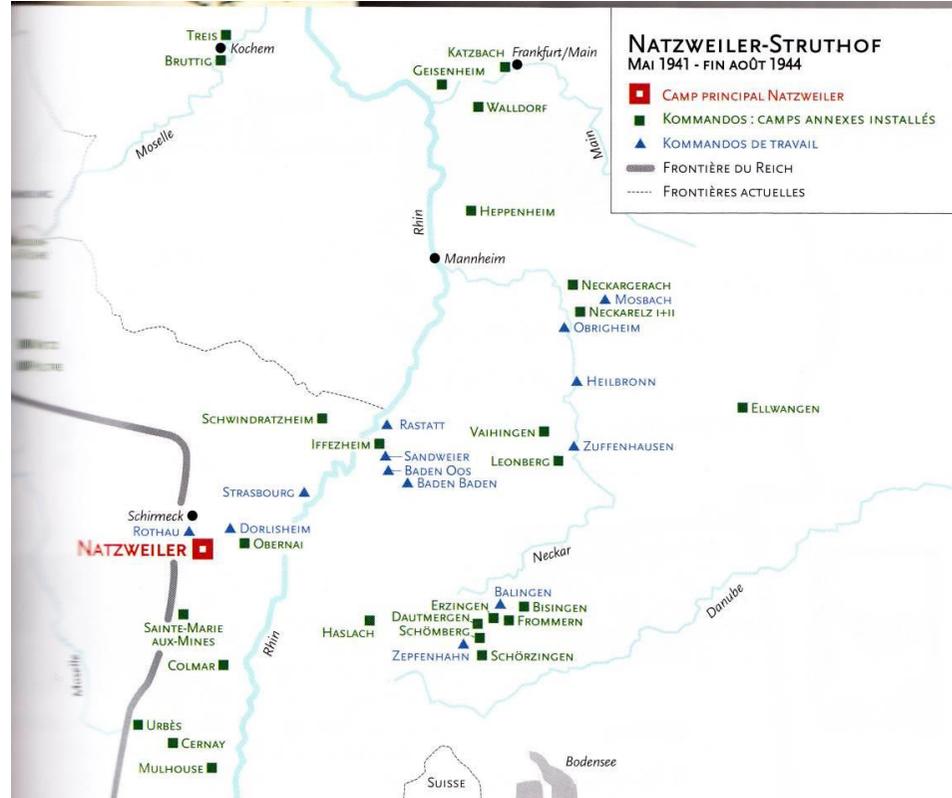
Despite conflicting testimonies, it is possible to put forward the number of 1920 deportees from Natzweiler-Struthof and Urbès registered in Dachau on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1945.

But this number neither includes the number of dead prisoners -between 250 and 300- during the several convoys nor the number of sick prisoners, nearly 887 men.

On 5<sup>th</sup> April 1945, 800 survivors were recovered by the Allies.

[Source : Robert Steegmann, p 112].

Some maps from Robert Steegmann's book.

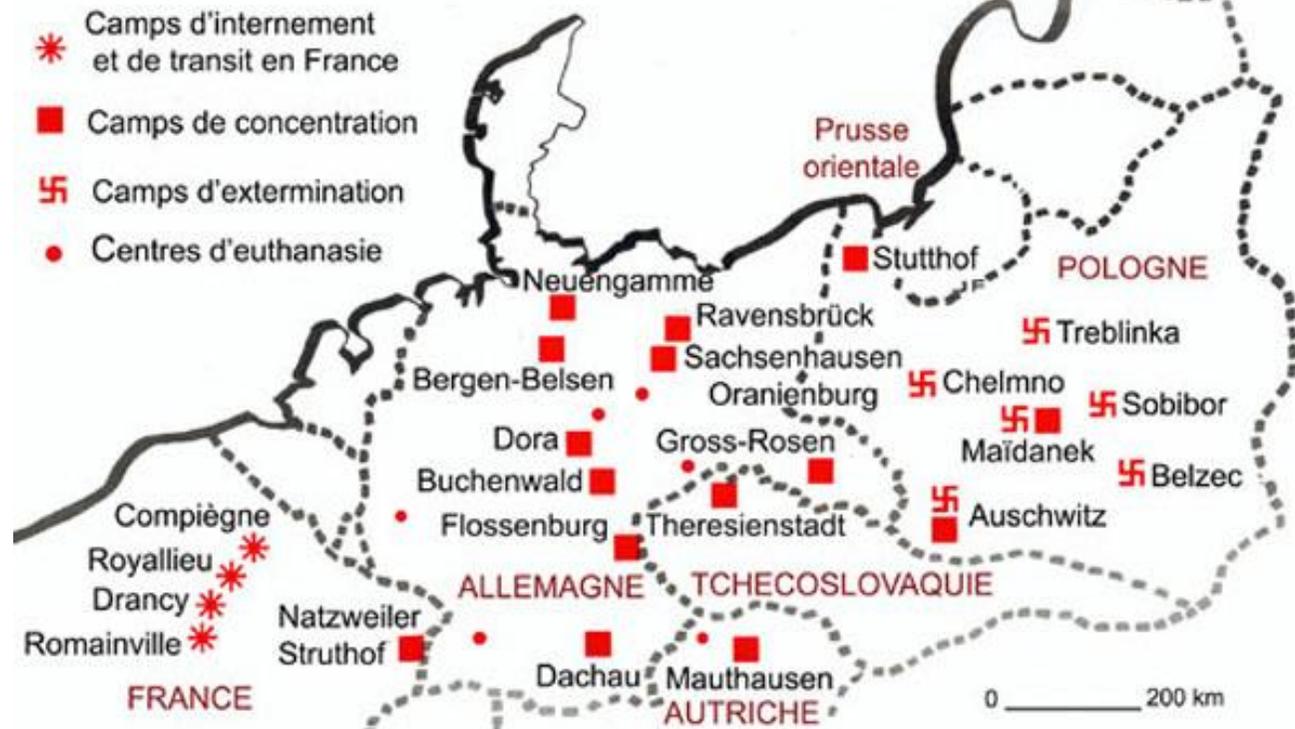


Le camp de Natzweiler et de ses camps annexes (situés principalement de l'autre côté du Rhin, sur la rive allemande) depuis sa création en mai 1941 jusqu'à la fin de la guerre, en avril 1945.

« The evolution of the main camp Natzweiler-Struthof and its secondary camps (mainly situated on the German riverside of the Rhine) from its opening in May 1941 till the end of the war, in April 1945 » (p. 289).



## Les principaux camps dans l'Europe annexée ou occupée par l'Allemagne nazie ( Frontières de 1937 )



Documents taken from the Wikipedia Website about Nazi concentration camps.



Complete list of the 465 Jews or « Daimler-Benz Jews » at the Urbès camp, from M<sup>r</sup> René Chevrolet (cf. Lesson 7c)

Document from Hans-Peter Goergens, Memorial Offenburg-Rammersweier (Baden, Germany).



Exhibition at the Memorial of Natzweiler-Struthof (Alsace), 2015.

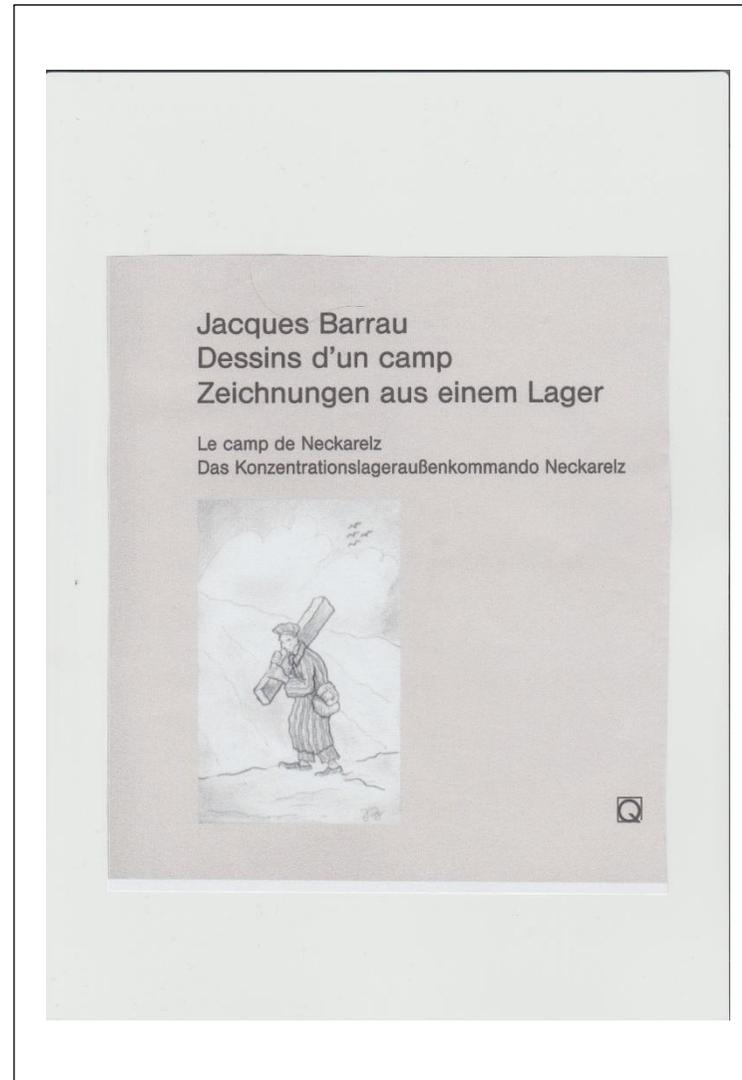
Watercolors by Deborah Edwards.



Drawing by a former French deportee,  
Jacques Barrau, « les 2 camarades »

« Two friends »

CRDP- Créteil, image Internet.



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