

# ÜBERLINGEN TUNNEL CONCENTRATION CAMP

On April 28, 1944, Friedrichshafen came under aerial bombardment - because armaments factories such as *Luftschiffbau Zeppelin*, *Maybach Motorenwerke*, *Dornier* and *Zahnradfabrik ZF* were producing weapons for the war machine of the Third Reich. The Reich's Ministry for Armaments and War Production in Berlin ordered production to be immediately moved to a 'bomb-proof' location.



Überlingen tunnel concentration camp

The location chosen was deep inside the Überlinger molasse-rock cliffs. This soft sandstone was relatively easy to work and because of its physical properties, offered optimum protection against bombs and aerial attack. The construction project was given the imaginary name of 'Magnetit' (Magnetite), which was intended to keep the actual purpose of the work as secret as possible. Prisoners from Dachau concentration camp, who in the fall of 1944 were compelled to build their own concentration camp northwest of Überlingen in the small village of Aufkirch, were used as labor. The number of prisoners in the camp averaged 700 to 800 and, in just seven months, they blasted 4 kilometers of underground passages into the molasse cliff. Before work on the tunnel system could be completed, in April 1945, French troops reached Lake Constance. The facility therefore was prevented from ever launching production of war equipment and armaments. Some 180 prisoners did not survive the harsh conditions of labor. 97 of them, after having been buried in a mass

grave for over a year, were buried in 1946 at the instigation of the French in the concentration camp cemetery at Birnau. A large number of these came from Italy and former Yugoslavia. Some of their names have survived. The Ravensburg branch of the VVN-BdA (Association for the Victims of the Nazi Regime - Anti-Fascist Alliance), together with local labor unions, has been endeavoring for the last several decades to ensure that the people who worked and died in these underground galleries are never forgotten. Each year, the VVN-BdA organizes a commemorative event at the concentration camp cemetery at Birnau near Überlingen. For many years, resistance fighters and concentration camp survivors from Italy, Slovenia, and other countries have been participating on a regular basis in the commemorative service. This has helped to create international bonds of friendship combined with a shared insight into history and how we respond to and cope with it today.



The concentration camp cemetery at Birnau

Our commemoration should serve to honor the victims of fascism. It stands for peace and disarmament, social justice, and friendship between peoples:

**Fascism, never again -  
war, never again!**

**There are tours of the concentration camp on the first Friday of every month at 5pm.  
Birnau concentration camp cemetery is open to visitors at any time.**

[www.vvn.telebus.de](http://www.vvn.telebus.de)

[www.vvn.telebus.de/ravensburg/indexrv.html](http://www.vvn.telebus.de/ravensburg/indexrv.html)

## ESCAPE

The inhuman conditions to which the prisoners working in the mine were subjected meant that thoughts of escape were ever-present. Despite strict surveillance, escape attempts were made time and time again. It was said that after one failed escape attempt, a Russian prisoner was bitten to death by dogs in the presence of the other prisoners in order to deter others from the attempt.



Location map: Überlingen tunnel concentration camp / Birnau concentration camp cemetery

Only two prisoners, Austrian Adam Puntschart and Ukrainian Vassiliy Sklarenko, succeeded in fleeing to Switzerland, on the night of March 21 - 22, 1945. During their escape, they made contact with no one. They avoided roads for fear of being discovered. They slept in the forest and survived on dried-out apples left lying under the trees from the previous fall. Since they did not have a map of the area, they had to navigate by the stars and the trees, which had a thicker growth of moss on their northern sides. After five days and nights, exhausted and starving, they finally reached the Swiss border at Schaffhausen. They were given food and drink and provided with new clothes. Puntschart had to be sent to hospital for treatment for pneumonia. Sklarenko was sent to a transition camp, to which Puntschart was also sent three weeks later. Three days after this, their ways parted. After the end of the war, Puntschart visited those inhabitants of Überlingen who had helped him. Sklarenko did not allow himself to be persuaded to return to the Ukraine by the Soviet repatriation officers who were even present in Switzerland. Instead, at his own initiative, he sought out a Red Army unit in the Soviet occupation zone, where he completed two years of military service, so allowing him to return to his Ukrainian homeland not as a freed prisoner, not as a displaced person, not as a collaborator, but as a reservist of the Red Army. Adam Puntschart returned to his home town of Graz at the end of 1945, where he died in 1988 at the age of 74. Vassiliy Sklarenko lived from 1947 onwards in a village in the Ukraine near Kiev. He died in 2002.

Source: [www.stollen-ueberlingen.de](http://www.stollen-ueberlingen.de)



## BIRNAU CONCENTRATION CAMP CEMETERY