

Life Journeys Leading to **MAUTHAUSEN**

Karl Fiebinger



Wolfgang Fehrerberger

Leo Koller

Dear student,

In 1938, in a small town in Upper Austria, one of the many Nazi concentration camps was constructed. It was known as the Mauthausen concentration camp. It existed from 1938 to 1945. The camp was run and guarded by the SS. The people who were imprisoned here came from many countries in Europe: Poland, Russia, France, Italy, Germany, Austria and others. They were political opponents, belonged to marginalised groups (e.g. 'criminals', 'asocials') or were persecuted for anti-Semitic and racist reasons (e.g. Jews). Most of the prisoners were men, but there were also women and children. In the Mauthausen quarry, the prisoners carried out hard forced labour. In the more than 40 subcamps (Gusen, Steyr, Linz, Ebensee, Vienna ...), they were deployed in the arms industry. People lived in overcrowded accommodation. They were not given enough food and clothing, and they starved and died of diseases. SS men beat many prisoners to death, shot them or murdered them in the gas chamber at Mauthausen. In total, almost 200,000 people were imprisoned at Mauthausen and its subcamps. Half of them lost their lives.

The Mauthausen concentration camp was on a hill and could be seen for miles around. Many people were involved with the camp: they worked there, brought deliveries or knew SS men. Almost everyone knew about the death camp. Often, the SS men committed the crimes in full view of the population. On 5 May 1945, the Mauthausen concentration camp was liberated by US troops. In this booklet, you will read the story of a person who was connected with the Mauthausen concentration camp. Where a word is underlined, you can find a short explanation at the end of the booklet. There are also tasks for you to work on in your small group after you've finished reading. Take the booklet with you on your visit to the Mauthausen Memorial! During your visit, you will encounter the places and stories you read about in the booklet.



Karl Fiebing is born in Vienna in 1913 as an only child. His childhood and adolescence take place at the time of the First World War, the end of the Habsburg monarchy in 1918 and the emergence of the first democratic Republic of Austria.

Fiebing studies at the Vienna University of Technology from 1931. He specialises in tunnelling and underground construction.

He is 20 when democracy in Austria comes to an early end in 1933. The Christian Social government under [Engelbert Dollfuß](#) shuts down parliament. In 1934, the Christian Socialists defeat the resistance of Social Democrats and Communists in a short civil war and establish a dictatorship. This is known as the 'Christian Ständestaat' and is supported by the Catholic Church. The Christian Socialists found a fascist unity movement, the Fatherland Front. All other parties, including the National Socialists, are banned. In 1935, Fiebinger joins the Fatherland Front.

Three years later, the Christian Socialist 'Ständestaat' collapses under pressure from Nazi Germany and the Austrian Nazis. When German troops invade Austria in March 1938, they are greeted with cheers from the masses. Many Austrians are proud of the fact that – following the 'Anschluss' (annexation) – they are now part of the German Reich.

During this time, Fiebinger completes his studies. A former professor provides him with his first orders from the German arms industry. This lays the foundation for his future career. Politically, Fiebinger becomes closer to the Nazis.

In 1939, he founds his own 'Office for Construction' in Vienna. In the course of the Second World War, he rises to become one of the most important engineers in the German arms industry. Thanks to his connections to leading Nazi officials, Fiebinger is awarded increasingly large contracts by the [SS](#).

During the Second World War, arms factories in the German Reich are bombed on a massive scale. The German defence industry therefore wants to produce some of the arms underground. Fiebinger's expertise in tunnelling and underground construction is particularly in demand. From 1943, he works closely with Hans Kammler, an architect and SS general responsible for expanding the underground production facilities. Kammler is also tasked with the supervision of buildings in concentration camps, including gas chambers and crematoria.



In 1944, Karl Fiebinger's career takes him to St. Georgen an der [Gusen](#). Prisoners at Gusen concentration camp have to build an underground aircraft factory for jet fighters. The factory has the codename '[Bergkristall](#)'. Fiebinger is a planner and construction manager. He and his staff move into their own [barracks](#) near the construction site. Whenever they look out their barrack windows, they can see the suffering of the prisoners with their own eyes.





Fiebinger travels a lot to supervise his construction projects, in the [Melk](#) and [Ebensee](#) concentration camps, and throughout the German Reich. He therefore employs some engineers from the surrounding area to supervise work at the 'Bergkristall' construction site during his absence. Fiebinger probably has little direct contact with the prisoners, but he sees them regularly. He accepts their deaths. In the course of working on the 'Bergkristall' tunnel system, thousands of prisoners die from exhaustion, disease or at the hands of the guards, who beat them on a daily basis.

A few months after the end of the Second World War, Karl Fiebinger is arrested by American soldiers and transferred to the Glasenbach camp near Salzburg. The Americans are holding leading Nazis prisoner at the camp. Some of them are later tried and convicted. The majority of them are released from the camp after a short time. One year after he is arrested, Fiebinger is also released. But he is not allowed to leave Salzburg.



In 1948, Fiebinger is taken to the USA with about 500 other scientists and engineers as part of Operation Paperclip. This operation is a secret US military project to harness the expertise of German scientists for its own military interests. The USA wants to gain an advantage in the Cold War, i.e. in the struggle with the Soviet Union for global military supremacy.

For Karl Fiebinger, this means that he is protected from further criminal prosecution. In the following years, he works for the US War Department and for an engineering firm in New York. After some time, Fiebinger is able to found his own company in the USA, which he calls Austrobau.

In the final years of his life, Fiebinger and his wife Herta move back to his native Austria. In Vienna, he regularly meets at a wine tavern with some of his former employees from the Nazi era for what they call 'Bergkristall meet-ups'.

Karl Fiebinger dies in Vienna in 2014 at the age of 101.

Einige Wörter erklärt...

Dollfuß, Engelbert – Was a politician from the Christian Social Party and Austrian Chancellor from 1932. Under his leadership, democracy was abolished in Austria and the one-party 'Christian Ständestaat' dictatorship was established with the support of the Catholic Church. Dollfuß was assassinated by Austrian Nazis in 1934.

SS – Stands for 'Schutzstaffel' or 'protection squad'. The SS was one of the most powerful organisations in the Nazi regime: it reported to the police, had business operations and had armed troops (the 'Waffen-SS'). The SS guarded the concentration camps and was mainly responsible for the persecution and mass murder under Nazism.

Gusen – From May 1940, there was a subcamp of the Mauthausen concentration camp in Gusen, which is only four kilometres from Mauthausen. The Gusen camp was similar in size to the Mauthausen camp. In Gusen, some of the prisoners had to work in quarries and some in the arms industry. Today, there are few remnants of the former concentration camp in Gusen. The town of Gusen is now located where the camp once stood.

Bergkristall – A tunnel system in the town of St. Georgen an der Gusen, which the SS referred to by the codename 'Bergkristall'. Prisoners of the Gusen concentration camp had to dig this underground facility under brutal conditions of forced labour. An aircraft factory was built in the tunnels.

Barracks – Often used to mean buildings for lodging soldiers. Here the term is also used to describe the wooden buildings in the concentration camps that were used for the prisoners.

Melk – From 1944, there was a subcamp of Mauthausen in Melk. More than 14,000 people were imprisoned here. Most of the prisoners had to dig tunnels for an underground arms factory for the company Steyr-Daimler Puch AG.

Ebensee – There was a Mauthausen subcamp in Ebensee from November 1943 to 6 May 1945. The prisoners had to dig a tunnel system for an underground factory. Approximately 27,000 people were imprisoned in the Ebensee concentration camp.



Brief history

Karl Fiebinger is born in Vienna - **1913**

1914 - 28 July, start of the First World War

1918 - 11 November, end of the First World War

He begins his studies at the Vienna University of Technology - **1931**

1933 - 30 January, Adolf Hitler becomes Reich Chancellor in Germany

- In March, the Christian Social government shuts down the Austrian parliament;
- In May, the 'Austrofascist' Fatherland Front is founded in Austria

Fiebinger joins the _____ - **1935**

Studienabschluss - **1935**

1938 - 12 March, 'Anschluss' ('Annexation') of Austria to Nazi Germany

- 8 August, construction starts on the Mauthausen concentration camp

1939 - Fiebinger founds a construction firm

1939 - 1 September, start of the Second World War

- December, Construction begins on the Gusen concentration camp

Fiebinger begins working with _____ - **1943**

He is a planner and construction manager of the underground aircraft plant

_____ in St. Georgen an der Gusen - **1944**

1945 - 5 May, Mauthausen concentration camp is liberated by the US Army

- 8 May, Nazi Germany surrenders; end of the Second World War in Europe





Fiebinger is arrested by US soldiers - **1945**

He is released - **1946**

"_____", Arbeit für das
work for the U.S. War Department; he later
founds his own company - **1948**

Karl Fiebinger dies in Vienna - **2014**

Further reflection in groups ...

-  After completing his training, Karl Fiebinger mainly takes on contracts from the Nazis. What could be the reasons for this?
-  As part of Fiebinger's work in the concentration camp, contact with the prisoners is unavoidable. Karl Fiebinger is confronted with great suffering and violence. How does he react to these experiences?
-  The prisoners in the concentration camps have to carry out forced labour. Even today, forced labour is common in many countries around the world. What do you understand by forced labour?
-  The drawings in the biography depict important moments in the life of Karl Fiebinger. Look closely at the drawings. Imagine you have the opportunity to ask Karl Fiebinger questions. What would you like to know from him?



Platz für Notizen

This section is a large rectangular area containing ten horizontal dashed lines, intended for writing notes.

Publication details

Biographies (research and text): Wolfgang Fehrerberger

Illustrated by: Leo Koller

Edited by: Christian Angerer

Proofreading: Teres Stockinger

Design: Walter Fröhlich

References for the biographies available at: www.lebenswege-nach-mauthausen.org

Educational manager and project manager: Gudrun Blohberger, with support from Christian Angerer, Petra Bachleitner and Bernhard Mühleder

Team coordinators: Walter Fröhlich, Jutta Steinmetz, Evelyn Steintaler

Academic and expert advice: Christian Dürr, Andreas Kranebitter

Supporting research: Bernhard Mühleder

Some words explained ... Jutta Steinmetz

Brief history: Evelyn Steintaler

Further reflection in groups ...: Petra Bachleitner, Christian Hanl, Teres Stockinger

Project management and administration: Aleksandra Božic, Angelika Heumader-Rainer, Gudrun Troppmann

Technical advice: Aleksandra Božic, Wilhelm Stadler, Thomas Zaglmaier

Technical development of the website www.lebenswege-nach-mauthausen.org:

INFOUND

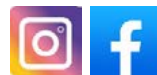
Printed by: druckerei-wien.at (Vienna)

Translation: Alexander Bradbury, Paul Richards

Published by: Mauthausen Memorial

Director: Barbara Glück

www.mauthausen-memorial.org



In cooperation with:

With funding kindly provided by:

erinnern.at

NATIONALSOZIALISMUS UND HOLOKAUST: GEDÄCHTNIS UND GEGENWART
DAS HOLOKAUST-EDUCATION INSTITUT DES BMBWF



NATIONALFONDS

DER REPUBLIK ÖSTERREICH FÜR OPFER DES NATIONALSOZIALISMUS

ZukunftsFonds

der Republik Österreich

Mauthausen, 2023



MAUTHAUSEN
MEMORIAL | KZ-GEDENKSTÄTTE

