

situated next to our house. Inside it we felt secure, although we heard the thunderous crash of the bombs falling even there. My father had purchased this tunnel from the local brewery in Freistadt before the war; it was ten meters high and led about fifty meters into a rock of granite. Before it had been a cellar used for storing beer. Since 1943 this cellar had to be opened as a shelter for the inhabitants of our village, when there was an air raid.

By that time, at the beginning of August, both the German and the American pilots and the civilians killed during the air raid had been buried. Only their mourning relatives, destroyed houses and the devastated landscape covered with bomb craters remained. The crops had to be harvested; our peasants and their workers were thus not able to repair the damage caused by the bombs beside their work in the fields.

In this year of the war there was a lack of labor everywhere, and so the inhabitants of the communities not hit by the bombing were forced to help without being paid during the clear-up operation in Hagenberg and Veichter on Saturdays and Sundays.

My grandfather was in charge of the air-raid shelter in our village called "Graben". It was his task to take care that no light

was to be seen through the windows and that there was enough water and sand in each house to fight fire that could be caused by incendiary bombs. Grandfather really didn't enjoy being such an inspector. He was no member of the NSDAP (Hitler's political party) either. He had been forced by the authorities to do that. Thus he received another order from the authority called "Kreisleiter." In August 1944: he had to name a person from each family of our village that had to join the labor service in the area hit by bombs.

At 11 a. m. on the 12th of August we were standing at the station in Freistadt and were waiting for the train to Linz. Our group consisted of approximately thirty young women, girls and a few men, most of them over sixty years old, including my mother, my aunt and my grandfather, too. I was allowed to join them as a courier, who was supposed to bring them snacks.

Each of them brought along a shovel or pickax. Going by train was free of charge. There was still some time left until the arrival of the train, and so I had a look at the posters to be seen everywhere at the platform. They advertised slogans like "Wheels must turn for the victory!" or "Watch out, the enemy is listening!". Finally our train arrived and we went to Selker, a station situated

between Kefermarkt and Pregarten. Then we walked towards Pregarten along the creek called Feldaist. My grandfather and I headed the line. After half an hour he said: "Well, now it won't last long till we reach our place of work. At the Wintermuhle (Winter 's Mill) we saw the first bomb craters and after climbing up a little hill we saw the devastated landscape lying in front of us. There one bomb crater was next to the other, in between them the remains of fruit trees. In most cases the trunk was left over, whereas branches and leaves had been torn off by the pressure caused when bombs had exploded.

My grandfather started immediately sending workers to single bomb craters, and after a drink from the bottles brought along, the people started leveling the craters. Doing that was no easy task on such a hot day, because the pressure caused by the explosion had scattered quite a lot of earth which had become hard during the recent weeks when the weather had been fine and dry. Thus it was a strain to move the material. Besides, there were no excavators or other machinery.

My grandfather and ten helpers were working at a crater down by the creek. It was the biggest of all and half filled with water. This hole was as big as a small house, and grandfather could not tell for sure, whether they would succeed in refilling the crater which was approximately five meters deep and twenty meters in diameter, until the evening. I climbed up the hill and went to the farmhouse there. A bomb had hit the back of this estate so that its roof and all its windows had been destroyed. Fortunately nobody had been injured or killed. The farmer's wife, Mrs. Katzenschlager excitedly told me of the misfortune. Nobody had expected any bombs to be dropped here. They had never been afraid of any hostile planes either when flying over their estate, but now they were scared of the Americans.



Gatekeeper's house beside the rail line leading from Linz to Prague. Destroyed on 25 July 1944.



The march to level the bomb craters August 1944