

Working Party E770 Ottmuth

There was a Working Party (E770) at Ottmuth at the Bat'a (pronounced 'Batya') Shoe Factory.

Mick Borrett said (in January 2020) that his father, Gunner R.L. Borrett of the 58th Medium Royal Artillery TA regiment, was working as a tailor at Ottmuth aerodrome.

There was certainly an airfield there (Ottmuth-Otrokovice airfield) built by and for the factory. They also built aircraft there. In fact the airfield is still there and in use, and aircraft are still built there.

Ottmuth, now called Zlín, is in the present-day Czech republic, but during the war was in the German-occupied area of Czechoslovakia called Moravia. The founders, Jan Antonín Baťa, and his brother Tomáš (who was killed in an air crash on that airfield in 1932) not only made shoes, but they developed a huge industrial empire that included aircraft manufacture and pilot training, the energy industry, agriculture, forestry, newspaper publishing, brick manufacturing, wood processing, the rubber industry, the construction industry, railway and air transport, book publishing, the film industry, food processing, chemical production, tyre manufacturing, insurance, textile production, motor transport, sea transport, and coal mining, synthetic fibre production, and river transport. The company had over 100 branches in several European countries.

Jan Antonín Baťa was one of the first people to use aviation extensively for business purposes, including rapid transport of personnel on business like delivery of maintenance men and spares to a location where needed, originating the practice of business flying. He had his own aircraft, and also manufactured aircraft at the airfield.

Just before the German occupation of Czechoslovakia, Baťa helped re-post his Jewish employees to branches of his firm all over the world. In 1939 when Czechoslovakia was annexed by Nazi Germany, Bat'a unsuccessfully tried to negotiate with the German authorities in order to prevent the control of his company from being taken over by the German army. With his family he went into exile to the United States. Ottmuth-Otrokovice airport was occupied by the Germans on March 15th, 1939. Pilots and technical engineers were arrested. During the war Bat'a's aircraft factory there was used to produce planes for the German army. There, and in the shoe factory and other enterprises, the Germans used Jewish forced labour, as well as prisoners-of-war.

The Bat'a company was re-established in Canada, and its headquarters was re-located to the UK after the war. With the communist take-over in Czechoslovakia, Bat'a never regained its factories and businesses there. The governments in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland and Yugoslavia confiscated and nationalized Bat'a factories, stripping Bat'a of its Eastern European assets.

Today Bat'a (Bata) is still a big company, employing over 30,000 people all around the World. The factory at the airfield (now called Zlín) makes aerobatic, training, sport and touring and multi-purpose aircraft, and there is, once again, a flying school there.