

NEIGHBOURS GUARDS RESIDENTS & CONTROVERSIAL TRACES



Walking and cycling
amongst historic sites
around Camp Westerbork





NEIGHBOURS GUARDS RESIDENTS & CONTROVERSIAL TRACES

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Duration

Walking

around 2.5 to 3 hours

Cycling

around 1.5 to 2 hours

Starting Point

Car-park of the
Camp Westerbork
Memorial Centre

Historic sites

The map shows the situation
early 60s

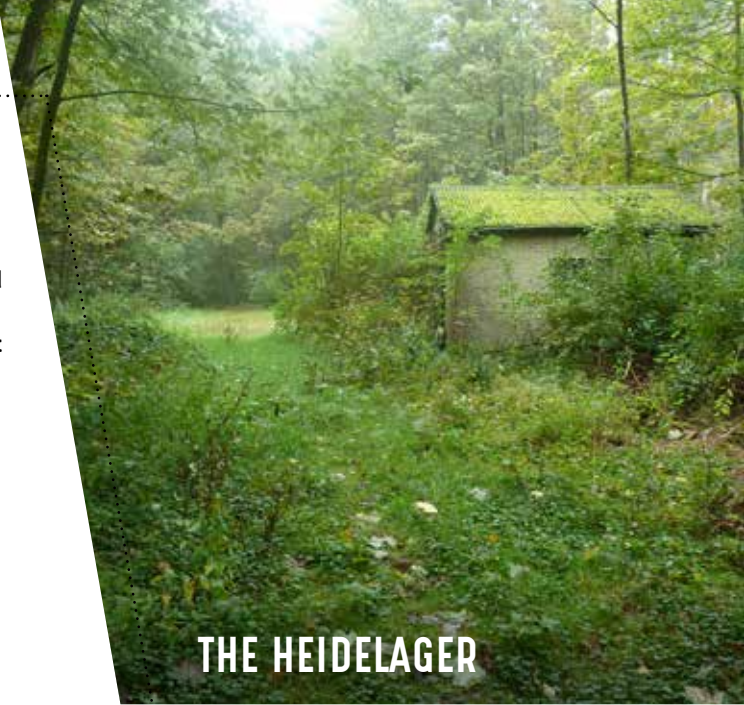
 Camp Westerbork
Memorial Centre

- ① Heidelager
- ② Original Entrance
- ③ Commander's House
- ④ Command Headquarters
- ⑤ SD Bunker
- ⑥ Crematorium
- ⑦ Resistance Grave
- ⑧ Internment Camp Cemetery
- ⑨ 'De Schattenberg' Camp Farm
- ⑩ Water Purification Plant
- ⑪ Potato Cellar
- ⑫ Shooting Range





From the Memorial Centre, follow the Bospad (forest path) towards Camp Westerbork. On the way you will see traces of the camp's history. This area was created in 1936 by unemployed men to give them jobs. After about 1.5 kilometres you will find a place on the right which used to be 'The Heidelager'. A stone barn remains as the only lasting memory.

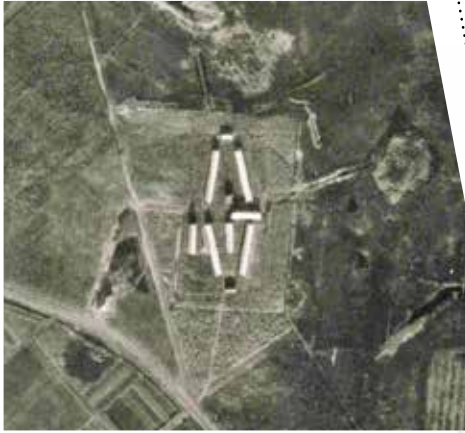


THE HEIDELAGER

1

The Heidelager consisted of six barracks with living and sleeping areas, built in a double V shape around a paved area for group gatherings. This was a typical building style for job-creation camps at that time.

In January, 1942, newly arrived German-Jewish refugees were the first residents. After the Nazi occupation, the Heidelager was consecutively inhabited by the SS-Wachtbatallion Nord-West, the Marechaussee (Dutch Military Police) and the Dutch Police Battalion.



The radio

Camp prisoner **Jacob Swart** worked in The Heidelager in the summer of 1944.

“ This afternoon we had a crazy afternoon. Whilst we were painting, one of the Dutch guards, when we were close to his room, turned on the radio and opened his windows. This was unforgettable. A scene from a film. We were like children, we were so happy. We were able to brush backwards and forwards to the beat of the music, accompanied by the guards tapping the floor with their rifle-butts. We did have fun, but what a tragic comedy.

”

HEROES OR VILLAINS?

After the war, the Dutch guards were judged from both sides. Herman Paridaen (1919) was in charge of the camp prison. Outside prison he gave prisoners a kick up the behind, but inside he gave them extra to eat. Paridaen helped different people to escape, but at the same time, thwarted an escape attempt. Was Paridaen “good” or “wrong”? Hero or villain?



Continue following the Bospad. The forest you pass through was created after the war by, amongst others, interned Waffen SS soldiers. At the crossroads, go straight ahead to reach the main road to Camp Westerbork. After 300 metres on the main road, on your left, you will see the location of the first entrance of Camp Westerbork.



THE ORIGINAL ENTRANCE

2

The original entrance was about 200 metre in front of the commander's house. Opposite the guard-house was a small sentry-post. The original entrance also had a lifting barrier.

The guard building and the sentry-post were manned by the outside guard. They checked people who wanted to come in or out. A small number of prisoners had official permission to leave Westerbork on a regular basis. From the beginning of the 1950s, for fifteen years the (enlarged) guard house was used as a hostel for Moluccan children.



The Sisters

On August 5th, 1942, **Pierre Cuypers** (1891) met **Edith Stein** ('Sister Benedicta') at the original entrance of Camp Westerbork. Edith (1891) and her sister Rosa (1883), born Jewish, became Catholic nuns before the war, but this did not make any difference to the Nazis. The Roman Catholic Church declared Edith Stein a Saint in 1998.

“ I did not know Sister Benedicta, and I had never seen Rosa Stein. Both nuns wore the yellow Jewish star. The black veil was flipped over the hood. The two sisters came through the gate of the camp to the wooden building of the Dutch police.

”

MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

The original entrance was a place where 'bystanders' (non-interned people from outside the camp) could meet prisoners. There is much discussion among scientists about the responsibility of 'bystanders'. To what extent does a bystander have the moral responsibility to act? Is affinity also a choice? Are bystanders not always an accessory to the Holocaust?



Continue walking or cycling to the site of the camp. On your left you will find the Commander's House. The glass cover was placed over the house in 2015 to preserve the building.



THE COMMANDER'S HOUSE

3

The commander's residence was completed in October, 1939 and is approximately 250 m² in size. Downstairs there is a central hall with access to three living areas. Upstairs are five bedrooms, a bathroom and an attic. The Commander's House was one of five houses built outside the camp. In 1944, a summer house was built in the garden.

Camp Commander Albert Konrad Gemmeker slept in the bedroom with the balcony. He moved into the house in January 1943. Previously, it was inhabited by Director Syswerda and Commander Schol of the refugee camp. After that, the commander of the intern camp, Buijvoets, lived here with his family. In 1950, Colonel Van der Speck Obreen, then Chief of Staff at the military base in Havelte, moved to the house. His daughter Hanneke left the house, largely in its original state, in July 2007.



Unpredictable

Prisoner **Betty Asch-Rosenthal** (1903) worked for a long time as housekeeper for Camp Commander Gemmeker.

“ With Gemmeker, you never knew what time he would get out of bed. He sometimes worked at night, and then slept half the day. Another time you would go into the house and he would be sitting waiting at the breakfast table.

”

DOCTOR AND PATIENT

During the legal process against Commander Gemmeker in 1949, there were, remarkably, enough Jewish prisoners who pleaded in his favour, such as Chief Physician Fritz Spanier (1902). Such testimonies contributed to the comparatively lenient ten-year prison sentence imposed on the camp commander. In 1951 Gemmeker was released early due to good behaviour and left for Düsseldorf. He met Fritz Spanier who worked in the German city as a general practitioner. What is also remarkable is that in the 1960s, Gemmeker was one of Spanier's patients.





Opposite the Commander's House you will find the former offices of the camp. In addition to the offices, there was a canteen for the internal guards of the camp, called 'The Casino'.



COMMAND HEADQUARTERS

4

The building which served as main offices or the camp has been used for many purposes. Until January 1943, as a hospital; after the war, as a post office and police station.

The Command Headquarters served as the office of the German camp leader. The Commander's secretary also worked there. Services relating to the maintenance of the camp were managed from this building. The headquarters of the ordinance and a department of the Municipality of Westerbork were also located here. The building contained a guest room which was also used as an office or an interview room.



Consultation

Camp prisoner **Kurt Schlesinger** (1902).

“ I was appointed by the Commander Gemmeker as the ‘Oberdienstleiter’ (a Jew given a degree of authority in the camp), one of my roles was to assist in the transports and make a list of those to be transported. [...] In the days before a transport was due to leave, Gemmeker allowed me to hold a meeting and discuss the list with the other Jewish leaders, namely those also responsible for the organisation of the transports. ”

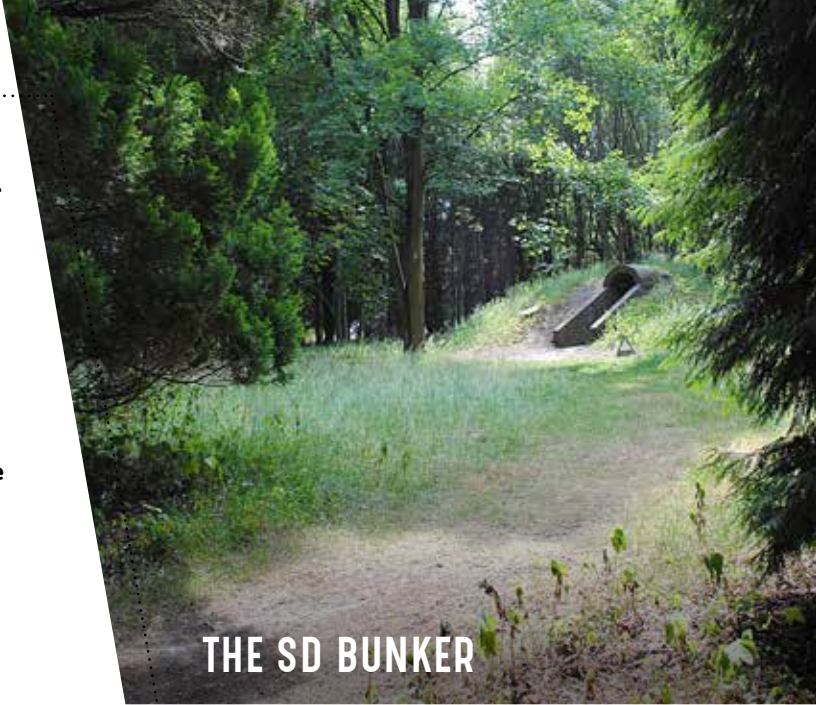
‘KRAUTS’

‘The German Jews are also real Krauts’, wrote prisoner Jo van Oosten-Jakobs (1902) to her family. There was great animosity between the German and Dutch prisoners. In particular, the German Jews in the leadership positions had to suffer; they were accused by the Dutch Jews of abuse of power and held jointly responsible for the deportations. The German Jews, on the other hand, suggested that they had been abandoned by their fellow believers before the war. Did they, in turn, have to offer Dutch Jews a helping hand during the war?





Take the path towards the radio telescopes and the monument to the Resistance. After about 100 metres you will find the SD Bunker on your right. Until July 1942 there was no barbed-wire fence around Camp Westerbork: prisoners could still move fairly freely. After the Nazis took over the camp, the construction of the fence and a total of seven watch-towers began.



THE SD BUNKER

5

The SD bunker was built by camp prisoners on the orders of the commander in 1943/1944 to store allied explosives and weapons that had fallen into the hands of the Nazis. These explosives and weapons had been dropped above Drenthe to arm the resistance.

The twin room SD bunker was constructed to withstand a light explosion. After completion, the bunker was camouflaged with earth, trees and plants so that it looked from the sky like a small natural hill.



Liberation

Camp prisoner **Walter Lenz** (1903).

“ At three o’clock in the morning, the SS had left and around eight o’clock, against the order to leave the camp, with two others, I walked to the Command Headquarters. We then walked to the bunker which was used by us as an observation station. We sat around in the trees and watched for the approaching Allies. Instead of Allies, I saw my first and only tank fight.

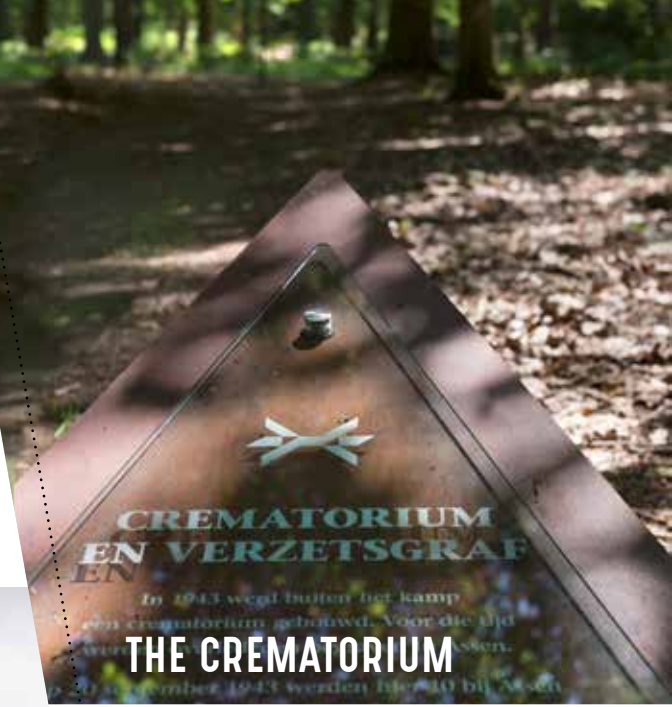
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STRIPES IN THE SKY

From Auschwitz-Birkenau, Prisoner Gerhard Durlacher (1928) saw the bombing of nearby factory complexes. ‘Were the oil refineries more important than us and our incinerators?’, Durlacher asked later. The question of why the Allies did not end the Holocaust has long been the subject of discussion. The fact that they knew of it has now been established. Military historians point out that it was ‘technically impossible’ to bomb the gas chambers. Or as US President Roosevelt said, ‘All the Nazis will do afterwards is move the concentration camp a bit further away.’



Continue towards the radio telescopes, placed on the Westerbork camp site since the mid-1960s. Stay on the path. Just past the service building, at the beginning of the forest, you will find the place where the crematorium stood.



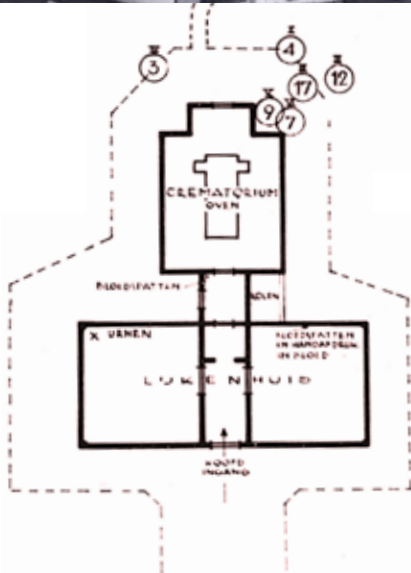
THE CREMATORIUM



6

Until 1943, prisoners were buried in the Jewish cemetery in Assen. At the beginning of that year the construction of a crematorium began. Through a central hallway, with two rooms on both sides intended for laying-out and ritual washing, one could reach the space where the furnace was placed.

On March 11, 1943, the furnace started operating in the crematorium. In total, approximately 525 bodies were cremated in the building. After cremation, the ashes were taken in urns to Amsterdam and from there to various Jewish cemeteries.



The Sword of Attila

David Cohen (1882), one of the presidents of the Jewish Council, heard from the infamous Nazi Ferdinand Aus der Fünten about the construction of the crematorium.

“The order came suddenly and as a surprise to the people in Westerbork. As an excuse, it was stated that our proposal for a cemetery in Westerbork would contaminate the water pipeline in the province of Groningen [...] Aus der Fünten said that it was just an honour for the Jews when their ashes were scattered as if on The Sword of Attila.

”

DEMOLITION

In 1950, The 1940-1945 Foundation encountered resistance to their proposal to make the crematorium a listed building. The Dutch Forestry Commission said that they would have to manage an ‘enclave’ of people coming to the memorial site, the Ministry of Defence thought that building was macabre for soldiers stationed nearby. From the Jewish side, they said there was no need to preserve the building, the memory would remain alive without it. At the end of 1951 the crematorium was demolished. Over the next two decades, almost all the buildings were also demolished.



Behind the crematorium site you will find the Resistance Grave. After the liberation, six coffins were discovered in this part of the forest. These were the remains of Resistance fighters who had been executed at the end of January 1945 and should have been cremated. The crematorium, however, turned out to be no longer in operation.



THE RESISTANCE GRAVE

7

The Resistance Grave was unveiled on May 3, 1949 in memory of ten resistance fighters executed on the Witterveld in Assen on September 20, 1943. Their bodies were cremated in the Camp Westerbork crematorium. The initiative for the Resistance Grave was taken by The 1940-1945 Foundation. The grave consists of a subterranean concrete trench, a grey hardstone cover and a nameplate of black Swedish granite.

The Resistance Grave also particularly includes the 52 people who, in 1944, were executed against the back wall of the crematorium. Except for four Jewish prisoners of war who had tried to escape and two reprisal victims, they were all resistance fighters.



Executions in 1944

Aad van As (1919), at that time working in the camp for the Municipality of Westerbork, saw the executions from his house.

“ From my window I saw people standing up [...]. Their sentence was read aloud and it was performed a few minutes later. Like geese, the resistance fighters were led behind the crematorium and put in line with their backs to the platoon. They had to hold their hands on their necks. From that position the people were shot in the back.

”

COMMEMORATE

Certainly for the first fifteen years after liberation, one memory of the war was the story of national suffering and resistance. A ‘monument to resistance’, as the Resistance Grave was known, is characteristic of this view. The proceedings against Adolf Eichmann for war crimes, the television series ‘De Bezetting’ and the ‘De Ondergang’ book brought, amongst others, in the 1960s, a change in perspective in which the Jewish persecution came to the forefront. In May 1970, with the establishment of the Camp Westerbork National Monument, the first memorial for Jewish prisoners was revealed.



Follow the path into the forest. About 200 metres past the first intersection you will find the disused cemetery on your right, clearly visible by the change in the forest pattern. The use of forests to produce wood for commercial purposes continued until the 1960s, after which, forests were used for more recreational activities.



THE INTERNMENT CAMP CEMETERY

8

At the time of the Internment Camp, at least 150 interns died. Until the autumn of 1945, bodies, whose relatives or friends were unable to take responsibility for them, were buried in Assen. Because of a lack of space, a new cemetery was built at Camp Westerbork in October 1945. A total of ten people were buried here.

After the closing of the Internment Camp, the graves were more or less forgotten. Investigation by the Storage and Identification Service of the Royal Dutch Armed Forces (BIDKL) in 2012, detected the presence of physical remains. After identification, these were re-buried at the German military cemetery in IJsselstein.



Died in Westerbork

The father of Prof. Dr. **Hans Blom** (1943) was a resistance fighter, his grandfather was a member of the NSB (Dutch National Socialist Movement).

“ On 15 June, 1945, my paternal grandfather died [...] in Westerbork. The cause of death was dysentery. It may be assumed that there was a connection between that disease and the conditions in the camp [...]. [...] One way or another, the commander of the Westerbork Internment Camp traced my father and asked him to come to Westerbork, and, irreverently, told him to collect his father's body.

”

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

In 2008 and 2009 the exhibition 'Westerbork Internment Camp' took place in the Memorial Centre. Some of the former inmates' relatives were critical, insufficient attention was paid to the abuse and murder of 'innocent' people. Likewise, there was criticism from Jewish ex-prisoners of war and their families: why was so much attention given to Westerbork after liberation, compared with the war years?



Continue your route along the path. The various ponds on your left were used by some prisoners in the winter for skating. After about 1 000 metres, just before the intersection, on your left you will find the former location of the camp farm.



'DE SCHATTENBERG' CAMP FARM

9

'De Schattenberg' camp farm was established in May 1940. At that time there were 10 hectares of farmland, later extended to 42 hectares. On this land the prisoners cultivated potatoes and vegetables. Cows and sheep were kept on the farm itself. The pigs were fed with waste food from the camp.

During the war, the running of the camp farm was in the hands of a local farmer who was under the control of the Dutch SD. The produce from the farm helped the prisoners in the camp, supplementing their rations. Due to the arrival of the radio telescopes, the last farmer had to leave here in 1966.



Hidden

Prisoner **Gert Laske** (1921) worked on the camp farm because of his experience as a farm-hand.

“ On the eve of a transport I hid in the straw on the camp farm. I was sent to work on the farm shortly after arriving in Westerbork. If I heard the next day that I had not been on the transport list, I could just return to the camp after work.

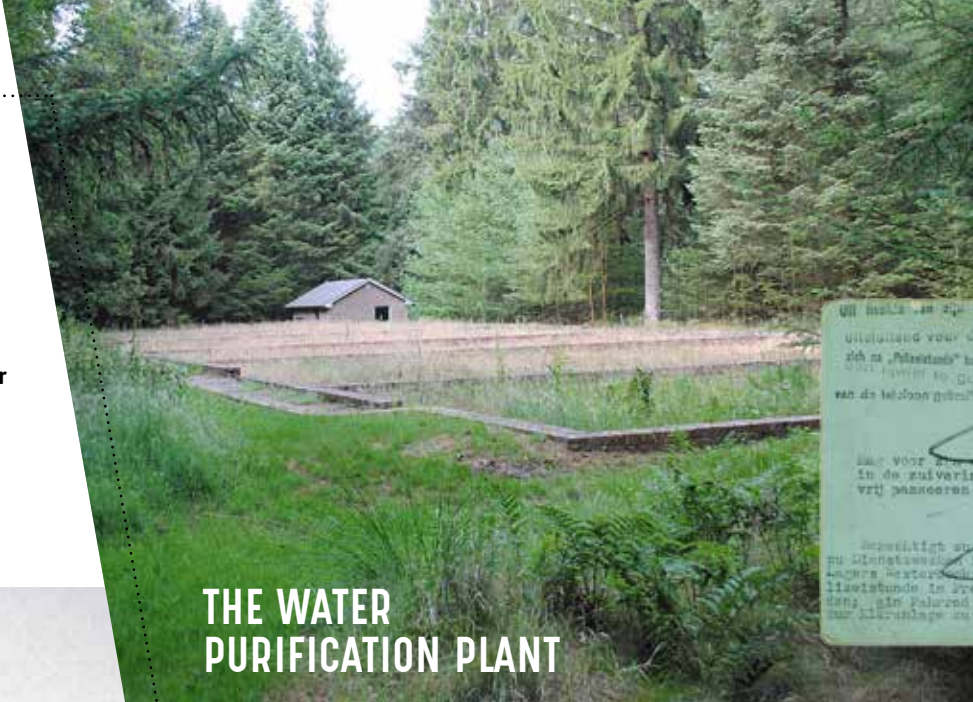
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JUDGEMENT

The judgment that prisoners gave after the war about the work on the camp farm and other farms, were partly dependent on the possible knowledge of 'The East' of the farmer concerned. What did this 'ordinary' Dutchman know about 'The East'? What should he have or could have known? Shortly after the war, the judgment was quite positive but, as time progressed, this became increasingly negative. 'Debt' and 'complicity' have, over the years, taken a more prominent place in the memories of the camp survivors.



Go back in the direction of the camp site. Along this path there was a narrow-gauge railway, used to bring goods from the nearby Oranjekanaal ('Orange Canal') to the camp. After about 1 200 metres, turn right at the intersection. After 175 metres, the entrance to the water treatment plant is on the left.



THE WATER PURIFICATION PLANT

10

In the spring of 1943, the construction of a state-of-the-art water purification plant with an area of 1100 m² began. The capacity of the old water purification plant (from 1940) had become too low for the number of prisoners, causing the water to become highly contaminated.

The new water treatment plant also had problems with, among other things, the poor construction of pipelines in the barracks. These frequently became clogged due to the fact that a lot of waste came into the tubes. In addition, due to the lack of adequate equipment, pipes and drains in the camp were not ideal. In the summer they became full of sand and in autumn and winter they became obstructed with leaves and snow.



'Stinking money'

Prisoner and resistance fighter **Werner Stertzenbach** (1909) discovered a large amount of money during his work on water treatment. This had been flushed away by the camp's newly-arrived prisoners before being found by the Nazis.

“ We had to keep the installation running. Suddenly we found a big banknote to our surprise. More and more appeared. [...] We glued the torn banknotes together and could send a large amount to the [resistance group] in Amsterdam.

”

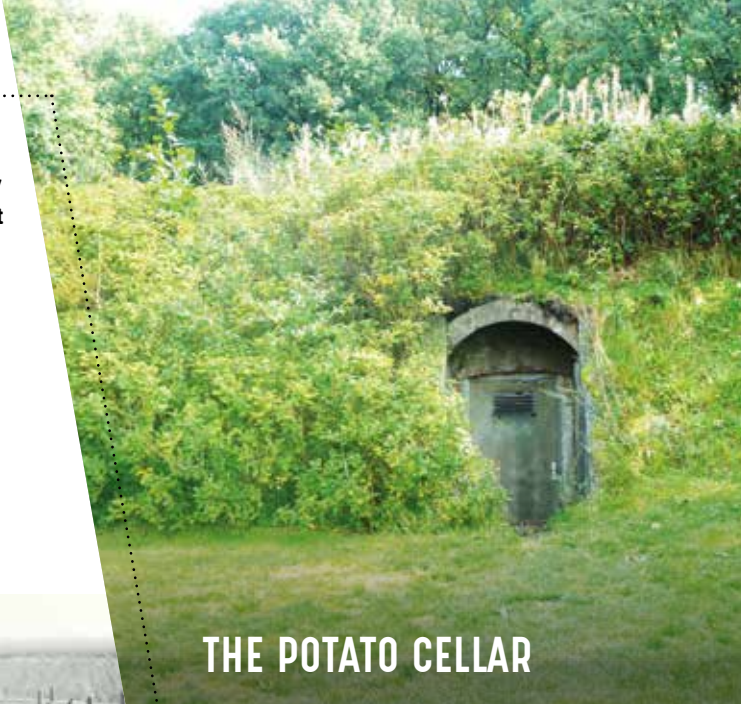
RESISTANCE

After the war, former guards from the death and concentration camps explained that Dutch transports usually took place in an orderly manner. There was no resistance. However, in Camp Westerbork there was resistance. In the forest around the water treatment plant, Jewish resistance fighters helped fellow prisoners to escape. The number of escapees was limited, partly because of the 'shiny world' of Westerbork. Because why would you want to escape if life in the camp was relatively good? And if you were forced to leave, could it also be like that in The East?





Return to the Commander's House and turn right onto the camp-site. Until the early 1990s, the site of the camp at the National Monument was almost empty. Around 1992, the redevelopment began, a process that continues right up to today.



THE POTATO CELLAR

11

The construction of the potato cellar began in the spring of 1942. Over the war years around 2.5 million kilos of potatoes were stored there. At any one time, around 400 000 kilos of potatoes and vegetables could be stored in the potato cellar.

Farmers from the area brought their produce to the potato cellar up to three times a day. Members of the Fracht Gruppe ('goods movers') then brought the potatoes to the Great Kitchen where food for the prisoners was prepared. The potato cellar was rented to a farmer for a short time during the 1960s. After May, 1967 the cellar was closed.



'Arrange'

Meijer Groen (1915), during his work at the Fracht Gruppe, knew how to 'arrange' for some extra food.

“ During unloading we hid some vegetables in our trouser-legs. When they became almost too full and we could hardly walk anymore, we emptied our trouser-legs in the toilet, which was accessible via the platform. [...] After we had finished unloading and were returning to the barracks, we picked up everything with a handkerchief. There was so much that a handkerchief was needed.

”

HERITAGE

To whom does the Westerbork campsite belong? After the potato cellar became empty in May 1967, it was used by the Dutch Forestry Commission for the storage of seeds. The basement is not accessible today: it serves as a home to between 150 and 1000 bats. It is an example of the sometimes distorted objectives of the Forestry and Memorial Centre: for the one, green heritage to be protected, and for the other, evidence of warfare to be exhibited.





Walk or bicycle past the National Monument. After 50 metres, continue along the path (on your right). Follow the path until the fork in the road, then turn right over the sand road into the forest, parallel to the camp boundary. After 100 metres you will see the road to where the telescopes are located, on your right. Go left along the track, further into the forest. After 100 metres you reach the location of one of the shooting ranges.

THE SHOOTING RANGE

12

In 1950, shooting ranges were built for military personnel. The relationship between the Dutch army and Camp Westerbork dates back to the previous date. In 1949, the camp was home to the VIIth Infantry Depot, one of the last group of 'wielrijders'; soldiers mounted on bicycles or motorcycles.

In the 1950s the army rented barracks in the camp. One of the barracks acted as storage for targets and was connected to the range by rail. At the back of the shooting range were 'bullet collectors'. In 1968, due to the arrival of the radio telescopes, the shooting ranges were abandoned.



SENSITIVITY

In the first years after World War II there was no room for 'sensitivities' about the history of camp Westerbork. It was the time of reconstruction, practical arguments prevailed. The siting of shooting ranges in 1950, near the spot where fifty or more resistance fighters were shot six years earlier, was not a topic of discussion.

The End of the Cyclists

J. Goedhardt was stationed in Camp Westerbork in 1949.

“ We had to give a bicycle demonstration to a couple of American soldiers [...]. This was the fatal-blow for the 'bicycle battalion'. We delivered the bikes and never saw them again. Those Americans did not see how you could defend a coast or a border with your bike from Westerbork.

”





You have reached the end of the route. Turn back to the potato cellar and follow the road to the Commander's House. During World War II transports left from this part of Camp Westerbork.

Follow the signs from the Commander's House to the Camp Westerbork Memorial Centre.



