

Stichting Nationaal Monument Kamp Amersfoort





I. A PICTURE OF THE MEMORIAL GROUND

The camp lies south of Amersfoort, between exit 5 of motorway A 28 (E 30) and roundabout 'Stichtse Rotonde' on the N 237. From April 1st 2008, the street Appelweg, will be renamed: "Loes van Overeemweg". The postal code will remain 3832 RK Leusden.

Two large rusty brown panels with "Kamp" and "Amersfoort" mark the former entrance to the barracks "Polizeiliches Durchgangslager Amersfoort" (Police Transit Camp Amersfoort).

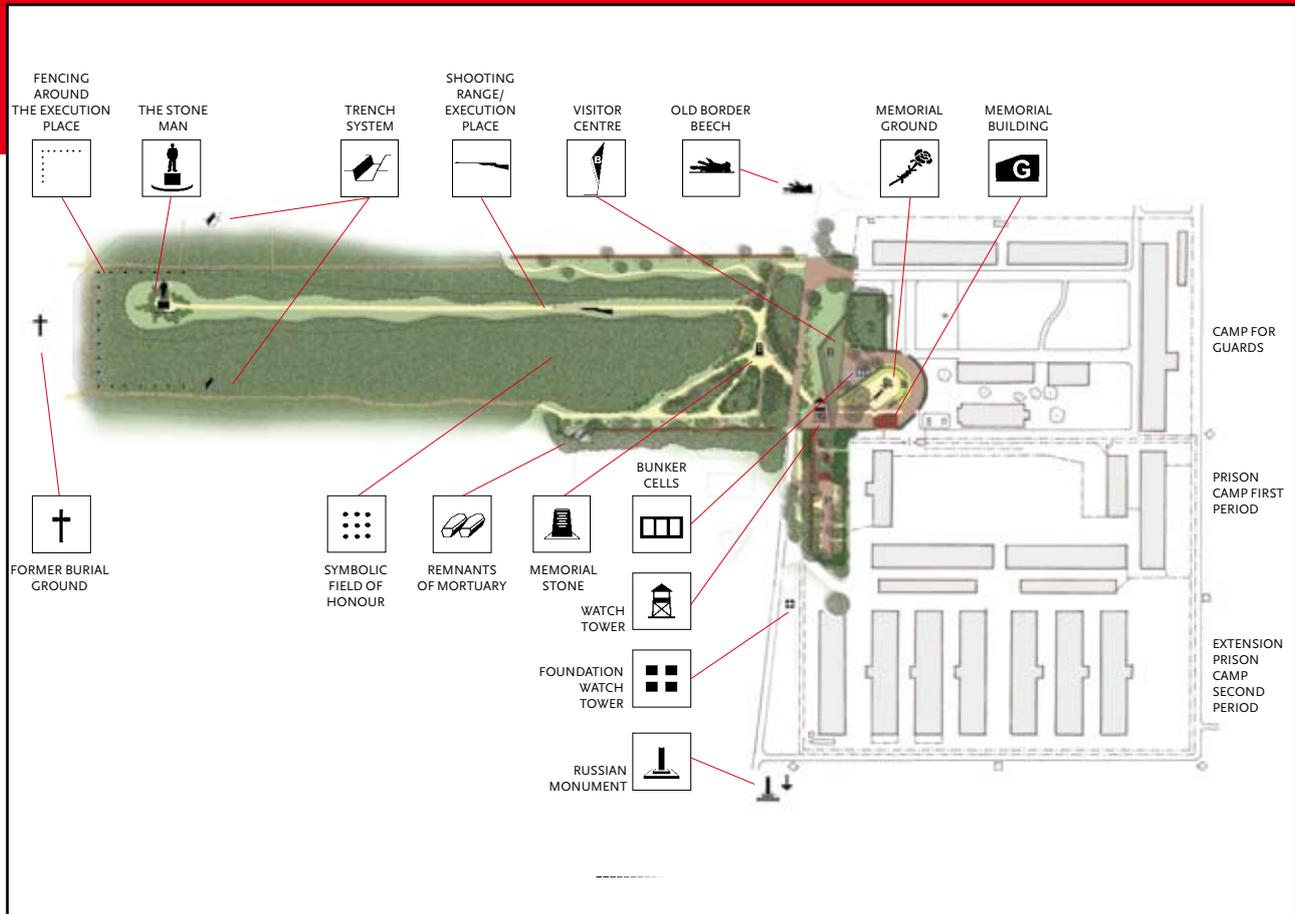
After the invasion in 1940, the Germans confiscated the Dutch army camp 'De Boskamp' – built during the mobilization in 1939 – as spoils of war. First Dutch prisoners of war, then German troops were encamped there for a short time. In May 1941, the SD (Sicherheitsdienst = Security Police) used the camp to confine the growing number of prisoners of the Nazi administration.

This was the first concentration camp in The Netherlands of its kind, however this size of camp was followed by the camps of Westerbork and Vught. Kamp Amersfoort, SD detention barracks and prisons were also the longest in use, right up until the liberation. The German bureaucracy named it "Durchgangs lager" (transit camp) and because it was in the hands of the SD, the word 'Polizeiliches' (Police) was added. Although the actual barracks were situated in Leusden, the other part of the camp was situated in Amersfoort. Thus, the name became

"Polizeiliches Durchgangslager Amersfoort", abbreviated to PDA.

A small part of the former camp is today's memorial ground. Partly hidden behind an artificial hill, the visitor centre with its rusty coloured steel walls and ceilings emphasizes the transience of a place too long forgotten.

The only remaining watch tower at the front is original but restored and is a symbol of cruelty to man. In the visitor centre, photos, drawings and a small number of objects timelessly represent the events of the past, as do the audio and video information. The high back wall can be seen through the glass front, symbolising the former barrier between the camp and the outside world. Simplicity and dignity characterise the visitor centre, which was awarded the regional prize for architecture in 2005.



2. GENERAL VIEW

On Monday, August 18th 1941, the first prisoners arrived, followed by people from all over the country and from all walks of life. People like us, without any distinction. Regardless who it was, each person witnessed every torture that happened to the others. The camp had two periods. The first one from August 1941 (arrival of 200 prisoners) until February 1943. Then all of the prisoners (over 2700 from 3 barracks) were transported to Kamp Vught. After the camp was extended, it was used for the second time. This period lasted for two years, from April 1943 till the liberation. On April 19th 1945, the Germans handed over the camp to Loes van Overeem of the Red Cross, which was the actual liberation of the camp. On May 7th 1945, the allied forces arrived, and the camp was finally free in all respects. The cruel behaviour of many of the SS (among them also Dutch volunteers) psychologically damaged several prisoners for life, so much so, that they were never able to speak about their experiences.

The prison camp consisted of two parts. The staff lived in the one in front. There, the barracks were in service for all kinds of purposes. The other part, grouped round the place for the roll call, consisted of the barracks for prisoners and the workshops. The entrance was formed by an inner gate, which was a wooden framework with barbed wire. In the second period, after the extension with new barracks, it was a brick gate of typically German concentration camp model.

In the camp were about 37,000 registered prisoners, 20,000 of whom were transported to prison camps and labour in Germany. At least 13,000 unregistered prisoners stayed for a short period. About 9,000 prisoners were released, having survived 3 to 6 months of detention. Others who attempted to escape were either executed or died of exhaustion. Some so worn out with weak frames due to continuous tortures, hardships and malnutrition. The camp saw all sorts of hostages, a number of them were shot down as retaliatory measure.

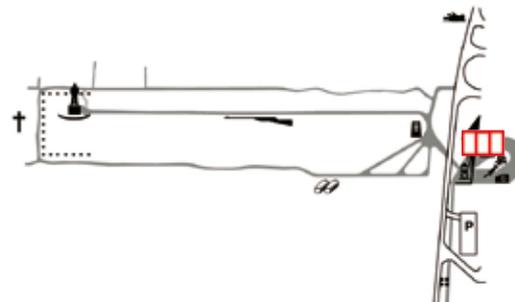
Apart from tens of thousands of men, there were hundreds of women, too. During various periods, there were also hundreds of families with children, especially Jewish families. For Jewish men, Kamp Amersfoort was a special detention camp, where inhuman treatment awaited them for breaking the rules of the occupying power or just for retaliation fed by hatred.

The barracks are shown on the map. The present memorial ground with the monument is in colour. Pictograms indicate the various locations.



kamp Amersfoort

1941-1945



THE BUNKER CELLS

The lay-out of the bunker cells, matching the original dimensions, can be seen in the pavement on the place where they once stood. The text tells you about an event that took place in one of these cells.



Foto: Museum Flehite Amersfoort



Foto: G. Kleinveld

Escape from the bunker cells

Gerrit Kleinveld, a member of the Dobbe resistance group, was taken prisoner during a raid. As he resisted interrogation, he was moved to Kamp Amersfoort and locked up in one of the armoured cells. A few days later, his hands and feet were chained to the wall. In spite of this, he was determined to escape. A spoon, left there by a former prisoner, was the tool he used to make his escape. He scraped the bracket of his handcuff on the floor until he could free one hand. With the handle of the spoon, he started to remove the concrete around one of the bars in the small window. After two weeks of hard toil, he had made sufficient progress. Then he made the handle of the spoon into a saw. With the serrated edge he was able to start sawing, which he continued to do for about five weeks.

Finally, on the night of March 1st, 1943 the time had come. With a bar from his bed, he could bend the three remaining cuffs on his hand and feet. He wriggled through the opening, barely wider than the length of the spoon. Soon he was outside and he sneaked through the first and second fence. As far as we know, this was never repeated. Gerrit stayed alive.

(this is a short version of the original story)



3. THE BUNKER CELLS

In the camp there was a complex of twenty-two cells, where prisoners with severe punishment were locked up but it also included survivors of allied air crews (after their planes had been shot down), those condemned to death, prisoners sentenced to kill others for retaliation and women (resistance fighters). Normally, these women were not locked up in the barracks. With just a few hundred of them, they were a minority compared to the tens of thousands of men. Often there were several prisoners in the same small cell.

Detention in a cell could be for a few days but more often for a few months. These cells, built in 1942 and measuring 2.40 m by 1.20 m, were dug into the ground. They could be reached via a flight of stairs (seven steps) from the guard house. There were eleven cells on each side of the corridor, which was always cool and damp because of the ground water or because the guards flooded the floor. Inside the cells, there was nothing but a steel bed – approximately 1.70 m long - sometimes with a straw mattress as well as a bucket for nature's calls. Some of the cells were always dark. When the cruel guards didn't forget, the prisoners had a lump of bread, and an extract that did not deserve the name coffee. A so-called warm meal did not exist. The guards carried out a reign of terror causing many a death among the prisoners. At the extension of the memorial ground in 2003 and the reconstructions around the visitor centre in 2004, the lay-out of the cobble stones

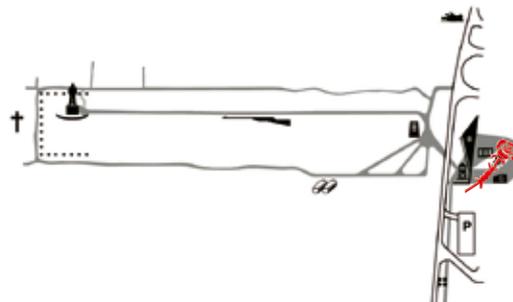
indicate the outlines of walls and floors of the bunker cell complex. A small part of a cell has been rebuilt so as to show how small the space must have been at the time. Between this place and the parade ground, was an original Dutch army camp lamp post from 1939, which still shines every night, together with the outside lighting.

During the war, many hundreds of prisoners were shot in and around the camp, on the Leusderheide, at execution places in Amersfoort and its surroundings. On the eve of their execution, they were locked up in the cells. The next day, early in the morning, they were taken to the places of execution, either on foot or in German army trucks. On the Leusderheide (military grounds) a man-size wooden cross commemorates at least 270 resistance persons who underwent the death penalty, far from the civilized world, not noticed by anyone but their executioners.



kamp Amersfoort

1941-1945



MEMORIAL GROUND

Rozentuin en Appèlklok

Op de plaats waar ooit de bunkercellen stonden is een symbolische herinnering aan de 'rozentuin' aanwezig. De 'rozentuin' was een afgescheiden deel van de appèlplaats, waar de gevangenen voor straf langdurig moesten stilstaan en ook wel mishandeld werden. De punten van prikkeldraad werden door gevangenen als een vorm van geestelijk verzet doornen van rozen genoemd. Zo ontstond de schertsnaam 'rozentuin', een naam voor een denkbeeldige rozentuin. Zuilen op een grindveld vormen een stil appèl op een symbolische appèlplaats. De helft heeft prikkeldraad als herinnering aan het verleden. De andere helft maakt de denkbeeldige rozentuin waar: de hoop voor de toekomst.

De steen bevat – naar tekening van J. Kopinsky – een uitgehouwen stuk prikkeldraad dat overgaat in een roos: een rozentuin-roos. De stichting heeft een vignet bestaande uit een krans van prikkeldraad waar de roos doorheen komt, als herinnering aan wat ooit was en daarnaast hoop voor de toekomst: dat prikkeldraad vervangen zal worden door echte rozen.

Bijna centraal in het Kamp Amersfoort - tegenover "Abteilung III" - in het tuintje bij de poort naar het gevangenen gedeelte, stond in de oorlogsjaren een klokkenstoel met de appelklok. Deze zijn bewaard gebleven bij de sloop van het kamp in 1968 en zijn opgenomen in de nieuw aangelegde gedenkplaats.





4. THE MEMORIAL GROUND

At the time, a part of the parade ground for roll-call of about 3 x 50 m was surrounded by barbed wire. The Germans called it 'Rosengarten' (Rose garden), invented in the concentration camp of Dachau. As a form of introduction, new arrivals were put there rain or shine, no matter the season. Hour after hour in summer heat or freezing cold, without food, drink, or use of a toilet.

As a more severe punishment, prisoners would be made to stand there for days at a stretch, or they were tortured. They had to stand motionless, witnessed by fellow sufferers, moving or talking were prohibited. When they moved a foot in the raked up soil, an extra hour was added for each step. Taking into account their physical weakness, this was an extremely cruel torture.

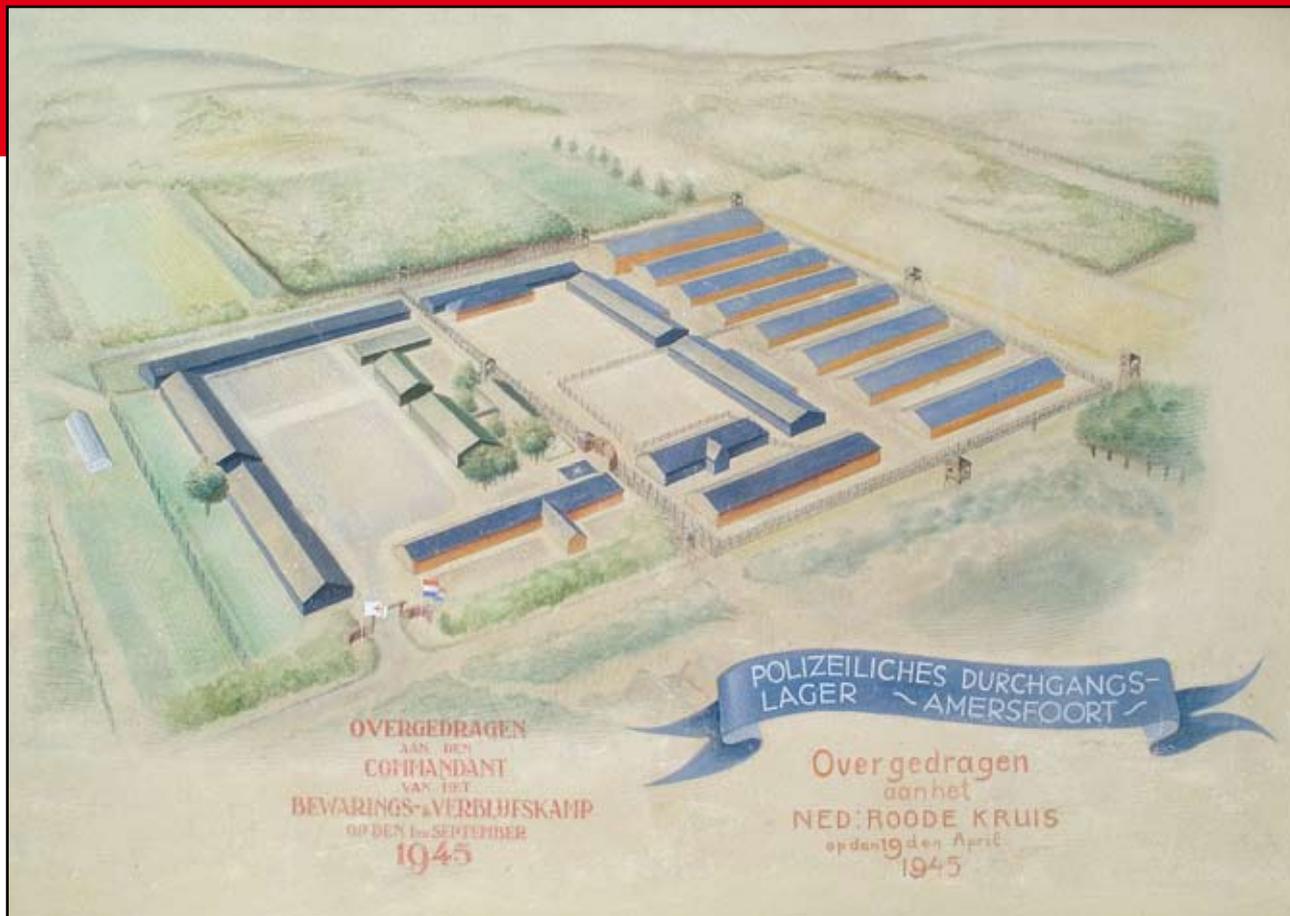
As a form of mental resistance, the prisoners named the place 'rose garden', imagining the points of the barbed wire to be thorns of roses in a fictitious rose garden. The present symbolic rose garden contains columns, representing the prisoners standing for roll-call on the parade ground. Half of these columns, entwined by barbed wire, are placed there as a tribute to those who stood there. The other half, entwined by real roses, represents the imaginary rose garden: the hope for a future where there will be no more barbed wire to confine innocent prisoners. A slab of stone in a bed of pebbles has a drawing by a former prisoner J. Kopinsky, a piece of barbed wire blending into a rose: his rose garden rose. The symbol of the Foundation Kamp Amersfoort is

Kopinsky's last drawing: a crown of barbed wire from which the rose grows.

When the last parts of the camp were demolished in 1971, the original wooden bell tower was restored. Now it is a protected national monument. In those days, it was in the camp commander's small ornamental garden, next to the inner gate and opposite 'Abteilung III', the camp administration.

At fixed times, for morning, midday and evening roll-call, the bell rang. When an escape took place, the bell would ring as well. All of the prisoners had to fall into line as fast as they could and they stayed there until the fugitive was caught and tortured severely or killed right before their very eyes. In some cases, when the fugitive was not found, they would stand there for days.

The wooden bell tower and the bell for roll-call form a protected national monument.



5. THE MEMORIAL BUILDING

Camp commander Berg had an office built at the head of the administrative barracks in 1944. On the former outer wall, now inner wall, he had two murals painted next to the door leading to the administrative office. One was a bird's eye view of the camp. As a form of propaganda, the other showed prisoners at work, giving the impression that they were treated well. After the camp was handed over to the Red Cross on April 19, 1945, it was used by the Red Cross, the Dutch prison system and the Royal Army (Grenadiers, Engineers and Cavalry). When they started renovation and rebuilding the police academy in 1971, just as the last barracks were being demolished, they finally discovered the murals behind wooden panelling. It would seem that these murals had purposefully been covered during earlier renovations back in 1951, because "the war" had better been forgotten. The commander of the police academy, Mr. B. Scholten, ordered that piece of the wall to be spared. During the opening of the academy in June 1971, Prince Bernhard of The Netherlands emphasized the monumental and emotional value of the murals, and he advised to consult experts. Result: the wall became part of the small, new museum built on the old foundations and in the style of the police academy. It wasn't a very good building and had the same constructional problems as the academy. Leakage, sunlight and changes in temperature (there was no heating) threatened to destroy this part of the historical heritage. In 1985 it was partly renovated.

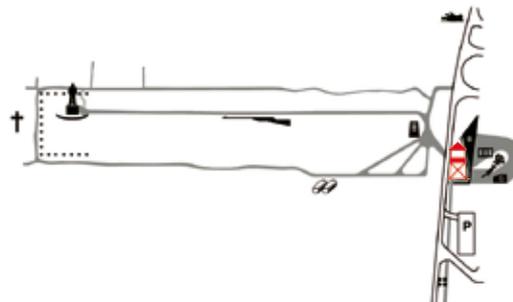
From 1988, the interest in Kamp Amersfoort and its history increased and volunteers began to upgrade the area. In 1994/1995, Rotarians from Amersfoort-Stad and volunteers of the police academy realised a first memorial square, where remnants of the camp were brought together: the wooden bell tower with bell, a watch tower and the memorial building with murals. They also made a connection with the memorial on the former shooting range. In 1999, the murals gave signs of deterioration and after advice of the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission and with private initiatives, the renovation began in early 2000. Over and around the small museum, a protective, copper-clad building with minimal facilities was constructed: the new memorial building. Soon it was inadequate for the growing numbers of visitors. A foundation was established in 2000, which received financial support from the House of Commons for further development and improvement.

The murals form a protected National Monument.



kamp Amersfoort

1941-1945



THE WATCH TOWER

This watch tower is among the few original remnants of Kamp Amersfoort. It has been renovated a few times and was placed on its former spot in 2004.

A guard with search light and machinegun: it is not hard to imagine the impression the tower must have made on the prisoners.

Within two metres of the concertinas, prisoners ran the risk of “being shot on the run”. Sometimes provoked by gifts (cigarettes or food)





6. THE WATCH TOWER

At the time, the German SD (Sicherheitsdienst = Security Troups) had twelve watch towers built round Kamp Amersfoort. Eight around the prison camp (6 in the first period) and four around the guard camp (later Amsvorde). There were the 1st battalion, staff company and the regimental band of the SS guard battalion 'Nordwest'. In that battalion, there were quite a number of Dutch volunteers. Both parts of the camp were interconnected by a road. Other companies of the guard battalion served at Westerbork, Vught, Haaren and St. Michielsgestel.

Via a steep flight of stairs, leading to a hatch in the floor of the observation deck, the guards entered the look-out post of a watch tower. Small window panes at the back gave the soldiers some shelter. The front was open to cover the area with search light and machine gun. Whoever came too close was 'shot on the run'. Desperate prisoners have been known to approach the barbed wire intentionally so as to be shot, actually to free themselves from their suffering. Guards who shot a prisoner on the run would get a few extra days of leave as a reward.

The authentic tower at the entrance has been renovated a few times. At the restoration in 2004, it was moved back to its original place. Further down the road, in the direction of the Russian Memorial, are the remnants of the foundation of the middle tower, at the west side of

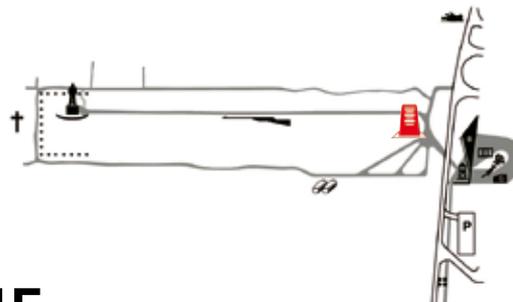
the camp. It is the only one of its kind preserved in The Netherlands. A replica is at the monument of Kamp Westerbork.

The watch tower is a protected National Monument.



kamp Amersfoort

1941-1945



THE MEMORIAL STONE



Photo: Consultancy Haver Droeze

Text: H.J. Meijer, secretary, Committee Monument Kamp Amersfoort

Producer: Steenhouwerij C.M. Lablans, Amersfoort, autumn 1952

The initiative for the memorial stone came from, the Prisoner Committee, the money came from the collection for the National Monument.

Dozens of graves in the neighbourhood have never been found.



7. THE MEMORIAL STONE

Opposite the entrance to the visitor centre is the National Monument of Kamp Amersfoort, established in 1953 and combined since 2004. To emphasize the unity of both parts, asphalt of the same colour as the connecting roads was used at the point where visitors cross the road. Steel edges have a guiding function. Alum stone used by the sculptor of the statue on the former shooting range marks the path from the road to the ‘Stone Man’. The alum stones were rearranged during the 2003 renovation; now clearly indicating the path.

The path, crossing the road, leads to a sober memorial stone with the following text:

THOSE WHO WERE KILLED HERE IN THE YEARS 1940-1945
HALLOWED THE GROUND WITH THEIR BLOOD.
BE THEIR SACRIFICE A SHINING EXAMPLE FOR PROSPERITY.

It reminds visitors of the suffering and the ill-treatment of the prisoners who were forced to work. In the vicinity, many prisoners were buried. According to research workers, among them Gerrit Kleinveld, a former prisoner of the camp, 98 graves of victims have never been found.

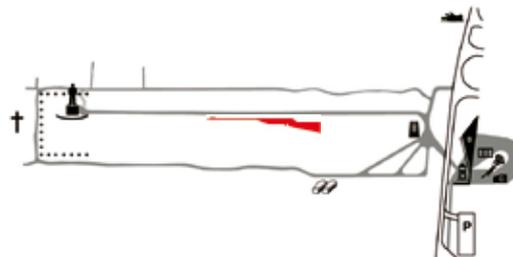
The memorial stone of Belgian hard rock marks the place of the hallowed ground for the visitors. Respect prohibits rooting up the soil. The path on the right of the memorial stone leads to the shooting range, dug out at the time.

This stone is a protected National Monument.



kamp Amersfoort

1941-1945



THE SHOOTING RANGE / THE PLACE OF EXECUTION



Museum Flehite Amersfoort

Prisoners dug out this shooting range. The sand was put on both sides to a height of about 2 metres. The rest of the sand was used during the building of barracks. In the beginning, the sand was transported in wooden cases, carried by the workers; later wagons on a narrow-gauge railway were used.

The digging started in 1941 and the range was lengthened to the present 350 metres between 1943 and 1945.

The guards used the range for shooting practice but also for carrying out death penalties and retaliation executions. A mass grave of 49 prisoners was discovered at the end of the range, where the Kamp Amersfoort monument stands. The statue is named 'Prisoner before the firing squad', usually referred to as 'The Stone Man'.



8. THE SHOOTING RANGE / THE PLACE OF EXECUTION

Because many German men served in the army, there was a shortage of manpower, especially since the war-industry needed so much labour. Slavery meant profit, and so it did in Kamp Amersfoort. Prisoners who died of exhaustion (hard labour, little or no food and corporal punishment) were reported 'death by work'. They 'cleared themselves up after having been useful first. The guards indulged themselves on the prisoners, and the camp leaders did not correct them. On the contrary, they carried out an even greater reign of terror. As life was of little value in the camp, this tyranny made many victims.

The guards also terrorized the wasted prisoners who worked in the woods with few and bad tools, felling trees and dragging them to the back of the camp. The stumps had to be dug out as well, to prepare the ground for agriculture. This timber felling changed the area, formerly carefully maintained oak woods, into the present open fields.

A place of terror, the compound also knew hierarchy among the prisoners. Being the lowest group, Jewish prisoners suffered the most. Helping a Jew was prohibited and was punished severely. Russian prisoners of war were also very poorly treated, and often worked to death. Severely punished prisoners and Jews formed the so-called "Jew workforce or workforce of the punished". These men had to do the most dirty and heavy jobs: emptying sewages, pulling road rollers - made heavier by bricks - to flatten paths, and digging out the shooting range

in a hill opposite the compound. Its length grew to 200 m in the first 18 months; the next year it was extended to 350 m. Alum stones mark three times 100 m, up to the target area where the statue 'The Stone man' is now. In the beginning, prisoners (while running) had to carry the crates with sand to the back of the camp. Three metal tip-wagons on a narrow-gauge railway were used later. The hill to the left of the entrance to the range was also made by 'slaves'.

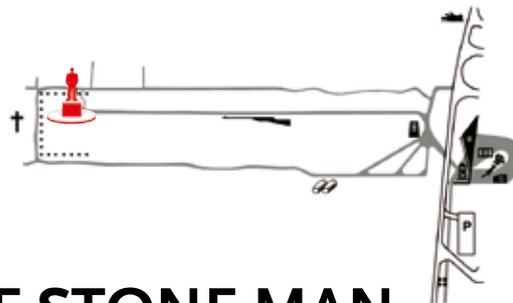
Kamp Amersfoort had no specific place for executions; prisoners were killed everywhere e.g. at the beginning of the shooting range, in the middle and mostly at the end. The statue was erected on the place where 49 victims were buried in a mass grave.

The shooting range and statue form a protected National Monument.



kamp Amersfoort

1941-1945



DE STENEN MAN - THE STONE MAN

The official name for the monument of Kamp Amersfoort is 'Prisoner before firing squad'.

It was made by Frits Sieger (ex-prisoner 1940-1945).

The first monument was a large wooden cross, placed at the same spot on September 23rd, 1950. The present one was unveiled by Prime Minister W. Drees on May 14th, 1953.

One fist is clenched as a sign of helpless anger and unbroken willpower, the open hand expressing despair. Sockle and statue are placed on a star-shaped mosaic with five doves of peace, symbolizing the five years of war. The material used is Vaurion, a soft limestone.



Opraving van slachtoffers



9. THE STONE MAN

Although the official name is ‘Prisoner before firing squad’, it is popularly called “The Stone man”. Sculptor Frits Sieger made it from the vulnerable French lime stone in 1952/1953. He was a prisoner in the “Oranjehotel” at Scheveningen from 1940 – 1945.

The whole statue, including the socle was cut out of one piece. The base is basalt rock with inlays of five doves of peace, one for each year of war. The statue replaces the temporary monument, a large teak cross. Prime Minister dr. W. Drees unveiled the statue on May 14th, 1953. Long before that, in 1947, the place received the status of national Monument. Sculptor Laurens Demmer renovated the statue in 2002/2003, after which it underwent a preserving treatment against decay in Germany.

Ex-prisoners paid for the design themselves. The promised contribution from the national monuments committee never came. The money came from nation-wide collections. From various possibilities, ex-prisoners chose for the simplicity of “The Stone Man”, representing a prisoner for whom each of them could have served as a model. Lacking formal, imposing texts, the statue represents what once was, as well as a warning of what might be repeated tomorrow.

The face and body bear marks of starvation. The gaze goes over the enemy and is aimed up “high”. The right hand’s fist indicates obstinacy, but the left hand speaks of despair. What will become of wife and children? The clothing consisted of spoils of war, old Dutch uniforms. Size did not matter. Ill-fitting clogs were deliberate instruments of torture.

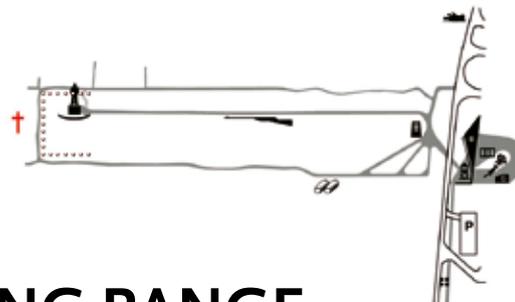
Farewell letters from executed prisoners, held in trust, do not recall hatred but send out a message which is actual even now. That is exactly why this place is a lesson from the past for the visitor of the present.

The statue is a protected National Monument.



kamp Amersfoort

1941-1945



BEHIND THE SHOOTING RANGE



The former burial ground of Kamp Amersfoort

Victims were temporarily buried here in 1945, including the 101 Russian soldiers from the mass grave in the woods near the camp. They were solemnly reburied at the specially laid out war cemetery at "Rusthof". There are also allied and Dutch war graves, including the graves of victims of Kamp Amersfoort. Some victims were reburied in family graves in their last place of residence. The last victims were moved to the war cemetery at Loenen (Veluwe) in 1951. The temporary burial ground of Kamp Amersfoort was then closed.

The fence of the shooting range

You are now before the reconstructed fence of the shooting range. Some poles are still original.



10. BEHIND THE SHOOTING RANGE

Stairs at the end of the shooting range lead to a reconstructed barbed-wire fence. The path to the left opens out on the back of the former range, the butt. Some of the original oak poles can still be seen behind the fence.

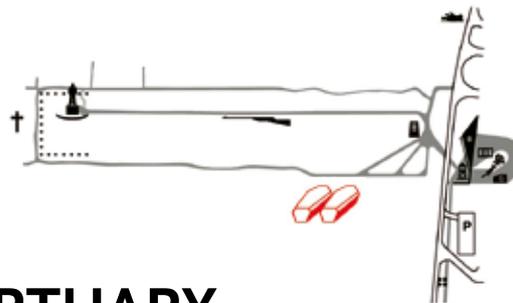
The outer area, where groups of prisoners were put to work, was divided into compartments, each forming a barrier for those who thought about the possibility of an escape. Due to this, and because of the patrolling guards, there was little chance of escaping. Bribed guards would allow an escape sometimes. However, bribing was very expensive.

A temporary cemetery for deceased and executed prisoners in the neighbourhood was made on the hill after the liberation in 1945. An “Identification and Recovery” unit worked in two barracks next to the mortuary. This unit succeeded in recovering hundreds of victims. Russian prisoners of war were reburied on the Russian war cemetery next to “Rusthof”, the public burial ground where victims of Kamp Amersfoort found their final resting places. There are also many allied war graves (especially air crews), which makes this one of the largest war cemeteries in The Netherlands.



kamp Amersfoort

1941-1945



REMNANTS - THE MORTUARY

The mortuary was meant for deceased prisoners who were taken away out of sight of the detainees. In some cases, a hearse would take a prisoner to his home town. More often, however, the destination was a mass grave in a remote fir tree wood, where unslaked lime would be thrown over the dead bodies. These mortal remains were rarely found again. In spite of this, hundreds of victims were recovered and identified by a special unit of the Royal Army, who worked here from 1945 till 1951.

Dr. Elie A. C wrote on pp 32 and 33 of his book "De Afgrond" (The Abyss):

After some weeks, Van Zeestraten said to me, "This Jew Commando (work group), this is not good for you. I'm going to establish a commando for the dead and you will be the foreman. You must collect the dead and bury them". Well, with a few fellow prisoners, that is what I did. We took them to the mortuary where there were three coffins. We would put two corpses in each of those. When they were full, we had to take them to a hole in the ground where we tipped the wheelbarrows over and then they were buried. These were the people who had died or were beaten to death. You ask me what it did to me. Nothing. Not much anyway. I only thought of myself. I had an easy job and whether I did it or somebody else, that made no difference. I was glad to be out of the Jew Commando, for that was a notorious one.



The mortuary



II. THE MORTUARY (REMNANTS)

Still visible, the remnants of the mortuary once formed the foundation of a barn belonging to a farmhouse down the road, where the golf club now is. When the SD annexed the barracks to make a concentration camp, the surroundings were declared “Sperrgebiet” (no-go area) for everyone. Whoever came there was arrested and locked up in the camp or was executed. The farmhouse was one place where prisoners had to work. By stealing wood (felling trees), the large field was formed.

According to German requirements, every camp had to have a mortuary for inspection and description of the dead by the camp physician. So the original farmer’s barn was changed into a mortuary. However, the camp doctors did not like that work and simply did not do it. As this was an SD camp, there was no authority to correct them.

Sometimes the weak frame of a deceased or executed prisoner was kept here and – remarkably so – returned to the family to be buried at Rusthof or in their home town. In other cases, a hole was dug at random and the body was thrown into it and buried. The police team, investigating the war crimes at Kamp Amersfoort, established that dozens of graves were never found again. This was due to the fact that the camp commanders had unslaked lime thrown over the mortal remains so as to get rid of any traces (evidence in later investigations).

The surroundings have become a final resting place for many a victim. For that reason, the ground around the monument is entered with due respect.

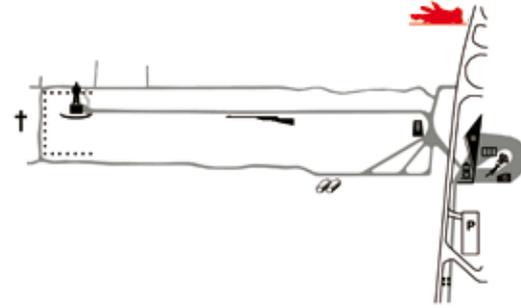
The unit “Identification and Recovery” was part of the Red Cross first but later it was integrated in the Royal Army. By tenacious and careful examination of the dead bodies, they succeeded in identifying all recovered bodies, with only few exceptions. Before being executed out of revenge or because they were sentenced to death, prisoners received their own civilian clothes. Although this was not the intention, it helped identification enormously.

The remnants of the mortuary form a protected National Monument



kamp Amersfoort

1941-1945



THE BORDER BEECH

*Stump of the plant
that heard and saw
and not forgets,
just holds out
until the last day
of the old generation
that still knows.*

*Here,
at the side
between statue and animal
I stand guard.*



The trunk before you is about 200 years old and was a witness to what took place here.

Standing at the borderline between Amersfoort and Leusden, the beech was called border beech.

For prisoners it was a remarkable tree that they saw before entering the gate to the camp. It was a symbol of the free life outside.

Branches were taken off the diseased tree on December 3rd 1993. On the trunk, ex-prisoner Pieter Ista wrote the poem alongside. The tree finally gave in on October 25th, 2000. Yet, the trunk remains indissolubly connected with Kamp Amersfoort.

Photographs H. van Vliet © 2004



12. THE BORDER BEECH

Groups of prisoners, on their way to the camp or being transported from there, passed a notable tall tree, the age-old border beech. Its circumference measured about six metres.

Border beeches served as landmarks (symbolic boundary posts) in olden times. Here, the borderline between Amersfoort and Leusden was drawn through the landscape..

Whether prisoners of the detention facility had an eye for mother nature's creation remains unknown. No descriptions of it have been found as yet. "The tree must have seen a lot". A grave was found right behind it after the liberation. Witness of a war crime.

A deadly fungus attacked the colossal beech by the end of the 1980s. To prevent accidents, dying and dead branches were removed, leaving a bare trunk with some remaining chopped-off branches. By the end of 1994, a short poem was written on the remaining trunk. Publications in the press led to the author: Pieter Ista, ex-prisoner of Kamp Amersfoort.

Ista was imprisoned in Kamp Amersfoort at the age of 17 in 1943 and released after three months. Later he was arrested during a police raid, recognized and transported to a detention camp in Poland. The Russians liberated him and sent him home (on foot). He can't remem-

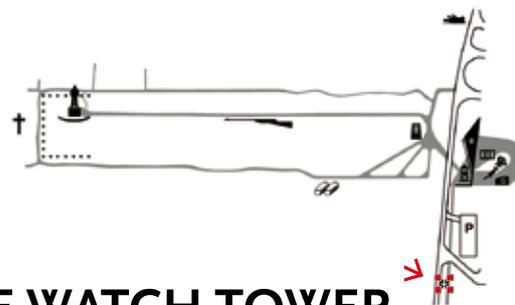
ber how he got home. He was enlisted in the Dutch army in 1946 and had to report at "De Boskamp", the former detention facility, where he received a basic military training. As an infantryman he served in the Dutch East Indies for two years. He demobilized in "the camp". Mentally torn apart, he became an alcoholic. After his wife's death he was hospitalised for treatment of his trauma in the Sinai Centre, close to the former Kamp Amersfoort.

Walking in the neighbourhood, he found himself again in "the camp". While he rested under a tree, lost in thought, he wrote the poem in a wave of feeling. As the years passed on, the poem faded. The remaining trunk came down and is now part of nature's recycling.



kamp Amersfoort

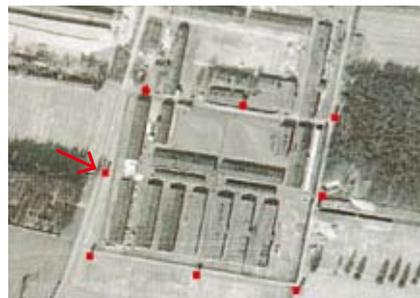
1941-1945



THE FOUNDATION OF THE WATCH TOWER

On the aerial photo, the foundation of one of the watch towers is visible and marked. In the first period of “Kamp Amersfoort” (August 1941 – February 1943) there were six watch towers placed around the prisoners section. During the second period after the extension of the camp (April 1943 – May 1945), they built two more watch towers making a total of eight.

On the map above the rough position of the watch towers around the camp is indicated. At the Security Camp alongside “Laan 1914” there were similar watch towers.





13. THE FOUNDATION OF THE WATCH TOWER

With the description of the remaining watch tower it was mentioned that originally there were eight around the prison camp: one on each corner and one between each corner tower, making a total of eight. On the road heading south you can see the remains of the foundation of a watch tower. What looks like only four blocks of concrete and an iron bar is in truth only the surface, beneath it is a whole foundation. With the restoration and re-location of the remaining watch tower they contrived to visualise what it must have looked like. A foundation of concrete was made with four salient blocks on which the legs of the watch tower were placed.

The old shortened blocks of concrete partly suffered concrete decay. During the restoration program alongside the road, they discovered that the foundations matched the exact same size and shape as the remaining watch tower.

The aerial photo on the information panel gives information about the camp as well as about the place of the remains of the watch tower.

At the end of the road near the edge of the wood is the execution place of the Russian captives. On that spot a Russian memorial remembers the war crimes that were committed.



14. REMEMBRANCES / STATUTORY TASKS

The “Stichting Nationaal Monument Kamp Amersfoort” makes it their task to:

- secure and preserve the remnants and other traces of “Kamp Amersfoort”;
- fulfill a task to ex-prisoners, their children and persons in question;
- take care of education of younger generations on the principle that: “this place is a lesson from the past”.

On the memorial ground and on the grounds of “Stichting Nationaal Monument Kamp Amersfoort” guided tours are given. Besides a general programme there are special educational projects for pupils from the age of ten to eighteen. The foundation has made an even more special programme for those who choose an education where they have to wear a uniform: police, Royal Military Police, Royal Navy, Royal Army and Royal Air Force. The guided tours for these groups contribute to their training. There is a close contact with the “Diensten Geestelijke Verzorging” (Mental Care Department) of the army.

All public guided tours are announced on the website, in the “Informatiebulletin” and through announcements in the press. For all other guided tours a reservation has to be made.

To pay lasting respect and keep the remembrance alive of the victims of “Kamp Amersfoort”, the foundation organises a commemoration every year on April 19th. On that day they commemorate the liberation and the transfer of the last hundreds of prisoners to the representative of the Dutch Red Cross on April 19th, 1945. During the evening traditional readings are held on the former ground of the camp.

Annually on May 4th at 11:00 a.m. the remembrance is held with the pupils of the school that adopted the monument. Every fourth of May at 07:00 p.m. a pilgrimage starts from the memorial ground via The Stone Man, to the “Rusthof” cemetery, and at 08:00 p.m. the national remembrance is held. After that, it is possible to go past the war graves (also war graves of “Kamp Amersfoort” are there).

On May 4th (the National Remembrance Day) and May 5th (Liberation Day) there are different opening hours and often extra tours and other activities. The annual “Russian” commemoration is held on May 9th. Together with the “Stichting Gijzelaars Beekvliet en Haaren” (Foundation Hostages Beekvliet and Haaren), the remembrance of the execution of hostages is held in the town of Woudenberg (location Austerlitz monument) every October 16th.



15. VISITOR CENTRE / DATA

The visitor centre and attached office of the foundation have the following data:

- Appelweg 3, 3832 RK Leusden.
- From April 2008 onwards the road will be renamed: Loes van Overeemlaan.
Phone: 033-4613129
Fax: 033-4615695
www.kampamersfoort.nl
info@kampamersfoort.nl
- The location can be reached:
using "Laan 1914" and the only side-road of it in Amersfoort-Zuid by car: motorway A-28 at the exit 5 (Amersfoort-Zuid / Maarn), then follow the signs "Kamp Amersfoort". A detailed route description is available from the above address.
- Bank account no. 96.95.81.599 in the name of "St. Nationaal Monument Kamp Amersfoort" at Leusden.

Opening hours:

- Monday – Friday from 9 am till 5 pm.
- April – September also on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays from 1 p.m. till 5 p.m.
- Visits on request at different times are possible.

The foundation has a committee representing several organisations: COVVS (Central Organ of Former Resistance and Victims), Expogé (the Dutch Association of ex-political prisoners of war), the Dutch-Israelite Community of Amersfoort, the Police Academy of Apeldoorn, the Rotary Club "Amersfoort Stad", the executive committees of the cities Leusden and Amersfoort. There are also some independent committee members.

The foundation has a small group of permanent staff members at their disposal, supported by many volunteers. In close cooperation all look after the whole task.

The costs of all activities are produced by allowances and gifts. A quarterly "Informatiebulletin" will be sent to all supporters and other persons interested. Once a year, the foundation will ask a donation for the cost of this magazine. Everyone who is interested can apply for the magazine giving their name and address. You can always help us by giving a donation in the box at the exit, so that we can continue doing our work. The foundation is fiscally recognised as an institution by order.

Stichting Nationaal Monument Kamp Amersfoort



The Jew- or Disciplinary Commando, also known as the Commando of the Shooting Range, stand in line. These prisoners dug out the former shooting range, at the same time the execution place. Due to the hard work and the physical maltreatments, they had to cope with, this commando was the most notorious one.

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