

THE CAMP IN THE SHADOW OF THE AIRPORT



In the immediate vicinity of Hamburg Airport stand the last two forced labourer barracks in northern Germany on their original site. Of the original four barracks, one is only partially preserved, the other one is completely preserved. The latter was inhabited by the son of the last camp director until 1997. The *Willi Bredel Gesellschaft* has set up an information center on forced labour there.

The renovated barrack, 2021 (Klaus Struck)

Forced labour as a business model

The forced labour barracks belonged to the gardening and landscaping company *Kowahl & Bruns*, which was founded in early 1939 by Emil Bruns and Fritz Kowahl, two members of the NSDAP and SA. The purpose of the business was, among other things, the camouflaging of airports in Germany, Poland and France, carried out mainly with forced labourers. The company operated four camps in Hamburg. Three of them were residential camps, which the company made available to various Hamburg companies to house their forced laborers in return for payment. After the war, Emil Bruns was convicted and imprisoned by the British military administration as a war criminal for mistreating female Polish-Jewish forced labourers. Despite this, he became one of the most successful contractors of the post-war period.



Dutch forced labourers in the camp yard in August 1943 (Piet Christiaans, WBG-Archiv)

Dutch forced labourers,
New Years Eve 1943
(Wijbrand Groot, WBG-Archiv)





Company pass of C.H.F. Müller AG, 1943 (WBG-Archiv)



Dutch forced labourers during their lunch break at C.H.F. Müller AG, 1943 (Piet Christiaans, WBG-Archiv)

Dutch in arms production

In September 1942, the company applied for the establishment of a purely residential camp to house 144 male "civilian workers" who were to work in various surrounding factories. From the beginning of 1943, the camp was occupied. In addition to Frenchmen, Belgians and Italian military internees, most were Dutchmen who had to work six days a week in arms production at the Philips subsidiary *C.H.F. Müller* in Fuhlsbüttel.



Stolperstein for Jan Woudstra, laid on 24 February 2009 (WBG-Archiv)

In 2000, five former Dutch forced labourers visited the barracks. They gave detailed accounts of the two years of their lives they were forced to spend there. They said that life in the camp was hardest in winter: "We had a stove in the middle of the room, but we had very little fuel. We would take a board out of our bed every now and then." In addition, on cold nights they often slept two to a bed to keep each other warm. Vermin in the straw sacks that served as mattresses was the norm. All of the residents survived their time in the camp, except for Dutchman Jan Woudstra, who was denied medical attention for a severe case of tuberculosis.

