

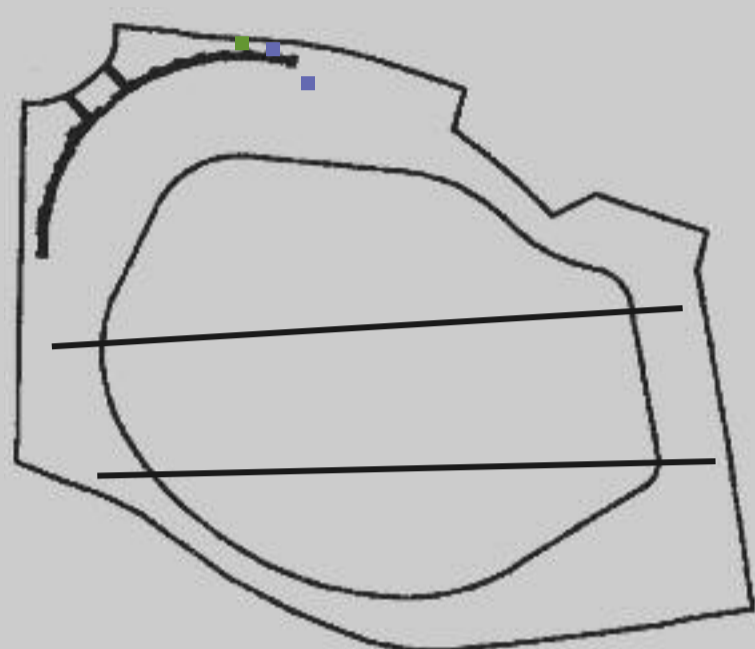
Columbia-Haus

Military Detention Centre, Gestapo Prison and Concentration Camp

Until 1938, Columbia-Haus stood here. It was constructed in 1896 as a military detention centre and originally formed part of the complex that included the barracks opposite. It served as a prison until its closure in the late 1920s. During the first few years of National Socialist rule, Columbia-Haus was one of the worst torture centres, and the only official SS concentration camp within Berlin's city limits.

In summer 1933, when huge waves of arrests took place, the Gestapo (the secret state police) began to use the vacated building complex as a prison again. Most of the people interned here were either political opponents of the Nazi regime for whom there was no space in the Gestapo HQ prison in Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse 8, or prisoners due to receive more severe terms of imprisonment. Every day, prisoners were transported back and forth between Columbia-Haus and the Gestapo HQ, where they were interrogated.

Most of the early "protective custody" camps and prisons were fitted out by SA units and closed again after only a few weeks or months. Columbia-Haus however, after serving as a Gestapo prison under SS guards for one year, was placed under the command of the newly established "Inspektion der Konzentrationslager" (inspection of the concentration camps). The central office was responsible for the "modern" concentration camp system, devised by Reichsführer SS Himmler as a permanent institution. The system of violence was standardised down to the very last detail. Columbia Concentration Camp existed until November 1936. The building was demolished in 1938 when the new airport building was constructed.



2 Das Konzentrationslager Columbia zwischen Columbiastrasse und Hangar des Flughafenneubaus, Stadtplan von Berlin 1935-38
The Columbia Concentration Camp between Columbiastrasse and the hangar of the new airport building, Berlin city map 1935-38
IAB, F Rep 270 A 2996 Bl.413

3 Das Columbia-Haus vor 1933
Columbia-Haus before 1933
SV-Bilderdienst München Nr. 12743

4 Das Columbia-Haus kurz vor dem Abriss, im Vordergrund die Bauarbeiten für den neuen Flughafen, 1938
Columbia-Haus before its demolition. In the foreground, building work in progress on the new airport, 1938
BRG

5 Geheimes Staatspolizeiamt Prinz-Albrecht-Straße 8 mit Verhörzentrale, um 1933
Gestapo HQ, Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse 8, with interrogation centre, ca. 1933
Bundesarchiv Koblenz, 183-R97512

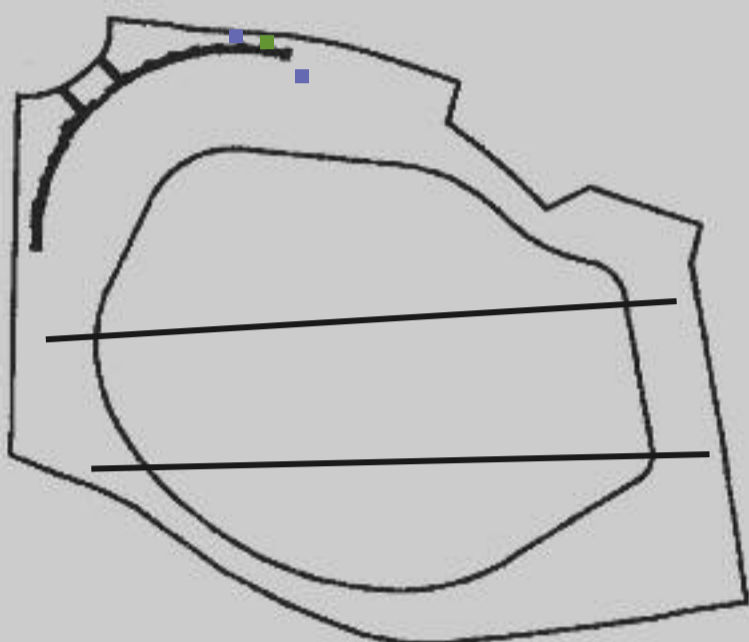
Columbia-Haus

Military Detention Centre, Gestapo Prison and Concentration Camp

The Columbia-Haus Gestapo prison, like so many of the early “protective custody” camps, was housed in a dilapidated public building. It was standing empty because the sanitary conditions no longer fulfilled the hygiene requirements of the Weimar Republic. From summer 1933 on, its 156 prison cells were overcrowded with opponents of the Nazi regime. The prisoners were intimidated, tormented and tortured by the Gestapo and SS men. Several were murdered. Complete lawlessness reigned in the building, which held about 450 prisoners.

There was no improvement in prison conditions after it was placed under the “Inspektion der Konzentrationslager” in December 1934. The arbitrary harassment and maltreatment that prevailed during the early days gave way to a sophisticated camp system of rules with draconic discipline and terrible penal conditions. The hygienic conditions, catering and health care were miserable from the very start. All in all, at least 8,000 men were interned in Columbia-Haus. Most of them were communists, social democrats, intellectuals, politically active doctors, lawyers, journalists and clergymen. In 1935, their number included many homosexuals, too. Jewish prisoners suffered particularly cruel treatment. Also among those imprisoned there were numerous prominent figures from the Weimar Republic.

SS commandants and guards at Columbia-Haus were able to “prove themselves suitable” for work in other concentration camps. This was the case with Karl Otto Koch, for instance, later commandant of the Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald and Lublin-Majdanek camps. In November 1936, Columbia Concentration Camp was closed and the prisoners taken to the newly constructed Sachsenhausen Concentration camp outside Oranienburg – from then on the Reich capital’s “exemplary camp”.



4 KZ-Kommandant Karl-Otto Koch (rechts), Foto aus dem SS-Dienstalbum
Concentration Camp commandant Karl-Otto Koch (right), photo from the official SS camp album

Archiv FSB Moskau/Gedenkstätte und Museum Sachsenhausen

5 KZ Sachsenhausen, 1937
Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp, 1937

Archiv FSB Moskau/Gedenkstätte und Museum Sachsenhausen

6 Denkmal des Bildhauers Georg Seibert für die Opfer des Columbia-Hauses,
errichtet 1994, am Columbiadamm Ecke Golbener Straße
Monument by the sculptor Georg Seibert for the victims of Columbia-Haus, erected at
the corner of Columbiadamm and Golbener Strasse in 1994

Photo: Stefanie Endlich



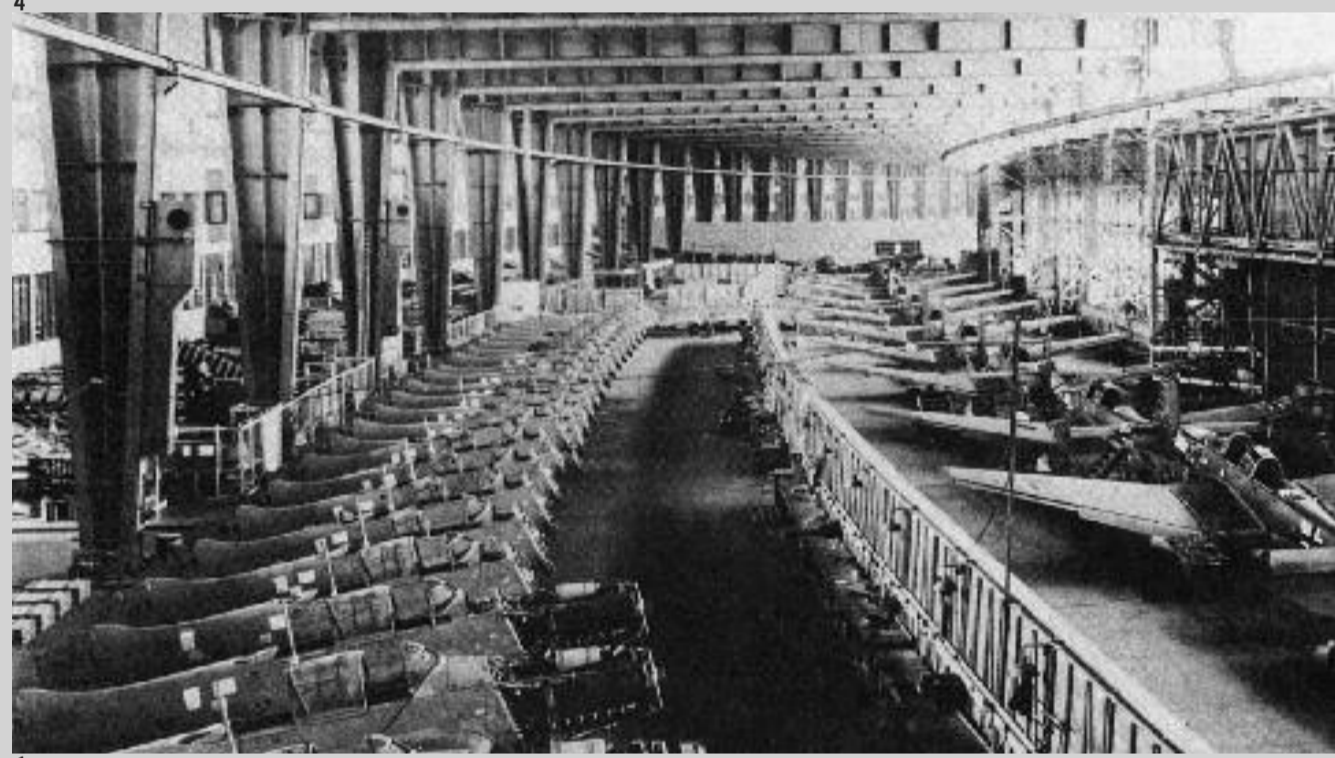
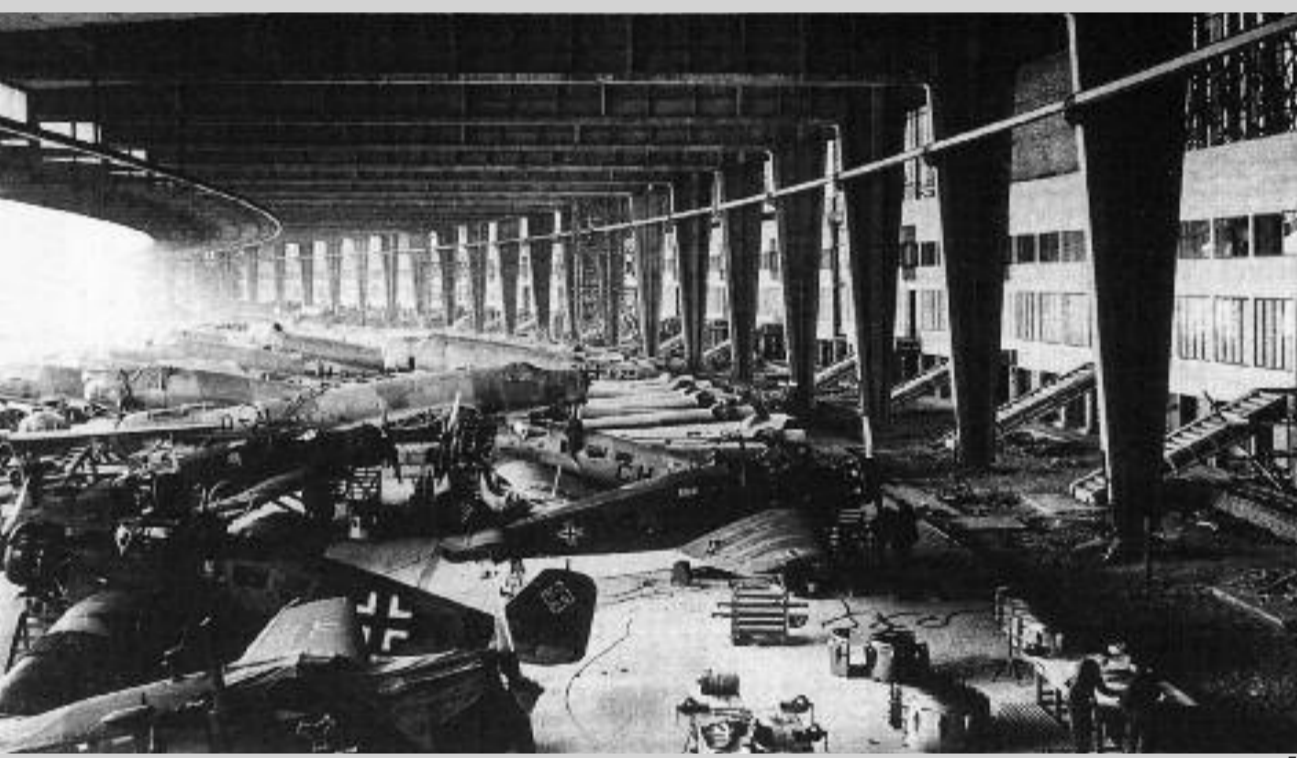
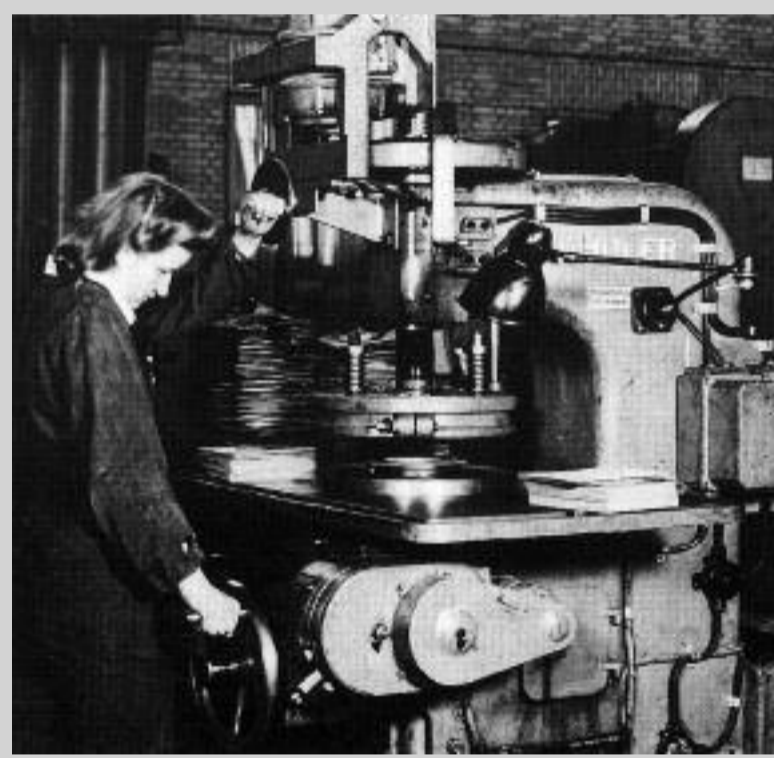
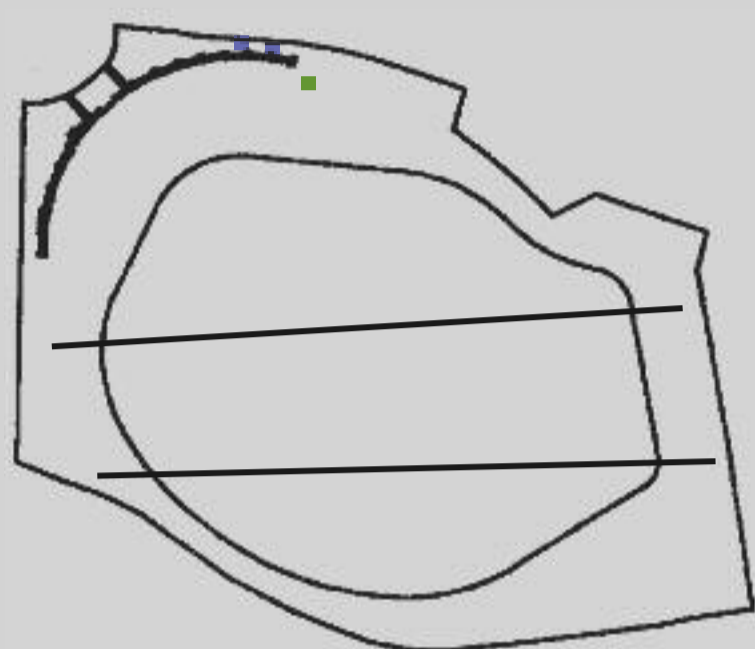
Forced Labour Camp

Armaments production, air base, forced labour camp

During the Second World War, a large forced labour camp stood here, extending from the airport building to Columbiadamm Cemetery. Additional barracks lined Tempelhofer Damm and perhaps the southern edge of the airfield. The history of the barracks complex has yet to be adequately researched. The marks it made in ground will be examined in the near future.

The barracks complex belonged mainly to the production plants and workshops fitted out at the order of Reich Minister for Aviation Göring for the aeroplane producer Weser Flugzeugbau GmbH. Four of the barracks were used by the Deutsche Lufthansa's repair and assembly workshops. The entire airport complex, whose construction was almost finished when Germany started the war in 1939, served as an airbase. The site management of the Luftwaffe and the offices of the Reich Ministry of Aviation were housed in the reception and check-in building, as well as in the new buildings at the rondel. Battle-planes were repaired in the airport gate and the huge halls. The Stuka dive bomber was produced here, and radio-defence equipment assembled.

With the men at the front, the Reich's war economy was sustained by forced labour. In Berlin alone, there were far more than 1,000 forced labour camps. Male and female workers from the occupied countries were put to work at Tempelhof Airport. At first, they were enlisted. Later, most of them were forcibly dispatched to Germany. Most of them originated from Poland, the former state of Czechoslovakia and, from 1942 on, the Soviet Union. Among them were also many prisoners of war. Between 1940 and 1942, Berlin Jews were also forced to work here before they were deported. Allied bombing raids destroyed the barracks, but the new airport building remained largely intact. Arms production ceased only a few days before the war ended.



4 Eine Frau in der Produktion
Woman on the production line
Archiv EADS

5 Flugsteig des neuen Flughafens, Abstell- und Umbaubereich
Gate A of the new airport, storage and conversion area
Archiv EADS

6 Halle 4, Montage der JU 87
Hall 4, assembly of the JU 87 dive bomber
Archiv EADS

7 Zerstörte deutsche Kampfflugzeuge, 1945
Destroyed German fighter aircraft, 1945
LAD