

Presentation of the Site

The prison camp of Ile Longue (Long Island), the camp on the Ile Longue was a prominent place of German Culture in France during the First World War.

A French project offered to Germany, to Austria and to Hungary

Who are these civilian internees and these war prisoners ?

In August, 1914 Germany and Austria mobilize. They call back their male citizens aged from 16 to 60 years being abroad. Many of them are captured by the Allies, in metropolitan France where some work since years, in Belgium, in Alsace and in Lorraine where the French troops enter temporarily during the first days of the war, in the German colonies of Africa (Togo, Cameroon), or aboard ships returning them to Germany. It is necessary, hastily, to create camps to accommodate some tens of thousands of men. Forts, factories and disused monasteries are requisitioned. From November 1914 a camp with barracks, (there will be a few in France) is created in the harbor of Brest, in Ile Longue, to receive, the nationals of the central powers captured in the Channel or in the Atlantic Ocean by the French navy. ↵

To these civilians are soon added servicemen captured on the front. They are often wounded soldiers who are evacuated towards the hospitals further away, in particular, the maritime hospital of Brest.

Convalescents, they are then interned in one of the six camps of Finistère.

What are the material peculiarities of the camp of Ile Longue ?

It is a camp created from nothing, on approximately seven hectares of rented farm land. Approximately a hundred wooden barracks of the "Adrian" type are built by the prisoners. The internees benefit of space, from specific premises, for kitchens, canteen, showers, infirmary, laundry, toilets, library, theater, workshops of crafts, education and musical concerts. ↵

They have a soccer field, bowling and two tennis courts. ↵

Designed to be able to accommodate 5 000 people, the camp will hardly see more than 2 000 people. In total, 5 300 prisoners will stay there, between a period of a few weeks to five years. ↵

About thirty prisoners die during captivity, among which half during the epidemic of Spanish flu end of 1918 and beginning 1919, and one was shot by a sentinel. ↵

The camp is permanently closed December 31st, 1919.

The camp of Ile Longue : a cultural exception ...

The capture, September 1st, 1914, by the French navy, of the Dutch liner "Nieuw-Amsterdam" constitutes the major event which will confer to the camp of Ile Longue its exceptional cultural dimension. Indeed, aboard this ship which makes the crossing from New York to Rotterdam are numerous artists and German, Austrian or Hungarian intellectuals. The majority of these thousand men, captured aboard the "Nieuw-Amsterdam" will spend the totality of the war and even one further year in Ile Longue. ↵

Among them are businessmen, engineers, musicians, orchestra conductors, painters and writers ... ↵

Among them is the director of the German theater of New York : the future film-maker Georg Wilhelm Pabst

(The Tragedy of the mine (Kameradschaft), The Three penny Opera...). It is essentially because of him and of his numerous directions that the theater of the camp will become a long-lasting and recognized success.↵

The prisoners publish, under the control of the administration of the camp, a weekly newspaper of four pages : "Die Insel-Woche" (The Week of the island). They create a library which will count 8 000 volumes. The prisoners launch a subscription to buy a piano, and obtain it. A concert is given every Sunday. A theater performance is given weekly. Language and sciences courses are also dispensed.↵

On Ile longue, Hermann von Bötticher writes his play "Jephta", and Karl Italiener translates into German the work of the economist John Maynard Keynes which he entitles in German : "Warum arbeitet die Fabrik mit Verlust ?"↵

Thanks to a coded announcement published in the newspaper of the prisoners, twelve freemasons find each other and create their own lodge : "in Ketten zum Licht !" (Chains towards the Light !)

... But also a place of suffering

Numerous prisoners cannot, or do not want to join this German-speaking cultural majority. 25 different languages are spoken in the camp. Sometimes, in the same barrack, the internees have no common language with their neighbors. The Armenians, the Hungarians, the Alsace and Lorraine inhabitants do not especially want to be close to the Turks, the Austrians or the Germans.↵

The social differences cross barbed wires : the rich hire poor people at their service, for the laundry for example. The poorest, insufficiently fed by the administration of the camp and not receiving any parcel from their family, search in the leftovers of the kitchen so that to be less hungry.↵

What are the objectives of this web site ?↵

The objectives of the site are :↵

- to bring to light this underestimated episode of the World War I,↵
- to emphasize the exceptional exploits of prisoners, for the culture, the art, and the humanist values,↵
- to get in touch with the descendants of prisoners and allow them to know better what their ancestor lived during his captivity. For this, the site is trilingual : French, German and English. Its translation in Hungarian (approximately 500 prisoners) constitutes a later objective. Our site is on-line since a few months and we are, for the moment, in touch with four families of prisoners.

What this web site presents ?

First of all this site presents an indexed database (receipt of declaration at the national committee of data processing and freedom N 1645316 v 1 of April 5th, 2013) containing approximately 4 800 names of prisoners and indicating for each :↵

- his name, his first names, his date and place of birth, the name and the first name of his parents,↵
- the conditions in which he was captured,↵
- the successive camps where he stayed, the dates of arrival and departure of Ile Longue. The constitution of this database mobilized about fifteen volunteers who exploited the series 9 R Departmental archives of Finistère, serial inside which are more than 10 000 individual index cards of prisoners (2 - 4 by prisoner). It required approximately 1 000 working hours. Then the site puts on-line 66 numbers of the prisoners

newspaper “Die Insel-Woche” which were printed between June 20th, 1915 up to March 31st, 1918. Copies come from Departmental archives of Finistère and from a private collection held by “Etre daou vor” (Between two seas), an association interested in the local heritage of the peninsula of Crozon. Finally the site shows various aspects of the life of the camp, from research works in archives (Departmental archives of Finistère and Vendée, archives of the historical Department of Defense in Vincennes and in Caen) :

- captures, on the ground and on the sea ;
- the construction of the camp ;
- the material organization of the camp ;
- the cultural life ;
- the biography of symbolic prisoners.

For which Internet users ?

- The descendants of prisoners ;
- The amateurs of history of World War I ;
- The amateurs of history of Brittany ;
- The amateurs of history of German cinema between both world wars ;
- The amateurs of history of German freemasonry ;
- People who are interested in the German culture ;
- People who are interested in the sociology of the prison circles.

Who are we ?

We are a small group of about twenty amateur volunteers of history and local history of the peninsula of Crozon. We are as many women as men, almost as many Germans as French.

What are our sources ?

We mainly used the series 9 R departmental archives of Finistère, but also the series 4 M Departmental archives of Vendée, as well as the archives of the historical Department of Defense in Vincennes (operations at sea) and in Caen (Office of archives of victims' of contemporary conflicts). We also use testimonies supplied by families of prisoners who got in touch with us by discovering our site.

The site is officially on-line since January 22nd, 2013, fiftieth anniversary of the signature of the treaty of Elysee