

Summary of Tallinn Central Prison presentation

In my presentation I focused on Tallinn Central Prison during the German occupation in 1941 – 1944. In 1942 the occupants renamed the prison Tallinn Work and Education Camp Number 1, when The German Security Police and SD took control over this establishment. It became a concentration camp, but not an extermination camp. It means that no mass executions of Jews or other nations or political enemies were carried out inside the prison territory. The condemned were transported and killed elsewhere, in the woods, for example. It was a typical work camp and at the same time keeping the same features which characterize the prisons. During the previous periods of Estonian Republic years, it was a simple prison.

The former employees – the guards and the rest of the staff during the Estonian Republic years – of the Central Prison were called back to service. During the brief period of Soviet occupation in 1940- 1941 the prison personnel had been replaced.

Tallinn Work and Education Camp was subordinated to the departments of the Security Police and SD B- Group (Estonian Security Police). A small part of the prison complex remained Central Prison with the law of the Republic of Estonia, meant mainly for the detention of criminals.

In my presentation I wrote about the functions, living conditions, structure and detainees in this establishment during the period of the German occupation. At first the occupants made it clear, that the prison would become a concentration camp. So, the enemies – the Jews, communists, high ranking Soviet employees, criminals and Estonian nationalists – were put in prison, which turned out to be a work camp. The problem was, that the buildings were not meant to detain such a large number of people. The yearly average number of prisoners in Tallinn Work and Education Camp during the German occupation was 2000 – 5000. But according to some sources the building complex was always overcrowded.

The everyday life, however was not so strict and repressive as in the typical concentration camps. It was a mixture of prison and work camp with the features of both. The living conditions were very bad: bad food (only bread and water), no proper hygiene (no washing conditions), extreme temperatures (during winters it was very cold in the prison cells) and overcrowded cells.

In 1944 the Tallinn Work and Education Camp was liquidated due to the advancement of the Soviet Red Army. As for the inmates, some were sent to other concentration camps in Nazi –

Germany, mostly Stutthof Concentration Camp, others were enlisted in the German Army and some prisoners were even freed by the guards just before the Soviet troops entered Tallinn.

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