

COLLINT

Internment of suspects of collaboration in Belgium (1944-1946)

Contract B2/233/P2/COLLINT

Summary

The internment of suspected collaborators at the end of the German occupation of Belgium (from September 1944 on) was a huge (extra)judicial 'operation' in Belgium's postwar history that still has an impact on present-day Belgian society (e.g. political interventions addressing this topic, questions by relatives, television series on children of the collaboration). Based on a decree of 1918, up to 40.000 suspects of connivance with the occupier were deprived of their freedom and interned in prisons or internment camps in 1944-1946, many of them taken captive by resistance members.

Intense societal debates have lasted for decades, myths were created and the legitimacy of the way the Belgian State and military justice system dealt with collaboration was and still is questioned.

This research project wants to contribute to a better understanding of the organisation of the internment and the military justice system and challenge and, if so, deconstruct or confirm myths or stories surrounding this issue. This project put Fort Breendonk at the centre of this research. Fort Breendonk, an internment camp in September-October 1944 actually managed by the WHI, was at the heart of the repression, since it had been until only a few months earlier a German SS concentration camp and is now one of the remaining sites. A (private) list of names of people interned in Breendonk served as a basis to make a database of all the internees in Breendonk, and more personal elements were collected in the archives of the military justice system (kept by the the State Archives). In order to make a comparison between an internment centre in the Flemish region, one in the Walloon region and one in the German speaking region in the same period (September-December 1944), similar information was collected in the archives of the former military courts, the "commissions consultatives" and the "Police des étrangers" regarding the internees of the internment centres of Namur-Arsenal and Eupen. As such the database contains detailed information on nearly 1800 suspects: who was brought in and by whom, the reasons of arrest and internment, who became subject to criminal investigation and trial etc. To describe the creation and evolution of the internment centres, the archives of the National Security's High Commissioner's office (at State Archives) pertaining to its position regarding the internment centres and their management were analyzed in a systematic and detailed way and combined with a more summary analyse of the archives of the office of the chief military prosecutor (at State Archives) regarding these centres. The research also focused on the legal framework, how the judicial system worked and how legal provisions evolved.