



Breendonk

Internment camp located in the Belgian village of Breendonk, south of Antwerp. In the early 1900s a fortress was built on the site as part of a string of fortifications.

The Germans occupied Belgium in May 1940. In August they turned the Breendonk fortress into an internment camp. In mid-September the first group of 20 prisoners arrived at the camp, mostly consisting of political prisoners and non-Belgian Jews.

At first, the majority of prisoners were Jewish. However, during 1942 the Germans began deporting Jews from Belgium, so the number of Jewish prisoners ebbed. The non-Jews who arrived were mostly members of the leftist Belgian underground, hostages, and people who operated the black market. Altogether, about 3,000--3,600 prisoners passed through the camp. About 300 died there as a result of torture and the intolerable conditions; 450 were shot to death and 14 were hanged; and 54 Jews were transferred to Auschwitz.

The physical conditions at Breendonk were among the worst in Western European camps. In addition, the camp commanders subjected the prisoners to terrible cruelty and violence. From late 1942 until the camp's liberation in the summer of 1944, political prisoners in Breendonk were executed.