

# **The work education camp (Arbeitserziehungslager) Lahde 1943-1945.**

## **Research. Visualization of the infrastructure.**

Cultural association Lahde.

Jürgen Nahrwold.

There is also a dark chapter in the local history of the Lahde village, and it's painful to remember that.

According to the definition at that time the camp in Lahde was not of the kind of a concentration camp. Nevertheless nearly 800 prisoners lost their lives during the 22 months of its existence. Statistically this means more than one dead prisoner a day. This is a thought which prompts one reflexively to suppress this difficult topic.

Nonetheless, in the face of the terror which this dark period causes in our brains, we must not forget that we owe a part of our prosperity to these prisoners. How would Lahde have developed without the present barrage together with the lock canal and the power station? For these projects the prisoners have contributed their part – against their own will.



Camp entrance.

Secret photo of  
Wilhelm Borggreffe,  
Lahde.

In connection with the construction of the camp in Lahde and with its numerous deaths the surrounding villages were involved in this dark period of history.

The deceased victims were buried on the designated burial grounds in Petershagen, Lahde and Bierde in an inhuman way.

The description called "buried" did not at all correspond with the practice during the camp period. The pits had to be dug by fellow inmates. Often the corpses were wrapped in cement bags because the clothes had been handed over to the other prisoners before. A priest or a cemetery keeper was not permitted to attend the ceremony.

On the former Jewish cemetery of Petershagen 130 officially registered victims of the period June 1943-October 1944 were buried. Among the victims were 17 German and Dutch Jews. Most of the victims were born in Eastern Europe, in Russia and Poland. The death of 233

victims was officially registered in 1943-1944. In 2022 personal information of 130 victims were certified by the national embassies and consulates.

In October 1944 a new burial ground named "Ostarbeiterfriedhof" was established in the outskirts of Bierde village because the capacity of the Petershagen burial ground was filled.

The number of the victims who were buried as singles, groups or in mass graves on the burial ground in Bierde is estimated at about 370. On the northern wing mostly victims from Western Europe, on the southern wing from eastern Europe are buried.

At the central memorial monument 102 victims are named.

During the post war period several victims of different nationalities were exhumed, whenever possible identified and in some cases transferred into their home countries. One Canadian victim was transferred to the cemetery of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in Hannover-Ahlem.

Over the decades of the post war period the local cultural associations of Bierde, Lahde and Petershagen built up their individual cultures of remembrance, which culminated in April 1995, when a memorial stone about the work education camp was dedicated near its location at the Dingbreite road in Lahde. Thenceforth the pupils of the secondary school Lahde annually held commemorative events under the auspices of the local cultural association.

At the request of the cultural association of Lahde these remembrance activities are supported by Hermann Kleinebenne by informative articles about the camp history since 2014, concerning the infrastructure of the camp elements. As a contribution Hermann had continuously secured the finds in the soil of the former camp over the course of ten years.

According to his voluntary cooperation in the German War Graves Commission (Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge) Hermann supported the remembrance activities by developing the chronologically ordered lists of the victims on each of the three burial grounds.

After a geophysical survey of the work education camp site in August 2019 a scientific essay "Konfliktarchäologie verbindet" was published in the yearbook 2021 of the magazine "Archeology for Westphalia".

Since 2021 the cultural association Lahde has been able to use a scale 1: 1.000 site map about the work education camp containing precise details about the infrastructure.

With the help of geodata the structure of the camp can be visualized precisely regardless of the season and the agricultural processing. The geodata are digitally stored by the urban building administration.

In 2021 the question arose how the numerous archaeological finds would be made available to the public. The answer was the erection of a pillar gabion on the place of the memorial. In November 2021 this project was successfully completed. The finds are systematically stacked in the gabion from the canalization to the roof. In this way they form an optimal addition to the local culture of remembrance.

Work education camp Lahde 1943-1945. Memorial since 1995.



Since 2022 four granite steles on the Jewish cemetery in Petershagen additionally remind of those named work education camp victims.

In August 2022 a new method of remembrance culture was implemented on the former camp site. By geodata numerous members of the volunteer fire department of Lahde marked the boundaries of the complete site, the former camp buildings, the air raid shelter, and the vegetable waste pits with tracking tape strips in three days. This project gave an idea of the former buildings and their completely new face

On the following day and under the auspices of the urban mayor Dirk Breves the cultural association of Lahde organized a guided tour for visitors on the camp site, where the essential features of the elements were explained and illustrated by archival material on 17 stations.



Survey of the former buildings, 16.08.22



Guided tour of visitors, 18.08.2022

Accompanying the field work the drone team of the German Red Cross Lahde made 185 aerial photographs about the entire site during seven flight strips.

The historical development of the camp has been documented in the past in several books and brochures, which are listed up in the appendix of this essay.

The local historian Friedrich Brinkmann lived in Lahde. In his brochure „Das Arbeitserziehungslager Lahde, 1943-1945 (The work education camp Lahde 1943-1945), he wrote about the foundation of the work education camp:

*After the construction of the ammunition depot in Liebenau (county of Nienburg) was completed, the work education camp located there was moved to Lahde in 1943. Here, the*

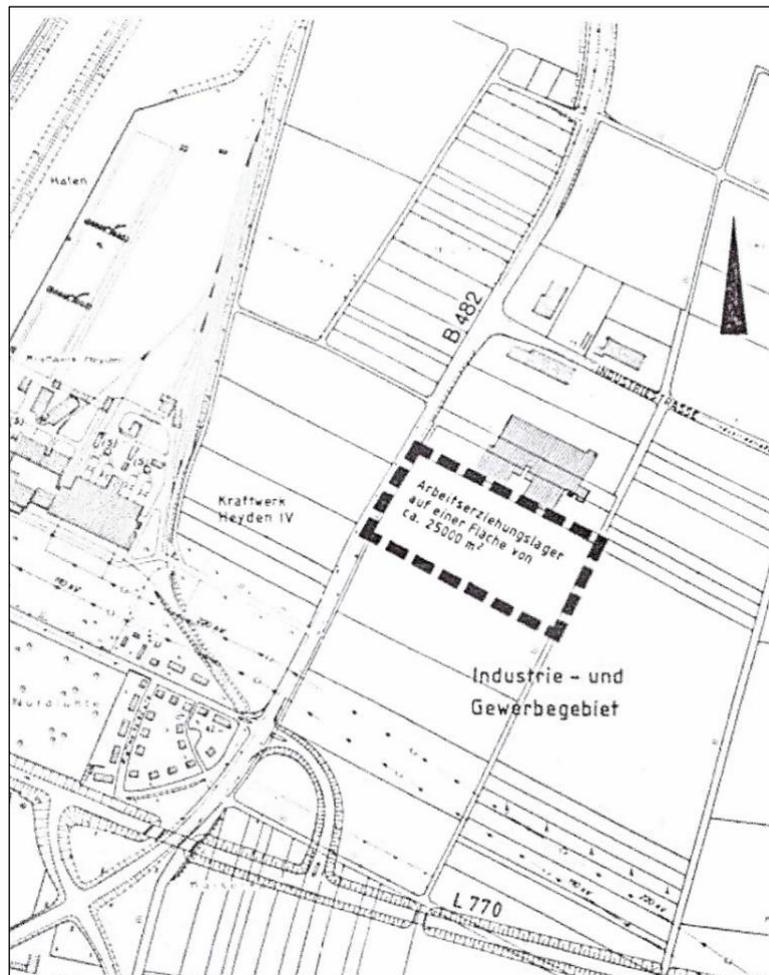
construction work on the barrage in Petershagen and the power station in Lahde was to be continued, after they had come to a halt at the beginning of the war. The power station was supposed to provide additional energy supply for the arms industry. (...)

Exactly when the work education camp was built cannot be determined anymore. Oetting, the mayor at the time, writes in his memoirs that in the beginning of 1943 two officers of the Gestapo informed him of the intention to move the work education camp from Liebenau to Lahde.

According to documents on the deployment of foreign workers in the county of Minden, already on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1943, prisoners of the work education camp Lahde were working at a construction company in Bad Oeynhausen. The first entry in the official record of deaths in the camp Lahde is dated May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1943.

Mayor Oetting noted that the local authorities had had no means to prevent the work education camp from being moved from Liebenau to Lahde.

The camp was built across the construction site of the power station on the eastern side of the county road (Reichstraße 559) connecting Lahde and Windheim. (...)



Work education camp Lahde. Former position. Marked on an official map of 1984.

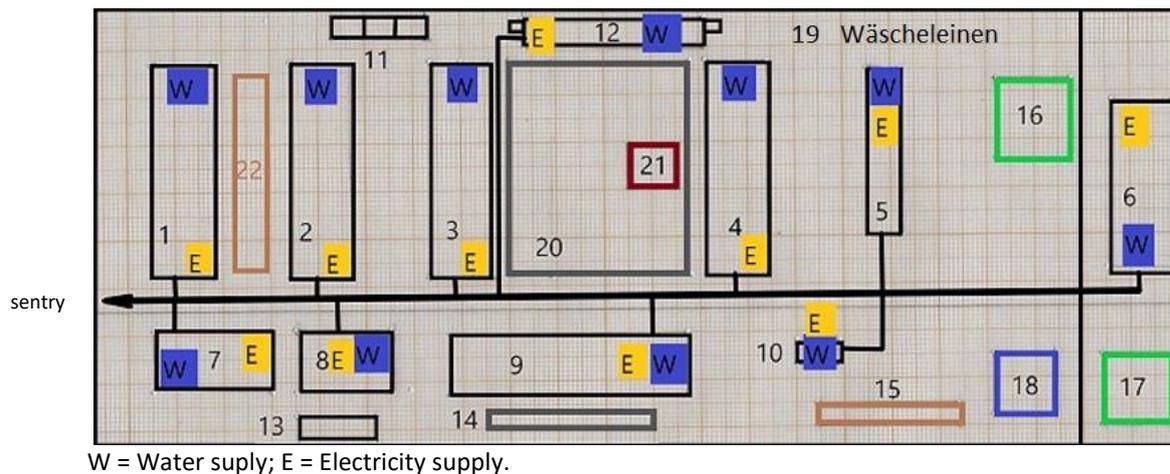
Source: Friedrich Brinkmann, Das „Arbeitserziehungslager“ Lahde, 1943 – 1945.

In the following passages we will accompany Hermann Kleinebenne during a virtual tour on the camp site, and meanwhile the visualization of the camp with its barracks and its

infrastructure should be in the foreground. Further Explanations see Hermann Kleinebenne, Ziegel, Strom und Strömung (bricks, electricity, and flow), text pages 82-91, sketch page 89.

The location of the work education camp site is on the eastern side of the provincial road 559 between Lahde and Windheim. The rectangular area is 230 m x 100 m large. Friedrich Brinkmann describes that the rectangle was surrounded by a double barbed wire taller than man and an alleyway between for guard dogs on patrol. At the western boundary of the camp the provincial road was broadened from five to ten meters. The trees mainly remained intact.

Work education camp Lahde. Site plan. Scale 1: 1.000. The barracks 1-6 were placed perpendicular, the buildings 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 15 parallel to the camp road.



### Work education camp Lahde. Site plan. Scale 1: 1.000. List of objects:

1. Guard barrack Police and SD Gestapo	9. Kitchen barrack	15. Beet and potato pit
2. Prisoner barrack A	10. Camp commander barrack	16. Vegetable waste pit north east
3. Prisoner barrack B	11. Two latrine barracks with sewage pit in between Senkgrube	17. Vegetable waste pit south east
4. Prisoner barrack C	12a. Boiler house Laundry Delousing station Arrest cells	18. Fire pond
5. Prisoner barrack D	12b.	19. Laundry drying near boiler house
6. Sick bay	12c.	20. Parade ground
7. Administration barrack	13. Coal shed	21. Gallow for two convicts
8. Workshop	14. Firewood stack	22. Air raid shelter

The entrance of the camp is at the western boundary, where the defences of the guard personnel are reinforced by a sentry and several foxholes along the barbed wire. The police guard is responsible for the control of vehicles and persons.

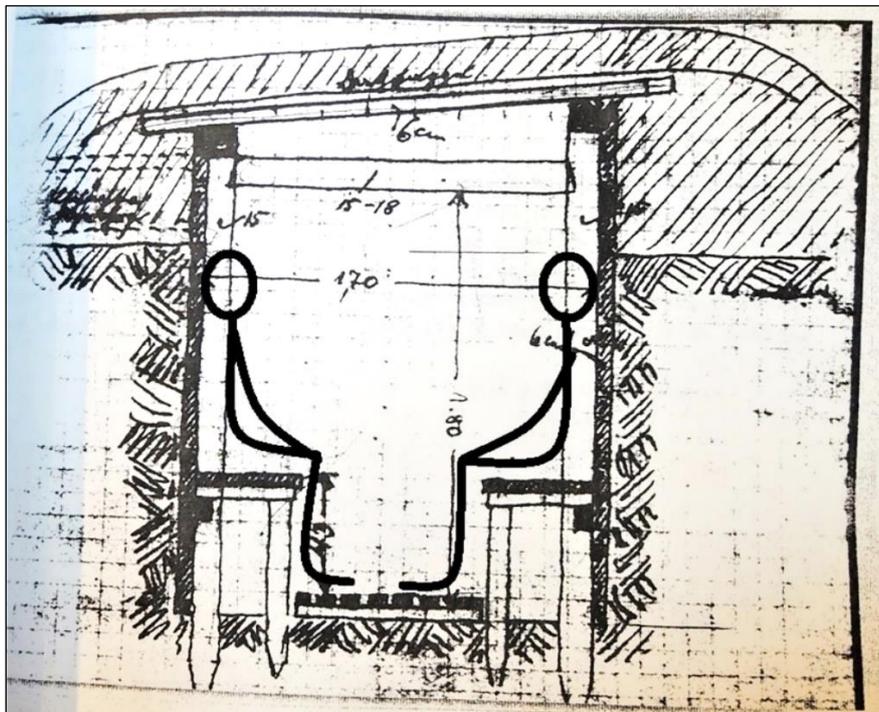
The six-meters-wide camp road leads from the entrance through the site and divides it up into a northern and southern camp area, where the barracks were built up in a distance of 10-20 meters and in a respectable distance to the barbed wire. On both sides of the camp road runs a small footpath paved with concrete slabs.

### **Object 1: Guard Barrack.**

Immediately near the entrance there is the accommodation barrack of Police and "Sicherheitsdienst" of the SS and Gestapo containing the guard room. There are barrack rooms, sanitary rooms, and a kitchen. A separate room is secured by iron bars.

### **Object 22: Air raid shelter.**

Nearest to the guard barrack there was the drained and reinforced air raid shelter. It was exclusively reserved for the guard and the camp staff personnel.



### **Objects 2 and 3: Prisoner accommodation barracks A and B.**

East of the air raid shelter the locations of the prisoner accommodation barracks A and B for "eastbound nationalities" (Poland, Russia) follow along the camp road. In total, the area is occupied by the four prisoner accommodation barracks A-D. In the barracks C and D the "westbound nationalities" (Germans, French, Dutch) are billeted.

Generally, the barracks are made of prefabricated wooden elements of modular design. Based on the regulations of the German army about living in accommodations they contain 10 barrack rooms and two washrooms, established with sinks, water dispensers and faces bins.



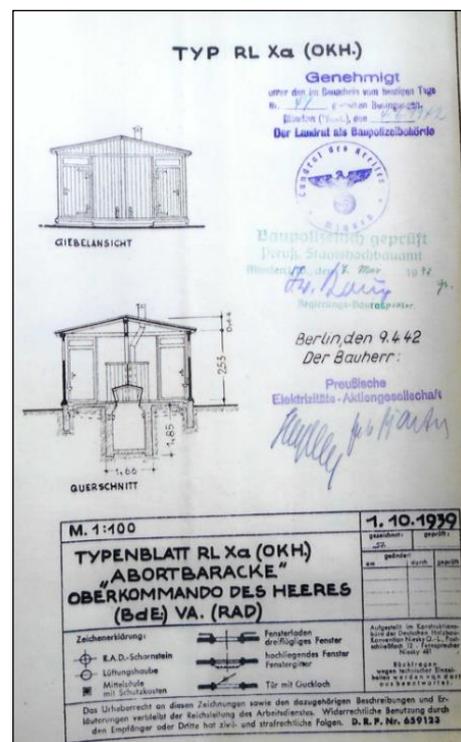
The barrack rooms are modestly established with double bunk wooden beds, straw bags, and a blanket for each prisoner.

Every barrack room for 15-20 prisoners is 25 square meters large. Cupboards and tables are missing. They are replaced by 2-3 stools. For two prisoners one towel is available.

The barrack rooms are heated by cannon furnaces. The windows and doors are established with iron bars or window shades, which are closed during the night.

### Object 11: Latrine buildings Construction drawing

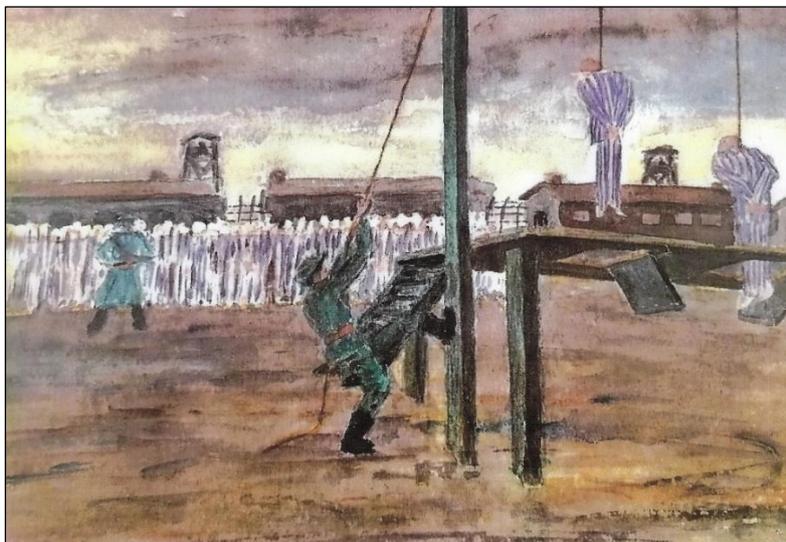
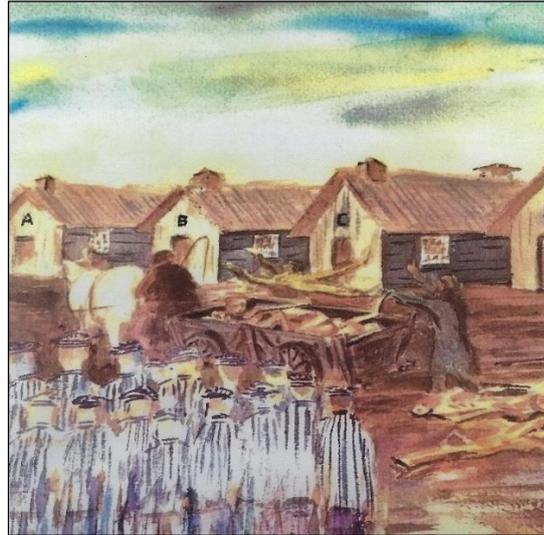
The two latrine buildings between the prisoner accommodation barracks A und B and the northern camp had special sewage pit in between for emptying the faeces bins every morning, because the prisoners were not allowed to leave their accommodation during the night.



### Objects 20 and 21: Parade ground and gallows

The parade ground in its central position north of the camp road and immediately near the prisoner accommodation barrack C, served for the daily morning and evening call and as a place for executions on the gallows for every two victims.

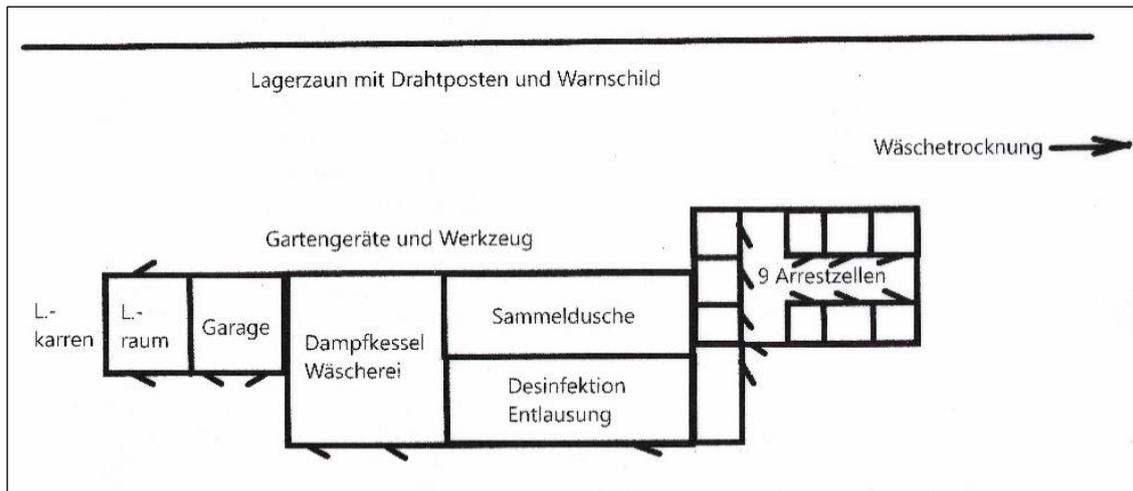
About 1980 the Dutch former prisoner Adriaan de Priester drew the following pictures about the inhuman treatment of prisoners in Lahde from his memories.



In his affidavits and during the “Lahde case” the former camp commander Winkler told about approximately 40 executions during the camp period 1943-1945. This number could not be certified because of further secret executions in the camp area. The registered death reasons were “attempt of escape”, “disobedience” or “unwillingness to work”.

### **Object 12: Boiler house**

The boiler house was built up on a concrete floor slab on an area of of 400 square meters between the northern camp boundary and the parade ground. The massive one-storey building with an obtuse-angled roof was built of red-brown bricks. It was divided into a west and east wing.



A boiler in the west wing with an unknown capacity supplies the collective showers, the delousing station and the laundry with hot water and hot air. The boiler is fueled by coal or coke. The smoke gases escape near the west gable through a round stub chimney on the roof ridge.

In the west wing there are some garage spaces for vehicles, equipment and for the two-axle corpse cart with a hand drawbar. At the north-west corner of the boiler house is a mortuary where the deceased prisoners are stored before they are transported to the burial grounds.

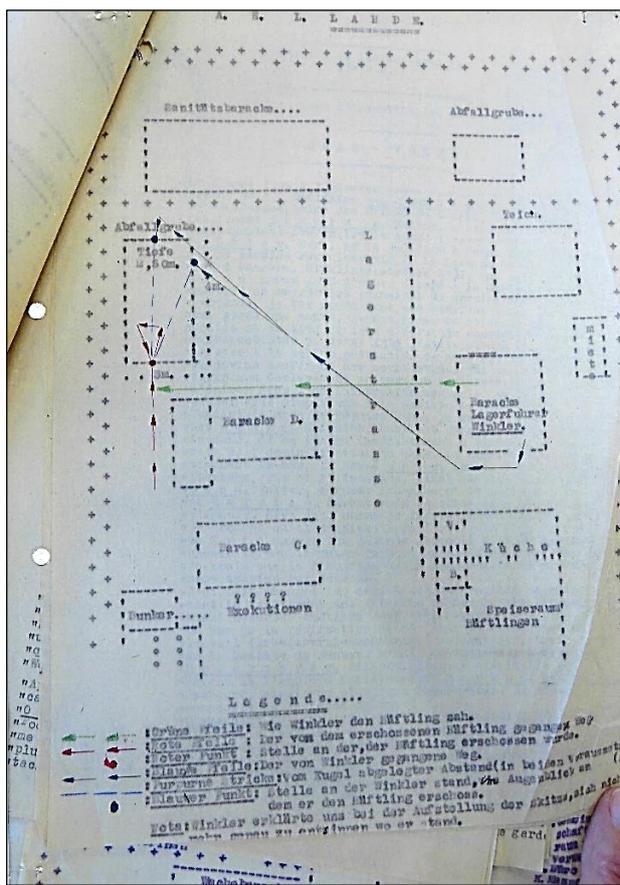
In the east part of the boiler house is a cell wing with ten escape-proof detention cells that can be heated extemporarily. Towards the entrance area they are equipped with high-lying and barred windows. The entire cell wing is protected from air raids by a six centimeters thick concrete cover.

The entire wing is protected from air raids by a six-centimetre-thick concrete cover. The cells are managed and controlled by the guards. On the northern wall of the boiler house, in the gap between the cell block and the northern camp fence, is the kennel for the guard dogs and a rabbit hutch.

#### **Objects 4 and 5: Prisoner accommodation barracks C and D**

Immediately east of the parade ground there are the prisoner accommodation barracks C and D, of which the latter is smaller. It was rebuilt after a fire and became the billet of German and Dutch prisoners. In this context Friedrich Brinkmann pointed to an order of Heinrich Himmler, "Reichsführer of SS". Accordingly, differences should be made in the treatment and nutrition of "westbound" and eastbound" prisoners. The "eastbound" prisoners were to be treated far more severely.

## Object 16: vegetable waste pit



East of the prisoner accommodation barracks D there is a vegetable waste pit with a depth of up to five meters. At this point the camp commander executed a prisoner with his carbine in a wicked way, while the man tried to fetch something to eat from the pit.

Photo: Extract from the case file about the execution of the prisoner at the vegetable waste pit.

Friedrich Brinkman described the situation in a different way: *During his interrogation in the Civil Internment Camp Staumühlen in 1946 as well as before the military court in 1947, camp commander Winkler admitted to have executed two prisoners with his carbine as they tried to steal vegetable waste from the pit next to the kitchen. A member of the guard, who served as witness, stated that the shots were fired from the commander's room through the open window and that the two prisoners were Russian officers.*

Later the camp commander was held accountable for his crimes against humanity, not only because of this murder.

## Object 6: Sick bay

The erection of buildings on the camp site ends at the eastern camp fence at the position of the sick bay with a treatment room and an isolation ward. In 1943 the medical doctor Joachim from Lahde was drafted into service by the Gestapo as a camp doctor and constantly tried an appropriate treatment of the prisoners. As a rule, he had to issue the death certificates by order.

## Objects 17 and 18: Vegetable waste pit south east and fire pond

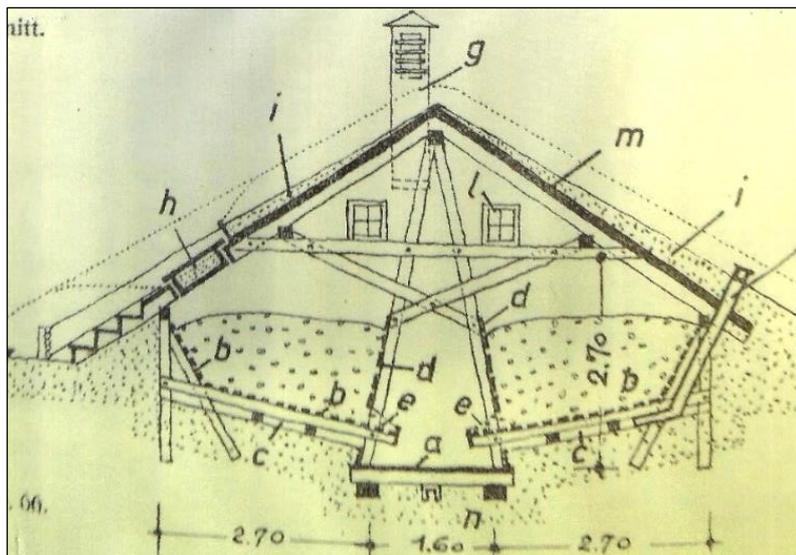
South of the sick bay there is a further vegetable waste pit with the same dimensions as near the prisoners accommodation barrack D. Some meters away there is the fire pond. It was laid out 15 meters square, sealed with bitumen cardboard and had a capacity of over 100 cubic meters.

### Object 15: Beet and potato pit

About ten meters west of the fire pond there is the frostproof beet and potato pit. It is about 30 by 7 meters in size and two meters deep. A wooden staircase leads down. The supplies are stored on either side of the central aisle and have a capacity of 250 cubic meters.

A gable roof rests on the wooden scaffolding. The roof construction is covered at the eaves and on the roof surfaces with soil and grass.

The interior is protected against moisture and frost, the exterior against enemy reconnaissance. A weatherproof hood ensures adequate ventilation. The ridge height of the system is about three meters above the ground.



### Object 10: Camp leader barrack

the camp leader's small but comfortably arranged living quarters are located directly on the camp road.



Winkler with the camp cook on the bench



Karl Winkler with his dog

The camp commandant Karl Winkler survived the war and was sentenced to death in the 1947 war crimes trial. The death sentence was not carried out, however, but commuted to a long prison sentence.

### **Object 9: Kitchen building with dining room**

A few meters west of the camp leader's barracks, at the level of the parade ground, is the long kitchen barrack containing a dining room. The kitchen barrack also had a walk-in basement where perishable supplies were stored.

### **Objects 13 and 14: Coal shed and firewood stack**

Parallel to the kitchen barracks, in the immediate vicinity of the camp fence, are the firewood stacks (object 14). Right next to it, to the west, is the coal shed (object 13). It is a simple brick building in which the coke supply for the operation of the boiler house and the oven-heated barracks is stored.

### **Object 8: Workshop**

West of the kitchen building is the workshop barrack of the camp near the camp road. It contains workbenches for the tailors, shoemakers, joiners, and locksmiths of the camp, who carried out internal and external orders.

In the clothing depot of the workshop individual prisoner clothing was stored, and their footwear for their work which consisted of a wooden sole with simple leather caps was handed out there as well.

### **Object 7: Administration barrack**

The administration barrack was built in the immediate vicinity of the entrance area to the camp. It has several offices and bedrooms as well. The nameplates on the doors indicate the respective employee. Additional instructions regulate the behavior in the case of an alarm in the camp area.

The entrance area in front of the barrack is decorated with trees and bushes. A flagpole and an SS symbol on a prominent stone indicate the importance of the building.

Later, during the "Polish period", numerous Latvian families were accommodated especially in the administration barrack. They redesigned the former symbol to the Latvian coat of arms. The final image of this documentation reports on this.

Not far away in the north-west corner of the camp is the lowest point of the camp area. Here the collector pipes for the camp sewage system left the area. Most of the waste water generated in the Lahde labour education camp is caused by the operation of the boiler house and the camp kitchen.

For the workforce of around 1,000 people, an average water requirement of at least sixty liters per capita and day can be assumed, which leads to a sufficient dilution of the waste water. The mixed sewage was discharged via the collection shaft on the road embankment west of the L 559, directly into the Riehebach and into the Weser River.

With this we conclude the virtual tour and the accompanying introduction of the camp infrastructure.

Friedrich Brinkmann writes about the disbandment of the work education camp:

*At the end of March 1945, when the allied troops approached from the west, the camp was disbanded and most of the prisoners were marched off towards the east. According to later statements of the commander, he had been informed in an earlier meeting in Hanover that approximately 200 "dangerous" prisoners were to be executed by order of the Gestapo, in case the camp must be disbanded. On April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1945, shortly before the disbandment, he received the actual order to execute these prisoners. Commander Winkler claims that he immediately contacted the mayor of Lahde to prevent this mass murder. Mayor Wilhelm Oetting states that he was able to get the county administration of Minden to intervene and cancel the order from Hanover. Oetting further remarks that the camp commander had ordered an extra ration of alcohol due to the planned mass execution. It is considered certain that thanks to Oetting the mass execution in Lahde was prevented.*

On April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1945, the surviving prisoners were marched towards Hanover. To follow the story of this prisoner transport, please refer to the literature under sources.

Epilogue.

With the disbandment of the Lahde labour education camp on April 6, 1945, this dark chapter was closed for the time being. On this day the village was occupied without heavy fighting.

In the weeks, months and years that followed, the former labour education camp once again gained importance for peaceful and humanitarian reasons.

Simultaneously with the shift of the front to the east, masses of treks with refugees and liberated forced laborers piled up west of the Weser, where the bridges and ferries were destroyed and the Allied military bridge was not allowed to be used.

In Lahde and the surrounding area the so-called "Polish period" began. The never-ending influx of refugees presented the British occupying forces in Lahde with enormous challenges. People had to be cared for and housed.

From April 9, the mayor of Lahde, Oetting, had prepared the former labour education camp and the neighboring eastern workers' camp as accommodation for "Displaced Persons" (DP for short) on the instructions of the local military government detachment.

When, a short time later, these camp barracks were no longer sufficient, the second dark chapter of the post-war period began for the village of Lahde and the surrounding villages with the formation of the so-called "Polish villages".

In the barracks of the former work education camp, the character of the camp had changed within a few days into the so-called "Baltic camp", a humanitarian facility of the UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration).

The DP families found temporary accommodation, new life moved in with the children, and there was also laughter in the former labour education camp in Lahde.

The following photos from the summer of 1946 show the entrance area of the "Baltenlager" and the former administration barracks, where Latvian families had temporarily found accommodation.



July 1946.  
Former work education camp  
Lahde.  
The SS symbol which was installed  
on a stone in 1943 has in the  
meantime been replaced by the  
coat of arms of Latvia. The former  
administration barrack later  
housed the Latvian camp school.

Source : Hermann Kleinebenne, Im  
Ausländerlager Lahde

**Sources:**

- F. Brinkmann: Das Arbeitserziehungslager Lahde 1943 – 1949
- H. Kleinebenne: Im Ausländerlager Lahde
- H. Kleinebenne: Die Weserlinie, Kriegsende 1945
- H. Kleinebenne: Ziegel, Strom und Strömung
- W. Gerdes: Lahde 1945 – 1949
- S. v. Behrens: Die Zeit der Polendörfer
- Herbert Marowsky: Hier wird jeder Wille gebrochen

## **Appendix**

Since 1995 the cultural association of Petershagen-Lahde has made its contribution concerning the remembrance work about the history of the Gestapo work education camp Lahde, 1943-1945.

To encourage these activities a pillar gabion was built up in November 2021 near the memorial stone in Dingbreite, Lahde. It contains the different building materials, which were used during the construction period of the camp.

In August 2022 the entire number of 22 buildings and wells in the area were marked by the members of the cultural association of Lahde under typical midsummer weather conditions in three days.

On 18th August 2022 the Sekundarschule Lahde took over the patronage of the monument. During a subsequent tour in the area the infrastructure and history of the work education camp was illustrated to a group of visitors during 17 stations.

For further questions Mr. Hermann Kleinebenne is available.

Email: [hermann\\_kleinebenne@web.de](mailto:hermann_kleinebenne@web.de).

Landeshuter Str. 3b

This concludes this post on the history and infrastructure of the camp facility north of Lahde.