

Nazi Terror on British Soil: Forensic Archaeological Investigations of Sylt Labour and Concentration Camp

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Abstract

Following the evacuation of Alderney, a handful of labour camps and an SS concentration camp (Lager Sylt) were built on British soil to house foreign labourers. Despite two British investigations in 1945, knowledge concerning the history and architecture of this camp remained limited. This article reports on the findings of forensic archaeological investigations at Sylt which revealed the relationships between the landscape and the camp's operations. It discusses how Sylt has been accurately mapped for the first time using non-invasive methods and 3D reconstructive techniques, thus revealing new insights into the daily lives of the prisoners and their overseers.

Introduction

The Nazis constructed a network of over 42,000 (concentration, extermination, labour, Prisoner of War (PoW) and transit) camps across Europe, imprisoning individuals opposed to Nazi ideologies, or those considered racially inferior (Megargee & White 2018). Little is known about the majority of these sites due to Nazi endeavours to destroy the evidence of their crimes (Arad 1987: 26; Gilead *et al.* 2010: 14; Sturdy Colls 2015: 3). Public knowledge regarding the camps that were built on British soil in the Channel Islands is particularly limited, not least of all because these sites were partially demolished, and they remain “taboo” (Carr & Sturdy Colls 2016: 1). One of these – Lager Sylt – was one of several camps built on the island of Alderney (Figure 1). The camp first operated as a labour camp, before becoming an SS concentration camp in March 1943.

Since 2010, the Centre of Archaeology (Staffordshire University) has regularly undertaken historical and archaeological investigations at Sylt as part of the “Alderney Archaeology and Heritage Project”. The project's aims are to “preserve the site...by way of digital record and develop alternative forms of heritage presentation” (Centre of Archaeology 2018). Archaeological fieldwork has been central to deciphering Sylt's landscape by locating and recording surviving structures and subterranean evidence. By comparing Sylt's surviving traces with sources derived from Desk-Based Analysis (DBA), new insights into how the camp

functioned and the daily lives of the prisoners and their overseers have been revealed, thus contributing to the historical record.

Figure 1. Plan of the Channel Islands archipelago, showing Alderney's position approximately 15-20km off the northern coast of France (figure by Centre of Archaeology)

Historical Background

Alderney, measuring 4.8km by 2.4 km, is the most northerly of the Channel Islands, an archipelago of five islands between England and France (Clarke 2008: 19). Following the “Battle of France”, and the decision that the Channel Islands were too difficult to defend against Nazi invasion, the British government evacuated 1,432 islanders from Alderney on 23rd June 1940 (Wood & Wood 1980: 36; Bonnard 1993: 5). On 2nd July 1940, the Luftwaffe landed on Alderney, encountering no resistance. Hence, the island’s “occupation” was a propaganda coup but one of tactical value to the Nazis; Alderney was supposedly the “last stepping stone before the conquest of mainland Britain” (Bonnard 1991: 21). As part of Hitler’s “Directive on the Fortifications and Defence of the Channel Islands” (1941 and 1943), Alderney became one of the most heavily fortified landscapes in Western Europe and was incorporated into the Atlantic Wall (Pantcheff 1981: 3).

By 1942, Alderney’s population comprised mostly of paid and unpaid foreign workers under the governance of *Organisation Todt* (OT), a Nazi civil and military engineering group responsible for supplying labour. These workers came from 27 countries, but most were Eastern Europeans (described as “Russians” in Nazi documentation but coming from Ukraine, Poland, Russia and other Soviet territories) (Pantcheff 1981: 3). The majority were forced or slave labourers, or they had “volunteered” under duress (Sturdy Colls and Colls, in press). Most were considered political enemies of the Third Reich. Some were French Jews. The OT accommodated the workers in camps constructed around the island: Lager Helgoland, Lager Norderney, Lager Borkum and Lager Sylt (Pantcheff 1981: 6); alongside several smaller unnamed camps (Sturdy Colls & Colls in press) (Figure 2). Initially, Helgoland housed around 1,500 forced Eastern European labourers; Norderney around 1,500 forced Eastern European, French, Czech, Dutch and Spanish workers alongside German volunteers; Borkum between 500 – 1000, mostly German volunteers; and Sylt between 100-200 and forced “Russian” labourers (Pantcheff 1981: 6). Each camp regularly exceeded capacity.

Figure 2. The island of Alderney and the location of: Helgoland, Norderney, Borkum and Sylt camps (figure by Centre of Archaeology)

Sylt Forced Labour & Concentration Camp: An Overview

Located south of Alderney's airfield, adjacent to a cliff road, Sylt was initially constructed to house 100-200 Eastern European political prisoners who arrived in August 1942 (TNA:WO311/106). Under the command of the OT, these prisoners were responsible for fortifying Alderney's defences and, ultimately, the development of the Atlantic Wall (Pantcheff 1981: 31; Bonnard 1991: 63). In March 1943, Sylt was transformed from a labour to a concentration camp through an exchange in command between the OT and SS *Totenkopfverbände* (Death's Head Unit). The SS *Totenkopfverbände* was a Nazi paramilitary organisation in charge of concentration-camp operations, specialising in acts of dominance and brutality (Sanders 2005: 197). The OT prisoners in Sylt were transferred to the Helgoland and Norderney camps to make way for incoming SS prisoners (TNA:WO311/13).

In September (1942), the SS formed a series of *Baubrigade* (building brigades) in Germany and, on the 3rd and 5th March 1943, SS *Baubrigade I* was transported to Alderney (TNA:WO311/106; WO311/12). The prisoners – c.1,000 in total - came from the German concentration camps Sachsenhausen and Neuengamme; hence, Sylt concentration camp was designated a sub-camp of Neuengamme concentration camp (Megargee 2009: 1361). Treated as slave labourers, they comprised about 500 “Russians”, 180 Germans, 130 Polish, 60 Dutch, 20-30 Czechs and 20 French (TNA:WO311/13). Later, Sylt also became a punishment camp for c. 135 OT prisoners who had committed perceived crimes (TNA:WO311/106). Sylt prisoners were distinguishable from other island prisoners as they wore distinctive SS concentration camp blue and white striped pyjama uniforms (Pantcheff 1981: 32; Freeman-Keel 1995: 62). Prisoners were identified by a number and different coloured triangle symbols worn on their uniforms to show their offence/group (TNA:WO311/106).

Between 70 and 80 SS guards ultimately guarded Sylt; a vast number which resulted in tight control and harsh conditions for the prisoners (Fings 2009). The first Camp Commandant of Sylt and head of the *Baubrigade* was SS-*Untersturmführer* Maximilian List and he was succeeded by SS-*Obersturmführer* Georg Braun in March 1944 (TNA:WO311/13). Both men were long-serving members of the Nazi party; List “ordered the security to treat the prisoners harshly” and Braun was “brutal to excess” (IA:AQ875/03; BA-B: SS Officer File of Georg Braun). The SS assigned certain prisoners the role of Kapo, which required supervision of, and disciplinary action against, other inmates (TNA:WO311/13; Bonnard 1991: 33). The Kapos

ensured work was conducted to standard and, if it was considered unsatisfactory, they would inflict punishment. This approach created hierarchies and mistrust within the camp.

Previous Investigations

Declassified intelligence documentation concerning Sylt shows that multiple investigations occurred in 1945, after the liberation of Alderney by the British. The first two-day investigation by Brigadier Snow, Major Haddock and Major Cotton revealed that Sylt was initially constructed to house Eastern European prisoners, and in 1943 was “controlled by the S.S. for political, homosexual, conscientious objectors etc, prisoners of all nationalities” (TNA:WO311/106). Eyewitness testimonies detail the atrocities at Sylt, specifically beatings, dog attacks and shootings (TNA:WO311/11). The investigation also discovered a false-bottom coffin at the site of the OT and SS worker cemetery on Longy Common and documented rumours of mass graves (TNA:WO311/13; Sturdy Colls & Colls, in press). Sylt’s dismantlement was also described alongside how materials were re-used by the Germans for “defence works” (TNA:WO208/3629).

In June 1945, at the request of the British War Office, Major Pantcheff assumed control of the investigations. Alderney was also visited by a Russian investigative team, led by a Major Gruzdev. These various investigations culminated in approximately 3,000 interviews with survivors, bystanders, and members of the German forces. Pantcheff’s investigation also documented brutality and murder, terrible working conditions, the details of the SS staff, the operational deployment and departure of *Baubrigade I*, illnesses, medical treatment and the deceased (Pantcheff 1981: 29). Importantly, the only plan of Sylt was produced and verified by members of the German forces on Alderney, and photographs were taken of the camp (Figure 3). However, by focusing primarily on the SS operations, not OT, significant information was missed regarding Sylt pre-1943.

Figure 3. A photograph of Sylt concentration camp taken in 1945 (figure by © Trustees of the Royal Air Force Museum)

Pantcheff stated that, “German records in Alderney were so confusing [contradicting] traditionally renowned...meticulous and efficient administration” (Pantcheff 1981: 70). Post-WWII, the existence of Sylt became public knowledge through media reports, resulting in rumours circulating about a death camp on Alderney (Megargee & White 2018: 1362). Quashing these claims, the findings from Pantcheff’s 1945 investigation were publicised in 1981, presenting a less atrocious version of events by comparison of the initial investigation

and historical record accounts. For example, although the investigation highlighted the extent of atrocities at Sylt and those individuals responsible, no prosecutions occurred, the initial findings regarding prisoner nationalities were simplified (reducing most victims to “Russian”) and eventually claims regarding the brutality were watered down (see Pantcheff 1981 compared to IA: AQ875/03). This, in part, was guided by the British government’s wish to hand over the investigations to the Russian government and due to their desire to forget about the crimes perpetrated on the island, as desire shared by the local government and population (Sturdy Colls 2012; Sturdy Colls & Colls, in press).

Contemporary Landscape

Concealed by overgrown vegetation, the only obvious reminders of Sylt are the gateposts leading to the prisoners’ compound, several concrete bunkers and a tunnel from the bathhouse to the Commandant’s villa (Figure 4). During the 1960s, a building housing airport direction finding equipment was constructed over the location of two former prisoner barracks (Pinnegar 2010: 3). Currently, the dilapidated building stores agricultural equipment and the former camp area is privately owned by various landowners, some of whom wish to protect it, others who do not share this enthusiasm for its wartime history.

Literature describing Sylt often claims that the camp was “completely” “destroyed”, “dismantled” or “burnt” with only gateposts and an underground tunnel remaining (Packe & Dreyfus 1971: 59; Pantcheff 1981: 36; Steckoll 1982: 182; Bonnard 1993: 72; Saunders 2005: 205). In 2008, at the request of former prisoners, a memorial ceremony was held at Sylt commemorating those incarcerated between 1942-1945 (Carr 2012: 102). A small memorial plaque was attached to the middle gatepost of the prisoner's section of the camp by survivor Sylwester Kukuła (Figure 4A).

Since 2015, to “prevent development and further damage to the surviving remnants of the camp structures”, Alderney’s government, the States of Alderney, has been reviewing Sylt’s historical status deciding if the site should be listed on the Register of Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments record (the States of Alderney 2016: 3). Some States members have enthusiastically pursued the idea of listing and developing the site into a memorial. However, they are seemingly in the minority; most members do not want to protect the site or raise awareness of it due to fear of bringing the island into disrepute. Additionally, the apparent lack of surviving remains has deterred other members. During a meeting in March (2015) a committee member stated, “if there were buildings or something there worth conserving I

might have a different opinion; but there is nothing, apart from a broken old wash trough...and a load of brambles” (Kelly 2015: 41). Another member responded, “there is a little bit more there than just the trough...there is a substantial amount there...although the site is quite wild, there is certainly a lot more there than just the trough” (Kelly 2015: 42). A letter published in Alderney’s local news further demonstrates local attitudes towards Sylt, “we seem to be getting people who are trying to change our history or open up the slave camps...I want them left overgrown, to deny access to everybody until they are completely hidden” (Alderney Press 2017: 15).

Figure 4. UAV photogrammetry of the site of the former labour and concentration camp Sylt in 2017 and the memorial plaque installed by a survivor on the surviving camp gateposts in 2008 (marked A) (figure by Centre of Archaeology)

Historical and Archaeological Investigations

In response to Sylt’s current condition and disparities between source material, historical research and archaeological fieldwork were undertaken at Sylt (2010-2017). This study used material from numerous archives around the world in order to document the history of the site, identify fieldwork survey areas and interpret findings. Although historical sources provide a valuable resource, Nazi documentation can be misleading, due to purposeful deceit, biased writing or absent documents (Pantcheff 1981: 70; Myers 2008: 234). Therefore, archaeological research is vital as it can complement and supplement historical records through the identification of surviving physical evidence.

To avoid disturbing the site, non-invasive methods were employed during the archaeological fieldwork, including: fieldwalking, vegetation clearance, remote sensing and geophysical survey. Systematic fieldwalking and vegetation clearance confirmed areas of significance by locating vegetation indicators, man-made depressions and surface finds. These discoveries confirmed the need to record surviving features because of the risk of erosion. To accurately record the position of vegetation indicators, depressions and structural remnants, a combination of Differential Kinematic Global Positioning Systems (DGPS), total station recording, Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR), resistance survey and Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) were used. These non-invasive methods allowed vast areas to be scanned, even through high-density foliage (Sturdy Colls 2015: 172; Abate & Sturdy Colls 2018: 130). Through acquiring diverse datasets from DBA and fieldwork, evidence-based 3D models were developed showing Sylt’s evolution between 1942-1945, highlighting spatial and temporal relationships.

The Construction of Sylt

From archive documentation, aerial reconnaissance, maps and plans, Sylt's gradual development is apparent (NCAP: ACIU/RB/0463/3919; ACIU/E/0182/4110; ACIUM/106G/K/0124/4029) (Figures 5 & 6). By August 1942, political prisoners and French "volunteer" labourers had constructed Sylt's first five barracks under the supervision of the OT. The camp security comprised guarded gateposts and "its perimeter [was] surrounded by coiled concertina barbed wire" (ACIU/RB/0463/3919; Pantcheff 1981: 6) (Figure 6A). In January 1943, prior to the arrival of the SS, construction at Sylt continued and the camp had tripled in size (Sturdy Colls & Colls in press) (Figure 6B). By March 1943, when the *Baubrigade I* prisoners arrived they described the camp as unfinished; some prisoners had to sleep outside for two months whilst construction continued (Bonnard 1993: 175). At this time, the camp's security comprised a wire fence and gateposts displaying the words "SS-Lager Sylt" (Kukuła 1999: 20).

Figure 5. Evidence-based 3D reconstructions of Sylt from: 1942 (A); 1943 (B); 1944 (C) and 2017 (D) (figure by J. Kerti)

Initially, prisoners constructed the SS buildings, extended the boundaries to incorporate 10 additional structures and built the Commandant's Tyrolean style accommodation (ACIU/E/0182/4110; TNA:WO311/11; Kukuła 1999: 21). To increase security the camp was surrounded "with a new barbed wire fence [with] watchtowers at the corners" and was divided into two separate compounds: a prisoner and SS section (Pantcheff 1981: 29; Bonnard 1991: 75).

By August 1943, the camp was extended to 25 structures (ACIU MD/969.542) (Figure 6C). It far exceeded capacity and housed c.1,000 prisoners (Pantcheff 1981: 27). DBA and fieldwork demonstrated that in early 1943, the eastern boundary wall of the prisoners' compound ran parallel to the cliff road that initially surrounded the camp and reinforced stone walls surrounded the SS orderly room and quarters barracks.

Figure 6. 2D plans showing the development of Sylt (A) from 1942, (B) 1943 and (C) 1944 based on aerial photographs (figure by Centre of Archaeology)

Surviving Traces

The archaeological fieldwork revealed that an abundance of traces at Sylt still exist within the landscape (Figure 7B). Since 1945, the locations of the SS quarters and ablutions have been

incorporated into Alderney's airport, whilst the remaining structures reside on privately-owned land. 30 surface features were recorded including boundaries ($n=4$) and structures within the: SS ($n=5$), prisoner ($n=21$), and Commandant's ($n=2$) sections. Above-ground, notable structures hidden under vegetation include the toilet block and bathhouse, stable block and kitchen (with accompanying subterranean cellar) in the prisoner area, accompanied by the remains of the SS canteen, workshops and guardroom in the SS area (Figure 8). Sentry posts, gateposts and remnants of the camp fences also survive intact. The LiDAR and geophysical survey data further display that much information still resides beneath the surface, including the foundations of prisoner and SS barracks, the sickbay and construction office (Figure 9).

Figure 7. 2D plans showing (A) the function of each structure and (B) surviving remnants recording during archaeological investigations (figure by Centre of Archaeology)

Figure 8. (A) The toilet block, (B) prisoner kitchen cellar, (C) stable block and (D) the SS Orderly Room (figure by Centre of Archaeology)

Figure 9: LiDAR survey data showing the surviving traces of Sylt camp in 2017 (figure by FlyThru and Centre of Archaeology)

The Architecture of Oppression

By developing evidence-based reconstructions of Sylt between 1942-1945, it is possible to document Nazi dominance and control as well as how their victims lived, died and survived. The historical and archaeological research at Sylt confirms that, because of the camp's architecture, aesthetics and guards, Sylt prisoners experienced terrible living and working conditions.

The OT Camp

The limited testimonies describing life in Sylt labour camp highlight the severity of atrocities before the SS took control. Former Helgoland camp prisoner Georgi Kondikov described Sylt as, "the most terrible camp [which] everybody was afraid of" (Bonnard 1991: 50). This was attributed to the camp's architecture e.g. barracks exposed to the windy weather conditions, and the treatment of prisoners by OT staff (Figure 6 and 7). Former prisoner Cyprian Lipinski explained how, during forced labour duties, "we were beaten with everything they could lay their hands on...most of these beaten people died of wounds they had received" (TNA:WO311/12). Each prisoner was assigned to a labour company and forced to undertake heavy construction work for 12 hours per day (TNA:WO311/12). Prisoners were inadequately dressed and undernourished. Daily rations comprised: black coffee for breakfast; thin soup and

a loaf of bread between five prisoners for lunch; and a relatively thicker soup with butter for dinner (TNA:WO311/12). The OT did not administer medical treatment at Sylt. Sick prisoners able to walk were sometimes permitted to visit the hospital at Norderney (TNA:WO311/13). One fifth of the camp's inmates reportedly died during this period (Sanders 2005: 200; Sturdy Colls and Colls, in press).

The SS Camp

As already observed, when the SS took over, they increased the size of Sylt considerably. Consistent with other European concentration camps, heightened security measures and other modifications to structures meant that architecture assisted in controlling the prisoners (Jaskot 2002; Figure 5 and 6). By dividing Sylt into prisoner and SS compounds, and restricting access to specific areas, SS dominance was maintained. German corporal Otto Taubert explained whilst visiting Sylt in 1943, that “no one [in the Wehrmacht] was allowed to enter the inner [prisoner] compound” (TNA WO311/13). German Lieutenant D.R Schwalm highlighted how security was enforced at the prisoners' compound, “at the gates stood an SS-guard. On a notice board, one could read that access to the camp was only allowed with the permission of the camp-leader and then only in his presence” (TNA:WO311/13).

The positions of steps and gateposts within the prisoners' compound dictated individuals' movements around the camp. Heightened security measures in 1943 took the form of more secure fences and gates. Sentry posts erected around the perimeter of Sylt had strategic value by creating a line-of-sight around the entire camp, allowing greater monitoring of prisoners. These security measures also had a psychological effect, physically reminding prisoners that they were confined to designated spaces, with consequences for attempted escapes. This mental torment was likely exacerbated by the fact that, due to the island's terrain and remoteness, there were limited opportunities to escape should prisoners breach the camp boundaries. Several accounts describe how escaped prisoners often returned to Sylt when they realised the difficulties in acquiring food and transport outside the camp (TNA:WO208/3629). For sport, the SS guards sometimes used dogs to force prisoners through security fences and then they shot them for attempting to “escape” (TNA:WO311/106; Bonnard 1993: 68). The SS documented many such deaths as “suicide”, but really, they were executions (Bonnard 1993: 175).

Accounts describing the camp's boundaries and the gateposts frequently outline that these spaces were used to inflict punishment on prisoners. The raised stone wall supporting the

barbed wire fence around the prisoners' compound is described in several accounts as a place where brutality occurred. For example, German soldier Otto Tauber recalled how four men were bound to the barbed wire fence and whipped for killing and eating a lamb (TNA:WO311/13). The gateposts were also a favoured place for the SS to conduct and display brutality. A former Lager Norderney prisoner explained, "at Lager Sylt we saw a Russian, he was just hanging, strung up from the main gate" on his chest was a sign indicating that he had stolen bread (JA:L/D/25/L/65). Others were strung up for days and whipped or had cold water poured over them all night until they died (TNA:WO208/3629; WO106/5248B). Bodies remained hung up as a warning to others not to commit crimes (Jersey Archives, Testimony of Francisco Font).

The torment of prisoners continued within their accommodation. Their housing comprised of simple concrete foundations and wooden barracks. These buildings – measuring only 2800cm by 800cm - were overcrowded, with approximately 150 individuals per barrack (Bonnard 1993: 175) (Figure 7). Prisoners received inadequate sleeping materials consisting of only a straw blanket, which was often infested with lice (Steckoll 1982: 75). Conversely, each Kapo had "a room to himself with a soft bed and white linen" (TNA:WO208/3629; WO311/13). Each morning prisoners woke at 5 am, cleaned the barracks, ate breakfast, attended roll-call and arrived back at the camp between 6-7pm each evening, following slave labour duties (Bonnard 1993: 175). Slave labour lasted an average of 12 hours per day, seven days a week. However, eyewitness accounts describe how prisoners sometimes worked for more than 24 hours (Pantcheff 1981: 11; Bonnard, 1993: 175). The prisoners often lacked the physical strength and stamina to perform intensive tasks, with individuals "dropping from complete exhaustion" (TNA:WO311/106; WO208/3629). Accounts describing prisoners collapsing from under-nourishment explain that individuals were never seen again (TNA:WO311/13). Prisoners also encountered beatings because of "unsatisfactory" work e.g. insufficient progress or failure to move at a designated pace (TNA:WO311/106).

Inmates requiring medical attention were "treated" within Sylt's sickbay, which was operated by the prisoners themselves, and thus, functioned with inadequate medical equipment and knowledge (Pantcheff 1981: 33; Figure 7A). An account by a German Air Force medical officer described how SS guards refused an offer of more medical supplies (TNA:WO208/3629; Pantcheff 1981: 33). If a prisoner died, the SS issued the Sylt doctor with pre-printed death certificates, which often labelled the cause of death as "faulty circulation" or "heart failure" (TNA:WO311/13). In many instances, island doctors were not permitted to view dead bodies

but instead instructed by the SS to sign the death certificates (TNA:WO311/13). During the SS's command of Sylt, an outbreak of typhus killed between 30-200 prisoners and some prisoners with tuberculosis and other conditions were transported off the island (TNA:WO311/13; WO311/106). Sick Eastern European prisoners were reportedly carried outside of the camp's boundary and shot (Steckoll 1982: 78).

In contrast to the prisoner area, the SS enhanced their areas of the camp to enable them to live in comfort and socialise. The archaeological surveys revealed that many SS structures were constructed from reinforced concrete and their foundations were excavated below ground level to afford the SS men protection from the weather and air raids (Figure 8D).

Located outside the south-east perimeter of Sylt are the foundations for the Commandant's villa and terrace. Due to its position on lower terrain, facing away from Sylt, the villa had picturesque views of a spring towards the English Channel. Adjacent to the villa was a tunnel which ran underneath the eastern boundary wall into the prisoners' compound (Figure 10). The tunnel joined a subterranean room, in which survive a furnace, traces of pipework, ventilation fixtures and a chute leading from the foundations above. For reasons unknown, concrete steps then led from the subterranean room into the prisoner bathhouse above. Therefore, although it was likely sealed by doors at either end, the tunnel seemingly compromised the camp's otherwise tight security by providing an entrance/exit point connecting the inside prisoner compound to the outside perimeter of the camp. Many theories exist regarding the purpose of the tunnel/room ranging from: an air raid shelter for Sylt's Commandant, a quick access point in and around Sylt, or a space which the Commandant could move women from the camp to his villa (Sturdy Colls and Colls, in press). Due to the tunnel being located beneath the surface, the date of its construction remains unclear, although aerial reconnaissance suggests that it was likely built sometime between February and August 1943 (Sturdy Colls and Colls, in press). In 1944 after the abandonment of Sylt, the Commandant's villa was moved to Longy Common for use as a private dwelling but the tunnel, room and plateau remain intact (Bonnard 1993: 73).

Both the tunnel and subterranean room have been accurately mapped using photogrammetry, (Bruno *et al* 2010; Sapirstein 2016). The resulting models provide the opportunity for spatial comparisons between landscape characteristics such as structures and boundaries, and remote analysis of subtle evidence such as graffiti and traces of former fixtures, all whilst preserving the features by way of record.

Figure 10: Photogrammetry of the tunnel and subterranean room which connected the Commandant's house to the camp (figure by Centre of Archaeology)

Identified through DBA and recorded during archaeological surveying, were the foundations of the SS canteen and prisoner kitchen (Figure 7). In terms of size, the SS canteen was larger than the prisoner kitchen foundations, measuring 2,248cm by 1219cm, despite fewer individuals eating within this space. The prisoner kitchen foundations were recorded over three separate platforms measuring 1956cm by 603cm overall, with several drain/water access points positioned around the foundations. Within this space, a clothing store was also established and located south-east, adjacent to the foundations, was a subterranean food store (Pancheff 1981: 28; Kukuła 1999: 20). Prisoners were sometimes hung, beaten and killed within these spaces. Former Sylt prisoner Wilhelm Wernegau recalled that the prisoner's cook was strangled and killed by the SS because they did not like his cooking (Bunting 1995: 188; Steckoll 1993: 75).

The SS used food to enforce dominance and control. Prisoner rations were stolen by SS guards, who either ate, sold, traded or kept the supplies; island soldiers could acquire cheap meals at Sylt's SS canteen as a result (TNA:WO208/3629; Bonnard 1993: 175). Sylt's Commandant, Maximilian List, was investigated by German military police, who discovered "chests full of sugar, lard, dripping, bacon" (Bonnard 1993: 175). German seaman, Franz Dokter, explained "almost every day a wangle took place to pass on the prisoners rations from the KZ [concentration camp] cookhouse to the SS canteen" (TNA:WO208/3629). SS entertainment events held at Sylt often served food stolen from prisoners, something which was never questioned by the German officers (TNA:WO311/11). By controlling the allocation of food, a hierarchy was established at Sylt. Francisco Font recalls that many German prisoners and Kapos "were all well fed" (JA:L/D/25/L/65). At the bottom of the hierarchy were "Russian" prisoners, described by OT commanding officer Schirholz as, "not human beings but scum of the earth" (TNA:WO311/13). Several German officers explain that orders were passed stating it was forbidden to supply "Russian" concentration camp prisoners with food. German officer Johann Burbach described being under close arrest for three days for selling bread to "Russian" prisoners, "out of sympathy" (TNA:WO208/3629). Any prisoners caught scavenging were beaten or hung and sick prisoners did not receive food rations (TNA:WO311/106; WO208/3629; WO311/13). As a result of this situation, many "Russian" prisoners fought amongst themselves for "garbage [to eat] and were terribly brutal to each other" (TNA:WO311/13). Insufficient prisoner nourishment at Sylt was most evident through the "emaciated" bodies of the deceased (TNA:WO208/3629).

Conclusion

Although two British military investigations were conducted at Sylt concentration camp in 1945 and publications exist which document the history of the site, knowledge concerning how the inmates and their overseers experienced camp life has remained conflicted and incomplete. The camp landscape itself has fallen into ambiguity – not least of all because of the perception that the site was destroyed after the war – and opinions about how best to treat it from a conservation perspective are also at odds.

Archaeological and historical investigations at Sylt have challenged the “official” narrative of events by demonstrating how showing how the architecture of the camp confirms the brutal nature of the site. By examining micro histories connected to the built environment alongside the physical remains themselves, this research has highlighted how prisoners lived, survived and died within the space, and how the SS used the landscape and camp architecture to enforce dominance and control. Utilising a wide range of non-invasive methods and 3D reconstructive techniques allowed the temporal as well as the spatial extent of Sylt to be analysed, thus illustrating both the consistencies and changes in the way the camp functioned between the OT and SS periods. The findings demonstrate that, under SS rule, Sylt was consistent in many ways with other camps that formed part of the concentration camp network in Europe (Sturdy Colls & Colls, in press). This research clearly demonstrates the necessity to examine landscapes and interactions with it in order to create a richer narrative of cases of internment. Additionally, by demonstrating that the overwhelming majority of camp structures and infrastructure survive within the modern landscape (contrary to popular opinion), the archaeological investigations highlight the need for a more coordinated approach to the future protection of Sylt and the dissemination of information about its internationally-relevant history.

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