

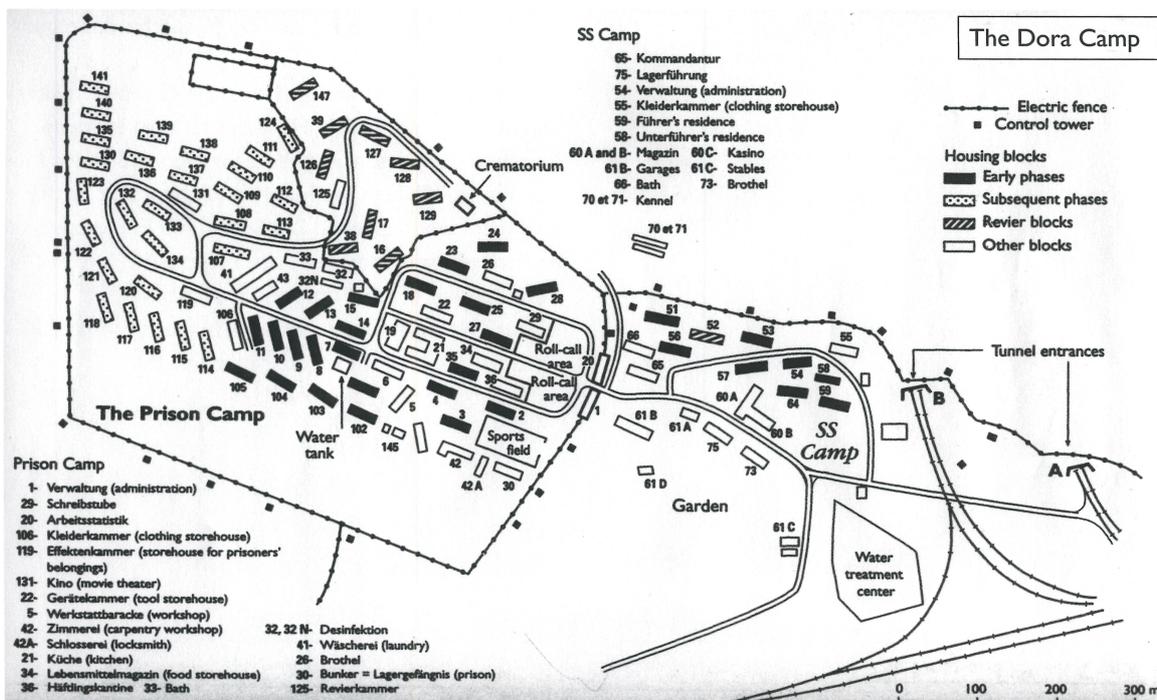
The V2 and DORA

The V2 rocket was developed in Peenemünde Military Test Site on the Island of Usedom in the Baltic Sea in Germany. Peenemünde (1936-45) was one of the most modern technological facilities of the Third Reich. V2 development started in 1936 and by the summer of 1943 its serial production began. The V2 was a cutting-edge liquid fuel rocket and a top-secret weapon. The first launch of a rocket into space took place there in October 1942. Peenemünde engineering and armament programme managers applied to the SS for concentration camp prisoners, as a means to compensate for manpower shortages. Slave labour was used all through V2 research and production. The rocket programme was carried out jointly by the Wehrmacht (the Nazi Armed forces), the armament ministry and the SS (Hitler's elite corps).

Following Operation Hydra, a massive Royal Air Force raid between 17 and 18 August 1943 and subsequent attacks (Operation Crossbow), V2 production was moved underground to the Harz mountain where Mittelwerk was established. Peenemünde continued to operate as a research centre until January 1945 when it was evacuated following the advance of the Soviet Red Army. The V2 chief rocket engineer and project leader was Wernher von Braun; he worked closely with General Walter Dornberger, who was in charge of the missile programme and a member of

Mittelwerk advisory council. They were both implicated in the use of slave labour at Peenemünde and Mittelwerk facilities. Von Braun and Dornberger were awarded the Knight Cross in 1944; they were members of the National Socialist (Nazi) Party and the SS¹¹.

Dora was a sub-camp of Buchenwald concentration camp until October 1944 when it became an independent camp under the name Mittelbau-Dora. Mittelwerk consisted of two parallel 1,800 metre-long tunnels, A and B, seven meter-high, and with north and south entrances and exists. The tunnels were linked together by 50 smaller tunnels, 150 metre-long and five metre-high halls, where the factory workshops were located. The first prisoners arrived from Buchenwald on 28 August 1943. Prisoners were mainly French, Belgian, Polish, Czech, Yugoslav and German, Roma and Sinti ('Gypsies'), Soviet and Italian POWs, and German criminals. The French have named Dora, 'le cimetière des Français' (the cemetery of the French) as a large number of French men died at Dora. The first Jewish prisoners began to arrive via Buchenwald in May 1944. They were Hungarian Jews, the only European Jews sent to Dora to work. Other European Jews arrived in January and February 1945, having survived the forced evacuation of Auschwitz.



André Sellier, *plan of Dora concentration camp*, 1998. © Editions La Découverte, Paris, 2010.

11. For more detail on Peenemünde, the V2 and its engineers read Michael J. Neufeld's publications: *Von Braun Dreamer of Space, Engineer of War (2007)* and *The Rocket and the Reich: Peenemünde and the Coming of the Ballistic Missile Era (1995)*.