

THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS



MORE THAN 3,000 GREEK-CYPRIOIS WERE LED TO THE DETENTION CENTRES WHERE THEY WERE HELD WITHOUT TRIAL. SOME WERE RELEASED AFTER A FEW MONTHS, BUT SEVERAL FREEDOM FIGHTERS WERE HELD FOR UP TO FOUR YEARS.

The Concentration Camps were a place where over 3.000 EOKA freedom fighters were held without trial, during the epic four-year struggle for independence. The camps were established on Nazi lines in July 1955 and closed down on 22nd February 1959, after the struggle came to an end.



Political prisoners at a barrack of the Kokkinotrimithia Concentration Camp holding a model of a ship made by them. The photograph was taken in secret by a camera assembled at the detention centres

Until November 1955 the freedom fighters were held at Nicosia Central Prison and Kyrenia Castle. Subsequently, the British colonial powers set up the Kokkinotrimithia Camp and then those of Pyla and Polemi. Other places of martyrdom for EOKA fighters were the camps at Pergamos, Mammari, Pyroi, Ayios Loucas, Limni and Agyrta.



View of interior of barrack where 30 political prisoners were held

Political prisoners eating dinner inside one of the barracks



Barrack at Kokkinotrimithia as it is today

Life for the political prisoners was a nightmare. The British had no evidence with which to drag them to the special courts and impose prison sentences so they kept them locked up at the Concentration Camps, hostages to the harsh whims of the British commanders, prison guards and army officers.

From the moment of his transfer from the interrogation centres to the Detention Centre, the freedom fighter became a mere number. Political prisoners were forced to live in barracks of corrugated metal with 30 other prisoners, in which they froze in the bitter cold of winter and baked in the intolerable summer heat.

Before sunset checks were carried out on the prisoners and then followed the long, dramatic night in the barracks. The doors were closed until morning. No one was allowed out during the hours of darkness, which was broken up by the strong beams of light emanating from the searchlights. These were trained on the prisoners by the guards who stood on their towers ready to shoot and kill anyone who might be out in the courtyard or the buffer zones. Most of the barracks had no lavatory. During the day the prisoners were able to move around in the small yard of a sector containing 2 or 4 barracks. The sector was fenced in with barbed wire and surrounded by buffer zones in which only the guards and tracker dogs circulated. Prisoners passed the time reading, exercising



Schoolboy freedom fighters at the Kokkinotrimithia Concentration Camp

with primitive means and occupying themselves with joinery and drew spiritual strength by studying the Scriptures.

In the Camps there was an invisible authority regulating the freedom fighters' action. This was a three-member secret council set up by EOKA leader Dhigenis. This council executed the organisation's orders, approved or rejected escape plans, decided on uprisings, mass protests and other action undertaken by the prisoners.

Protest action included hunger strikes, such as the three-day strike during Easter Week of 1958 and the Maundy Thursday uprising, in which in the course of five minutes, the organised political prisoners set fire to the Kokkinotrimithia

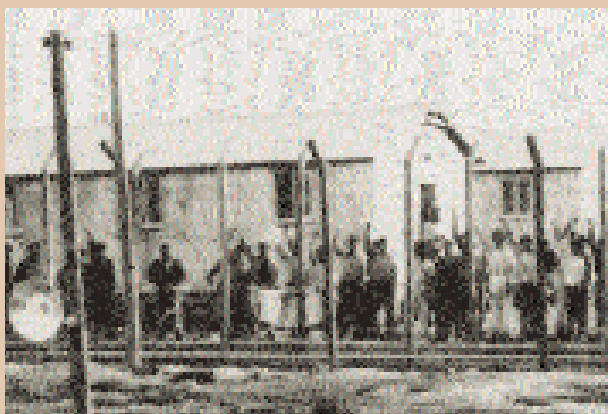


*Political Prisoners in Sector A of Kokkinotrimithia
Concentration Camp*

Holding Centre. The uprising was followed by mass torture inflicted by units of the British army who entered the barracks and mercilessly beat up the prisoners and kept them awake by firing shots and throwing stones. Uprisings of this sort resulted in the loss of privileges. Prisoners were no longer allowed to send or receive letters, which, in any case were always censored, and weekly visits were banned. During the periods of punishment, attempts at destroying human dignity were cruder and harsher than usual and included methods such as the stripping naked of prisoners in public, isolation in disciplinary cells and survival on bread and water.

Throughout the four-year EOKA liberation struggle, the Concentration Camps were fields of constant and unequal moral resistance and

battle between the soul of the struggle and the conqueror. In the end the soul of the Hellenes of Cyprus dealt a decisive blow to the enemy. The political prisoners won. And Dhigenis described them as "the flower of Cypriot youth and the pride of Cyprus".



View of the Kokkinotrimithia Concentration Camp



THE COUNCIL OF HISTORIC MEMORY
OF THE EOKA STRUGGLE 1955-1959



P.I.O. /2012—10.000
Published by the Press and Information Office

Printed by the Government Printing Office