

Factsheet

The Tower of London as a Prison in the 20th Century

The Tower of London held high profile prisoners and suspected criminals well into the 20th century.

First World War Prisoners

- Between November 6 1914 and April 11 1916, eleven men of various nationalities were held at the Tower, accused of espionage, tried in camera and executed by firing squad.
- Up until the first German spy, Carl Hans Lody, was incarcerated in 1914, there had not been prisoners in the Tower for nearly one hundred years and the last execution had taken place nearly two hundred years previously.
- In 1915, Captain Franz von Rintelen, alias E. V. Gache, was apprehended at sea and spent two days at the Tower pending his trial. He was charged with espionage acts in America against shipping bound for England. After his trial, he was deported back to America and was sentenced to four years hard labour. In February 1921 he went back to Germany and published his memoirs entitled *The Dark Invader*.
- In 1916, Sir Roger David Casement was apprehended as he landed by submarine at Tralee, Ireland. He was charged with visiting Irish PoWs in Germany and persuading them to form an Irish brigade of the German Army. He was held in the East Casemates pending his trial and then moved to Brixton prison.

Second World War Prisoners

- The Tower received prisoners from September 1939 and those held included the 43 man crew of U-boat 39, the crews from U-27, U-42, and U-35, as well as a number of aircrew men. Many were held on the top floor of the New Armouries, others in the Main Guard building north of the Wakefield Tower. Those who were injured were kept at the Old Hospital Block before being sent to a proper hospital in Woolwich. Prisoners often stayed only temporarily at the

Tower before being moved on to other confinements. During the Second World War, nearly 180 prisoners passed through the Tower.

- In 1940, Doctor Herr Gerlach, an ardent Nazi and German Consul General to Iceland, was arrested after British troops moved to Iceland to aid them against the Nazi invasion. He was caught while burning documents in the city of Reykjavik. He was taken to the Tower on June 1 1940 and was given a room in King's House (now known as Queen's House). He took daily exercise at the Tower and befriended the four year-old son of a Yeoman Warder. He was removed to another destination on September 18 1940.
- A famous prisoner during the Second World War was Rudolf Hess, Deputy Fuhrer of Nazi Germany. He was apprehended after he flew his own ME 110D from Germany and was forced to bale out over Scotland. He injured his ankle and, after his interrogation, was taken to the Tower on May 17 1941. He stayed only until May 21 1941. It was always a mystery as to why he was flying to Britain in the first place. At his trial in Nuremberg in November of 1945, he was sentenced to life imprisonment in West Berlin. He died from strangulation with electric flex on August 17 1987. Today, Rudolf Hess's autograph is on a piece of Tower stationery framed in the Yeoman Warders' Club. He was kept in a first floor room of the Queen's House facing east over Tower Green.
- The last man to be held and executed at the Tower of London was Josef Jakobs, a sergeant of the German Army. He was captured after injuring his ankle parachuting into England. After his trial in Brixton, he was brought to the Tower and held overnight in the top floor of the Waterloo Block. He was accused of espionage, tried in camera, and then executed by firing squad in the East Casemates Rifle Range on August 15 1941. The chair in which he sat to face the firing squad is still preserved in the Royal Armouries' artefacts store.