



Federal Office
for Migration
and Refugees

ENGLISCH



Upheaval

The South Barracks through the ages
SS Barracks | Merrell Barracks | Federal Office



From SS Barracks to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees

What was originally an SS (Schutzstaffel) barracks, then Merrell Barracks and South Barracks, is today the official building of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees and Nuremberg's central customs office. The architecture of this monumental structure continues to bear witness to National Socialism's totalitarian claim to power. Planned by architect Franz Ruff as accommodation for the SS, the barracks were described as a "gateway to the Nazi Party rally grounds" by the *Fränkische Tageszeitung*, a mouthpiece of the Nazi press, on 2 June 1939.

Nazi propaganda emphasised Hitler's involvement in the design process. "When in attendance, he always drew sketches and significantly influenced the planning". The barracks never fulfilled their original purpose of housing SS troops during Nazi Party rallies. Instead, they served as a training institution for the Waffen-SS and a satellite concentration camp during the war. After the war ended, the US Army used the building for more than 40 years.

From 1996, the main building of the former barracks complex was home to the headquarters of the Federal Agency for the Recognition of Foreign Refugees, which then became the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees in 2005. The west wing has been used by Nuremberg's central customs office since 2000.

Only the "Z-block", named for its layout, remains today along with the main building. It was planned as a "Führerheim" for ranking SS officers and is now used as a cultural centre.

The perimeters of the former barracks grounds are still visible on Tiroler Straße and Ingolstädter Straße.



The original planning for the Nazi Party rally grounds did not include troop accommodation for the Waffen-SS, but since the SS were supposed to be performing sentry duty for the Nazi Party rally grounds, a suitable site was hastily sought in 1936 and one on Frankenstraße was ultimately chosen.

On 12 December 1936, SS chief Heinrich Himmler inspected the construction ground with Nuremberg's mayor Friedrich "Willy" Liebel and Central Franconia's Gauleiter Julius Streicher, as well as architect Albert Speer, Walter Brugmann and Franz Ruff. There were urban development concerns about the location, since the construction site lay at right angles to the main direction of traffic, but these were swept aside. Numerous commercial enterprises and Reichsbahn [state railway] facilities were forced, at great cost, to make way. Hitler's direct influence also drove up the building costs, which eventually reached approximately 25 million Reichsmarks (the equivalent of around EUR 108 million).

The original plan stipulated accommodation for 700 men (five infantry companies, a signals platoon and a band), horses, messengers dogs and vehicles. Spare capacities were to be kept available throughout the year for course attendees and for SS leaders during the Nazi Party rallies. These plans no longer applied after war broke out, since no Nazi Party rallies were being held. A prestigious barracks building in the eyes of those in power, it would then be used as a training institute, primarily for signalmen who were deployed from here to battle zones across Europe, and as a satellite concentration camp.

The Satellite Concentration Camp at the SS Barracks, 1941-1945

On 12 May 1941, 58 prisoners from Dachau concentration camp were transferred to the SS Barracks in Nuremberg. They were locked up in the cellar of an annex building that was used as a mess hall, gymnasium and drill hall (H-block). This satellite concentration camp was assigned to the Flossenbürg concentration camp from 16 June 1943 and remained until 1945. According to the incomplete transfer lists, the number of prisoners fluctuated between 41 and 175. Former prisoners spoke of numbers between 100 and 300.

Prisoners were initially deployed to complete the barracks facility, but also had to clear bomb damage in the city after the air raids on Nuremberg that mainly struck armament factories.



There has been a memorial to the fate of forced labourers at Nuremberg's South Barracks since 2007. Two information boards in the gatehouse, their content provided by Alexander Schmidt, explain the system of the satellite concentration camp. The biographies on the information boards of two inmates represent the fate of all forced labourers from the SS era. A former employee of the Federal Office who died in 2007, Peter Hugler, provided the impetus for the project.



Architect Franz Ruff and Adolf Hitler during an inspection (1936).



Arch of Honour with eagle. The main arch is reminiscent of a triumphal arch. There was an eagle mounted onto a swastika in the centre.



The drill ground behind the building (today's south car park). The "H-block", visible in the background to the right, housed the mess hall and gymnasium. It was demolished in the summer of 2000.

The US Army in Residence, 1945-1992

On 18 April 1945, the SS Barracks were taken by the 45th US Infantry Division. The property was renamed "Merrell Barracks", probably in the same month, after Joseph F. Merrell, an 18-year-old American soldier and member of the 3rd US Infantry Division who died during the attack on Nuremberg on 18 April 1945. He received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his exemplary, heroic efforts against a dogged resistance put up by German troops. The Medal of Honor is the highest military decoration awarded by the US government.

The barracks were used during 1945 as accommodation for liberated forced labourers who were being cared for by the municipal finance office on the orders of the military administration.

When it transpired in late 1945 that the building would soon become available, the Nuremberg city council resolved on 18 December 1945 to "make the SS barracks available for the purposes of city administration when it becomes available."

This did not come to pass, however, as the US military government laid claim to the site in order to build its Nuremberg garrison.

The US Army used the barracks after they were fully vacated in 1948. The 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment was billeted there from 1952 until 1992.



Conversion and Use by the Federal Office

The city of Nuremberg's plans to remove the military legacy on Frankenstraße and create space for a subsequent urban development of the barracks site failed due to the preservation of historic monument policy in Bavaria. As "the most significant barracks facility of the Third Reich", the main building was registered as an historic monument.

The rising numbers of asylum seekers in Germany in 1992 caused an extraordinary domestic political challenge. Asylum law reform adopted by the Federal Government resulted in substantial staff increases at the Federal Office. At times, it was necessary for seven properties to be used in Nuremberg along with the one in Zirndorf to accommodate staff. The Federal Office urgently required an official building with adequate dimensions. The idea of using the South Barracks as a federal building was considered.

The first spatial requirement plan assumed office space for 1,500 employees would be needed. Planning requirements were altered during the conversion phase as asylum law reforms took effect and the number of asylum seekers decreased rapidly. Only 1,000 employees were to move in to the new office building. The construction volume was reduced by 25% and the surplus space was kept available for federal customs administration.

The state building department Nuremberg II commissioned the architectural firm Grabow + Hofmann to plan the conversion. Gerhard Seidel from the state building department wrote in the short guide for Open Monument Day 2000: "When converting buildings previously used by the military, it is necessary to work through the content of their history and not just deal with the technical, functional and design aspects."



The South Barracks at the end of the war. On 18 April 1945, the SS Barracks were taken by the 45th US Infantry Division. The building survived the war largely unscathed.



The Americans laid claim to the entirety of the barracks site to set up their Nuremberg garrison.



The Arch of Honour after the Americans' final renovation in 1990.



An aerial view of the South Barracks (2022)



An impressive foyer: In 1997, Manuel Franke designed an architectural “bridge” between National Socialism, the post-war era and today’s function.



The wall, painted light blue, brings to mind the Americans’ period of residence; the unrendered, reinforced concrete elements stand for change and the modern era.



The percent for art in the SS Barracks also included National Socialist symbols. The Americans removed the SS runes between the torches in Max Körner’s ceiling mosaic.



Percent for Art from 1993

An agency with a strongly humanitarian assignment moving into former SS barracks, of all places: employees of the Federal Office perceived this as a strong contradiction at the time and it is precisely this area of conflict that is addressed by the percent for art.

In his work “Time Bracket”, Düsseldorf artist Manuel Franke created a link between the various phases of use in the newly-created, two-storey entrance hall that adjoins the former gateway where military guards once stood. It is a piece of art that needs an explanation: the old, newly-laid paving as the first architectural element of the time bracket recollects the SS era.

The second, “blue wall” element is reminiscent of the US Army’s period of residence. One of the first measures taken by the Americans was to paint all walls and door frames with oil paint. This was initially for hygiene reasons – it was supposed to be easy to disinfect these areas. However, the different military unit sections were also marked with different colour schemes. To commemorate this, Manuel Franke painted a wall in the entrance hall with blue oil paint. He interprets the colourful coats of paint as an attempt by American soldiers to give the building a new skin and therefore a lighter character to the monumental structure.

The third element is made up of a concrete pillar that, contrary to the original plan, is neither plastered, nor painted white. This emphasises the architectural interventions, clearly underlining the changes in the ways in which the building was used – most recently from a property used by the military to an administrative building. The contrasts between the monumental, National Socialist architecture and the steel and glass elements of a modern office building therefore become very apparent.



A Turbulent and Moving History: The Federal Office

The Federal Office was established in 1953 as the Federal Agency for the Recognition of Foreign Refugees. After the Geneva Refugee Convention was adopted in 1953, applications from asylum seekers were accepted and decided upon on the site of the “Valka Camp”, situated in what is now the Langwasser district. The agency’s headquarters were moved to Zirndorf in 1960/1961. With the Aliens Act of 28 April 1965, the Federal Agency was given the name “Federal Office for the Recognition of Foreign Refugees”. The adjective “foreign” originates with the contemporary endeavour to distinguish between asylum seekers and ethnic German refugees, particularly those from the Soviet-occupied zone and former eastern German territories.

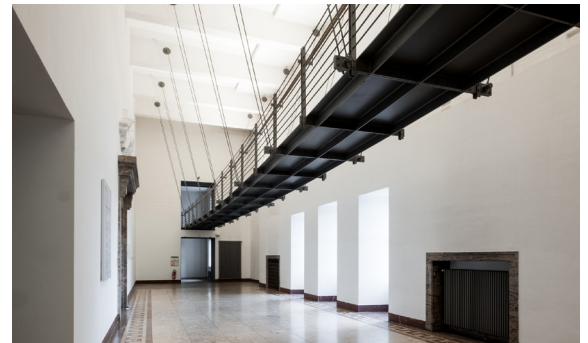
Geopolitical developments since the 1960s and their impact on German refugee and asylum policy are reflected in the development of the Federal Office. From its beginnings in the 1950s with 40 employees, staff levels increased moderately to 60 after the “Prague Spring” in 1968. When admission figures increased considerably after the 1974 military revolt in Turkey, 100,000 applications were recorded for the first time – 55,000 of them from Turkey. The number of employees rose to 240.



An exterior view of main entrance.



The design elements, furnishings and lighting concepts in the South Barracks are the manifestation of an open and modern building.



The foyer in front of the large conference hall.



Architectural history and present united in contrast: A view of the main entrance.



The Americans initially used the former “Hall of Honour” as a central banquet hall and later as a chapel. Today, it is the Federal Office’s large conference hall.



View of the rear side of the South Barracks, with canteen and exterior seating area. Visible in the background is the portal to the gatehouse, which is opposite the main entrance, and above it the balcony of the large conference hall.



After the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the collapse of the Soviet Union, there followed a refugee movement that reached its zenith in 1992 with 438,000 people seeking asylum. The huge number of asylum applicants led to wide-ranging organisational changes and the asylum procedure was decentralised. Across Germany, 48 branch offices were created. At times, there were 4,000 employees working at the Federal Office. The Asylum Compromise of 1993 and new geopolitical situation in Germany, now right in the middle of a free Europe, led to a significant decline in asylum applications.

European influence on the migration and asylum policies of EU Member States was reinforced with the Schengen Agreement (1995) and Dublin Convention (1997). The Federal Office for the Recognition of Foreign Refugees was extensively restructured as a consequence of these developments. When the Immigration Act was implemented in 2005, the Federal Office for the Recognition of Foreign Refugees became the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. As a result of the Immigration Act, the agency was assigned comprehensive integration and migration tasks in addition to asylum procedures. The evolution of an agency purely involved in asylum procedure to a centre of excellence for asylum, migration and integration had begun. The Federal Office has branch offices in all of the federal states. Approximately 2,000 of its roughly 8,000 employees work in Nuremberg.



Status Quo

The Institute for Federal Real Estate, which emerged from the Federal Property Administration in 2005 and administers the Federal Government's real estate in the business division of the Federal Ministry of Finance, owns the property on Frankenstraße. The office building at Frankenstraße 210 was transferred to the unified property management of the Federal Government in 2009.

The South Barracks are also home to the offices of organisations other than the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees: the Nuremberg-Fürth central customs office, a branch office of the Federal Information Technology Centre (ITZBund), the Federal Office for Goods Transport (BAG) and a representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the Federal Republic of Germany. Liaison staff from other federal agencies also work at the headquarters of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees.

The Federal Office is open about the history of its building on Frankenstraße. New employees regularly become acquainted with the chequered history of their place of work during historical tours of the building. Tours are also offered to visitors and interested members of the public during municipal events, such as open days.

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