

Gunther Jikel

How to Remember Peenemunde?

Peenemunde became known worldwide in WWII for its testing ground for flight bombs (V1) developed by the German air force and a missiles program (V2) by the army. Myths played a role early on in this vast program became on the island of Usedom in the Baltic Sea. V stands for "Vergeltung" - revenge and the weapons were part of the alleged Nazi "wonder weapons." However, they were largely ineffective militarily, mainly causing terror and deaths among civilians in large cities, such as London and Antwerp towards the end of the war. In 1939, about 10,000 Germans worked on these programs in Peenemunde. In 1943, an additional 10,000 to 20,000 foreigners were forced to work there, many of them slave laborers from Poland. After an air raid in 1943, mass production of the V2 went underground in Mittelbau-Dora, which became a concentration camp of 60,000 prisoners of which about a third died of the terrible conditions. Despite these horrors, after the war, the involved engineers and military leaders succeeded in portraying Peenemunde as a research facility and the cradle of space travel. most famously Wernher von Braun. I will talk about recent research on slave laborers in Peenemunde, as well as the debates about remembrance of what happened in Peenemunde.