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Top Secret! The Cold War – Hidden and Forbidden Places in the Netherlands

Ściśle tajne! Ukryte i zakazane miejsca w Holandii z okresu zimnej wojny

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Abstract

The Cold War (1945–1991) was a bipolar nuclear rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies that developed immediately after the Second World War. The Cold War was waged on political, economic, cultural and propaganda fronts, even manifesting itself in a Space Race, and had only limited recourse to weapons. During the Cold War, secret defence lines, command posts, air bases, radar stations, barracks, nuclear bunkers and public shelters were built all over Europe. Much of this specific heritage has long remained classified and therefore unknown to the general public, and – partly for this reason – is now in danger of being lost, especially now that the generation of ‘insiders’ who were privy to these secrets at the time, is thinning out. Recently, the Netherlands started a survey of military heritage of the Cold War. It was carried out by the Cultural Heritage Agency, and it concluded that heritage from the Cold War period is still not receiving the attention it deserves. Therefore it is necessary to increase awareness about this period, through the dissemination of information about its history and launching a designation scheme to ensure the preservation of this vulnerable heritage for future generations.

This article will showcase three (former) top secret potential listed national monuments from the Cold War period in the Netherlands. These are the Rhine-IJssel Defence Line in the eastern part of the Netherlands, the NATO headquarters in the cave tunnels of the Cannerberg in the south, and the underground emergency command post for the political elite: the Night Watch in The Hague in the western part of the Netherlands.

Keywords

Cold War, difficult heritage, top secret, hidden and forbidden places, the Netherlands, heritage conservation

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Abstrakt

Zimna wojna (1945–1991) była rywalizacją nuklearną między Stanami Zjednoczonymi a Związkiem Radzieckim i ich sojusznikami, która zaczęła się bezpośrednio po II wojnie światowej. Zimna wojna toczyła się na frontach politycznym, gospodarczym, kulturalnym i propagandowym, przejawiała się nawet w wyścigu kosmicznym i tylko w ograniczonym stopniu odwoływała się do broni. W tym okresie w całej Europie budowano tajne linie obronne, stanowiska dowodzenia, bazy lotnicze, stacje radarowe, koszary, bunkry nuklearne i schrony publiczne. Znaczna część tego specyficznego dziedzictwa przez długi czas pozostawała utajniona, a zatem nieznana ogółowi społeczeństwa. Między innymi z tego powodu obecnie grozi nam jego utrata, zwłaszcza teraz, gdy ubywa osób z pokolenia wtajemniczonych, którzy w tamtym okresie mieli dostęp do tajnych informacji.

Niedawno Holandia rozpoczęła badania dziedzictwa wojskowego z czasów zimnej wojny. Badanie zostało przeprowadzone przez tamtejszą Agencję Dziedzictwa Kulturowego i wykazało, że dziedzictwu z okresu zimnej wojny wciąż nie poświęca się wystarczającej uwagi. Należy zatem zwiększać świadomość dotyczącą tego okresu przez rozpowszechnianie informacji o jego historii i wprowadzić system oznaczania powstałych wówczas obiektów, aby zapewnić zachowanie tego wrażliwego dziedzictwa dla przyszłych pokoleń.

Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia trzy zabytki narodowe z okresu zimnej wojny w Holandii, niegdyś ściśle tajne. Są to linia obrony Ren–IJssel we wschodniej Holandii, kwatery główna NATO w tunelach jaskiniowych Cannerberg na południu kraju oraz podziemne stanowisko dowodzenia dla elity politycznej – Nocnej Straży – w Hadze.

Słowa kluczowe

zimna wojna, trudne dziedzictwo, ściśle tajne, ukryte i zakazane miejsca, Holandia, ochrona dziedzictwa kulturowego

AT THE STROKE OF NOON ON THE FIRST MONDAY OF EACH MONTH, EMERGENCY TEST SIRENS ARE sounded across the Netherlands. This auditory legacy of the Cold War (1945–1991) has been in place since that time. There are also many more surviving physical relics, sites, areas, and structures from this tense and paranoid era. However, how many of us are actually aware of their existence or even recognize them? In the light of this, the Netherlands has recently started a survey of military and civilian defence sites conducted by the Cultural Heritage Agency. The study concluded that heritage from the Cold War period is not receiving the attention it deserves and is under-represented among the country's listed national heritage sites. By studying and showcasing three Dutch top-secret sites, which merit designation as monuments, the rich variety and outstanding values of this Cold War legacy can be more fully appreciated.

Introduction

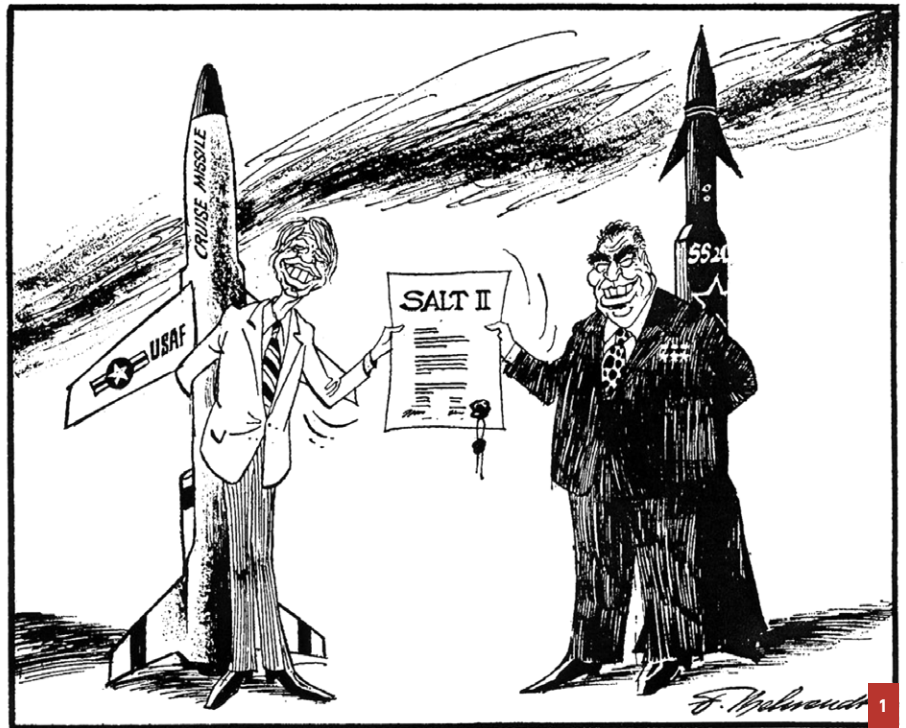
The Cold War was a bipolar nuclear rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies that developed in the aftermath of the Second World War. The Cold War was waged on political, economic, cultural and propaganda fronts, even manifesting itself in a Space Race, and had only limited recourse to weapons.¹ One could argue, that the Cold War commenced with the detonation of two atomic bombs, codenamed *Little Boy* and *Fat Man*, over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. This event turned the world into an enduring ideological battleground between the perceived communist and capitalist threats. The Cold War did not conclude until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, which also marked the end of the military strategy of deterrence and Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD). The fear of a Third World War, which had lasted for almost 25 years, subsided.²

¹ J.L. Gaddis, *The Cold War*, London 2005; E. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991*, London 1994/2007; *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, eds M.P. Leffler, O.A. Westad, vols 1–3, Cambridge 2010.

² F. Kaplan, *The Bomb – Presidents, Generals, and the Secret History of Nuclear War*, New York 2020.

1 Cartoon by Fritz Behrendt speculating on the real will of US President Jimmy Carter, and of Leonid Brezhnev, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, to implement the SALT II disarmament agreement, published on 4 May 1979 in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*

Karykatura Fritza Behrendta spekulująca na temat rzeczywistej woli prezydenta USA Jimmy'ego Cartera i sekretarza generalnego Komunistycznej Partii Związku Radzieckiego Leonida Breżniewa, aby wdrożyć porozumienie rozbrojeniowe SALT II, opublikowana 4 maja 1979 roku we „Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung”



During the Cold War, secret defence lines, command posts, airbases, naval ports, radar stations, barracks, atomic bunker facilities, and public shelters were built across Europe. Much of this specific material heritage has long remained classified and therefore unknown to the general public, and – partly for this reason – is now in danger of being lost, especially now that the generation of ‘insiders’, who were privy to these secrets at the time, is thinning out.

Subsequently, the Netherlands initiated a survey of military heritage conducted by the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed (RCE), a division of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science) and the survey concluded that heritage from the Cold War period is still not receiving the attention it deserves.³ In a Letter to Parliament dated 28 April 2020, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science noted that Cold War heritage is underrepresented among the country’s listed national heritage sites.⁴ Subsequently, the Netherlands’ Cultural Heritage Agency was tasked with increasing awareness about this period, through the dissemination of information about its history and launching a designation scheme to ensure the preservation of this vulnerable heritage for future generations.

In the meantime, a working group of the Agency devised six narratives exemplifying the Dutch Cold War heritage. In their report: *Faithful Ally with Hollanditis* – a copy of which was given to the last conscripted soldier in the Netherlands, discharged in 1996 – each storyline focuses on a specific theme, including the Netherlands as a faithful ally, the (global) arms race, moments of escalation, civilian defence, compulsory military service, and the protest (peace) movement.⁵

To learn more about the Cold War period, the Cultural Heritage Agency initiated a public campaign in the summer of 2023 entitled: ‘What did you do during the Cold War?’ More than 350 responses were received, providing insight into the impact of the Cold War on Dutch citizens. For

³ Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland, *Op Verkenning 2.0. Twee eeuwen militair erfgoed in het vizier*, tinyurl.com/yc6y637m (accessed 21 November 2024).

⁴ *Beleidsreactie verkenningen erfgoedthema’s archeologie, militair erfgoed, herinneringserfgoed en erfgoed van na 1965*, 28 April 2020, tinyurl.com/33pcpxhj (accessed 21 November 2024). This Parliamentary Letter was signed by both the Dutch Minister of Culture and the Minister of Defence.

⁵ B. de Vries et al., *The Netherlands: Faithful Ally with ‘Hollanditis’. Traces of Military and Civil Defence, and Their Social Impact, During the Cold War (1945–1991) in the Netherlands*, [s.l.] 2024, tinyurl.com/ykk2ptr2 (accessed 21 November 2024).



2

Detail of the huge (3 × 3 metre) plan of attack of the Warsaw Pact troops, 1970, signed by general Wojciech Jaruzelski, then Polish Minister of Defence. The main thrust is directed south-westwards towards Antwerp. Six nuclear attacks were planned on the Netherlands. The map was found in the Warsaw Pact archives in Poland. Photo: P. Piotrowski

Fragment ogromnego (3 × 3 m) planu ataku wojsk Układu Warszawskiego z 1970 roku, który został podpisany przez generała Wojciecha Jaruzelskiego, ówczesnego polskiego ministra obrony narodowej. Główne uderzenie zostało skierowane na południowy zachód, w stronę Antwerpii. Planowano sześć ataków nuklearnych na Holandię. Mapa została odnaleziona w polskich archiwach dotyczących Układu Warszawskiego. Fot. P. Piotrowski

example, Dutch conscripts recount their experiences of protecting nuclear weapons at military bases. The conscripts were placed in a difficult position when they were confronted by demonstrators advocating for peace while they themselves were armed with loaded weapons.⁶ This bottom-up approach of interviewing individuals who were present during the time of the Cold War about their experiences, prevents the loss of a wealth of information of eyewitnesses over time. In view of the success of this oral history project, the RCE hoped not only to raise awareness of the significance of this historic period and emphasize the necessity of putting this ‘young’ yet fearsome heritage ‘on the agenda’. Furthermore, it also aspired to serve as an inspiration for others in Europe, both in the former Eastern and Western Bloc.

⁶ Koudeoorlog, tinyurl.com/58nfrfb6 (accessed 21 November 2024).

The Dutch Cultural Heritage Agency is currently engaged in the process of synthesising the fragmented knowledge about Cold War military-civilian heritage. To this end, the RCE is collaborating with a diverse range of experts, including lay specialists, academic researchers, veterans, and professionals from the Menno van Coehoorn Foundation, among others. It is also essential to collaborate with municipal and provincial authorities, the Central Government Real Estate Agency, and the Ministry of Defence. This will facilitate the identification of a shortlist of fifty potential listed national heritage sites, which will be presented to the Minister for Culture in Winter 2024. This process will ensure the preservation of these diverse yet overlooked legacies from the Cold War period for future generations.

Similarly, some other European countries have produced inventories of their Cold War heritage, including Denmark,⁷ Italy,⁸ Albania,⁹ Lithuania, Latvia/Estonia,¹⁰ Austria,¹¹ some German states, Scotland and England¹² – a forerunner in this field. These studies contribute to our understanding of Cold War infrastructure in individual regions and countries. However, they do not yet provide an appreciation of the wider transnational and even global geopolitical landscape of which these sites formed a part.¹³

This article will present three former top-secret potential national monuments from the Cold War period in the Netherlands. The first is the Rhine-IJssel Defence Line, located in the eastern part of the Netherlands. The second is the NATO headquarters situated within the cave tunnels of the Cannerberg in the south. The third is the underground emergency command post for the political elite, known as the *Night Watch*, which is located in The Hague in the western part of the Netherlands. By explaining the challenges associated with investigating these historical locations, these three former clandestine sites are afforded a more comprehensive context and a broader platform for discussion.

Materials and Methods

This study on Cold War heritage in the Netherlands used a combination of archival research, fieldwork, and oral history to identify and assess the significance of military and civilian defence sites from the period 1945–1991. The archival sources included declassified government documents, military records, and planning documents from the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE). Fieldwork was conducted at key Cold War sites, including the Rhine-IJssel Defence Line, NATO headquarters at Cannerberg, and the *Night Watch* bunker, focusing on three key areas: architectural features, preservation status, and historical context. Furthermore, oral history played a pivotal role, with more than 350 personal accounts collected from veterans, military personnel, and civilians who lived through the Cold War. These accounts provided invaluable insight into the social and cultural impacts of these sites. The data gathered through these methods was analysed to evaluate the historical value of the sites and formulate recommendations for their preservation as national monuments.

⁷ *Kold Krig – 33 fortaellinger om den kolde krigs bygninger og anlaeg i Danmark, Faerøerne og Grønland*, eds M. Stemnak et al., Copenhagen 2013; U.V.S. Egeskov, B. Frandsen, *Hvis (atom)krigen kommer*, Copenhagen 2023.

⁸ S. Bravaglieri, 'Una rassegna delle tipologie di siti e manufatti della Guerra Fredda in Italia', *SMC*, special issue 2019, no. 1, pp. 131–136.

⁹ E. Glass, 'Once Upon a Time in Ksamil: Community and Post-communist Biographies of Mushroom-shaped Bunkers in Albania', in: *In the Ruins of the Cold War Bunker: Affect, Materiality and Meaning Making*, ed. L. Bennett, London 2018, pp. 145–164.

¹⁰ Military Heritage Tourism, tinyurl.com/35kv8bjb (accessed 21 November 2024).

¹¹ M. Platzer, *Cold War and Architecture. The Competing Forces that Reshaped Austria after 1945*, Vienna 2020.

¹² W.D. Cocroft, R.J.C. Thomas, *Cold War: Building for Nuclear Confrontation 1946–1989*, Swindon 2003.

¹³ J. Schofield, W. Cocroft, M. Dobronovskaya, 'Cold War: a Transnational Approach to a Global Heritage', *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 2021, vol. 55, iss. 1, pp. 39–58.



3 Shortly after 1950, a number of military structures and installations were built as part of the Rhine-IJssel Line, including intended for deliberate flooding of the area. Photo: J. Duivenvoorden

Na początku lat 50. XX wieku w ramach linii Ren-IJssel zbudowano wiele obiektów i instalacji wojskowych, w tym obiekt widoczny na zdjęciu, który miał służyć do celowego zalania tego obszaru. Fot. J. Duivenvoorden

Rhine-IJssel Defence Line: *Water as a Weapon*

In the early 1950s, the local inhabitants were unaware of the project that was taking place in the centre of the Netherlands along the IJssel river. The area was a hive of activity, screened off with reed mats and heavily guarded by soldiers round the clock. The Ministry of War was responsible for the construction of a defensive line, which was carried out in strict secrecy at the behest of the newly established North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), of which the Netherlands was an ally from its outset in 1949. The Rhine-IJssel Line, as it was called, extended 127 kilometres from Kampen to Nijmegen and formed part of a broader network of European defence works along the Rhine extending to the Swiss border. Its objective was to impede the advancement of Warsaw Pact tanks for a period of one or two weeks, thereby allowing NATO partners to mobilize additional military resources, primarily from the United States and the United Kingdom, through the harbours of Rotterdam, Flushing (Vlissingen) and Delfzijl. Keeping the Russians at bay had become imperative since the outbreak of the Cold War. In the early 1950s there was a great fear of the Warsaw Pact and its allies, popularly known as the Red Scare – although recent archival research has shown that Stalin had no intention of starting an invasion. At the time, the Red Army was ten times larger than the NATO forces in Europe, and numerous Soviet divisions equipped with nuclear weapons were stationed nearby, in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Poland. Furthermore, as a consequence of the Second World War, West Germany was not permitted at that time to maintain its own standing army.

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Museum in the former Command Bunker in Olst, part of the IJssel Defence Line. Photo: B. de Vries

Muzeum w dawnym schronie dowodzenia w Olst, część linii obrony IJssel. Fot. B. de Vries



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Delay tactics

The idea behind the Rhine-IJssel Line was to impede the advancement of Warsaw Pact tanks in the Netherlands long enough for the deployment of allied support troops. The river's flood plains and the IJssel valley would be flooded to a width of five to ten kilometres and to a depth that would render them impassable: too deep for boots, too shallow for boats. Purpose-built sluices and intakes in the winter dykes would be opened allowing the river water to flow in, propelled by moveable floating caissons sunk at three strategic positions: in the IJssel River at the villages of Olst and Welsum, in the Waal River at Bommel near Nijmegen, and in the Lower Rhine river near Arnhem. The army constructed an additional structure, called a sleeper dyke, which stretched eleven kilometres between Arnhem and Nijmegen to prevent water from running off across the Betuwe countryside in the event of a breach in the dykes. In total, more than 400,000 local inhabitants, in addition to livestock, would be forced to evacuate to unconfirmed locations. This was a huge sacrifice. It is reasonable to conclude that the large number of refugees would also likely impede the use of key roads by army units.

At the time, the plans to use water as a weapon were known only to a select few, including senior officers and local mayors. Not even Parliament was informed. The army turned searchlights onto passing vessels and passers-by to deter prying eyes. The projects were meticulously planned and represented an ingenious feat of Dutch hydraulic engineering. The contractors working at the site were given only partial information and the builders were deliberately recruited from towns and cities far away from the construction sites. In return for their confidentiality, they were paid an extra ten per cent. Sixty various military structures and installations were built on higher, dry positions, including nuclear, biological- and chemical-proof command bunkers, a hospital bunker, searchlights, underground telephone switch boxes, sluices, floating dams or caissons, inland ports, emplacements for quadruple Browning .50 and Bofors anti-aircraft guns, and (M4 Sherman and Ram) tank casemates in concrete constructions. Remnants of these structures can still be seen along the riverbanks today.

Obsolete and dismantled

Not long after the line was put into operation in 1953, military strategy changed. West Germany became a member of NATO in 1955, shifting the Cold War frontline towards the Weser River and later towards the Elbe River on the border with East Germany (DDR). Subsequently, the Dutch



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5 Tank casemate in Welsum.
Photo: B. de Vries

Kazamata czołgu w Welsum.
Fot. B. de Vries

6 Anti-aircraft battery site
in the dyke near Olst.
Photo: B. de Vries

Stanowisko baterii przeciw-
lotniczej na grobli w pobliżu
Olst. Fot. B. de Vries

military commenced operations in conjunction with the allied forces in the North German Plains. The defensive water line became obsolete, and work on dismantling it started in 1964. Many troops remained stationed in the area, and equipment was still stored there. On three occasions serious preparations were made to sink the dams into position in anticipation of a potential conflict. These instances occurred during the Hungarian Uprising against the Soviet regime in



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The main entrance to the former NATO Headquarters at Cannerberg, built in 1953. Photo: M. Kosian / Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed

Główne wejście do byłej kwatery głównej NATO w Cannerberg, zbudowanej w 1953 roku. Fot. M. Kosian / Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed

1956, the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, and the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1961–1962. In all three instances the bunkers and batteries were fully manned and supplied in order to defend the floating dams.

Immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the classified status was lifted and the IJssel Line site was reopened to the public. In retrospect, we know that Moscow was well aware of these plans. When Russian generals visited the defence line in the 1990s they provided detailed topographic maps of the site. No secrets were safe in those days... The Russians knew more than we knew.

The decommissioned hospital bunker and command bunker at Olst are now keenly visited museum exhibits. In 2003 a foundation was established with the aim of converting the intact bunkers, including their complete interiors, into museums. This active community acts as guides for the more than 25,000 visitors per year telling them how the flooding and the military organization worked. They recount the national narrative of how water was used as a tool against the enemy. Mobile apps and bike tours do the rest.¹⁴ This technical megastructure from the Cold War era, integrated into the local riverscape is unique in Europe, if not the world.

NATO Headquarters Cannerberg: *Working in Labyrinthine Tunnels*

Another super-secret site was the NATO Headquarters built in the 1950s in the former limestone quarries of Cannerberg, near Maastricht in the southern province of Limburg. The endless tunnels of the quarries were converted into a joint combat and training base for the Northern Army Group and the Second Allied Tactical Air Force (NORTHAG / TWO ATAF STATIC). Their mission

¹⁴ Ijssellinie, tinyurl.com/8bvj42vk (accessed 21 November 2024).



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Map of the tunnels in the cave system in the Cannerberg. Source: limburgs-landschap.nl

Mapa tuneli w sieci jaskiń w Cannerberg. Źródło: limburgs-landschap.nl

was to coordinate land and air forces in northern West Germany, which was considered the most likely avenue of attack for Warsaw Pact forces. The Dutch Ministry of War signed a fifty-year lease with the owners of the Cannerberg quarry. The owners were henceforth banned from the site. In 1956, Queen Juliana issued a royal decree under the Official Secrets Act declaring Cannerberg a prohibited area. The subsequent period saw the laying of endless lengths of cable for telex, radio and jet links, the installation of three huge diesel generators and a lot of helicopter traffic.

When tensions mounted during the Cuban Missile Crisis, this top-secret Joint Operations Centre (JOC) was manned permanently. The labyrinthine tunnels, stretching over eight kilometres, were populated by American, Belgian, British, German and Dutch personnel. Getting lost was all too easy, so the tunnels were given names such as Main Street, Foxtrot Street and Bravo Street. More than 400 offices were hewn and built from limestone, concrete blocks and bricks. There were basic facilities such as heating, canteens and bathrooms, but there was also a barber's shop, a golf course, a gym, and 51 toilets, two restaurants, two bars (called the Mushroom and the Flintstones), and an Operations Room or Situation Room – a sort of bunker within a bunker – to which only a few select officers had access. Here, in the strictest secrecy, the day-to-day management mapped out European air defence operations on giant sheets of plexiglass.

In 1992, the Defence Ministry decommissioned the complex and began stripping the interior. However, due to huge quantities of asbestos fibre and major soil contamination, the clean-up was not completed until 2013. What is left now is basically a subterranean ruin. The uncomfortable climate inside, with high air humidity and constant low temperatures of 12 to 14 degrees Celsius, makes it difficult to repurpose the space. A provincial preservation society, Het Limburgs Landschap, gives guided tours of the facility and some authentic components have been brought

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It is always damp and cold inside the heavily secured NATO Headquarters near Maastricht.

Photo: B. de Vries

Wewnątrz dobrze zabezpieczonej kwatery głównej NATO w pobliżu Maastricht zawsze jest wilgotno i zimno.
Fot. B. de Vries



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back.¹⁵ A so called Pilot Briefing Facility was brought over to the Cannerberg from the bunkers of the British Royal Air Force Station Brüggen in West Germany, one of the airfields within the NATO command structure. Fighter pilots remained in these specific bunkers and received their last instructions before departing for a mission in a war zone. The Cannerberg site is therefore gradually beginning to take on the appearance of a museum with an unusual Cold War legacy.

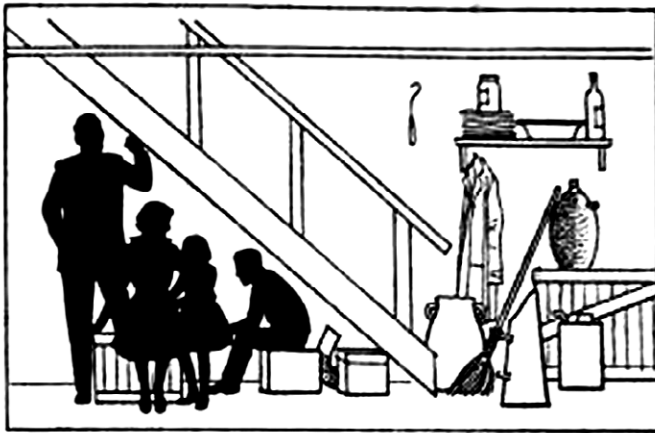
The Night Watch: In case of an emergency

This period also saw the creation of public (bomb) shelters in tunnels, bridgeheads, underground stations, car parks and under government buildings throughout the country. Construction was slow. By 1990, all the shelters combined could only accommodate 350,000 Dutch civilians. Everyone else was given tips on how to shelter under desks at work or under stairs at home. In 1961, a booklet entitled: *Suggestions for protecting your family and yourself (Wenken voor de bescherming van uw gezin en uzelf & Toelichting)* was delivered to every home – 3.3 million in all. It explained what to do in the event of a nuclear attack. The overarching theme of this PR campaign, directed by the Minister of the Interior, was to counter the widespread pessimism that had taken root in the 1950s. The general public needed to be convinced that self-protection was worthwhile. But the Dutch brochure, which suggested that a nuclear war could be fought and survived, was not well received.¹⁶ Similar national charm offensives to protect citizens took place in Denmark, Sweden, Belgium and Germany. Following the brutal Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Netherlands has recognized that European security is once again being directly challenged by another state, and as a result has revived municipal interest in local bomb shelters. In many cases their exact location and current condition is unknown, sometimes even the key is lost...

The most exclusive of these underground shelters were the emergency bases for critical administrative and infrastructure departments. Some twenty large bunkers were built, most of

¹⁵ 'Koude Oorlog in een mergelgrot', *Andere Tijden* series, tinyurl.com/5ysu4chf (accessed 21 November 2024); 'De geheime NAVO-bunker', *Andere Tijden* series, tinyurl.com/37dwpjxu (accessed 21 November 2024); *Cannerbos en NAVO-hoofdkwartier*, tinyurl.com/3wy3jd4b (accessed 21 November 2024).

¹⁶ K. Bosma, *Shelter City: Protecting Citizens Against Air Raids*, Amsterdam 2012, pp. 358–378.



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The main advice in the government's 1961 PR campaign was: 'Take shelter under the stairs at home or under your desk at work'. Source: Ministry of the Interior

Główna rada w kampanii rządowej z 1961 roku brzmiała: „Schronić się pod schodami w domu lub pod biurkiem w pracy”. Źródło: Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych

which survive, including the Central Government Emergency Base.¹⁷ This fallout shelter was intended for members of the Dutch Cabinet and a limited number of civil servants; up to a total of 150 people. Codenamed *Nachtwacht* (Night Watch), this emergency base was designed in 1969 by the Civilian Defence Office and built deep beneath the Ministry of Finance in The Hague. The shelter has two levels, with suspended shock-absorbing floors, a command centre, a hospital wing, rooms that doubled as bedrooms and offices, and a Faraday shield made of steel plates to block electromagnetic pulses.

In addition to all of this, the shelter also housed an emergency studio for radio and television broadcasts and a secret telephone and telex network for communication with civilian command posts and the NATO satellite ground station at Schoonhoven. With its unusual technology and highly specific layout and function, this government bunker is something of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Shaped by a single design philosophy, it was unified in its furnishings, colour and decoration. Careful thought went into every threshold, handle and doorway. The thick steel doors were made to withstand nuclear and gas attacks, although none of the emergency bases could survive a direct hit. The Central Government Real Estate Agency, which manages the site, is now planning to open the still fully intact Government Emergency Base to the interested public, revealing a secret underground world.

It was a strange and secret parallel underground world created at that time. When life above ground became impossible, the business of government could be carried on underground for two, possibly three weeks. Or so it was thought. In retrospect, we know that life in that underworld was barely tolerable. And in any case, once the nation's leaders had used up all the drinking water, emergency rations and fresh air, and were ready to leave their bunker, the world aboveground would be in ruins; an apocalyptic urban landscape. Fortunately, this never happened.¹⁸

¹⁷ The Cold War working group of the Dutch Cultural Heritage Agency published a report (K. van Leeuwen, *In geval van nood. Ondergrondse noodzetels voor de rijksoverheid tijdens de Koude Oorlog*, [s.l.] 2020, tinyurl.com/2kt7e2ut [accessed 21 November 2024]) and launched a video on YouTube (*In geval van nood. Ondergrondse noodzetels voor de rijksoverheid tijdens de Koude Oorlog*, tinyurl.com/8mfkyaus [accessed 21 November 2024]). See also: *Ondergrondse bunkers Koude Oorlog in beeld gebracht*, tinyurl.com/28zhv2zy (accessed 21 November 2024).

¹⁸ D. van Lente, 'A Transnational History of Popular Images and Narratives of Nuclear Technologies in the First Two Postwar Decades' and 'Nuclear Power, World Politics, and a Small Nation: Narratives and Counter-narratives in the Netherlands', both in: *The Nuclear Age in Popular Media. A Transnational History 1945–1965*, ed. D. van Lente, New York 2012, pp. 1–17; 149–173.



11 Command centre at the government's emergency base in The Hague, built in the early 1970s. Photo: B. Sorgedrager

Centrum dowodzenia w rządowej bazie ratunkowej w Hadze, zbudowanej na początku lat 70. XX wieku. Fot. B. Sorgedrager

12 Detail camera of the prime minister in the *Night Watch* emergency bunker. Photo: E. Gol

Szczegółowa kamera premiera w awaryjnym bunkrze Nocnej Straży. Fot. E. Gol

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Cold War heritage of the Netherlands represents a unique and significant chapter of recent history that is in danger of being forgotten. The secret defence lines, bunkers and military installations that were once at the centre of global tensions are now in danger of disappearing from the landscape and public memory. Yet these sites, such as the Rhine-IJssel Defence Line, the NATO headquarters at Cannerberg and the *Night Watch* bunker, are invaluable material witnesses to a time when the threat of nuclear war loomed large. They embody

not only the technological and military strategies of the Cold War, but also the fears, anxieties and geopolitical complexities of the era. Protecting and preserving these sites as national monuments is essential, not only to honour the historical significance of this period, but also to ensure that future generations understand the delicate balance of global power that shaped the second half of the 20th century. These sites are not just relics of the past; they are reminders of the fragile peace that defined the Cold War and the enduring importance of vigilance in preserving history.

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Historyk specjalizujący się w stosunkach międzynarodowych w XX wieku. Obecnie pracuje jako kierownik programu ds. dziedzictwa wojskowego w Agencji Dziedzictwa Kulturowego holenderskiego Ministerstwa Edukacji, Kultury i Nauki (www.cultureelerfgoed.nl).

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