

[In 2000 the historian Dr. Cordula Tollmien was commissioned by the city of Göttingen to explore the history of forced labour in the city during the Nazi period. The translated title of the [project homepage](#) is **Göttingen City Archives Cordula Tollmien Project on Forced Labourers**. The account below records the experiences of a young Dutch medical student [Lambert Peter Muskens](#) (see detail at right, from photograph below) who was forced to work in the Anatomy Institute of Göttingen University. The text was translated from German by Brian Freeman; most links below are to other pages of the project.]



Forced labour: Lambert Peter Muskens

Born 27/08/1925 in Moergestel (The Netherlands), died 28.6.2011 in Rekken (The Netherlands); Deportation May 1943, Bad Lauterberg City Hospital; from June 1943 Göttingen University Hospital; arrested by the Gestapo early October 1943; 10 days at a camp in Hildesheim, then back to Göttingen.

Memoirs, January 2003

Lambert Peter Muskens, born 27.08.1925, was one of the Dutch medical students who had to work in the Göttingen University hospital because they refused to sign the [oath of loyalty](#) to Germany. Whereas most of the Dutch students who came to Göttingen in May 1943, had to work in the Flakzeugamt [anti-aircraft artillery arsenal], a small group entered the hospitals attached to Göttingen University (as Cees Louwarse described in his [diary](#), both groups maintained close contact with each other). Lambert Muskens arrived in Göttingen a month after the others because originally he was allocated to the municipal hospital in Bad Lauterberg. On 25 Jan. 2003 he wrote a long letter to Cordula Tollmien (in response to previous questions), which - along with additional comments from a second letter dated 18 Feb. 2003 - is worth quoting here at length. The letters are extraordinary documents based on much reflection (also about the person himself), characterized by the effort to ensure accuracy and nuance, as well as justice, even toward the Germans. The portions of the letter, which are responses to the questions I [C.T.] asked, were modified in a few places to highlight connections; some minor errors were also corrected in the German in order to avoid misunderstandings.



Lambert Muskens (at far left of photograph) in a group of Dutch medical students, all of whom had to do forced labour in Göttingen.

(Photograph - see Sources: courtesy of Dr. C. Tollmien - www.zwangsarbeit-in-goettingen.de)

"Dear Ms. Tollmien,
[...]

Over the past six weeks, I have of course thought much about it (I have nothing else to do!) and I have even had dreams about this time, 60 years ago. Firstly I want to let you know (because you showed concern that I was not damaged psychologically) that I have no "post-war trauma".

Secondly, I need to tell you that many "truths/facts" have vanished from my memory, and what remains above all are the emotional memories of encounters with people.

Specifically, I noticed that so little remains of spatial impressions. For example: every day for several years I went on foot from Goßlerstraße to the Anatomical Institute (near the railway station) and the only clear memory that I have is that I often stopped at the corner of "SA-street" [Weenderstraße - C.T.] in order to read the Wehrmacht reports that were pasted up there. The orientation with respect to the compass points is not clear to me. So I have only very patchy and - who knows? - even false (?) memories.

The reason for our "visit" to Germany was the fact that at the end of 1942, the German occupation authorities demanded that Dutch students sign an "[oath of loyalty](#)" regarding the activity of the occupiers. If one refused to sign, one had to report for work in Germany - otherwise one's parents would be arrested.

At the time I was 17 years old and had just begun to study medicine. My brother (19) was studying chemical technology - and, along with many others, we reported to the German authorities and were transported to a concentration camp in the province of Drenthe and then by train to a camp in Watenstedt (via Braunschweig). This camp was actually a collection of numbered barracks. One section of the camp, surrounded by a prickly hedge [= barbed wire fence - C.T.], was called [Camp 21](#) - it was a prison camp. However we were put into an open part of the camp. There we were "sorted" according to our usefulness for different sorts of jobs. A large number (like my brother) stayed on in this camp. The foreign workers for the "Hermann Göring Werke" [Reichswerke Hermann Göring - C.T.] and for the "Stahlwerke Braunschweig" [Braunschweig Steel Company, which belonged to the Reichswerke Hermann Göring - C.T.] lived here. My brother had to haul metal tubes from the H.G.W. [Hermann Göring Werke]. I alone was sent to be an assistant at the Bad Lauterberg Municipal Hospital (the director was Dr. Timmer).

I slept in a single room in the tuberculosis barracks and after "work" I amused myself with young people from Russia and Ukraine who were also there. I had only one concern: I had been a smoker since the age of 15 and so I went to the "administration" and requested a "smoker's card". The man burst out laughing and said to me "Want me to tie up your pants as well" [a saying, referring to a child's pants with drawstring] - to which I angrily retorted by asking him if the Germans abducted children from their homes - and then he was no longer amused.

I was also annoyed by a nurse who, every time we met, greeted me with a raised arm and "Heil Hitler". I told her that she knew full well that I was not German. Finally, I once got into conversation with a small group of people. They were talking about something, which I will never forget, that the Jews were guilty of something or other and that fortunately they would be arrested. I then aired the view that, although the position of the Germans happens to be as it is now, by the end of the war the roles would probably be reversed and they would be going to prison instead of the Jews.

These three incidents were the reason for my deportation from the beautiful Harz Mountains. [Lambert Muskens was sent to Göttingen in June 1943 - C.T.]

From these small stories one might conclude that I was a hero, or at least acted as a hero would have done, but it was quite different: I was very inexperienced and reckless; in a nutshell, I was stupid.

Actually I was scared, but my biggest fear was that my emotions would get the better of me and lead to "treasonous" behaviour.

My deportation to Germany occurred sometime in May 1943; a few days later I was in Bad Lauterberg and a month later I was required to attend the Gestapo precinct office in Bad Herzberg. I still remember that Alex K. (from Werchojansk) showed me the way there early one morning. The Gestapo were not friendly; I was threatened with this and that, and finally was sent to the employment office at Osterode with a "referral". On the way I read in the referral that the Labour Office was proposing to send me to work in the limekiln plant in Herzberg. It occurred to me that there was no friendly intent behind that transfer, so I kept the referral paper in my pocket. The official greeted me warmly and I told him that I was from Holland and wanted to work in a medical facility. He said that he had worked for seven years in Maassluis and offered me a cigarette - and so he will forever remain a friend in my memory!

Because the nuns at the Duderstadt Hospital did not respond to his phone call, I ended up at the University Curatorium in Göttingen. There I was appointed as an "assistant" in the Anatomy department and was quartered with my colleagues - known to you - in the department of Ophthalmology, Goßlerstraße 12. Later we were all relocated to the upper floor (6th floor) of the Pathology department, at Number 10 [Goßlerstraße].

We received money for our work, being listed on the payroll as nurse, salaried staff or auxiliary staff. How the money reached us, I do not know. Food and linen came from the central kitchen of the clinics. I know for sure that we got money because we often went to the cinema or to the opera house, and on a few occasions we were able to travel: I visited my brother in Goslar, where we went on a nice walk in Okertal. Once when we were all together, we went to Kassel, where our colleague Jan Sl. was in hospital with a serious heart problem caused by diphtheria [Jan Sl. was sent home as an invalid on 21.01.1943 - C.T.].

In the Anatomy department I was assigned to the prosector, Mr Julius Treibe [Treiber - B.F.], a very quiet, friendly, short, thin man with a large ulcer on his leg, which he made a big fuss about every now and then by dragging off the bandage. It was only later that I understood why he did it! Mr Treiber did not burden me heavily with work and we had frequent discussions. After my experience in Harz I was more cautious. An example of a conversation that I recall went as follows:

T: I love music; you also, Mr. M.?

M: Yes, me too, Mr T. (We named various composers).

M: Felix Mendelsohn is one who has composed beautiful music, Mr T.

T: Yes, but you must realise, Mr. M., that although he has produced some nice music it is not original, he stole it from another, from a German composer.

M: Oh is that so, Mr. T.

This conversation demonstrates how carefully we sussed each other out.

Professor Blechschmidt [Head of Anatomy - C.T.] was quite a "nice person". It seemed that he wanted to project himself this way and that wanted to make it obvious to me. My main job was making teaching models of embryos and parts thereof. They were used in the lecture theatre. He also asked me to be present at the lectures, which however brought me into conflict with my fear of behaving in a way that would mark me as treasonous.

Additional work: On several occasions I had to help Mr Treiber and this resulted in my first gruesome experience with cadavers; mostly I was assisting with Mr Treiber's "shortcut" work [referring to sawing the body into parts - C.T.]. It was even more gruesome when (1 x per week?) a big car arrived from the prison at Wolfenbüttel. The vehicle contained "beheaded" bodies. Each time I had to inspect the dead in order to be sure that my brother was not among them (Wolfenbüttel is not far from Watenstedt!).

Most cadavers from Wolfenbüttel arrived guillotined. Sporadically some were sent with gunshot wounds. On the very day following the liberation [the US Army arrived in Göttingen on 8th April 1945 – B.F.], I was showing the rubble of the mortuary of the **anatomy building** to an American medical officer. [The *Theatrum Anatomicum* was destroyed by an American bomber on April 7, 1945 – B.F.]. To his mind, everything was legal because in Germany guillotining was the official way to carry out the death penalty. In the last year of the war I had frequent contact with some Göttingen medical students. Two of them (Rudolf D. and Franz Sch.) were once sent from the Anatomy department to Wolfenbüttel for special handling [of the cadaver] directly after death. The two told me of their shock, the conversation ending with Rudolf saying "heads must roll for victory", a phlegmatic parody of "wheels must...."



Theatrum Anatomicum, Göttingen (formerly in Bahnhofstraße at the end of Goethe-Allee)
(Photograph courtesy SUB Göttingen)

As I said, Professor Blechschmidt had a clear grasp of my situation, although he - like all the others - was cautious. In the beginning of October 1943, two men showed up from the Göttingen Gestapo, one was the "boss" and his name was Kerl. Professor Blechschmidt came with the two men into my workroom; he was clearly embarrassed. The men had been trying to track me down for half a year. Professor Blechschmidt told me this and also that he had told them that I was harmless and that he could not do without my work.

The Gestapo took me in a car with barred windows to Hildesheim, along with two Polish girls and two young Frenchmen. I was accidentally carrying seven "illegal" letters on me, and I ripped them into small portions and swallowed them. When my stomach started complaining, I threw the remaining shreds through the window grill.



*Remnants of columns in ruins of anatomy building in 1952;
the site is now the Bus Interchange in front of Göttingen railway station.*
(Photograph by Georg Benno Gruber, pathologist, 1884 - 1977; courtesy SUB Göttingen)

[In response to a subsequent question, Lambert Muskens added later: I do not know where these letters came from and where they were to be sent; in any case they were for other Dutch people and I did not know the contents and therefore considered them, the way I saw it, as potentially dangerous. In Göttingen the Gestapo had not yet searched my belongings. I was in the Gestapo office for only a short time; various prisoners were being herded into a fairly small prison car - and then the car took off for Hildesheim. Only en route did I realize that the contents of my pockets would come to light. And that this would happen in the Gestapo office at Hildesheim.]

We arrived at a Gestapo "pre-camp" and there my "case" was handled by Mr Glorian, who dismissed me after ten days. The ritual of dismissal also included the signing of a protocol, to the effect that I was sorry that I had behaved so subversively and that, next time, it would be a real Gestapo education camp (probably the camp in [Liebenau](#)). Like all the other "narratives" this protocol ended with "Heil Hitler", beneath which I was expected to sign my name. I was terror-struck because signing would be such a treacherous act. I had to refuse. To my astonishment, Mr Glorian let it go. He gave me back my things, and a travel permit for Göttingen.

The camp in Hildesheim was relatively small (about 60 prisoners). The food was pathetic and the hygiene indescribable. My hair was shaved; my protest attracted the attention of the camp's subleader (a Pole) who had a large stick, which is why I quickly yielded to him. The "Head-Kapo" was a Russian, he got his kicks chasing the prisoners out of the barracks early in the morning while it was still dark; you then had to pass through a doorway to get to the muster area. Nothing happened to the first ones through, but all those who followed received a wack on the head with a stick, and the later you got there, the heavier the blow. The Russian was a stupid man. I concluded that the Pole was a sadist from the fact that he was probably busy all day long torturing rabbits housed in a cage near the barbed wire. Also because he thrashed two French boys in the presence of two aggressive dogs. The camp leader was a German - a somewhat older man who always appeared to be quite calm. I observed no bad behaviour on his part; on the contrary, the following event comes to my mind: Our daily work was to load by hand a farm cart with blast furnace slag; then we all had to push the cart up a sloping path,

and then offload the slag into a railway wagon. During this work I once collapsed from exhaustion. Someone threw me a piece of bread and then the camp leader arrived with a wheelbarrow and ordered me to follow him with this barrow. He went into the kitchen while I had to wait outside; he came back with a big package of sandwiches for me - that's touching, is not it? But I was - and am - convinced that this separation of roles between Germans and foreigners, at whatever level, is played out over and over again. Also, it was always the case that the treatment and living conditions of the "[Eastern workers](#)" were much worse than ours. Later this became more noticeable because our speech gradually improved to the extent that some people even thought we came from the Rhineland. [Following some additional questions, Lambert Muskens explained: I do not know the name of the camp in Hildesheim, nor do I know where it was or for which organization it was operating. Concerning the last point: I always thought that the material we had to carry was blast furnace slag and that it was near a railway line, so maybe that's another clue?

I can certainly answer your last question: Yes, we knew that [Liebenau](#) was the name of a penal camp. With your indulgence, the following story explains why I am so sure of this: There were two chaps living in our apartment, both of whom worked in the hospital boiler room, namely a Dutchman Joep K. [not a student - C.T.] and a Frenchman, Robert D. [not a student - C.T.]. They got on well, but neither understood the other's language. Sometimes the lack of comprehension was hilariously counterbalanced by always-loud-in-the-ear-shouting between them (each in his own language). One morning I witnessed Robert trying to get Joep (pronounced 'Jupp') out of bed, lest he got to work too late: "Joep, Kraanse" (Mr. Kranz was the boss of the boiler room). Joep remained reluctant until the trump of trumps: "Joep, Liebenau!!", then Joep leapt out of bed].

[In the Göttingen Municipal Archives (Göttingen Police Report, File 124 No. 2, Bl. 561) there is a report stating that, on 25.11.1944 following the [bombing of November 23, 1944](#), four Dutch persons - including Lambert Muskens - "were loitering without reason in the damaged areas". On February 26 the four were summoned to do community service work and their passports withheld until the work was finished. The work they had to do is not stated. Lambert Muskens replied to a question from C.T. concerning this as follows]: I can't remember anything about it, I must have forgotten. But concerning contact with the police, I can give you accounts of two experiences:

In 1944 I was assigned to emergency duties; that meant that with each night-raid alarm I had to go to the canteen in the sports grounds (on the opposite side of Goßlerstraße) to wait there if I were needed. The alarms were too frequent for me and one night I just wanted to sleep, so I stayed in bed. Then from behind the house came a series of bombs, right across Goßlerstraße. You could hear the whistle and then the explosion. They came closer and I decided to get up. Just as I was straightening up, I heard "my" bomb whistling over me. But there was no detonation, and then the next bomb exploded, showering me with window shards. The next day, a group of prisoners had to dig up the unexploded bomb directly in front of "our" building. One of the prisoners was Roger M., who also lived with us; he was in police custody on account of some (non-political) criminal act.

I came into contact with the police on a second occasion: every year we (all foreigners) received a letter from the police commander requesting that we report to the police station the next day "for a consultation". There we were told how beautiful life was in the Waffen-SS [armed wing of the SS] and how by joining, we could save ourselves a heap of misery. After this religious instruction we had to enter a room individually where a Dutch Waffen-SS man would be sitting alongside

a policeman. We were pressured to join up. Of course most of us refused and then the threats started, including being sent to an "armaments factory in Hannover" (where we knew there was intense bombing).

I was in Göttingen until after the war. I think that the Americans arrived in Göttingen on May 8 [April 8 - C.T.]. There was no fighting; it was described as an "open city". Only one grenade was thrown into a church tower, probably against a "sniper". Shortly after that I went to work at the "HQ **8th Armored Div**, 3rd US Army" for the "Town Major" stationed at the Hotel zur Krone [see postcard photograph below; the 8th Armored Division was in command in Göttingen from 25 Apr 1945 to 5 Jun 1945]. I was an interpreter, especially for people who had all sorts of questions when they were required to report to the "orderly room". Another category of people who also had to register was: SS and Gestapo. I thought the wheel had turned full circle when Mr. Kerl and his companion had to report. I received him politely and referred him on to the relevant department.



Hotel zur Krone, Weenderstraße, Göttingen

A few days later my brother came to see me. Towards the end of 1944 he had fled from Watenstedt, managing to arrive in one piece at our parents' place. The southern part of Holland was liberated shortly afterwards and Gerard accompanied the Canadians as an interpreter on the campaign to Oldenburg, after which he came on to Göttingen. I got a short vacation and we went home together. Then I went back [to Göttingen] again. When the Americans advanced on Munich, I joined them, but then returned [to Göttingen] because there was nothing for me to do in Munich. Then I started doing the same job for the "Scottish Regiment Royal Artillery 405" and later moved further north with them. In December 1945 I took my leave in Cuxhaven and travelled home. The date on my "Municipal Registration Card" is therefore incorrect [the registration card notes that Lambert Muskens had already left Göttingen in January 1945 - C.T.].

I remember that on the day before the liberation I was sent to deliver a message to the new house of Professor Blechschmidt (the address was: Am Weißen Steine 18). His wife Traute-Marie offered me (a great deal of) white wine and I had to get away quickly as my legs were giving way beneath me.

In relation to the above, I wish to report that I received a German pension when I reached 65. At this age, I had a visit from an official [Dutch] who asked me where I was working during the war. He then approached the German authorities with the aim of obtaining a retirement pension for me. Now you will understand why the German authorities have denied some of my dates! [Lambert Muskens is referring to the false statement on the Municipal Registration Card - C.T.]

At the end of 1945 I returned to my studies in Utrecht and tried to catch up on something from the three lost years. By May 1951 I was a doctor and until the summer of 1953 I was a health officer. From 1953 to 1957 I worked at the Utrecht Institute of Medical Physiology, obtaining a doctorate with a dissertation in neurophysiology. I graduated in 1962 after training in neurology and psychiatry in Wassenaas (Ursula Clinic) and finally worked as a neurologist in Eindhoven, Vlaardingen and Winterswijk.

A few observations:

What strikes me is that there are actually two stories here: one is about the facts and the "adventure" - the one you probably want to know about - and the other is about my personal experiences and my development. And these are two very different stories. - If one were to ask me what was actually the worse aspect of this period, then I would say: The loss of an important part of my youth - and not much else.

The students in the university hospitals had intensive contact with their fellow students who were deported to do forced labour in the Göttingen [Flakzeugamt](#)."

Sources

Letter and email from Lambert Muskens (born 27.8.1925) on 25.1.2003 and 18.2.2003, Stadtarchiv Göttingen, Sammlung 32-Tollmien.

Photograph of Johann K. B., born 16.11.1922, Stadtarchiv Göttingen, Sammlung 32-Tollmien.

Photographs of Anatomy Institute, Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen.