

Inspector Rex's History Snippet #23

What did Kaiser Wilhelm do after World War 1?

Peter Broadmore

Former Editor / Speechwriter/Public Affairs Analyst (1967–1981)

What did the Kaiser do in exile after WW1?

He seems to have spent most of his days cutting and stacking firewood at Huis Doorn, the 60-acre estate he purchased in the Netherlands after his abdication. It must have been difficult with only one functioning arm, but if nothing else, it was strenuous exercise.



Wilhelm II in 1908 (Philippe A. Lazlo)

The Dutch weren't terribly impressed by his preferred fitness regime. Between 1926–29, he managed to cut down more than 17,000 trees on his estate, leaving large areas looking like a landscape on the Western Front. Of course, he did have a little help, from his gardeners and woodsmen.

He also spent time smoking cigarettes, walking his dogs and feeding his ducks, fairly banal occupations for someone who had triggered a war that killed more than 40 million people. Motoring was one of his favourite pastimes and he had learned how to sail during pre-war visits with his English cousins. Unfortunately, he wasn't allowed near a boat and his touring opportunities were limited. His movements were restricted to a 30-kilometre radius of Doorn.



Huis Doorn... Netherlands

He sought permission to return to Germany but was refused. On the other hand, Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands also refused to turn him over to the Allies who would surely have tried him for war crimes.

He flirted with National Socialism before finally coming to the conclusion that Hitler was a danger to Germany and the German people.

During a magazine interview in 1938, he observed of Der Führer...

"There is a man alone, without family, without children, without God...He builds legions but he doesn't build a nation. A nation is created by families, a religion, tradition: it is made up out of the hearts of mothers, the wisdom of fathers, the joy and the exuberance of children. [Of Germany under Hitler he said]...an all-swallowing State, disdainful of human dignities and the ancient structure of our race, sets itself up in place of everything else. And the man who, alone, incorporates in himself this whole State, has neither a God to honour nor a dynasty to conserve, nor a past to consult...

For a few months, I was inclined to believe in National Socialism. I thought of it as a necessary fever. And I was gratified to see that there were, associated with it for a time, some of the wisest and most outstanding Germans. But these, one by one, he has got rid of or even killed...He has left nothing but a bunch of shirted gangsters...

This man could bring home victories to our people each year without bringing them...glory...But of our Germany, which was a nation of poets and musicians and artists and soldiers, he has made a nation of hysterics and hermits, engulfed in a mob and led by a thousand liars or fanatics..."

Kaiser Wilhelm finally died in June 1941 of a pulmonary embolism. He was 82. Despite his last wishes, an entire platoon of Nazi dignitaries showed up at his funeral. He was laid to rest in a private mausoleum on the grounds of his estate.



The tomb of Kaiser Wilhelm II, King of Prussia and Emperor of Germany