

Espelkamp Is Where Hopes Are Reborn And Dreams Rekindled

Espelkamp was saved by stubbornness and disobedience. When you walk its streets you should offer up a little thanks that some people just won't do what they are told. Then, like the locals, stop and offer up a toast to one Major Küppers, who bravely decided **not** to blow up the town on March 28th, 1945.

The original Espelkamp was just a shadow of itself at that point. It had been an agricultural village for more than 700 years, but had dwindled down to less than 1,000.

Starting in 1938, the army hid a whole new town away in the woods...

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It wasn't properly a town in those days — it was a massive munitions and attack gas production compound. But it had all the roots of a real town, and they worked for years to make it a habitable environment.

When it was nearly complete, the war was almost over. Hence, Major Küppers' decision to ignore the command to ignore what he had spent years building up.

On April 4th, 1945 it was turned over intact to the Allies. It was a neat little town... just empty. Yet today it has more than 25,000 inhabitants. You walk the streets and things look new, but not so new that you wouldn't think it all hadn't been there for years. So where did Espelkamp find its people?

All over Europe at that point were broken hearts, smashed hopes, and people just looking for a

safe place to start over. What better place than a new but empty town? The call went out, the people came in, and the rest is history.

Yet you don't just have to marvel at the unique history of the place. The locals here have really cared about making their shell town into a real place with a vibrant community. They've done tons of parks and arts development, and grown over to take in the historical buildings of the old village as well.

You can visit the nearby Elle castle with its moat, or see the Rudolf Weber Sculptors Symposium on display every summer in the town park.

The Film Festival is a regional leader, and the freshly redone theater has an ambitious annual schedule.

Also, if you are in town the last full weekend in September, don't miss the town cultural days festivities — the locals are proud to be here and proud to host you as well! ;-)