



The prisoner of war camp **Stalag VIII A Görlitz**



**Didactic Guide
for Historical-Political
Educational Work
at the Stalag VIII A Memorial Site**

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for Historical-Political
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at the Stalag VIII A Memorial Site**

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Memory Messiaen e.V., 2022

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Foreword

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Teachers, Dear Students, Dear Readers,

This publication “The Prisoner of War Camp Stalag VIII A Görlitz. Didactic Guide for Historical-Political Educational Work at the Stalag VIII A Memorial Site” is intended, as the title suggests, to provide you with support in planning and preparing your visit to our memorial site.

The content of this booklet is divided into three parts. In the first part you will find introductory information about the events of World War II that are relevant for a successful visit to the Stalag VIII A memorial. You can use this as an introduction but also as a repetition for preparation in class.

In the second part, detailed information on the prisoner of war camp Stalag VIII A is provided in the context of the entire prisoner of war camp system in the Third Reich, but also in relation to our region and Görlitz.

The third part was developed to work with individual biographies of prisoners of war from Stalag VIII A who were brought to the camp from many countries all around the world. We know from experience that personal perspectives and fates are particularly well suited for working with young people.

For each chapter, you will find three questions that allow the students to immerse themselves in the topic in three phases. The corresponding operators clearly define the work assignment and go from basic reproduction to transfer to reflection.

The guide also offers the possibility of working with it in the memorial itself, as it is adapted to our educational paths and both sources of information can be used in a complementary way, allowing for interactive work on the grounds of the former camp itself.

We wish you a successful preparation and look forward to welcoming you and your students to the memorial.

Lastly, we would like to express our deep gratitude to the families of the prisoners of war who suffered and died here in Stalag VIII A. For it is they who tell us about their fathers and grandfathers and hand over personal memories of them, which makes this kind of memorial work possible in the first place.

Alexandra Grochowski

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PART I

The Second World War

The prisoner of war system

The Geneva Convention

The Nazi propaganda



The Second World War

Two world wars took place during the 20th century, the First World War from 1914 to 1918 and the Second World War from 1939 to 1945. The term „world war“ comes from the fact that many states were involved in both wars and the theatres of war covered a large part of the world.

In 1920, still reeling from the experiences of the First World War, the international community had decided to found the **League of Nations** to secure world peace and cooperation among countries. The German Reich joined the League in 1926.

From 1933, the National Socialist German Workers' Party (**NSDAP**) under Adolf Hitler began to establish a totalitarian dictatorship in Germany. This was based on a nationalist, racist, and **fascist ideology**. Step by step, the National Socialist state intervened in all areas of social life and instituted persecution against various groups of their population (e.g. Jews, homosexuals, people with disabilities). Germany withdrew from the League of Nations that same year and began arming its military, thus quietly breaking the **Versailles Peace Treaty** of 1919, which had imposed severe limitations on the German military.

On 1 September 1939, Germany attacked its neighbour Poland without officially declaring war, which was a violation of generally accepted international law. The war had been planned and prepared by the Germans for a long time. From the very start, since his appointment as Reich Chancellor, Hitler had intended to obtain „living space for the German people in the East“. This was not only about conquering territory, but also about suppressing and even extermination of people and destruction of ideologies that did not correspond to the National Socialist world view. The war was also internationally perceived as a retaliatory strike against the victorious powers of the First World War.

The longer the war lasted, the more states joined. Besides the European continent, the theatres of war also encompassed North Africa and the Pacific. In total, more than **110 million people** took part in the war as soldiers. The exact number of casualties is difficult to estimate - it is believed to be between 60 and 80 million. Many people did not only die because of battles or of their immediate consequences, but also because of targeted extermination, i.e. they were killed with a plan and intent.

The League of Nations was a precursor of the United Nations (UN). This organisation was established with the aim of securing peace through the arbitration of international conflicts.

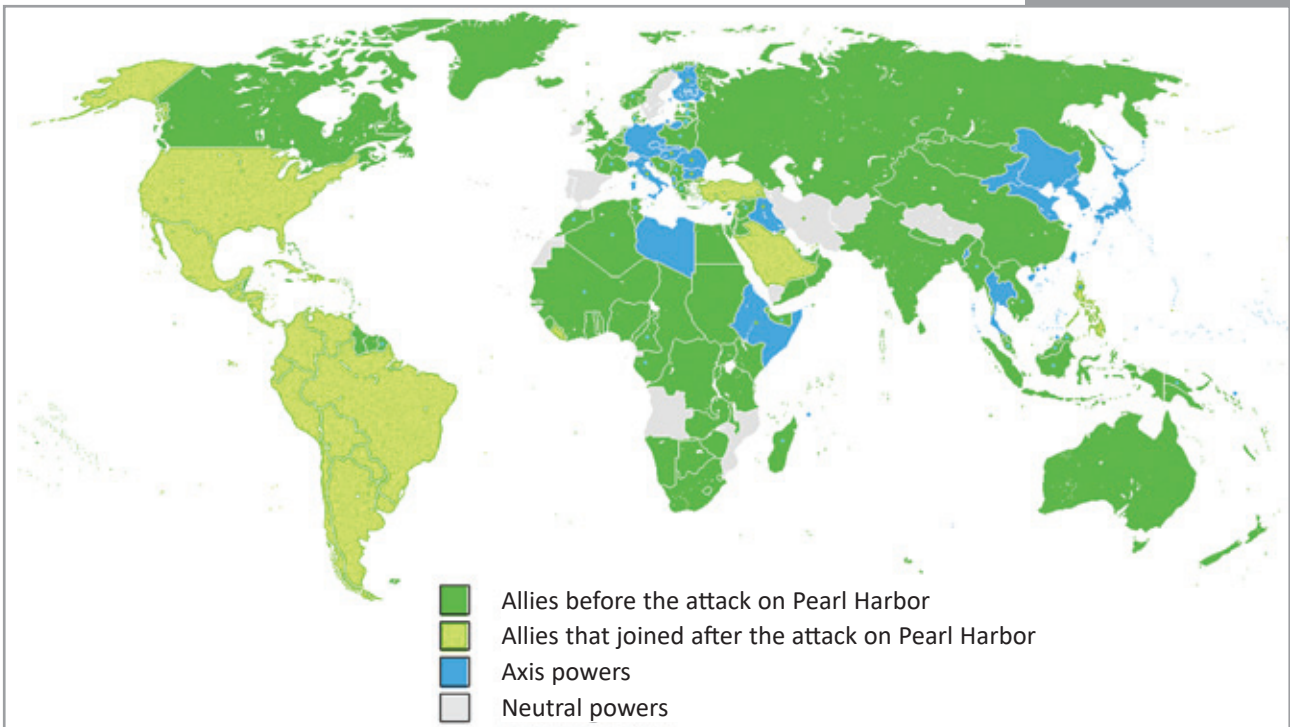
Find out more about Nazi propaganda on page 12.

The term „fascism“ originated in Italy and refers to a political system in which only one ideology and worldview is in force. In a fascist state, therefore, there can only be one party and one leader.

The Peace Treaty of Versailles or Treaty of Versailles was the key treaty to end the First World War. Among other issues, it also provided for the establishment of the League of Nations.

These numbers are hard to imagine and therefore it might be hard to understand what the war meant for an individual person. On pages 38–46 you can find a few personal stories of POW and their fates.

1. Describe the stages leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War.
2. Explain the geopolitical situation in 1939 with special reference to the major and colonial powers.
3. Compare at least two competing states and their respective ideologies or systems in the 1930s.



Map of the nations involved in the Second World War. Svenskbygderna, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons



Warsaw Old Town, 1945. About 85% of the entire city was destroyed during and after the Warsaw uprising by Nazi Germany. Source unknown

The prisoner of war camp system

The Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht replaced the War Ministry from 1938 and was directly subordinated to Adolf Hitler.

The planning of POW camps began as early as 1938 and was part of Germany's war preparations. The **High Command of the Wehrmacht** (Armed forces) was tasked, among other things, with organising and establishing POW camps and preparing the use of POW labour in the event of war. This was being done without the knowledge of the German public or the international community. They established the so-called „Wehrmacht Auskunftstelle für Kriegerverluste und Kriegsgefangene“ (Wehrmacht Information Centre for Casualties and Prisoners of War) just before the start of the war. It was to conduct registration of all prisoners of war in accordance with the Geneva Convention.

The camp system was based on the division of the German Reich into military districts, each of which was in charge of setting up POW camps and registering of prisoners of war in its respective area. In the course of the war, the annexed or occupied territories were also divided into military districts. Today, it is assumed that there were around 1,000 POW camps in total.

Ratification means integrating an international legal text (e.g. a treaty) into one's own legal system (e.g. the German legal system). Only after ratification does the law begin to have effect.

The German Reich had signed and **ratified** the Geneva Convention in 1929. The prisoner-of-war system was based on internationally recognised regulations, anchored in the Convention. Among other things, it concerned at least a minimum level of equipment in the camps to ensure human dignity, the manner in which prisoners of war should be transported, their clothing and food, as well as sanitary facilities, medical care, and work assignments.

However, not all parts of the Geneva Convention were equally respected by Germany or applied to all prisoners of war. For example, the ban on work assignments in the armaments industry was circumvented or broken.

In addition to controlling captured enemy soldiers, the German prisoner of war system was also intended to provide labour that the German economy lacked in wartime. Each camp therefore had numerous smaller sub-camps that housed prisoners who were on labour duty outside the main camp. The prisoners of Stalag VIII A, for example, were used as **labourers** in many Lower Silesian locations. That means, the POW system consisted of a network of camps and work sites throughout the German Reich and its occupied territories.

You can find out more about forced labour and the different kinds of jobs prisoners of war had to do on page 26.

1. Who was imprisoned in Stalag VIII A?
2. Explain how the Stalags functioned and their significance within the camp system of the German Reich.
3. Explain and give reasons why the Geneva Convention was partly respected and partly disregarded by Germany.



Map of the military districts of the Third Reich during the Second World War. Unknown author, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons



Life under the open sky. The hygienic conditions among the approximately 32,000 prisoners reported for August 1941 in the Zeithain camp near Riesa were catastrophic. Provisional latrines and no facilities for personal hygiene led to the spread of diseases

The Geneva Convention

International humanitarian law includes all intergovernmental agreements and regulations that aim to protect people, infrastructure and the environment in the event of war or armed conflict.

The Battle of Solferino is considered one of the cruelest war events of the 19th century, which claimed many lives. Most of the soldiers did not die during the fighting, but in the aftermath, suffering from injuries, poor hygiene and lack of food.

Over time, more and more countries signed the convention and eventually there were 57 signatories from around the world.

Find out more about the Soviet prisoners of war on page 24.

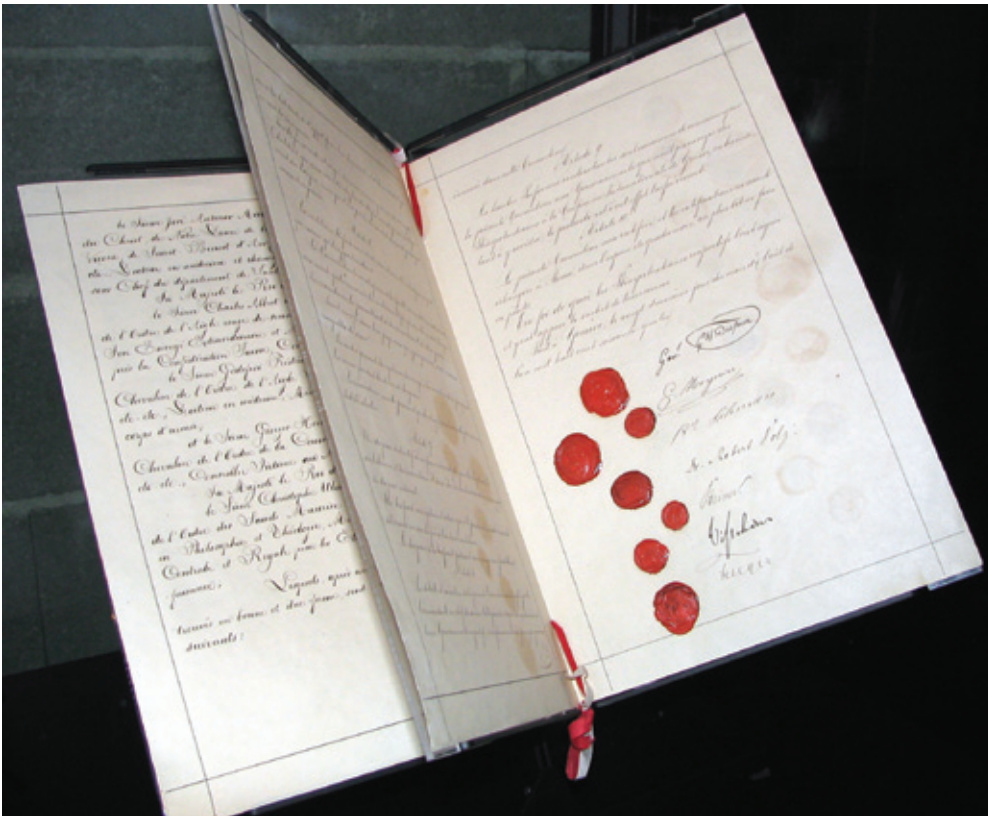
The Geneva Convention is an international agreement that forms the basis of **international humanitarian law**. It sets out how people should be treated and protected during armed conflict and defines treatment of people who are not (or no longer) taking part in immediate action.

The first Geneva Convention came into being as early as 1864 and mainly concerned the care for wounded and sick military personnel. This first convention goes back to the Swiss entrepreneur and humanist, Henry Dunant. The suffering of the wounded soldiers he had observed in the **Battle of Solferino** affected him deeply. In his book “A Memory of Solferino” he advocated for the creation of aid organisations and in an effort to embody this idea he organised an international conference. Thus the first Geneva Convention was born, and signed by **fourteen states**, including Prussia. The same initiative gave rise to the International Committee of the Red Cross, the oldest international medical aid organisation, which at the same time functions as the controlling body for compliance with the Geneva Convention.

The Geneva Convention changed over time. In 1929, 49 states signed the “Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War”. The special feature of this document was that the signatory states undertook to treat all prisoners of war equally in accordance with the Convention’s rules, regardless of whether the prisoners came from one of the signatory states or not. Germany also signed the Convention. During the Second World War, however, it deliberately broke international law: not all prisoners in German POW camps were treated accordingly. This was especially true for **Soviet prisoners of war**.

Four Geneva Conventions dating from 1949 and three additional protocols are in force today. The Conventions protect wounded and sick military personnel on land and at sea, prisoners of war, and civilians.

1. Describe the objective of the current Geneva Convention.
2. Explain the role of the International Committee of the Red Cross and its importance for the Geneva Convention.
3. Discuss what kind of conditions must prevail for an international agreement such as the Geneva Convention to work.



Facsimiles of the original first Geneva Convention of 1864, donated to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum in Geneva, Switzerland. Photo: Kevin Quinn, Ohio, US – Flickr, CC BY 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=359407>

Articles of the Agreement on the Treatment of Prisoners of War 1929. From en:Reichsgesetzblatt – <http://alex.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/alex?aid=drb&datum=1934&page=282&size=45>, Public domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=46664569>

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| <p style="text-align: center;">Nr. 21 — Tag der Ausgabe: Berlin, den 30. April 1934</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Convention relative au traitement des prisonniers de guerre Du 27 Juillet 1929.</p> <p><i>Le Président du Reich Allemand, le Président des Etats-Unis d'Amérique, le Président Fédéral de la République d'Autriche, Sa Majesté le Roi des Belges, le Président de la République de Bolivie, le Président de la République des Etats-Unis du Brésil, Sa Majesté le Roi de Grande-Bretagne, d'Irlande et des Territoires Britanniques au delà des mers, Empereur des Indes, Sa Majesté le Roi des Bulgares, le Président de la République du Chili, le Président de la République de Chine, le Président de la République de Colombie, le Président de la République de Cuba, Sa Majesté le Roi de Danemark et d'Islande, le Président de la République Dominicaine, Sa Majesté le Roi d'Egypte, Sa Majesté le Roi d'Espagne, le Président de la République d'Estonie, le Président de la République de Finlande, le Président de la République Française, Son Altesse Sérénissime le Gouverneur de la Hongrie, Sa Majesté le Roi d'Italie, Sa Majesté l'Empereur du Japon, le Président de la République de Lettonie, Son Altesse Royale la Grande-Duchesse de Luxembourg, le Président des Etats-Unis du Mexique, le Président de la République de Nicaragua, Sa Majesté le Roi de Norvège, Sa Majesté la Reine des Pays-Bas, Sa Majesté Impériale le Shah de Perse, le Président de la République de Pologne, le Président de la République Portugaise, Sa Majesté le Roi de Roumanie, Sa Majesté le Roi des Serbes, Croates et Slovènes, Sa Majesté le Roi de Sum, Sa Majesté le Roi de Suède, le Conseil Fédéral Suisse, le Président de la République Tchécoslovaque, le Président de la République Turque, le Président de la République Orientale de l'Uruguay, le Président de la République des Etats-Unis de Venezuela,</i></p> <p>reconnaisant que, dans le cas extrême d'un guerre, il sera du devoir de toute Puissance d'en atténuer, dans la mesure du possible, les rigueurs inévitables et d'adoucir le sort des prisonniers de guerre ;</p> <p>désireux de développer les principes qui ont inspiré les conventions internationales de La Haye, en particulier la Convention concernant les lois et coutumes de la guerre et le Règlement qui y est annexé ;</p> <p>ont résolu de conclure une Convention à cet effet, et ont nommé pour leurs Plénipotentiaires, savoir :</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Le Président du Reich Allemand :</i> S. Exc. M. Edmund Rhombert, Dr. en Droit, Ministre en disponibilité ;</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">227</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(Übersetzung)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Abkommen über die Behandlung der Kriegs- gefangenen. Vom 27. Juli 1929.</p> <p>Der Deutsche Reichspräsident, der Präsident der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika, der Bundespräsident der Republik Österreich, Seine Majestät der König der Belgier, der Präsident der Republik Bolivien, der Präsident der Republik der Vereinigten Staaten von Brasilien, Seine Majestät der König von Großbritannien, Irland und der überseeischen Britischen Gende, Kaiser von Indien, Seine Majestät der König der Bulgaren, der Präsident der Republik Chile, der Präsident der Republik China, der Präsident der Republik Kolumbien, der Präsident der Republik Cuba, Seine Majestät der König von Dänemark und Island, der Präsident der Dominikanischen Republik, Seine Majestät der König von Spanien, Seine Majestät der König von Estland, der Präsident der Französischen Republik, der Präsident der Hellenischen Republik, Seine Durchlaucht der Reichserzherzog von Ungarn, Seine Majestät der König von Italien, Seine Majestät der Kaiser von Japan, der Präsident der Republik Lettland, Ihre königliche Hoheit die Großherzogin von Luxemburg, der Präsident der Vereinigten Staaten von Mexiko, der Präsident der Republik Nicaragua, Seine Majestät der König von Norwegen, Ihre Majestät die Königin der Niederlande, Seine Kaiserliche Majestät der Schah von Persien, der Präsident der Republik Polen, der Präsident der Portugiesischen Republik, Seine Majestät der König von Rumänien, Seine Majestät der König von Serbien, Kroaten und Slowenen, Seine Majestät der König von Siem, Seine Majestät der König von Schweden, der Schweizerische Bundesrat, der Präsident der Tschechoslowakischen Republik, der Präsident der Türkischen Republik, der Präsident der Republik östlich des Uruguay, der Präsident der Republik der Vereinigten Staaten von Venezuela,</p> <p>in der Erkenntnis, daß es Pflicht jeder Macht ist, im äußersten Falle eines Krieges dessen unvermeidliche Härte abzumildern und das Los der Kriegsgefangenen zu mildern,</p> <p>von dem Wunsch geleitet, die Grundsätze fortzuentwickeln, die bei internationalen Saager Abkommen, insbesondere dem Abkommen über die Gesetze und Gebräuche des Krieges und der ihm angefügten Ordnung zugrunde liegen,</p> <p>haben beschlossen, zu diesem Zweck ein Abkommen zu treffen und haben zu ihren Bevollmächtigten ernannt:</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">der Deutsche Reichspräsident: Herr Edmund Rhombert, Dr. jur., Gesandten z. D.;</p> |
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Reichsgesetzbl. 1934 II 60

Nazi propaganda

Propaganda is the term used to describe the attempt to deliberately influence people's thoughts, actions and feelings. In most cases, one speaks of propaganda when someone from a position of power tries to impose a certain political or ideological opinion to the broad population of a country in an organised way, i.e. intentionally and planned. The aim is to convince the population that the opinion conveyed by the propaganda is the only correct way to think and behave.

Propaganda is often based on disinformation or half-truths and appeals to people's emotions. It often refers to pre-existing, mostly negative feelings and prejudices existing in society about a certain group or political current.

Since Adolf Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor in January 1933, the Nazi government made targeted use of propaganda for its goals. The „Reich Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda“ under the direction of Joseph Goebbels came into being shortly after the Nazis took power. It immediately began taking over and **subordinating** the media **to the state (Gleichschaltung)**. The Nazi state used propaganda as a means to influence German society, to bring it into line and to incite it against certain groups of the population. The aim was to strengthen the position of power of Adolf Hitler and the NSDAP and to convince society of the correctness of National Socialist ideology and policies.

The propaganda of the Nazi government fell on fertile ground: German society at that time was still struggling with the trauma of the world economic crisis in 1929, by the difficulties of the first democratic experiences of the Weimar Republic and the memory of the First World War, which had brought much suffering and had left many Germans with a sense of injustice due to very high war reparations to be paid. Anti-Semitism and nationalism were widespread and entrenched in society, back then.

The Nazi government used propaganda not only for domestic political purposes. The international reputation of the German Reich was also to be improved. The 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin served this purpose. The German capital presented itself to the outside world as cosmopolitan and tolerant, although at the same time the Sachsenhausen concentration camp was being built a few kilometres from Berlin, which was a blatant contradiction to each other.

In the months before the war, Nazi propaganda served to arouse anti-Polish mood amongst the German population. During the war years, special propaganda companies were responsible for war reporting and were supposed to convey the image of a victorious German war to society, the soldiers, and also to foreign countries.

1. Explain the term „propaganda“.
2. Work out which means were used for propaganda purposes during the Nazi era.
3. Present some ideas on how to protect populations from the influence of propaganda.

The term Gleichschaltung originates from the Nazi era. It refers to the process of subordinating all social, economic, political and cultural elements of social life to the government or dictatorship. In a Gleichschaltung state, every area of life is determined by the ruling ideology.



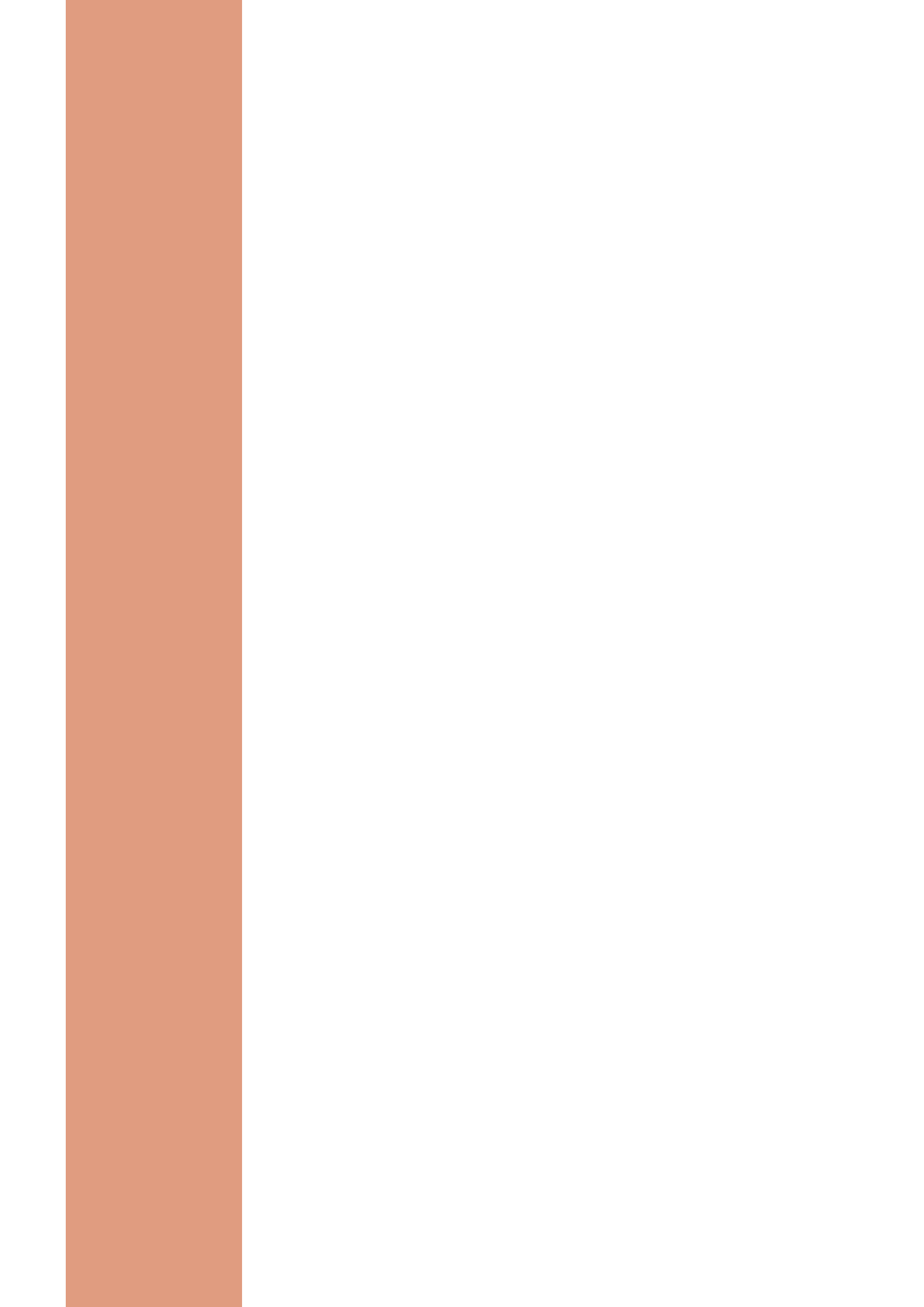
The magazine „Die Wehrmacht” with reports on the war against the Soviet Union. Inscription poster „Me or you!” Source unknown



Struggle for food. Four guards watched in amusement as starving prisoners pounced on scraps of food lying on the ground. Collection Ehrenhain-Zeithain Memorial



Graves as photo motif. A German guard soldier posed in front of the grave slabs of deceased Soviet prisoners of war on the present grounds of the Zeithain grove of honour at the end of 1941. Until the end of September, the dead were buried in individual graves marked by name. Source Zeithain Cenotaph



PART II

Stalag VIII A in the Third Reich prisoner of war camp system

Stalag VIII A

The prisoners

The Polish prisoners

The Soviet prisoners

Prisoners of war as forced labourers

Life in the camp

Cultural life in the camp

Religious life in the camp

The cemetery of Soviet prisoners of war



Stalag VIII A in the Third Reich camp system

Non-commissioned officers and men enlisted were treated as “ordinary” soldiers who did not have a higher rank and did not belong to either the air force or the navy.

„Productive” at this point means ‘producing something’ or also ‘generating profit’.

These figures refer to how many people could actually be accommodated in the camp and were actually accommodated. In total, many more prisoners were subordinate to Stalag VIII A, but were located in subcamps.

It was already decided to build the POW camp Stammlager VIII A (abbreviated to „Stalag”) before the war began. Stalag VIII A was a camp for **non-commissioned officers and men enlisted** taken prisoners of war and brought to Görlitz. Camps like the one in Görlitz were spread throughout Germany.

During the Nazi dictatorship, such camps were located in many places. They were divided into different types. It is important to distinguish between extermination camps, concentration camps, and camps for prisoners of war. Extermination and concentration camps were part of the Nazi dictatorship and arose from the National Socialist ideology. These camps were mainly for people who were seen as enemies of the regime and threat to security and, therefore, were to be removed from society. It was at extermination camps where entire national or ethnic groups (Jews, Roma, Sinti) were being murdered on a mass scale.

Camps for prisoners of war were part of a war infrastructure that served to control captured enemy soldiers.

Prisoner-of-war camps also had another purpose: since the war concentrated a large part of the **productive**, mainly male, labour force at the front lines, prisoners of war were to replace the missing workers as quickly as possible.

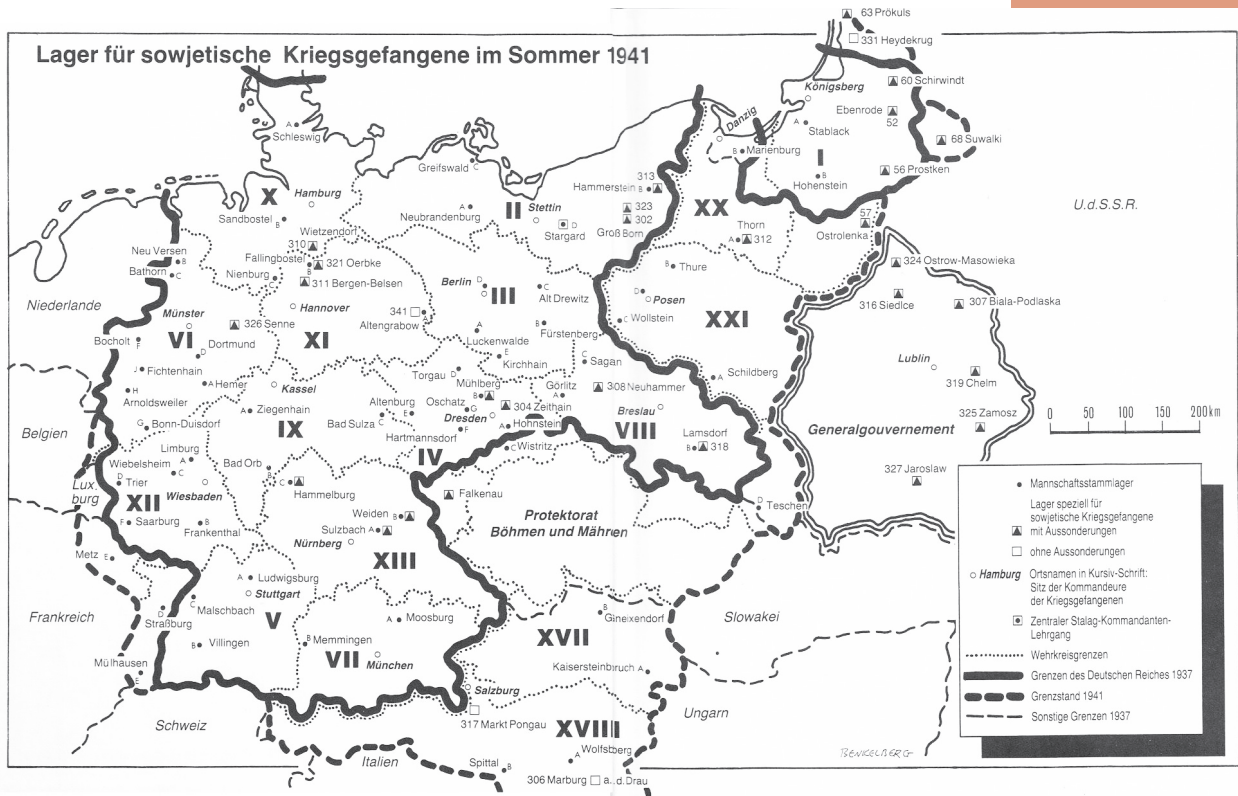
On 29 August 1939, the first canvas tents of the transit camp („Dulag”) were erected in the north-eastern part of Görlitz. One week after the war began, the first group of prisoners of war arrived and consisted of about 8,000 Poles. In the beginning there were not only soldiers in the camp. For 1,647 civilians, including women, the Dulag became a temporary stay while being transported to other camps.

The prisoners of the Dulag worked mainly on the construction of Stalag VIII A itself which was located in the south of the city. The working and living conditions were very dire. Initially, the POWs slept on the ground or on boards, and poor hygienic conditions triggered epidemics.

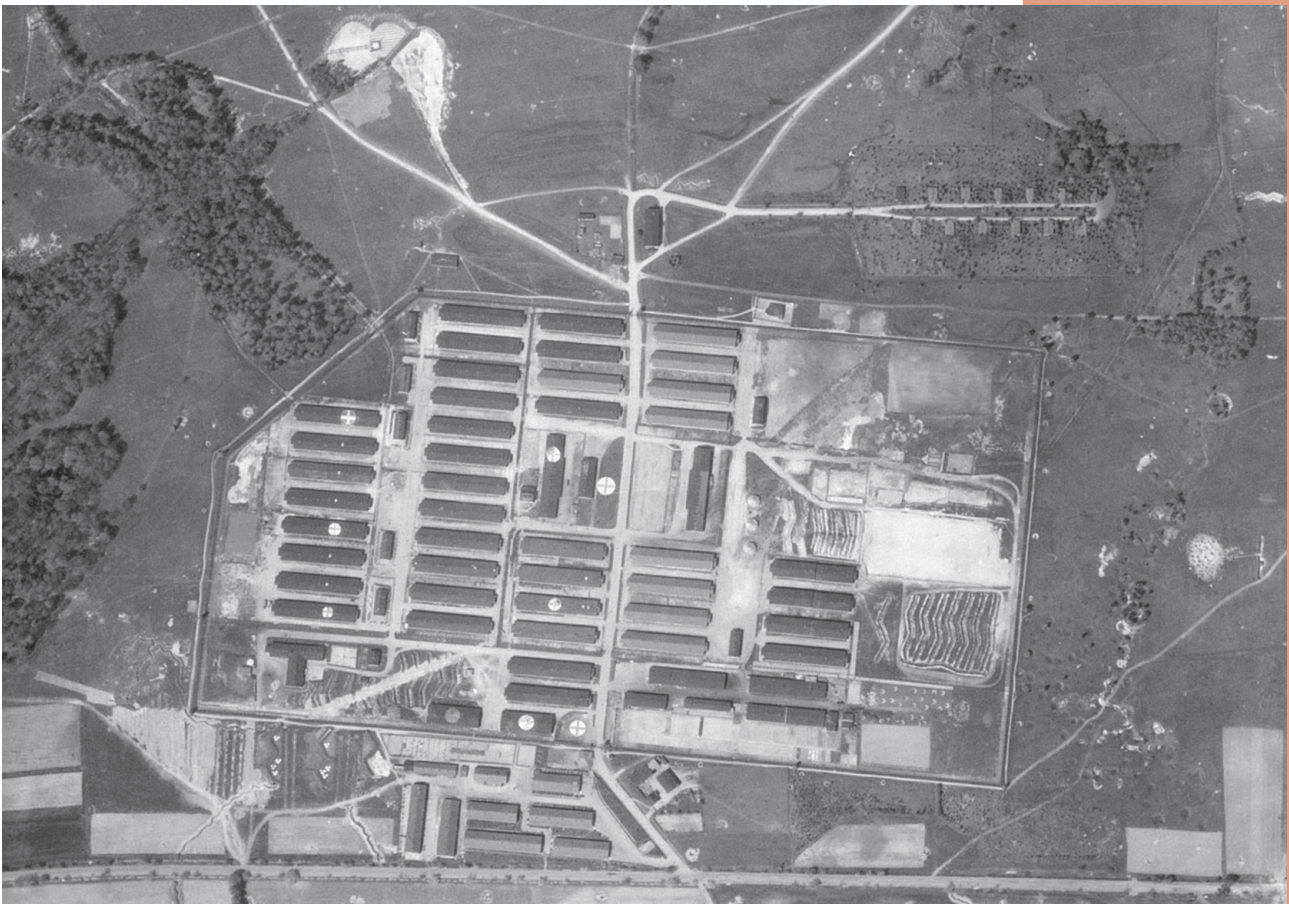
In late December 1939, the POWs of the Dulag were gradually transferred to the main camp Stalag VIII A. Initially, the camp was **to accommodate 3,000 prisoners of war. During the war years, however, the maximum occupancy was as many as 15,000 at its peak.**

Most POWs of Stalag VIII A were only interned for a short time at the actual camp. Arriving at the camp site, the soldiers were registered and in most cases assigned to a work detail. Assignments to work details were almost always connected with a transfer to a subcamp. That is why only a fraction of prisoners taken to Stalag VIII A were housed in the camp’s barracks themselves.

1. Define the terms „Dulag” and „Stalag”.
2. Name and explain at least one other type of camp in Germany during the Second World War.
3. Investigate the connection between the economy and the prisoner of war camp system during WW II.



Map of the military districts in the Third Reich from 1941 showing the camps for Soviet prisoners of war. Some camps for non-Soviet POWs are not marked. Collection MMM e.V.



Aerial photograph of Stalag VIII A from May 1945 after the evacuation. Collection MMM e.V.

Stalag VIII A

Germany's borders looked different during the Second World War from how they do today. Görlitz was not situated at a border with Poland - as the country's territory stretched further east - but in the Silesian province of the Reich, Military District VIII. Germany was divided into a total of 21 such military districts, which provided a framework for the POW camp system: „Oflags” were meant for officers, „Stalags” for non-commissioned officers and men enlisted. Air force privates were sent to so-called „Stalag Luft”. Located in the area of Military District VIII, there were three Stalags, one Stalag Luft and ten Oflags.

The location for Stalag VIII A in Görlitz was chosen in view of accessibility of building materials and the town's position in Lower Silesia.

The camp was divided into different areas. The POWs were separated and housed strictly according to their respective nationalities. The separation of nationalities was not only linked to National Socialist racial ideology, but also to the Geneva Convention. This procedure had both positive and negative effects for the prisoners. On the one hand, they remained in the community of their compatriots and comrades. On the other hand, the separation made unequal treatment between the nationalities possible.

The National Socialist authorities only granted some prisoner groups the rights laid down by the **Geneva Convention**. These included, for example, accommodation in clean, heated barracks with sufficient sleeping space and the possibility to engage into cultural, sporting and religious activities. For this reason, there was a sports field and a library on camp grounds. But not all prisoners of war had access to those.

In the post-war years, Stalag VIII A fell into oblivion. The barracks soon became nothing more than valuable building material for the local population and were dismantled. Today, only a few remains of the camp can be seen.

In the 1970s, Stalag VIII A was officially recognised by Poland as a national memorial. In 2015, the „European Centre of Remembrance, Education, Culture” and the Polish foundation of the same name came into being, which together with the German association „Meetingpoint Memory Messiaen” commemorates the camp.

1. In what part of Görlitz was the camp built? In what city is the former camp site located now?
2. In your view, which camp parts, built thanks to the Geneva Convention in Stalag VIIIA, were particularly important for the POWs?
3. Does the division of the city have any influence on the memory of the former camp? If so, how?

To learn more about the Geneva Convention itself, see page 10. For more information on specific rights laid down by the Convention, see the texts on everyday life, culture and religion on the following pages: 28–32.



Aerial photograph Stalag 1945.
Aerial photograph archive



Polish prisoner of war in wooden clogs on the main camp road in Stalag VIII A, January 1942. Archive of the International Red Cross



Insights into Stalag VIII A. Between the barracks and a burial in a local cemetery. Collection MMM e.V.

POWs

The soldiers taken to Stalag VIII A came from countries closely linked to the course of the war. On 1 September 1939, the German Wehrmacht attacked Poland and so the first prisoners of war were of Polish nationality. Belgian and French prisoners did not arrive in the camp until June 1940, and Soviet soldiers were brought in in winter of 1941.

From capture to accommodation in Stalag VIII A or in a sub-camp, the prisoners went through a set procedure: Transport to the Stalag was usually by train in cargo or cattle cars. Upon arrival, the prisoners were searched and had to hand over all dangerous objects as well as their uniforms. They were then disinfected and shaved all over. After which they were registered and given a POW and identification number according to their nationality.

Stalag VIII A was initially intended for French and Belgian prisoners of war. However, in the course of the war, prisoners of different nationalities were taken to the Stalag and its satellite camps, including Americans, Serbs and Italians, because the **World War had brought soldiers to Europe by various routes and from all over the world.**

The **Geneva Convention**, which was supposed to guarantee dignified treatment for all prisoners, played a special role in the treatment of prisoners of war.

Germany **ratified** the Convention in 1934, one year after the National Socialist government under Adolf Hitler came to power. It thus committed itself to treat all prisoners of war, regardless of their nationality, in accordance with the Convention in the event of war. However, this commitment proved to be an empty promise: The German Reich deliberately broke the Geneva Convention by depriving certain nationalities of their rights. This mainly affected Soviet soldiers, whose conditions of captivity were extremely severe and in very many cases led to illness and death. The Nazi racial ideology and ideological enmity with the Soviet Union were two major reasons for the Germans to defy the Convention that way.

Find out why a young New Zealander took part in the World War on page 38.

There is more about the Geneva Convention on page 10.

You can find the meaning of this word on page 8.

1. Describe the beginning of the Second World War.
2. Explain the process a prisoner arriving at the camp site had to go through.
3. The German Reich did not apply the Geneva Convention equally to all groups of prisoners. Explain why and if this approach was legal.



Himmler inspects the prisoner of war camps in Russia, circa 1941. Heinrich Hoffman Collection / U.S. National Archives and Records Administration



Polish prisoners of war are lined up for roll call in Dulag on Leopoldshainer Straße in Görlitz in 1939. Görlitz Council Archive

Polish POWs

Prisoners of Polish nationality constituted the largest group in the POW camp in Görlitz during the first months of the war. In addition to soldiers from the Polish army, the first transports also brought civilians to Görlitz. In the first weeks after the transit camp was established, women were also among the prisoners. From November 1939, the Polish prisoners were divided into two groups: Silesians and Poles. Silesians were considered „ethnic Germans” and were treated differently. Until the beginning of 1941, Jewish prisoners were not segregated from other prisoners.

In the Nazi dictatorship, „ethnic Germans” were persons who lived outside the German Reich but belonged to the German people according to National Socialist ideology.

The Generalgouvernement was a part of the Polish state that was placed under German administration after Poland’s surrender.

The Home Army was an underground Polish Army that resisted German occupation in the Polish territory during World War 2.


Gradually, all Polish prisoners were transferred to the inner territories of Germany and by December 1944 there were no Polish prisoners left in Stalag VIII A. The last Polish troops had surrendered on 6 October 1939 and part of Poland was annexed by the German Reich. The rest of the territory was declared the **Generalgouvernement**. The Polish government continued in exile in London. Officially, there was no Polish army anymore, however, the **Home Army** functioned in the underground.

On 1 August 1944, the Warsaw Uprising began, which was the largest act of resistance by the Polish Home Army. The uprising lasted 63 days and ended in defeat for the Polish resistance. As a result of the Warsaw Uprising, approximately 18 thousand members of the resistance, as well as 180 thousand civilians lost their lives. Warsaw was almost completely destroyed and its inhabitants chased out to transit and concentration camps. 37 soldiers of the Home Army were sent to Stalag VIII A in December 1944 and were the last group of Polish prisoners in Görlitz.

1. Why were the first camp prisoners Polish? Where and in what conditions were they kept?
2. Work out why there were no Polish prisoners in Stalag VIII A from 1942 until December 1944.
3. Explain why Poles were treated like „second-class” prisoners having the National Socialist ideology in mind.



Józef Pluciński during registration in Stalag VIII A. Collection of the Pluciński family

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|------|------------|-----------------|--------|------|--|
| Personalkarte I: Personelle Angaben | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Abteilung im Gefangenennachstr. Str. 4937 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Kriegsgefangenen-Stammlager: VIII A - 8 Bering | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Eigent. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Name: Labuda Stanislaw | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Staatsangehörigkeit: Pole | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Vorname: Stanislaw | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Dienstgrad: Leutnant | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Geburtsort und -zeit: 11.5.1890 Brest Lit. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Truppenteil: 1. Pol. Div. 1. Btl. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Religion: keine | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Militärberuf: Leutnant | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Vorname des Vaters: Martin | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Matrikel Nr. (Zimmernr. des Stammbuchs): | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Familienname der Mutter: Witold | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Gefangenzustand (Zeit und Datum): 1.11.1940 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| OB gesund, krank, verunz. eingeliefert: gesund | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | OB gesund, krank, verunz. eingeliefert: gesund | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Bild | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Nähere Personalbeschreibung | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| Höhe | Complexion | Other features: | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1,70 m | slav | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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Personal card of Stanislaw Labuda

Soviet POWs

Germany declared war on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, although both states had concluded a non-aggression pact in 1939. In winter of 1941/42, Soviet prisoners of war also were taken to Stalag VIII A and from Autumn of 1943 formed the largest group of POWs.

The POW system treated Soviet soldiers as a homogeneous (consistent) group, even though they belonged to different nationalities, because the Soviet Union was an amalgamation of different republics that differed in terms of nationality, religion, and language.

In National Socialist racial ideology, Slavic and Eastern peoples were considered so-called „Untermenschen“ (subhumans). That is why the Germans exposed them to extremely poor, utterly inhuman living conditions in the camp. The German Reich ignored the Geneva Convention when it came to Soviet prisoners and thus deliberately committed a war crime. On the international scale they gave the official reason for this unequal treatment that the Soviet Union had not signed the Convention.

The political catchword „extermination through labour“ was not used publicly by the National Socialists, but it appeared at government conferences and was put into practice. **Concentration camps** in particular functioned according to this principle. Soviet prisoners were most prone to die because of this ideology.

In Stalag VIII A, the Soviet soldiers were housed in a part of the camp that was separated from the rest by double barbed wire. The barracks were unheated and often overcrowded. The food rations were below the minimum amount necessary to survive. They often were assigned the hardest work and the longest hours, for example in quarries. Sickness and death were more common among the Soviet prisoners than among other nationalities. This was not only the case in Stalag VIII A. In total, around 3.3 million Soviet prisoners of war lost their lives during the Second World War.

In the Nazi camp system, concentration camps were intended for civilians. They were designed for the isolation, slave labour and extermination of people considered by the Nazis to be enemies of the German state and nation. Concentration camp inmates were imprisoned without trial and for an unspecified period of time. The first prisoners of the camps in Germany were political opponents of the Nazis (including communists), Jews, homosexuals, Jehovah witnesses and criminal offenders. After 1939 the concentration camps were filled with prisoners from all conquered European countries. Some Soviet prisoners of war were also sent to concentration camps. Concentration camps were places where individuals and specific groups of people, such as clergy, members of the resistance, persons with disabilities, and mentally ill, were murdered. They were also the site of inhumane pseudo-scientific medical experiments. Slave labour was one of the ways in which prisoners were killed between 1940 and 1945.

1. Explain the difference between „Soviet“ and „Russian“ soldiers.
2. Compare the situation of Soviet prisoners of war with the situation of French prisoners of war.
3. Evaluate the term „Untermensch“ and the ideology behind it and explain its impact on the treatment of Soviet prisoners by the Germans.

Russia, Transport of Soviet prisoners of war in freight wagons, Bundesarchiv, Image 1011-267-0124-20A / Vorpahl / CC-BY-SA 3.0



Personnel card of Nikolai Trofimovskiy who was in various camps. Memorial online archive

Personal card of Nikolai Trofimovskiy. The card includes the following information:

- Name:** ТРОФИМОВСКИЙ ТРОФИМОВ
- USSR:** УССР
- Stalag:** 349
- Place of Birth:** d. 12. 12. 1912, d. 12. 12. 1912, d. 12. 12. 1912
- Occupation:** 4111, 4111, 4111
- Religion:** Orthodox
- Family Status:** Married
- Current Location:** Stalag 349
- Notes:** MIA: Trofimovskiy Nikolai Trofimovich, d. 12. 12. 1912, d. 12. 12. 1912, d. 12. 12. 1912

Administrative forms for Nikolai Trofimovskiy. The top section is a 'Verordnung im Gefangenensache' (Order in Prisoner Case) with fields for name, number, and date. The middle section is a 'Personalkarte' (Personnel Card) with fields for name, date of birth, and place of birth. The bottom section is a 'Kommandos' (Command) table with columns for name, date, and location.

Death notice of Nikolai Trofimovskiy. The notice includes the following information:

- Subject:** Sterbefall-Anzeige
- Place of Birth:** d. 12. 12. 1912, d. 12. 12. 1912, d. 12. 12. 1912
- Place of Death:** Stalag 349
- Cause of Death:** d. 12. 12. 1912, d. 12. 12. 1912, d. 12. 12. 1912
- Family Status:** Married
- Signature:** [Signature]
- Date:** 12. 12. 1912

Death notice of Nikolai Trofimovskiy who died in Stalag VIII A shortly after his 23rd birthday. Memorial online archive

Prisoners of war as forced labourers

A work crew usually consisted of, depending on the type of work, a few or several hundred prisoners of war who were detached to a specific work assignment.

Do you remember this term? If not, then look on page 16.

Bolshevism was the name given to the communist ideology on which the political structure of the Soviet Union was based.

The use of prisoners of war for labour was already decided before the war began. The majority of the prisoners of war who came to Görlitz were directly assigned to **work crews (labour commandos)** after their arrival, which determined their work assignment. The first use of the prisoners was the construction of the actual main camp. This was built by Polish soldiers, the first Görlitz prisoners of war who were accommodated in the **Dulag**.

After the completion of Stalag VIII A, work took place either on camp grounds, in its surroundings, or in subcamps located throughout Lower Silesia. In Görlitz alone there were over 20 sites where POWs work was used. Some prisoners stayed in one labour commando for their entire imprisonment, while others were frequently transferred and had to change both, their assignment and accommodation.

The work detachments included assignments in forestry, agriculture, quarries, as well as in smaller and larger production facilities, which also included handicraft workshops. In Görlitz, as in most other German cities, the presence of prisoners of war soon became part of the cityscape.

According to the Geneva Convention, prisoners of war were not allowed to work in the armaments industry. The National Socialists circumvented these restrictions in various ways, for example by assigning prisoners the category of „forced labourers“. Thus they were officially no longer considered prisoners of war, losing their protective status and therefore could be used in the armaments industry.

Soviet prisoners of war were initially not to be used as labourers, because **bolshevism** was considered the „mortal enemy of National Socialist Germany“ and Soviet soldiers were thus to be kept away from German society. However, as the need for labour grew, Soviet labour commandos were established too, where thousands of POWs died due to exhaustion, malnutrition, illness or hard physical work.

1. Where and for what type of work were prisoners of war were used?
2. Explain in what way the place and type of the work assignment could influence the situation of a prisoner of war.
3. Work out what role forced labourers, including prisoners of war, played in the German economy and in the course of the Second World War?



Polish prisoners of war shovelling snow in the centre of Görlitz. Görlitz Council Archive Collection



Polish prisoners of war during the construction of the transit camp in 1939. Collection Görlitz Council Archive

Life in the camp

Stalag VIII A was designed to function almost independently of the outside world. The camp had workshops, a vegetable garden, and also a punishment barrack. Most of the work in the camp was done by the prisoners, ranging anything from cooking to organising cultural events.

Life in the camp functioned according to certain rules: The POWs had to work. They did receive a pay but the wage was a fraction of what German workers earned for exactly the same work. At the same time, part of the wage was deducted for accommodation and food in the camp. The prisoners of war were not allowed to leave the camp or their place of work on their own under threat of severe punishment. The daily routine was strictly regulated and the prisoners were under constant surveillance. Soviet and Italian prisoners were subject to particularly strict rules and additionally aggravated conditions of imprisonment.

Each national prisoner group (except for the Soviet POWs) and each labour commando had a man of confidence. This person represented his fellows in dealings with the camp administration and performed a number of various tasks. According to the **Geneva Convention**, he should be allowed to present complaints or inform aid organisations about grievances. In addition, the man of confidence was present when food was distributed and when prisoners were searched. If a prisoner fell ill, the man of confidence would pass on the information to the camp administration.

Life in the camp was marked by disease. Initially, there were no washrooms in the barracks and the prisoners washed with scraps of their own clothes. Cramped accommodation, lack of hygiene in food preparation and a shortage of medicines and bandages led to the spread of diseases, such as **dysentery and typhus**, as well as parasites, such as fleas and lice. Washrooms in the barracks of Stalag were not installed until September 1943. When prisoners fell ill, they often died, especially in the Soviet part of the camp.

Do you remember this term? If not, look it up on page 10!

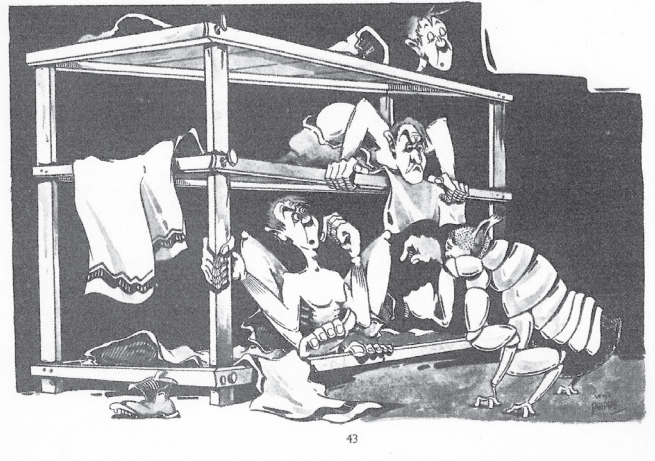
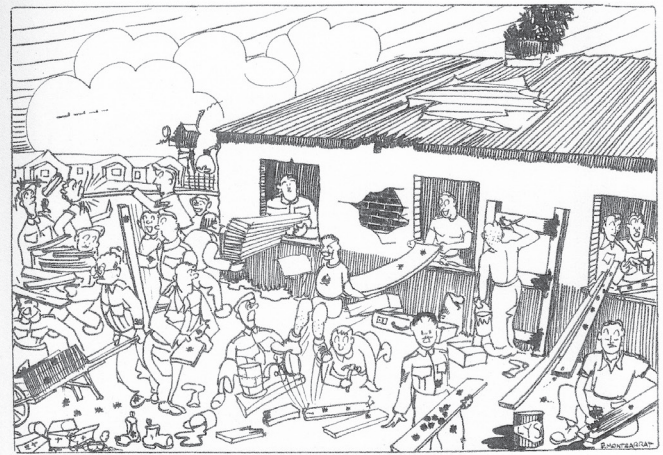
Dysentery is a diarrhoeal disease in which the high loss of fluids can lead to dehydration of the body. Typhus, on the other hand, causes very high fever. Both diseases are very contagious and caused multiple epidemics in the camp, during which a lot of prisoners died.

1. Describe the structure of Stalag VIII A.
2. Compare the daily routine of different prisoner groups in Stalag VIII A.
3. Work out why, despite the precise regulations on the treatment of prisoners of war in the Geneva Convention, inhumane conditions still occurred in the camp.

Cartoons on the hygienic conditions in Stalag VIII A. Drawn by British prisoners. From „Interlude“



Three-storey beds in a barrack. Collection MMM e.V.



Operation in the hospital of Stalag VIII A 1941. Archive of the International Red Cross

Cultural life in the camp

International non-governmental organisations had great influence on the situation of prisoners of war during World War II. The „International Red Cross“ (IRC) was responsible for the observance of the Geneva Convention and enabled the development of a cultural life in POW camps.

Find out more about it on page 46.

Stalag VIII A was provided by IRC with books, but also musical instruments. This made the first performance of the **chamber piece** „Quartet for the End of Time“, created in the camp by the French composer Olivier Messiaen. Since there were many musicians among the prisoners of war, an orchestra was formed, which gave regular concerts.

The camp had a library with books in German, French and English, and in one of the barracks there was a theatre where Belgian and British groups performed plays ranging from classics to satires and comedies.

French-speaking prisoners published a bimonthly and later monthly camp newspaper called „Le Lumignon“ beginning in late 1940. In it, for example, the adventure and romance novel „Le mystère de la baraque“ (The Mystery of the Barrack) appeared as a serial story, they also published a German language course. However, the prisoners also used the newspaper to remember their common homeland and to honour national holidays.

Sport also played an important role in Stalag VIII A. The sports field was used by the prisoners in their free time for exercise and games and partly also for religious celebrations.

Access to cultural and sporting activities was not the same for all prisoners. This depended on the nationality and also on the place of their work assignment. The International Red Cross had a particular influence on the situation in the Stalag in this respect. In the work detachments located far away from the main camp, the POWs wouldn't normally have the opportunities to organise cultural or sporting activities. Moreover, the state of health or exhaustive work did not allow the prisoners of war to make use of their right to cultural, educational, and sporting activities.

Soviet POWs were denied these possibilities altogether.

1. Name activities that the prisoners of war in Stalag VIII A could organise.
2. Name other (international) organisations besides the Red Cross that had some influence on the everyday life of the prisoners.
3. Explain the difficulties faced by prisoners of war in claiming the right to cultural, educational and sporting activities.



The Allied Prisoners of War also organised language courses, among other things. Collection René Gerboux and MMM e.V.



Announcement of a concert in front of barrack 27b, which was used as a theatre. Collection MMM e.V.



The camp newspaper „Le Lumignon” published by the French Collection René Gerboux and MMM e.V.

Religious life in the camp

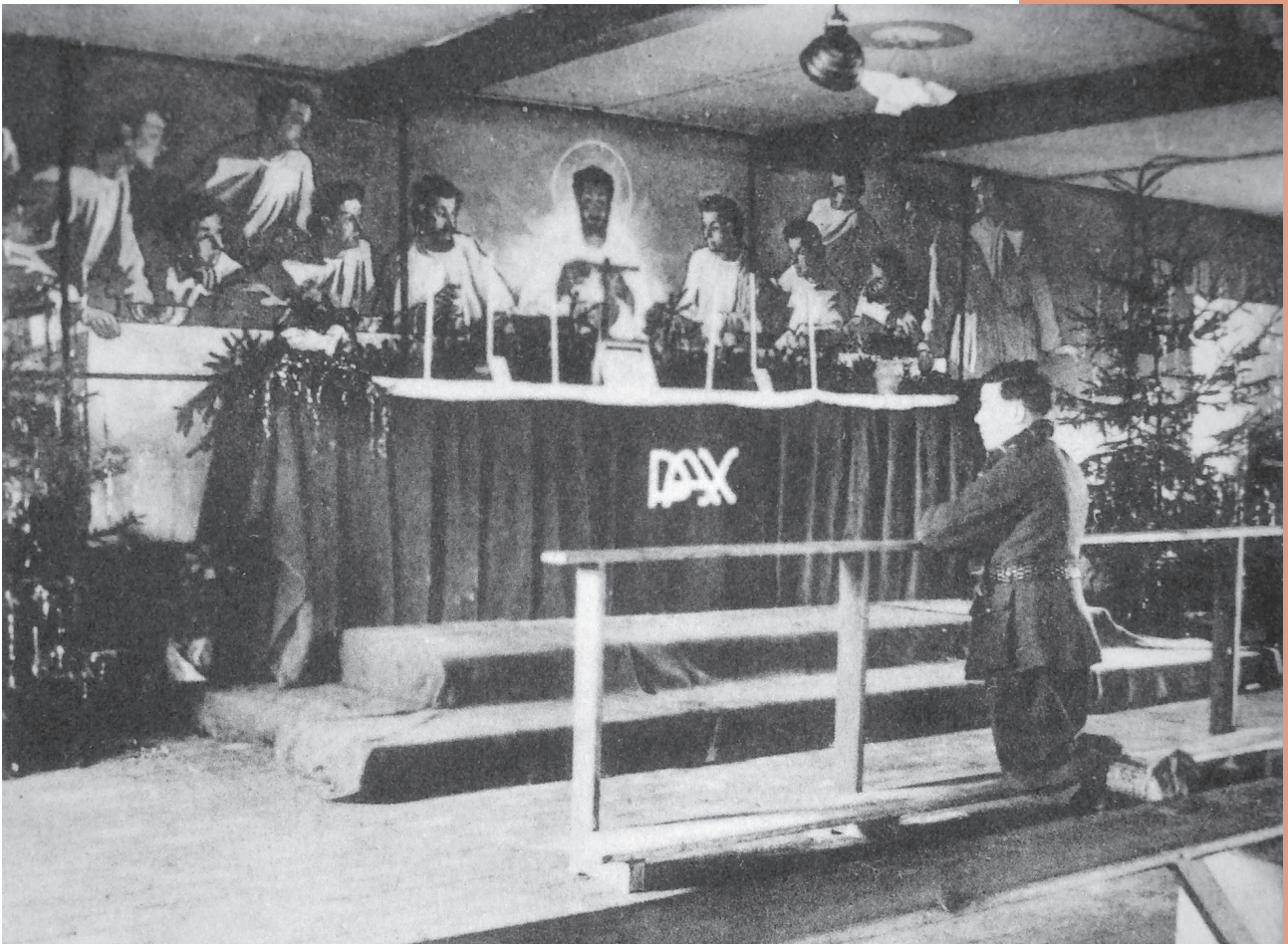
The fact that prisoners of war could practise their religion was made possible thanks to the Geneva Convention. In Stalag VIII A, all nationalities except the Soviet prisoners could exercise this right. Various professions were represented among the soldiers, including clergy. In the group of Belgian and French prisoners of war who came to Görlitz in 1940, there were as many as 120 priests, clerics and theology students.

For most prisoners of war, the practice of their religion played an important role during their captivity. For this reason, the prisoner-of-war clergy organised **pastoral care** that functioned in the camp from autumn 1941. Among the prisoners „entitled” to practise their religion were Catholics, Protestants, Anglicans and Greek Catholics. Services were held in a chapel, for which part of one of the barracks had been allocated. The chapel was decorated with paintings made by prisoner artists. In the warm season, services were held on the roll-call square.

Father Franz Scholz, parish priest at St Boniface Church, was assigned to look after the prisoners of war in Stalag VIII A and to oversee the camp chaplaincy. As garrison priest, he performed his functions until the end of the war, supplying indispensable liturgical paraphernalia to the camp clergymen.

The term “pastoral care” is understood as preaching the principles of faith and celebration of liturgy, as well as spiritual accompaniment and support of a person who is in a difficult situation in life.

1. Name the group of POWs that was not allowed to practice their religion officially. Why?
2. Find a provision in the Geneva Convention entitling POWs to freedom of religious practice.
3. Explain the importance of pastoral care for prisoners of war.



The part of a barrack in Stalag VIII A converted into a chapel. Collection MMM e.V.



Mass in the chapel. Collection Hequet family

The cemetery of Soviet prisoners of war

The cemetery commemorates the Soviet soldiers who died while prisoners of war in Stalag VIII A. Marked with a commemorative stone, it is one of the few elements of the camp that are visible today. Two plaques document the fate of the dead POWs. The upper one was donated by Polish authorities in 1964, the lower one was placed by a delegation of French war veterans a year later.

According to National Socialist ideology and policy, Soviet prisoners of war were on the lowest rung of the prisoner hierarchy. In Stalag, they were housed in a segregated area that was secured with additional barbed wire.

Death rates were particularly high among the Soviet prisoners. They received the lowest food rations and were housed in overcrowded barracks. In addition, they were not entitled to medical care; they were only cared for on **an outpatient basis** by prisoner-of-war medics of other nationalities. Many deaths were related to epidemics, which increasingly spread in this part of the camp from 1942 onwards.

Unlike other nationalities, the Soviet prisoners were not buried in the Protestant cemetery to the north-east of the camp, where the deceased were buried in individual graves. This way, the exact burial place could be communicated to the relatives. However, the deceased Soviet prisoners were **buried** in a mass grave near the camp. Until today, only some of the prisoners of war buried here have been identified. It is assumed that 6,000 to 10,000 dead are buried at this site.

The Geneva Convention was not applied by the Germans concerning Soviet prisoners, which was a war crime. The death of a Soviet soldier was therefore not recorded by the International Red Cross, so that in many cases the relatives were never informed of such fact.

For Soviet soldiers who survived their captivity, returning home did not mean an end to their suffering. In the post-war Soviet Union, former prisoners of war were considered traitors, as Stalin believed that every soldier had a duty to fight to the death for his fatherland. They were therefore often sent to Siberian forced labour camps. For this reason, many the individual fates of Soviet POWs remain unknown to this day.

Outpatient means not hospitalized. Soviet soldiers were not admitted to the camp hospital and were not under medical care of a doctor.

You can find out more about the Soviet prisoners of war on page 24.

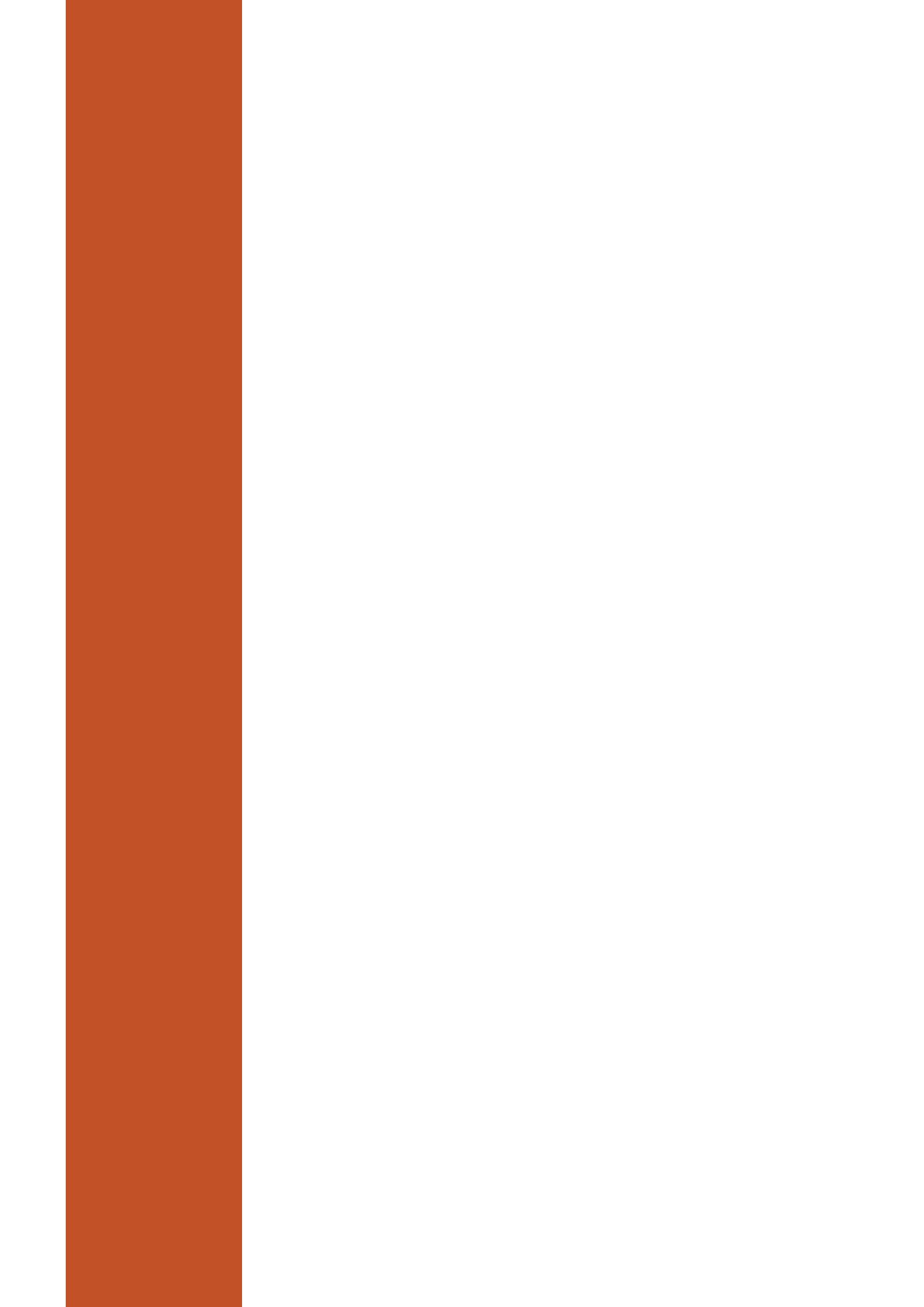
1. Name all the elements you see in the photo.
2. Try to explain how the death of the Soviet prisoners of war who died in Stalag VIII A influenced the lives of their families.
3. Why is it important to preserve and care for the cemetery today? Justify your opinion.



Memorial stone on the cemetery for the Soviet POWs. Photo: Jakub Purej (top), Jakub Sochoń (centre)



Cemetery of Soviet prisoners of war Stalag VIII A 2021. Photo Jakub Purej. MMM e.V.



PART III

Winding paths in wartime

Post-war trauma

Lost Generation

Missing

Art as a means of survival



Winding paths in wartimes

Sounds complicated, doesn't it? The word „geopolitical“ is made up of the words geographical and political. It refers to situations that have both a political and a geographical dimension. Wars, for example, usually also have a geopolitical character because they affect a certain territory.

The following story shows us how much a **geopolitical** situation can influence the life of an individual.

Harold Thompson Brook was a New Zealander and died in Stalag VIII A in January 1945. How did it happen that a young person from the other side of the world took part in this war and ended up in the camp?

Today we call the war between 1939 and 1945 the Second World War. The conflict involved Europe, North Africa and the Pacific.

Many European states, e.g. Great Britain, France, and also Germany (up to 1919) and Italy, owned colonies, or subordinate territories, in very distant places of the globe. Colonies were directly dependent, politically and economically, on the dominant country. This meant, for example, that Senegalese served in the French army.

New Zealand, which had been a British colony, gained its independence gradually in the first half of the 20th century. As World War II began, the country was already virtually independent. However, its ties with Britain remained very strong. For example, New Zealand remained part of the Commonwealth of Nations, a union of Great Britain with its former colonies.

In 1939, immediately after Germany's attack on Poland, New Zealand declared war on Germany. In addition to Harold, around 104,000 New Zealanders took part in World War II as soldiers. The first 60,000 had volunteered. Over time, the initial „enthusiasm for war“ waned and so, from June 1940, compulsory conscription began for men aged 19 to 45 who were fit for war. Among them were 16,000 **Maori**.

The first New Zealand troops arrived in Egypt in February 1940. At that time, Egypt was officially an independent state, but Britain, as a former colonial power, was still present and highly influential there. Hence, Egypt became one of the theatres of war where the British fought Italian forces. Harold, a soldier from New Zealand, was taken prisoner of war by the Italians during the battles in North Africa and was later **handed over to** German troops. As a result of events unfolding during the world war, a life that began in Kaitangata found its end in Görlitz.

Maori are the indigenous, i.e. native, population of New Zealand.

The handing over is connected to the fall of Mussolini, the Italian dictator. Don't you remember what it was about? Then look on page 40!

1. Describe Harold's journey from New Zealand to Germany.
2. Explain why New Zealand took part in World War II even though it is on the „other side of the world“.
3. Soldiers from New Zealand often volunteered to fight in World War 2. Comment on that.

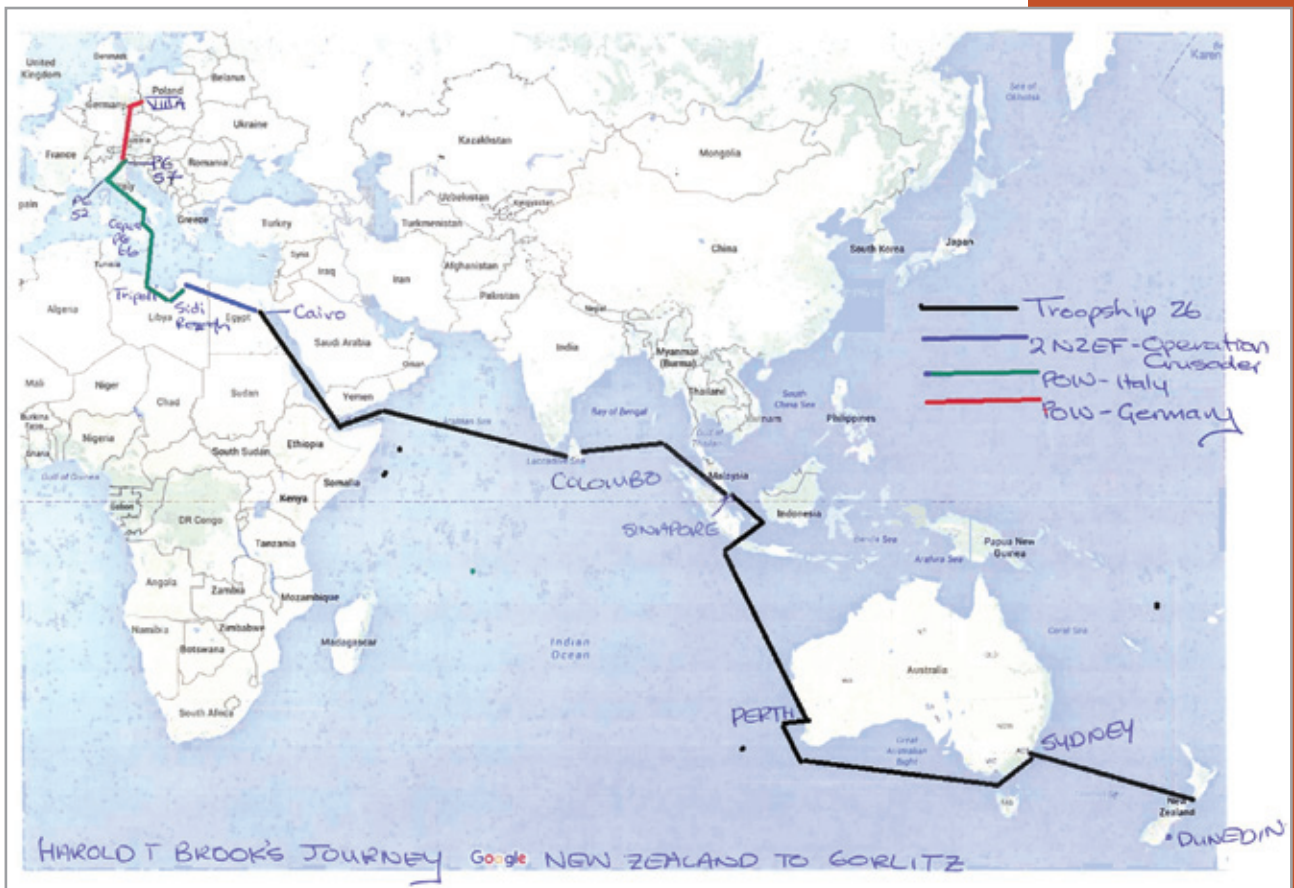


Harold T. Brook with his family (centre back) 1940. Brook family collection



Gnr. H. T. Brook, of Dunedin, died while prisoner of war.

Auckland Weekly News 4 April 1945: Harold BROOK died as POW. Brook Family Collection



Harold's wartime paths that ended in Stalag VIII A. Brook Family collection

Post-war trauma

The end of a war does not mean that its effects also come to an end. People deal with difficult or traumatic experiences in different ways. Some feel the need to talk about these experiences while others cannot or choose to remain silent.

Renato Gargano's story shows how strongly the experience of being a prisoner of war can have an impact after returning home to one's family. Renato was born on 16 January 1923 and was 16 years old when the war began. We don't know exactly when he began his military service, most likely shortly after attaining his majority. One thing is certain, however: after the **fall of Mussolini** and thus with the breaking of the alliance between Germany and Italy, Renato and other Italian soldiers were arrested by German troops in Venice on 8 September 1943. As a prisoner of war, he was first sent to Thorn (now Toruń in Poland) and later to Görlitz.

Renato did not tell his children and grandchildren until many years after the war that he had not been himself in the immediate aftermath. When a comrade who had survived being a prisoner of war, as well, sent him a letter asking for a reply, he did not write back. However, he carried the letter with him, at all times.

Today, we often hear about post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD for short. This disorder, which is now considered a mental illness, is a particularly common diagnosis among servicemen and women. At the time when Renato came back from the war, no greater importance was attached to the mental condition of former soldiers. Thus Renato had to resume his military service as early as 28 February 1946, about four months after his return. The many months of captivity did not matter, because the time in Stalag VIII A was considered an interruption of his military service, which was compulsory in Italy at the time and which he had to continue.

Benito Mussolini ruled Italy as a dictator from 1925 to 1943. Under his government, Italy formed an alliance with the German Reich in 1939 and fought alongside Germany in the first years of the war. In 1943, Mussolini was overthrown, turning Italy and most Italian soldiers into enemies of Germany.

1. Briefly describe Renato Gargano's life.
2. Explain why, in September 1943, Italian soldiers were now considered enemies by German troops.
3. How do you think did the traumatic war experiences influence relationships after the war?

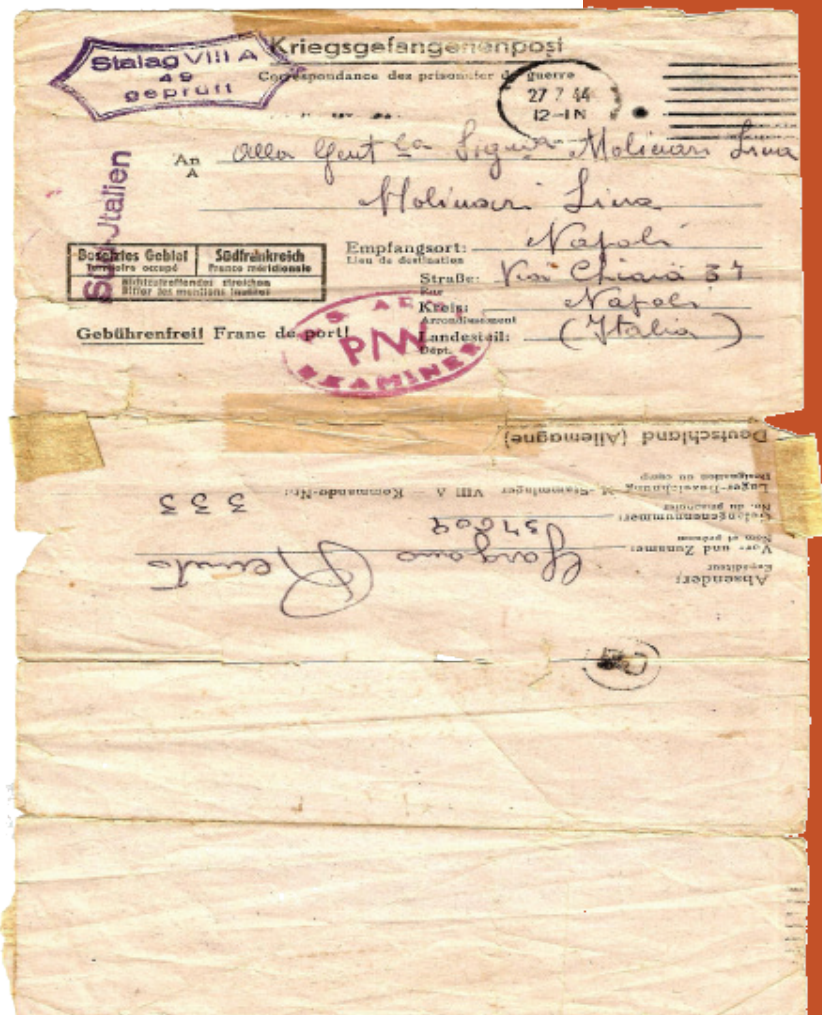


Portrait of Renato starting his military service in the navy in Venice. Renato is about 18 years old in the photo. Stefania Turco collection



Renato and Lina get married on 24 July 1950. Here, after the wedding ceremony, they board a ship shortly before the start of their honeymoon. Stefania Turco collection

Prisoner of war mail from Renato to his fiancée Lina, July 1944. Stefania Turco collection



Renato's granddaughter Stefania Turco (r.) visiting the Stalag VIII A memorial in 2015. MMM e.V. collection

Lost Generation

Mikhail Timofeyevich Afanasko was 23 years old when Germany declared war on the Soviet Union. At that time, he was doing his military service, which was compulsory for all young men in the Soviet Union. Although he lived in the Volga Germans' republic, as a descendant of Ukrainians, he was considered trustworthy by the Soviet leadership and was immediately drafted and sent to the front at the start of the war. Members of national minorities who were not considered „trustworthy” (e.g. Estonians, Latvians, **Volga Germans**) were sometimes only committed as soldiers for defence inside the country during the war.

Volga Germans are descendants of German settlers who dwelled in the lower Volga region in the southern European part of Russia at the end of the 18th century. It was the Russian Tsarina Catherine the Great who made it possible for German comers to settle there.

Shortly after joining the military, Mikhail Timofeyevich Afanasko took part in the Battle of Rostov. This was one of the first major counterattacks by the Red Army against Germany, whose army had by then advanced very far into Russian territory. In one of the last messages from Mikhail to reach his family, he reported an injury. After his time in hospital and his return to the front, contact broke off. Mikhail's family knew nothing of his captivity and did not learn of Mikhail's death in 1943.

Vassily, Mikhail's brother, was also drafted into the army shortly after his brother and sent to the front. Although they were stationed not far from each other, they never saw each other during the war. Vassily only learned what had happened to his brother 70 years after the end of the war. Thanks to the cooperation of the Russian association Memorial and the Meetingpoint Memory Messiaen, Vassily was able to contact the Stalag VIII A memorial site and find out where his brother's grave was. A bouquet of flowers was laid in his name at the cemetery for Soviet prisoners of war. At the time, Vassily was 90 years old. Saying goodbye to his brother, even if remotely via a video call, was a very emotional moment for everyone witnessing it.

You can say that both Mikhail and his brother Vassily belonged to a lost generation. The term „lost generation” was coined by Gertrude Stein (1874 - 1946), an American writer: she used it to describe the generation that experienced World War I at a young age. Gertrude Stein's observations showed that these experiences had a great influence on the life and mental state of an entire generation. World War II also had „its” lost generation of young people who had to grow up far too quickly, were traumatised or lost their lives far too early.

1. Give the reason why Mikhail was drafted into the Red Army and sent to the front lines.
2. Explain how it came about that Mikhail's family did not know about his imprisonment and death.
3. Assess the impact of the experiences of the „lost generation” on the post-war period social relations.



Portrait of Mikhail Afanasko in uniform. Collection of the Afanasko family

(афанасько)
 ИМЯ: АФАНАСКО
 ФАМИЛИЯ: АФАНАСКО
 2. Vornamen: Mikhail
 3. Geburstag: 23. наст. 1918.
 4. Geburtsort: АССР Нарваб-Мотви.
 5. Lager: Stalag VIII A
 6. Im Lager eingeleitet am: 12.3.43
 7. Dienstrang: 248 стп-пачк
 8. Nr. der Erkennungsmarke des deutschen Lagers: 35220/33A
 9. Vorname des Vaters: Тимофей
 10. Name der Mutter: Савченко
 11. Anschrift der nächsten Angehörigen: р. с. Ромашовка
 12. Beruf: Крестьянин
 13. Wann und wo gefangen: 23 июля 42
 14. Nr. der Erkennungsmarke des eigenen Gruppenreils: 248 стп-пачк

Death certificate issued in Stalag VIII A 1943. From the Memorial's online archive

Family contact with the Stalag VIII A Memorial Site, 2014. Collection MMM e.V.



Vasily Afanasko with his nephew Gennadiy Kuznetsov in 2014 after they learned where Mikhail is buried. Collection MMM e.V.

Dear Mr. Kuznetsov,

thank you for your email! We are very excited to hear from you. Infact, we have very little information about soldiers from the former Soviet Union and always try to get more information. Of course we can make a short film, as you wish to. We would be happy to do it. I have a friend who speaks a bit russian. I will ask her, if she has some time to do the film.

I wish to send you some information about our project with this email.

Thank you again for getting in touch with us. I will write you shortly again!

Where does your family live now?

Greetings from the twincity of GoerlitzZgorzelec.

Alexandra Grochowski

Am .10.2014, 22:14 Uhr, schrieb Геннадий Кузнецов (Петрусь) <genkuzn@rambler.ru>:

> 7 Oct, 2014
 > Alexandra Grochowski,
 > Meetingpoint Music Messiaen e.V.
 >
 > Dear Ms Grochowski,

> Recently I have learned about the Meetingpoint Music Messiaen e.V. As
 > far as I know you arrange some public events and excursions in the place
 > which is of particular interest for me. So I decided to address you with
 > this request.
 > I have a relative, Vasily Timofeevich Afanasko. He fought during the
 > Second World War and took part in the battle of Stalingrad. He is still
 > alive and now is ninety years old.
 > Vasily Timofeevich Afanasko had an elder brother Mikhail Timofeevich
 > Afanasko. Mikhail had gone off to the war and since that time our family
 > have heard nothing about him except for the formal letter informing
 > "gone missing". At last I got some information about Mikhail from the
 > Russian Federation Ministry of Defense website <http://obd-memorial.ru>.
 > I explored that Mikhail was taken captive in the south of Russia. Then
 > he was a prisoner of Stalag 338 and finally was moved to Stalag VIII-A.
 > He died at 8th of February, 1943 and buried in the concentration camp
 > cemetery.
 > My relative Vasily Timofeevich Afanasko wishes greatly to visit this
 > place and honour the memory of his brother. But he is old and sick, it
 > is impossible to get to Zgorzelec for him.
 > That is why we kindly request you to put some flowers on the Soviet
 > prisoners' memorial on behalf of Vasily Timofeevich Afanasko, to take
 > some photos and shoot a short video (3-4 minutes) about this action. If
 > it's possible, say just few words about Stalag VIII-A, the Soviet
 > prisoners' cemetery and the Soviet prisoners' memorial, show this
 > cemetery and the flowers, so that Vasily could imagine himself there.
 > It is truly of great importance for him.
 > Unfortunately, my relative doesn't speak German, Polish or English, so
 > we would like to know if there is anybody who can say just few phrases
 > in Russian for him. If not, we hope you could say them in English.
 > We are ready to prepay the flowers and the whole of your service every
 > way you wish (Web-money or another contactless payment system).
 > We are looking forward to hearing from you,
 >
 > Yours faithfully,
 > Gennadiy Kuznetsov <mailto:genkuzn@rambler.ru>
 > <https://www.facebook.com/genkuzn>

--
 Alexandra Grochowski
 Programmabteilung Geschichte

MEETINGPOINT MUSIC MESSIAEN e.V.
 ZGORZELEC - GOERLITZ
 Demianiplatz 40 | ul. Warszawska 1
 D-02826 Gorlitz | P-59900 Zgorzelec

The missing

In the chaos of war, many people lost contact with their loved ones and did not know what had happened to them. In most cases, families received a letter informing them that their son, father or husband had died or fallen during his service. But it was not always possible to trace a person's whereabouts or their burial site precisely.

The uncertainty often extended beyond the end of the war. For many families, the search for missing loved ones began only in the post-war period. Some searched for missing persons in the hope that they had survived. Others searched for the grave site of a loved one.

Marcel Hecquet was a Belgian soldier and came to Stalag VIII A as a prisoner of war in May 1940. He played the clarinet and joined the camp orchestra. Towards the end of 1941, he fell ill and died of cirrhosis of the liver at the age of 42 on 4 December 1941 in the camp hospital. He was buried in the Protestant cemetery for prisoners of war near the camp.

The German Red Cross informed the Belgian Red Cross of his death in December 1941. The information reached Marcel's wife in January 1942. The death certificate noted the cause of death, the exact time of death, all the objects left behind, and the place of burial with the grave number.

After the war, however, it was decided to exhume the remains of all Belgian prisoners of war and take them from Stalag VIII A to Belgium. The information on the whereabouts of Marcel Hecquet's burial was lost in the process. The family searched long and hard for the burial place in Belgium. As late as 2016, his granddaughter came to Zgorzelec to find some clues. Despite the support of associations and local authorities, she has still not found Marcel Hecquet's grave site.

Even today, families are still looking for people who went missing during the war or after the war. The Red Cross has a special tracing service for this. It can be contacted by anyone.

1. Describe the procedure followed when a prisoner of war died. Was the same procedure used in case of all POWs?
2. Work out what difficulties family members could encounter after the war in searching for family members who had died in Stalag VIII A.
3. Why finding the burial place of a deceased or killed relative is important for the families.

Rat der Stadt Görlitz

Herrn
Jean Hecquet
Rue Achille Chavée, 6
7100 LA LOUVIERE
(BELGIQUE)

Görlitz, den 6. März 1986

Sehr geehrter Herr Hecquet!

Ihr Schreiben vom 31. 1. 1987 (?) ist beim Rat der Stadt Görlitz eingegangen.

So wie Sie mitteilen, ist Ihr Herr Vater auf dem Friedhof des früher "Moys" genannten Stadtteiles beerdigt worden. Dieses Gebiet gehört zur Volksrepublik Polen in der Stadt Zgorzelec.

Bitte wenden Sie sich mit Ihrem Anliegen an die zuständigen Organe der Volksrepublik Polen.

Anbei senden wir Ihnen die uns zur Verfügung gestellte Photokopie zurück.

Answer of the Görlitz city administration to the search request for Marcel's grave site. March 1986. Collection of the Hequet family

Zgorzelec, dnia 1986 czerwiec

NACZELNIK MIASTA ZGORZELCA

Sekr. NM/ 23 /86

Jean HECQUET
Rue A.Chavée
B 7100 LALOUIERE
Belgia

Dotyczy: cmentarza Stalag VIII A w Zgorzelcu.

W nawiązaniu do listu Obywatela w sprawie powojennych losów Stalagu VIII A, oraz cmentarza zmarłych jeńców przekazuję informacje;

1. w miejscu byłego Stalagu VIII A wzniesiono obelisk upamiętniający męczeństwo i śmierć jeńców wojennych
2. cmentarz, o którym Obywatel wspomina znajdował się w pierwszych latach powojennych. Mogiły ekshumowano przez państwa, których jeńcy zmarli w Stalagu VIII Cmentarz uległ likwidacji.
3. w Izbie Pamięci Narodowej, która znajduje się w Zespole Szkół Górniczych w Zgorzelcu eksponowane są fotografie i inne dokumenty z okresu wojennego i powojennego tak Stalagu VIII A jak też i cmentarz z okresu pierwszych lat po zakończeniu wojny. Izba Pamięci Narodowej jest dostępna dla wszystkich zainteresowanych historią minionego okresu.

NACZELNIK MIASTA
Edward Matusz

Marcel Hequet in his uniform shortly before his imprisonment. Collection of the Hequet family

Answer of the Zgorzelec Municipality to the search request for Marcel's grave site. June 1986. Collection of the Hequet family



Art as a means of survival

Chamber music is a form of classical music played by a small group of instruments, e.g. quartets (4 instruments) or trios (3 instruments).

„Quartet for the End of Time” is one of the most famous **pieces of chamber music** of the 20th century. It was composed in Stalag VIII A.

The creator of the „Quartet for the End of Time”, Olivier Messiaen, had already been a recognised musician and composer before the war began. As an organist at the parish church La Trinité in Paris, he was highly esteemed in music aficionado and connoisseur circles. However, his status as a musician did not protect him from being drafted into service. As chance would have it, Messiaen served in a regiment with a cellist, Etienne Pasquier. Both were taken prisoner together shortly before the surrender of France and were taken to Görlitz to Stalag VIII A by the same route.

Music accompanied them in many moments throughout the captivity, although the difficult circumstances did not always allow them to make music. Even before they were transported to Görlitz, Messiaen and Pasquier met the clarinetist Henri Akoka, who was also taken to Stalag VIII A. He had managed to keep his clarinet with him despite being captured.

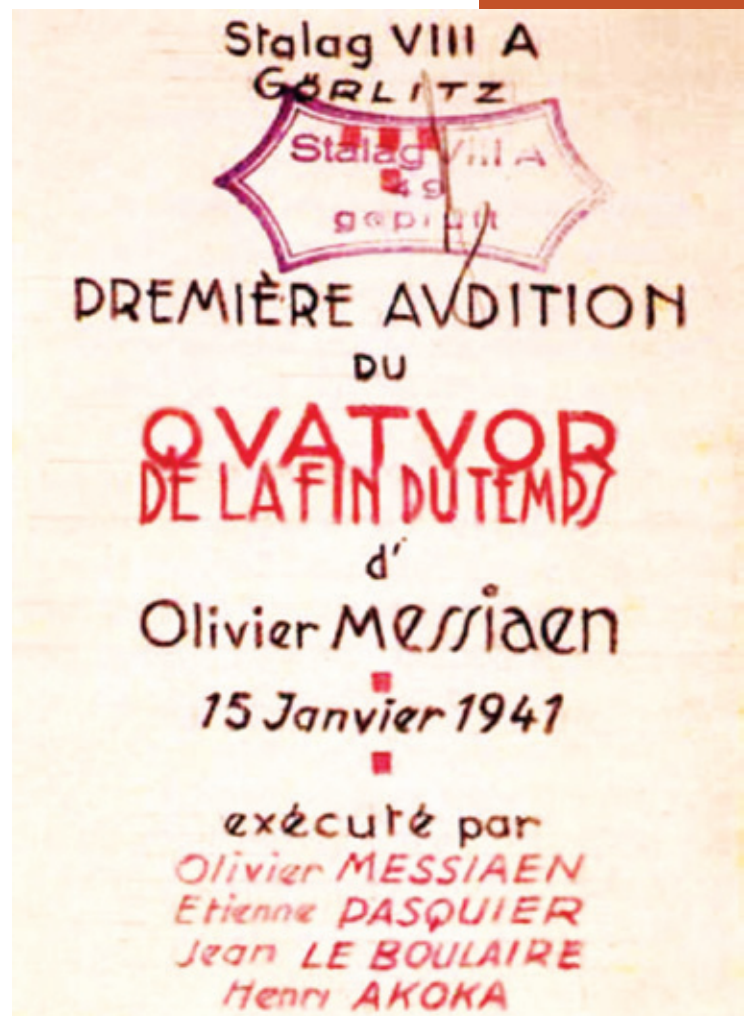
Although his stay in captivity was a dramatic experience, it can be said that Messiaen was quite lucky. As a Frenchman he was protected by the Geneva Convention. His French fellow captives, knowing who he was, tried to protect him from manual labour. Thanks to the help of a Polish prisoner of war, Zdzisław Nardelli, who was in charge of the library, he was employed there. He also found a protector in the person of a German non-commissioned officer, a camp translator from French, who, knowing and admiring his work, supplied him with music paper and pencils. This was the setting for his „Quartet for the End of Time”, which was first performed on 15 January 1941 in Barrack 27B, where the camp theatre seated about 400. The instruments were provided by the International Red Cross. Apart from Pasquier and Akoka, there was another musician in the camp, the talented violinist Jean Le Boulaire. Messiaen himself performed the piano part.

Le Boulaire wrote after the premiere: „To Olivier Messiaen, my great friend, who took me on a journey into a wonderful world with the ‚Quatuor pour la fin du temps’. A thousand thanks, in deep adoration and friendship.”

1. Describe the premiere of the „Quartet for the End of Time” on the basis of the recording.
2. Explain the difficulties that had to be faced by the musicians in connection with the first performance of the „Quartet”.
3. Evaluate the place of music, art and culture in the Geneva Convention.



Olivier Messiaen 1937, Studio Harcourt, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons



Invitation to the premiere of the "Quartet for the End of Time" by a prisoner of Stalag Görlitz. Badinguet 42, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

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Stalag VIII A Görlitz was a prisoner of war camp through which some 120,000 prisoners of various nationalities passed. There were Poles, French and Belgians, Serbs, Italians, English and British Commonwealth soldiers from distant continents, as well as Red Army soldiers of more than a dozen nationalities. Some stayed here for several months; many spent almost five years behind the wires of this camp. Most were used as forced labourers to work for the economy of the Third Reich. More than 10,000 lost their lives here.

For a long time, the only reminder of the Stalag was an obelisk with a memorial plaque and a small cemetery for Red Army prisoners of war. For some years now, the memory of the camp and its prisoners has been maintained by two institutions: The Foundation Remembrance, Education, Culture from the Polish city of Zgorzelec and the association Meetingpoint Memory Messiaen e.V. from the Saxon city of Görlitz.

Together, the partners carry out numerous historical-political educational activities for young people as well as projects and measures to preserve the memory of the past of the site and the prisoners of war.

We hope that the publication you hold in your hands will be a useful tool for our joint work to commemorate the tragic events of the Second World War and its victims, among whom were millions of prisoners of war.



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