



Sandbostel Memorial

In September 1939, the first internees, several thousand Polish prisoners-of-war (POWs), were brought as first inmates to Sandbostel Camp, situated on a secluded moor between the Elbe and Weser rivers.

Before the Stalag X B (= Base Camp B for Enlisted Men in Army Sector X, Hamburg) was liberated in April 1945, many hundreds of thousands of men from many different parts of the world were imprisoned here (some for just a few days, others for years): POWs, mainly from the Soviet Union, France, Poland, Yugoslavia and Great Britain, Italian military internees, members of the British Merchant Navy, woman who had taken part in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 and finally about 10,000 concentration camp prisoners. The POWs had to work for the German war industry in many different places.

Hunger, sickness, fatigue and violence were the reasons for the extraordinary number of deaths among Soviet prisoners in the winter of 1941/42 and the concentration camp inmates deported to Sandbostel in April/May 1945. Those who died at the camp are buried in the War Cemetery about two kilometers to the east. Their exact number is still unknown. Estimates vary between 8000 and 50000.

British troops liberated the Camp on April, 29th 1945. At the end of May some parts of the camp were burnt down because of a typhoid epidemic. Between June 1945 and 1948 a few thousand former SS and NS leaders were interned there. From 1952 till 1960, the buildings then still standing were used as a transit camp for juvenile refugees from the GDR. In 1974, those parts of the camp which had not been turned back into farmland became Immenhain Industrial Estate. Most of the 25 buildings which still exist today, some of which in a derelict form, were given „Listed“ status in 1992.

In summer 1945 the Soviet Military Administration had a monument erected in the Sandbostel Cemetery in honour of the Red Army soldiers buried there. Four years later the entire cemetery was broken up and restructured. The original 53 rows of Soviet communal graves were rearranged into the present day 14 „Collective Graves“; this means that the graves only partially correspond to the actual position of the bodies. In 1956, the Soviet Monument was blown up at the instigation of the Bremervörde District Authority and the Lower Saxony Ministry of Internal Affairs, one reason being the allegedly exaggerated number of dead upon it.

The reburial of nearly 3000 concentration camp prisoners from communal graves in the area to Sandbostel Cemetery was essentially completed in 1956. The remains of non-Soviet POWs were for the most part transported to their home-countries, those of the Italians to the Central Cemetery in Hamburg-Öjendorf. Today, there are about 170 individual graves of Polish, Yugoslavian and unknown prisoners in the cemetery. After the war the national POWs veterans organisations and the organisations of concentration camp survivors such as Amicale Internationale de Neuengamme worked hard to ensure that the history of Stalag X B would not be forgotten and that the burial-places at Sandbostel would be kept in good condition. From 1946, the Federal State of Lower Saxony was in charge of their maintenance; in 1973, Sandbostel Community took over.

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