

## French POWs

The number of French soldiers captured by the Germans during the Second World War is recognized around 1.6 million. The first prisoners-of-war arrived at Stalag VIII B Lamsdorf on 14 August 1940. They were nine soldiers of the Foreign Legion. Later, more were brought to the camp. By the end of September 1941, on average, there were around 4,000 of them housed there, but already in the autumn of that year they were all transported to Stalag VIII C Sagan. It was this camp that, according to the plans of the German military authorities, was to become a place of concentration for captured soldiers of the French army. However, this intention was not completely fulfilled. Another transport of just over 2,600 French soldiers arrived at Lamsdorf in the spring of 1941. Over the following months, they were gradually moved, along with Belgians and Yugoslavs, to the newly established stalag in Teschen (now Cieszyn). From December 1943 until the evacuation of the camp, the number of French held at Lamsdorf in the so-called *Russenlager* was around 2,000.

Among the French POWs held in Lamsdorf were many people from the colonies, including Moroccans, Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese and a Chinese. The French were among the best treated prisoner-of-war groups, like the British and Americans. They were accommodated in suitable huts and given sufficient food rations, which were further supplemented with the help of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Some of the prisoners also benefited from the so-called 'eased up status', which was the result of an agreement between the collaborationist Vichy government and the German authorities. It allowed them, among other things, to move around freely without supervision, which had an impact on the high number of escapes. Consequently, many were sent to perform forced labour.

From 1940 to 1945, around 17,300 French prisoners-of-war were passed through the Lamsdorf camps. 19 of them died, including one who was shot. Probably, like the British, they were buried in the First World War cemetery. Between 1947 and 1948, the French Search Mission exhumed the bodies of French POWs, transferring them to other cemeteries.