

Polish POWs

Soldiers of the Polish Army - participants of the Polish Campaign of 1939 - were the first POW group sent to Lamsdorf POW camps during the Second World War. The first prisoner-of-war in the Lamsdorf transit camp (Dulag B) - established as early as August 1939 - was already there on 3 September. Two days later, a transport of almost a thousand men arrived at the camp. In total, for just over a month, some 43,000 Polish prisoners-of-war passed through Dulag B, which on 4 October was transformed into Stalag VIII B Lamsdorf. Among them were also interned civilians, including a group of Franciscan friars from Niepokalanów with Father Maximilian Maria Kolbe. The first months in captivity were hard, with the prisoners kept initially in tents and outbuildings, only later in the huts they had participated in constructing. Added to this were poor sanitary conditions and inadequate food, with only those who worked received slightly larger rations.

In the spring of 1940 the Third Reich began to prepare room in camps for future prisoners-of-war from its planned campaign in the West. The Poles were either transferred to camps in the heartland of the Reich, or were forced to relinquish their prisoner-of-war status, and were sent as civilian workers to carry out forced labour in agriculture and industry in Silesia. Thus, only a handful of Poles remained in the camp, held in the so-called Soviet camp (*Russenlager*). In total, around 72.5 thousand Polish soldiers passed through the Lamsdorf stalags during the Second World War.

A second large group of Polish prisoners-of-war arrived at Lamsdorf in October and November 1944. They were participants in the Warsaw Uprising, mostly soldiers of the Home Army (AK). In total, nearly 6,000 officers, non-commissioned officers and rank-and-file soldiers were brought to Lamsdorf via Ożarów, Częstochowa and Opole, out of a total of about 17,500 taken prisoner. There were more than 1,000 women and about 650 children among them. They were housed in the northern part of the so-called *Russenlager*, in the vicinity of the Poles from the Campaign of 1938, Frenchmen and Yugoslavs. Among them were people with well-known names, such as Colonel Jan Rzepecki of the Home Army Headquarters, later successor to General Leopold 'Niedźwiadek' Okulicki, Lt. Col. Franciszek 'Paweł' Rataj - commander of the 15th Infantry Regiment of the AK, participant in the Wielkopolska Uprising, the Polish-Soviet War and the Third Silesian Uprising, Capt. Witold Pilecki, "the volunteer to Auschwitz", and, for example, outstanding historians Aleksander Gieysztor or Witold Kula.

Stalag 344 Lamsdorf was a transit camp for the insurgents, in which they stayed for a relatively short time. Thus, before they had time to get used to the place and its poor conditions,

they began to be transported to other camps. The last transport left on 20 January 1945. The few wounded and sick, unable to make the evacuation march, remained in the camp until the Red Army troops entered it on 17 and 18 March 1945.