



MUSEUM IN A SITE OF REMEMBRANCE

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The Central Museum of Prisoners-of-War in Łambinowice-Opole



What kind of museum are we?

The Central Museum of Prisoners-of-War in Łambinowice-Opole (hereafter referred to as: CMPOW, Museum) is a unique institution on the European scale. It deals with the problem area of prisoners-of-war and certain issues concerning the newest history of Poland. The scope of the Museum's activity includes the following: collecting, preserving and rendering collections accessible, conducting scientific studies and popularizing the problem area of two prisoner-of-war systems – German and Soviet – during World War II, primarily the vicissitudes of Polish POWs functioning within these two systems, as well as Polish soldiers interned in neutral states. A significant place in this activity is occupied by the histories of the POW camps in Lamsdorf and of the Labour Camp in Łambinowice. The realization by the Museum of its statutory tasks means:

- collection of monuments, mementos and other materials;
- preparation of inventories, cataloguing, digitalization and scientific elaboration of the collections;
- storing collections and securing the appropriate state of their preservation and rendering them accessible for scientific, educational, exhibiting purposes, and also for the needs of former POWs and their families;
- protection and conservation of sites of former camps;
- organization and conducting scientific studies, as well as presentation of their results;
- organization of permanent and temporal exhibitions, as well as providing visitors with the service of guides while visiting the Museum, sites of the former camps and war cemeteries in Łambinowice;
- running educational, cultural and editing activities;
- cooperation with domestic and foreign institutions and organizations which have similar goals, scholarly and educational institutions, as well as with former POWs and their families.

The Monument of Martyrdom of Prisoners-of-War



Stalag VIII B (344) Lamsdorf



Remains of a bunkhouse



Fragment of the swimming pool from the 1930s in the area of Stalag VIII B (344) Lamsdorf



A pool from the 1930s within the area of the stalag

What events gave rise to the establishment of the Museum?

The Central Museum of Prisoners-of-War in Łambinowice-Opole has existed as an independent institution since 1965. It belongs to the group of museums of martyrdom, which were established in Poland after World War II in places of major crimes perpetrated by the Nazi Germans, with the aim to document the crimes and cultivate remembrance of the victims, and in this way to provide a warning against history repeating itself in the future. The crimes which were committed in Łambinowice (until the end of World War II the place had been known under the name Lamsdorf) were connected with the functioning of one of the biggest prisoner-of-war camp complexes in Europe in the years 1939-1945. The complex was sited on the premises of the transition POW camp Dulag B (*Durchgangslager*), which had been organized in Lamsdorf already before the outbreak of World War II, as one located along the border between the Third Reich and Poland. In October 1939, the place was transformed into a stationary camp for privates and non-commissioned officers – Stalag VIII B Lamsdorf (*Mannschaftsammelager*). Following the German invasion of the Soviet Union, in June 1941, over two kilometres away from it, a new camp – Stalag 318 Lamsdorf was set up. The two camps situated in the vicinity of the village accommodated POWs of many nationalities basically until the end of the military operations carried out in Opole Silesia. During the functioning of the camps, there were numerous alterations made regarding their organization. They included, among others, changes in their subordination and names. For instance, for a short time in 1943, the complex of Lamsdorf supervised also Stalag VIII D Teschen (Czech Tesin) – the camp located relatively far away from Lamsdorf.



Stalag 318/VIII F (344) Lamsdorf



Fragment of the remains of stalag,
with the best-preserved,
partially-reconstructed bunkerhouse



A wall of a bunkerhouse in the area of Stalag 318/VIII F (344) Lamsdorf

Lamsdorf camps provided a useful source of cheap labourforce for agriculture and industry of Silesia during World War II, particularly in the part of the region, which was marked out by the borders of the VIIIth Military District of the Wehrmacht (OKW – *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*), within which the complex was situated. Consequently, in the years 1939-1945, the Germans detained there over 300 thousand POWs – men of many continents, who were forced to stay there in very hard living conditions. The most numerous groups included the following: soldiers of the Red Army, Polish POWs (soldiers of the September Campaign of 1939 and Warsaw insurgents of 1944), British POWs. In the case of the Soviet POWs – considered to be the most dangerous ideological enemies – Lamsdorf proved to be a place of extermination. The number of victims buried here – POWs who died mainly as a result of inhuman treatment, hunger and exhaustion – is assessed at about 40 thousand. It is still considerably augmented by the number of victims of the evacuation march into the heart of the Reich, which began at the end of January 1945.



The Monument of Warsaw Insurgents – Prisoners-of-War in Stalag 344 Lamsdorf



The Cemetery of the Soviet Prisoners-of-War