

Plötzensee Memorial Center
Hüttigpfad
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or 030 - 26 99 50 00 (German Resistance Memorial Center)

Opening hours:

March to October 9 am - 5 pm daily
November to February 9 am - 4 pm daily
(Closed: December 24, 25, 26, 31
and January 1.)

Public transportation:

Turmstraße U-Bahn station or Beusselstraße S-Bahn station,
then bus 123 to "Gedenkstätte Plötzensee"
(3 minutes' walk)

Admission is free of charge.

This is a site of quiet remembrance.
No guided tours are available.

The website www.gedenkstaette-plotzensee.de
documents the entire exhibition in German and English.
German, English, and French publications are also
available for free download in pdf format.

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by the Federal Government Commissioners
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The Plötzensee Memorial Center is part of
the German Resistance Memorial Center Foundation,
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The Bloody Nights of Plötzensee

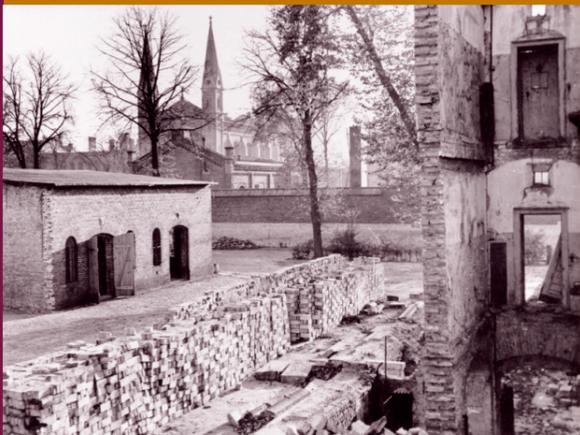
In the night of September 3-4, 1943, several allied bombs fell on the blacked-out Plötzensee Prison during an air raid on Berlin, causing severe damage. At the time, some 300 of the prisoners in Plötzensee had been condemned to death. The air raid also severely damaged the execution shed and the guillotine.

On September 7, 1943, the Reich Justice Ministry was informed by telephone of the names of the prisoners sentenced to death. The undersecretary of state Curt Rothenberger decided on the clemency proceedings without waiting for the usual legal opinions. He ordered execution in almost all cases, having the names passed back to Plötzensee by telephone.

As the guillotine had been destroyed, the prisoners were hanged on a gallows against the back wall, eight at a time. 186 people were murdered in this way in the night of September 7-8, 1943 alone. On the same night, six prisoners whose execution had not been ordered at all were also "accidentally" hanged.

After a break of only 12 hours, the Plötzensee executioners hanged more than 60 further victims in the following nights up to September 12, 1943. Among the over 250 people murdered between September 7 and 12, 1943 were German, French, and many Czech prisoners.

Prison church and execution building (left),
in the foreground the bombed House III,
the "house of the dead", after 1945



Karlrobert Kreiten

Karlrobert Kreiten was born in Bonn on June 26, 1916, to a Dutch father. He grew up in Düsseldorf, and was regarded as one of the most important pianists of his generation. During a concert tour in March 1943, under the impression of the German defeat at Stalingrad, he said to a friend of his mother's in Berlin that the war was lost, calling Hitler "a madman." The woman denounced Karlrobert Kreiten, who was arrested in early May of 1943. The "People's Court" under Roland Freisler sentenced him to death for "demoralizing the troops, aiding the enemy, and defeatist statements" on September 3, 1943. Karlrobert Kreiten was murdered four days later in Berlin-Plötzensee.



Zdeněk Hajek

Zdeněk Hajek was born in Litomyšl on July 27, 1919. He worked in Berlin as a metalworker, while his wife and family remained in Prague. In January 1943, he was arrested with his friend Jaroslav Matyas for stealing rabbits and geese. Hajek was sentenced to death for this theft by Special Court V on July 21, 1943. Despite not having the necessary means or any real chance of success, he attempted to escape from prison in the night of July 25-26, 1943. He had freed himself from his bonds and started to open the barred window when he was caught. He spent two weeks in a maximum-security arrest cell, his hands and feet tied, before being murdered in Berlin-Plötzensee on September 7, 1943.

The Red Orchestra



In the 1930s, resistance circles formed around the Berlin senior civil servant Arvid Harnack (pictured above with his wife Mildred) and Harro Schulze-Boysen, who worked at the Reich Aviation Ministry. Over time, more than 100 opponents of National Socialism joined them, from very different social origins and political traditions, creating one of the largest German resistance groups in 1941/42.

The group was willing to pass on important military messages to Moscow via radio after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, but failed to do so because of technical problems. From February 1942, they distributed leaflets about Nazi crimes of violence and the military problems on the eastern front.

In summer 1942, the Gestapo discovered the resistance organization. The Reich Court Martial passed the first of almost 50 death sentences in December of that year. To make sure the members of the group died as wretchedly as possible, a steel girder with eight hooks was installed as a gallows in Plötzensee. Between 7 and 8.33 pm on December 22, 1942, five men were murdered here by hanging, and three women and three men by guillotine. The executioners murdered another 13 prisoners between 7 and 7.36 pm on May 13, 1943.

On July 21, 1943, Adolf Hitler personally rejected the pleas for clemency of 17 members of the Red Orchestra. Even the Reich Court Martial had recommended pardoning the 22-year-old ceramic artist Cato Bontjes van Beek and the 19-year-old school student Liane Berkowitz, who had given birth to a daughter in prison. Liane Berkowitz and Cato Bontjes van Beek were murdered between 7 and 8 pm on August 5, 1943 in Berlin-Plötzensee, along with 17 other women and men from the group.

July 20, 1944

Following extensive preparations by civilian and military circles, in early July 1944 Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg decided to make an attempt on Hitler's life himself, despite his war injuries and his key role in Berlin. On July 20, 1944, he succeeded in detonating a bomb in Hitler's closely guarded "Wolf's Lair headquarters" near to Rastenburg in East Prussia.

On his return to Berlin, Stauffenberg and his fellow conspirators in the Bendler Block tried to launch the attempted coup across the German Reich. That same night, Stauffenberg, his adjutant Werner von Haeften, Albrecht Ritter Mertz von Quirnheim, and Friedrich Olbricht were shot dead on the command of Colonel General Friedrich Fromm.



A few days later on August 7 and 8, 1944, the first case against Field Marshall Erwin von Witzleben (4th from right), First Lieutenant Peter Graf Yorck von Wartenburg (standing), Colonel General Erich Hoepner, Lieutenant General Paul von Hase (3rd from right), Major General Hellmuth Stieff, Captain Karl Friedrich Klausung, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Bernardis, and First Lieutenant Albrecht von Hagen took place before the "People's Court" under Roland Freisler, ending with death sentences for all the defendants. They were murdered that same day in Berlin-Plötzensee.

This was the start of a series of more than 50 trials resulting in over 110 death sentences. From October 1944 these included cases against people who had supported the conspirators or helped them to escape. All in all, 89 people who belonged to the resistance circles of July 20, 1944 or supported them were murdered in Berlin-Plötzensee between August 8, 1944 and April 15, 1945.

Plötzensee Memorial Center



Plötzensee Prison



Plötzensee prison was built outside the gates of Berlin from 1868 to 1879. Covering an area of over 25 hectares (about 62 acres), it consisted of a building complex for 1200 prisoners with generous open spaces. Alongside the prison blocks there were red-brick administration and service buildings, numerous work sheds, a prison infirmary, a church, and prison officers' housing.

Soon after the National Socialists took power in 1933, the conditions in Plötzensee became harsher. The new aims of the penal system were retribution, deterrence, and the "eradication" of allegedly "inferior elements." Plötzensee was now also used as a remand prison for political proceedings, more and more of which were carried out by the Special Courts set up in 1933, the Prussian regional High Court's political criminal tribunals, and the "People's Court" founded in 1934.

At the center of the aerial photograph above is House III, where those who had been sentenced to death were imprisoned. Immediately before their execution, they were taken to the execution shed (left) and murdered. The front part of the execution shed was pulled down after 1945; in its place are the memorial wall and the courtyard of the memorial center.

After 1939, more and more foreigners were imprisoned here, having been deported to Germany as forced laborers. They formed a fourth group of prisoners in Plötzensee alongside the German prisoners with mostly shorter sentences, the political prisoners awaiting trial, and the inmates awaiting execution.

Due to overcrowding, insufficient food, and delayed or withheld medical treatment, the prisoners' living conditions constantly deteriorated during the second half of the war. Most of the inmates were released shortly before the Red Army captured the prison on April 25, 1945.

In 1945, the Allies decided to use Plötzensee as a juvenile detention center. House III was demolished, with new blocks built in its place for young inmates and day-release prisoners. There is still a prison infirmary in Plötzensee.

In 1951, Berlin's local government decided to build a memorial center in Plötzensee, commissioning the architect Bruno Grimmek with its design. Parts of the execution shed were demolished, and a memorial wall was erected in front of it. The foundation stone for the memorial center was laid on September 9, 1951, and the center was officially inaugurated on September 14, 1952. Ever since then, Plötzensee has been a site of remembrance and silent commemoration of all victims of the National Socialist dictatorship.



Cell entrances in House III, before 1945

Executions in Plötzensee 1933 – 1945

Between 1890 and 1932, a total of 36 convicted murderers were executed by ax in the Plötzensee prison yard. In the twelve years of National Socialist terror from 1933 to 1945, in contrast, 2891 people were the victims of judicial killings on the site.

Between 1933 and 1936, a total of 45 prisoners were beheaded by ax in Plötzensee. On October 14, 1936, Adolf Hitler approved a proposal by the Justice Minister Franz Gürtner to carry out death sentences by guillotine. Under strict secrecy, a guillotine was transported from Bruchsal prison in Baden to Plötzensee, and set up in a brick shed.

The prisoners who were sentenced to death were housed in the large cell block (House III) directly next to the execution shed. They spent their final hours in shackles in special ground-level cells, which the prisoners called the "house of the dead." Their last walk took them across a small courtyard to the execution room housing the guillotine.

At the end of 1942, a steel girder was installed in the execution room, on which eight hooks were fastened. This gallows was used for hangings, starting with the members of the Red Orchestra resistance organization, and later those of the resistance fighters involved in the attempted coup of July 20, 1944.

Around 1500 death sentences passed by the "People's Court" and some 1000 passed by the Special Courts were executed in Plötzensee. The remaining 400 victims were sentenced to death by the Reich Court Martial, other military courts, but also by the Reich Court, the Prussian regional High Court, and the State Courts.

About half of those executed were Germans, most of whom were sentenced to death for resistance activities against the lawless Nazi state. After 1939 in particular, many people were given excessively harsh sentences for minor crimes, often condemned to death.

Sentences against foreign members of resistance organizations or people brought to Germany as forced laborers were even harsher. After 1939, people from all over German-occupied Europe met their end in Plötzensee.

Executions in Berlin-Plötzensee between 1933 and 1945	
1933	4
1934	13
1935	21
1936	7
1937	38
1938	55
1939	95
1940	190
1941	87
1942	535
1943	1180
1944	534
1945	132
	2891

Origin of prisoners murdered in Berlin-Plötzensee from 1933 to 1945.	
Germany	1437
Czechoslovakia	677
Poland	253
France	245
Austria	89
Belgium	68
Netherlands	35
Soviet Union	24
Yugoslavia	14
Spain	9
Italy	6
Lithuania	6
Switzerland	4
Greece	4
Romania	4
Hungary	3
Bulgaria	2
Norway	1
Afghanistan	1
Egypt	1
Luxembourg	1
Stateless	7
	2891

These figures are based on all sources available to the German Resistance Memorial Center as of the end of 2004.



Liselotte Herrmann

Born in Berlin on June 23, 1909, Liselotte Herrmann joined the German Communist Party (KPD) in 1931, and was expelled from Berlin University for this reason in July 1933. In Württemberg in 1934, she passed on information about arms production in the Friedrichshafen Dornier Works and the construction of an underground munitions factory near Celle to an instructor for the KPD central committee in Switzerland. Liselotte Herrmann was arrested on December 7, 1935, and sentenced to death by the "People's Court" on June 12, 1937 for "treason and preparation for high treason." She was then held in the Berlin women's prison on Barnimstrasse for almost a year. She was murdered in Berlin-Plötzensee along with her friends Stefan Lovasz, Josef Steidle, and Artur Göritz on June 20, 1938.



Galina Romanova

Galina Romanova was born near Dnepropetrovsk on December 25, 1918, and went on to study medicine. On July 1, 1942, she was deported to Germany, where she worked as a doctor in forced labor camps. At the start of the war years, the doctor Georg Groscurth, the physical chemist Robert Havemann, the architect Herbert Richter, and the dentist Paul Rentsch started a resistance group in Berlin with the name of "European Union." They saw their joint struggle against the National Socialist regime with forced laborers from many European nations as the foundation for a post-war socialist system across the whole of Europe. They were also in contact with Galina Romanova. After the group was discovered by the Gestapo, she was arrested on October 6, 1943, sentenced to death on April 27, 1944, and murdered in Berlin-Plötzensee on November 3, 1944.



Hermann Stöhr

Born on January 4, 1889, the theologian and political scientist Hermann Stöhr worked towards ecumenical and pacifist ideals. He spent some time as the secretary at the Berlin headquarters of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation. Hermann Stöhr took a courageous stand against National Socialist Church policy after 1933, calling on the Protestant Church to include victims of political persecution in its intercessions and show practical solidarity with the Jews. After being drafted to the Wehrmacht in 1939, he rejected military service for reasons of conscience, and requested to be allowed to carry out labor service instead. On March 16, 1940, Hermann Stöhr was sentenced to death by the Reich Court Martial for conscientious objection, and murdered in Berlin-Plötzensee on June 21, 1940.



Musa Jalil

Born on February 15, 1906, the dramatist Musa Jalil became the chairman of the Tatar Literary Association in 1940. He is regarded to this day as one of the most important authors in the Tatar language. After Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, he was called up to the army and served as a political officer and war correspondent. He was taken prisoner in June 1942, severely wounded. After a while he joined the Wehrmacht propaganda unit for the Legion Idel-Ural, where his patriotic writing strengthened his compatriots' will to resist the National Socialists. He was arrested with his comrades in August 1943, sentenced to death by the Reich Court Martial on February 12, 1944, and murdered in Berlin-Plötzensee on August 25, 1944.