

**HAN
NOV
ER** 

ZUR EWIGEN
ERINNERUNG AN DIE
ANGEHÖRIGEN DER U.S.S.R.
U. ANDERER NATIONEN
OPFER
DER NAZI BRUTALITÄT
GRAUSAM GEMORDET



WAR CEMETERY

Maschsee lake, north shore



Image: RGASPL, Moscow, Bestand 117, Fndbuch 1, Nr. 2090

The war cemetery on the north shore of the Maschsee lake

386 forced labourers, prisoners of war (POW) and concentration camp prisoners from all over Europe are buried in this cemetery. They were murdered in Hannover towards the end of the Second World War. The victims include 154 citizens of the former Soviet Union who were killed in a mass shooting at the municipal cemetery at Seelhorst on 6 April 1945 – four days before the liberation of Hannover.

Forced labour in Hannover

During the Second World War (1939 bis 1945), in which Germany was the aggressor, forced labourers were brought to work in Hannover. There were more than 500 camps within the city area housing more than 60,000 forced labourers, most of whom had to work in the armaments industry. From 1943 to 1945 the city also hosted seven satellite camps of the concentration camp Neuengamme near Hamburg. They were located in Ahlem, Langenhagen, Limmer, Misburg, Mühlenberg and Stöcken. Several thousand concentration camp prisoners lived and worked there under inhumane conditions.

Image, above: Decorated graves in the war cemetery at the Maschsee lake in May 1945, in the background the New Town Hall.

The crime and the victims

Forced labourers were entirely at the mercy of the Nazi regime. They suffered draconian punishments for alleged “crimes”. Thus many forced labourers died in the provisional police prison in Hannover-Ahlem, mostly as a result of torture and starvation. Numerous prisoners were executed by the Gestapo in the grounds of the prison in Ahlem.

On 6 April 1945 a group of prisoners from Ahlem were marched through Hannover to the municipal cemetery at Seelhorst. Most of them came from the recently closed “labour education camp” (Arbeitserziehungslager / AEL) Lahde near Minden, which had been under the control of the Gestapo. Mortality rates were very high in this punitive camp, prisoners were tortured and murdered. In the course of the death march through the city several prisoners managed to escape the armed guards. During the subsequent shootings at Seelhorst cemetery, Peter Palnikov succeeded in getting away. The remaining prisoners were forced to stand groups of four in front of the mass grave they had dug themselves where they were shot in the head by members of the Gestapo.



Image: Imperial War Museum London, EA 65377

The bodies were covered with white cloths and decorated with flowers for their transport in a funeral cortege from Seelhorst cemetery to the north shore of the Maschsee lake.



Burial of the bodies on the north shore of the Maschsee lake.

After the liberation of Hannover on 10 April 1945, Peter Palnikov as eye witness to the murders informed the Allies of the shootings at Seelhorst cemetery. On 2 May 1945 the British and Americans ordered the exhumation of the bodies and their dignified burial on the north shore of the Maschsee lake.

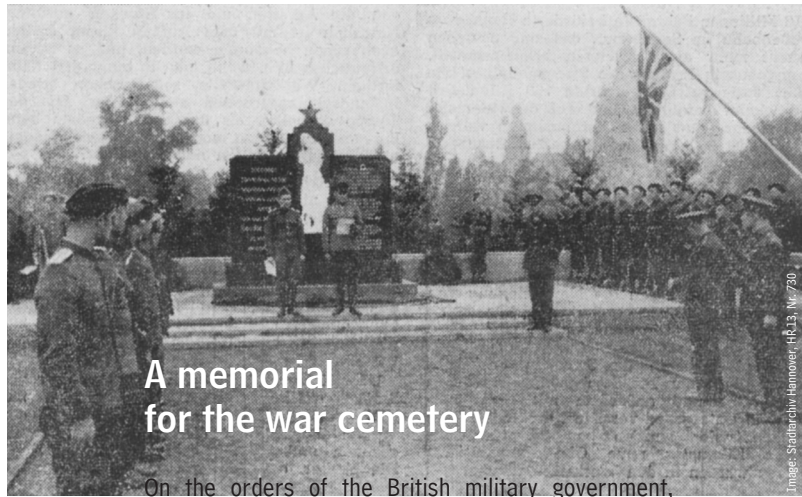
At the time only a few individuals could be identified:

- Nadja Podmogilnaja – Michael Masuskewiz
- Nicolai Belozenko – Iwan Sauszuk
- Iwan Burba – Wassili Sednew

The bodies of a further 232 forced labourers were exhumed on 2 and 3 May 1945 and interred in this cemetery. A monument in Seelhorst cemetery commemorates the shooting victims at the site of the crime.



Peter Palnikov succeeded in escaping the shooting at Seelhorst cemetery.



A memorial for the war cemetery

On the orders of the British military government, the murdered concentration camp prisoners, forced labourers and prisoners of war from the Soviet Union and many European countries found a dignified final resting place on the north shore of the Maschsee lake within view of the New Town Hall.

The prisoners of war who were shot at Seelhorst cemetery on 6 April 1945 were the first group of victims to be identified. This is probably why the Soviet repatriation command was placed in charge of the design of the memorial. The Soviets chose high quality Swedish granite and Silesian stone for the base and marble for the figure of the soldier. The British military government and the Soviet command decided the wording of the inscription together. The German text was placed prominently on the left-hand side of the memorial. The date cited in the memorial is based on an error. In the early 1980s historians identified 6 April 1945 as the date of the crime.

The city of Hannover bore the cost of the memorial and the landscaping of the cemetery. It was officially inaugurated on 16 October 1945.

Image, above: Inauguration of the memorial, crowned with a Soviet star, on 16 October 1945.

The artist and his work

Mykola Muchin-Koloda (* 24 May 1916 in Zaitseve, Ukraine; † 8 Mai 1962 in Philadelphia, USA) studied art in Kharkiv, Odessa and Kiev and later taught sculpture at the art school in Lviv (Lemberg). In 1949 he emigrated from Munich to the USA via a Displaced Persons Camp. Stylistically, his work is representational and makes use of traditional religious symbolism.

In the summer of 1945 Muchin received a Soviet commission to design three memorials for war cemeteries, each of which had a marble figure at their centre: he created a dying figure for the cemetery at Oerbke, a grieving soldier for Hannover and a weeping girl for Bergen-Belsen/Hörsten. Muchin's sculptures dispense with heroic forms, which is unusual for Soviet memorials. The figure of the soldier rests on a pedestal. A small tree is putting out new leaves – a sign of hope.

The artist's daughter Masha Archer née Muchin comments: "The soldier bends his head in sorrow, but he keeps watch with strength and a quiet energy. The girl is a symbol of home, the starving man (...) embodies the fears and agony of war, its true extent."

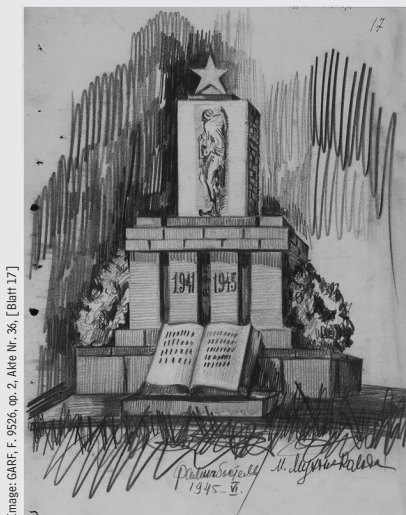


Image: GARF, F. 9526, op. 2, Akte Nr. 36, [Blatt 17]

Muchin's drawing for the memorial at the Soviet POW cemetery at Oerbke, dedicated on 3 July 1945.



Image: Stiftung niedersächsische Gedenkstätten / Dokumentationsstelle Celle

Soviet memorial at the POW cemetery at Bergen-Belsen, ca. 1947.

Vandalism and neglect

The British military government referred to it as the "Memorial for the Maschsee cemetery" in 1945, the Soviets called it the "Cemetery for Soviet citizens", the municipal administration spoke of "Russians' graves" and the "Russian memorial". During the anti-communist period of the Cold War the memorial was repeatedly vandalised. In 1947 the head of the bas-relief was knocked off, in the early 1950s the Soviet star was removed under mysterious circumstances, explosive attacks were carried out in 1979 and 1987 and there was a paint attack in 1980.

The war cemetery was redesigned several times, first with individual grave markers, then a triple row of rose beds and later a park-like lawn. In 2009 the rows of graves were emphasized again in order to underline the site's character as a cemetery.



Image: Stadlarchiv Hannover, HG Belleff 2015.

Memorial on the north shore of the Maschsee lake, 1947.

A living culture of commemoration at the war cemetery

The city of Hannover has worked hard for years to promote a lasting engagement with the history of the war cemetery and its establishment in the public consciousness as a place of commemoration, learning and information.

Numerous actors are involved in shaping commemoration at the war cemetery on the north shore of the Maschsee lake:

Since the 1980s the industrial workers union IG Metall has supported the revitalisation of the war cemetery. Members of the union's youth division have enriched the annual commemorative events for Anti-War Day with their reflections on the topic of war.



Image: Reinhold Weismann-Kesser

Commemorative event on Anti-War Day, 1. September 2011.

St. Ursula School and Bertha von Suttner School are sponsors for the cemetery. The students work to preserve the cemetery by studying it and carrying out maintenance work.

The city of Hannover's Remembrance Culture Project has provided scientific supervision for the war cemetery since the project was established in 2010, and it designs and organises new forms of commemoration. This includes the growing awareness of the war cemetery as a place of European memory.

These actors and other representatives of institutions concerned with historical and political education (incl. the war cemeteries organisation Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V., the German-Russian organisation Volga Int., the City Parks Department, the German-Polish Society) founded the Maschsee Working Group. Regular meetings promote communication and exchange and projects are planned. The working group is headed by the city's Remembrance Culture Project.



Image: Bernd Schwabe

Memorial book in the grotto in the New Town Hall.

Thanks to these efforts it has been possible to realise numerous projects in recent years: in 2008 and 2010 two memorial signs were erected, providing information about the history of the war cemetery in situ. The signs were created as part of an educational project of Heinrich Heine School and St. Ursula School together with the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V., the City of Hannover and the societies Verein Gegen das Vergessen/NS-Zwangsarbeit and Volga Int.

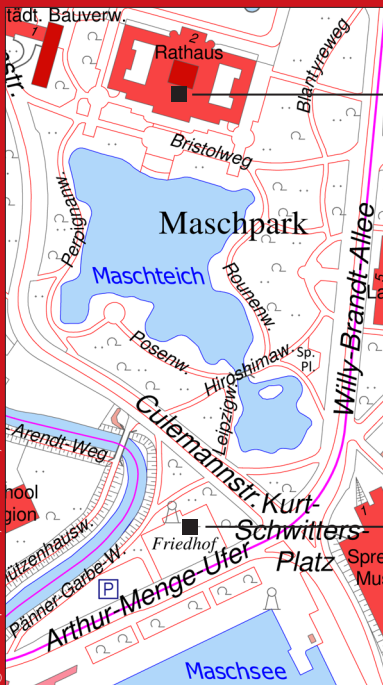
In May 2011 and 2013 the City of Hannover – Remembrance Culture Project – together with the Maschsee Working Group organised an international youth encounter with the motto “Dignity and respect in everyday life”. Students from Russia, Poland, France, Latvia and Hannover engaged with the history of the cemetery and organised a commemorative event for Liberation Day on 8 May. It is planned to continue the youth encounters in 2015 with a focus on the cemetery as an external educational facility for schools.



Image: Thomas Weidemeyer

International Youth Encounter 2011. Visiting the war cemetery at Hörsten/Bergen-Belsen.

The memorial book – Gedenkbuch – for the war cemetery was first presented to the public on 8 May 2012. A name search commissioned by the Remembrance Culture Project brought to light the names of 160 of the 386 people buried in the war cemetery. These names were entered in the book in accordance with the principle “one page, one name, one story”. The memorial book is on permanent view in the grotto in the New Town Hall. After decades of being forgotten and suppressed the names have found their place at the heart of the city.



New Town Hall
Memorial book

War cemetery

Stadtkarte Hannover 1:5000

City of **Hannover**

The Lord Mayor
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Department of Education
Culture of Remembrance Project
Sallstraße 16, 30171 Hannover
0511 - 168 42088
Erinnerungskultur@hannover-stadt.de
www.erinnerungskultur-hannover.de

Editors Dr. Karljosef Kreter und
Julia Berlit-Jackstien

Design Rita Helmke-Steinert
Translation Edel Sheridan-Quantz, BA PhD
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Note: Revised text based on the memorial plaque erected by Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V.

For further information concerning commemorative events at the Maschsee war cemetery see:
Tage der Erinnerung. Wegweiser zu Gedenkveranstaltungen in Hannover, Landeshauptstadt Hannover - Projekt Erinnerungskultur, Hannover 2012.