

Occupation—Annihilation—Forced Labour

Occupation Annihilation Forced Labour

**Papers from the 20th Workshop
on the History and Memory
of National Socialist Concentration Camps**

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Gedruckt mit freundlicher Unterstützung der
Stiftung Erinnerung, Verantwortung, Zukunft,
der Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah und der Stiftung Zeitlehren



Der Workshop fand in Kooperation mit dem Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung der Technischen Universität Berlin, Kontakte-Kontakty e. V. und dem IBB „Johannes Rau“ Minsk statt und wurde unterstützt durch das Auswärtige Amt, die Stiftung Erinnerung, Verantwortung, Zukunft, die Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah und die Thyssen-Stiftung



Auswärtiges Amt



Umschlagabbildung: Gedenkstätte Chatyn, Foto: Olga Kulinchenko

ISBN: 978-3-86331-346-3

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Ansbacher Straße 70
10777 Berlin
www.metropol-verlag.de
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Druck: www.buchdruckerei.de

Inhalt

- 7 FOREWORD
by Stefanie Schüler-Springorum
- 9 INTRODUCTION
by Frédéric Bonnesoeur, Philipp Dinkelaker, Sarah Kleinmann,
Jens Kolata, Anja Reuss
- Deutsche Besatzungs- und Vernichtungspolitik
in Osteuropa**
- 27 ANJA REUSS
„Holocaust by Bullets“
The German organisation of mass murder in Belarus, 1941–1944
- 54 THOMAS IRMER
Forced labour for German enterprises and the Minsk ghetto
The case of Telefunken
- 73 HELEN NIKOLAEVNA MOCH
Possibilities of Survival for Soviet Prisoners of War in the German
Wehrmacht's POW Camps on the Territory of the Occupied Belarusian
Soviet Socialist Republic (1941–1944)
- 84 ROBERT PARZER
The murder of patients by Nazi perpetrators in occupied Poland
- Nationalsozialistischer Umgang
mit sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen**
- 101 MAREIKE OTTERS
Photographing Soviet prisoners of war
in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp
A study of anti-Soviet propaganda photos

132 DMITRI STRATIEVSKI
Annihilation through work or inhumane profit-making?
Soviet prisoners of war as forced labourers for the German Reich,
1941–1945

148 VERENA MEIER
“We are the masters, you are the slaves.”
The economic exploitation of Soviet prisoners of war
as forced labourers in the propellants factory at Liebenau

Erinnerungskultur, Gedenken und Aufarbeitung nach 1945

169 PAULA A. OPPERMANN
Early Commemoration of the Holocaust
On the creation of the Rumbula Memorial in Soviet Latvia

191 CHRISTIAN GANZER
Soviet Prisoners of War in Soviet and post-Soviet
Commemorative Culture
The Brest Fortress: A Case Study

Heutige wissenschaftliche Zugänge (Forschung und Methoden)

211 ANGELIKA LAUMER
Getting Rural
A plea for critical research on Nazi crimes in rural areas

233 NINA JANZ
The Documents on Soviet prisoners of war in the German Archives
Sources, documents and research opportunities

253 **Die Autorinnen, Autoren und die Herausgebenden**

NINA JANZ

The Documents on Soviet prisoners of war in the German Archives

Sources, documents and research opportunities

Introduction

In the first decades after World War II, the fate of the Soviet prisoners of war was barely or not at all paid attention to by German politics, society or scholars. However, research has increasingly started dealing with this issue since the publication of Christian Streit's study *No Comrades*.¹ Particularly subsequent to the new opportunities of access to Eastern European archives after the end of the Cold War, numerous new works on the issue have been created.²

It's not only in historiography that Soviet POWs have gained attention. In German politics, as well, time in German captivity is now recognised as a painful fate. In May 2015, seventy years after the end of WWII, these people have finally received a symbolic gesture by means of parliament's decision to compensate the living victims.³ This, however, is not a guarantee for com-

1 Christian Streit. *Keine Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941–1945*. Bonn, 1991 (first ed. 1978).

2 For instance: Rolf Keller. *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im Deutschen Reich 1941/42: Behandlung und Arbeitseinsatz zwischen Vernichtungspolitik und kriegswirtschaftlichen Zwängen*. Göttingen, 2011; Klaus-Dieter Müller, (ed.). *Die Tragödie der Gefangenschaft in Deutschland und der Sowjetunion 1941–1956*. Cologne, 1998.

3 "The German Bundestag decided on 21 May 2015 that former Soviet prisoners of war should receive a symbolic payment in recognition of their time in German detention. Members of the Soviet armed forces who were detained as prisoners of war by Germany in the Second World War (during the period from 22 June 1941 to 8 May 1945) may receive a one-time payment in the amount of €2,500." The Federal Office for Central Services and Unresolved Property Issues (BADV), <http://www.badv.bund>.

compensation that would legally categorise these POWs as victims of National Socialism. It is merely “symbolic” recognition, seven decades late. Officially, the mass of deaths of Soviet prisoners of war in German custody is not considered a German war crime. Today, as in the past, not all milieus in German society commit to—and even often ignore—the idea that the captivity of Soviet soldiers and their systematic murders had been based on ideological race-policy. Research on this group of victims shall help achieve the recognition and resolution of the deaths of up to 3 million⁴ prisoners of war from the Red Army, and help to start a discussion in Germany, Russia, Belarus and Ukraine.

The present essay offers an overview of the sources in German archives on, and also originating from Soviet prisoners of war in German custody during World War II.⁵ Hereby, the focus is on the German Federal Archives (*Bundesarchiv*, BArch), on the files from military departments and organisations. A complete overview, however, cannot be given here as documents of captured Red Army soldiers are to be found as well in numerous state archives and a lot of small and private collections. This essay particularly addresses scholars who want to begin with research on prisoners of war from the Soviet Union, and in the first place want to make themselves familiar with the sources’ situation in Germany.

Records are to be found where prisoners of war were confronted with German administration and society: first, with Wehrmacht departments in the capture, transport and accommodation of Soviet POWs. The local state authorities in the Reich mainly dealt with this group when it was about work deployments in the armaments industry, in mining and agriculture. Furthermore, collections, estates, photo albums, diaries etc. from soldiers, police

de/EN/UnresolvedPropertyIssues/PaymentToFormerSovietPrisonersOfWar/inhalt.html (January 15, 2016 [English version: December 29, 2016]).

4 Streit. *Keine Kameraden*, p. 10.

5 This essay considers the largest group of Red Army soldiers in captivity: male POWs. Necessarily, female POWs—who, in this essay, cannot be mentioned in a detailed manner—need to be referred to. On female POWs and their fates, see Bernhard Strebel. “Feindbild ‘Flintenweib.’ Weibliche Kriegsgefangene der Roten Armee im KZ Ravensbrück,” in: Johannes Ibel, (ed.). *Einvernehmliche Zusammenarbeit? Wehrmacht, Gestapo, SS und sowjetische Kriegsgefangene*. Berlin, 2008, pp. 159–80.

and civilians testify to encounters and communication with prisoners of war. Very detailed accounts on the body of sources in Germany,⁶ and above all on the documents in Moscow were already published by Rolf Keller and Reinhard Otto in 1998.⁷

A “general holding” of documents on this issue does not exist, neither in Germany nor in any archive on Soviet prisoners of war. Rather, the records and papers have to be targeted and evaluated according to each scholar’s particular enquiry, and the precise sources’ origins.

Different kinds of documents

Any sources—documents as well as objects—may grant insights into the life of Red Army soldiers in German custody, such as: uniforms, dishes and cutlery, personal objects like the prisoners’ watches and glasses in museums and memorial sites, but also images, sketches and films, as well as mainly written documentation in the archives. However, the majority of the sources passed down are German state files, thus originating from the very authority that had been responsible for this group’s capture, forced labour,⁸ exploitation and

6 On the files in the German Federal Archives, in particular see: Henry Böhm and Gerd R. Ueberschär. “Aktenüberlieferung zu sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen im Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv,” in: Klaus D. Müller, (ed.). *Die Tragödie der Gefangenschaft in Deutschland und der Sowjetunion 1941–1945*. Cologne, 1998, pp. 265–79.

7 Rolf Keller and Reinhard Otto. “Das Massensterben der sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen und die Wehrmachtsbürokratie: Unterlagen zur Registrierung sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener 1941–1945 in deutschen und russischen Institutionen,” in: *Militär-geschichtliche Mitteilungen* 57 (1998), pp. 149–80; Reinhard Otto and Rolf Keller. “Zur individuellen Erfassung von sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen durch die Wehrmacht,” in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 59 (2011), pp. 563–77. For in-depth archive work on Soviet POWs, these essays are highly recommendable. On the body of files on Soviet POWs in Belarusian archives, see: V. I. Adamushko *et al.* *Lagerâ sovetskih voennoplennykh v Belarusi 1941–1944: spravočnik*. Minsk, 2004.

8 It is impossible to only attribute one single group of people to the issue of forced labour. POWs were not the only ones to have been compulsorily employed, but so also were “civilian workers,” that is male and female workers abducted and recruited from all over Europe. Equally, the work deployment of prisoners in concentration camps and other detention facilities needs to be taken into account when considering

deaths en masse. The state records regarding the prisoners involve two essential aspects: the soldiers' captivity (capture, accommodation in POW camps, treatment as prisoners of war, etc.) and their employment in forced labour. Partly, it is impossible to unambiguously delineate both domains from one another, which find expression in civilian Reich files as well as in military documents. The files from Wehrmacht departments must be mentioned as being particularly instructive; their records have not been collected in a single archive and place, but are—due to the impacts of war (requisition, etc.), and due to the methods of archiving (according to different responsibilities; see more information below)—distributed throughout several sites, cities and countries.

However, the most important and largest amount of knowledge can be extracted from these materials. The Wehrmacht records and documents are mainly kept in the German Federal Archives, by the Department for Military Archives in Freiburg im Breisgau.

The state's military documents

*The German Federal Archives, the Department of Military Archives
in Freiburg im Breisgau*

With the help of examples from the files, this archive's holdings are to be presented by tracing the way of prisoners of war from the point of being taken captive into the POW camps, and finally to their work deployments.

The first contacts with German troops occurred while they were being taken captive at the front. Here, the records from units operating in the Eastern fighting territories need to be considered.⁹ For instance, the 454th

the issue of forced labour. In many holdings, there are interconnections between these individual groups of people. Thus, in research, also the files on "civilian forced labour" or "general forced labour" need to be considered. Memorial sites like the Nazi Forced Labour Documentation Centre in Berlin-Schöneweide may equally provide relevant evidence, albeit their documentation is mainly about civilian forced labourers.

9 Due to the essay's limited extent, only a rough hint can be given here.

Security Division (*Sicherungs-Division*, holding RH 26-454) reports on the nutritional norms and the transport of Soviet POWs in autumn 1941 (RH 26-454/28). In its daily reports, the 221st Security Division mentioned the prisoners' escapes and attempts to escape, and even gave the names of the captured Soviet soldiers, which is rather rare (RH 26-221/22b). After being taken captive, the Red Army soldiers were transferred to the army group rear areas (*rückwärtige Heeresgebiete*, holdings RH 22 and 23). In this context, other records give evidence of the POWs' way: File RH 22/282 gives an account of the POW transports in the army group rear area north in summer 1942, whereas RH 22/193 reports on the provisioning of POW transports in autumn 1942. Partly, the POWs' state of health was examined by visiting medical officers (RH 22/193). There are also reports of escapes from German intelligence officers (RH 22/180). Concerning the POW transports, a special Navy file needs to be referred to, providing information on a maritime POW transport from Stettin (Szczecin) to Norway, including the route and the number of casualties, including the cause of death and resting place (RM 102/3884).

In the front rear areas, the captives were escorted through transit camps (*Dulags*). Theoretically, the prisoners in the Dulags were to be registered and recorded by name, but due to the mass of prisoners, this task was impossible to realise completely and carefully.¹⁰ Finding records giving the prisoners' names in the Wehrmacht holdings in the rear areas represents an accidental stroke of luck for scholars. In the Army High Commands' holdings (holdings RH 20 and RH 21), above all the war diaries and activity reports from the quartermaster departments (Wehrmacht Department Ib) need to be taken into account, for they may contain information on the prisoners' nutrition and transport.

In the files from the very units and groups that had carried out the captures, the war diaries and reports from Wehrmacht Department Ic provide evidence on interrogations of prisoners, deserters, *et al.*

10 Reinhard Otto, Rolf Keller and Jens Nagel. "Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene in deutschem Gewahrsam 1941–1945: Zahlen und Dimensionen," in: *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 56 (2008), pp. 557–602, here p. 562.

At this point, source-related differences between the front and the rear areas as well as the Reich have to be highlighted: The papers on the recordings and registrations,¹¹ which represent the most comprehensive sources of importance for research, were created in military departments within the Reich territory and the occupied territories, above all in the POW camps for privates (*Mannschaftsstelllager*, Stalags). The files from the camp administrations are kept in holding RH 49 and involve the registration indexes of the above-mentioned Stalags (Arabic and Roman numbering), the POW camps for officers (Oflags), the POW front camps, the transit camps, the army prisoner collection points, the Navy and Airforce POW camps as well as the POW labour battalions and work brigades.¹² This enumeration gives the impression of a complete preservation of sources, although a huge part of the military records has been lost, destroyed or requisitioned due to the war. The holding's documents not only contain information on imprisoned Soviet soldiers, but on prisoners of war from other nationalities such as, for instance, the records on French prisoners. The files handed down, however, include merely 200 units; this number represents their unsatisfactory preservation by a large camp administration for several million prisoners of war. Additionally, there are a number of microfilms which were given away by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in Washington, D.C. in 2001, with approximately 38,000 pages recorded,¹³ and mainly containing documents with personal information on US POWs, but also on Soviet prisoners of war. Additionally, there is information documented on the transport, transfer, financial and administrative matters, as well as records from POW interrogations. All in all, these films constitute a precious source, particularly in contrast to the scarce state of preservation of the "camp files." However, the NARA film rolls do not represent a closed holding, they are rather a collection of documents composed from frag-

11 On recording and registration, see *ibid.*, as well as Keller and Otto. "Massensterben sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener."

12 Regarding the BArch RH 49 holding, there is a very detailed overview in the research software *invenio*, compiled by Henry Böhm.

13 See the holding's information on BArch RH 49 via www.bundesarchiv.de > research > invenio.

ments. And it has been impossible to completely clarify where the originals are kept.¹⁴

The few documents preserved in the RH 49 holding mainly deal with organisational and administrative affairs, like orders, regulations and explanatory leaflets on the POW administration, on accommodation and nutrition as well as on the general provisioning of the prisoners. Among these there are printed documents like the “Ten commandments on the treatment of prisoners of war—regulation for the troops” (RH 49/111) and food quotas for the group of Soviet prisoners of war (RH 49/111). Special incidents like attempts to escape have equally been noted in reports (RH 49/34), along with the arrest of Soviet prisoners who had escaped (RH 49/50), or the advertising among Soviet POWs for the so-called “Russian Liberation Army” or “Vlassov Army”¹⁵ (RH 49/111).

The “camp files” offer an insight into the captured Red Army soldiers’ lives in the camps, into their everyday lives as well as their exploitation and ideologically based inhumane treatment at the hands of German authorities. The follow-through of the criminal and racist policy of Nazism was realised by Wehrmacht units and groups in the POW camps under army authority. It was at the top levels that the foundations for orders and regulations on the treatment of the Soviet prisoners of war were laid out. In the Military Archive’s holdings on the Army High Command (holding RH 2),¹⁶ the Wehrmacht Supreme Command (holding RW 2), the Wehrmacht Operations Staff (holding RW 4) and the General Wehrmacht Office (holding RW 6), there are files preserved relating to the Soviet Union, the planning of Operation Barbarossa, the pursued objectives regarding the exploitation of the Soviet countries and the fight against Bolshevism, above all the Commissar Order.¹⁷ The

14 Despite their huge efforts, the BArch archivists were not able to completely clarify where the originals had come from and where they are currently kept.

15 The Russian Liberation Army, aka: the Vlassov Army (named after their first commander, Andrey Vlassov), was an auxiliary organisation consisting of Soviet POWs, deserters and volunteers fighting within the Wehrmacht’s ranks against the Soviet Union.

16 This holding, though, has only fragmentarily been preserved, having been almost completely destroyed in WWII.

17 See the BArch RW 4 OKW/Wehrmachtsführungsstab holding in the German Federal Archives, Department Military Archive Freiburg (BArch RW 4/578).

General Wehrmacht Office (holding RW 6) in particular, contains files from the chief of the POW administration. The records are filed according to the POWs' countries of origin, and equally provide numerous basic documents on the treatment of prisoners, for instance some overviews on the occupation quota for each and every camp in the Reich, regulations and statistics. Equally, regulations and memorandums are to be found in official, printed publications which, based on a register, can be made use of in respect to the issue of POWs (holdings RHD 1, 2 and 4).

Administrative matters can be supplemented by information from the Military District Commandos, namely by records from the POW commanders (holdings RH 53-1 ff., filed according to the Military Districts I, II, III, IV, etc.). Contained therein are documents on the registration, work deployment, numerous organisational and basic matters of the camps as well as numerous reports on escapes. For the military districts that they depended on, the responsible grave officers put up lists and evidence on the graves—equally, such lists may hold hints on casualties and graves of Soviet prisoners of war such as casualty reports from Cologne, Gelsenkirchen and the Weser and Ruhr areas (RH 53-6/64–68).

Besides everyday life in the camp, work deployment was one of the most prominent aspects of a POW's everyday experience. The RH 49 holding contains clues and information on forced labour, though, the most important sources on this topic are to be found in the holdings from the Wehrmacht Offices of Armaments, and from the civilian authorities regarding work-planning and work assignments.¹⁸ The “utilisation” of captives in the war economy, in armaments production and in agriculture is depicted in the war diaries of the armaments offices. In the holdings of the War Economy and Armaments Office (*Wehrwirtschafts- und Rüstungsamt*, holding RW 19), the subordinate authorities (holding RW 46), as well as Armaments Inspections and Commandos (*Rüstungsinspektionen und -kommandos*, holdings RW 20 and 21) and the armaments authorities in the occupied territories (*Rüstungsbehörden in den besetzten Gebieten*, holding RW 24 to 32), there are numerous hints to be found on the work deployment of prisoners of war, and on the

18 On the topic of forced labour, also see Section 4 in the present essay.

latter's treatment and remuneration. Likewise, the files from the Wehrmacht's perspective, deal with the capability for work and the mortality of the prisoners. These documents offer highly interesting insights into the exploitation of the prisoners of war.

The camp administrations' files give information on the hygienic conditions in the camps and the health of individual prisoners. A special holding, though, provides additional evidence for high mortality and insufficient nutrition: the autopsy reports from the Pathological Institute at the Military Medical Academy are contained in the Army Medical Inspection holding (*Heeres-Sanitätsinspektion*, RH 12-23). These reports about autopsies on POWs who had lost their lives in custody, provide an insight into the bad state of health of the prisoners and allow conclusions on epidemics and frequent illnesses. Partly, these reports are filed according to the names of the individual prisoners.

These preserved public records may be supplemented by private documents contained in estates and collections. In the Military Archive, there is a diary of a camp commandant which broadens the gaze on a prisoner of war's everyday life in a German POW camp and introduces new aspects.¹⁹ Reports from foreign or clerical associations documenting the conditions in the camps during their delegation visits are present as well, for instance, in the Military-Historical Collection (*Militärgeschichtliche Sammlung*, MSg) holding 194, titled the "Protestant Relief Organisation for Detainees and Prisoners of War."

Access to names, figures and fates

The following paragraph is about access to individual documents. Documents in the German Federal Archives are filed following the archivist principle of provenance, meaning the records are collected and ordered accord-

19 BArch MSg 1/257. Reference from Christian Hartmann. "Massensterben oder Massenvernichtung? Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im 'Unternehmen Barbarossa:' Aus dem Tagebuch eines deutschen Lagerkommandanten," in: Hartmann, (ed.). *Der deutsche Krieg im Osten 1941–1945: Facetten einer Grenzüberschreitung*. Munich, 2009, reference on p. 100.

ing to their department or unit, etc. For instance, any document originating from Stalag III A is to be found in the RH 49 “POW establishments” holding (*Kriegsgefangeneneinrichtungen*). However, due to correspondence with the camp commandant, documents on Stalag III A may also be contained in the RH 53-3 “Military District Commando III (Berlin)” holding. Furthermore, it is possible that there is a report on the visit of a foreign or clerics’ delegation in the respective collections or other holdings.

Access to individual POW’s names is far more difficult: The classic individual cards (*Personalkarten*) of the prisoners have, as such, not been preserved in the Military Archive’s holdings, because the registration by name happened centrally in the Wehrmacht Information Office in Berlin—and after the end of the war, these individual card indexes were transported to the USSR. Due to the hand-over of the central name card indexes of the Soviet prisoners of war²⁰ from the Wehrmacht holdings, direct access to the names of individual prisoners of war is, in that way, impossible with the files remaining in the Military Archive. Its holdings, as already mentioned, mainly keep documents on administrative matters regarding the captivity of Red Army soldiers. However, they partly contain documents with personal information, for instance casualty reports, escape reports, lists of work detachments, etc. which indicate individual prisoners’ names. These documents with personal information, though, do not exist in an ordered way, and these lists cannot be assessed and used by looking up the names either: thus, direct access to individual names and people’s fates is not possible. The meta data record, for instance, only mentions the “Stalag III A Casualty Registry on Soviet Prisoners of War.”

Whether or not a particular person can be found in these documents should be examined on an individual basis. If there is knowledge that a Red Army soldier stayed in Stalag III A during captivity, these files need to be worked through, page by page. From the perspective of international law and humanitarian concerns, an assessment must unconditionally be advised, in order to clarify the fate of a person and the criminal exploitation of Soviet prisoners of war.

20 Only those who have been registered by German military departments like POW camps.

As the files on the POW administration have not but only fragmentarily been preserved, one has to fall back on replacement documents in other holdings. As the above example shows, files from these departments that tightly cooperated with the POW camps can be used, as was the case with Military District Commando III and the commandant of the POW system in this very military district.

German Federal Archives, further departments

The military documents have been supplemented by the public civilian holdings in the German Federal Archives in Berlin and Koblenz (the latter: photo archives). The POW camps in the Reich territory were situated in a military periphery, and—in the context of forced labour, accommodation, prosecution, attempts to escape and the German authorities' practices (shaped and driven by Nazi ideology) of dealing with the Red Army soldiers—also affected civilian departments like Reich ministries, district offices (*Gauämter*), the SS and the police.²¹

Ministry documents from the time of National Socialism are kept safe in the Reich Department of the Federal Archives in Berlin. Instructive on the deployment of prisoners of war in forced labour, are the files on manufacturing and armaments in the holdings of the Reich Ministry of Labour (holding R 3901), the Reich Ministry of the Economy (holding R 3101) and the Reich Ministry for Armaments and the War Economy (holding R 3). With the help of reports on the demand originating from individual industries, details on remuneration and the treatment and accommodation of the prisoners can be sketched. Further insights into the POW's work deployments may be provided by organisational units like the Todt Organisation (holding R 50-I), which organised and oversaw forced labour in particular. Now and then, documents from the police and SS (like in the R 58 "Reich Security Main Office" holding) contain information on the treatment of individual prisoners

21 For a first overview, see Reinhard Otto. *Wehrmacht, Gestapo und sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im deutschen Reichsgebiet 1941/42*. Munich, 1998.

who had escaped, on pick-ups and searches, etc.²² Concerning the administrative institutions in the occupied territories, like the Reich Commissariat for Ukraine (holding R 94) and the Reich Commissariat Ostland (holding R 90), partly, there is information about the camps for Soviet prisoners of war in these areas regarding accommodation and nutrition. In addition, files on the ideological and racist dimensions of the treatment of Soviet prisoners of war are to be expected in the Reich Propaganda Ministry (holding R 55) and the NSDAP Party Chancellery (holding NS 6).

In other sites of the German Federal Archive as well, there are sources on Soviet prisoners of war. The central picture archives in Koblenz²³ provide numerous photographs—from public and private sources—of prisoners of war, the camps, the work deployments as well as of crimes and the dramatic conditions in the camps. Additionally, the documents in the B 162 holding of the Central Office of the State Justice Administrations for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes in Ludwigsburg have to be taken into consideration. This holding, which keeps safe the documents of the investigative procedures for the legal work-through of National Socialist crimes, is highly valuable for researching the German policy of annihilation during World War II as well as researching individual people, places and units. If any suspect in these trials mentioned some POW camps or individual groups of victims, these were listed in a detailed card index system researchable by people and locations. These records equally make possible information on individual camps or on the treatment of Soviet prisoners of war by responsible German individuals.

Possibilities for research

In cooperation with other archival institutions in Germany and abroad, the Federal Archives offer an online information portal on the topic of forced

22 On the forced labour of Soviet prisoners of war and other groups, see Mark Spoerer. *Zwangsarbeit unter dem Hakenkreuz: Ausländische Zivilarbeiter, Kriegsgefangene und Häftlinge im Deutschen Reich und im besetzten Europa 1938–1945*. Stuttgart and Munich, 2001.

23 A digital picture archive is accessible online, http://www.bild.bundesarchiv.de/index.php?switch_lang=en (March 3, 2016).

labour,²⁴ providing details on the deployment in forced labour of people from all over Europe, including prisoners of war. Additionally, this project provides recommendations on literature, basic information, further links to archives, memorial sites, research institutions and documentation centres, as well as background information on reparations and services by the Federal Republic of Germany.

The software *invenio* offers another possibility for doing research.²⁵ Via *invenio*, the holdings can be queried by means of the meta data of the Federal Archive's database. Either research on the military or civilian holdings, or for relevant records and papers within a particular holding is possible. Likewise, research guidelines and information on the software are accessible online.²⁶

Additional sources

State, district and municipal archives

In the state, district and municipal archives, the contacts of prisoners of war with civilian departments and with the population are discernible on a local level. For instance, the prisoners were assigned to work deployment by the local employment offices, and the latter also provided for their social insurance. Also, records exist on the provisioning and accommodation of this group.²⁷ Immediate contacts between the prisoners of war and the population, for instance, may be researched in the holdings of local police authorities, mayor's offices, etc., with the help of neighbours' complaints or reports to the police for theft or harassment. As casualties had to be reported to the

24 <http://www.bundesarchiv.de/zwangsarbeit/index.html.en> (February 26, 2016).

25 <https://invenio.bundesarchiv.de/basys2-invenio/login.xhtml>, in German only (February 26, 2016).

26 www.invenio.bundesarchiv.de > Hilfe.

27 See "Verpflegung sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener im Heimatkriegsgebiet," Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv – Wolfenbüttel site, 12 new 13, No. 16242 – As an appendix issued by the Reich Ministry for Sustenance and Agriculture to the states' and provinces' Sustenance Offices.

local registry offices,²⁸ mortality registers and grave lists have been handed down in the municipal archives. Life in the camps can be reconstructed—similarly as with the documents from the Central Office in Ludwigsburg—based on post-war information, that is, by means of investigation and court files, of testimonies as well as minutes on camp inspections and on interrogations of POWs that had taken place after liberation.

Further archives and collections

The Information Office in Berlin, formerly the Wehrmacht Information Office (WASSt)²⁹

The WASSt was an informational authority subject to the Wehrmacht Supreme Command; it was in charge of the registration of German soldiers and Allied prisoners of war alike. According to this mission, WASSt administered the individual cards of the registered Soviet prisoners of war. The card indexes that had been filed according to the POWs' countries of origin, had been requisitioned by US troops after the war and handed in to the respective countries. The card indexes on the Soviet prisoners of war had already been transferred by the Red Army to the USSR in May 1945. Nowadays, they are kept in Moscow, in the Central Archive of the Russian Ministry of Defence (CAMO) (Центральный архив Министерства обороны Российской Федерации [ЦАМО]).³⁰

There are still some personal cards on Soviet prisoners of war in the Information Office (*Deutsche Dienststelle*, formerly WASSt) which—within the framework of demilitarisation and the winding-up of Reich authorities—were handed in after the end of the war by former Wehrmacht offices. How-

28 For more on this topic, see Keller and Otto. "Massensterben sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener," pp. 149 ff.

29 For extensive information on the history and mission of the Information Office, see Wolfgang Remmers. *Deutsche Dienststelle (WASSt) 1939–1999: 60 Jahre im Namen des Völkerrechts*. Berlin, 1999. (Transl. remark: For very brief information in English, see <https://www.dd-wast.de/en/history.html>.)

30 Partly, these card indexes have been filed according to the Soviet POWs' nationalities, therefore, there are also individual card indexes in the archives in Belarus and in Ukraine, see Keller and Otto. "Massensterben sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener," p. 152.

ever, with these documents, it is only about fragments.³¹ The overwhelming part of the records with personal information is in the CAMO. These cards have been tapped since the year 2000 and entered into a database,³² thus it is possible to research online the individual fates of Soviet prisoners of war based on a name.³³

Memorial sites, corporative archives and other archives

Some former POW camps nowadays are memorial sites and documentation centres where the exploitation and inhumane treatment of the prisoners of war have been made an issue, as is the case with Stalag 326.³⁴ Such institutions equally possess numerous documents as well as objects from former detainees. And because numerous Soviet prisoners of war had been abducted into concentration camps, also these memorial sites—for instance, the Bergen-Belsen Memorial³⁵—and their holdings should be taken into account.

Other archives shall briefly be mentioned: Archives of corporations that employed POWs during World War II may provide insight into work deployments, treatment and remuneration. While the Political Archives of the German Foreign Office in Berlin has not directly been in charge of the files on prisoners of war, however, POW matters, questions of international law, etc. may be investigated through international relations to countries like the Soviet Union. In its documentation centre based in Dresden, the Saxony Memorial Foundation also maintains a database and accepts inquiries on the fate of Soviet prisoners of war in German custody.³⁶ This database provides

31 Ibid.

32 On this recording project, see as well: Stiftung Sächsische Gedenkstätten (ed.). *Für die Lebenden – der Toten gedenken: Ein internationales Gemeinschaftsprojekt zur Erforschung des Schicksals sowjetischer und deutscher Kriegsgefangener und Internierter*. Dresden, 2003.

33 www.obd-memorial.ru, in Russian only (February 26, 2016).

34 www.stalag326.de, in German only (February 26, 2016).

35 Transl. remark: see <http://bergen-belsen.stiftung-ng.de/en/home.html> (December 30, 2016).

36 The database is accessible online: <http://www.dokst.de/main/content/auskuenfte/sowjetische-buerger/kriegsgefangene/datenbank/db-kriegsgefangene>; transl. remark:

information on people who were in prisoner camps or work brigades in the former Reich territory. Additionally, the documentation centre provides a database on the grave sites of Soviet citizens in the Free State of Saxony.³⁷

The International Tracing Service in Bad Arolsen (ITS)

The international tracing service is mainly concerned with the fates of civilian victims, of concentration camp prisoners, of forced labourers *et al.* Because many Soviet prisoners of war had—for racist reasons and out of disrespect for martial law—been transferred to concentration camps, their names and fates can possibly be clarified here as well. Besides, the ITS keeps a personal card index on former Displaced Persons (DPs), that is, people who, after their liberation, could not immediately return home nor be repatriated, or were stateless. Soviet prisoners of war as well, may have been assigned to the group of DPs. This card index (phonetically ordered by names)³⁸ contains these people's names who had been deployed for forced labour or abducted into a concentration camp. The vast majority of these victims were civilian forced labourers or detainees; however, also former Soviet prisoners of war may have been among them.

Archives abroad

Records on Soviet prisoners of war in German custody may be kept outside Germany for the following reasons: 1) Wehrmacht files which, by the end of the war, were found outside German borders, were transferred to the nearest archives (for instance, records and papers in Prague); 2) Through requisition

by 2017, requests on POWs are taken by the Information Office in Berlin (see <http://www.dokst.de/main/dokumentationsstelle-beendet-auskunftstaetigkeit-zu-sowjetischen-kriegsgefangenen>).

37 Transl. remark: <http://www.dokst.de/node/1115/> (December 30, 2016).

38 That is, the files were not put in alphabetical order, but according to the sound of a name; for instance, the name Ivanov may in German be transcribed as “Iwanow” or “Ivanov;” phonetically ordered, it will be found in either form

by Allied Forces; 3) Through the relinquishment of these materials based on the Geneva Convention.³⁹

In the archives of the Allied warring parties, documents of commissions investigating the crimes of Nazi Germany are to be expected. Regarding the institutions of former Soviet Union members, a particular reference is to be made to the files on the Wehrmacht crimes against the civilian population, including the systematic policy of exploiting Red Army captives. These records may also contribute to knowledge about individual fates.

A quite large amount of records from Stalag VIII A is kept in the Military History Institute in Prague (*Vojenský historický ústav Praha*). After the end of the war, these files had stayed in the now Czech territory and reached Prague.

The aforementioned card index from the Wehrmacht Information Office is today kept in the CAMO.⁴⁰ As shown, it has been made accessible through an internet database.

In addition to these source bodies on liberated prisoners and detainees, further archives and documentation centres outside Germany should be mentioned: First, the collections in documentation centres like the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., and the archives in Yad Vashem in Jerusalem have to be named. As numerous Soviet prisoners of war were deported to German concentration camps or murdered because of their Jewish descent, the collections of both of these institutions are highly valuable. Furthermore, papers from relief organisations like the Red Cross or the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) may be brought in. Partly, both organisations registered the people liberated from captivity, provided them medical care and helped in organising family reunions, in inquiries on missing persons, and they supported people returning to

39 Art. 77 of the Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, July 27, 1929; see *Reichsgesetzblatt* (Reich Law Gazette) II 1934, p. 227. (Transl. remark: The Convention is online at: <https://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/INTRO/305> [October 28, 2016].)

40 Hereon, see Keller and Otto. "Massensterben sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener," pp. 149 ff.; and Tatjana Anikonova. "Die Bestände der staatlichen Archive Russlands zu den deutschen und sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen, Internierten und Repressierten," in: Hartmann. *Massensterben oder Massenvernichtung*, pp. 27–42.

or emigrating from their homeland. The files of these relief organisations may be inquired for research in the United Nations' headquarters in New York, and in the archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva.

Access to and time limits on the archives

In Germany, access to archived materials and their safekeeping periods are regulated by law. The Federal Archives Act (*Bundesarchivgesetz*, BArchG) shall here serve as an example. In accessing the papers on Soviet prisoners of war, two aspects have to be considered: For general and factual papers—like from POW camps on administrative matters (that is, without references to individual names)—a thirty-year term of protection applies, according to the Federal Archives Act, paragraph 5, section 1: thirty years after creation, everybody can look at them. As World War II dates back more than seventy years, there is no restriction whatsoever; also with the papers that had been classified as “secret” by the Wehrmacht (on Operation Barbarossa, for instance), there are no restrictions for use.

Personal records, containing a person's name and date of birth, are considered worthy of protection. In this context, the Federal Act on archives stipulates that these kinds of records can be used by third parties only thirty years after the death of the person concerned; if the year of death is impossible to ascertain, the term of protection expires 110 years after the birth of the person concerned.⁴¹ In case there is an entry in the registry of deaths, insight into personal information on Soviet prisoners of war, thus, can be granted without restrictions, because these people's deaths date back more than thirty years. In case the year of death is not ascertainable, but the demise of the person concerned can be assumed due to the period of time passed, insight into these documents may be granted via a special commitment to the term of protection (*Schutzfristverpflichtung*) in the Federal Archives (with which

41 § 5 Abs. 2 Bundesarchivgesetz. (Transl. remark: a full-text version in English is accessible online: <https://www.bundesarchiv.de/bundesarchiv/rechtsgrundlagen/bundesarchivgesetz/index.html.en> [December 30, 1016].)

the user commits to not give out to third parties the data on natural people, and to use information only in an anonymised way).

For the state archives, there are similar stipulations; however, terms and access have to be clarified for every single archive and documentation centre individually.

Conclusion and outlook

As our overview shows, there are numerous and manifold sources on Soviet prisoners of war. These documents allow an analysis—as rich in facts as profound—of the inhumane treatment and exploitation of the Red Army soldiers in German custody. However, it needs to be emphasised that most of the relevant sources originates from German public archives, and thus was initially created by the very departments which had been responsible for the capture and coercion to forced labour: by the German Reich and military authorities. This body of sources provides only one perspective on the history of World War II and for the clarification of the fates of the people concerned. The POW's perspective needs to be added with the help of different sources. At this point, auto-testimonies are to be mentioned, like diaries, letters, eye-witness reports, interviews and autobiographies of survivors in the post-war era. Such sources, though, do not exist to the same extent as the German files do; however, they are to be found in memorial sites, documentation centres and collections like that of the NGO Kontakte-Контакты.⁴²

Since the moment when Christian Streit's study *No Comrades* was published, public files, mainly in the German Federal Archives have been intensively used. A further deepening of research on this topic would be meaningful, with new questions and different perspectives.

42 The latter collection is mainly about the reports from memory of former POWs from the former Soviet Union, and about the correspondence on possible reparations. www.kontakte-kontakty.de (March 14, 2016). Some few studies are concerned, equally, with personal notes of former POWs in Germany, like: Dmitri Stratievski. *Sowjetische Soldaten in deutscher Kriegsgefangenschaft: Menschenschicksale in Selbstzeugnissen*. Berlin, 2015.

The individual card indexes having been preserved, provide obvious evidence on the prisoners' living conditions and circumstances of death. Otto and Keller estimate that there are no card entries or documents on approximately half of the prisoners.⁴³ Furthermore, the fate of hundreds of thousands of prisoners cannot be clarified since they died on transport, were arbitrarily shot or fell victim to illness and malnutrition. Not every single life history of the millions of Soviet prisoners of war can be clarified. But further efforts in research, in the media, in society and in politics are required so the suffering of these people will not fall to oblivion. The documents in and the access to the German archives presented in this essay shall contribute to this endeavour.

43 Otto and Keller, "Erfassung von sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen durch die Wehrmacht," p. 597.