

## Stalag VIII-A (8-A)

*Following is courtesy of Wikipedia*

Stalag VIII-A was a German World War II prisoner-of-war camp, located just to the south of the town of Görlitz, Lower Silesia, east of the River Neisse (now Zgorzelec, Poland).

Originally a Hitler Youth camp, in October 1939 it was modified to house about 15,000 Polish prisoners from the German September 1939 offensive. It was initially a transit camp or Dulag located on an 18-hectare field alongside Ulica Lubańska, renamed as Stalag VIII-A on 23 September 1939. At the end of December 1939 the prisoners were transferred to the main camp in Moys, located on the right side of the road from Görlitz to Reichenau. It was the first prisoner of war camp in the military district VIII Breslau (Wrocław). The camp covered about 30 ha.

By June 1940 most of the Poles had been transferred to other camps and replaced with Belgian and French troops taken prisoner during the Battle of France. At one time there were over 30,000 jammed into facilities designed for 15,000. In 1941 a separate compound was created to house Soviet prisoners. In 1943 2,500 British Commonwealth soldiers came from the battles in Italy, among them residents from the British Isles, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Later in the same year more than 6000 Italian soldiers came from Albania. A total of 47,328, the highest number of prisoners in Stalag VIII A was registered in September 1944. Numerically, Frenchmen were in the majority, followed by the Russians, Italians, Belgians, Britons and the Yugoslavs. Finally in late December 1944 1,800 Americans arrived, captured in the Battle of the Bulge.

On 14 February 1945 the Americans and British were marched out of the camp westward in advance of the Soviet offensive into Germany. The evacuation process was carried out gradually through to May 1945. The evacuation took place on foot, with all means of transport driving in front of the people for military purposes. The Long March claimed further victims. Some of the prisoners were taken to Bavaria, the others to Thuringia, where they were freed by the Allies. The last evacuation of the camp took place on 7 May 1945, when the Soviet army freed the prisoners.

After the war, many graves of western soldiers were exhumed and sent back to their home countries. In 1948 the city council of Zgorzelec decided to have the barracks dismantled in order to use the materials to rebuild Warsaw and other Polish towns. In 1976 a memorial was erected on the site of the former commandant's office by French and Polish veterans who had been POWs. On the sandstone plate next to the memorial it says: Stalag VIII-A: A place sanctified by the blood and martyrdom of the prisoners of war of the anti-Hitler coalition during the Second World War – 22.VII.1976 French veterans of the camp arranged for a marble slab to be attached to the memorial in 1994. On the slab it says in Polish and French: "1939 Stalag VIIIA 1945: Through this camp walked, in it lived and suffered ten thousands of prisoners of war".