

Plötzensee Memorial Center
Hüttigpfad
13627 Berlin-Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf
Telephone: 030 - 344 32 26 or
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Opening hours:

March through October daily 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
November through February daily 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
(Closed on December 23, 24, 25, 26, 31, and
on January 1.)

Public transportation:

Bus TXL to bus stop "Gedenkstätte Plötzensee"
(three-minute walk).

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

The Web site www.gedenkstaette-plotzensee.de
documents the entire exhibition in German and English.
Here you will also find free PDF files of publications
in German, English, and French for downloading.

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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

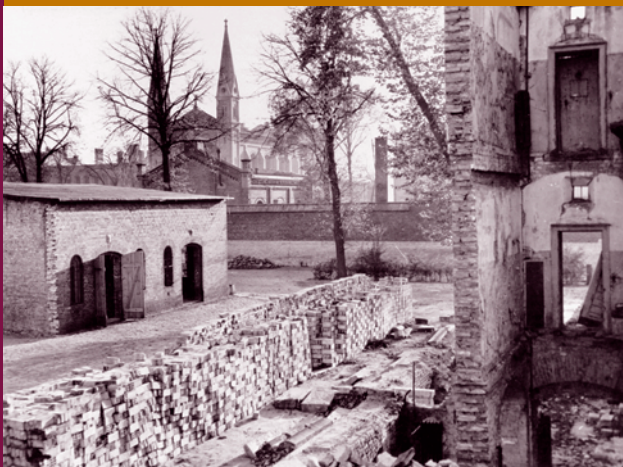
During an air raid on Berlin in the night of September 3-4, 1943, the blacked out Plötzensee prison is hit several times by Allied bombs and heavily damaged. At this time, a total of about 300 prisoners sentenced to death are confined in Plötzensee. The execution shed and guillotine are severely damaged in the air raid.

The Reich Ministry of Justice receives the names of prisoners sentenced to death by telephone on September 7, 1943. State Secretary Curt Rothenberger reviews the cases and rules on the clemency proceedings without waiting for the usual depositions. In nearly every case, Rothenberger orders the sentence to be carried out and has the names forwarded to Plötzensee by telephone.

Because the guillotine has been destroyed, the prisoners are hanged on the gallows on the back wall in groups of eight each. One hundred eighty-six people die in this manner during the night of September 7-8, 1943, alone. During this night, six prisoners whose clemency proceedings are still pending or who have not even been sentenced to death are also "mistakenly" hanged.

After pausing for only 12 hours, the executioners in Plötzensee hang more than 60 other victims during the following nights until September 12, 1943. Over 250 people are murdered between September 7 and 12, 1943, among them German, French, and especially Czech prisoners.

Prison church and execution building (left);
in the foreground, the destroyed building no. III,
the "House of Death", after 1945



Karlrobert Kreiten

Karlrobert Kreiten is born on June 26, 1910, in Bonn as the son of a Dutch citizen. He grows up in Düsseldorf and is regarded as one of the most talented pianists of his generation. Contemplating the defeat at Stalingrad during a concert tour in Berlin in March 1943, he remarks to a friend of his mother's that the war is lost. He calls Hitler "a madman." His mother's friend reports Karlrobert Kreiten to the authorities, and he is arrested in July of 1943. The "People's Court" presided over by Roland Freisler sentences him to death on September 3, 1943, for "subversion of national defense, aiding the enemy, and defeatist statements." Four days later, Karlrobert Kreiten is murdered in Berlin-Plötzensee.



Zdeněk Hajek

Zdeněk Hajek is born in Litomyšl on July 27, 1919. The mechanic is married and works in Berlin while his family remains in Prague. Sometime in late December 1942 or early January 1943, he is arrested with his friend Jaroslav Matyas for stealing rabbits and geese. On July 23, 1943, Hajek is sentenced to death by Special Court V, Berlin, for the theft. Without the proper means or a real chance of succeeding, he attempts to escape from jail in the night of July 26, 1943. He is surprised by the guard while starting to open the window after having freed himself from his bonds. His hands and feet bound, he spends two more weeks in maximum security confinement before he is murdered on September 7, 1943, in Berlin-Plötzensee.

The Red Orchestra



As early as the 1930s, resistance circles develop around the Berlin senior civil servant Arvid Harnack (above with his wife Mildred) and Harro Schulze-Boysen, who is assigned to the Reich Aviation Ministry. More than one hundred opponents of National Socialism from a wide variety of social backgrounds and ideological traditions later join these circles. They form one of the largest German resistance groups in 1941-42.

The group intends to transmit important military information to Moscow by radio after the German invasion of the Soviet Union. However, this undertaking fails because of technical problems. In the winter of 1941-42, the group prepares leaflets about National Socialist crimes of violence and the military problems on the Eastern Front.

In the summer of 1942, the Gestapo discovers the resistance organization. The Reich Military Court pronounces the first of nearly 50 death sentences in December 1942. A gallows with eight hooks is erected in Plötzensee so that the members of this group will die as wretchedly as possible. Here on December 22, 1942, between 7:00 p.m. and 8:33 p.m., five men from the resistance group are murdered by hanging, and three women and three men are murdered with the guillotine. On May 13, 1943, the executioners carry out another 13 death sentences between 7:00 p.m. and 7:36 p.m.

On July 21, 1943, Adolf Hitler personally declines the appeals for clemency of 17 members of the Berlin Red Orchestra. Even the Reich Military Court has recommended that he pardon 22-year-old ceramics artisan Cato Bontjes van Beek and 19-year-old student Liane Berkowitz, who has given birth to a daughter while in custody. Liane Berkowitz and Cato Bontjes van Beek are murdered together with 17 other men and women in Berlin-Plötzensee on August 5, 1943 between 7:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m.

July 20, 1944

After extensive preparations by civilian and military circles, Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg decides to attempt the assassination of Hitler himself in early July 1944, despite his key role in Berlin and having been seriously wounded. On July 20, 1944, he succeeds in smuggling a bomb into Hitler's closely guarded headquarters in the "Wolf's Lair" near Rastenburg in East Prussia and detonating it.

Once back in Berlin, Stauffenberg and his fellow conspirators in the *Bendlerblock* (Offices of the Army High Command) attempt to set the coup in motion throughout Germany. That same night, Stauffenberg, his adjutant Werner von Haefften, Albrecht Ritter Mertz von Quirnheim, and Friedrich Olbricht are executed by a firing squad on orders from Colonel-General Friedrich Fromm.



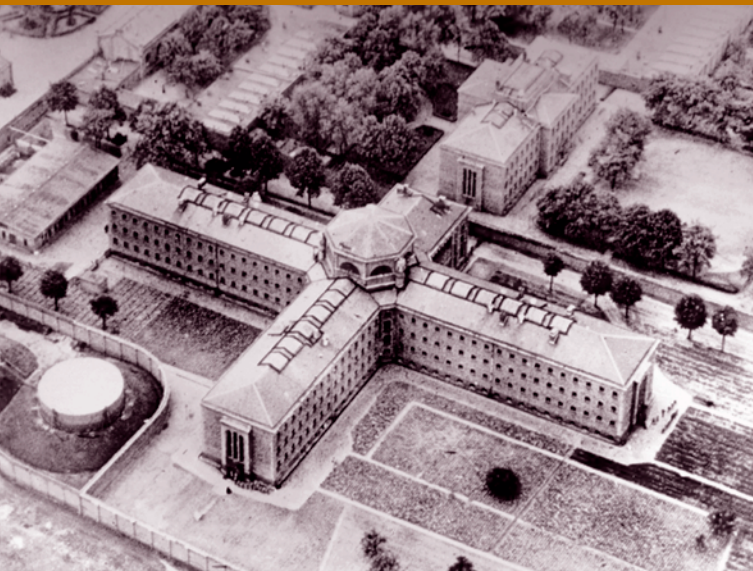
A few days later on August 7 and 8, 1944, the first trial before the "People's Court" presided over by Roland Freisler is held against Field Marshal Erwin von Witzleben (fourth from right), First Lieutenant Peter Graf Yorck von Wartenburg (standing), Colonel General Erich Hoepner, Lieutenant General Paul von Hase (third from right), Major General Hellmuth Stieff, Captain Karl Friedrich Klausung, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Bernardis, and First Lieutenant Albrecht von Hagen. All the defendants are sentenced to death. They are murdered that same day in Berlin-Plötzensee.

This marks the beginning of a series of over 50 trials that end with more than 110 death sentences. From October 1944 on, these trials also include persons aiding fugitives and persons providing support to those involved in the attempted coup. Between August 8, 1944, and April 15, 1945, a total of 89 people are murdered who are either thought to belong to the resistance circles involved in the attempted coup of July 20, 1944, or who have supported them.

Plötzensee Memorial Center



The Plötzensee Prison



Plötzensee prison was built between 1868 and 1879 as a prison outside the limits of Berlin. Covering an area of over 25 hectares (about 62 acres), it is a complex of buildings with many open areas, accommodating 1,200 inmates. In addition to the prison buildings themselves, the red brick complex includes administrative and service buildings, numerous work sheds, a prison infirmary, a chapel, and housing for prison staff.

Shortly after the National Socialist takeover in 1933, prison discipline, as elsewhere, becomes harsher in Plötzensee. The goals of the penal system are now retribution, deterrence, and the "elimination" of individuals regarded as "inferior." Plötzensee now serves as a facility for pretrial confinement for persons arraigned on political charges. Increasing numbers of such cases are prosecuted before the Special Courts created in 1933, the political criminal tribunals of the *Kammergericht* (State court), and before the "People's Court" established in 1934.

House III is visible in the center of the aerial view. The condemned prisoners are brought here immediately before their sentence is carried out in the execution shed (left), where they are murdered. The front part of the execution shed was torn down after 1945; in its place now stands the memorial wall and the courtyard of the memorial center.

After 1939, increasing numbers of foreigners who have been deported to Germany as forced laborers are incarcerated. They form a fourth group of inmates in Plötzensee in addition to the German prisoners most of whom serve shorter sentences, political suspects in pretrial confinement, and convicts awaiting execution.

Overcrowding, insufficient nutrition, and delayed or withheld medical treatment contribute to increasingly poor living conditions for the inmates in the second half of the war. Most of the inmates are released shortly before the Soviet Army captures the facility on April 25, 1945.

In 1945, the Allies decide that Plötzensee should henceforth serve as a juvenile prison. House III is torn down. It is replaced by new structures built to house juvenile offenders and an open correctional facility. Plötzensee still includes a prison infirmary.

In 1951, the Berlin Senate decides to erect a memorial center in Plötzensee. Architect Bruno Grimmek is entrusted with the planning. Portions of the execution shed are torn down, and a memorial wall is erected in front of it. The cornerstone of the memorial is laid on September 9, 1951; the memorial is officially inaugurated on September 14, 1952. Since that time, Plötzensee has been a site of remembrance and silent commemoration of all the victims of the National Socialist dictatorship.



Corridors leading to cells in building no. III, before 1945

Executions in Plötzensee 1933 – 1945

From 1890 to 1932, a total of 36 persons convicted of murder were put to death with an executioner's ax in a Plötzensee prison courtyard. In contrast, over 2,891 persons fell victim to killings at the hands of the judiciary in Plötzensee during the 12 years of National Socialist terror from 1933 to 1945.

Between 1933 and 1936, a total of 45 prisoners are beheaded with an executioner's ax. On October 14, 1936, Adolf Hitler approves Justice Minister Franz Gürtner's proposal to use the guillotine for all future executions. Under strict secrecy, a guillotine is transported from the Bruchsal prison in Baden to Plötzensee, where it is erected in a brick shed.

The condemned prisoners are kept in the large cell block building (House III) directly adjacent to the execution shed. They spend their final hours in shackles in special cells on the ground floor, which the prisoners call the "house of the dead." Their final steps take them through a small courtyard to the execution chamber housing the guillotine.

In late 1942, the execution chamber is fitted with a steel girder to which eight iron hooks are fastened. This gal-lows is then used for hangings. The first to die here are members of the resistance organization known as the "Red Orchestra," later followed by resistance fighters involved in the attempted coup of July 20, 1944.

Approximately 1,500 death sentences handed down by the "People's Court" and 1,000 handed down by the Special Courts are carried out in Plötzensee. The remaining 400 victims are sentenced to death by the Reich Military Court or other military courts, or by the Reich Court, the appellate court, or state courts.

About half of those executed are Germans, most of whom have been sentenced to death for acts of resistance against the lawless National Socialist state. Especially after 1939, many persons receive death sentences as disproportionately harsh punishment for minor offenses.

The judicial system is even more ruthless against foreign members of resistance organizations or people who have been deported to Germany for forced labor. After 1939, people from all parts of German-occupied Europe meet their death 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	1,180
1944	534
1945	132
	2,891

National origin of persons murdered in Berlin-Plötzensee between 1933 and 1945.

Germany	1,437
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
	2,891

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



Liselotte Herrmann

Born in Berlin on June 23, 1909, Liselotte Herrmann joins the German Communist Party in 1931, for which she is expelled from the Berlin university in July 1933. In 1934, she passes on information about the production of armaments in the Dornier plant in Friedrichshafen and about the construction of an underground munitions factory near Celle to an advisor of the Central Committee of the German Communist Party in Switzerland. Liselotte Herrmann is arrested on December 7, 1935, and is sentenced to death by the "People's Court" on June 12, 1937, for "treason and acts preparatory to high treason." After being sentenced, she is held in Berlin's women's prison on Barnimstrasse for nearly a year before. She is murdered in Berlin-Plötzensee on June 20, 1938 together with her friends Stefan Lovasz, Josef Steidle, and Artur Göritz.



Galina Romanova

Galina Romanova is born near Dnepropetrovsk on December 25, 1918. She later studies medicine. On July 1, 1942, she is deported to Germany, where she works as a physician in camps for forced laborers. In Berlin in the early years of the war, physician Georg Groscurth, physicist and physical chemist Robert Havemann, architect Herbert Richter, and dentist Paul Rentsch give their resistance group the name "European Union." They see the foundation for a pan-European socialist postwar order in their common struggle with forced laborers of many European nations against the National Socialist regime. They also establish contact with Galina Romanova, who is arrested on October 6, 1943. On April 27, 1944, she is sentenced to death, and on November 3, 1944, she is murdered in Berlin-Plötzensee.



Hermann Stöhr

Born on January 4, 1889, theologian and political theorist Hermann Stöhr advocates ecumenical and pacifist ideals. For a while he serves as secretary in the office of the International Federation for Reconciliation in Berlin. He takes a courageous stance against the National Socialist church policy after 1933, demanding that victims of political persecution be included in the Protestant Church's prayers of intercession as well as practical solidarity with the Jews. When he is drafted in 1939, he refuses military service, citing his conscience and requesting to be allowed to perform work service instead. Because of this, Hermann Stöhr is sentenced to death as a conscientious objector by the Reich Military Court on March 16, 1940, and on June 21, 1940, he is murdered in Berlin-Plötzensee.



Musa Dzhaliil

Born on February 15, 1906, famous playwright Musa Dzhaliil becomes the chairman of the Tatar Literary Association in 1940 and to this day is regarded as one of the most important authors in the Tatar language. After Germany's invasion of the USSR in June 1941, he is drafted and serves as a political officer and war correspondent. In June of 1942, he is seriously wounded and captured. After a while, he joins the Wehrmacht propaganda unit for the Legion Idel-Ural. With his patriotic writings, he strengthens his compatriots' will to resist the National Socialists. In August of 1943, he is arrested together with his comrades. On February 12, 1944, he is sentenced to death by the Reich Military Court, and on August 25, 1944, he is murdered in Berlin-Plötzensee.