

Information



about the War Cemetery Oerbke

Gemeindefreier Bezirk Osterheide

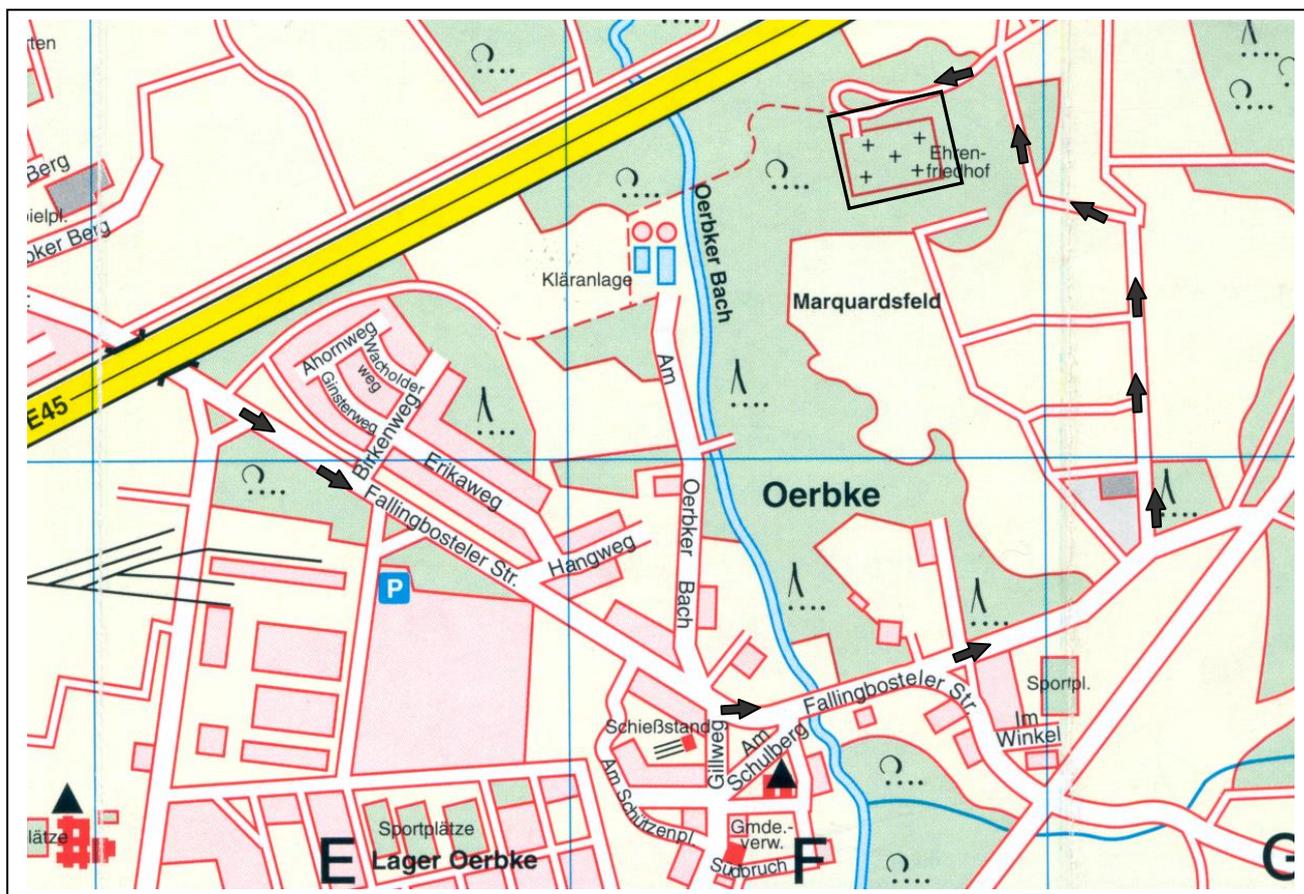
Gemeindefreier Bezirk Osterheide
- Archives -

29683 Oerbke, April 2007
Gillweg 7
Telefon: 051 62 – 96020

THE CEMETERY OF THE NAMELESS

Russian War Cemetery at Oerbke

In our county Soltau-Fallingb. there is a war cemetery with about 30.000 graves of Russian prisoners of war. Who really knows this war cemetery, the so-called "cemetery of the Nameless" close to the little town of Oerbke near the motorway from Hamburg to Hanover?



*Map of Oerbke and surrounding
(indicating the way to the cemetery)*

There are also signposts for this Russian war cemetery at Fallingb. (Centre) as well as at Oerbke.

There is an epigraph on the **stone slab** under the monument which says:

„IN MEMORY OF THOSE MANY THOUSEND RUSSIAN SOLDIERS – LYING
HERE IN PEACE – WHO DIED AS PRISONERS OF WAR“.



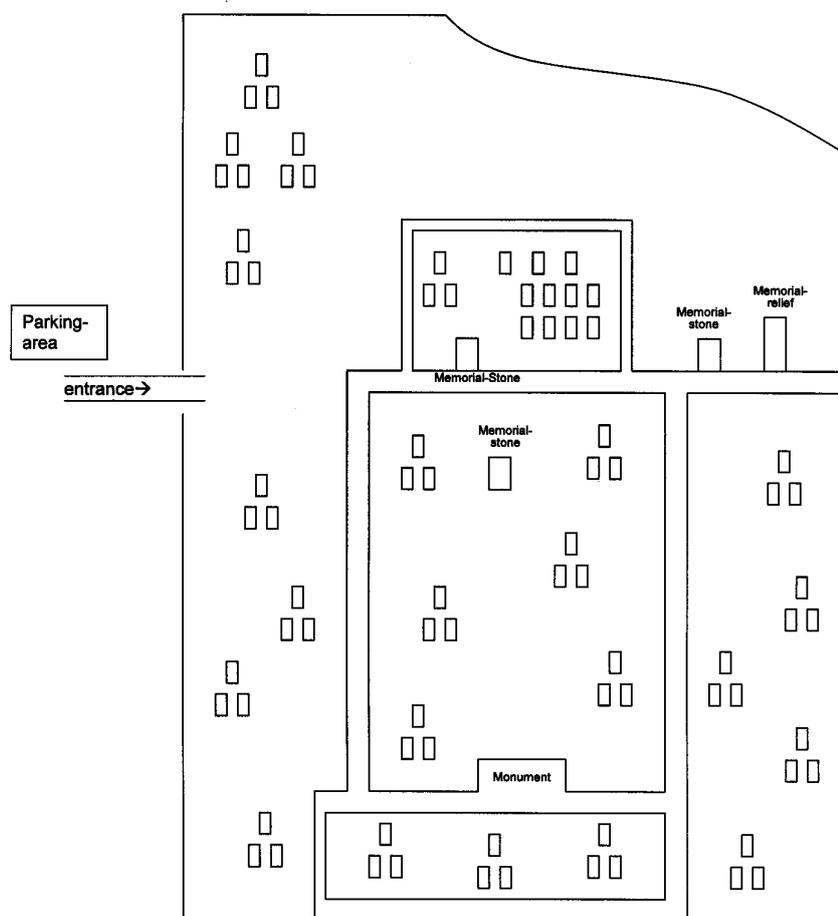
The “Cemetery of the Nameless” near Oerbke

The monument on the cemetery of Oerbke was designed by the artist and sculptor Klaus Seelenmeyer in 1964. It was built up by a firm named Dykerhoff. The monument is designed as a combination of plastic art (sculpture) and architecture. The four columns – combing at the top – symbolise an interior space in the middle of which lies the memorial stone. The four columns could also be understood as a big hand giving shelter.

The area of the cemetery amounts up to about 14.888 qm (square meters).

On the cemetery there are

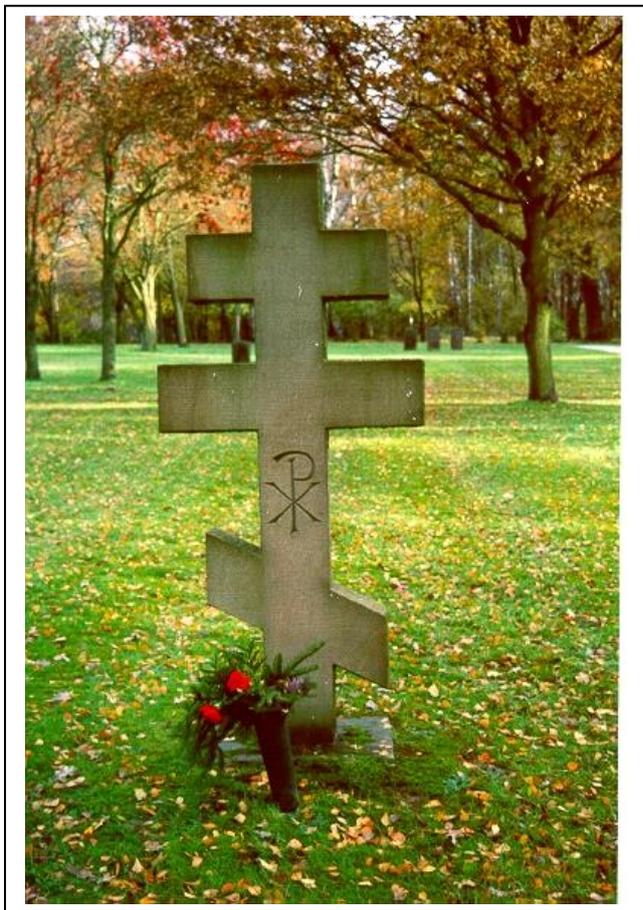
- a monument
- a Russian memorial relief with any inscription
- a Polish memorial stone
- a Russian-Orthodox sandstone obelisk
- a French memorial stone
- 109 gravestones with a total of 920 individual names



Drawing of the Russian war cemetery at Oerbke
(not true to scale)

On the wall at the entrance there is an inscription which reads:

Kriegsgräberstätte Oerbke
1941 – 1945
(War cemetery Oerbke 1941 – 1945)

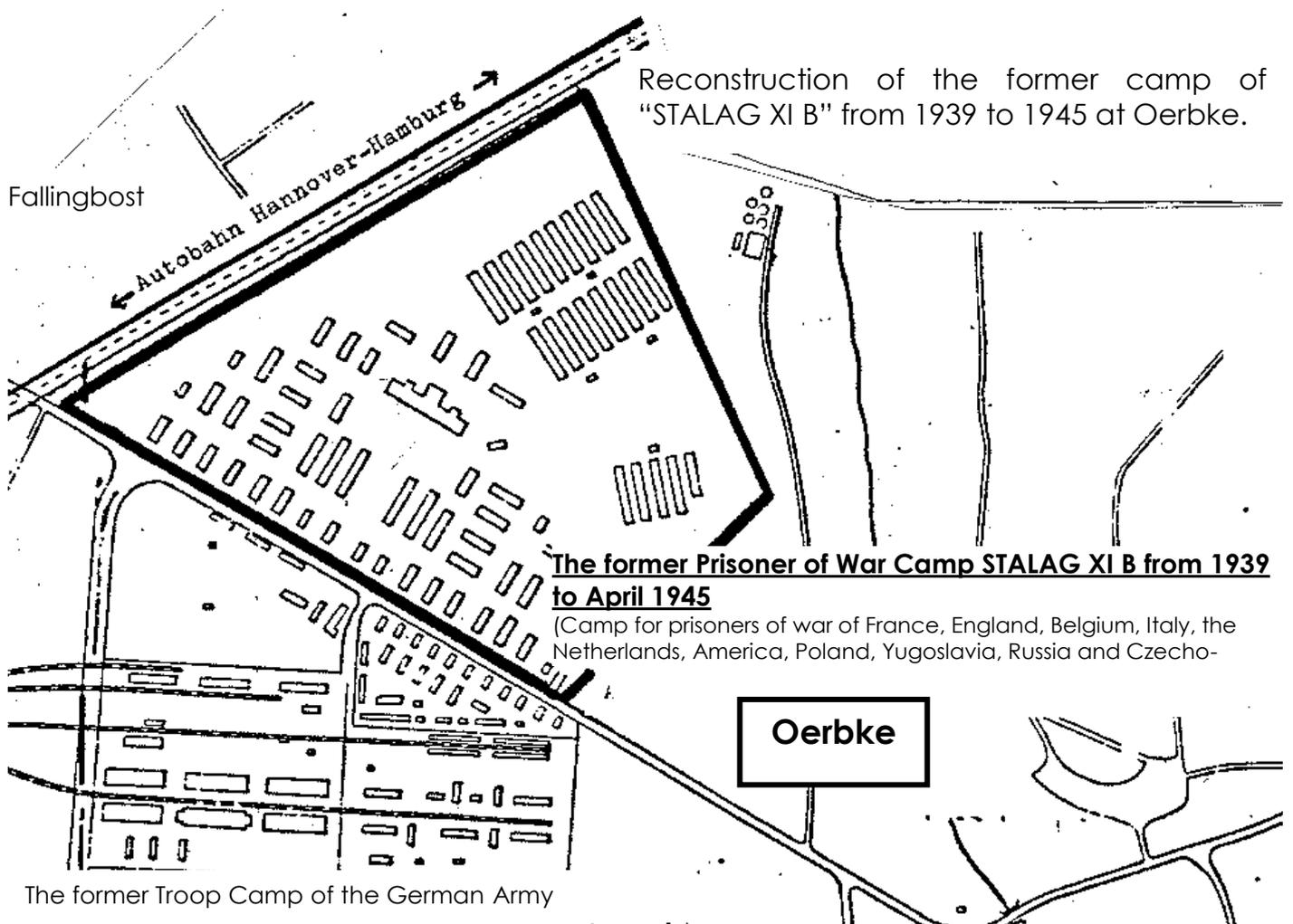


This **Russian-Orthodox Sandstone Obelisk** has been unveiled at a commemoration by the Russian-Orthodox, the Roman-Catholic and the Protestant Church.



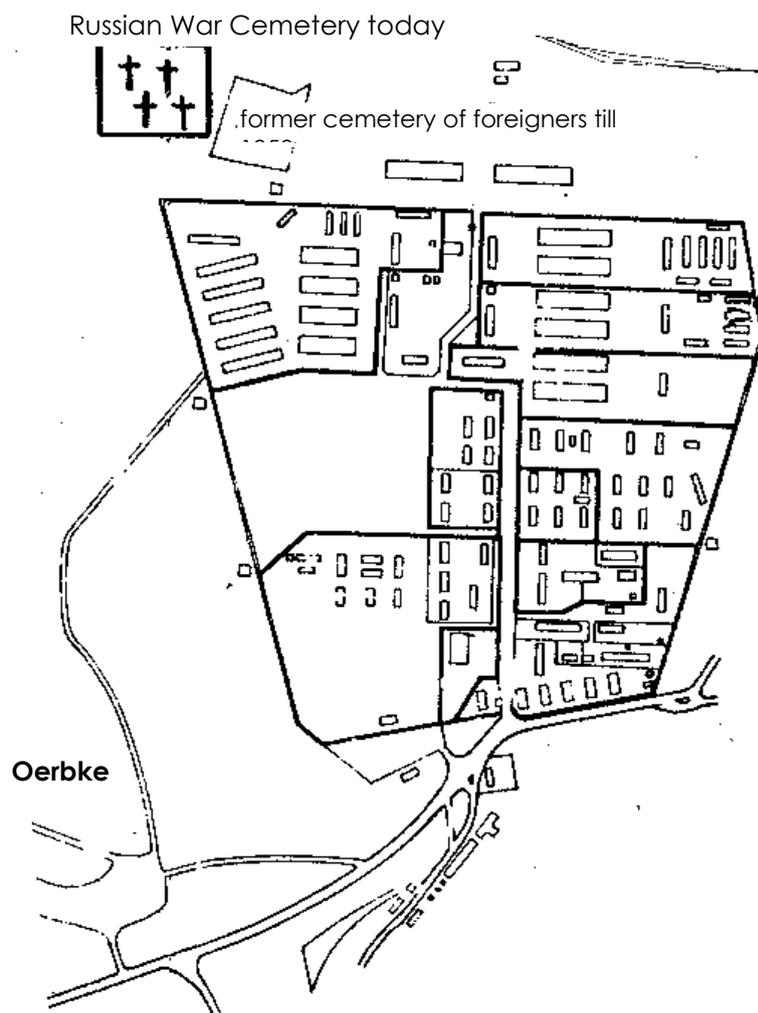
French Memorial Stone erected on the occasion of a memorial meeting with former French prisoners of war on the 16th June 1990.

Between 1939 and 1945 there were three camps of prisoners of war (P.O.W.) at Oerbke: The so-called "Stalag XI B" (main camp) was built in 1939. It kept prisoners of war from France, Great Britain, Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, the United States of America, the U.S.S.R., Poland, Yugoslavia and Czecho-Slovakia. Most of the prisoners of this camp, which existed till the end of the Second World War, were divided into abt. 1.170 fatigue parties (details) which had to work mostly out of Oerbke, for example in factories at Salzgitter, Wolfsburg and Brunswick (Braunschweig).



In August 1941 a second camp was built for Russian P.O.W.'s (prisoners of war), which was at first named "STALAG 321" but soon changed into "STALAG XI D" till its break-up. In both camps ten thousands of Russians were kept as P.O.W.'s, most of them died of hunger and disease. The hastily built-up barracks of the Oerbkean camp were only a poor and needy accommodation for the prisoners-of-war, who were totally exhausted and starved when they arrived at the camp after long transports in closed goods wagons. In the course of a typhoid fever (epidemic) hundreds of P.O.W.'s died sometimes on one day. The total number of dead prisoners is estimated to be about 30.000.

In camp "STALAG 357", which was transferred in August 1944 from Thorn in Poland to Oerbke, English, Americans, Canadians, South Africans and Australiens were kept prisoners-of-war. This camp existed till the end of the Second World War.



Reconstruction of the former camp of Russian "STALAG XI D" from 1941 to 1943 at Oerbke and "STALAG 357" from 1943 to 1945 at Oerbke.

The about 30.000 unknown Russian P.O.W.'s were buried in collective graves. Only a few could be buried in individual tombs. The 109 gravestones with individual names have – in most cases – found a symbolic place.

Therefore only few names of the buried Russian P.O.W.'s are known to us. During the early months of the German-Russian War 817 dead Russians had been registered at the registry office at Fallingbostel up to November 1941.



Polish memorial stone with an inscription translated into German:

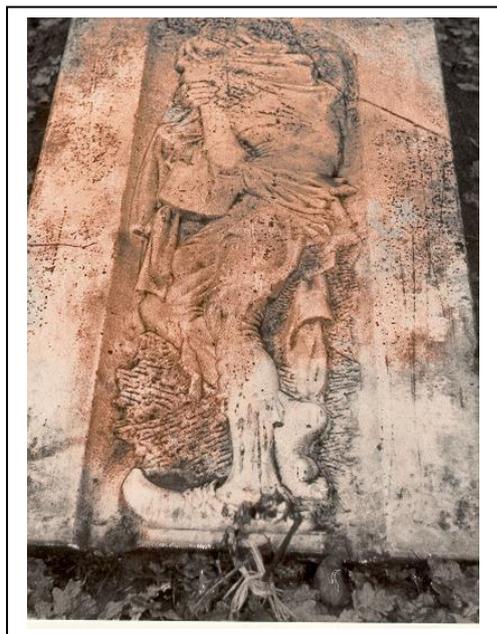
1939 – 1945

“MAY YOUR MORTAL REMAINS
BECOME THE SEED OF FREEDOM
FOR ALL NATIONS”

In the grave register of the district of Oerbke the following entries are to be found:

Nationality	Total numbers
Yugoslaves	75
Polish	25
French	5
unknown nationality	12
unknown dead P.O.W.'s	18
Belgians	1
Slovakians	2
Russian: unknown – individual graves	94
unknown dead P.O.W.'s collective graves (9.711 qm)	<u>ca. 30.000</u>
Total Number	30.232

Apart from the “Cemetery of the Nameless” there was also a cemetery of foreigners where dead prisoners of war from camp “STALAG XI B” had been buried. This cemetery was given up in 1958. 607 dead prisoners (Americans, Belgians, English, French, Italian) were put into other graves on other central cemeteries, whereas 127 dead P.O.W.’s of different nations found their last rest-place on the “Cemetery of the Nameless” at Oerbke.



Russian memorial relief

(without inscription)

In 1965/1966 the memorial relief was put to its present place in course of a reorganisation of the cemetery. The memorial relief is made of stone.

In 1962 and 1963 about 120 young foreigners helped to extend and complete the “Cemetery of the Nameless”. They took part in international

youth camps at Oerbke, which were organised by the German War Graves Commission, the “Volksbund”. The leitmotiv of these camps was “RECONCILIATION OVER THE GRAVES – WORK FOR PEACE”. Also in July 1987 36 young persons of Algeria, Belgium, Great Britain, Denmark, France, Norway, Hungary and the Federal Republic of Germany worked for maintenance of the war cemetery. They took part in international youth camps at Oerbke, which were organised by the German War Graves Commission, the “Volksbund”.

Responsible for the cultivation, maintenance and administration of this war cemetery is the government of Lower-Saxony, represented by the administration of the district of Lüneburg. The administration of Oerbke also gives information about the cemetery if requested.

A documentation about each camp at Oerbke has been published with a chronicle of the district of Osterheide called "The Heidmark – Wandel einer Landschaft – Die Geschichte des Truppenübungsplatzes Bergen" (ISBN No. 3-00-017185-1). It can be bought in any German Bookshop for 60,00 Euros.

Arranged by:
Gemeindefreier Bezirk Osterheide
Gillweg 7, D-29683 Oerbke

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