



The Nuremberg POW camps 1939 - 1945

Preliminary note

The picture we are displaying is from the book

Georg Schramm: Bomben auf Nürnberg. Luftangriffe 1940-1945. Munich 1988.

It had been taken by an Allied reconnaissance plane on April 11, 1945. Because the original photo is public property, we do not think that we are violating any copyright by showing details from it, but if anyone can claim legal reservations that are justifiable, we will remove this presentation immediately from our website.

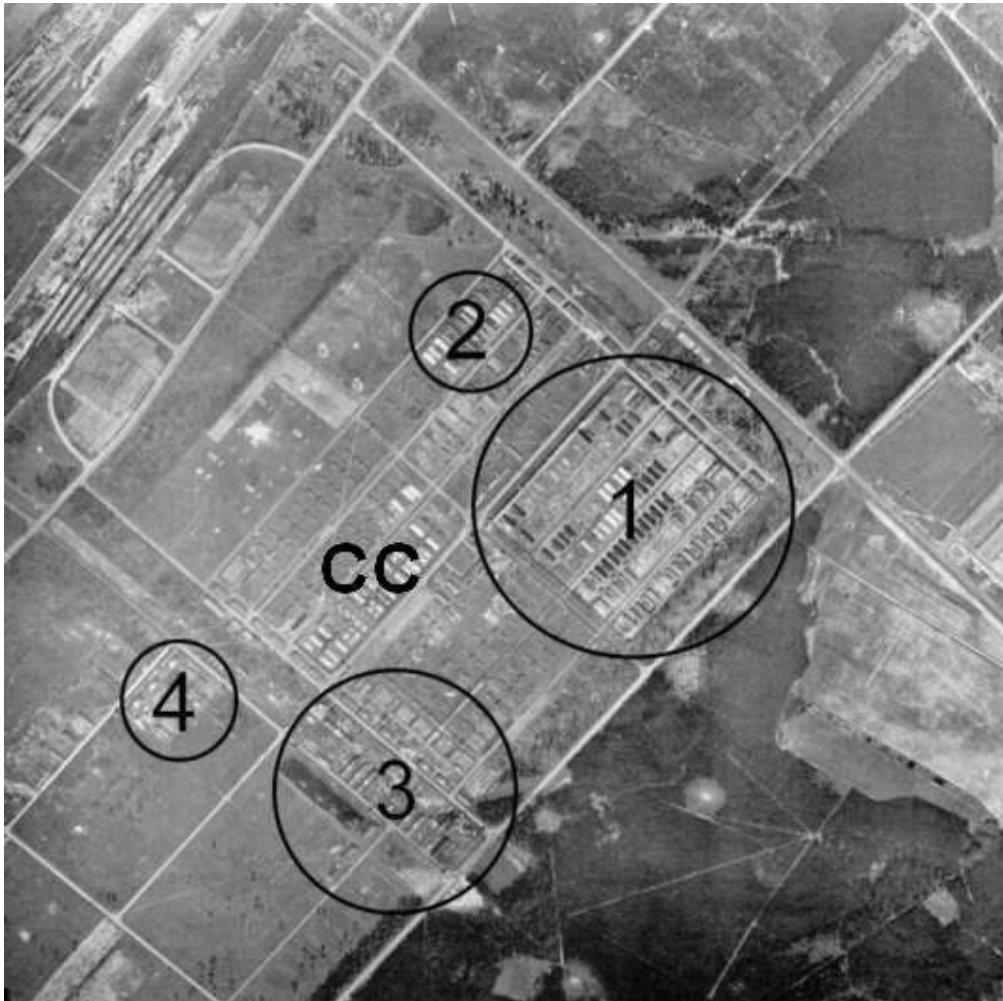
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Introduction

Georg Schramm's *Bomben auf Nürnberg* (Bombing Nuremberg) is a mandatory reading for anyone who deals with the history of this city during WW2. Because the aerial warfare had such a massive impact upon the *Sanctuary of the Third Reich*, the results of Schramm's meticulous research on dates and details about the British and American air raids have to be consulted frequently by any local historian.

Among the many illustrations in the book, one photograph caught our special attention: a large picture of *Stalag XIII D Nürnberg-Langwasser*, a difficult German term, however well known by foreign inmates from all over Europe, Canada and the United States.

Photo of the *Stalag XIII D / Oflag 73* area, April 1945



With the U-shaped camp commanding officer's HQ in the middle (CC), the Nuremberg POW camps were four separate complexes on the ground of the former *SA-Lager* (Stormtroopers' camp, 1-3) and *HJ-Lager* (Hitler Youth's camp, 4).

A clear-cut point of reference in the surrounding area of the camp is the railway station *Märzfeld* to the northwest. The bright spot between the station and the camp as well as two others in the adjacent woods to the southeast mark the impact of bombs.

A brief history of Nuremberg POW camps

For the imprisonment of captive enemy enlisted men, a net of *Stalags*, an military abbreviation for (*Mannschafts-*)*Stammlager* (regularly allocated POW camps for enlisted men) spread over the territory of the Reich, counted by Roman numbers according to the *Wehrkreis* (martial district) they were situated in and additionally differentiated by capital letters if there was more than one camp within the district.

According to the Geneva Convention and the Warfare Ordinance of The Hague, captive officers had to be treated in different ways - as long as their country had signed these treaties. Hence there was another category of German POW camps, the *Oflags*, i.e. *Offizierslager* (POW camps for officers), for logistical reasons often attached to a *Stalag*, but with own guarding personnel and administration.

The archival sources for the life in these camps are scarce. Many records have been destroyed during or immediately after the war or confiscated by the Allies. This fact aggravates research and applies also to the situation in Nuremberg. The only coherent description of the development of the local *Stalag*, for which the installations of the *Reichsparteitagsgelände* (Nazi party rally grounds) were utilized, has been written in 1949 by the retired colonel Pellet, last commanding officer of *Stalag XIII D Nürnberg-Langwasser* (the latter is a creek used for the denomination of the then undeveloped area, today of the suburb covering large parts of the rally grounds). Of course the tendency of his military memoirs is far from being self-critical, at least the dates and figures he gives can claim certain reliability.

Immediately after the German aggression against Poland in September 1939, the grounds of the former *SA-Lager* (Nazi Stormtroopers' camp) at Langwasser were used by the *Wehrmacht* as prisoners' camps, at first as *Ilag* (*Internierungslager*, camp of internment) for enemy civilians, but in the very month being converted into a *Stalag*.

Until its dissolution in August 1940, the number of inmates grew enormously to a peak of approx. 150,000 housed in barracks with a maximum capacity of 200 men. All the nationalities of the invaded countries were held captive here: Poles, Dutchmen, Belgians and French, but obviously no British soldiers, who as well as later on the G.I.s were concentrated in other camps, mostly in the eastern part of the Reich. They came to Nuremberg only at the end of WW2 when the eastern *Stalags* were evacuated before the approaching Red Army.

Right from the beginning the captive soldiers' working power was made available to the German war economy. Particularly the Western European inmates, skilled in trades useful to the industry were divided into *Arbeitskommandos* (work details) and *lent* to the companies by the *Wehrmacht*. Others had to work as farm hands in the rural areas of the martial district.

The dissolution of the *Stalag Nürnberg-Langwasser* in August 1940 took place for reasons of creating smaller entities easier to control and dislocated in remote areas of the *Wehrkreis*. The result were 3 new *Stalags*:

- *Stalag XIII A Hohenfels*, military training area (Upper Palatine), moved to Sulzbach (Upper Palatine) in November 1940
- *Stalag XIII B Weiden* (Upper Palatine)
- *Stalag XIII C Hammelburg* (Lower Franconia)

After the camp area had been cleared of enlisted men - of course the numerous work details remained with the armament industry in the city, but were housed in camps owned by the respective companies - two *Oflags* (*XIII A* and *XIII B*) were established there. Their inmates were in their majority French and Serbian officers.

The German aggression against the Soviet Union changed the situation of POWs in German detention dramatically. Millions of soldiers of the Red Army became captive and after the Germans decided on making use of their working power for the German industry, the remnants of the wave of lethal diseases and starvation in fall and winter 1941 were shipped to the Reich.

The former Stormtroopers' camp on party rally grounds gained importance in this process by being used as *Dulag* (*Durchgangslager*, transit camp) for Nuremberg being a railroad hub of great importance to the logistics of this undertaking. Also Soviet soldiers, enlisted men and officers, had to stay in Nuremberg assigned to work here - the USSR had not signed the Geneva Convention - but not before April 1943 an official *Stalag* had been reestablished here: *Stalag XIII D*. The *Oflags* were moved temporarily to Hammelburg training area, but obviously were relocated as *Oflag 73* until the middle of the following year.

In his report colonel Pellet wrote that in August 1943 *Stalag XIII D* had been damaged heavily by an allied air raid. 2/3 of the wooden barracks burned down but only 2 Soviet soldiers were the casualties of this attack. The frequency of the bombings of Nuremberg, the density of the population within the barbed wire fences with, at the same time, merely symbolic sheltering facilities (*Splitterschutzgräben*, protective trenches, covered by a ceiling of wooden beams and a layer of soil) explain the precautions displayed in the surveillance photo (see below). Though Pellet reports no other attack against the camp, many POWs fell victim to the aerial warfare against Nuremberg during their working duty or other assignments in the city area, most of them Soviets, but also U.S.-soldiers: During the raid of April 5, 1945 performed by US Air Force, a column of American officers at the periphery of the city was hit with 29 men killed.

When the allied forces closed in for the German borders from East and West in late 1944, *Stalag XIII D* and *Oflag 73* became the destination of the increasingly chaotic evacuation transports from other German POW camps. Entire camps moved in, e.g. inmates and staff of the *Luftwaffenlager* (air force POW camp) III Sagan in Silesia with approx. 6,000 U.S. and British crew members. But also the regular population of the Nuremberg camps reached enormous dimensions as given in the periodical *Kriegsgefangenenbestandsmeldung* (POW status report) of Dec. 1, 1944 (quoted after Sanden, *Das Kriegsgefangenenlager*, p 70 - see below). The total of 29,550 POWs including 8,680 officers in *Stalag XIII D* and *Oflag 73* consisted of the following nationalities:

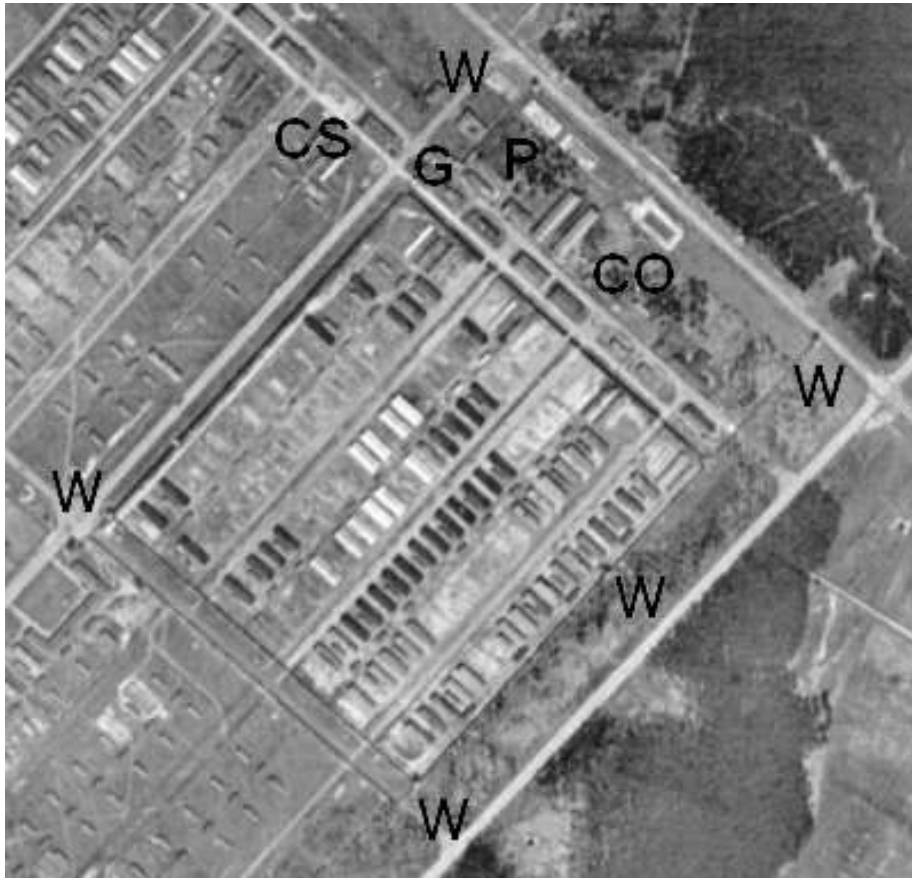
- 14,818 Soviets
- 10,807 French
- 1,521 Italian military internees (IMI)
- 1,200 Belgians
- 606 Serbs
- 476 Poles
- 77 British
- 45 Americans

Of these men 21,002 were in work details including 7,943 Soviet officers and 2 others.

In Nuremberg too, the prelude to the liberation were evacuation marches starting April 12, 1945, which headed to *Stalag Moosburg* in Upper Bavaria. The Nuremberg camps were freed by the U.S. Army on April 16, 1945 finding there approx. 13,000 quarantined POWs for typhoid fever, the Serbian officers and the staff of the POW hospital, most of them also Serbs. The bulk of the former inmates was liberated on April 29 northwest of Moosburg.

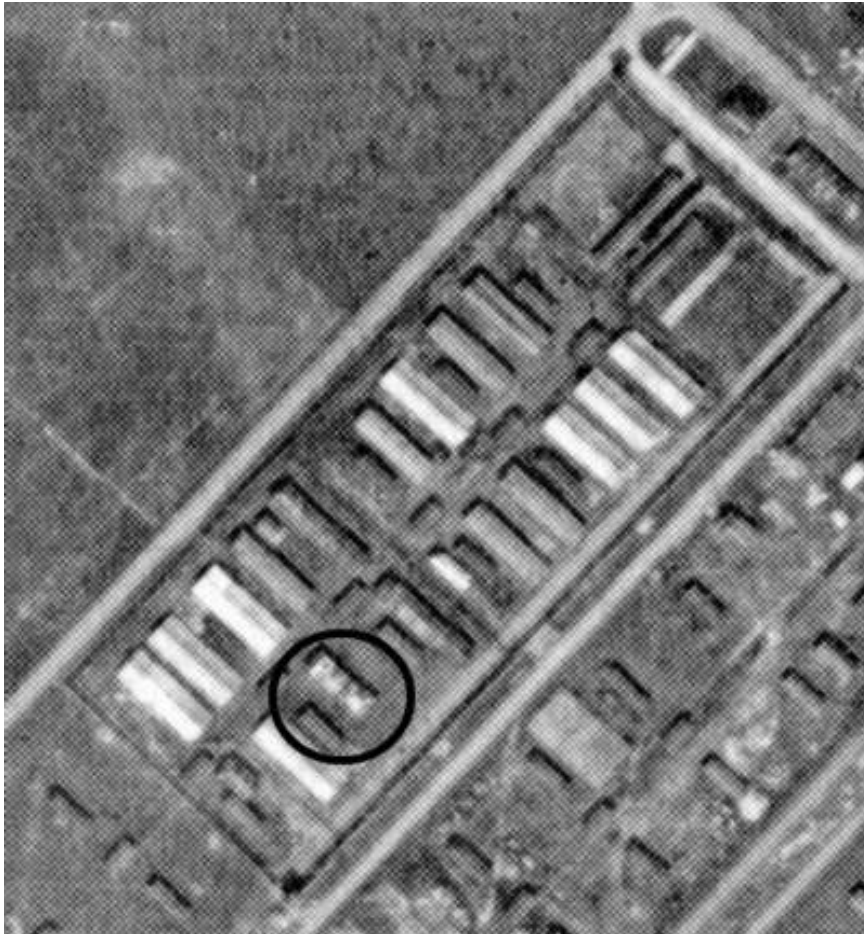
The four complexes of the camps

The main camp



The captions given in the map of late June 1944 (see below archival sources) apply perfectly upon the status quo depicted in the surveillance photo: To the northeast of the scattered rows of barracks surrounded by a double barbed wire fence and watchtowers (W), there were the HQ of the commanding officer of the *Stalag* (CS), the main gate of the camp (G), close to it the military prison for the inmates (P) and the HQ of the commanding officer of the *Oflag* (CO).

The barracks were divided into seven blocks alongside the camp's streets. Block 7 to the southeast side of the camp has been subdivided into 3 units (from right to left 7a, 7b, 7c), most likely the location of the *Oflag*.

Block 8

The separation of the 8th block of the camp with its barracks standing closely side by side must have had a special purpose within the *Stalag*. Has it been established for the quarantine of recently arrived POWs from other camps? There is another difference to the main camp: On one roof of the barracks, clearly readable for the allied bomber pilots approaching the city of Nuremberg from the southwest in most of the cases, there is the inscription *POW*. The same precautions can be found at the two POW hospitals, but not within the limits of the main camp.

Another interesting detail in this picture are the lines drawn with a ruler to emphasize the fence around the block. The Allied air force specialists meticulously analyzed the information brought home by their crews 5 days before the Americans liberated the camp.

The POW hospital



The roofs of the barracks are marked by red crosses to prevent them from being bombed, to make it sure in addition the triple warning *POW* (see circles) on the ground. It is not clear to us whether the mysterious >o< shaped lines are some kind of a military flag symbol or caused by something else.

To the right of letter *S* one can see the zigzag-structure of a *Splitterschutzgraben*.

The hospital for Soviet POWs



The existence of a separate *Lazarett* (hospital) for Soviet POWs on the grounds of the former Hitler Youth camp meant primarily: lower standards of treatment and nutrition compared to the captive soldiers from other countries according to the deadly racial theory of the Nazis, which of course also influenced the way the *Wehrmacht* looked at them. Otherwise the details match the elements of the other parts of the camp: Warning signs for the allied bombers, fence and position of watchtower (W) emphasized by a pencil, 2 covered trenches between the barracks to the southeastern corner. Their zigzag form was supposed to break the power of a blast close to the shelter. In the case of a direct hit, these trenches offered no protection at all.

Archival Sources

Nuremberg City Archives C 36/I no. 322 (report of colonel Pellet), C 32 no. 1190 (map as attachment to report of June 26, 1944), C 56 no. 6 (figures of U.S. victims of the April 5, 1945 air raid).

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[Index](#)

[Home](#)