Cemeteries of Soviet Prisoners of War in Norway

By Reinhard Otto

From 1941 to 1945, approximately 13,700 Soviet prisoners of war (POWs) died on Norwegian territory, but only about one-third are known by name or can be identified by their ID tag. This is surprising, because the German Wehrmacht had strict rules about registration of the deaths of POWs. Every prisoner was given an ID tag, making identification definitive, and every death was recorded so that the resting place could be verified. In Norway, about 8,300 deaths can be documented today, very often including the location, but with thorough research this number could increase to at least 9,000 POWs. It is possible to reconstruct the burial setup at many cemeteries or at least to compile allocation lists for the end of the war. Research is complicated by the fact that many of the deceased were relocated more than once to newly created cemeteries, especially the cemetery at Tjøtta in Fylke Nordland. In those cases the identities of victims have often been lost.

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For many years, the topic of POWs in Norway has been widely neglected in scholarly research. It was first in 1988 that Birgit Koch wrote an essay on the subject at the University of Oslo, and it took until 2004 before Marianne Soleim (in her doctoral dissertation) gave a comprehensive overview of the living conditions, work detachments and deaths of Red Army soldiers in this Scandinavian country. Soleim’s paper provided the foundation for Mari Olafson Lundemo’s (University of Helsinki) recently written Master’s thesis on the causes of death of these POWs.

In total, more than 13,700 Soviet POWs died in Norway between 1941 and 1945, mostly in the northern part of the country. After the war, several common graves were created and the remains of most of the deceased POWs were transferred and reburied there. The biggest is the common grave site at Tjøtta, situated in Fylke Nordland, where the inscription on a memorial stone states that altogether 7,551 people were buried, 826 identified by name. Overall, the Norwegian national war grave commission lists about 2,700 deceased Soviet POWs who were identified by name, 102 of them civilians. In the cases of 768 prisoners, only the identity tag number is known today, and there is no information at all about the rest except for place of death.

An official pamphlet of Falstadsenteret ascribes this to the way the Germans handled deceased POWs: «Around 13,700 Soviet POWs died in Norway. The high mortality count makes these POWs the largest group of war losses on Norwegian soil. Exact mortality figures are still uncertain, as the source material was destroyed when the Germans capitulated and the Nazis had little respect for human life. POWs were thrown into common graves or never properly buried. Today, only 2,700 of the victims have been identified by name. In 2008, the Norwegian authorities launched the research project „Krigsgraver søker namn“ (war graves seek...»

1. I would like to thank Ekaterina Kiselewa, Martinus Hauglid and Michael Stokke from Narviksenteret for scientific support, Dorothy Otto for translation.


2. Approximately 10,700 died on Norwegian territory, in addition to nearly 3000 victims who drowned due to the sinking of the ships Rigel and Palatia. Cf. Steffenak, p. 50–58; Trond Carlsen, Rigel, Norgeshistoriens største skipsforlis, 2005.

3. Since there have been many new graves found between 1953-1980, the number is higher today: known by name: 835, by number: 776, unknown: 6417, in total 8026.
Cemeteries of Soviet prisoners of war in Norway 533

names) with a view to identifying more of the Soviet victims. Since March 2011, information about POWs who have been identified is available in a database that can be searched for answers concerning the fate of individual prisoners.⁴

The Falstadsenteret pamphlet describes German *Wehrmacht* behaviour that fundamentally contradicts its effective military rules at the time. The Geneva Convention of 1929, regulating the treatment of POWs in future military conflicts, had been effective law in the *Reich* since 1933. In 1939, still before the start of the war, the treatment of enemy soldiers in German captivity was determined on this basis. The registration of prisoners was regarded as an essential element in being able to notify the next of kin, but also in having a general overview of the POWs held. In the case of death, this inevitably entailed the need to know exactly where and when a POW had died and was buried.

In this article, I demonstrate how the German military in Norway handled deaths among POWs during the period of occupation. To comprehend this, however, it is crucial to know how policies within the *Wehrmacht* regulated this process. If everything went according to regulation, the question that inevitably arises is why, today, more than three-quarters of prisoners buried in Norwegian POW cemeteries are not identified. An answer can be found in the time after 1945, but is not the subject of this article.

The relevant *Wehrmacht* regulations form the basis of this presentation. In addition, I use the Personal Cards of deceased POWs, which were filled in upon arrival at the POW camps and are available in large numbers today via the Internet.⁵ Finally, the files of the *Wehrmachtbefehlshaber Norwegen* (Armed Forces Commander of Norway) and of the *Armeeoberkommando* (AOK; Field Army Command) 20 stationed in Finland, to be found at the Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (BA MA) Freiburg, offer important information.

**soviet pows in norway**

It is difficult to determine exactly the number of Soviet POWs in Norway between 1941 and 1945, but based on a German source Marianne Soleim assumes a total of about 100,000 people, 9,000 of them civilians,⁶ whereas

⁵. www.obd-memorial.ru
⁶. Report of *Wehrmachtbefehlshaber Norwegen*, German POW manpower status report, 1.1.1945. According to this report, 74,560 POWs were transferred to Norway until 1.1.1945. Soleim adds another 9,758 for the year 1945 Soleim, pp. 56-60.
Michael Stokke estimates 93,000 POWs and, in addition, 7,000 civil Soviet citizens.7

Based on German POW manpower status reports, the situation was as follows: For January 1st, 1945, the three German POW camps in Norway, namely Stammelager (Stalag; POW main camps) 303, 330 and 380 reported 26,423 Red Army soldiers captive. The Verstärkte Kriegsgefangenen-Arbeitsbataillone (reinforced POW working battalions) recorded 35,569 and the Bau-Pionier-Bataillone (POW construction engineer battalions) 3,201 POWs. There were therefore 65,193 POWs, 1,284 of them officers.8 In addition, there were approximately 22,000 prisoners who were moved to northern Norway when the AOK 20 retreated from Finland in late fall 1944.9 By August 31st 1944, this AOK comprised a total of 21,094 POWs and other prisoners,10 as well as 5,507 Hilfswillige (Hiwis; Russian auxiliary military forces), former POWs with a very unstable legal status which could be changed back to POW at any point in time. Adding up these numbers, it becomes clear that at the beginning of 1945 there were more than 86,000 Soviet POWs in Norway.11 Assuming that approximately 12,000 POWs had died up to this point, there must have

7. Stokke, p. 5 and pp. 35–38.
8. Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg (BA MA), RW 6/x. 455/5. Those were the Verstärkte Kriegsgefangenen-Arbeits-Bataillone with the numbers 180, 182–188, 190, 202–205. In addition there were the Nachschub-Btl. (supply battalion) 464 and the Bau-Pionier-Bataillone 1, 2 und 5. The number of POWs in custody of the German Luftwaffe at that time is unknown.
9. "The retreat contains 22,000 POWs incl. those of Luftwaffe and O.T., of whom 12,000 shall work in the new region, about 10,000 were set free. About 17,000 should take Eismeer-strasse or Reichstrasse 50 to the direction of Lakselv. BA MA, RH 20-20/257/175, 22,000 POWs who were brought to Norway from Finland means by far more than it is known until today. See L. Westerlund, Saksan vankileirit Suomessa ja raja-alueilla 1941–44, Helsinki, 2008, p. 317 (8,000 to 11,000). From the region of Porsangerford alone 10,051 POWs were transferred by ship in November 1944 (BA MA RH 20-20/257/107). They were probably the POWs at the disposal of the XIX. Gebirgsjäger (mountain army corps) in the Petsamo region. (31.8.1944: 10,220 POWs; BA MA, RH 20-20/256/71). 15,000 POWs should be sent back to Germany in late autumn 1944 (BA MA, RW 39/198/53), but that did not happen because of lack of ships (ibid., p. 49). As far as I know no transports from Norway to Germany are documented for late 1944 and 1945.
10. BA MA, RH 20-20/256/50. The latter prisoners whose number was small were mainly German army soldiers in penal camps.
11. From April 1st,1945 different POW manpower status reports exist, apparently made up later by the Germans under British supervision. Only in one exact numbers were quoted for the different units. (Norges Hjemmefrontmuseum, Oslo, FO II, Div. Box 9) Stalag 303, 330 and 380: 27,022, Verstärkte Kriegsgefangenen-Arbeits-Bataillone: 35,983, Bau-Pionier-Bataillone: 5,204, Nachschub-Bataillone: 1,095, Luftwaffe: 6,118, together 75,495. According to another POW manpower status report there were 75,244 Soviets from the different units, additionally 854 who could not be assigned. (Public Record Office London, WO 331/9/88511). The same list exists, however, also with handwritten corrections saying that there were 82,932 POWs (Norges Hjemmefrontmuseum, Oslo, FO II, Div., Box 21). Stalag means Kriegsgefangenen-Mannschafts-Stammlager (= Main camp for POWs who were not officers).
been at least 98,000 members of the Red Army in Norwegian POW camps between 1941 and 1945, not including civilians. At the present time it is not possible to determine the exact number of POWs transported from Norway back to the German Reich. It is known, however, that a great many POWs buried in cemeteries in Germany received their ID tags at Stalag 303 or 330.

The above-mentioned authors have written extensively about the living conditions and deaths of Soviet POWs in Norway, so these topics are only briefly summarized here. Just as in all areas the Germans had occupied, in Norway, too, the Geneva Convention in regard to Soviet POWs was only followed in certain respects, and certainly not where accommodation, diet and medical care were concerned. In Northern Norway in particular the rarely heated barracks provided little protection from the cold, wind, rain and snow, and it was virtually impossible for POWs to recover from the day’s long, hard labour. The constant humidity in the buildings promoted tuberculosis and pneumonia, which were two of the most common causes of death. The food rations served up by the Wehrmacht were insufficient to maintain the physical condition of hard-working men and decomposition of strength ensued. The camp administrators tried to improve conditions by frequently reporting the situation to the higher authorities, but they rarely succeeded in improving things.

As early as October 22nd, 1941, a letter to the Armeearzt (army medical officer) in Norway concerning the situation of prisoners in the north of the country read: «A reason for concern are the Russian prisoners. In the area of care for the POWs much needs to be done if they are supposed to be labourers and not a burden – not only in terms of medical care, but especially concerning accommodation, provisions, and clothing.»12 Up to the end of February 1942, approximately 10% of the 3,200 Soviet soldiers in forced labour in Norway died.13

Only a few beds, personnel and drugs were available for medical care, so referral to the military hospital often came too late. The unfavourable geography further complicated the situation: The distance between the different work sites and the medical facilities, which were usually located at the Stalags, was often too far to make the transport of a sick prisoner «worthwhile» in the eyes of the Wehrmacht. Only in the south and cen-

13. Report of Oberquartiermeister (Chief quartermaster branch) AOK Norwegen, February 1942; 28.2.1942. BA MA, RW 59/154/62. It reads: „By good treatment and good food about 50 % of the POWs of the Alta camp could be made fit to work again“ – but this also means that this treatment was not successful in one of two cases.
Central parts of Norway did referral to a military hospital occur fairly regularly. At least attempts were made to determine the cause of death, as can be proved by numerous autopsy reports.14

Often the prisoners died shortly after arrival, many even during transport to the camps. They were usually put to rest at sea and only on rare occasions would the body be brought ashore for burial in a cemetery such as Oslo-Vestre Gravlund.15 These early deaths were caused by the living conditions in the camps in the German Reich and the occupied territories, where in many cases the situation was much worse than in Norway. Consequently, emaciated prisoners started the long northbound journey with the worst possible prospects; sometimes they even needed to be «made transportable through additional provisions in special camps».16 In 1941, Stalag commanders complained that it was mainly men from the Asian republics of the Soviet Union, men physically rather unsuited for the Nordic climate, who were being referred to Northern Norway. The high number of deaths among the people from this region until spring 1942 is strong proof of this assessment.17

The National Socialist (NS) view of the Soviet soldiers worsened the situation: they were looked upon not just as «Slavic Untermenschen», but also as personifications of Bolshevism, the ideological foe of NS ideology. They were considered people whose sole aspiration was to harm Germany and lead Communism to victory. This view was generally approved of and shared by the German people, especially the German soldiers. The treatment of Soviet POWs thus did not conform to the conventions of international law. In cases of doubt, resolute use of weapons was advised, according to a directive from September 8th, 1941, «with the firm intention to strike».18 For this reason, the cause of death is very often marked as «shot in an attempt to escape», which in many cases can be read as shot

14. BA MA, RH 12-25 Collection of hospital records with examples of autopsies from Gardermoen (L 1611 und 1612) and Kirkenes (L 1596, und 1597), also more from Bergen and Mo i Rana. Cf. the comments on several personal cards that POWs were taken to the pathology in Oslo for autopsy e.g. Nefedow Ilja Stepan, II D 84915, or Lobanow Klim Stepan, II B 105615. If names of POWs are mentioned the ID-number is added.
15. See the diary of steamship Ulanga from 11.8.–7.9.1942 with 12 POWs who died on the way from Stettin via Trondheim to Kirkenes. The exact geographic coordinates of the sea-graves were mostly written down. BA MA, RM 102/3884. Srappolow Michail Wassilij (II B 96057) died in Hamburg-Altona (12.4.1942). On his personal card was already noticed „Transport nach Norwegen“ (transport to Norway).
17. BA MA, RW 58/445/81. Armeearzt (medical officer) of the 702. Infantry Division, Report for September 1941. The text says that already during the first transports „the Russians from Asia generally were in bad condition concerning nourishment and physical state."
18. Archiv des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte München, Nürnberger Dokument 1519-PS.
after the actual attempt, which means nothing short of murder. The same is true of the transferral of «ideologically intolerable subjects», e.g. Jews or «instigators», to the SD, where they were usually executed.

Altogether approximately 11,000 prisoners lost their lives on Norwegian territory between 1941 and 1945. Another 3,000 drowned when the steamboats Palatia and Rigel sank.

Mari Olafson Lundemo has pointed out that the mortality rate lies by «only» about 10% of the total number of POWs and thus differs considerably from rates in other areas under German control, which in some parts were higher than 50%. The only exception is the area of the AOK 20 in Northern Finland, where the death rate was also about 10%, while in Finnish camps approximately 25% of Soviet POWs died.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES OF REGISTRATION

Nearly all prisoners who were sent to work in Norway had undergone «registration» in the occupied territories or the German Reich beforehand. Only on rare occasions did this take place in Norway or in Finland.

The registration process had been standardized by the OKW in February 1939 in the «Instructions for the commander of a Kriegsgefangenen-Mannschafts-Stammlager» (Stalag). Upon arrival, every POW received an ID tag bearing the appellation of the respective camp and, starting at 1, the registration number of the individual prisoner. This usually occurred at the first or second camp the prisoner went through. He had to wear the tag on a piece of string around the neck at all times. In the event of death, the upper half of the tag stayed with the body while the lower

19. The typical wording reads like this: attempt to escape – recaptured – shot at a second attempt to escape. So far 221 cases have been recorded on the personal cards.

20. See footnote 2.


23. The number of POWs registered in Finland: Stalag 309 Salla: 15,576, Stalag 522 Elvenes: 4,450. In Norway: Stalag 505: 5,591, Stalag 530: 5,495 POWs (in each case the numbers given are a minimum). Later (11.1.1944) Stalag 580 was transferred to Wehrmachtbefehlshaber Norwegen, from the beginning 1945 in Drezja. BA MA, RW 50/170/18. Obviously there are no registrations for this Stalag for the time in Norway.

24. On the territory of the German Reich the camps were marked with the Roman number of the military district were they were situated combined with a capital letter indicating their chronological order. Thus Stalag VII B located in Memmingen e.g. was the second camp established in the military district VII Munich.
half, along with personal records, was sent to the «Wehrmachtakquisitionstelle für Kriegerverluste und Kriegsgefangene» (WASt; information office for war losses and POWs) in Berlin. The WASt had been established within the OKW in August 1939, on the one hand to comply with section 77 of the Geneva Convention of 1929 and be able to inform enemy states about the POWs in German camps at any point in time, and on the other to document the German Reich’s own losses.

When the ID tag was handed out to the POW, the camp administration created a so-called personal card I (PK I) containing a photograph and/or fingerprint of the prisoner as well as personal data, information on transfers to other camps, hospitalisations and working detachments. The card remained with the POW throughout his captivity. The most important criterion for identification though was the individual number on the ID tag. It was so significant that it also served as the means of sorting the camps’ filing systems. The most important data concerning prisoners were sent to WASt immediately after registration, and a comprehensive archive containing all records from every camp, called Stammkartei, was created, where any subsequent changes and additions, such as hospitalisations or transfers, were documented as well. Thus, the WASt had a slightly delayed but accurate overview of the number of prisoners in individual camps as well as the total number of POWs.

Registration took place only once, with the prisoner keeping his ID number throughout captivity, even when transferred to another camp. Consequently, once a number had been given out, it could not be used again, not even when the respective prisoner had died. The loss of an ID tag had to be reported to the WASt and if it was recovered it was confiscated and destroyed. If recaptured escapees were no longer in possession of their original tag, they were registered again under a different number.

Every camp had its own directory of ID tags, which included a number, first and last names, details about family and place of residence and in the last column the current location of the prisoner. Official registration of the POWs’ personal data was thus the beginning of a complex administrative process which only ended with the end of the war, or ear-

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25. The personal card followed in formation and handling the text of article 77 (4,5) of the Geneva Convention. It was issued only once. In case of loss the new card was marked as «Duplikat» (copy) or «Ersatzkarte» (substitute). If there is a photo it normally shows the POW holding a board with his ID number on it.
lier, if the POW escaped from captivity, was released or died. Therefore each number existed only once.

Since the National Socialist war against the Soviet Union was planned and conducted as a war of conquest and extermination in which POWs were not necessarily to be treated in accordance with international law, the Wehrmacht established a large number of new POW camps.

Their appellations between the numbers 301 and 399 did not conform with those of camps already in existence, but they were still regular POW camps based on the respective rules. On June 26th, 1941, about two weeks before the first transports arrived in Germany itself, the OKW demanded a few "preliminary changes" to some of the existing regulations for the so-called «Russian Camps» within the borders of the Reich. However, this order for «the registration and treatment of Russian POWs» hardly affected the rules concerning the registration process. The PK II for all kinds of economic information was to be created only once the decision for a work detachment had been made. The PK I though, the ID of the prisoner so to speak, had to be administered regardless, and each POW had to be equipped with an ID tag as usual. There were no changes or restrictions to this part. Thus the administrations of the respective «Russian Camps» were obliged to handle the registrations of new arrivals in the same manner as in all other camps, the only difference being that they solely included citizens of one single state – the Soviet Union.

The highly accurate registration of POWs was matched by the precise registration of deaths. The order from 1939 contains several references to this fact. Instructions concerning the ID tag demanded the same procedure as applied in the event of a German soldier’s death, i.e. the upper half of the tag had to remain with the body while the lower half was sent to the WASt along with a casualty report and the PK I and II. Every 10 days the camps had to send a report concerning deaths to Berlin. In column 14 of this form, the specifics of «wounds, injuries, death (place of death)».

26. Soviet POWs were released from captivity above all when handed over to the Gestapo, transferred to a civilian job or recruited as volunteers in units of the Wehrmacht.
27. BA MA, BW 59/142/55f.
28. All information about Red Army soldiers taken prisoner were sent to the WASt not by lists but by four-part green cards according to an order by OKW from 2.7.1941. This procedure had already been introduced in the beginning of April 1941 for the Yugoslavian POWs because of their different nationalities, languages and writing. BA MA, BW 58/12/142 f.
were noted, and in column 15 («comments») whether the deceased had been killed while attempting to escape or during a mutiny. It was also the camp administration’s obligation to record «the designation of the exact place of burial» for every single dead prisoner. The *Wehrmachtgräberoffizier* (*Wehrmacht* officer responsible for graves) in charge of this area received the casualty report, notification of place of burial and the death certificate, which had to include the personal data of the deceased as well as the camp physician’s detailed description of the circumstances of death and location of the grave. A duplicate of the death certificate was kept in the record office of the respective camp.

The bodies were laid to rest at the camp’s own cemetery, which, for hygienic reasons, was located a certain distance from the actual barracks. There were precise instructions regulating the setup and structure of POW graveyards. They had to be «as level as possible or suited for laying out terraces». To prevent «crooked burial grounds within the cemetery» the regulations dictated strict axes, with the middle axis intersecting the level curves at a right angle. Grave sites «were to be structured in a way that the deceased could be buried head to head» with no separation into single graves. The passage reads: «The deceased rest below a common blanket planted with grass, heather or a similar local plant. The ensuing burial grounds are to be raised up 15 cm higher than the paths in between.» If several prisoners passed away at the same time, it was not always possible to bury each of them in a single grave, although every single POW was recorded in connection with this common burial site. Each grave had to be marked and noted in the camp’s cemetery allocation plan so that immediate verification of a prisoner’s burial place was possible at any point in time. To ensure this, cemeteries were structured in fields, rows and graves once they exceeded a certain size. The lists were managed in a register of deaths or a cemetery register.

These regulations also applied to Soviet POWs, with only minimal restrictions. The first essential orders concerning the registration and treatment of POWs did not mention this at all and thus presupposed the usual procedures for death reports and burials. The *OKW* underlined this on March 24th, 1942: «In common graves the bodies (…) have to be provided with their ID tag, so that at a later point in time their identity can be confirmed based on the files containing all their personal data.» A crucial exception concerned the hitherto common notification of the next of kin. On January 7th, 1941, the *OKW* demanded that in the event of death of a POW an additional questionnaire was to be filled out to ensure a prompt report to the POW’s home state by way of the Red Cross. In the case of Red
Army soldiers this was not necessary – the OKW informed the camps on July 25th, 1941 – but it was necessary to provide a precise description of the place of burial to prevent eventual inquiries. Nonetheless, the German military authorities explicitly stood by their standard of a meticulous registration process. On November 11th of the same year, the OKW felt compelled to inform the camps «upon request» that «in case of death of Soviet POWs the obligation to notify the authorities is the same as in the case of death of POWs of other nationalities, as long as the Soviet POWs are registered with the WASt.» Even if prisoners died during transportation to the camp and had not been registered beforehand, their «identifiable personal data [had to be] recorded in a list and sent for safe-keeping to the respective camp the transport was intended for». Because of the high numbers of deaths at the beginning of the winter of 1941/42, it was decided to simplify the notification procedure, but the location of the grave site had to be recorded in any circumstances. In mid-1942 the Reich’s Ministry of the Interior ordered that the Soviet graves be arranged «in the simplest way possible; the main intention is to generally maintain the condition of the graves. The single graves are to be marked with a number plate, the names of the deceased are to be recorded in layout plans of the cemeteries.» The military authorities repeatedly demanded strict compliance with these regulations.

To summarize, deviations from the usual procedures mainly concerned simplifications to the administration, the burial process and cemetery maintenance. Not affected were policies regarding the registration of deaths and the locations of grave sites, nor whether a prisoner died at his place of work detachment, in which case the local commune was responsible for the grave and had to follow the regulations.

It should have been easy to prove these insights based on the registry of ID tags and personal cards, but the WASt files of Soviet POWs were considered to have been lost since the end of the war. Only a few people knew that US troops had come across the undamaged personal files at Meiningen, where the WASt had relocated in 1943 because of the aerial war, and had handed them over to the Red Army in August 1945. Also the files of survivors liberated from the camps by the Allies have only recently been rediscovered. It is therefore understandable that the lack of information regarding the prisoners has led even historians to believe that for ideological reasons the Soviet POWs had not been registered at all or at best starting in spring 1942. In fact, the bulk of the seemingly lost files from the WASt concerning deceased POWs and those who did not return to their home states are in the Central Archive of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Feder-
542 OTTO

( CAMO) in Podolsk, southwest of Moscow. Since the year 2000, an international cooperation of organisations from Germany, Russia and Belarus has been working on making all these files accessible. All material, including a large amount of PK I, is being digitized and can be accessed by different criteria on the Internet at www.obd-memorial.ru.

CEMETERIES IN NORWAY

The many big cemeteries of Soviet POWs, for example in Germany where visitors often find just a sizeable grass field, seem to prove the opposite of accurate administration. In a place like this it is difficult to imagine a well-structured burial ground with identifiable numbered and recorded graves.

It is now possible to prove exactly this, i.e. a recorded structure, for the big so-called Russian Cemeteries of camps 526 (VI K) Senn in East Westphalia, 531 (XI C) Bergen-Belsen in the northwest of Germany, 504 (IV H) Zeithain in Saxonia, and the officers' camp 62 (XIII D) in Hammelburg, Lower Franconia. For these graveyards, tens of thousands of deceased can be matched, and in some cases even their exact grave sites can be located.

For the Occupied Eastern Territories, there is for example a sketch available of the graves in the cemetery at Kowno (Kauen). It remains to be seen whether this was also the practice in Norway.

When visiting the cemetery at Jørstadmoen of camp 505 Lillehammer, the biggest burial ground in Norway since 1945, first impressions do not evoke the
notion of accurate administration. As a matter of fact, the details of this cemetery have been passed on more precisely than those of most others. All in all, there are 954 people buried here\textsuperscript{32}, the first laid to rest on April 20\textsuperscript{th}, 1942, the last after the end of the war on May 25\textsuperscript{th}, 1945. A PK\textsuperscript{1} exists for about two-thirds of the deceased; on the front page, as in the case of Gontcharow Sachar Grigorij, 526/165831, the following is marked, usually in red:\textsuperscript{33}

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{32} Among them 21 Serbs and two men from Croatia. Only 11 can be found on today’s grave-list.
\textsuperscript{33} Source of this and the following cards obd-memorial.ru.
Day of death: 20.11.1944
Cause of death: Tuberculosis of the lungs
Place of grave: Jørstadmoen
Number of Grave: 696
23.11.1944
Kaluza, Gefr.(eiter)

Information about those whose PK I has not yet been retrieved can be added from a cemetery list which was created by the Germans under British supervision, probably in the summer of 1945.34 In addition to first and last names, in most cases this list contains the number on the ID tag, so it is not difficult to relate an unknown dead man in grave 1 to the number 515/28537, which can be matched to the easily retrievable PK I identifying the deceased as Norez Grigorij Andrej. The exact location of the grave within the cemetery can be found on a plan that was probably an attachment to the German list. Every single grave is recorded there up to the number 697; after that, recording is by row. It can be seen from the plan that not all graves in the rows were used. Therefore the empty plots were not considered in the count.35 The present-day list of graves of the Norwegian War Grave Commission counts 954 deceased POWs, usually with name and ID tag number; that is 20 people fewer than were buried there up until May 1945. The missing 20, mostly Serbs, can also be identified, so the cemetery at Jørstadmoen can be reconstructed in its entirety.

Administration of camp 303 Lillehammer was actually more comprehensive than was stipulated by the regulations. For example, it was not a requirement to note the death on the PK I; in fact, there was not even a column for this purpose on the card. Apparently, soldiers in the registry were free to handle this at their discretion. In Norway, this was all the more important since the different work detachments had to act largely independently because of the difficult geographic and climatic conditions and was the main reason they were often called labour camps, branch camps or side camps. Therefore many of these side institutions developed their very own characteristic recording patterns, a feature which has made it easy to identify them today.36

54. CAMO, file 18003/1609.
55. Map as attachment; CAMO, file 18003/1609. Several mistakes in today’s grave list could be corrected by the personal cards, e.g. Aksenenko Iwan Jakow (526/165755) – today Axenin Ivan, Semiroschin Aleksandr Makam – today Amneshin Aleksander.
56. A good example is the OT-working camp Kroken-Engan. Today, 158 dead can be proved. On 50% of the PK I is written «Totenliste #» (death list; a serial number follows). This list, which has most likely been lost, was only kept in Kroken-Engan and probably contained more precise information on the burial sites of the dead POWs.
The most distinctive example is the cemetery at Bjørnelva in Saltdal, Nordland. For this grave site today, 100 deceased people can be proved via PK I. Only in rare cases were the grave numbers recorded, but the soldier responsible for entering the details substituted the numbers with a sketch of the grave site on the front of the PK I and marked the respective grave with an arrow. In the few cases where grave numbers were noted, in combination with the sketches and dates of death, we are able to decipher the cemetery fairly accurately.

As an example, see the detail from the PK I of Efimenko Georgij Kornej with the number I B 45389; he was most probably buried in grave number 82:

Place of burial: Björn-Elva
Distance: about 1 km north-west of the camp
For the Soviet POW
Georgij Efimenko
ID-tag 45389
Day of death: 22.11.1944
Died from: Dysenteria

Just like Bjørnelva, other places (some of them literally) had very distinctive handwriting as well, such as the work detachment in Sola (e.g. Dmitriew Wassilij Kusma 350/2994).

37. In the official list the name is Dmitrow, the place of death Skadberg, the ID tag 303/2994 (not 350/2994).
One last example is the cemetery of camp 322 at Elvenes close to Kirkenes. This camp was established in July 1941 and existed until the German retreat in October 1944. It was important for work detachments because it was from there that workers were sent not only to eastern Finnmark, to the area of the Wehrmachtbefehlshaber Norwegen, but also to northern Finland to the Gebirgskops Norwegen (later XIX. Gebirgskorps), who were in action along the Murmansk front. A large POW hospital was established in the camp at a very early point in time to treat battlefield injuries and later many cases of disease caused by a lack of care and provisions: general physical weakness, cardiac or circulatory insufficiencies and tuberculosis were among the most common causes of death of prisoners who died there and within the camp. At Elvenes, there were two different ways in which a death was usually noted on the PK I; either it was marked on the back in the following way (Rykow, Petr Iwan 302/25470):

Died June 18th 1944 from pneumonia in POW hospital Elvenes and buried in the POW cemetery Elvenes.

58. Further information see footnote 21, Otto, Lapland front.
59. This is so striking, that those prisoners, whose death was noted on the PK I in the same handwriting but without a mention of Elvenes as the burial site, are not counted among the dead of Elvenes, even if they were noted as such at obd-memorial (e.g. Grigorew, Jakow, 522/905). Also see the typical Stalag 322 stamp «verstorben» («deceased», e.g. Efremow, Pawel Kusma, II B 118896). These men probably died within this stalag’s area of authority but were not buried within its vicinity.
... or it was recorded at the bottom of the front page, as here in the case of Sidnew, Sergej Iwan (309/11643):

Died May 20th 1944 in a POW hospital and buried in the POW cemetery at Elvenes in Northern Norway

The PK I from Elvenes don’t exactly identify a burial site, but some grave and hospital files give a precise overview of the structure of a cemetery at Elvenes. In many cases the administration wrote «grave labelled by name» (Krutitschew, Wassilij Leon 309/1754) or «grave labelled by name. Double grave No. 50» (Nikiforow, Matwej Igor 322/1237). Here is the so-called grave file (Grabkarte) of Krutitschew as an example.

40. His death was reported to the WASI on death roll no. 26, ser. number 30.
In some cases there were even grave numbers, so it can be assumed that there was a detailed plan of the cemetery. All in all, there is proof today at Elvenes of at least 603 Soviet soldiers who lost their lives. This is another sign of the administration’s accurate management of the cemetery until liberation of the camp; as one of the last ones, Schujkin Tichon Ewstegej (326/164,065) was buried there on September 20th, 1944.

Knowing all this, the question arises whether the deceased at these cemeteries are indeed resting in the graves they were assigned to by the administration. Contrary to the burials of prisoners from Western nations, the interments of Red Army soldiers were usually undertaken lacking any dignity: their bodies were stripped – the clothes could be of further use – wrapped in paper bags and hastily buried; more than once, and contrary to the regulations, they were left without the required half of their ID tag, since this was considered reusable material. Taking into account the manner in which these procedures were conducted, how can we be sure that the person noted in the cemetery index under a particular number is really resting in the corresponding grave and not in the one next to it, especially if several prisoners died on the same day?

For one thing, the cemeteries in Norway were relatively small, as was the number of deaths compared to the so-called Russian camps in the East or within the Reich; Jørstadmoen was (until 1945) by far the biggest one, with «only» 954 deceased buried there. The low numbers were mainly due to the fact that about 95% of the prisoners were only taken to Norway after the severe autumn and winter 1941/42. With such a low daily number of deaths, the probability of bodies being mixed up and buried in the wrong burial lot was extremely low, so the allocation of grave and person should be accurate in the large majority of cases. In addition, photographs of exhumations, the transfer of remains and the newly created cemeteries show clearly that the deceased, now in a dignified resting place, had usually been identified at the time of reburial: if their ID tag could be recovered, their identity could be acquired via the cemetery index or the mark on the grave and finally confirmed via the German register.

41. The Cemetery Tjøtta was only created for the transfers of bodies from other burial sites and suggests a size that does not correspond with the cemeteries in 1945 in any way.
42. According to present knowledge, the numbers of known and temporally allocated deaths is as follows: 275 (1941), 1,822 (1942), 1,947 (1943), 1,400 (1944), 1,111 (1945).
43. See several photo-series in the Norwegian National Archive, Oslo, Archive of Leif Kreyberg.
44. According to the official graves list, the deceased at the cemetery of Jørstadmoen still have the same grave numbers they were assigned at their burial. See attached plan from 1945.
cemeteries of soviet prisoners of war in norway

grave list, their identity could be confirmed, although perhaps not with 100% certainty.

The cemetery at Tennebekk, June 1945. The memorial plate was made after the end of the war by former POWs.45

An example of a very small burial ground is the cemetery at Skipagurra (Finmark), where the four deceased resting there were later transferred to Tjøtta and reburied.46

There were certainly camps where death and grave site were not noted on the PK I. This is true especially of the many construction and working battalions employed in Norway. At this point it is important to mention again that it was not necessary to record a death on the PK I because other cards, such as the grave files or the 10-day death report lists for the WAS, explicitly asked for this information and were filled in with the respective data anyway. A clear hint of this practice can often be found on the actual PK I: in many cases the Soviet administration subsequently added the exact date of death of the POW, which they could only have garnered from other German sources.47

45. Information from Michael Stokke who has the copyright.
46. National Archives, Oslo. Archive of Leiv Kreyberg. According to the name-plate it seems to be a cross from war-time.
47. These sources seemed to be lost. See p. 550.
The thoroughness of the German bookkeeping is most obvious in the cases of blatant breach of international law, which at least the officers must have been aware of. To date, «shot in attempt to escape» can be proved in 221 cases. POWs who were shot were buried at the nearest cemetery, with the cause of death added to the PK I – wouldn't it have been «better» to note an invented «natural» cause of death? The same is true of POWs who were handed over to the SD, often after an unsuccessful escape attempt. Although it was prohibited to hand them to an institution outside the military, this still happened and was even put in writing. This shows the importance of the registration process for the Wehrmacht, but is also a definite sign that in Norway every single death was accurately recorded. Knowing this, the following note on the PK I of Piskarew Wladimir Iwan (II A 87425) is no longer surprising: «Shot dead by the Grenzschutzwacht (border guards) East of Graddis. The body was hastily buried in the mountains», painfully close to safety on the other - the Swedish - side of the border. In this case there was no grave sign for sure.48

Essentially, there is only one problem when it comes to identifying the graves, and this concerns the year 1945, for which only a very few PK I have been recovered up to the present day. From the end of 1944 the files of the dead could only be brought to the WASi in Meiningen sporadically. The question is what happened to the files that were probably never sent there because of the course of the war. There are two possibilities. The end of the war went peacefully, the British took over the camps but left most of the administration to the Germans up until late summer 1945. Together and in cooperation with the Norwegian authorities and individuals, efforts were made to locate further grave sites and identify dead prisoners, which suggests that the British might have taken over the files and, consequently, these could be deposited in British archives today.

Evaluation of the files at CAMO opens up a different possibility though, which has not been considered up to now. The 620-page-long file 18003/1613, which the Soviet authorities apparently compiled in 1945/46 based on the German PK I and which can also be accessed via the Internet, contains lists of Red Army soldiers who died in imprisonment in France, Germany and Norway. On page 3 of this document there is a passage: «Files in the quantity of about 318.200 cards have been destroyed. See: File N 29146 – 46 (signature) April 20th, 1946. Act of destruction N 3516c – 47. Leader

48. There were cemeteries with only a few crosses or without crosses at all like Aasane, Fjell or Lista, but nevertheless the respective camp-administration knew who was buried there. I thank Michael Stokke for this information.
division 1. Captain, January 28th, 1947.» According to this note the Soviet authorities would have destroyed the German files themselves, even though they contained much more information than they recorded in their lists (usually last name, first name, father’s name, date of birth and date of death, cause of death, camp).49 In total, the file contains the names of about one thousand prisoners who died in Norway mostly in 1944/45; for most of them, no PK I has been discovered, nor can they be found on the Norwegian list of war graves to date. Since the place of death has usually been recorded in the Russian list though, they can be ascribed to specific cemeteries with a fair amount of certainty.

So, until the end of the war the German troops in Norway were meticulous in their administration of POWs, and up to the highest ranks the whereabouts of every single one of them were recorded, including date of death and grave site. Simple proof of this is the project «Krigsgraver søker namn» of the Falstadsenteret (mentioned at the beginning) based on the very material that, according to its own argument, should not even be in existence today,50 namely the German files regarding the dead POWs which were sent by the camps to the WAS in Berlin or Meiningen. This contradiction has apparently not been noticed.

Today, a total of about 8,500 deceased can be identified by name, in most cases also by grave site and a great deal of additional personal data; the uncertainty in the number arises from the different spellings of names in German, Norwegian and Russian which in some cases makes it difficult to determine whether two slightly different names actually match the same person. Besides Jørstadmoen and Elvenes there were big cemeteries at Engeløy (496 dead), Harstad/Trondenes (454), Beisfjord (381), Alta/Elvebakken (315) and Kroken-Engan (158; most current numbers), to name just a few. A maximum of 8,500 to 9,000 deceased POWs (of about 11,000 in total) might be identifiable. The nearly 3,000 victims who died with the sinking of the steamships Palatia and Rigel will unfortunately most likely remain anonymous.51

49. In a similar way they apparently handled the files of some other camp, among them Stalag 518 Lamsdorf in Upper Silesia. It seems that of this specific camp there are mainly death-lists at CAMO which were created based on PK I.

50. See the quotation on p. 1: «Exact mortality figures are still uncertain as the source material was destroyed when the Germans capitulated». Cf. http://falstadsenteret.no/painfulheritage/index.htm where a PK I is shown.

51. Even here there is a possibility to at least approach the victims individually. The Riksarkivet in Oslo compiled a list of repatriated Soviet citizens. It entails 78,522 people and does most probably the large majority of Soviets having returned to their country. It is very likely that POWs, who – according to their PK I – were brought to Norway, did not die there, but don’t show up on the list of repatriates either, were on board of one of the two sunken ships, Rigel and Palatia.
There are also several reasons contradicting the thesis mentioned on page 532 assuming an obliteration of the graves before the retreat at the end of the war:

- Photographs from 1945 show intact cemeteries with marked graves; it is known of many camps in Central Europe that the POWs quickly attempted to arrange their comrades' grave sites in a dignified way; the first step was usually the matching of grave and person. There is a picture of the first reburial site for the deceased in Eastern Finnmark, Høybuktmoen near Kirkenes, with more than 1,500 dead prisoners, which shows a multitude of crosses and thus proves the existence of individual grave sites.

- The plan and the list of Jørstadmoen were created after the liberation, when no German soldier would have risked changing anything about the cemetery; and why would there have been any interest in doing so anyway? It should be added that the British troops would probably have intervened rather quickly.

- In the summer of 1945 the Deutsche Oberbefehlshaber Norwegen had a «List of Russian Graves in Drontheim zone» produced which
included the names and grave sites of those who had died in 1942, e.g. for Øysand. For Opdal, there are, among others, 55 prisoners who died between the beginning of February and early May 1945. However, the list is not complete because there are deceased in the official grave list who are not mentioned in the overview of 1945. In addition, there are PK I's of prisoners whose names don't show up in either of the two lists. Here, further research is necessary.

- The cemetery at Nikel (formerly Kolosjoki), on the Russian side of the border, can be used as an example of the way the graves were marked. Soviet POWs were employed in the local nickel mines under terrible conditions. For the deceased, a cemetery was established close by. Today, it is in a desolate state and will probably become submerged under the advancing mine dump within the foreseeable future. In the surrounding shrubbery, small slabs of wood stick out of the earth, evenly spaced in three rows of at least 15 in each row. This corresponds with the way many of the cemeteries were set up, i.e. the graves marked by simple wooden plates with an ID tag number. No further information was necessary, since the person could always be matched with the tag number via the respective list. Of course the markings at the cemetery at Nikel have long been weathered, but test excavations several months ago prove that in fact POWs were buried there. There is no reason to believe this should not have been the case at other cemeteries in 1945, namely, they looked at least similar to the one at Nikel before the POWs were transferred and reburied.

The claim that the large number of unidentified dead Soviets in Norwegian cemeteries was the fault of the German Wehrmacht is no longer sustainable. The Germans are rightly being reproached for their inhumane treatment of POWs, which defied all international conventions, but the
same cannot be said of the administrative processing of cases of death. This was handled accurately by the book in accordance with rules similar to those applied in the case of their own soldiers.
In 1945 the German military administration along with the British troops in most cases knew who had been buried where and when, so information was passed on correctly up to that point. The first transfer and reburial in the area of Finnmark apparently still happened under protection of the deceased's individuality. Only in the later reburials, for example in the context of «Operasjon Asfalt», did the single dead prisoner become part of an anonymous mass.

The way that individuality could be lost can be demonstrated clearly in the following example. Six POWs resting in the cemetery at Tjøtta had been transferred from the cemetery at Høybuktmoen close to Kirkenes. Their ID tag numbers are known as opposed to those of 1558 others. All six can be identified, and it is clear that they died in a penal camp known as «Sonderlager» (special camp), at km 25 on the road from Taarnet to Parkkina, and were buried in the adjoining cemetery. From there they were apparently moved to Høybuktmoen and then transferred to Tjøtta. Somewhere along the way their identities were lost. If these six bodies were transferred from the penal camp at km 25, the same is certainly likely to be true of at least 46 other POWs whose graves have so far been identified by PK I at the cemetery of «Sonderlager». Their tracks have been lost completely though.

Some smaller local cemeteries seem to have been neglected in the same way, since there is no other explanation for the fact that more people were buried there than were later transferred, or that today locally the names of the people buried there in the past are no longer known.

One would need to direct the reproach, that the memory of the deceased

55. Cf. an overview by the Territorialabschnittsbevollmächtigten Drontheim from July 6th, 1945, «excerpt from the book «Funerals», begun October 19th, 1943, about the Russian POWs buried at the cemetery Lademoen close to Trondheim from this point in time until May 11th, 1945.» The PK I, however, were not at hand though — they could not have been, since they were kept at the respective Stalag or had been sent to the WAS CAMO 18003/1609.


57. Høybuktmoen was the first collecting cemetery in Finnmark. Among the POWs who were brought there from smaller graveyards, there were the dead from the camp cemetery of Stalag 922 Elvenes. POWs mentioned above on pp. 546-548 were exactly known in Elvenes, probably known in Høybuktmoen (see the photo p. 21), unknown in Tjøtta.

58. The example shows clearly how carelessly the transfers and reburials were handled in these cases: all ID tag numbers of these POWs had been handed out in Stalag 509 Salla (Finland). Today the numbers 1150, 11721, 12051, 12056, 12207 and 12319 correspond to transfer from Taarnet as well as Høybuktmoen — which is impossible. In addition there are the numbers 3639 and 13272 for the cemeteries Taarnet and Karasjok. So the number of people is doubled from 8 to 16. But that is not a specifically Norwegian phenomenon; it can be found in Germany as well, e.g. at the cemetery of Stalag 526 (VI K) Senne.

59. See the example of Orkanger cemetery with three unknown today. Via the PK I they can be identified as Schabanow Filip Dmitrij (II B 90388), Iwanow, Aleksandr Iwan (315/26776) and Chabarow, Leonid Demid (II B 102922).
was handled in a way that made an individual remembrance at a specific place impossible, at the Norwegian authorities of the time. The effort to at least recover the names of the POWs today only means compensation for past mistakes.

This way of organising the cemeteries of Soviet citizens after 1945 was certainly not a specific Norwegian phenomenon. Most graveyards in Germany and in the occupied territories were intact at the end of the war. The start of the Cold War and Europe being separated by the Iron Curtain left deceased Soviets in the West appearing once more to be what they had been prior to 1945, i.e. members of an ideological enemy. Why maintain their graves if their sole existence gave the Soviet government reason to inspect these places in northern Norway, NATO's strategic north flank and a tangent between East and West, just as precarious as in the Federal Republic of Germany. The creation of a few large common grave sites could only be beneficial. The individual became irrelevant.60

But the Soviet Union was not interested in a cemetery overview by name either.61 The family of every deceased POW whose burial site was known would inevitably want to travel to his last resting place to pay their respects and remember him. For millions of Soviet citizens, however, this would have meant gaining an insight into capitalism. Consequently, the relatives of a missing soldier were given no information from the authorities if they asked about what had become of him even although they had the respective German documents. Organising the cemeteries as common graves of people who had been tortured by fascism and died far from home enabled the state to establish them as heroes and to erect huge monuments for them.

Fortunately, this attitude has changed on both sides: today, families can freely visit their relatives' graves. Whether they can find them is another question, however, and for this reason it should be the moral duty of a state, be it Norway, Germany or Russia, to mark a last resting place once it is identified – if only by a name – on a list or on a plate. It is hardly possible to imagine a better way of international understanding put into practice.

60. Marianne Neerland Soleim et al., Sovjetiske krigsanger i Norge/Soviet Prisoners of War in Norway, Falstad 2010, p. 5 and 26. Compare a mail from Michael Stokke to the author (5.7.2011): «I just read from Lista that in 1948 the Youth movement from the Communist party made plates in concrete and they had thrown away all the crosses in a pile. So all names were gone! Of 128 possible names.» Stokke refers to the archive of War graves service in the Riksarkivet Oslo

61. This is also true for the cemeteries within the former Soviet Union as well as in the States of the former Eastern block. In Molodetschno for example, location of Stalag 542, local people told me that later on housing units had been erected on the grounds of the former POW cemetery.