



Liberation
Route
Europe

TOUR & TRAVEL GUIDE
GERMANY

Julius Erasmus and the Vossenack cemetery



Julius Erasmus

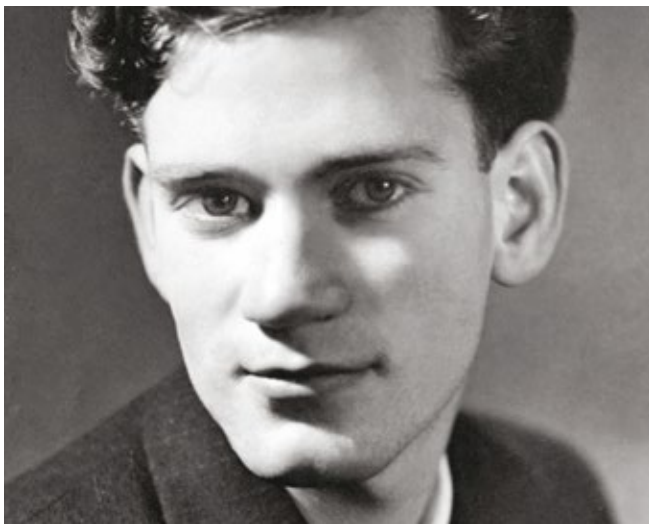
The former German Engineer Captain Julius Erasmus returned to the Hürtgen Forest just months after the end of WWII.

He found dozens of bodies of German soldiers still lying in the woods and decided to give them a respectful grave. In the following years, he recovered 1.569 German bodies from the forest, often putting his own life at risk, as the terrain was mined. He collected as many personal data as possible and carpentered simple wooden crosses for every grave. Today's war cemetery in Vossenack - situated on Hill 470, a scene of fierce fighting - is the resting place of the bodies that Erasmus recovered, with the help of villagers.



Julius Erasmus

Ralph Neumann



Ralph Naumann

Ralph Neumann grew up in Berlin as the son of Jewish parents. He eluded deportation twice: in early 1943, when he was just 16, and in early 1945, when he managed to flee from the Gestapo during an air raid.

Shortly before the capitulation of Nazi Germany, he participated in an action of resistance in Berlin to protest against the Nazi appeal for fierce resistance to Soviet soldiers: on the night of 18 April, 1945 the Uncle Emil Group painted the word Nein (NO) in large letters on train stations and building façades.

Two weeks later the war was over in Berlin. Ralph Neumann later recalled: "We wanted to shout to the world that we were again free. We hugged and kissed and danced around... Our new-found freedom was emotionally overwhelming; but joy was also mixed with great sadness. The reality of the loss of our mother, brother, and other relatives came to the forefront. The report that millions were killed in the holocaust was devastating news."



Joe Polowsky



Joe Polowsky seated in a Jeep with American and Soviet Soldiers (credit: City of Torgau)

Joe Polowsky was one of the U.S. soldiers who met the Soviet troops on the Elbe near Torgau in April 1945. After the war, he dedicated his life to promoting peace and mutual understanding among nations. Torgau remained an important symbol for him and he was buried there in 1983 despite the Cold War.

Born on 2 October 1916 in Chicago, Joe attended the University of Chicago before being drafted into the U.S. Army's 69th Infantry Division in December 1941. As the youngest son of Jewish-Russian parents originally from Kiev, Polowsky spoke fluent Russian. On 25 April 1945, as part of a reconnaissance platoon led by Lieutenant Albert Kotzebue,

they became the first Americans to meet Soviet soldiers on the Elbe River near Torgau – a symbolic meeting representing the closure of the Eastern and Western Fronts. The photo of this meeting circulated around the world and still stands today as a potent symbol of the end of the war.



Joe Polowsky at Eble Day in 1960 (credit: City of Torgau)

Sophie Scholl



Sophie Scholl

Sophie Scholl was part of the White Rose (Weiße Rose) resistance group.

The group consisted of a few students and professors of the University of Munich, who printed and distributed anti-war pamphlets around German cities between June 1942 and February 1943. This action was motivated by their experiences of fighting on the Eastern Front, which resulted in their call for non-violent resistance against the Nazi regime.

Sophie, a biology and philosophy student, joined her brother Hans, who was already engaged with the group. On 18 February 1943, Sophie and her brother were caught distributing pamphlets by the janitor of the university. The

same day they were arrested by the Gestapo.

The process against Sophie and Hans took place behind closed doors four days later. Together with Christoph Probst, they were convicted to the guillotine, and the verdict was executed that same day.



Graves of Sophie and Hans Scholl

Key events & commemorations

27th
January
Day of Remembrance
for the Victims of
National Socialism

February
Battle of Hürtgen Forest

23-27th
March
Crossing of the
Rhine River

16-19th
April
Battle of Seelow Heights

25th
April
Elbe Day – First Meeting
of American and Soviet
Forces in Torgau

8th
May
End of the war

27th
July
Remembrance of 20 July
Plot (Operation Valkyrie)

3th
October
German Unity Day

**Two
Sundays**
before the first
week of Advent
Volksrauertag (People's
Day of Mourning) Also
called 'Memorial Day'

History



Berlin in air war

Germany holds a unique position in the history of the Second World War.

Adolf Hitler played a key role in the decision to go to war as well as was responsible for the Holocaust. It is important to remember that his Nazi regime was supported by a majority of the German population. However, there were Germans that resisted the regime and the German population itself suffered greatly from the fighting and bombing campaigns. After the war, Germany was split into four occupation zones by the Allied powers which eventually formed East and West Germany until the reunification in 1990.

Battle of Hürtgen Forest

During the fall and winter of 1944 and 1945, the longest battle of the war on German soil took place in the Hürtgen Forest.

It caused numerous casualties on both sides. The Hürtgen Forest consisted of thick woodland, bare hilltops and deep gorges not far from the Belgian border. Heavy rain and snowfall and a lack of roads made it extremely difficult to penetrate. Nonetheless, the Allies pushed into the rough and unfamiliar terrain in order to secure their advance towards the Rhine. The battle proceeded from mid-September 1944 to mid-February 1945, and ended with an Allied victory.



Hürtgen Forest

Crossing of the Rhine – The Rhine- land Offensive

After the failure of Operation Market Garden in September 1944, the Allies developed a new plan to invade Germany: Operation Veritable.

Over half a million troops assembled, along with vast amounts of armaments. Cities such as Kleve and Emmerich were razed by the Allied air forces. The final hurdle was the Rhine itself. The crossing near Wesel (Operation Plunder) was one of several coordinated Rhine crossings. A million Allied soldiers participated. In support of the crossing, 14,000 paratroopers were dropped behind enemy lines (Operation Varsity). At the city of Remagen in Rhineland-Palatinate, the Allies managed to capture Ludendorff Bridge – one of the few remaining bridges across the Rhine. Following the crossing of the Rhine, the Allied forces were able to advance further into the heart of Germany.



Ludendorff Bridge



Wobbelin

Berlin – the symbolic city of WWII

The German capital is one of the key cities of WWII, if not the symbolic city for the war and its consequences on Europe.

It was here that the Nazis planned and implemented the Final Solution to the Jewish question following the Wannsee Conference. In the latter part of the war, the Allies heavily bombed the city causing great destruction and suffering for the local population. The Battle for Berlin, in spring 1945, left huge scars on the city itself and caused enormous losses to the Soviet Army in the attempt to encircle the capital and put an end to the Nazi regime, which eventually happened in early 1945. Berlin was seen as the final stop of the Liberation. The German Armed forces



Berlin in the air war

signed their unconditional surrender at the headquarters of the Soviet Military Administration in Berlin - Karlshorst. It was also in the Berlin suburb of Potsdam where the Allies held the Potsdam Conference that would shape the post-war world order and the ultimate division of the city in four zones of occupation, each for one victorious power. Ultimately this division would last for decades. Berlin was shaped deeply by WWII, leaving a lasting heritage. A variety of museums, documentation centres, and memorials tell its recent history from a multitude of perspectives.

In the footsteps of the Soviet Army

In early 1945, the Western Allies were approaching German territory from the natural border of the river Rhine, while the Soviet Red Army launched a ground offensive from the Vistula river to penetrate German territory from the East.

The main objective of the Soviet Army was the encircling of the capital of the German Reich, Berlin, which proved to be challenging in the Seelow Heights. The German resistance and the high ground near Seelow cost time, energy and lives, but they could be overcome on 19 April 1945, beginning the proper advance onto Berlin. The ring around the German capital was completed on 25 April, and on the same day the American and the Soviet soldiers met for the first time in Torgau, on the river Elbe. The final conquest of Berlin would take some more days: the assault to the Reichstag, the symbol of the Nazi rule, would be completed on 30 April. The capitulation of Germany would be signed at the Soviet headquarters in Karlshorst on 8 May 1945.

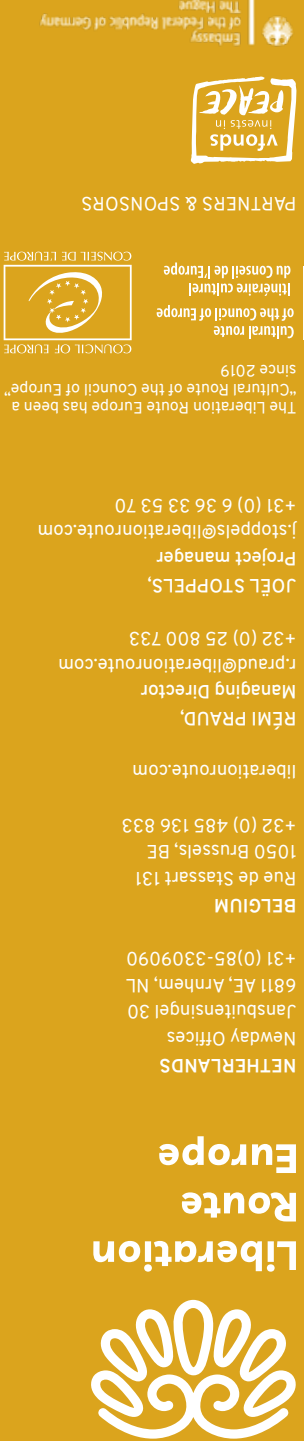


Elbe Day

The Liberation of the Camps

As the Liberation progressed towards Germany, both from the East and the West, the Allied armies took over concentration camps and other sites where Nazi crimes were committed.

The majority of the camps were evacuated by the German forces as the Allies advanced into the territory of the German Third Reich, and prisoners were often forced to extreme death marches towards other locations. The Red Army liberated several concentration camps in present-day Poland and in the Baltic States already in 1944. In 1945, it was the turn of the Stutthof camp in Poland, Sachsenhausen and Ravensbrück in northeast Germany. The US Army liberated Buchenwald concentration camp and 20,000 prisoners on 11 April 1945, and further moved on to Mittelbau-Dora, Flossenbürg and Dachau camps in Germany, and Mauthausen, in Austria. In turn, the British forces liberated the rest of the camps in northern Germany, including Neuengamme and Bergen-Belsen. Thanks to the photo and video documentation of the liberation of the camps taken by the liberating forces, the horrors of the Holocaust were exposed to the public opinion worldwide for the first time.



Liberation
Route
Europe



Partners & Sponsors
The Liberation Route Europe has been a
Cultural Route of the Council of Europe
since 2019
Council of Europe
Literature Culture
of the Council of Europe
du Conseil de l'Europe
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

NETHERLANDS
Newday Offices
Janszhuisingel 30
6811 AE, Arnhem, NL
+31 (0)85-3309090
BELGIUM
Rue de Stassart 131
1050 Brussels, BE
+32 (0) 485 136 833
liberationroute.com
Managing Director
r.praud@liberationroute.com
Project manager
j.stoppel@liberationroute.com
+32 (0) 25 800 733
+31 (0) 6 36 33 53 70



Battle of Hürtgen Forest



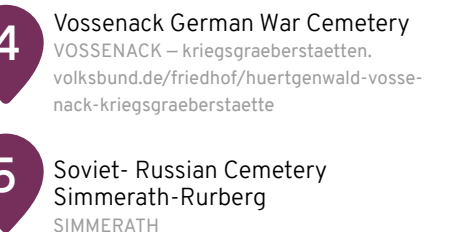
Museum Hürtgen Forest 1944
VOSENACK – museum-huertgenwald.de



Vogelsang IP
SCHLEIDEN – vogelsang-ip.de



Hürtgen German War Cemetery
HÜRTGEN – volksbund.de/kriegsgraeberstaette/huertgenwald-huertgen-kriegsgraeberstaette.html



Vossenack German War Cemetery
VOSENACK – kriegsgraeberstaetten.volksbund.de/friedhof/huertgenwald-vossenack-kriegsgraeberstaette



Soviet- Russian Cemetery
Simmerath-Rurberg
SIMMERATH



Others



Memorium Nuremberg Trials
NUREMBERG – museums.nuernberg.de/memorium-nuremberg-trials



Documentation Center
Nazi Party Rally Grounds
NUREMBERG – museums.nuernberg.de/documentation-center/



Dokumentation Obersalzberg (World War II Memorial and Educational Center)
BERCHTESGADEN – berchtesgaden.de/en/salt-history/world-war-ii-memorial-educational-center



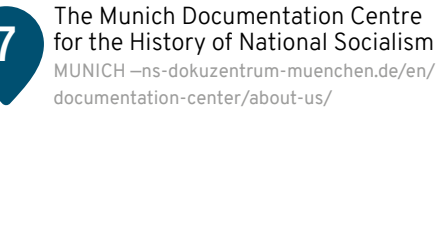
Documentation and Information
Centre (DIZ) Torgau
TORGAU – diz-torgau.de



Fort Zinna
TORGAU – diz-torgau.de

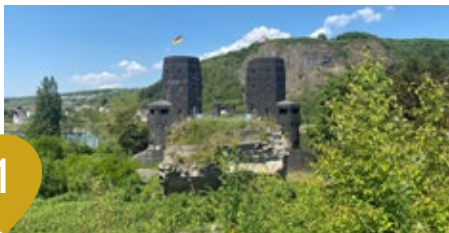


Peenemunde Historical-Technical
Museum
PEENEMÜNDE – museum-peenemuende.de



The Munich Documentation Centre
for the History of National Socialism
MÜNCHEN – ns-dokumentum-muenchen.de/en/documentation-center/about-us/

Crossing of the Rhine – The Rhineland Offensive



Peace Museum
REMAGEN – bruecke-remagen.de



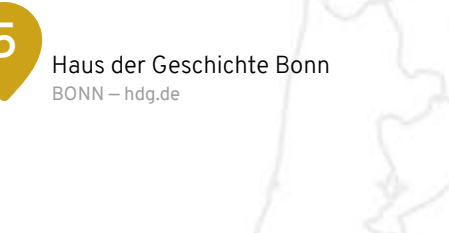
Peace Chapel & "Golden Mile" Prisoner of
War Temporary Enclosures
REMAGEN



Reichswald Forest War Cemetery
KLEVE



ELDE-Haus
NS-Documentation Center Cologne
COLOGNE – nsdok.de



Haus der Geschichte Bonn
BONN – hdg.de



Anna Church
DÜREN



Reichswald War Cemetery
KLEVE



Anne Church
DÜREN



ELDE-Haus NS-Documentation Center
COLOGNE



Haus der Geschichte Bonn
BONN



Peace Chapel & "Golden Mile"
POW Enclosures
REMAGEN



Peace Museum
Ludendorff Bridge
KOBLENZ



The liberation of the Camps



Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum
ORANIENBURG – sachsenhausen-sbg.de/en



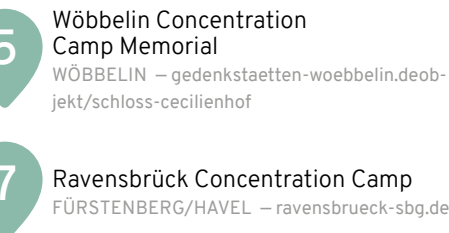
Buchenwald Memorial
WEIMAR – buchenwald.de/en/72



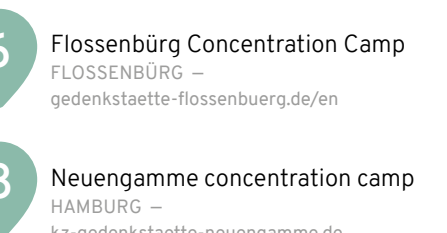
Mittelbau-Dora
NORDHAUSEN – buchenwald.de/en/29



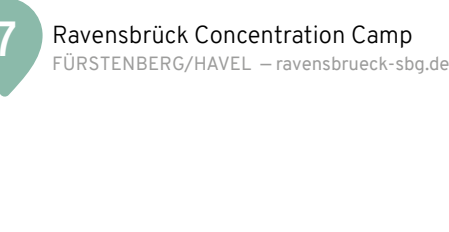
KZ Dachau
DACHAU – kz-gedenkstaette-dachau.de/en



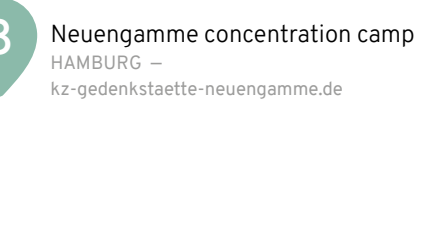
Wöbbelin Concentration
Camp Memorial
WÖBBELIN – gedenkstaetten-woebelin.deobjekt/schloss-cecilienhof



Flossenbürg Concentration Camp
FLOSSENBÜRG – gedenkstaette-flossenbuerg.de/en



Ravensbrück Concentration Camp
FÜRSTENBERG/HAVEL – ravensbrueck-sbg.de



Neuengamme concentration camp
HAMBURG – kz-gedenkstaette-neuengamme.de

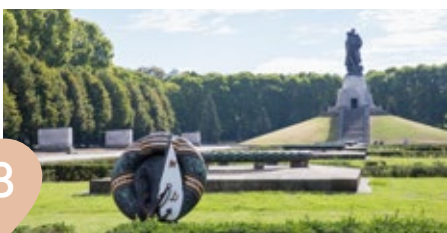
In the footsteps of the Soviet Army



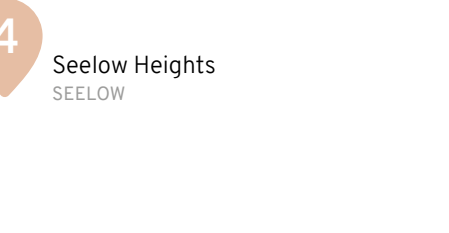
German- Russian Museum
Berlin Karlshorst
BERLIN – museum-karlshorst.de



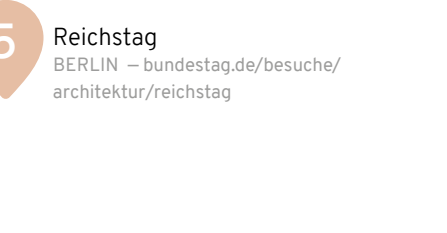
Soviet-American Encounter Memorial
TORGAU – tic-torgau.de



Soviet War Memorial Treptower Park
BERLIN



Seelow Heights
SEELOW



Reichstag
BERLIN – bundestag.de/besuche/architektur/reichstag

Berlin – the symbolic city of WWII



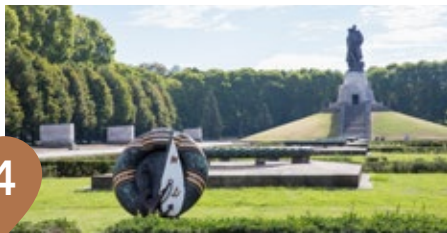
Allied Museum
BERLIN – alliertenmuseum.de



German- Russian Museum
Berlin Karlshorst
BERLIN – museum-karlshorst.de



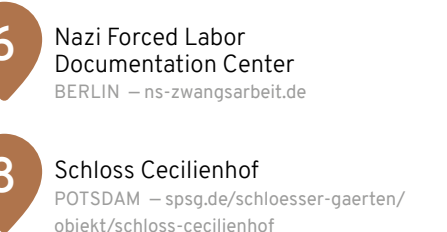
The Memorial to the
Murdered Jews of Europe
BERLIN



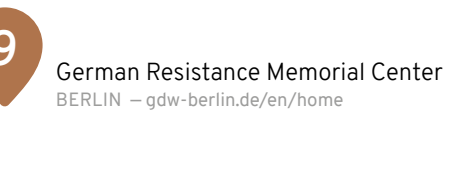
Soviet War Memorial Treptower Park
BERLIN



Topography Of Terror
BERLIN – topographie.de



Nazi Forced Labor
Documentation Center
BERLIN – ns-zwangsarbeit.de



Reichstag
BERLIN – bundestag.de/besuche/architektur/reichstag



House of the Wannsee Conference
BERLIN – ghwk.de/en

