

...sheer hell. We worked ten, sometimes even 12 hours a day. Only one meal a day and the food is not good. The climate is damp, cold...Bit by bit we lose our strength. Within a few months we have become mere shadows of ourselves.

Elio Materassi, November 1943



Arrival in Stalag III B in Fürstenberg/Oder, September 1943
© Archiv Strankmeyer, photo: Heinrich Voss

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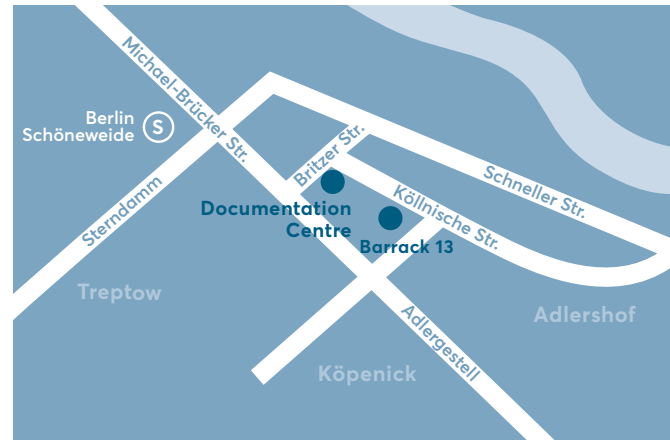
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Between Two Stools



THE HISTORY OF ITALIAN MILITARY INTERNEES 1943-1945





Between Two Stools

THE HISTORY OF ITALIAN MILITARY

INTERNEES 1943–1945

Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy were initially allies in the Second World War. Italy withdrew from the alliance on 8 September. In response, the German Wehrmacht took Italian soldiers and officers prisoner. Approximately 650,000 were deported to the Third Reich and to occupied territories.

The Nazi regime planned to exploit the Italians for labour. Since a Germany-dependent fascist puppet state was in place in occupied Italy, the prisoners of war were designated military internees. In this way the captured Italians remained military personnel of a friendly state, but could nevertheless be deployed as forced labourers in the armaments industry without concern for international law. The prisoners' everyday life was marked by hunger, illness, and violence. To increase work productivity, they were designated "civilian workers" in summer 1944. However their living conditions improved only briefly. Approximately 50,000 Italians died in less than two years of captivity.

After the war, both Italy and Germany were slow to acknowledge the fate of military internees. Today, Italian military internees remain the only group of prisoners of war that have yet to receive compensation from the Federal Republic of Germany.



Registration of Italian officers in Stalag X B, winter 1944/45
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Guarded military internees clearing out debris, 12 May 1944
© Hildegard Rölsner, photo: L. Rölsner



"Comrades-in-arms", 1937
© Süddeutsche Zeitung, photo, Munich



Mario Zipoli's calendar, 1943
© Riccardo Zipoli,
Photo: Hagen Immel



Military internees guarded on their way to the camp, 1943
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