



# Police Brutality and Forced Labor

The Osnabrück  
Secret State Police



Gedenkstätte  
Gestapokeller

*“R. was arrested on 21.12.1943 because he stole 700 grams of sausage from a butcher.”*

Quote from the Gestapo card file on Igor Rudchin



*“Why [did you steal]? I was hungry. [...] He began to strike my back with a whip. [...] he lashed and lashed.”*

Igor Rudchin

## Police Brutality and Forced Labor The Osnabrück Secret State Police

The Secret State Police (Gestapo) constituted one of the most important instruments of terror for the Nazis. The headquarters of the Osnabrück Gestapo were located in the west wing of the palace.

It was from here that its employees monitored the population in the Osnabrück region. In World War II the Gestapo primarily persecuted foreigners who had been deported to Germany for forced labor who had either evaded compulsory work or defied racist discriminatory measures against them.

The exhibition describes the actions taken by the Gestapo against forced laborers. It shows the power of the Gestapo and the people who exercised this power. Visitors also have the opportunity to research people whom the Gestapo persecuted. The perpetrators got off with light sentences after the war. The victims, on the other hand, received little acknowledgment of their suffering and were overlooked for a long time.

The Gestapokeller and Augustaschacht memorials make up a historical ensemble. A joint permanent exhibition entitled “Police Brutality and Forced Labor” is presented at the two locations. The memorials can be visited individually and in any sequence.

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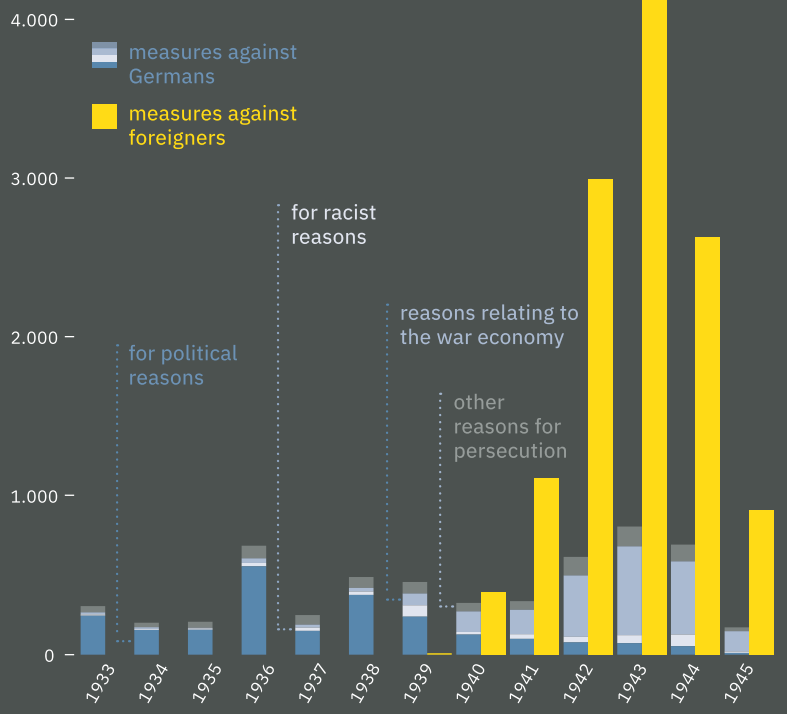
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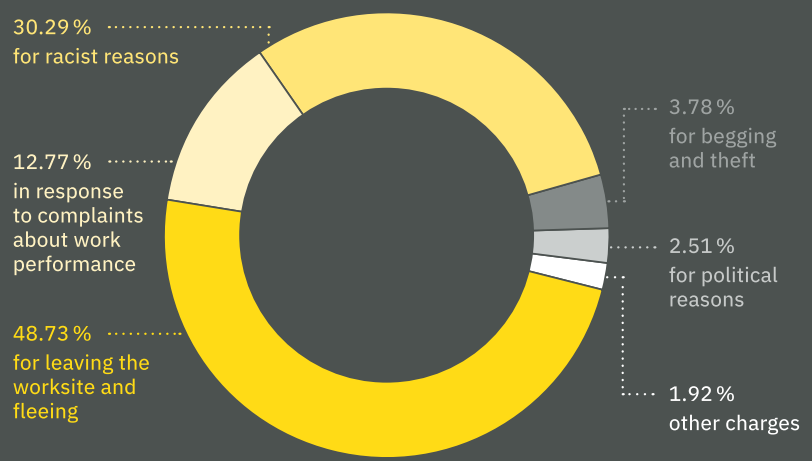
[ NIEDERSÄCHSISCHES LANDESARCHIV |  
STANDORT OSNABRÜCK ]

[ INTERVIEW IGOR RUDCHIN | 2011 | GEDENKSTÄTTEN  
GESTAPOKELLER UND AUGUSTASCHACHT ]

### Persecution measures taken by the Osnabrück Gestapo, 1933 to 1945



### Why the Osnabrück Gestapo persecuted foreigners



## In the Sights of the Gestapo

The Osnabrück Gestapo persecuted members of the political opposition as well as people who did not fit in with the National Socialist racist world view. Its main targets were Communists, Social Democrats, Jews, members of religious groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, so-called asocials, people with disabilities and mental illness, and foreigners.

As of 1940, forced laborers from abroad made up the largest group of persecuted people in the Osnabrück region. Because the German war economy depended on forced labor, the Gestapo acted against anyone who tried to evade work.

The regime also feared a revolt by the men and women it had deported to Germany for forced labor. Under National Socialism, these people were deemed less worthy than Germans. The Gestapo tried to hinder contact between foreign forced laborers and the German population. Violators were persecuted.

## Policemen instead of Judges

Over time the SS and the police acquired more authority to punish foreign laborers. As of March 1940, the Gestapo had the right to imprison anyone in a concentration camp whose labor was criticized or who did not turn up for work. Polish men who had sexual relations with German women could be sentenced to death.

In September 1942, the justice minister agreed to the Reich SS Leader's suggestion that the criminal prosecution of women and men from Poland and the Soviet Union be left to the police. The consequence of this was that these people were no longer able to defend themselves in court. The Gestapo was able to use severe punishment as a deterrent to people for whom the penal code did not apply.

In special cases the Gestapo handed Polish and Soviet workers over to the courts. This legal option was only adopted when the death sentence was a foregone conclusion.



1

### Forced to Work

Igor Rudchin was born on 15 May 1927 in Sevastopol, Crimea. In late 1941, the German military occupied Simferopol, Crimea where he was living. He was deported to Germany for forced labor in August 1942. Although he was weak and emaciated, he had to perform hard physical labor at the Klöckner factory in Georgsmarienhütte.

In December 1943, Igor Rudchin stole sausage from a butcher. He was caught by a passerby and handed over to the Gestapo. After the interrogation, the Gestapo official Friedrich Kicker beat him with a whip. Rudchin tried to escape the lashes, causing Kicker to accidentally hit his colleague who was holding down Rudchin. Furious, they both beat Rudchin until he fell unconscious. The physical abuse caused permanent damage to his hearing.

All that the Gestapo noted on their file card was that Igor Rudchin had been warned, lectured and released from prison on 24 December 1943.

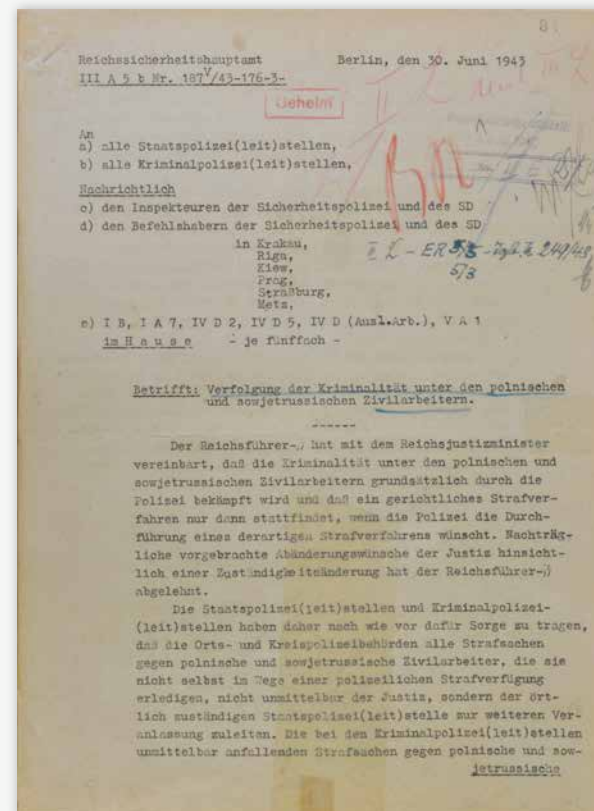


2

### Resistance

More than 100 prisoners of war were able to flee Osnabrück in the fall of 1943. Raymond Vinclair and Louis Bertin, two Frenchmen carrying out forced labor for the Reich railroad, helped them escape. Both men were betrayed to the Gestapo by an informer. Vinclair and Bertin were imprisoned here in the palace prison for several days and interrogated by the Gestapo.

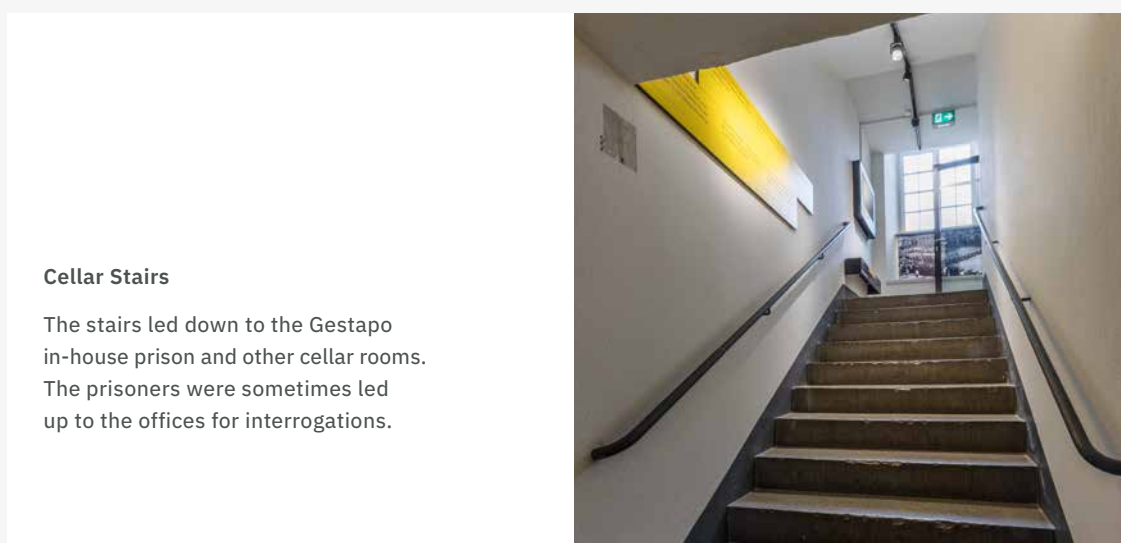
JeanMarie Vinclair researched the story of his great uncle — who was executed — and made a film about him for the exhibition.



*“The Reich SS Leader has arranged with the Reich Justice Minister for the police to be generally responsible for combatting the crimes of Polish and Soviet-Russian civilian workers and for judicial criminal proceedings to take place only when this form of implementation is desired by the police.”*

Circular of the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA)

[ LANDESARCHIV NRW | ABTEILUNG RHEINLAND ]



### Cellar Stairs

The stairs led down to the Gestapo in-house prison and other cellar rooms. The prisoners were sometimes led up to the offices for interrogations.

1 Igor Rudchin in December 1941 in Simferopol, Crimea. He returned home after the war and worked in maritime shipping for many years. He married and had two children. Igor Rudchin died in 2017 at the age of 90.

[ GEDENKSTÄTTEN GESTAPOKELLER UND AUGUSTASCHACHT ]

2 Raymond Vinclair, undated (probably 1938)

[ JEAN-MARIE VINCLAIR ]



1

The “Reichstag Fire Decree” of 28 February 1933

§ 1

“Articles 114, 115, 117, 118, 123, 124 and 153 of the Constitution of the German Reich are suspended until further notice. It is therefore permissible to restrict the rights of personal freedom, freedom of expression, including the freedom of the press, the freedom to organize and assemble, the privacy of postal, telegraphic and telephonic communications. Warrants for house searches, orders for confiscations as well as restrictions on property are also permissible beyond the legal limits otherwise prescribed.”

# Deadly Power

The Nazi rulers granted the Gestapo powers that far exceeded those of a democratic police force. The Gestapo not only opened investigations and arrested people, it was also authorized to issue and implement punishment on its own accord and without a court ruling. It also had the power to kill prisoners. Its actions were not subject to any judicial control.

“Protective custody” was one of the Gestapo’s most important instruments of power. It allowed the Gestapo to hold people in a concentration camp indefinitely. The Gestapo trivialized its torture of prisoners by referring to it as “intensified interrogation.” Gestapo powers culminated in so-called “special treatment,” which referred to the murder of prisoners. The decision over life and death initially lay with the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA), or more specifically, with the Reich SS Leader. During the course of the war, this authority was gradually handed over to the local Gestapo chiefs.

2



## Cell Block

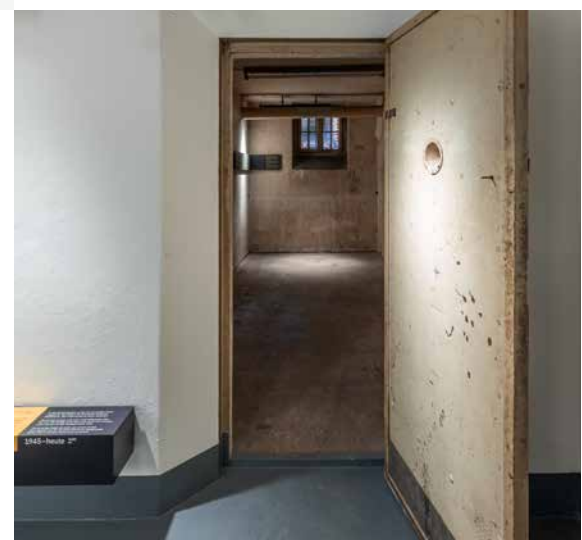
The prisoners of the Gestapo were often held in the cells of the palace cellar for only a few days before they were released or transferred to another site of imprisonment.

1 The “Reichstag Fire Decree” of 28 February 1933 restricted basic rights. The Nazis used this emergency decree to expand its rule. It served as the legal foundation for the arbitrary measures granted to the Gestapo. Inviolable personal rights ceased to exist.

[ REICHSGESETZBLATT | TEIL 1 | JAHRGANG 1933 | NR. 17 ]

2 The Gestapo employees used an air-raid bunker in the cellar to interrogate and torture prisoners. They closed the air-raid bunker doors and window shutters during interrogations so that the screams could not be heard outside. The photograph from 2019 shows a preserved window shutter.

[ GEDENKSTÄTTEN GESTAPOKELLER UND AUGUSTASCHACHT ]





1

## Career with the Gestapo

In spring 1944, 34 men and seven women worked in the Gestapo office in Osnabrück. Nearly two-thirds of the men had switched to the Gestapo from other professions and had no police training. Many of them had applied for their positions before the war. War invalids and “ethnic Germans” joined the staff later. Only a third of the men were trained policemen with work experience.

Most of the long-serving policemen joined the Nazi Party late and probably out of opportunism. In many cases, the men who transferred to the police force from other careers had joined the National Socialists much earlier.

Many of the police officers and employees participated in SS and police missions in the occupied territories, during which atrocities were committed against civilian populations. These men returned to the German Reich hardened and brutal. As Gestapo employees, they had a lot of leeway in the actions they chose. Even simple clerks could make recommendations for punishment.

2



Fritz Rascher, born on 14 May 1914 in Gera, was the son of a painter. He joined the SS and the Nazi Party at the age of 18.

Rascher studied pedagogy,

psychology and philosophy in Jena.

While working as a primary school

teacher, he served as a training leader of the 47th SS-Standarte (SS Regiment).

He began his career in the Security Police and Security Service (SD) in 1941. In late

1943 he was appointed chief of the Osnabrück Gestapo, which established the Ohrbeck labor education camp (AEL) in January 1944. Before his transfer to

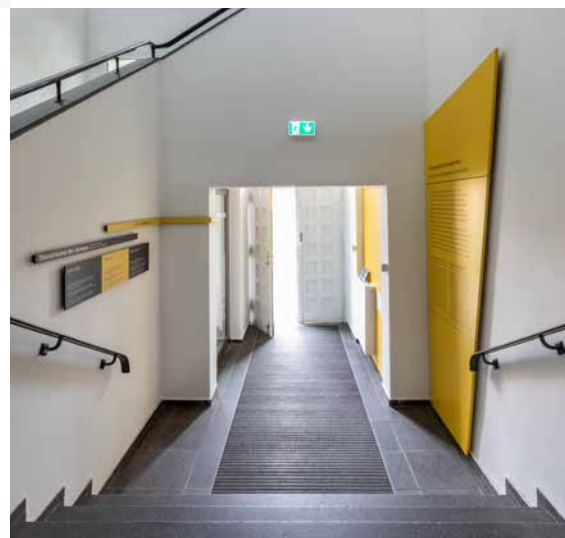
Berlin in January 1945, Rascher oversaw the execution of a Soviet forced laborer in a shed on the Osnabrück freight yard.

In April 1945, after bidding farewell to his wife with the words “I must go and

won't return,” the father of two disappeared without a trace. He was declared dead by the district court of Gera in 1950, but according to his daughter was actually living in South America, where he is believed to have died in 2000.

### Offices of the Gestapo

The palace, completed in 1673, contained a riding hall in the west wing. It was converted into offices for the Gestapo from 1937 to 1938. It used the west wing until 1940 and – following a break – again from 1943 until the end of the war. The Pedagogical College moved into the renovated building in 1953; the Osnabrück University took it over in 1973.



1 This is the only group photograph of members of the Osnabrück Gestapo known to exist. It was taken in 1940 or 1941. The men and women who were still working in the office in spring 1944 are marked on the photo. Gestapo employees often transferred between offices in the German Reich and the occupied territories.

[ NIEDERSÄCHSISCHES LANDESARCHIV | STANDORT OSNABRÜCK ]

2 Fritz Rascher  
SS-Hauptsturmführer (SS captain)  
Government assessor, Head of the Osnabrück Gestapo.  
Undated photo (ca. 1938) from an SS personnel file.

[ BUNDESARCHIV | BERLIN ]

### Observed and Persecuted People

To maintain an overview, the Osnabrück Gestapo created a card index on the people it was looking for, monitoring or persecuting. In total, 49,390 of the file cards from 1933 to 1945 have been preserved. The cards typically contain personal information such as name, date of birth and place of birth, family status, profession, religious affiliation and nationality.

The Gestapo recorded additional information in the field marked "Sachverhalt" [facts of the case]. This could include an alert to a particular suspect, a suspicion or an incident entailing a reprimand or punishment. The Gestapo also noted which department had handled the case and whether a related file existed.



1

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Name: (bei Frauen auch Geburtsname) Reinköster										Wohnung: (Zeit der Eintragung ein/stehen) 16.21.1.42 Döhre					Dejonaht: ja				
Vorname: Hilde										Geburtsort: 19.6.21 Insingdorf					Bildbezeichnung: H/15/244				
Beruf: landw. Gehilfin										Familienstand: led.					Singer-Adress- karte:				
Staatsangehörigkeit: D. R.										Name: Dröge					Schiffscodex:				
Deutsche Einstellung:										Glaubens- bekenntnis: evgl.									
Datum der Aufnahme: 16.1.42										I P ab. einm Sachverhalt					Staatspolizei/Heil- schutzstellen: II D-22/42				
6.2.42										Die H. hatte mit einem Polen geschlechtlich verkehrt und ist mit diesem Verkehr nicht ohne Folgen geblieben. Die H. wurde festgenommen und da sie im 8. Monat der Schwangerschaft sich befindet wieder entlassen. Das RSHA hat über die R. Schutzhaft und Unterbringung in das KL Ravensbrück angeordnet. Die Haft wird erst durchgeführt nach der Ratbindung und Beendigung der Stillzeit.					6. St. Nr. 14				

3



2

Hilde Reinköster was born on 19 June 1921 in Insingdorf/Melle district. She was working as a maid in the Melle district in 1941 when she met Joseph Grzeskowiak, a prisoner of war. Grzeskowiak was six years older and came from Działyn in Poland.

[ HILDE REINKÖSTER | PROBABLY 1939 | MECHTHILD JÜSCHKE ]

A tailor who also delivered mail denounced them to the local chapter of the Nazi Party. Wilhelm Dröge was the head of the local NSDAP branch in Altenmelle/Melle district. He and his adjutant handed Hilde Reinköster over to the Osnabrück Gestapo in December 1941.

[ WILHELM DRÖGE, PROBABLY 1948 | NIEDERSÄCHSISCHES LANDES-ARCHIV | STANDORT OSNABRÜCK ]

The Osnabrück Gestapo created a file card on Hilde Reinköster in January 1942. The Gestapo killed Joseph Grzeskowiak in a wooded area near Riemsloh/Melle district on 28 April 1942. On 8 August 1942, Hilde Reinköster was sent for a year to the Ravensbrück concentration camp for women.

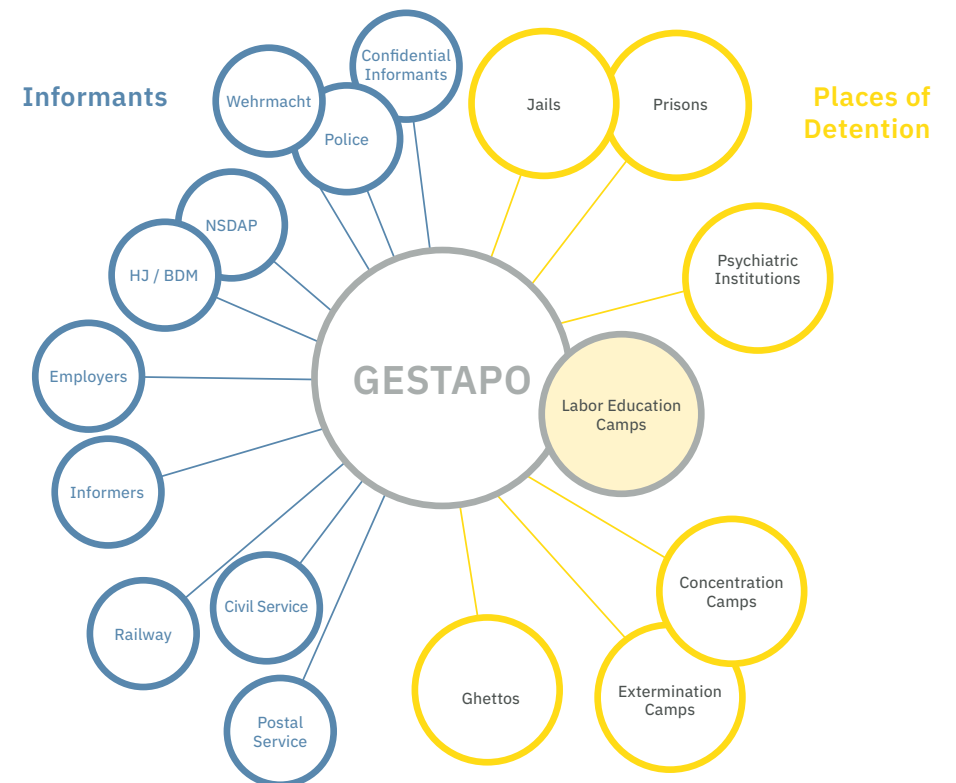
[ NIEDERSÄCHSISCHES LANDES-ARCHIV | STANDORT OSNABRÜCK ]

### In the Web of the Gestapo

Members of the police, Nazi Party functionaries and employees and civil servants of state and local offices were obligated to cooperate with the Gestapo. Everyone had to decide for themselves how far they chose to go.

The Gestapo used informants, called "V-Leute," to expose illegal groups and infiltrate their milieu. Cooperation was sometimes voluntary and sometimes coerced by the Gestapo. Informants spied on people they knew personally, thus benefitting from their trust.

The general population also supported the work of the Gestapo. People had different reasons for reporting someone to the police or voicing suspicions. The people who denounced someone usually acted on their own initiative and remained anonymous. The Gestapo was thus able to acquire information about people's private lives without taking direct action.





1

## Covered Up and Forgotten

Following the German capitulation in May 1945, the Allies declared the Gestapo a criminal organization and detained former Gestapo employees in internment camps. During the subsequent proceedings held before a tribunal, people were only prosecuted for their membership to the Nazi Party. Very few were actually held accountable in a court of law for their actions.

Nothing more is known about the later lives of the many others who were persecuted by the Osnabrück Gestapo. Those who had been deported to Germany usually returned to their home countries or emigrated elsewhere. The people who had been persecuted continued to suffer from their experiences and did not often speak about them. Survivors rarely received any compensation.

In 1995, members of Osnabrück University sponsored a memorial plaque documenting the people who were persecuted at the former Gestapo offices. The Gestapo Cellar Memorial was established by a civic association in 2001.

**D. RECORD OF EMPLOYMENT AND MILITARY SERVICE**  
 29. Give particulars, with dates, of your employment and military service, as from 1st January 1931, accounting for promotions or demotions, transfers, periods of unemployment, attendance at educational institutions (other than those covered in Section B) or at training schools and full-time service with para-military organisations. (Part-time employment is to be recorded in Section F.) Use a separate line for each change in your position or rank or to indicate periods of unemployment or attendance at training schools or transfers from one military or para-military organisation to another.

**D. NENNUNG, IN ZEITLICHER REIHENFOLGE, ALLER BESCHÄFTIGUNGEN UND ANSTELLUNGEN, EBENSO ALLER MILITÄRDIENSTLEISTUNGEN, SEIT DEM 1. JANUAR 1931.**  
 29. Unter Erwähnung aller Einzelheiten und Daten, Beförderungen und Rangherabsetzungen, Versetzungen, Arbeitslosigkeit, Besuch von Bildungsinstituten (mit Ausnahme solcher, die unter B vorkommen) ebenso aller Ausbildungsschulen und Lehranstalten und Voldienst in militärischen Organisationen (Nebenbeschäftigungen) sind in Abschnitt F anzugeben. Benutzen Sie eine besondere Zeile für jeden Wechsel in Stellung oder Rang, oder zur Angabe von Arbeitslosigkeits-Zeitabschnitten, oder für den Besuch von Ausbildungsschulen, oder für Versetzungen von einer militärischen, oder militärischen Organisation zu einer anderen.

From	To	Employer and Address or Military Unit	Name and Title of Immediate Superior or C.O.	Position or Rank	Duties and Responsibilities	Reasons for change of Status or Cessation of Service
von	bis	Arbeitgeber und Anschrift oder Militäranstalt	Name und Titel (Rang) des unmittelbaren Dienstvorgesetzten oder höheren Offiziers	Stellung oder Dienstgrad	Art der Tätigkeit und Verantwortungsbereich	Grund für Wechsel in Position oder Beendigung des Dienstverhältnisses
1.1.31	31.12.31	Müllerei Bismarckstr. Osnabrück		Former	Fermergeselle	Arbeitslosigkeit
1.1.32	31.12.32	Hebeamt Bismarckstr. Osnabrück		Former	seit 1936 Einheitswehr für Gebirgswehren	Militärdienst
1.1.33	31.12.33	Soldat 2. Klasse Militärverwaltung Osnabrück	Hptm. Witte	Schütze	Soldat	Wachdienst
1.1.34	31.12.34	Soldat 2. Klasse Militärverwaltung Osnabrück	Hptm. Schneider	Unteroffizier	Zentrallist	"
1.1.35	31.12.35	Munitionshaus Küstungsinspektat Osnabrück	Oberstl. Brada	Waffenverwalter	Waffenverwalter	
1.1.36	31.12.36	Waffenprüfungsamt Osnabrück	Hptm. Bandrich	Feldwebel	Waffenprüfung Handfeuerwaffen	Waffenzeugabschluss
1.1.37	31.12.37	Waffenprüfungsamt Osnabrück		Arbeiter	Arbeiter	Waffenzeugabschluss
1.1.38	31.12.38	Waffenprüfungsamt Osnabrück	Wachmeister Brömer	Arbeiter	Arbeiter	Waffenzeugabschluss
1.1.39	31.12.39	Waffenprüfungsamt Osnabrück		Arbeiter	Arbeiter	

2

1

Undated group photo of the Gestapo Pardubitz/today Czech Republic. Helmuth Mieth is wearing an SS uniform (2nd row, 6th from left) in the picture. The Pardubitz Gestapo participated in the extermination of the town of Ležáky on 24 June 1942. Thirty-four women and men were shot and killed; nearly all of the 13 deported children were murdered.

2

Helmuth Mieth was part of the Gestapo from 1937 to 1945. He worked in Osnabrück before being transferred to the "Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia" in 1939. At his denazification hearing on 9 September 1946, he claimed to have served in the Wehrmacht during the war. This enabled him to evade criminal prosecution.



## Imprint

### The project's responsible body

Gedenkstätten Gestapokeller und Augustaschacht e. V.

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### Project management

Dr. Michael Gander

### Project coordination

Dr. Janine Doerry

### Curators

Dr. Janine Doerry, Dr. Matthias Gafke,  
Dr. Michael Gander, Dr. Michael Pittwald,  
Tanja Vaitulevich

### Administration

Georg Hörnschemeyer

### Exhibition design and realization

GfG / Gruppe für Gestaltung – Ulrike Rosemeier  
oblik identity design – David Lindemann

### Scientific Advisory Council

Prof. Dr. Rosmarie Beier-de Haan (bis 2016),  
Prof. em. Dr. Wolfgang Benz, Prof. Dr. Carsten Dams

## Proofreading

Textgärtnerei, Jules Bradbury, textual – Koert  
Braches, Thomas Hartwig

## Photos film and film editing

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Matthias Menne, Ralf Siebenand

## Contracted companies

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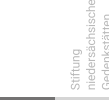
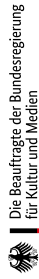
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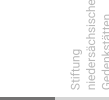
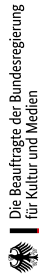


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