

Chart. 24.1+2 | Police Training in the "KdF Seebad Rügen"

Nobody has ever vacationed in the "KdF Seebad Rügen". Allegedly meant for the relaxation of German workers, it ultimately served only for war. Already during the planning phase, Hitler demanded that the buildings could also be used as hospitals "in case of war".

After the outbreak of war in 1939, 26,000 men were drafted into the police for important tasks in the "reorganization in the East", as stated in the call. These policemen were organized into police battalions of about 500 men each and trained at various locations in Germany. One of the training locations was the unfinished "KdF Seebad Rügen".

The training of the "Police Training Battalion Rügen" in 1940 lasted six months. The men were subjected to military drill, received firearms training, and were taught Nazi ideology. This unit was then incorporated into the "SS Police Division" and initially deployed to France, then to the Eastern Front in June 1941, and finally to Greece in 1943.

Subsequently, six more police battalions (numbered 105 and 252-256) were sent to Rügen for approximately one month each, where they were trained in light and heavy machineguns in particular. During the winter of 1940/1941, several police battalions on Rügen also received ski training in preparation for their deployment in Norway. These police battalions were initially shipped from the port of Sassnitz to Norway, but were later relocated to other countries during the course of the war. From May to October 1941, Alsatian gendarmes were trained in Prora, who were then deployed to Poland and participated in the murder of Polish Jews.

Chart 1:



1. Members of Police Battalion 105 during machine gun training on the beach of Prora. In the background, the unfinished construction of the "KdF-Seebad Rügen," May 1940.

State Archives Bremen, Karl Schneider Collection

2. Two police officers from Police Battalion 105 in front of the chalk cliffs at Sassnitz, May 1940.

State Archives Bremen, Karl Schneider Collection.

3. Members of an unidentified police battalion in front of the unfinished construction of the "KdF-Seebad Rügen," winter 1940/1941.

Archive Documentation Center Prora

4. Postcard with postmark of the "KdF-Seebad Rügen" and stamp of the "Police Training Battalion Rügen," 1940.

Archive Documentation Center Prora

5. Stamp of the "Police Training Battalion Rügen," 1940.

Archive Documentation Center Prora

6. Members of Police Battalion 256 at the train station of the "KdF-Seebad Rügen," February 1941.

Daniel Popielas Collection

7. Recruits of the "Police Training Battalion Rügen" on the beach of Prora, 1940.

Archive Documentation Center Prora

8. Swearing-in of recruits of the "Police Training Battalion Rügen" in a hall of the "KdF-Seebad Rügen," 1940.

Archive Documentation Center Prora

Chart 24 - 2:



1. Members of Police Battalion 105 burning a Russian village, October 1941.
State Archive Bremen, Karl Schneider Collection
2. Excerpts from field post letters of a member of Police Battalion 105.
State Archive Bremen
3. a b c: Excerpts from identification cards and personnel files of police officers from Police Battalions 255 and 256.
BStU, State Archive Münster, Documentation Center Prora
4. Propaganda postcard about the use of police in war, 1942. Police wore green uniforms, while the SS wore field gray uniforms.
Archive Documentation Center Prora
5. After a battle with Greek partisans, members of the 4th SS Police Panzergrenadier Division killed all 218 inhabitants of the village of Distomo, Greece, on August 12, 1944.
Wikimedia
6. Jewish residents at the assembly point in Bialystok, guarded by police from Police Battalions 255 and 256, before being deported to the extermination camps of Treblinka and Majdanek, August 1943.
Wikimedia
7. A member of Police Battalion 105 in front of a barrack at the transit camp Westerbork, Netherlands, October 1942.
State Archive Bremen, Karl Schneider Collection
8. Map showing the deployment locations of the police battalions trained in Prora.
Documentation Center Prora.

Chart. 25 | Prora from 1945

In early May 1945, the Soviet Army entered Prora, marking the end of World War II in Germany, as it did in the rest of the country. Army units used the existing facility, dismantling parts of the buildings for building materials and shipping materials to the Soviet Union. They completely demolished the southern most block of the facility and partially demolished the two northern most blocks.

Over 1,500 refugees from the eastern regions of the German Reich, those who had been bombed out, and soon-to-be expropriated large landowners were housed in some of the buildings on the facility. At the end of July 1949, all of Prora's residents were ordered to vacate the buildings within a short period. One reason for this was the order to establish a police school, which put an end to discussions about future uses, such as converting the buildings into a holiday resort. Another 40 years of military use followed. Prora became a military restricted area.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, discussions about civilian uses resumed, in a way that was not so different from that of 1949. The facility was privatized block by block, with the final block, Block 5, being sold in 2018. A modern holiday resort is now being built in Prora, which bears little resemblance to its past history.



1. Central holiday camp of the Pioneer Organization of the GDR in Prora in the summer of 1949, pioneers in front of one of the blocks from which bricks were removed for other uses.

Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden (SLUB), Deutsche Fotothek, Photographer: Abraham Pisarek.

Chart. 26 | National People`s Army (NVA) in Prora

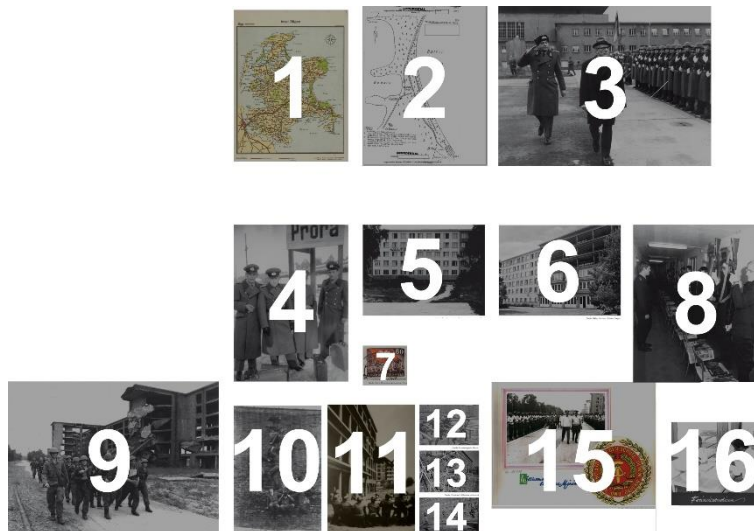
In 1949, a military use of Prora began that lasted for 40 years. Even before the founding of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), "People's Police-Readiness Units" were established, which were then merged into the Barracked People's Police (Kasernierte Volkspolizei, KVP) in 1952. In the early 1950s, there were approximately 12,000 People's Police stationed in Prora at the same time. They were equipped similarly to the units of an army, i.e., with heavy weapons such as tanks of Soviet production.

The development of the Cold War led to the establishment of armies in both German states: on May 5, 1955, the Bundeswehr was founded in the Federal Republic of Germany, and on January 18, 1956, the National People's Army (NVA) was founded in the GDR, incorporating the KVP. Initially, combat units dominated Prora, with the Motorized Infantry Regiment 29 in Block 2 and partly in Block 5, the Artillery Regiment 16 in Block 3, the Tank Regiment 8 in Block 4, and the Paratrooper Battalion 5, later 40, in Block 5. In later years, it was concluded that Prora was not very suitable for combat units, as in the event of war, the island could easily be cut off from the mainland by destroying the Rügendamm. Therefore, predominantly military training facilities moved into the blocks from 1969 onwards. In this year, the "Erich Habersaath" Military Technical School (named after a Labour leader, one of the first casualties of the November Revolution of 1918) was established in Block 3, which later also included Block 2. Instruction was given in communication, tank, and pioneer technology, and even military music.

In 1981, the Officer High School for Foreign Military Cadres "Otto Winzer" was founded in Prora, named after the GDR Foreign Minister from 1955 to 1965. Here, soldiers from politically friendly, mostly socialist states were taught, from Nicaragua and Cuba to Libya, six sub-Saharan African countries, Yemen, Iraq, and Vietnam. In addition, there were also some students from non-state organizations, from cadres of the Communist Party of Chile to the "Palestinian Liberation Organization" (PLO).

The southernmost Block 1 (according to current numbering) was converted into a recreational home for the NVA in 1952, which existed until 1990 and was primarily available to officers.

On October 3, 1990, with the reunification of Germany, the NVA was absorbed into the Bundeswehr. The military location of Prora was closed by the Bundeswehr and fully dismantled by 1992.



1. A map of Rügen from the GDR. Prora and its two train stations, which were then military restricted areas, are not marked for reasons of secrecy. The sketch by the CIA from the same period shows how little such attempts at secrecy were useful. Binz is referred to as the "spa of the working people," 1954.

Archive Documentation Center Prora

2. Drawing by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), foreign intelligence service of the USA, of the location of the Kasernierte Volkspolizei (Barracked People's Police) in Prora, drawn from reports by agents or deserters who had fled to the West in the early 1950s.

CIA, Freedom of Information Act Reading Room

3. The Chairman of the State Council of the GDR, Erich Honecker, visits units of the NVA in Prora. To his left is the Minister of National Defense, Heinz Hoffmann. In the background is the transverse building of Block 3, to the left the planned theater building, to the right the longtime location of the Documentation Center Prora, 1972.

Federal Archives

4. Soldiers of the NVA at the train station in Prora, 1964

Archive of the Documentation Center Prora

5. and 6. Seaside view of the NVA recreational home "Walter Ulbricht" in Block 1 in Prora, 1952,

and Seaside view of a "rest hall" of the NVA recreational home

Archive Documentation Center Prora

7. DDR stamp with portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin and a postmark from Prora, 1953.

Archive Documentation Center Prora

8. Soldiers of the NVA display their weapons in one of the corridors of the barracks in Prora.

Military History Museum Dresden

9. Soldiers of the NVA during a march exercise in front of the ruins of Block 7 in the north of the complex, early 1980s.

Military History Museum Dresden

10. Group photo of soldiers of the NVA on the quay in Prora, 1985

Private collection Jens Meyhöfer

11. Members of the NVA Paratrooper Battalion 40 train at the ruins in the north of the complex.

Archive Documentation Center Prora

12. Image from the NVA magazine "Radar" showing exercises of the paratroopers in Prora.

Army magazine "Radar"

13. and **14.** Training of paratroopers in Prora.

Private collection/unknown photographer

15. First page of a photo album that was presented to the Minister of National Defense of the GDR, Heinz Hoffmann, on the occasion of his visit to the Officer School for Foreign Military Cadres "Otto Winzer". On the right is Block 4 in Prora, the seat of the school. On the left, students from Mozambique are standing, 1982.

Military History Museum Dresden

16. Students of the Officer School for Foreign Military Cadres "Otto Winzer" from Mozambique studying in their room in Block 4 in Prora. Through the windows, one can see the trees near the dunes, 1982.

Military History Museum Dresden

Chart. 27 | Construction soldiers

The National People's Army (NVA) was initially a volunteer army when it was founded in 1956, unlike the Bundeswehr, which was founded in 1955. It was not until after the construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 that conscription was introduced in the GDR in 1962. Those who refused to serve for religious or other reasons could be imprisoned for four to 24 months. In 1964, under pressure from churches, the GDR government created the option of unarmed basic military service. Unlike in the FRG, young men in the GDR did not perform civilian alternative service outside the military, but were a subdivision of the NVA, although they were not trained in the use of weapons. The alternative service lasted 18 months, just like the military service. Conscientious objectors were assigned to construction units and given the official rank of "construction soldier". The option of unarmed military service did not exist in any member state of the Warsaw Pact for a long time. It was not until the 1980s that alternative service could also be performed in Poland. In total, around 15,000 GDR citizens became construction soldiers, while nearly three million performed military service.

The first construction soldiers were already temporarily deployed to Prora in small groups from other locations in 1964. They were used, among other things, for the further conversion of the planned "KdF Seebad" into barracks. Construction soldiers came to Prora in larger numbers from 1982 onwards, making it an independent and the largest location for construction soldiers. In 1985, there were 1,284 construction soldiers in the GDR, of whom 354 (28.5%) served in Prora. They were used here in the construction of the ferry port in Mukran.

After the declaration of martial law in Poland in December 1981, the leadership of the GDR and the Soviet Union feared that a reliable land connection between the GDR and the Soviet Union could be endangered through Poland, especially in the event of war. Therefore, a large ferry port was to be built near the old fishing village of Mukran. In addition, large railway facilities were built there to convert trains from the German standard gauge to the Soviet or Russian broad gauge before entering the ferries.

The work of the construction soldiers in Prora was very difficult. They were also quickly classified as oppositional forces, and were therefore not well-liked by their superiors, NVA officers, and were often treated in a harassing manner. Many construction soldiers suffered professional disadvantages after their service and were not allowed to study.



1. Law Gazette of the German Democratic Republic from September 1964 with the law on the "Introduction of Construction Units in the Ministry of National Defense," as Non-Combat Military Service

Archive Documentation Center Prora

2. Military Service ID of Construction Soldier Christian Schmidt, who served in Prora from July 1988 to October 1989, 1988

Private collection of Christian Schmidt

3. Shoulder patch of the uniforms of the Construction Soldiers (gray embroidered spade on the dress uniforms, hence the designation "Spade Soldiers")

Archive Documentation Center Prora

4. Construction Soldiers at the construction site of the Mukran Ferry Port, 1980s

Image Archive Harro Schack, Sagard

5. The construction site of the Mukran Ferry Port in the 1980s

picture alliance

6. Stamps from the German Democratic Republic and the Soviet Union commemorating the inauguration of the ferry connection between Mukran (Rügen) and Klaipeda (then USSR, now Lithuania), 1986

Wikimedia Commons

7. A duty officer Construction Soldier announcing the command for bedtime in a room in Prora

Private collection, Archive Documentation Center Prora

8. Extract from surveillance transcripts by the Ministry of State Security (MfS) on June 16, 1984. Conversations of six Construction Soldiers in the 2nd Construction Company in Prora were monitored. In 1984, Construction Soldiers in Prora referred to the manipulation of a municipal election in May, which is mentioned here.

BStU Branch Office Erfurt, "Surveillance Transcripts of the MfS 1984-85 Block 5/BE II (Construction Soldiers) in Prora"

9. Construction Soldiers waiting at the train station in Prora after their discharge, 1987

Private collection, Archive Documentation Center Prora

10. Aerial view of the Mukran Ferry Port. In the foreground, there are masts for an offshore wind farm off the coast of Rügen, 2015

Wikimedia Commons

Chart. 28 | Developments since 1990

Since the reunification on October 3, 1990, the Prora complex became property of the federal government as it was previously a location for the NVA (National People's Army) and the Bundeswehr (Federal Armed Forces). However, the Bundeswehr abandoned the location and shut it down by 1992. In October 1992, Prora was declared a historical monument due to its exceptional architectural value. The monument justification states that "*The architectural ensemble of Prora is a remarkable testimony to a self-contained historical epoch. It should be the largest seaside resort in the world, from which its gigantomania is derived. Its construction in a steel skeleton design is evidence of the technical achievements of the 1930s, making it an important testimony to the working and production conditions of the time and to architectural history. (...) there are scientific reasons for the preservation of the entire ensemble.*"

The discussion about the possible demolition of Prora was thus ended, and its significance as a historical monument was recognized. Although a certain level of protection against structural changes was given, it was negotiable. The southernmost block in Binz, which was destroyed and completely dismantled after 1945, became a camping site for the Bundeswehr social welfare organization. The NVA recreation center in Block 1 became a youth hostel until 2000. In Blocks 2 and 3, educational institutions and employment companies settled, which aimed to tackle the high unemployment rates after the reunification. From 1994 onwards, parts of Block 3 were rented to various private initiatives, which set up exhibitions. This led to the creation of the so-called "Museumsmeile," ranging from a large gallery with an important graphics collection to a technical experience museum and the "KulturKunststatt," which focused on the NVA's use of Prora. In 2000, the Documentation Center Prora moved into the transverse section of Block 3, which presents the permanent exhibition "MACHTUrlaub" on the construction history of the "KdF-Seebad Rügen" and its historical context.

Block 4 remained completely empty until the beginning of renovations. Units of the Russian Federation's army were briefly quartered in Block 5, using the port of Mukran to transport Russian troops from the former GDR to their home country. After that, asylum seekers were accommodated there during the Yugoslavian wars. Block 5 also remained empty from 1994 onwards. A feasibility study, named after the planning office S.T.E.R.N., was carried out in 1996 and agreed upon by the participating bodies. It called for a monument-compliant development of the facility as a whole and mixed use. There were also extensive discussions about possible uses, to which the founders of the Documentation Center Prora made a significant contribution by organizing symposia and conferences.

Nevertheless, from 2000 onwards, the federal government began to sell the blocks individually to investors without presenting a comprehensive concept. Block 3 was sold to an investor in 2004, although the museums on site had also made a purchase offer. There were various difficulties with the sales, and the financial crisis from 2008 prevented the timely start of renovations. However, various tenants were already given notice early on, which resulted in some blocks remaining empty for years. Only Block 5 remained in public hands, as it was sold by the federal government for one euro to the Rügen district. In the northern third of Block 5, a youth hostel was built and opened in 2011, marking the start of further development.

Renovations by the investors began in 2012. Around 1300 apartments are planned to be built in the five blocks. Block 2 was the first to be ready for occupancy, with a hotel and high-end vacation apartments. In October 2018, the district of Rügen sold the remaining empty part of Block 5, the last part in public hands, to an investor. The privatization was thus completed. Only the section of the northern "Liegehalle" remained in public hands, where a new education and documentation center is planned.



1. Disposal of the interior furnishings of Block 1, formerly the NVA "Walter Ulbricht" recreational home until 1990, 1990

Image Archive HarroSchack, Sagard

2. Tank barriers as remnants of the NVA in Prora, 1991

Franz Zadnicek

3. The peripheral development of the "Festivity Compound". The entrance to the "Reception Hall," the reception of the complex, was supposed to be located here. An identical hall on the northern edge of the "Festivity compound" remained unfinished, 2002

Documentation Center Prora, Katharina Rostock

4. The interior of the "Reception Hall." It was used as a sports hall by the NVA during the GDR era and for skateboarding after reunification until 1999. Since then, it has been deteriorating, 2013

Documentation Center Prora, Christian Schmidt

5. Advertising signs of museums and other cultural institutions such as galleries or a pottery workshop, known as the "Museum Mile," which developed in Block 3 in the 1990s and ended with the termination of the "KulturKunststatt" in 2018. Only the Documentation Center Prora remains in the transverse section of Block 3, 2006

Documentation Center Prora

6. Advertising sign on Block 1. While the time and circumstances of the construction are not addressed by the investors, it promotes monument protection, which allows for high tax deductions, 2015

Documentation Center Prora, Katja Lucke

7. Construction work in Block 2. During the renovation, the blocks were largely gutted, and despite declared monument protection, windows were enlarged or converted into balcony doors after lengthy approval processes, 2014

Documentation Center Prora, Marco Esseling

8. Updated infographic for the Ostsee-Zeitung as of April 2019. Blocks 1 to 5 have been privatized except for the sections of the youth hostel and the planned educational and documentation center. The ruins of Block 7 have also been sold, but plans for it are unknown.

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9. The northernmost section of Block 5, which remained unpainted during the GDR era and was supplemented with an extension. Today, this part is occupied by the youth hostel, 1996

Image Archive Harro Schack, Sagard

10. The entrance of the youth hostel, which opened in the first renovated section in 2011, 2015

Documentation Center Prora, Marco Esseling

11. The "rest halls" in Block 1 were demolished in 2015 and rebuilt in a similar form, 2015

Documentation Center Prora, Christian Schmidt

12. A model apartment in Block 2 with a ceiling that retains authentic structures but has a high square meter price in its luxury renovated state, 2015

Liron Milstein, air-freelance.com

13. Block 1 from the land side. The construction of roof top terraces, which are created despite monument protection, can be seen.

Martin Kaule, Orte der Geschichte e.V.

14. Balcony design on Block 4 in the northern part of the complex. The original facades being modified, and it is no longer recognizable that it is a building from 1939. In the background is the not yet renovated Block 5, 2015

Documentation Center Prora, Marco Esseling

15. Graffiti on one of the blocks in Prora. The construction of high-priced holiday apartments by private investors is viewed critically by some residents of the island, 2013
The graffiti text says: Where capital reigns, the island dies. Syltwessi, go home. Rügen for the old inhabitants of Rügen.

picture alliance

16. The area in front of the blocks up to the dunes has been designated as private property, even the public path through the dunes is indicated as a private road, 2014

Documentation Center Prora, Marco Esseling

17. The already renovated Block 4 on the left and the not yet renovated Block 5 on the right. In between is the foundation of a planned "community house." Above, one of the residential settlements called "Gefolgschaftsunterkünfte", where parts of the staff for the seaside resort were supposed to be accommodated.

Martin Kaule, Orte der Geschichte e.V.

18. Numerous trees around the blocks in Prora were cut down as part of the renovations, also to improve the sea view from the buildings, 2015

Documentation Center Prora, Marco Esseling

