

World War II Stalingrad Soldiers to Be Reburied

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Nearly 1,000 Red Army soldiers who died during the World War II Battle of Stalingrad will receive a military burial on June 22, the day Russia marks the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, news reports said.

The original graves of the soldiers, which date back to 1943, were unearthed during construction work last year in Volgograd, which was known as Stalingrad during the Soviet era and was the site of a massive battle that stretched from mid-1942-early 1943. More than 1 million Soviet soldiers died in the battle.

The grave is the largest burial site of this kind found since the war, Ekho Moskvyy reported Monday. But of the 949 soldiers whose remains it contained, only five have been identified, the report said.

The soldiers will be reburied at a military cemetery near the city on the Day of Memory and

Mourning, which is marked on June 22, Ekho Moskvu reported.

The soldiers had been expected to be reburied at Mamayev Kurgan heights — a World War II memorial ground overlooking the city — but municipal officials said there were no spots left at the site, the Kavkazsky Uzel news portal reported.

For the past two decades, all Soviet soldiers who died in the battle of Stalingrad have received burials at Mamayev Kurgan, the deputy chief of the region's Poisk (Search) organization, Svetlana Pervukhina, was quoted as saying.

But in a break from that tradition, the city administration said the latest burial will instead move to a memorial cemetery in the village of Rossoshki outside Volgograd, Kavkazsky Uzel reported.

“There is no space now at Mamayev Kurgan to bury such an amount of remains, nearly 1,000 perished soldiers,” a deputy director of the memorial site, Alexander Kutikov, was quoted as saying. “There is only space for 136 named graves and a maximum of several hundred in mass graves.”

Mamayev Kurgan is the burial grounds for 48,000 soldiers, including 2,047 who are interred at a military memorial cemetery created two decades ago, Kavkazsky Uzel reported. Meanwhile, the cemetery in Rossoshki, is divided into two sections — a Russian one, which holds the graves of more than 17,000 Red Army soldiers, and a German one, which holds the graves of more than 58,000, the report said.

Activists who search for unmarked graves of World War II soldiers have posted an online petition to regional Governor Andrei Bocharov — himself a retired colonel and Hero of Russia — to have the 949 soldiers buried at Mamayev Kurgan.

“Searchers and people who are not indifferent have for a year been waiting for those soldiers to be commemorated at the military cemetery on the heights for which they had fought,” the petition reads.

Underscoring the petition's point, Poisk's Pervukhina said that the remains of the soldiers were found near Mamayev Kurgan in the city's Krasnooktyabrsky district, Kavkazsky Uzel reported.

By early morning on Monday — the day of the planned burial — the petition on the change.org website had garnered about 700 signatures out of the 1,000 it said it needed.

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