



Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme (AIN)

Internationale Lagergemeinschaft des Konzentrationslagers Neuengamme

**KZ-Gedenkstätte
Neuengamme**

Ausstellungen
Begegnungen
Studienzentrum

3 May 2015

Ceremony to commemorate the victims of the shipping disaster in the Bay of Lübeck on 3 May 1945

- Christine Eckel, Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme (AIN)
- Torsten Albig, prime minister of Schleswig-Holstein
- Dr Tordis Batscheider, Mayor of Neustadt in Holstein
- Jewgenij Malychin (Ukraine), survived the sinking of the prisoners' ships
- Martine Letterie (Netherlands), vice president of the AIN
- Reading (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Neuengamme)
- Kaddish: Lübeck Jewish community

Musical accompaniment: Ostholstein church district brass band

Cap-Arcona Memorial, Neustadt-Pelzerhaken, 3rd May 2015

**Commemoration ceremony for the victims of the bombings in the Neustädter
Bucht (Bay of Neustadt) on 3rd May 1945**

Welcome address:

**Christine Eckel, Secretary General of the Amicale Internationale KZ
Neuengamme**

Survivors of Neuengamme concentration camp and its satellite camps,
Premier Torsten Albig,
Mayor Tordis Batschneider,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I welcome you in the name of the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme, the international association of former prisoners of Neuengamme concentration camp, founded in 1958.

Its former president, Victor Malbecq, would very much have liked to speak to you today. He passed away in March this year at the age of 89, after having worked tirelessly for the commemoration of the crimes that were committed in Neuengamme concentration camp and its satellite camps – together with many other former prisoners, many of whom have left us over the past years. Their commitment is one of the reasons that we are here today.

I would like to welcome you especially, the survivors of Neuengamme concentration camp and its satellite camps. I am very glad that you have come to Hamburg and Neustadt with your families to take part in this ceremony of commemoration. 70 years after the liberation it is not at all self-evident that you would undertake this trip. And yet you are here and tell us about your experience, about your time of imprisonment in Neuengamme concentration camp, and about your life after the liberation. Your conversations with younger generations are especially valuable – these are moments which they will always remember. Also for me it is an honour, but first of all a great pleasure to accompany you over the next few days.

Many relatives of prisoners who have not survived their imprisonment in Neuengamme concentration camp have also come here today. These daughters and sons, grandchildren and even great-grandchildren are an important connection with the present. They attend the ceremonies of commemoration or work for the associations of former prisoners: They pass on remembrance from one generation to the next – thereby preserving the memory of many women and men who were persecuted, deported, and killed by the National Socialists in occupied Europe.

Of the 100.000 prisoners of Neuengamme concentration camp and its satellite camps, one half did not survive. They died of diseases, violence, hunger, on the death marches in the last weeks of the war – or here, in the bay of Neustadt, when the prisoner ships “Cap Arcona”, “Athen” and “Thielbeck” were bombed on 3rd May 1945. Only shortly before the end of the war 70 years ago almost 7000 people lost their lives here: they burned, drowned, or they were shot while trying to save themselves, both in the water and on the shore. Not even 450 people survived. I am all the more honoured that Mr Malychin who survived the inferno aboard the “Cap Arcona” is going to speak to us today. But to begin with, I would like to pass over to the Premier of the state of Schleswig-Holstein. Following Torsten Albig, the Mayor of Neustadt in Holstein Dr. Tordis Batschneider is going to address us.

[speeches Albig and Batschneider]

I now welcome Jewgenij Sacharowitsch Malychin: He was 17 years old when he was deported from Ukraine to Germany in 1942. He had to do forced labour in the Borgward factories in Bremen. A few months after an attempt to escape he was brought to Neuengamme concentration camp where he remained imprisoned for two and a half years. On this day 70 years ago Jewgenij Malychin was liberated in Neustadt by British troops after having survived the bombing of the “Cap Arcona”. Mr Malychin, I am glad that you are going to speak to us now:

[speech Malychin]

I now pass over to Martine Letterie from the Netherlands whose grandfather was murdered in Neuengamme concentration camp in 1941. She is president of the Dutch survivors' association Stichting Vriendenkring and vice-president of the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme.

[speech Martine Letterie]

To conclude this commemoration ceremony members of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Neuengamme (the German former prisoners association) will read to us the testimonies of survivors and witnesses of the ships' bombings of 3rd May 1945 and let us hear their voices.

Thank you very much.

Speech by Minister-President Torsten Albig
Commemorative event at the Cap Arcona Memorial /
70 years since the end of World War Two

Neustadt, 3 May 2015

(Check against delivery!)

Ms Eckel (Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme),
Ms. Letterie (Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme),
Mr Malychin (survivor of Cap Arcona),
Ladies and Gentlemen,

70 years ago today, the National Socialist Party of Germany had already lost the war. Hitler had taken his own life, and Berlin was completely occupied.

But Nazi Germany had not yet surrendered – and the fighting continued. It was only on 8 May 1945 that the Second World War ended in Europe – a day of liberation for everyone who had suffered under the tyranny of the Nazis.

Whether in German-occupied Europe or in Germany itself.

Here in the cold waters of the Bay of Lübeck, in the few days between Hitler's death and the end of the war, many thousands of people died who had already managed to survive concentration camps and death marches.

What a terrible twist of history it was, that the Allied planes intended to destroy the remainder of the German naval fleet here in the Bay. And that, instead, they struck ships in which former prisoners of concentration camps were trapped under the worst possible conditions.

Only a small number of the prisoners on the *Cap Arcona* and the *Thielbek* survived the destruction of the ships. I consider it a great honour that you, the survivors of this awful day, have invited me to this commemoration today. And

it is a great responsibility. It is a great honour for me personally, because I grew up very close to here.

My generation has no personal memories of the crimes of the Nazi dictatorship. We belong to the post-war generation. The Bay of Lübeck, the beach at Neustadt: For me, they are more likely to evoke happy memories of summer.

It would be so easy to just leave things that way.

There are many voices in Germany that call for us to finally put all of this behind us. To consign history to history. At least the Nazi history. They want to see a Germany that is not burdened by the crimes of the Nazis.

They want to see the *Cap Arcona* as a proud luxury liner. And not as a floating concentration camp. Yet this ship was both. And it symbolizes the way an entire country can transcend into barbarism.

We will not turn a blind eye to this. On the 40th anniversary of the end of the war in Europe, Richard von Weizsäcker, who was then President of Germany, said:

“Anyone who turns a blind eye to the past will be blind to the present. Anyone who fails to remember inhumanity will be vulnerable to possible new risks of contagion.”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Historical comparisons are not the point here. For they never really fit. Nor do any other comparisons. No simple lessons can be learned from history. For memory is far too complex. Too individual. And too cloudy.

But the memory of the inhumanity of the Nazi regime gives us a feeling of compassion for everyone who suffers under authoritarian regimes today. Who are persecuted because of their beliefs, their political convictions or their sexual orientation. Who are caught between the camps during a war.

The memory of this inhumanity makes us responsible for people who flee from war and persecution. Who leave their homeland. And whom we must help so that they can lead a decent life here.

And the memory of this inhumanity keeps the abhorrence alive in us toward all those who pursue their own corrupt political agenda based on demagoguery and xenophobia.

History does not provide guidelines for political action. But it does provide a moral foundation upon which our political action is based.

This is why we need places of remembrance. The Holocaust stelae in Berlin. The "Topography of Terror." The concentration camp memorial sites in Hamburg-Neuengamme or Bergen-Belsen. And here on the Bay of Lübeck, the Cap Arcona Memorial.

As a place of remembrance for the survivors and the bereaved.

As a reminder of the inhumanity of the Nazi regime.

As a warning against the danger of any new risk of contagion.

Dr. Tordis Batschneider, Mayor of Neustadt in Holstein

**3rd May 2015: Welcome address for the 70th Anniversary of the Cap Arcona
Catastrophe in the Bay of Neustadt**

Prime Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since 1948 we commemorate here at the Cap Arcona Memorial, always on 3rd May, one of the most horrendous events of WWII; the bombings of the prisoner ships “Cap Arcona” and “Thielbeck”.

I would like to welcome especially the survivors of this naval catastrophe as well as all the other former prisoners of Neuengamme concentration camp from Belgium, Denmark, France, Poland, the Netherlands and Slovenia, who came here to commemorate the victims together with us. I am certain that it was not easy for you to take on this long journey and to return to these places which carry burdensome memories. Thank you very much for confronting these memories, they are an eternal warning to us all!

Through the bombings of the prisoner ships on 3rd May 1945 about 6600 people were killed. They burned, they drowned or they were shot by members of the SS and the navy once they reached the shore. Even though it was the British fighter-pilots who dropped the bombs on the “Cap Arcona” and the “Thielbeck”, it has to be said very clearly that the responsibility for the death of these 6600 people lies entirely with the National Socialists.

Because it was the Nazis who undertook the mass annihilation of whole population groups with horrible precision. It was the Nazis who declared war first to Europe, and then to the whole world. And it was the Nazis who continued fighting this war until the end with grim hatred and boundless violence.

We, the Germans of today, have to live with the fact that no other European nation has ever brought as much wrong and terrible suffering to its neighbours as ours. And we, the people of Neustadt, have to live with the fact that an especially tragic chapter of the war has taken place near our city. The catastrophe of the “Cap Arcona” of 70 years ago has become a horrible part of the history of this city.

For us who are living with this history today, it means that even if we are not guilty in the way of our fathers and grandfathers, as descendants we are responsible for making sure that such an injustice will not ever be committed again.

Looking at the history of post-war Neustadt, we can see that its citizens have accepted their responsibility for the horrible crimes of National Socialism. They have accepted it by contributing to the peaceful process of European integration. Already few years after the war had ended, with its wounds still open, people from countries all over Europe were invited to Neustadt to sing, dance and celebrate together. The connections thus established with all regions of Europe have contributed to Neustadt being an open and tolerant city which welcomes strangers as friends and where racism, intolerance and xenophobia do not stand a chance. The story of success of the European Folklore Festival which was founded more than 60 years ago shows that the citizens of Neustadt are living their sincere dream of communication and understanding. It has become a part of the newer, better identity of our city.

That Europe has become more democratic and mostly peaceful after the war is also, to a very small part, due to us here in Neustadt. The Neustadt of today is Europastadt and has been awarded the title "Place of Diversity". We are proud of this – especially because of the injustice committed by our fathers and grandfathers.

We, the post-war generations, will continue to stand up for a peaceful coexistence of all nations, for democracy, justice and respect for human rights, because we carry a special historical responsibility. Our generations as well as future generations have a moral obligation to ensure that something like National Socialism and the catastrophe of the "Cap Arcona" will never happen again.

We owe this to you, the survivors, and to all the victims we are commemorating here today!

Jewgenij Malychin

Former prisoner Neuengamme concentration camp and survivor of the “Cap Arcona”

Speech 3rd May 2015

Organisers of the meeting of former prisoners of Neuengamme concentration camp,

70 years ago on the day of our liberation we, the prisoners of Neuengamme concentration camp, were unable to imagine that we would one day have the possibility to honour the memory of the thousands of our comrades who died.

I was onboard the “Cap Arcona”. I had burns and I had been in the water for five or six hours, holding on to the hull of a boat that was floating upside down. We were several people there. It grew dark, it started to rain, and we swam to the other end of the ship. The whole ship was burned and was lying on its side. I swam with whatever energy I had left and someone helped me to climb onto the burnt part of the ship. It was raining and we were swaying back and forth to warm ourselves at least a little bit. Late at night everything became very quiet. In front of me there was the bombed bay. Then a speedboat appeared which approached the ship. We had to board it. The wreck of the “Cap Arcona” was still hot. When we came onboard the ship we were each given a blanket and brought under deck. Then we were brought onshore. There we sat until morning in a dining-hall. There were already people from the “Athen”. Then we came to another building where we were given navy uniforms and we were sent to another building where we were supposed to stay. I arrived there on 4th May and remained unconscious for four days.

On 8th May I regained consciousness and went to the infirmary. My sailor blouse was still sticking to my burns and it was impossible to take it off. I was covered with a liquid and the blouse was cut off me. I was told I had to stay in the infirmary, but I refused, because I thought everybody else would go away and I would be left behind on my own. Every other day my bandages were changed, and then we were brought somewhere else. Then I was drafted to a reserve regiment. Only later I was admitted to a military hospital.

All of these and many other memories I tell my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, so that they will not forget.

I hope that all the horrors that we have lived through will never return. Thank you for your attention!

Martine Letterie

**President Stichting Vriendenkring Neuengamme (Netherlands) und
Vize-President Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme (AIN)**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme is an organization in which the Neuengamme associations from various countries are represented: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Poland and Slovenia. The Amicale has set itself the goal to keep alive the memory of both what happened at Neuengamme concentration camp and of the consequences of those events.

I am addressing you today as one of the three vice-presidents, and the reason for this is a sad one. On March 14th, our president Victor Malbecq, former prisoner of Neuengamme concentration camp and survivor of the satellite camps Schandelah and Wöbbelin, has passed away. He would have been 90 years old in June. For the last 30 years of his life he tirelessly fought against oblivion, even when his health made this more and more difficult. Not only did he earn respect by doing this, but he also made everybody realize the importance of his mission. I hope that he died knowing that the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme will continue his efforts.

Today we are standing at the North German coast overlooking the Lübecker Bucht where the greatest catastrophe in the history of Neuengamme concentration camp took place: When the Allied forces were approaching, the camp and its numerous satellite camps were evacuated and thousands of prisoners were transported to the port of Lübeck. A part of them was brought to the "Cap Arcona", a passenger ship which was lying at anchor near Neustadt. The other prisoners were brought on board of the "Thielbeck" and the "Athen". The "Thielbeck" sailed and cast anchor not far from the "Arcona". The prisoners were held in the cargo areas of the three ships where conditions were worse than in the camps they had arrived from – if that was even possible. They came from Germany and from all those countries occupied by the Nazis or at war with them: the Baltic States, Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Norway, Ukraine, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Russia. There was hardly any light or air and some prisoners were not given any food for days. Whoever managed to survive as by miracle could not escape the bombings.

On May 3rd at three o'clock in the afternoon the ships "Cap Arcona" and "Thielbeck" were first attacked by British Typhoon fighter-bombers. There were 7000 prisoners aboard the "Cap Arcona" and between 2500 and 3000 aboard the "Thielbeck". The "Cap Arcona" caught fire quickly, whereas the "Thielbeck" was made completely of iron and therefore could not burn, but sank rapidly. On both ships all hell broke loose.

I am going to read to you a passage from the memoir of Alfred Kneendorf, a Jehovah's Witness who survived the catastrophe and wrote down the following in 1946:

"Having arrived on deck I was particularly calm and composed and it seemed that the whole catastrophe did not concern me. I saw a Russian fighting with a German. The Russian had a life-vest and the German did not. The German said: 'That's my life-vest', and the Russian answered: 'No, it's mine.' They fought until the fire reached their clothes and they were forced to jump overboard. That was 14 to 15 metres of height. The German who had no life-vest drowned, of course, and so did the Russian who had one. The whole ship from the front to the back was a fire and the heat was enormous. The cries of prisoners could be heard even on shore. An officer with two stripes walked past me. He was holding a suitcase in each hand, probably his valuables, and I asked him where he wanted to go with those suitcases because he would have been better off trying to save his life. But he said: 'No, I'll take the suitcases. They are very valuable.' I watched this man the entire time. He jumped overboard and drowned."

Onboard the two ships prisoners were trying to save their lives, but only few survived. Most of them drowned or were burned, British fight-bombers were shooting at the drowning and those who reached the shores were shot by German members of the SS or the Hitlerjugend.

While the ships were being bombed, peace talks between Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz and the British General Bernard Law Montgomery were taking place in the Lüneburger Heide. For the majority of the prisoners onboard the bombed ships peace came too late. 7000 people died a horrible death here.

We are here to commemorate them, and that is why we have come here with former prisoners – some of whom have survived the catastrophe, such as the previous speaker Jewgenij Malychin and my compatriot Wim Alosery – as well as with relatives and others concerned who have come from all the countries of those who died here.

Because I have hope that we can learn something from this, and also to continue in the spirit of our late president Victor Malbecq I ask you to pass on this horrible story to new and future generations. May the fate of those who died here not be forgotten.

As Dutch poet Leo Vorman wrote:

“Come tonight with stories,
about how the war disappeared
and repeat them a hundred times
every time I will cry.”