

Speeches held during the commemoration in Neuengamme concentration camp memorial, May 4, 2015

Dr Detlef Garbe, Director of Neuengamme concentration camp memorial

Dear Janusz Kahl,

Dear Survivors – so many of you have come,

The president of the Hamburg State Parliament, Mr Mayor,

Minister Todeschini, State Secretary Dr Schröder, and Parliamentary Party Leader Haersma-Buma,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you, in the name of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial Site, to this event marking the 70th anniversary of liberation and of the end of the war. Anniversaries are always an occasion for remembering. This year, not only will the international memorial be 50 years old – it was dedicated on 7 November 1965 – but the various commemorative events marking this day of liberation bear round numbers as well. The first memorial event organised by the Amicale Internationale de Neuengamme took place 25 years ago with the support of the City of Hamburg. 20 years ago, the survivors – there were still many of them – were able for the first time to hold their event on the former roll-call ground on the historical camp site, although prison operations were still ongoing. Ten years ago today, after the prison was closed and almost the entire concentration camp area had been integrated, the memorial underwent a completely new design, with exhibitions and a study centre.

Thanks to the generous support by city and federal sources, we were able to write to all of the former prisoners regarding the various events to take place during these days and ask whether they would like to receive an invitation. Today we are still in contact with 600 survivors of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp, and we are very pleased that 56 of them are able to participate in this event. Since – due to their high age and the great distances involved – only 10 percent of those we wrote to are able to be here, we are broadcasting the event via live stream to the survivors who live scattered all over the world. I send my best wishes to everyone who is only able to participate from the distance and especially to those who are in ill health.

Many of them have told us with very moving words how much they regret that their current state of health no longer permitted them to come. From the hundreds of letters and mails, here are just a few:

94-year-old Mads Madsen from Denmark declined with this message: "My many visits to you with groups, my participation in conversations with contemporary witnesses, have given great and good meaning to my life in recent years. It irks me immensely that I have become too old to continue to be active."

Recuperating at the moment after a long stay in hospital, 90-year-old Marian Hawling from Australia, as one of the few survivors of the "Cap Arcona disaster," would like to have returned to the place in which he was given a second life, to bid farewell from the many comrades whose survival was denied them. "There is nothing I would rather do. [...] My whole life, I was always willing to take risks, and if I hadn't taken certain risks, I would not have survived. But my children begged me not to undertake this long trip again." Also 90 years old, Henryk Francuz from Israel particularly wants to send his greetings to the families of the prisoners, who will keep this remembrance alive today and in the future.

The letter with which 94-year-old Arturs Neparts from the USA thanked us for the invitation to this very important memorial event and at the same time declined for health reasons, included a check for a considerable sum to support the continuing activities of the memorial.

There were also other scattered voices.

86-year-old Melitta Stein from the USA implored us not to use the metaphor "the last time" too often. In her statement, which was also published on 31 January in the Washington Post, she said: "I complained that people are writing about us as if we were already dead [...]. It is always said that this is probably the last time the survivors will meet [...]. I am tired of being constantly reminded of my mortality."

And the 89-year-old Dutch survivor Jan van der Liet, who later became an entrepreneur in Great Britain, informed us that, when he was seriously ill in the first years after the war, he waited in vain for support. And to the present day, the German government has not apologized to him. Until this occurs, he will not accept any invitations.

Victor Malbecq from Belgium, Vice President of the Amicale Internationale since 1990 and President since 2013, is not with us either. He wanted to speak to us today. But fate had other ideas. He died six weeks ago at the age of 89. Today let us also remember this man, who fought with such dedication against forgetting, and who totally dedicated his life in the three last decades to the work of remembrance.

The Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial and Amicale Internationale are very pleased that the Parliament and the Senate have organized the main Hamburg memorial event for the first time on a round anniversary of the end of the war here in Neuengamme. This is an important signal, and one that is very necessary at the present time. Most recently, the media have reminded us often – such as through the NDR documentation "Hamburg 1945 – How the city was rescued" – of the rescue operations of individual decision makers, such as Major General Alwin Woltz and the Phönix General Manager Albert Schäfer, who took responsibility and undoubtedly acted with great courage in view of the opposing Hitler orders. But on 3 May 1945, the day on which the city, of which large parts had already been destroyed, was handed over to the British troops in a hopeless situation, not all the people in the city were granted their freedom.

There was no one left in the Neuengamme Concentration Camp who could be liberated. The camp and its 170 buildings and barracks, which had been cleansed of obvious traces of crime by a residual commando of prisoners, was empty when the British came. In fact, Neuengamme is the only main camp that had been completely cleared before the arrival of the Allied troops. The prisoners from the satellite camps in the major Hamburg industrial enterprises like Blohm & Voss and Deutsche Werft were also removed from the city shortly before the British marched in.

The prisoners, whose removal had been insisted upon by the Gauwirtschaftskammer (the Gau Chamber of Commerce), were sent on death marches and to the receiving camps of Bergen-Belsen, Sandbostel and Wöbbelin. The last 10,000 were brought to the "Cap Arcona" and other ships acquired by the Hamburg Gauleiter Karl Kaufmann. As the result of a tragic error, they were attacked by British fighter bombers on 3 May 1945. Almost 7,000 prisoners died. This occurred at almost the same time as the British entered Hamburg.

This means that 3 May is both a day of joy due to the freeing of Hamburg and a day of mourning. For we may not forget the many thousands of prisoners in the Neuengamme Concentration Camp who were not saved when Hamburg was handed over in 1945, but who were sent by the SS on death marches or to death camps or who tragically died in Neustadt Bay when the ships were bombed. A book by the former archive director Kurt Detlev Möller, published in 1947 by order of the Senate, titled *Das letzte Kapitel* (The Last Chapter), ignored main aspects of the criminal activity of the Hamburg Gauleiter

Kaufmann and stylized him into the man who rescued Hamburg. At the time, it shocked the political sphere in Hamburg and led to spirited Parliamentary debates regarding the so-called Kaufmann legend. Even 68 years later, today's political sphere in Hamburg should not be interested in one-sided, excessively brief representations of the supposed rescuer of Hamburg.

Precisely for this reason, it is a very positive sign that the Parliament and Senate are organizing the main memorial event today here in Neuengamme to mark liberation and the end of the war.

Many thanks for your attention.

Olaf Scholz, Lord Mayor of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg

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Dear Survivors of this Concentration Camp,

Dear Family Members,

You have taken it upon yourselves once again to travel to Hamburg from many different countries. From Belgium, Denmark, France and Great Britain. From Israel, Italy, Croatia, the Netherlands, Norway and Austria. From Poland, Russia, Sweden, Slovakia and Slovenia. From the Czech Republic, Ukraine, Hungary, the United States of America and Belarus. I would like to thank you for being here today.

At today's event, organised by the Parliament and Senate, we are commemorating the end of the war, the liberation of the concentration camps, and all of the victims of war and persecution during the National Socialist era. At the same time, we remember the liberation of Hamburg, Germany and Europe from the regime of Adolf Hitler. We do so even if not all Germans wanted to be freed in 1945, because at this time they were still supporters of this fascist dictatorship. For the followers of Hitler, the beneficiaries of the regime, and those who were lured by him, this was a day of defeat.

For the persecuted, the righteous, and the opponents of the Nazis, on the other hand, this was a day of liberation. One must keep this difference in mind, even today.

On 3 May 1945, Hamburg was surrendered to the British troops without resistance – a step even those in power at the time were prepared to take in view of the destruction in the city. But before this could happen, as was stated in the records of the dictatorship, the "wretched figures from the concentration camps" were to disappear from the city. Neuengamme and most of its satellite camps were emptied by the SS, and many prisoners were sent on death marches. About 9,000 prisoners from the main camp were loaded onto three ships in the Bay of Lübeck. British planes bombed the ships in the early afternoon of 3 May 1945, because they assumed German troops were on them, and they sank two of them. Some 6,600 prisoners died – right before they would have been liberated and only a few hours before Hamburg surrendered without a struggle. What a tragedy.

How is the Nazi era and the history of Neuengamme remembered here in Hamburg? This is a question that not only interests you, the survivors, but all of us. When the work on memorials in Hamburg began in the 1970s and 1980s, Neuengamme was considered a "forgotten concentration camp." How could this place have been dispelled from the public consciousness? Why was this place comparatively unknown, even though Neuengamme, with more than 80 subcamps and 100,000 prisoners, was one of the largest concentration camps on German territory? The number of prisoners registered here that died was, at 42,900, no lower than that in other large concentration camps.

Historian and former SPD Member of Parliament Jan Klarmann recently summed this up as follows: "Pictures from this concentration camp did not go around the world." Pictures like those that existed, for example, of Auschwitz, Buchenwald or Bergen-Belsen. The power of images raises awareness. The media and their resources play an important role, if not the central role, in communicating knowledge of history. This is particularly true for the present time. 70 years have now passed since liberation. Soon it will be 80, 90 or 100 years. Then there will no longer be anyone there who can describe from his own experience to the following generations what people experienced and suffered, what was done or not done, during the National Socialist era in Neuengamme and other places.

Today you, the survivors, are here. You extend your hands to us, and we listen to you. When we look back at the time that has passed since liberation, we must unfortunately admit that you were left on your own for many decades in your struggle against forgetting. There was no worthy way of dealing with this

place, in which the SS murdered so many people. The premises of this former concentration camp were used for a mundane prison for decades. New prison buildings were even erected as late as the 1980s.

Just the same, the work of remembrance could not be stopped. In 1953, a pillar made of shell limestone was erected with the inscription "To the victims" and the dates "1938 to 1945." But there was still no direct mention of the concentration camp. It was in 1958 that the survivor organizations joined forces by forming the "Amicale Internationale de Neuengamme." The first president was Lucienne Bouffieux, wife of the Belgian lawyer and author René Blicq, who died on 3 May 1945 as a concentration camp prisoner on one of the ships in the Bay of Lübeck. With a great deal of diplomacy and perseverance, the Amicale was successful in achieving its wish for a worthy memorial site. The international memorial was dedicated in November 1965 on the site of the former camp garden.

But Neuengamme was still far from becoming an appropriate place of remembrance of the victims. In 1981, a document building was opened near the memorial. The number of visitors, 50,000 annually, was higher than expected. In 1989, the Hamburg Senate then decided to relocate the prison, which had been erected on the former prison camp site, to another location. A commission made up of scientists, politicians and representatives of Amicale developed the concept for a memorial site. In 1994, it was able to move into a temporary container building. The archive and library, a group and film room, as well as offices were housed in these 650 square meters of space.

It was to take another decade before use of the former concentration camp property as a prison was finally a thing of the past. On 6 September 2003, several hundred survivors gathered on the roll-call ground to celebrate the closing of the penal facility and the transfer of the property to the memorial, under the motto: "Neuengamme enfin libéré". Many of you were there at the time. And many of you came again two years later, at the beginning of May 2005, to participate in the opening of the new concentration camp memorial site.

For many others, the festive reopening on these historic camp grounds came too late. They could no longer hear First Mayor Ole von Beust say: "We have understood. A prison and a memorial cannot coexist. This would be incompatible with the dignity of this place, with the dignity of each and every victim."

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ten years after it was opened, the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial Site, which has since been redesigned, has in the meantime established itself as a place for remembrance and learning. Approximately 100,000 people come here every year. The pedagogical activities, the seminar programmes, and the scientific competencies of this institution are now recognized internationally. Since 2009, the German government has supported the memorial and provided financial assistance.

Many young people have also come to our commemorative event today. Personal meetings and conversations with concentration camp survivors are important for them. It is for this reason, too, that all of you who have come to Hamburg confront your own painful memories again and again, and answer the questions of those born later. By doing so, you help ensure that the fate of the people who suffered and died here will not be forgotten.

I am very pleased that students from Hamburg and the surrounding areas, who have accompanied you during the past few days, are also contributing to this event themselves.

Janusz Kahl, Polish survivor of Neuengamme concentration camp

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the last decades, I attended the annual celebrations to mark the anniversaries of the liberation of the Neuengamme concentration camp, and I was deeply moved every time. This year's events, marking 70 years since the moment of liberation, are the crowning moments in this tradition. This prompts me to give you a brief outline of what happened after that joyous day.

After being used by the occupying power, the grounds of the camp passed into the possession of the City of Hamburg. Their idea was to use them as a civilian facility, and they combined this idea with the general tendency of glossing over the Nazi past. In blatant disregard for the memory of the tens of thousands of victims of Neuengamme, the camp was redeveloped as a prison and a reformatory for the local population. The camp's structural remains were torn down or converted to suit the new requirements. For a very long time, all efforts to reinstate this site's dignity as a cemetery and as testimony to its devastating past remained fruitless. I decried this state of affairs during the events to mark the 50th anniversary of the liberation in 1995, when I spoke to attendants gathered in the prison's athletics field, into which the camp's former roll-call square had been converted.

After long negotiations, the strenuous efforts on the part of the international association of former Neuengamme prisoners, the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme, eventually led to the City of Hamburg abandoning its use of the grounds as a prison and paved the way for the opening of a museum to honour the martyrs. Today, this is an important historical and educational site which attracts many visitors, people who seek the truth, both from the Hamburg area and from abroad. It is thanks to the commitment of the Neuengamme Memorial's management and staff, the significant support from the associations of survivors and their families, the work of the local Neuengamme Working Group and Friends of the Memorial association, and the benevolent attitude taken by the Hamburg government that a memorial has been created which fittingly honours the memory of those who were tortured and murdered here.

Through its academically sound documentation and presentation, the museum irrefutably proves that any form of extremism will lead to perversion. This threat never goes away, and it is our task as those who feel obligated by the legacy of the former prisoners to unwaveringly stand against all attempts to reactivate it.

"YOUR STRUGGLE, SUFFERING AND DEATH SHALL NOT HAVE BEEN IN VAIN"

Dr Ole Schröder, Parliamentary State Secretary, Member of the German Bundestag

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Mr Kahl,

Mayor Scholz,

State Secretary Todischini,

Mr van Haersma Buma,

Honoured guests from abroad,

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the representative of the Federal Government, I bring greetings from Berlin to this official memorial ceremony of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg for the end of World War II and the liberation of the concentration camps 70 years ago.

It is a special honour for me to meet you, the survivors of the Neuengamme concentration camp and its satellite camps. You have travelled here from all over the world to bear witness to the suffering in the camps, to remember the dead and to call on later generations to keep this memory alive. I am impressed by your strength.

Thank you, Mr Kahl, for your remarks, which I found deeply moving.

Since 1999, the Federal Government has provided funding for memorials at concentration camps, based on its policy paper on such memorials.

This funding is primarily intended to ensure the preservation of these memorials as museums of modern history and places of learning. It also supports important projects to ensure that we never forget.

The 2008 federal policy paper on memorials described the special significance of the Neuengamme concentration camp memorial: "The Neuengamme concentration camp is an outstanding example of the Nazi policy of 'extermination through labour', which benefited the SS and its construction projects."

As Mayor Scholz has described, establishing the Neuengamme memorial was a long and complicated process. Especially you, honoured guests from other countries, showed great persistence, working with former political prisoners from Germany to convince the city and the state of the need for a proper memorial on this historical site.

Finally, ten years ago today, on 4 May 2005, the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial was opened in its current form, as a centre for exhibitions and studies and a place of meeting, with funding from the city and the Federal Government.

In 2009, the Federal Government included the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial in its institutional funding programme. Hamburg's Senate and the Federal Government Commissioner for

Culture and the Media negotiated an agreement governing the shared federal and state responsibility for this memorial site, which has since become a place of learning with international significance. Covering 57 hectares and with 17 camp buildings still extant, Neuengamme is one of the largest camp memorials in Germany. It receives a hundred thousand visitors a year.

For several years now, the memorial has also offered seminars for vocational schools and professionals, including public employees, railway employees, trainees and students in medical and legal fields as well as police trainees. These study programmes show how the past remains relevant today, by exploring the actions of government organizations during the National Socialist regime and their involvement in Nazi crimes, as well as human rights issues and the role of the participating institution up to the present.

The Federal Ministry of the Interior expressly welcomes research into the history of the police, who played a key role in carrying out Nazi crimes. For example, squads from Hamburg's Reserve Police Battalion 101, as paramilitary units of the Nazi Ordnungspolizei, were directly involved in the execution of at least 38,000 Jews. They also helped deport at least 45,000 Jews to the death camps, as the American historian Christopher Browning documented in his 1992 book "Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland".

Today, the police are publicly facing this dark chapter in their history in order to learn from it for the present and the future.

The seminars offered by the Neuengamme Memorial and the Hamburg Police Academy are an impressive example of this effort. Even more so are the regularly scheduled trips for Hamburg police cadets, initiated by the former head of the Hamburg police, Wolfgang Kopitzsch, to sites where the Reserve Police Battalion 101 committed massacres in Poland and to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial.

Precisely because the police work in sensitive areas, future police officers must be aware of the history of their profession in Germany. The Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial helps make them aware of this history. It also helped the Hamburg Police Museum put together its exhibition on 200 years of police history, which opened near the Hamburg police headquarters in February 2014. This new museum too sets a national standard for transparency by the police and their desire to engage in a dialogue with society.

The 2008 federal policy paper on memorials states, "Understanding its own history helps every nation in forming its identity. For us Germans, this includes the lessons drawn by the founding generation of the Federal Republic of Germany from the experience of the criminal National Socialist regime. The inviolability of human dignity, awareness of the importance of freedom and the binding values embodied in the Basic Law are the cornerstones of our democracy."

I can assure you that the government of the Federal Republic of Germany recognizes its responsibility to history and will never allow the crimes of the Nazi regime to be forgotten.

We can never make up for what Germans did to you and others more than 70 years ago, but we are responsible for making sure it is never forgotten, and that you are never forgotten.

Participants of a youth project

We continue to remember. We will pass on your stories. We will not forget.

Dear Survivors, dear guests,

We are overwhelmed being allowed to stand in front of you today. We, as a group, have studied the history of this place over the past weeks, have learned about the crimes committed here and admired your fight for survival.

Those experiences strongly affected us. With excitement and gladness we are expecting the following days, we are looking forward to the encounter with the survivors and also the exchange with members of the second and third generation during the Forum "Future of remembrance".

We feel honoured by the opportunity to learn from your stories and experiences.

We feel thankful for getting the chance to talk to you, the survivors, and we want to find out how we, as the younger generation, can take over the responsibility to keep the memory alive.

Without the survivors as contemporary witnesses it wouldn't be possible for us to understand the history of this place and relate to it. Realizing that has affected and sensitized us.

We want to take responsibility and inspire others to interact respectful with each other.

It has been tried to cover the tracks, it has been tried to suppress the past. But we continue to remember. We will pass on your stories. We will not forget.

Minister Jean-Marc Todeschini, France

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The Director of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial Site,

The First Mayor of Hamburg,

The President of the Hamburg Parliament,

The Parliamentary State Secretary,

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Students,

First and foremost, I would like to welcome the former prisoners who are here with us today. As witnesses of the horrors that took place here, you have not hesitated to relive this very dark side of our history in the place where you were forced to suffer them. After all, we are not on an old battlefield with white crosses, to honour our fallen soldiers. Nor are we at a memorial to the dead, one that speaks to us because the living witnesses have been silenced forever.

On the contrary, we are at the centre of the barbarity and the unique efforts to destroy humanity, crimes that people committed. We are in a place of suffering and death that became a memorial site 10 years ago. 106,000 women and men were deported to the Neuengamme Concentration Camp. 55,000 of them never returned. These include Anton Gies from the Mosel, the first Frenchman to be deported to Neuengamme in 1940, as well as the Prefect Edouard Bonnefoy, who died in the bombing in the Bay of Lübeck, as did 7,000 other prisoners, and whom I honoured a few days ago at the Montluc prison.

The Neuengamme Concentration Camp has its own history. Beginning in 1938, prisoners were relocated here from Sachsenhausen, in order to build a camp whose development was to be aligned with the Nazi system of concentration camps, and that would take away people's identity and dignity. "Before they killed us or let us die, they had to rob us of our dignity," says Louis-Martin Chauffier, who was deported to Neuengamme in April of 1944. The objective of this system was to turn people into just a number among others. Louis-Martin Chauffier became Identification Number 36 483.

Beginning in 1942, thousands of prisoners were divided into 80 commandos, including 20 for women, in which abuse, forced labour, hunger, cold and illness awaited them. In March and April 1945, the prisoners were evacuated. After seemingly never-ending death marches, with the dead numbering more than 15,000, they were displaced to the death camps of Bergen-Belsen, Sandbostel, Wöbbelin and the Baltic Sea.

This is the appalling history of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp, a story that Europe became abruptly aware of 70 years ago. On 2 May 1945, the Allies entered the Wöbbelin Concentration Camp, where they discovered half-dead survivors, as well as dozens of corpses lying on the ground. Only a few minutes separated the dead from the living. On 4 May, the soldiers reached the main camp in Neuengamme, but all of the prisoners had already been evacuated. Both the living and the dead were gone. The camp was empty, with no witnesses or any human presence.

The prisoners in Neuengamme came from almost 30 foreign countries. They were united by the fact that they could write their fate with letters in blood. Their names were Ernest Duval from France; Lucien Filipek from Poland, René Blicke from Belgium, Coen Hissink from Holland, or Rudi Goguel, who was German. They belong to the war generation, the generation of terror, but they will also be part of the generation of Europe, the generation of peace. Europe grew out of their spirit and their hearts. As the prisoner Pierre Sudreau puts it: "In the concentration camp, I became a European."

In this hell, Europe developed in the rhythm of the song of the "Moorsoldaten" – the "Peat Bog Soldiers" – which each person translated into his own language. Your faces, ladies and gentlemen, obligate us – French, German and European – to always remember what we owe to Europe.

How would it be possible not to believe in this ideal if one considers the things from which the European Union and the brotherhood of the peoples protect us? And if one sees the Frenchmen and Germans who were together in the hell of the Nazi concentration camps only yesterday, and who have come together today to revive this memory here in Neuengamme.

It is at this place that the voice of the survivors now resound, as they did this morning. They have drawn strength from the deep feeling that they must bear witness, not to live, but to survive. Behind the faces of the survivors of Neuengamme, we can sense those of the millions of men, women and children who perished in the concentration camps. And at each of these places, on this 70th anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camps, France is present for the first time, represented by the gestures and voice of a member of the government.

Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Ravensbrück, Bergen-Belsen, Dachau, Neuengamme: These names are permanently engraved in our memory. They are resounding names that take hold of our hearts and souls. Names that make us shiver and that encourage us to defend the values that were torn away from us by the Nazis at the price of so much suffering.

Let me say to you, the women and men who have survived. Your presence today is the best possible victory over National Socialism. I would like to convey to you the eternal recognition of France for the determination and strength you have shown in not ceasing to raise your voice, to tell your stories, to testify, and to communicate. Your words are a real school of remembrance for our young people, who are exposed to pervasive denials, especially on the Internet, for we must stand by them on the path to remembrance.

And this is not only so that they will grasp what occurred in the death camps – for this goes well beyond what is human, and is often met with incomprehension – but to appeal to their conscience as citizens, as Europeans, and to call upon them to be vigilant. This story must be retold with many voices, to remind people that this hell had European origins. This is the reason why this story calls for a special commitment on the part of us as Europeans. Wherever human dignity is trampled on, where human life is diminished, where peace and freedom are threatened, and violence and hate are sown, Europe is called upon to oppose these trends.

This is the lesson of Neuengamme.

Many thanks.

Sybrand van Haersma Buma, chief member of the Dutch parliament

Someday in 1942 my grandmother got a message that a parcel was waiting for her at the post office. Something extraordinary in wartime. My father, then ten years old, took his bicycle to go to town to fetch it. It turned out he knew the package. It was the food package the family had sent earlier to father, who was in detention. Returned to sender, the addressee was gone, to an unknown destination. My father told me this story sixty years after. It was, as he said, the moment he realized it was likely he would never see his father again.

The next message the family received was the death notice from Neuengamme. A German place they had never heard of. As cause of death it said "cardiale insuffizienz", heart failure, the family had no idea what that meant. My grandfather died December 11th 1942, not even 39 years old. He left behind his wife and four children aging from 2 to 10 years old.

My grandfather, named Sybrand like me, was a mayor in the rural municipality in the province of Friesland in the north of the Netherlands. He was a man with a strong sense of responsibility. Before the war he already fundamentally rejected fascism and national socialism. After the German invasion in May 1940 he turned to active resistance. He openly denounced the oppression and started building an underground network.

During the course of 1941 he was arrested and detained in the infamous prison of Den Haag. After over a year he was transported to the Dutch concentration camp of Amersfoort. From there he disappeared in the "Nacht und Nebel" of Neuengamme.

This is the story of just one name of the over 20 000 remembered here in the "Haus des Gedenkes". One name, unknown to you, but one whose death caused unspeakable grief to his family.

The over 20 000 names are only half of the 43 000 dead of Neuengamme. The others died unnamed. And the 43 000 are only a fraction of the millions who didn't survive the war. And behind those millions stand a multitude of survivors and families left behind with life long pain. Sometimes until today.

A war isn't over after the weapons have fallen silent. A war haunts generations.

Proof of that is that we are with so many here today. The number of people that were eyewitness of the war is declining rapidly this decade. It is the responsibility of the post war generation to keep telling the story. Especially at this place where it all happened.

It is the story of oppression and suffering but also of rising up and resistance against injustice. The story must be told to keep the memory alive but also to warn today's world. The end of the second World War meant liberation from the Nazi terror, but it didn't mean the end of war, dictatorship and violence in Europe. Europe was divided. Eastern Europe came from the one dictatorship in the other. After the reunification of Europa a cruel armed conflict broke out in the Balkan. Today we see hostilities in Eastern Ukraine. Last summer 298 innocent died when they flew over the war zone on their way to holiday or business. Amongst them 196 Dutch citizens. They lost their lives far from home in a conflict that wasn't theirs. War again. Again innocent dying. Again grief that will not be gone with the silence of the weapons. Again families are scarred for life by the horrors of war.

And at the same time, on the borders of Europe in Syria and Iraq, Yemen and Lybia a mediaeval war takes place. Again there are millions scarred for life. And as an export product of that war we are confronted with terrorism in our part of the world. And we see young men and women from here joining the war there. Also for them the story of Neuengamme has to be told. Also for them the 43 000 dead of Neuengamme should be a warning.

Today we remember that 70 years ago the death registers of Neuengamme closed forever. Europe was liberated from Nazism. When time passed conscious grew that Nazism had made victims in all countries, also in Germany, as there were offenders in all countries. Post war Germany led the way to democracy and prosperity. Neighbours turned into friends. Nowadays The Dutch are only annoyed by the Germans when they win the football World Cup again. And German irritation is limited to the endless queue of slow Dutch caravans on the Autobahn each summer.

Seventy years ago also my grandmother and her four children were liberated. The family came out of the war with irreparable damage. Damaged, but without hate. In one of the first summers after the war my grandmother took a girl in from Hamburg. She was a victim of the allied bombings. The girl could relax at the Dutch countryside. My grandmother considered her as much a victim as her own family. The contact remained for the rest of her life.

Let it be our commitment to the victims of Neuengamme to celebrate peace, remember the dead, and warn coming generations.

For as it is written so beautifully on the monument here in Neuengamme:

"Euer Leiden, euer Kampf und euer Tod sollen nicht vergebens sein."