

May 3, 2018

Commemorative Ceremony Program

on the occasion of the 73rd anniversary of the end of the war and the liberation of concentration camps

Opening Speech

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Welcome Speech

Carola Veit, President of the Hamburg Parliament

Speech

written by **Pascal Valliccioni**, survivor of the Neuengamme concentration camp from France, delivered by his daughter **Pascale Evans**

Song "Die Kuhle"

Chamber Choir Altona

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Creative Project "Change of Perspective"

Students of Gymnasium Allee

Commemorative Ceremony on the Occasion of the 73. Anniversary of the End of the War and the Liberation of Concentration Camps

Opening remarks: Detlef Garbe

May 3, 2018, 17:00

Mrs. Veit, President of the Parliament,

Mr. Gaussoit, President of the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme,
ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to greet you on behalf of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial and welcome you to this year's commemorative ceremony of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg on the occasion of the anniversary of the end of the war and the liberation of concentration camps, which we organized together with the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme. I would like to extend a warm welcome to those who have come from afar to pay their respects to the victims of the SS terror here in Neuengamme but also on the sites of the former satellite camps and to stand up against oblivion. We are happy that the survivors of the Neuengamme concentration camp undertook this strenuous trip yet again this year, despite their old age, in order to be here with us and to talk to you about their experiences. Nataliya Radchenko came from Belarus, Pascal Valliccioni from France, Mindu Hornick from Britain is here for the first time, Wim Aloserij and Ivan Moscovich arrived from the Netherlands, Haim Liss, Barbara Lorber, Nahum Rotenberg and Hana Weingarten from Israel, Joanna Kiąca-Fryczkowska and Roman Kamieniecki from Poland, Livia Fränkel from Sweden, Edith Kraus from the Czech Republic, Karl Paiuk and Yevgenij Malykhin from Ukraine and Natan Grtossmann from Munich. We appreciate your being here very much and we see it as a precious gesture so thank you for that. Special thanks goes to Pascal Valliccioni. He was brought to Neuengamme on August 29, 1944 at the age of 18 for his involvement in the resistance. He was forced to work for the Kriegsmarine in the Wilhelmshaven satellite camp. He survived a death march and was liberated in Flensburg after Germany surrendered. His daughter Pascale Evans will deliver his speech because Mr. Valliccioni is afraid he might be overwhelmed by emotions.

Numerous other relatives of former prisoners are among us today. One of them is Mark Van den Driessche, President of the Belgian Amicale who will also address the audience in a moment. His father Urban van den Driessche, who was active in the Belgian resistance against the German occupiers was deported to Neuengamme after his arrest. He died in Hamburg, in the Blohm und Voss satellite camp before his son Mark was born.

President of the Hamburg Parliament will address the audience on behalf of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg. The citizens of Hamburg know that Mrs. Veit has a special connection with the Neuengamme Memorial and our work.

We are pleased to have the representatives of the Consular Corps, church representatives as well as the representatives of the Jewish community and other religious communities among us again this year.

Special thanks to the members of the Altona chamber choir for accompanying our commemorative ceremony. A song "It Is Our 8th of May" by Ilja Richter will be performed today. He is a son of a former prisoner, too. His father Georg Richter survived Neuengamme, its external detail Kaltenkirchen and the Wöbbelin camp which was liberated 73 years ago yesterday by the 82. Airborne Division. Kolja Richter will tell us a few words about the song. Welcome Ilja and Kolja Richter!

The students of Gymnasium Allee will also present the results of the youth project "Change of Perspective" they have been working on together with the staff of the Neuengamme Memorial.

Today we are missing many survivors who supported us till the very end, attended commemorative ceremonies in the past years, gave speeches and were dear friends and companions. Out of those who left us in the past year, I would like to mention Henryk Francuz, Dagmar Lieblová, Karla Raveh, Walter Riga and Gino Sirola. Let us remember these extraordinary people.

In what way does the history continue to have an impact on the families and the public memory and how can memory serve as a warning, especially today when the number of eyewitnesses keeps growing smaller due to the ever-increasing time gap, are the questions that this year's international forum "Future of Remembrance" has been dealing with in the past two days at the Center for Historical Studies. I would like to thank my colleague Oliver von Wrochem and his team as well as everyone else who helped make this ceremony and numerous other events happen. Church volunteers and the Friends of the Neuengamme Memorial are supporting us this year as well, accompanying our guests.

I would like to thank the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media, Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, Bergedorf Borough Assembly, Schleswig-Holstein Memorials Community Foundation, Foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future" and other sponsors for financially supporting numerous events you can read about in the program flyers and enabling us to invite survivors to Hamburg.

For three years, the central commemorative ceremony of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg on the occasion of the anniversary of the end of the war and the liberation of concentration camps has taken place here in Neuengamme on May 3. May 3 was the day when the citizens of Hamburg

surrendered the city to the British troops thus liberating themselves from the Nazi rule. It was also the day on which Cap Arcona and the other ships containing the last 10,000 prisoners of the Neuengamme main camp, brought there by the SS days earlier, were bombed. This morning, during a ceremony at the Cap Arcona Memorial in Nestadt-Pelzerhaken, we commemorated the 6600 prisoners who tragically lost their lives in the attack by the Royal Air Force by drowning in the Baltic Sea or having been shot trying to escape, hours before they would have been liberated.

Anniversaries give us the opportunity to remember. Two days ago we marked the 60. anniversary of the foundation of the Amicale Internationale in Curiohaus which was where the Neuengamme trial took place 1946-1948. Without the engagement of survivors and their associations, the Neuengamme memorial as we know it would not exist today. In twelve weeks, Hamburg will mark 75. anniversary of the air raids in July/August 1943, which led to the destruction of large parts of the city. On that occasion, the Neuengamme Memorial will open an exhibition entitled "Only Rubble Lay Before Us – Deployment of Concentration Camp Prisoners Following Operation Gomorrah" at St. Nikolai Memorial. In November we will remember the end of the First World War, the revolution and the emergence of democracy a hundred years ago. On December 13 we will mark the 80. anniversary of the establishment of the Neuengamme concentration camp.

Despite the ever-increasing time gap, the importance of looking back at history has not waned. Rather it has grown in the time of the surging right-wing populism, antisemitism and racism, threats imposed by autocratic leaders, terrorism and military conflicts around the globe. Survivors and their families, our partners but also many of our visitors ask themselves how much we have learned from the experience with the National Socialist regime.

It is precisely due to the fact there are but a few survivors left, who can talk about the persecution and terror they personally experienced, that the places and witnesses gained even more importance. The memorials which survivors had often fought for themselves are their legacy. They brought the "Never again!" to the present by preserving the relics and sources of history and by passing it on to younger generations through exhibitions and events. These are the places of remembrance, education and they are a warning.

I yield the floor to Mrs. Carola Veit, President of the Hamburg Parliament.

Introduction to the song "It Is Our 8th of May" by Kolja Richter

May 3, 2018

Ladies and gentlemen,

My name is Kolja Richter. I am Georg Richter's grandson. My grandfather was imprisoned in the Neuengamme concentration camp in Hamburg as a resistance fighter. He was deported to various satellite camps. Had he ended up on one of the ships, Cap Arcona or Thielbek, like many of his comrades, I would not be standing here today. However, George was in the Wöbbelin camp in Mecklenburg on the May 3, 1945. On May 2, 1945 he was liberated by the British troops.

My father, Illja Richter, wrote the poem "It Is Our 8th of May", which you are about to hear in a moment, 37 years ago for the peace movement. Uli Schreiber composed music to it. The world has changed in the meantime, but the dream of world peace has not. On this day, May 3, we are commemorating the people who died in the Neuengamme concentration camp, bearing in mind that May 8 is often remembered as the capitulation day and very rarely as that what it really was, is and will always be:

On May 8, nationalism and fascism surrendered to an international alliance, which gave us a chance to live in freedom and democracy we fought for relentlessly. Let us take this chance.

That is why today, on May 3: It Is Our 8th of May

It Is Our 8th of May

by Ilja Richter

Music: Uli Schreiber

It is your, it is my
it is our 8th of May!
It is your, it is my
it is our 8th of May!

And when children ask
who was Anne Frank-
it doesn't matter if you are
Christian, Jewish or atheist.
Let the children know,
let the children know,
what it stands for, what it stands for: 8th of May!

And when children ask
if fascism was a bad thing,
it doesn't matter if you are
Christian, Jewish or Muslim.
Let the children know,
let the children know,
what it stands for, what it stands for: 8th of May!

It is your, it is my, it is our 8th of May
It is your, it is my, it is our 8th of May

And when children ask
if racism is something hateful,
it doesn't matter if you are
Christian, Jewish or whatever.
Let the children know,
let the children know,
what it stands for, what it stands for:
8th of May!

Speech written by Pascal Valliccioni, survivor of the Neuengamme concentration camp from
France, delivered by his daughter Pascale Evans

May 3, 2018

Mrs. Carola Veit,
Mr. Detlef Garbe,
fellow sufferers and family members,
friends,
ladies and gentlemen

My emotions are overwhelming, so my daughter Pascale Evans will deliver my speech.

Thank you for your invitation to the ceremony on the occasion of the 73. anniversary of the end of the war and liberation of concentration camps and for the opportunity to address you today.

Allow me to use this chance to remember my comrades and my friend Raymond Gourlin whom I met in Wilhelmshaven and who passed away on August 17 last year. He was an active member of the board of the Amicale Française de Neuengamme, spokesman for the Wilhelmshaven satellite camp group and fought relentlessly for preserving the memory and for the French-German reconciliation in Wilhelmshaven with his exceptional energy and benevolence. For Mr. Barkowsky, a former mayor of Wilhelmshaven and for us all, Raymond will remain "the symbol of forgiveness and hope for a new beginning." Salut Titi!

I am therefore deeply moved by being given a chance to address you today.

Despite my age, and I am 91 years old, the memory of the Neuengamme concentration camp is still very vivid in my mind and it has been for 73 years now. It is the memory of the work of National Socialists: the abominable dehumanization organized down to the smallest detail - deportations which I survived and which I would like to tell you about.

On September 1, 1944, right after I passed the gates of the Neuengamme concentration camp, my life began to unravel. Within seconds I was no longer a person, nothing. I was only a number, the 43778, a "head", which is what the SS and their henchmen called us, when they counted us on the roll call square. After a few days I was transferred to the Wilhelmshaven satellite camp. What I learned there was that degradation and debasement are worse than physical pain. No one can imagine what kind of mental pain and humiliation we suffered on a daily basis.

In order to survive, we had to adapt to everything and withstand everything: the wind, the rain, the cold, the snow, the dirt, the gloom, the hunger, the sickness, the exhaustion, the fear, the brutality, the horror, death. The fate did the rest.

It is here that the word "survival" gets its true meaning.

Every day, during the day or at night, we went to the armory of the Kriegsmarine where we, concentration camp prisoners, supported German war effort against our will twelve hours a day. This easily replaceable workforce didn't cost anything, on the contrary, it was profitable for the SS, who "delivered" us to German companies. We were serving the largest economy of the Reich to the point of exhaustion.

Destiny played a cruel joke on me, a deportee from the ranks of the Résistance, and I ended up working in the arms production and construction of military facilities. This was hard for us, because the weapons and bombs were used to kill our compatriots and families. The SS knew this, they were cruel and perverse.

But I have also experienced a humane gesture from a German civilian foreman which I would like to tell you about. Two or three times, he gave me a slice of bread in a separate room where I was working. He did that at his own peril. The SS men would have killed him, had they found out. I have often asked myself: was it the bread that helped me stand it all a bit longer? I think it was. I have tried to find this man to thank him or at least a member of his family, but to no avail.

On April 3, the evacuation of the camp began. Four hundred sick prisoners were crammed together into train cars headed for Bergen-Belsen, or that's what we thought. But the train never reached its destination, it was bombed in Lüneburg. The injured were murdered and the few survivors sent to Bergen-Belsen.

The peak of the cruelty were the death marches. On April 5, 1945 the 600 prisoners of the satellite camp were evacuated. We covered 330 km in two weeks under horrible conditions without food or water: Varel, Brake, Bremen-Farge, Hagen, Horneburg, Harburg and Hamburg.

Curtains were drawn in these cities as we marched through. German citizens, molded by National Socialism, showed us no sympathy, no humane gesture. The ideology built on hate, callousness and indifference, leaves people to die helplessly. That is the dreadful trivialization of death.

We arrived in Hamburg on April 17, twelve days after we had set off. The city was largely destroyed in the Allied air raids and it was impossible to reach Neuengamme which had been evacuated as well.

We didn't know at that time that we had escaped certain death, because many prisoners had been sent to the ships anchored in the Bay of Lübeck after the evacuation of the Neuengamme main camp. On May 3, 1945, Cap Arcona, Athen, Deutschland and Thielbek were bombed by the Royal Air Force who were not aware of the fact that prisoners were on board the ships. In less than two hours, 7000 concentration camp prisoners died. The tragedy in the Bay of Lübeck will be recorded in history forever. We, on the other hand, continued our precarious way to the Sandbostel camp, with 12,000 prisoners of the Neuengamme main camp and numerous satellite camps.

How can I forget the atrocities I saw? The piles of naked bodies, stacked like logs, with their petrified gaze, a human wall, more than four meters long and two meters high.

How can I describe my powerlessness, my fear of dying like everyone else there? How can I tell you about mortifying hunger, exhaustion, beatings? How can we talk about our decline, we, who were mere skeletons as we were marched off out of Sandbostel by the SS.

In the night between April 19 and 20, in a complete chaos, we left many comrades behind us, who were either shot or died of typhus.

I remember the night of April 21 when we left Stade on the Olga Siemens coal ship. We went up the canal towards Kiel, crammed in the cargo space, among pieces of coal lying in black water, still without food or water, surrounded by unbelievable stench. It was a stroke of luck that our ship escaped a bombing attack. We arrived in Flensburg on April 30. We left countless dead behind on the ship.

The final attempt of the Nazis to make us, witnesses of their crimes, disappear occurred on May 5, 1945. We were put on the tugboat "Rheinfels", which was supposed to be sunk outside of the German waters, but a propeller damage brought it to a halt. On May 8 we learned of the surrender of Nazi Germany.

Our ordeal ended on May 10, 1945, as the Bernadotte delegation from the Swedish Red Cross took us over.

Together with my surviving comrades, I was brought to the ship Homberg. I arrived in Malmö on May 11, 1945, around half past five in the afternoon.

Sweden was a host country for everyone who was repatriated. They took good care of us, they were very attentive and devoted. Typhus which a lot of deportees contracted at their arrival was unfortunately fatal for some men and women.

It was National Socialism that devised and established concentration camps, the regime which German people supported for 13 years! During the occupation, the French Vichy regime collaborated with the Nazis. We must not forget that.

I would also like to express my appreciation and gratitude to all the official representatives as well as presidents of national and international associations and family members of the deportees. Thank you to the administration of the memorial for your relentless fight to establish the Neuengamme memorial as a place of remembrance, thus saving all of the spirits that the SS reduced to "heads" from oblivion.

It is only by means of a true politics of remembrance that we can act. We, the last of survivors, are the key to eyewitness testimonies.

But what kind of impact do our words have on young people? What kind of trace do they leave behind? Do you know that we bear witness in order to warn you? Do you understand that we do it in order to tell you that hate does not help. Lately, the hate has returned to Europe and the world. The hate that we fought against. It brought back the fear and the anger, the misery and the violence.

How should we protect ourselves? Remembrance is one way, but what will become of it once we, the deportees, are no longer there to tell our stories? I am telling you, we have to – you have to fight it together, build a front, like Stéphane Hessel said, rise up time and again.

My testimony today should serve a noble purpose: humanism, respect towards others, reconciliation.

I wish the tragedy, which my comrades and I experienced, inspires young people to stand for these values. I wish that children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren of the victims and our tormentors stand united in the fight against barbarity. This is what we survivors call to work on remembrance. The purpose of our duty to remember is to never forget the ones who sacrificed themselves to protect these values. Its purpose is to warn, denounce and condemn any attack on human dignity.

I wish the dead will keep teaching the living. That we, concentration camp survivors, who are slowly growing silent, give all the people today something to remember and to take along.

Thank you for your attention.

Mark Van den Driessche's Address

(President of the Belgian Friends of the former political prisoners of the Neuengamme concentration camp and its satellite camps as well as their relatives)

May 3, 2018

Mrs. Veit,
Mr. Vallicioni,
Mr. Garbe,
ladies and gentlemen,
from this moment on I will address you as dear friends.

During numerous trips to Neuengamme, I have had the opportunity to hear many political prisoners talk about the horrors of this concentration camp, standing at this lectern. The testimonies I remember especially vividly are those of Fritz Bringmann, Robert Pinçon and our late president Victor Malbecq. I therefore feel very honored to be able to address you standing here today.

I represent the second generation, those who have not experienced the horrors of concentration camps themselves. However, being a son of a man who never came back from a concentration camp, I have heard horrible stories firsthand.

It was a man called Heinrich Gütting, an engineer at the Blohm und Voss shipyard at the port of Hamburg, who told us about the life of concentration camp prisoners at the shipyard. After he had written a letter to my mother following the end of the war, he also came to visit us. I was five or six at the time, but I can still clearly remember the unbelievable stories he told about the conditions at this satellite camp of Neuengamme. The distribution of soup for instance. The moment the cauldron with hot soup was brought in, it became impossible to hold the starving prisoners back. They tried to eat as much soup as possible with their bare hands! Or how they had to take off all of their clothes and were hosed down with ice-cold water. And how they were forced to stand for hours on end afterwards, until they grew stiff with cold.

Heinrich Gütting was commissioned to manufacture instruments for submarines at Blohm und Voss. For this purpose, he got a group of prisoners from the Neuengamme concentration camp, among them my father Urbain van den Driessche. Heinrich Gütting tried to treat the people the best he could, which was practically impossible due to the strict monitoring by the SS. My father died on January 6, 1945 in Heinrich Gütting's arms.

My father Urbain van den Driessche was not yet 22 as he was arrested in the city of Aalst on August 18, 1944. In 1942, he had joined the resistance group called "Secret Army", lead by his cousin Omer Huylebrouck. This group operated from a small community Woubrechtgem, which lies 40 km away

from Gent and 20 km from Aalst. They organized hiding places for those who refused to work, the resistance fighters, Allied paratroopers and others and provided them with food and drinks, clothing, false documents and work permits. They organized weapon transports and collected information which could be used in military strategic planning.

Their most outstanding mission was saving six Allied crew members of the American bomber B24 Liberator "C for Charlie", from the operation Carpetbagger, which was shot down by German night fighter on its way back to England on May 29, 1944. The resistance fighters then tried to bring the crew members back to England. They kept these people in hiding at their family members' and acquaintances and provided them with food and clothing.

But all necessary things were rationed. In order to procure food, one needed ration coupons. Every family received a certain number of coupons, which were the size of a stamp. They could be used to get a little bit of meat or potatoes. With a letter from the occupier, one could collect the number of marks designated for them at the local post office.

In order to get hold of these coupons, the members of the resistance planned to break into the post office in the city of Aalst. My father and other resistance fighters were supposed to do this on August 18. It turned out that their connection in Aalst was a Sicherheitsdienst agent and he made sure that my father and his friends were arrested in the most brutal manner.

My father was deported to Neuengamme on August 30, 1944, having gone through the prisons in Gent and Antwerpen. The train carrying more than 2000 Belgian prisoners arrived in Neuengamme in the night between September 1-2, 1944. My father was given the prisoner number 45167. Like many others, he did not survive the imprisonment.

I was born on October 13, 1944 and have never met my father.

Dear friends, my story is one among thousands of stories of other concentration camp prisoners. They have one thing in common: the suffering and the powerlessness inflicted upon us by a totalitarian regime in which people seemed to be worthless.

What unifies us is the will to commemorate the victims, the heroes of the Second World War and to fight against senseless violence. That is why Amicale internationale Neuengamme (AIN) was founded. Yesterday we celebrated the 60th anniversary of its foundation in Hamburg.

But who is AIN actually?

The AIN, dear friends, it is you, and you and you and you...

In short, everyone present here, be it from Germany or from another country, who feels the need to be here in Neuengamme today, even if it's only in their thoughts. That is Amicale Internationale Neuengamme.

And that is why I am so happy to see so many of you today at this ceremony. Thank you!