



Amicale
Internationale
KZ Neuengamme



Stadt Neustadt
in Holstein

3, 2022, 11:00 AM

Commemorative Ceremony to Mark the 77th Anniversary of the Air Raid on the Prison Ships on May 3, 1945

Location: Cap Arcona Memorial, Neustadt/Pelzerhaken, Stutthofweg

Wreath laying ceremony at the Cap Arcona Memorial

Opening speech: Kirsten Eickhoff-Weber
Vice president of the Schleswig-Holstein State Parliament

Opening speech: Sönke Sela
Head of the Neustadt Town Council

Opening speech: Dr. Martine Letterie
President of the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme

Speech: Magda Wajsen
granddaughter of Kazimier Wajsen, survivor of the Athen

Speech: Bernard Jeune
son of Eugène Jeune who died aboard the Cap Arcona

Reading: Students of the Küstengymnasium talk about Roger Vyvey,
survivor of the Athen

Kaddish, Jewish Community Lübeck

Musical accompaniment: Jacob-Lienau-Gemeinschaftsschule, Küstengymnasium
Neustadt, Ostholstein Parish Wind Ensemble

The commemorative ceremony is organized by the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme and Neustadt in Holstein and supported by the Working Group Neuengamme, the Brunswiker Foundation, the Schleswig-Holstein Memorials Community Foundation and the Foundation of Hamburg Memorials and Learning Centers Commemorating the Victims of Nazi Crimes.



Kirsten Eickhoff-Weber
Vice President of the Schleswig-Holstein State Parliament
May 3, 2022
Neustadt-Pelzerhaken

Mr. Sela,
Ms. Letterie,
Ms. Wajsen,
Mr. Jeune,
Members of the Jewish community Lübeck,
Ladies and gentlemen,
relatives, children and grandchildren of the victims of the Nazi regime,

We have gathered here today to remember the 7,000 dead who 77 years ago fell victim to Nazis' barbarian extermination mania and the most brutal crime against humanity the world has ever seen.

They have found their final resting place here, their "eternal home" within sight of the place where they died. And - we must never forget this! - they have found their final resting place where their oppressors and murderers lived.

Can a person, can a soul, find peace like that?

This question is on the minds of the relatives of the victims of the bombing of the Cap Arcona, Thielbek and Athen on May 3, 1945 and it is on our minds, of those whose ancestors committed the millionfold murder.

The fact that we are standing together here today and remembering the victims shows that we are treading a path which was unimaginable 77 years ago.

We are grateful that a child and a grandchild of two former prisoners will address us today on behalf of all the victims.

You, Ms. Wajsen, and you, Mr. Jeune, will speak on behalf of your grandfather and father respectively, who fell victim to a cruel play the SS staged in the Neustadt Bay.

History often seems distant. But relatives, parents and siblings, they are and remain close to us. And you remembering your murdered relatives today moves us in a very special way.

The commemoration of the dead includes the Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the dead, which is said today by members of the Lübeck Jewish community. We are grateful that Jewish life is now once again an integral part of our society and that 77 years after the Shoah, Jewish communities once again hold religious services here in Schleswig-Holstein.

Jewish life belongs to us, and every democrat has to make sure that it can exist freely today.

It is a great privilege to remember the victims together with you today. In the face of the indescribable crimes of the past, we are humbled and grateful for the miracle of reconciliation.

The city of Neustadt, the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme, the Kinder- und Jugendnetzwerk Neustadt and many other initiatives that actively support the process of coming to terms with the past have also contributed to this. Many citizens have been involved in this process and have taken the initiative to help shape the way we remember and commemorate the events which occurred on this day 77 years ago.

Remembering the Nazi crimes would lose its meaning if it were observed solely by the state. Remembrance is only credible and can only be filled with life if it comes from within ourselves, as a result of an inner urge and a personal concern of us citizens.

Civic engagement, the willingness to talk and listen and no longer "keep quiet" are indispensable and they all must continue to have an effect in our society. Because anti-Semitism, racism and hatred of all things foreign have not disappeared from the world or from Germany.

Coming together to commemorate victims is therefore not only a way to remember and honor them, but a reminder to us all to do everything in our power to make sure such a crime against humanity never happens again.

In the face of the legacy of the past, it is our duty as convinced democrats to take a clear stance and stand firmly against anti-Semitism, racism and any form of discrimination and rejection. We all bear the responsibility for this, every day, no matter where we are.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank all of you, especially the relatives of the victims. Let us honor and remember the victims together today, so that their suffering is never forgotten. May their fate be a reminder of the importance of understanding, reconciliation and peace to future generations!

Thank you.

Sönke Sela
Head of the Neustadt Town Council
May 3, 2022
Neustadt-Pelzerhaken

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to offer you a warm welcome as the Head of the Neustadt Town Council and on behalf of Mirko Spieckermann, the Mayor of Neustadt. Allow me to share my first impression with you: It is overwhelming to see so many join us here today - to be honest, I would hardly have thought it possible. But that may also be due to the fact that for two years, 2020 and 2021, we were only able to hold a silent commemorative ceremony in a very small circle, and this year we have come together again to let our thoughts return to those who experienced something so dreadful here in the immediate vicinity of the place where we are sitting today.

I am especially thankful to the Vice President of the Schleswig-Holstein State Parliament, Ms. Eickhoff-Weber, for being here in Neustadt for two days despite the election campaign. This also shows the importance the state parliament and the state of Schleswig-Holstein ascribe to the events of that time as well as their commemoration. Thank you very much for that!

Yes, I would also like to extend a warm welcome to the President; thank you for the wonderful preparatory work the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme has done, as always. It is nice that, unlike in the past, we now have many young people here, because – and I will come to that later - it is very important to pass on what we are feeling now.

Just a side note: I was asked to give a very short speech and I would like to stick to it, because I know the timetable is very tight today.

All of us who live in the immediate vicinity feel the special obligation to commemorate the victims of the catastrophe of May 3, 1945 and I remember, back in my school days, that we also walked over here every May 3.

However, the memory of these events, of the inhuman Nazi dictatorship, also makes it clear that it is our duty, and it is imperative, to stand up for democracy again and again. You have emphatically and forcefully pointed out this responsibility, Ms. Vice President. It is even more important that we comply with this request, because unfortunately we are witnessing right-wing ideas gaining ground once again, not only in Germany, but also in other neighboring countries. This must not happen and that is

why it is important that our young people are here and that they understand: What you are witnessing here today can be passed on, even when you are adults, and as young Neustadt residents who have lived and grown up here, you should always feel this very special duty which all of us here feel towards the victims and their relatives.

By the way – just a tip – in today's issue of the WELT there is an article about Mr. Wim Alroserij, who kept coming back here until he reached very old age and unfortunately passed away four years ago aged 93 on his trip to Neustadt. It is a very detailed article that I can only recommend to everyone.

I wish us all that we remember this day and that we remember it especially at a moment in the not too distant future, when for the first time in a long time the weapons in Russia and Ukraine fall silent again. I think that is a very important wish of us all, that this senseless killing soon comes to a definitive end.

Thank you!

Martine Letterie
President of the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme
May 3, 2022
Neustadt-Pelzerhaken

Vice President of the State Parliament,
Major of the city of Neustadt,
Magda, Bernard, survivors of the Neuengamme concentration camp, relatives,
friends,

My name is Martine Letterie and I am the president of the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme, the umbrella organization of friends of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial from Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain. We are an association of former Neuengamme prisoners and their relatives.

Today we remember the shipping disaster which took place here shortly before the end of World War II. On May 3, 1945 at 3 p.m., while Montgomery was negotiating the surrender with a German delegation at Lüneburg Heath, British Typhoons attacked the ships Cap Arcona and Thielbek in the Lübeck Bay on the assumption that German troops were on board.

Nothing could have been further from the truth. In the days prior to this, thousands of prisoners of the Neuengamme concentration camp were crammed onto these two ships and the Athen after the camp was evacuated. In this way, the Nazis attempted to cover up the traces of atrocities which had taken place in Neuengamme. The conditions on the ships in the days leading up to May 3 were possibly even worse than in the concentration camp. There was hardly any light and air, and some prisoners got nothing to eat for days.

At the time of the attack, there were approximately 7,000 prisoners aboard the Cap Arcona and 2,500 to 3,000 aboard the Thielbek. The Cap Arcona caught fire and the Thielbek sank almost immediately. All hell broke loose on both ships. The prisoners tried to save their lives, but only a few succeeded. Most of them drowned or were killed in the flames. The British planes shot at the drowning prisoners while the German SS men and the members of the Hitler Youth shot at those who reached the shore. Seven thousand people died a horrible death. In a Dutch documentary about the disaster, a resident of Neustadt who was a boy at the time recalled: "I saw a sea of bald heads. I will never forget this image, as long as I live."

It was a catastrophe of international proportions, not only due to the enormous number of victims but also to the fact that they were not only from Germany, but from all the countries occupied by the Nazis or at war with them: the Baltic countries, Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Ukraine, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Russia. A catastrophe that must never be forgotten.

The first commemorative ceremony was held in this place on May 7, 1945 by the representatives of the British army and former prisoners. They chose this place because it is where the temporary graves of the victims of another terrible incident which took place in the early morning of May 3 were located: the execution of at least 257 prisoners of the Stutthof concentration camp.

In 1946, a committee headed by a Norwegian survivor of the Stutthof concentration camp was formed at the initiative of a committee of Polish survivors of the DP camp. The new committee determined the form and the inscription of the monument. The Polish-German former prisoner Paul Stassek, who worked in the orderly room of the Neuengamme concentration camp, wrote the text. The monument was inaugurated in 1947 and was financed by the prisoners' committee.

Since then, commemorative ceremonies have been held here every year. For several years now, they have been organized by the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme and the City of Neustadt. The AIN appreciates the collaboration and the city's commitment to the organization of the commemorative ceremony as well as to the new museum. We are pleased to see the events of May 3, 1945 presented to international visitors in an adequate and contemporary manner in the future.

In the past, the survivors themselves told their stories here and today people related to them or otherwise involved tell their stories for them. Today, Bernard Jeune will speak about his father, Eugene Jeune, a Frenchman, who died here on May 3, 1945. Magda Wajsen from Poland will speak about her grandfather Kazimierz Wajsen who survived the shipping disaster aboard the Athen. The students of the Küstengymnasium will speak about the Belgian survivor Roger Vyvey.

By remembering this terrible event and other heinous crimes of the Nazi regime we raise awareness of the importance of the rule of law. In the past few months, we were reminded that it is not to be taken for granted. The survivors of this catastrophe and the Neuengamme concentration camp had experienced this firsthand.

It was not without reason that the founders of the Amicale Internationale formulated the main goal of the organization as follows: maintaining European peace and security. They advocated international rapprochement, strengthening of the international relations and the fight against neo-Nazism, neofascism and revanchism. That is why the story of the catastrophe in the Lübeck Bay must be passed on, especially now.

Magdalena Wajsen
Granddaughter of a prisoner of the Neuengamme concentration camp
May 3, 2022
Neustadt-Pelzerhaken

Good morning

I am happy to be here speaking to you, so thank you for that! My name is Magdalena Wajsen and I am the granddaughter of Kazimierz Wajsen, a prisoner of the Neuengamme concentration camp.

My grandfather was sent to Germany for forced work in May 1942 and had to work for a farmer in Hamburg. In April 1944, he was accused of participating in an illegal gathering and singing patriotic songs and transferred to the Hamburg-Wilhelmsburg penal camp ("Langer Morgen"). He was released two months later and sent to work at a metal manufacturing factory. On October 14, 1944, he was arrested for sabotage at a civilian workers' camp in the Hamburg-Billbrook district. He and several other men were suspected of having been involved in the scheme. Some of the prisoners were brutally beaten during interrogations.

Five months later, in early March 1945, he was sent to the Neuengamme concentration camp. He received the prisoner number 76633. In late April 1945, my grandfather was transported to Lübeck together with other prisoners. He was initially taken aboard the Athen, after a few days he was moved with other prisoners to the Cap Arcona and then back to the Athen. He stayed there until May 3, 1945. The Athen did not sink because it was taken back to the harbor to take more prisoners on board. My grandfather survived; he was one of the lucky ones who were granted a new life.

Following the liberation, in the DP camp in Wentorf near Neuengamme grandfather Kazimierz met my grandmother Jadwiga, who was a liberated forced worker. After numerous horrible experiences, something wonderful happened: they fell in love, went to Lodz and got married.

As a child I already knew that my grandfather had been a concentration camp prisoner, but I didn't know anything else, I didn't understand. My grandfather died when I was only 10 years old. Following my grandmother's death in 2014, I found my grandfather's notes, documents and letters from the Neuengamme Memorial in my

grandparents' house. I contacted the Memorial and am very happy to be able to honor my grandfather's memory by talking about him and his experiences.

My first visit to Neuengamme was very emotional for me, primarily because for many years my grandfather could not prove that he had been imprisoned in Neuengamme. He kept looking for evidence and wrote letters to Arolsen and Neuengamme. It was only after he died that the letters from the Neuengamme Memorial arrived. My grandmother unfortunately never responded to any of them, maybe she did not want to dwell on the past.

For me it was very important because for years my grandfather tried to prove he had been there, he survived, but he did not manage to document it and I could not ignore that. That is why I felt like crying when I visited the Memorial for the first time, because this is where he suffered, because so many people were killed in this place.

But the most emotional thing was that my grandfather died before he managed to tell me about what he had experienced, because I was too young to process such information. And here I am, almost 30 years after his death, in this place, his name is on the list of former prisoners, nobody doubts it anymore, there are documents that prove it.

In my head, I said the words: "Look, grandpa, I am here, under this sky, on this earth." Now I can talk about him and about what he lived through, what kind of person he was and the fact that my grandparents fell in love in Hamburg.

So many victims of the disaster in Neustadt have nobody to remember them, they have no family left or had been too young to even start one. And that is why it is important that we are here today, that we talk about this. I think it is very important that we tell young people what we know about what happened, because it must not be forgotten, and it must never happen again. Every person, every victim of the war matters, and for someone they could have been the most important thing in the world. The victims of the Neustadt disaster are not "them", everyone is their own person, an individual, each one a tragedy of their own, "they" deserve to be remembered.

Honor their memory! Never again war!

Bernard Jeune
Son of a prisoner of Neuengamme concentration camp
3 May 2022
Neustadt-Pelzerhaken

I thank you for the invitation to give this short speech about my father, Eugene Jeune, who, as a young 27-year-old doctor died on Cap Arcona on May 3, 1945.

He was affiliated with the French resistance movement "Combat" and participated in a resistance group in my native town Lyon. As a young doctor in a big hospital, he was responsible for the liaison between the city and the training schools in the French alps via the accomodation and transport possibilities provided by the hospital.

He was arrested on April 20, 1944, by the "butcher from Lyon", Klaus Barbie, who was the head of Gestapo. He was kept imprisoned in the infamous Montluc prison, where so many French resisters were imprisoned and from there transferred to interrogation and torture by Klaus Barbie and his torturers in Gestapo's headquarter in Lyon.

Shortly before Lyon was liberated in August 1944, my father was transported by train to the Compiègne collection camp, north of Paris, and from there by train to Neuengamme on July 28, 1944. In Neuengamme, he worked as a prison-doctor in Revier II. Here he cooperated with other prison-doctors from different countries, among others a Danish doctor, Gregers Jensen, who after the war became my stepfather (I reported more about that last year online).

As I was only half a year old when my father was captured by Gestapo, I have no remembrance of him, and I have not been able to create emotional ties to him. Yet he has always been there in my memory and in my thoughts, and also in my family's thoughts and conversations.

I have often thought about how he died on Cap Arcona. A French coprisoner, who succeeded in jumping in the sea and swimming ashore, later told my mother that he - climbing up to the deck of the ship - had seen my father helping burned coprisoners. If it is right, he first died after the bombings. But how did he die? Did he burn to death, like many of the burning coprisoners, he as a doctor tried to help? Was he suffocated by smoke or did he drown? He probably didn't jump into the sea, as he couldn't swim (he was a runner and a mountaineer).

Although we have some surviving prisoners' reports on the hell that was on the bombarded Cap Arcona, it is almost impossible to imagine what terrible sufferings each of the thousands of prisoners had to endure before dying on the Cap Arcona or in the sea around the ship.

Just until recently, one could have hoped that such war-tragedies would not be repeated, at least not on European land. But unfortunately, it did happen again. Although you have to be careful about comparing different war tragedies, the horrific consequences of the bombings in Mariupol and other cities in Ukraine, reminded me again of what my father went through.

We must never forget what war can lead to of human suffering. And we must never forget how important it is to resist, even though it can have great costs. It is, therefore, important to keep the memory of these tragedies alive.

I am looking forward to the opening of the new Cap Arcona Museum here in Neustadt and will soon visit it with my children and grandchildren.

Project by the Working Group Neuengamme and the Küstengymnasium Neustadt
May 3, 2022
Neustadt-Pelzerhaken

Students of the Küstengymnasium Neustadt learned the story of the Belgian resistance fighter Roger Vyvey (1920-2003) through a project.

Who was Roger Vyvey?

Roger Vyvey lived in Nieuwpoort, Belgium. The town was located in the restricted zone established by the German occupiers for the construction of the Atlantic Wall. In 1942, Roger Vyvey joined a resistance group which collected information for the British army. On April 14, 1944, he was arrested by the German military police after the group was betrayed. The Germans interrogated and tortured him before deporting him from Antwerpen in a cattle car with 2000 other people on August 30, 1944.

In the Neuengamme concentration camp, Roger Vyvey was given the prisoner number 44444. He was one of 400 Belgian prisoners who were forced to work for the Deschimag shipyard in the Bremen-Blumenthal satellite camp. After a machine was damaged, Roger Vyvey was accused of sabotage and tortured as a punishment.

In early April 1945, the satellite camp was evacuated. The prisoners were initially forced on a death march and then taken by cattle cars to Lübeck via Neuengamme and loaded onto ships. What Roger Vyvey would remember most vividly later in life was his fellow prisoners dying on the Cap Arcona and the Athen in the days leading up to May 3. He belonged to a group of prisoners who escaped the bombs because they were liberated on the Athen on May 3, 1945.

Roger Vyvey was very weak. After returning to his mother, he realized that his stories about imprisonment were met with disbelief. He was a member of the Belgian prisoners' association Belgische Vriendenkring Neunegamme.

His grandson Kristof van Mierop learned about his grandfather's story and joined the Vriendenkring following a trip to Neuengamme and Bremen in 2015. He is now secretary general of the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme.

Kristof van Mierop provided the material for the project and was available to answer the students' questions. The project was a cooperation between the Küstengymnasium Neustadt and the Working Group Neuengamme (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Neuengamme e.V.) and took place in April 2022.

The history of the Cap Arcona cemetery of honor and the Memorial in Neustadt-Pelzerhaken

Every year we commemorate here at the Cap Arcona Cemetery of Honor the approximately 7000 dead of May 3, 1945. We, the prisoners' associations of the survivors, relatives and surviving dependents of Neuengamme Concentration Camp, commemorate here together with the city of Neustadt, the state of Schleswig-Holstein and many civil society initiatives.

From this spot we can overlook the sites of the sinking of the Cap Arcona and the Thielbek. We gather here in mourning.

Who do we commemorate here?

In this cemetery of honor lie 621 dead concentration camp prisoners in individual graves. Very few dead have been identified. The dead came from four different concentration camps. The largest group were prisoners of the Neuengamme concentration camp and its subcamps, which were evacuated as of April 20, 1945. Another group were prisoners, among them women, who reached this beach on the morning of May 3 coming from the Stutthof concentration camp in two barges. And finally, there were prisoners on the Cap Arcona and the Thielbek from a death march that had reached the Neustadt region, more precisely the villages of Siblin and Glasau, coming from the Auschwitz-Fürstengrube subcamp and the Mittelbau-Dora concentration camp.

The prisoners of the Stutthof concentration camp had been stranded at this location on two barges during the night of May 3, 1945. In the morning hours of May 3, SS, marines and other uniformed Germans shot at least 257 defenseless prisoners on the barges, here on the beach and on the march to Neustadt.

On the site of today's cemetery of honor, provisional graves for the murdered prisoners of the Stutthof concentration camp were laid out on May 3 and the following days. Dead from the Cap Arcona and Thielbek that had washed up on the coast were also buried here and at numerous other sites along the coast.

On May 7, 1945, representatives of the British Army and hundreds of former prisoners held a memorial service for the dead at the graves in Neustadt-Pelzerhaken.



Commemoration at a grave in Neustadt-Pelzerhaken on May 7, 1945. Photo: Moldvay, Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial Archive

Why is the cemetery of honor located here?

From May to August 1946, the regular cemetery for 412 (as of 1950), now 621 dead of Neuengamme, Stutthof, Auschwitz and Mittelbau-Dora concentration camps was created on the site of the provisional graves. Dead were transferred to this cemetery from 43 temporary graves on the coast and the temporary grave at this site; then newly found dead from the beaches were interred here.

Dead identified as Jews were buried in the newly created Jewish cemetery in Neustadt. The dead were to be identified in 1946. However, this was only possible for a few, because the dead had not been examined in 1945 and because even the prisoner number, if ascertainable, did not provide any certain information, because the dead could have come from four different camps.

In 1946, on the initiative of a committee of Polish survivors from the DP camp, a commission was formed under UNRRA director Einar Hjellemo (a Norwegian survivor of Stutthof concentration camp), which included one representative from each of three Eastern European committees and one representative of the German former prisoners. This committee determined the shape and inscription of the memorial, which is still valid today. The Polish-German former prisoner Paul Stassek, former inmate of the camp writing room of Neuengamme Concentration Camp, drafted the text. The memorial, inaugurated on July 6, 1947, was financed by the prisoners' committees themselves.



Inauguration of the memorial in 1947, photo: Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial Archives.

We would like to thank the Arolsen Archives, the Neustadt City Archives, the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial Archives, and the Ministry of the Interior of the State of Schleswig-Holstein for information and access to archival materials.