

Slave Labour

The preparation for a visit to the
Neuengamme Concentration
Camp Memorial

The Neuengamme concentration camp was initially established as a "work camp" for the production of clinker bricks. The prisoners had to perform hard labour. In the second half of the war, armaments production became the main focus of work in the Neuengamme concentration camp.



An indoor photo of the Messap workshop on the grounds of the Neuengamme concentration camp. An illegal photo by a worker, ca. 1944

A Belgian resistance fighter Pierre de Tollenaere was accused of sabotage and executed while working for Jastram, as a prisoner at the Neuengamme concentration camp. Whether he made a mistake unintentionally or intentionally remains unclear.

Josef Händler, a former political prisoner from Austria, remembers the execution:

"Around one o'clock in the afternoon [...] all the prisoners were summoned on the roll call square and lined up in three rows. [...] Then I saw Tollenaere being brought to the gallows by two block leaders. His hands were handcuffed behind his back. Thumann read the death sentence aloud, which ran something like this: In the name of the Reichsführer of the SS Himmler a Belgian Tollenaere is sentenced to death by hanging and will be executed." Thumann raised his right hand and then let it fall again. Tollenaere was then brought to the platform and the handcuffs were taken off of his hands. He screamed something like: "Long live the Belgian resistance movement!" Two prisoners then placed the noose around his neck and pulled the platform from under his feet so that he was hanging by his neck."

Josef Händler, undated report (Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial, Archives)



The prisoners of the Neuengamme concentration camp in the clay pit, mining and transporting the raw materials, 1942

Why do you think the execution was carried out in the presence of other prisoners?

Look at the two photographs and the text and think about what kind of physical and psychological hardships the prisoners in different work commands were exposed to.

Write down the questions regarding different work commands or the resistance, which you would like to look into more closely when you visit the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial.