

May 3, 2024

## Program for the Commemorative Ceremony

Marking the 79<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the End of the War and the Liberation of the Concentration Camps

Music	<b>Violin Sonata</b> No.1 in G minor, solo, BWV 1001, Adagio (1st movement) by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
Welcoming address	<b>Prof. Dr Oliver von Wrochem</b> <i>Director of the Foundation of Hamburg Memorials and Learning Centers</i>
Greeting	<b>Carola Veit</b> <i>President, Parliament of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg</i>
Greeting	<b>Anja Hajduk</b> <i>State Secretary at the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action</i>
Music	<b>Ein jüdisches Kind</b> (A Jewish Child) by Carlo Sigmund Taube (1897-1944) In 1941, the Nazis deported the Austrian composer and pianist Carlo Sigmund Taube and his family to Theresienstadt. From there, they were taken to Auschwitz in 1944 and murdered. Of the compositions he wrote in Theresienstadt, A Jewish Child is Taube's only surviving work.
Discussion	<b>Dita Kraus</b> <i>Survivor of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp, in conversation with young people</i>

Music

**Mir lebn ejbig** by Leyb Rozental (1916-1945)

Rozental composed the song in the Vilnius ghetto, where he and his family were forced to live from 1941; there he was involved in "cultural activities". The ghetto was destroyed in 1943 and its inhabitants murdered. Rozental was deported to the Klooga concentration camp in Estonia and murdered in early 1945.

Speech

**Jan van den Hoorn**

*Chairman, Stichting Oktober 44 (Putten, Netherlands)*

Music

**Die Moorsoldaten** (The Peat Bog Soldiers)

This protest song was written in 1933 by "political" prisoners at the Börgermoor concentration camp in Emsland. According to the composer Rudi Goguel, the song was written "as a deliberate protest song by resistance fighters against their oppressors, as a public demonstration of our higher morals in the face of the barbarity of the SS. "

Musical accompaniment by prize winners and scholarship holders of the association Jugend musiziert Förderverein Hamburg e. V.: **Magdalena Mahnke** (violin), **Gabriel von Dehn** (baritone) and **Mathis Simon** (baritone), also featuring **Natalie Böttcher** (accordion)

This will be followed by a wreath-laying ceremony at the former arrest bunker.

Musical accompaniment: **Nikolas Oberländer** (clarinet)

## Oliver von Wrochem

Ms. Edith Kraus, dear Dita,

Honorable President of the Hamburg Parliament, dear Carola Veit,

Honorable State Secretary at the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action,

Ms. Anja Hajduk,

Dear Chairman of the Stichting Oktober 44, Jan van den Hoorn,

Esteemed Representatives of the Bundestag, Senate, Parliament, and the Consular Corps,

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends, especially those of you who are survivors of the Neuengamme concentration camp,

Together with you, we would like to commemorate the 79<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the war and the liberation of concentration camps. On behalf of all the staff, as the Head of the Foundation and Director of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial, I extend a warm welcome to you.

Those among us who survived persecution and violence in the Neuengamme concentration camp are now advanced in age. Therefore, we are very fortunate to have with us today Edith Kraus from Netanya and Prague, who will address us later on, along with other survivors of the Nazi concentration camps: Livia Fränkel from Stockholm, Helga Melmed from Venice in Florida, and Barbara Piotrowska from Warsaw. They are taking active part in our program through eyewitness accounts, intergenerational discussions, and a conversation café with young people. A heartfelt thank you to all of you for undertaking the arduous journey to Hamburg.

I am also very pleased that delegations from the member associations of the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme and family members of former prisoners of the Neuengamme concentration camp from Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Spain, Israel, Ukraine, and the USA have traveled to this commemorative event. As descendants of former prisoners of the Neuengamme concentration camp, you join us in remembering the crimes committed at this site and advocate for remembrance in your respective countries. For this, I sincerely thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

As the number of former prisoners who can bear witness to Nazi atrocities grows smaller, it becomes increasingly important for us to preserve their memory, their experiences, and their messages for future generations. This task becomes more urgent with the increasing distance from the historical events; not only because they are fading from the consciousness of many people, but also because the trivialization and denial of Nazi crimes are no longer marginal phenomena in our society. Rather, the shift of political discourse towards the far right is increasingly and directly affecting memorials, jeopardizing their work.

Therefore, we are also pleased to have the representatives of the state and federal governments address us today, which shows that the remembrance of Nazi crimes is firmly anchored in the German democratic society at both the state and federal levels.

Today, we reflect on the fact that most prisoners of the Neuengamme concentration camp did not live to see the end of the war and the liberation, which in Hamburg took place on May 3, when the city surrendered without a fight. Those who were still alive had been hastily taken from the city by the Nazi elite. Tens of thousands had perished in captivity, and thousands more died in the final weeks of the war on death marches or in camps from malnutrition, disease and exhaustion – or they fell victim to massacres. On May 3, about 7,000 of them lost their lives in the Bay of Lübeck. Their fates are at the heart of our commemoration today.

As in previous years, last year also saw the passing of many survivors of the Neuengamme concentration camp. I would now like to read out the names of those whose deaths we have learned of in the past 12 months.

Stefania Bajer, Salomon Birenbaum, Cor Bos,

Cornelis Feenstra, Marian Hawling, Alexey Yefimenko,

Louis Malzieu, Karl Payuk, Anna Puchajda,

François H. M. Raveau, Anton Rudniev,

Eva Smolková-Keulemansová, Rola Sochachefski.

This year, our commemoration is once again overshadowed by Russia's ongoing illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, which continues to bring endless suffering to so many people. Together with the voluntary organization Friends of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial, private initiatives, and in collaboration with a support network for survivors of Nazi persecution, we continue to assist survivors of the Neuengamme concentration camp and

their descendants from Ukraine in this difficult situation. Several relatives of former prisoners from Ukraine are with us today, and I want to extend a very warm welcome to them.

Since October 2023, we have witnessed another war that directly affects our work, as we have diverse contacts with survivors and their family members from Israel itself, as well as close connections with Jewish communities and descendants of Jewish victims. Since Hamas's inhumane attack on Israel on October 7, which resulted in more than 1,100 casualties, we have seen a significant increase in antisemitism in Germany from various sides, which we vehemently oppose. However, I am also troubled by the speechlessness in the face of the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip, which has claimed thousands of Palestinian lives and where more than 120 Israelis continue to be held hostage. I have encountered far too often a lack of empathy rather than compassion for all the innocent victims that Hamas's massacre and the subsequent war in the Gaza Strip have claimed and continue to claim.

We observe with deep concern the AfD increasingly evolving into a platform for far-right and revisionist positions. Additionally, memorial sites in Germany are increasingly confronted with far-right motivated statements, actions, and attacks aimed at delegitimizing the engagement with National Socialism and its consequences which form the foundation of our democratic understanding today. We are experiencing more and more hate and incitement to violence in the society. We are apprehensive about the upcoming elections, especially the European Parliament election and the state elections in Saxony, Brandenburg, and Thuringia.

It is our collective responsibility to openly address the social divides caused by the COVID-19 crisis and other global crises as well as their economic consequences, and to unite democratic forces to protect and strengthen our open and diverse society. We must also show those who are dissatisfied with the state of affairs in our country ways to positively shape our society. While it remains significant to educate people about where far-right ideologies have led in the past, I believe that alone is not enough. We also need positive answers to the question of what kind of world we actually want to live in and why our democracy is so valuable. Memorial sites must also play a more active role in these debates.

In closing, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to all participants. In addition to the speakers and the young people who will engage in a conversation with Dita Kraus, I would also like to highlight the musical contributions to our commemorative event by Jugend musiziert under the guidance of Susanne von Salisch. Nikolas Oberländer will accompany the wreath laying ceremony on the clarinet. A big thanks also goes to those who made the earlier events

as well as the program for today and the coming days possible, including – to name but a few – Dr. Alexandre Froidevaux and Sophia Annweiler. To everyone here today, thank you for your support and for joining us in remembrance!

Following this commemorative event, we will proceed together to the so-called detention bunker in the grounds of the former prisoners' compound to hold a memorial ceremony there.

With that, I now yield the floor to the President of the Hamburg Parliament.

Translation/ Übersetzung: Ana Buka

## Carola Veit

Representatives of Amicale Internationale and all participating associations of former prisoners and their relatives,

Members of the Consular Corps,

State Secretary and colleagues from the German Parliament,

Senator Brosda,

Professor von Wrochem,

Ladies and Gentlemen

"Whoever hears an eyewitness, becomes an eyewitness." So said holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel in his speech at Yad Vashem.

And so I'm particularly delighted that dear Dita Kraus is with us today and will speak to us in a moment.

It's hard to describe in words the never-ending suffering unleashed more than 79 years ago by this place, the Neuengamme concentration camp and its satellite camps.

This following sentence of yours, Dita Kraus, moved me deeply. You said, "It's as if I am able only to talk about the peripheral aspects, never the wound itself." Perhaps this describes exactly the inexpressible nature of this horror.

The prisoners at Neuengamme concentration camp and its satellite camps were forced into slave labour, in cruel and most inhumane conditions. For instance they had to assemble pistols for their enemies and tormentors in the Walther Factories where we're gathered today. I'd like to remind you that there were close connections between the concentration camp and city society. The prisoners laboured in almost all areas, but particularly in the armaments industry. All over the city, they had to do the "dirty work" that the National Socialists felt was beneath them: defusing bombs, clearing rubble, recovering bodies. It was hard, physical work, constantly in mortal danger, with hardly any food. Anyone who disobeyed was severely punished, often with death. It was more than the soul could bear for anyone who survived this hell. And, as is now well documented, this was done in full view of the people of Hamburg, who for years clung to the oft-cited post-war narrative that "we knew nothing".

Today, May the third, is the 79th anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camp by the British and of the end of the war in Hamburg. We commemorate all victims of the National Socialists – and we also use this day as an opportunity to remember all people throughout the world who are affected by crises, wars or terror today.

Such important work of remembrance requires places of commemoration such as this one. They can enable us to make a connection to the present day at the sites where those horrors took place: as places of commemoration and remembrance, as places of encounter and – for later generations more importantly than ever – as places of learning.

According to a recent study, almost one in four people aged between 14 and 29 in Germany sympathise with right-wing populists. How could it have come to this? International crises and rising inflation coupled with rising housing costs are driving these young people to reject immigrants. The researchers say this is largely due to anxiety about their own futures. But haven't we in Germany experienced mechanisms like this before, and don't we know where fascism leads us? Have decades of awareness-raising and democratic education achieved so little? No, it's not quite like that. I'd like to remind you of the hundreds of thousands who took to the streets in recent months to demonstrate against the plans of the extreme right, many young people among them. On the one hand, that's encouraging. On the other, fascism didn't simply end with the Second World War. Antisemitism, hatred and rabble-rousing have increased noticeably across all social classes. And so, unfortunately, has the number of right-wing motivated acts of violence, including here in Hamburg.

In my view, that's what makes the work of remembrance and the commitment of eyewitnesses so important: People in our society today, not just young people, but people of all ages, including refugees, need to hear the harrowing, sometimes almost unbearable details about the atrocities committed by the Nazis in order to understand, indeed empathise with, what was done to Jews in the Holocaust, the Shoa, and to all victims of National Socialism. They need to understand, and to do so at an emotional level, what lies behind the abstract concepts from history lessons and to develop empathy. They need to understand where right-wing thinking starts: with the conviction that one person is "worth" more than another, based on whatever characteristics we ascribe to them. Only those who understand the causes and connections are able to expose and call out racist ideas as such. And if you can tell apart serious



sources from conspiracy mongering, you won't be so likely to fall for what I call – in inverted commas – "modern propaganda" on TikTok or other so-called social media channels.

"Hate isn't natural. Hate is something you learn," as you said, Dita Kraus. You went on: "People have to be educated against hate. If we begin today and the next generation carries on with it, there's hope." You yourself were 13 when you were imprisoned with your mother by the Nazis, and you had to spend the whole of your puberty in the camps.

Thank you for coming today, at the age of 94, so speak with the young people. Thank you for continually finding the strength to shock us and shake us up – and yet for still being full of courage and hope. For remembering, as so many eyewitnesses recount, also means facing the unbearable pain again and again and keeping the wound raw.

But there are fewer and fewer eyewitnesses. Liberation 79 years ago also entails the duty to preserve their names and stories, to keep this heritage alive and to pass it on to future generations. The Hamburg Parliament is aware of this responsibility and therefore celebrates every day of remembrance with dignity and as publicly as possible. As President, participation by young people is particularly close to my heart. We organise formats especially for school students, such as staged readings. From laying "Stolpersteine" – pavement plaques to commemorate victims of the Nazi regime – to interactive digital exhibitions and new formats such as comics, we need to create new places for the future of remembrance that establish connections between then and now. We have to keep asking ourselves critically what it takes for these places to become visible, and how we can create links in these places to refugees seeking protection in our city, so that we can make encounters and tolerance possible.

My thanks to all the staff of the Stiftung Hamburger Gedenkstätten und Lernorte and to the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme for their commitment and for the important work of remembrance they do on a daily basis. I would like to thank all the survivors and descendants of victims of National Socialism for travelling from all over the world, sometimes at an advanced age, to join us here in commemoration.

May today be a reminder to us all to watch out for injustice in our daily lives and to show civil courage. To rise up against the right, against every kind of group-focussed hate. At the check-out, on the bus, or at the office. We just can't take it for granted that democracy will function on its own. We need to live out our democracy if we are to protect our peaceful and liberal

society and, with it, the most important achievement since the end of the Second World War  
– the inviolability of human dignity.

Therefore, I'd like to finish with an appeal that's very close to my heart: Use your right to vote whenever you have a chance. Please, go and vote!

Translation/ Übersetzung: Bürgerschaftskanzlei

## **Anja Hajduk**

Dear Ms. Fränkel, Ms. Kraus, Ms. Melmed and Ms. Piotrowska,

Dear Relatives and Representatives of the Amicale Internationale,

Madam President,

Professor von Wrochem,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial documents the crimes perpetrated by Nazi tyranny. Around 100,000 people were imprisoned at this site alone and in the numerous satellite camps; more than 42,000 of them died, many annihilated by the harshest of forced labor for the war economy.

These crimes are not subject to any statute of limitations. They do not become more bearable with time.

And time and again, remembrance days such as today's are subject to criticism – specifically from two quarters. Firstly from those, unfortunately all too numerous, who would actually like to draw a line under the past once and for all. Those who no longer want to hear about the responsibility of the German population for the heinous collapse in civilization that occurred at the heart of 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe.

But there is also criticism from people who are merely seeking to keep these memories alive and who feel that an annual commemoration is a form of ritualization and "exoneration" from a duty that is actually everlasting. I have sympathy for this position, even if I firmly believe that, if we are to sustain a vigorous culture of remembrance, we also need days of remembrance like today's. And specifically, at the very sites of the crimes themselves. Indeed, the institutions that make up our state – and those of us who were born after the war and now uphold that state – need to confront our nation's history. Anniversaries oblige us, and rightly so.

The history of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial is painfully indicative of the long road that leads to a commensurate policy of remembrance in the Federal Republic of Germany.

And you as former prisoners and as relatives have long had to fight for this memorial site. But allow me to tell you what I was ashamed of when I first learnt about it, as I became a resident of Hamburg many years ago: namely how long it was considered acceptable, not only in the young Federal Republic of Germany but also decades later, to "re-use" the site of the former Neuengamme Concentration Camp for the prison buildings of a democratic constitutional state.

Where – if not here – are we able to learn that there was no such thing as a switch inside people's minds that simply needed to be flicked over to "democratic culture".

Instead, a culture of remembrance in the Federal Republic of Germany had to be fought for over decades – not least through your commitment as former concentration camp prisoners and relatives, but also through remembrance initiatives and history workshops and at dinner tables, in classrooms and seminar rooms – before it could become firmly anchored – right across the board – in state institutions. Before the memory of the Holocaust could become part of the democratic self-perception of our Republic.

It is good that consensus about this has now been reached among all democratic parties today. And it is good that the federal government and the City of Hamburg have now underscored this once again by enabling the Neuengamme Memorial to refurbish its buildings and redesign the permanent exhibition so that remembrance work continues to be relevant and productive also for future generations and for Germany's increasingly diverse population.

After all, while remembrance work is obligated to history, it has our present and our future in mind. It allows us to build bridges to the present and makes us responsible for the way in which we prove ourselves in our time.

As democratic institutions in Germany, we have a duty to live up to the standards of our "Grundgesetz" (German constitution); indeed, in three weeks' time, on May 23, we will be celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its establishment. Respecting and safeguarding human dignity. Enabling people to live in dignity and freedom.

That also means safeguarding our democratic institutions themselves: an insight we are capable of gaining by examining German history. And what does this mean in concrete terms? For instance, that the firewall against the right-wing authoritarian enemies of democracy must hold firm at all costs. To this end, conservatives must not be vilified as right-wing radicals, just as right-wing radicals must not be trivialized as conservatives.

Democrats are not mutual enemies. Safeguarding our democracy in Germany and in Europe requires broad social alliances and a clear sense of direction.

That's why it is a good thing that there are more and more non-partisan demonstrations and initiatives in Germany, for example by business enterprises, against the right-wing authoritarian enemies of liberal democracy. I would like to see civic society mobilized in similar ways in the fight against antisemitism.

The Gaza war must not have any repercussions on the way Jews are treated in Germany. The rule of law and democracy must stand the test when it comes to protecting minorities in society effectively.

And, finally, democracy in Europe is under threat not just from within, but also from without. For more than two years now, Ukrainians have been defending themselves against a brutal attack on their country and their freedom. In doing so, they also defend our freedom and our democracy, and they deserve our support for as long as is necessary.

I therefore expressly endorse the unequivocal position the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial and the Amicale Internationale have adopted towards Ukraine as well as civil society initiatives from Russia and Belarus.

Dear Ms. Fränkel, Ms. Kraus, Ms. Melmed and Ms. Piotrowska,

Dear Relatives,

It is an honor to be able to attend this commemorative ceremony with you today as a representative of the Federal Republic of Germany. And it is an ongoing commitment for our shared present and future, in a free and democratic Europe.

Translation/ Übersetzung: Stephen Grynwasser

## Dita Kraus

As an adolescent, Dita Kraus survived the concentration camps at Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen as well as three satellite camps of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp. In today's discussion with young people, she will share with us her views on how best to commemorate the history of the concentration camps in a dignified way, in the future too.

Born in 1929, Dita Kraus grew up in Prague (in what was then Czechoslovakia) as the only child of Hans and Elisabeth Polach. Hers was a carefree childhood, growing up in a Jewish family with social-democratic leanings.

Following the annexation of Czechoslovakia by Nazi Germany, Dita Kraus and her family were persecuted for reasons motivated by racism. When she was 13 years old, she and her parents were deported to the Theresienstadt ghetto, where she spent about a year. In December 1943, the family was then deported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp; Hans Polach died there. Five months later, Dita and her mother Elizabeth were deported to Germany and assigned to forced labor at the women's camps of Dessauer Ufer, Neugraben and Tiefstack in Hamburg, all satellite camps of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp. Shortly before the end of the war, she was then sent to Bergen-Belsen. It was there that, on 15 April 1945, they were liberated by the British army. Shortly after the liberation, Dita Kraus's mother died from the consequences of her imprisonment at the concentration camp.

Dita returned to Prague alone. There she learnt that her grandmother Katharina had survived the Theresienstadt ghetto; Dita first moved in with her aunt Manya and, later on, with her grandmother. In Prague, she met up again with Otto Kraus, a survivor whose acquaintance she had made in Theresienstadt. Dita and Otto Kraus were married in 1947. Two years later the family emigrated to Israel with their first son, and two more children were born. Today she lives near her youngest son and his family; two of her own children and her husband have since passed away. Dita lives in Netanya (Israel) and frequently travels to Prague.

Dita Kraus has been active as a contemporary witness since the early 1990s, sharing her story publicly. She has long been associated with the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial, travelling to attend its commemorative events and giving talks as a contemporary witness. In 2019, she published her memoirs in English, entitled "A Delayed Life", and then in German one year later. Her book has since been published in several other languages.

The panel discussion with Dita Kraus is part of this year's "Conversation Café" youth project at the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial. It is being held as part of the commemorations marking the 79<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the war and the liberation of the concentration camps and provides a forum of encounter for young people and concentration camp survivors. Indeed, it is these young people who have prepared the subject matter for today's panel discussion with Dita Kraus, as part of the direct dialogue they will have with her.

The discussions will focus on questions pertaining to commemoration and remembrance. How did Dita Kraus's life go on after she was liberated? What sort of issues continue to move her, 79 years after the liberation? How does she view today Germany's culture of remembrance vis-à-vis National Socialism, and what opportunities and dangers does she foresee for the future? What would Dita Kraus like to see us do? And what is the message she would like to pass on to us? We look forward to the discussion and are most grateful to Dita for her willingness to talk to us.

The conversation will be recorded and made available to view on the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial website in the coming weeks. The video will have English, French, Dutch, Polish, Ukrainian and German subtitles.

Translation/ Übersetzung: Stephen Grynwasser

## Jan van den Hoorn

Dear guests,

My name is Jan van den Hoorn, and like my ancestors, I am from Putten. A total of five cousins on my mother's side fell victim to the raid on 1 and 2 October 1944 in Putten, four of them from a single family. These four had hidden in a ditch and thought the raid was over, so they emerged from hiding. They were arrested by the Germans later the same day.

At the end of the war, Putten had some nine thousand to ten thousand residents. The village consisted of a relatively small core surrounded by many tiny hamlets. People at the time mainly worked in agriculture, so they never went hungry.

On Friday, 29 September 1944, the Putten resistance group was instructed to shoot at a German passenger car. This operation failed on account of poor preparation.

One day later, they were better prepared. Once again, the designated location was Nijkerkerstreet (Nijkerkerstraat), but farther in the direction of Nijkerk, where there were more opportunities to get away if something went wrong. Now they also had a small lorry with a machine gun mounted on it. The lorry lights were supposed to blind the driver of the passing German car, and then the machine gunner would immediately fire.

A German passenger car approached fast from the direction of Nijkerk. The machine gun momentarily jammed, but the German car came to a stop with a jolt nonetheless. In the subsequent panic, the resistance fighters left their post and their leader disappeared. The Germans shot back from their car. One resistance fighter was seriously wounded. The resistance fighters found a wounded officer near the German vehicle. He was taken together with the wounded resistance fighter to the resistance group's assembly point. The officer was later released, but the resistance fighter died. He was just twenty years old. Another officer who was also wounded managed to reach a nearby farmhouse. He died in a hospital on 2 October. The two other passengers in the car managed to escape.

At six o'clock on Sunday morning, the farmers who wanted to go milk the cows were rounded up at the site of the attack. From eight o'clock, the enemy surrounded the village, making it difficult to enter or leave Putten.

The residents were ordered to present their identity documents on church square (Kerkplein) in the centre of the village. The Germans went from house to house accompanied by Putten



police officers. After presenting their identity documents, the residents were supposed to be able to return home – or so they thought. After all, they had not done anything forbidden.

My grandfather was a farmer, and a hiding place had been created in a haystack on his farm. On the Sunday in question, my father hid in there with others, enabling him to evade the Germans. A neighbouring boy had already encountered the Germans several times that day and they had not done anything to him, so he did not want to hide. When the soldiers saw him the next time, they took him with them. He did eventually return from Germany, but he was traumatized by the war.

After they had presented their identity papers, the people were not allowed to go home after all. The women and children were confined in the reformed church, and the men were held mainly in the school on church square (Kerkplein). At around nine in the evening, the women and children were released and told to return the next morning with food for the men. Most of the men were taken from the school to the church. Men over the age of fifty and boys under the age of eighteen were allowed to go home.

Seven people died on this Sunday, including a young woman.

The next day, Monday, 2 October, the men left the church and walked in the direction of the railway station. Once there, they were roughly loaded into goods cars. A total of 659 men were victimized this way, not just residents of Putten but also evacuees and people who happened to be passing by. The train's interim destination was Amersfoort concentration camp. The conditions there were still relatively good for the men. A total of fifty-eight prisoners were released for various reasons.

On 2 October, the Germans burned 110 houses in Putten as part of their retaliatory measures. On Wednesday, 11 October, the men left the Amersfoort camp and were taken by train to Neuengamme. They did not arrive there until Saturday, 14 October. During the journey, thirteen men managed to jump from the slow-moving train. They all survived. Others did not dare jump out of fear that the people left behind would be subjected to retaliation.

In Neuengamme concentration camp, the prisoners were assigned numbers between 56,000 and 57,000. Many were taken from the main camp to satellite camps, including in Ladelund on the border with Denmark. This camp existed from November to mid December 1944. The prisoners there had to dig anti-tank ditches into which Allied tanks were supposed to drive. This never happened, however. During this short period of time, around 110 of the men from Putten died as a consequence of the dreadful conditions. They received hardly any food, the

medical care was poor, and they mostly slept on damp, rotting straw on the floor. The prisoners who died were buried by the local pastor in nine mass graves in the cemetery by the church. Pastor Johannes Meyer wrote their names in the Ladelund church register.

Of the 588 people who had arrived in Neuengamme, only 48 returned after the liberation. Five of those people died shortly after returning. The last person to return, Jannes Priem, died in 2013. Everyone who returned bore trauma from the war.

The victims included one of the resistance fighters who had carried out the attack. He died on 25 April 1945 in Sandbostel, four days before the camp was liberated.

Soon after the war, Pastor Meyer contacted the family members and let them know that the graves were being well tended.

In 1950, a delegation of some 130 people from Putten visited Ladelund. They still could not and did not want to sleep on German soil, so they stayed overnight in Denmark. The following year, Pastor Meyer visited Putten in return. Seven years after the raid, he held a sermon in German in the church from where the men had been deported. Personal contacts were established between Putten and Ladelund after this. This led to the foundation of the Putten-Ladelund Bridge Committee in 1976. Six years later, this became the Stichting Oktober 44 (Foundation October 44).

Pastor Meyer's successor, Pastor Harald Richter, went to great efforts to strengthen these contacts. When he retired in 1992, he was appointed a Knight of the Order of Orange-Nassau, and in 2015 he received the Pin of Honor of the municipality of Putten. He died in 2018 at the age of ninety. As Chairman of the Stichting Oktober 44, I was honoured to read a Bible passage and recite a prayer at his memorial service. Residents of Putten were his pallbearers.

Since the 1980s, there has also been contact with other former concentration camps. During the annual remembrance ceremonies on 2 October, wreaths are laid in the names of Aurich-Engerhufe, Ladelund, Neuengamme, and Wedel.

When Queen Beatrix attended the memorial ceremony for the anniversary of the raid in 1994 and asked the mayor how it was possible for these personal contacts with Germans to have been established in Putten of all places, he responded: "Faith, Your Majesty".

Translation/ Übersetzung: Jessica Spengler