Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme

Stadt Neustadt in Holstein

Commemoration Ceremony on May 3, 2026 to Mark the 81th Anniversary of the Bombing of Prison Ships

Cap-Arcona Memorial Cemetery, Stutthofweg, Neustadt in Holstein

10:30 a.m.	Wreath-laying ceremony and flag bearers
10:45 a.m.	Choir of the Jacob-Lienau School and the Küstengymnasium Neustadt in Holstein: Moorsoldaten
10:50 a.m.	Welcome address by Martine Letterie, President of the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme
10:55 a.m.	Address by Mirko Spieckermann, Mayor of Neustadt in Holstein
11:00 a.m.	Address by Eka von Kalben, Vice President of the Schleswig-Holstein State Parliament
11:05 a.m.	Speech by Philippe Cosnay, President of the Amicale française de Neuengamme et de ses Kommandos
11:10 a.m.	Presentation by the Küstengymnasium Neustadt in Holstein und the Neuengamme Working Group: Waldemar Nods
11:20 a.m.	Choir of the Jacob-Lienau-School und Küstengymnasium Neustadt in Holstein: Blowin' in the Wind
11:25 a.m.	Closing remarks by Martine Letterie

The ceremony will continue at the Jewish Cemetery on Grasweg, Neustadt in Holstein

11:50 a.m.	Wreath-laying ceremony and Kaddish by Nathan Grinberg, Jewish Community of Lübeck

The commemorative ceremony will be photographed and filmed. If you do not wish to be photographed or filmed, please let photographers and the camera team know. The commemorative event is organized by the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme and the Town of Neustadt in Holstein, with the support of the Children and Youth Network Neustadt in Holstein, the Neustadt schools, the Working Group Neuengamme, the Schleswig-Holstein Memorials Community Foundation, as well as the Foundation of Hamburg Memorials and Learning Centers Commemorating the Victims of Nazi Crimes.

KINDER UND JUGEND NETZWERK Neustadt in Holstein e.V.

arbeitsgemeinschaft neuengamme eV

Bürgerstiftung Schleswig-Holsteinische Gedenkstätten

Stiftung Hamburger Gedenkstätten und Lernorte zur Erinnerung an die Opfer der NS-Verbrechen

Martine Letterie
President of the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme
May 3, 2026
Neustadt-Pelzerhaken

My name is Martine Letterie and I am the President of the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme and the granddaughter of Martinus Letterie, who was murdered at Neuengamme concentration camp on January 25, 1942. The AIN was founded in 1958 by former prisoners of the Neuengamme concentration camp. They pledged to keep the memory of what happened in this concentration camp and its many satellite camps alive. For many years now, the AIN has organized the commemorative ceremonies on May 3 in cooperation with the town of Neustadt in Holstein.

On behalf of all of us, I extend a warm welcome to the delegations who have traveled here from Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Spain and Poland. Among us today, there are no survivors of the catastrophe that took place here exactly 81 years ago. But we are joined by relatives of its victims and by family members of former prisoners of the Neuengamme and Stutthof concentration camps.

A special welcome goes to the Vice President of the Schleswig-Holstein State Parliament, Eka von Kalben and to Philippe Cosnay, President of the Amicale française, who will shortly speak about his cousin, Marc Bourguedieu.
And of course, I would also like to extend a very warm welcome to Mirko Spieckermann, Mayor of the City of Neustadt in Holstein.

Before I continue, a brief note: Please be aware that today's event is being filmed and photographed and several camera teams are present.

The first commemoration of the horrors of May 3, 1945, took place just four days later and was organized by survivors. On May 7, 1945, people of various nationalities came together—among them survivors of the catastrophe as well as those rescued from Stutthof. They began to lay the dead to rest and, as best they could, erected a simple memorial of stones.
What they endured is almost beyond our imagination.

As the Allied front drew nearer, the concentration camps and their many satellite camps were evacuated. Three thousand prisoners were transported from Stutthof across the Baltic Sea on inland vessels; from Neuengamme, thousands of prisoners were taken to the port of Lübeck.
Some of them were taken aboard the *Cap Arcona*, a passenger ship lying at anchor off Neustadt; others were taken to the *Thielbek* and the *Athen*. The *Thielbek* later set sail and dropped anchor not far from the *Cap Arcona*.

The prisoners were confined in the holds of the three ships, where conditions were, if anything, even more appalling than in the camps from which they had come.
They came from Germany and from all the countries occupied by the Nazis or at war with them: from the Baltic states, Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Ukraine, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Russia. There was barely any light or air; some people received no food for days. Those who survived that, as if by a miracle, were then faced with the bombing.

During the night of May 2-3 two of the Stutthof vessels reached Neustadt. On board were hundreds of prisoners, primarily Jewish women and children. Their living conditions, too, were appalling and many had already died on the way.
The guards attempted to take them aboard the same ships that were already holding the Neuengamme prisoners, but the captains refused. After the prisoners had disembarked on the beach at Pelzerhaken, the guards shot hundreds of them in the early morning of May 3, assisted by naval personnel and police.

At 3 p.m., British Typhoons launched the first attack on the *Cap Arcona* and the *Thielbek*. Approximately 4,200 prisoners were on board the *Cap Arcona* and between 2,500 and 3,000 on the *Thielbek*. The *Cap Arcona* caught fire; the *Thielbek*, constructed entirely of iron, could not burn but sank quickly. On both ships, all hell broke loose. Prisoners struggled to save their lives, but only very few succeeded. Most drowned or died in the flames. In addition, British aircrafts fired upon those in the water and those who reached the shore were shot by German SS men and members of the Hitler Youth.

While the ships were under attack, peace negotiations between Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz and the British General Bernard Law Montgomery were taking place in the Lüneburg Heath.
For the vast majority of the prisoners aboard the bombed ships, peace came too late. Here 7,000 people met a cruel death.

Mirko Spieckermann
Mayor of Neustadt in Holstein
May 3, 2026
Neustadt-Pelzerhaken

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Ms. Von Kalben, Vice President of the Schleswig Holstein State Parliament,

Ms. Letterie,
Mr. Cosnay,
Ms. Kirner, Chair of the District Council,
Mr. Gaarz, District Administrator,
Dear relatives,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I warmly welcome you to today's commemorative ceremony, held 81 years after May 3, 1945.

I would like to extend my special thanks to the family members of the victims who have travelled here from six countries. Many of you will then continue on to the commemorative event at the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial in Hamburg. You therefore have a very demanding program today.
I hope that this ceremony will offer you a few moments of reflection and give you time to remember your family members.

As Mayor of Neustadt in Holstein, it means a great deal to me to be able to speak to you here at this memorial cemetery today.
This cemetery and the memorial were established in the years after 1945 at the initiative and with the involvement of the survivors. The Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme, the association of survivors and their relatives, has organized the commemorative ceremonies held here on May 3 for many years — and in recent years together with the Children's and Youth Network Neustadt in Holstein, with the support of the town.

This cooperation is very important to us. It shows that the commemoration and remembrance of May 3, 1945 are firmly anchored at the heart of our society, in the midst of Neustadt in Holstein.
Today, school students are among the key figures in remembrance work. They engage with the history and ask what it means for their future.

The history we are remembering here is one of great cruelty and tragedy. On May 3, 1945, crime and death, liberation and the end of the war followed in immediate succession.
Ms. Letterie described the events at the beginning. It is always deeply disturbing to be confronted with the crimes committed here in Neustadt in Holstein so shortly before the collapse of the Nazi regime.

But we must not conceal anything, let alone suppress it. This also refers to the question of the guilt and responsibility of those living here at the time.
For the perpetrators were not only members of the SS, but also members of the German Navy and police officers, and it cannot be ruled out that members of the Volkssturm and the Hitler Youth were also involved — in other words, people from Neustadt.

We do not even know the names of many of those who died here around May 3, 1945. The memorial stone here lists 24 nations and population groups. They were people from all across Europe who resisted National Socialism and the German occupiers.

They were people who were persecuted because of their religion, their worldview or their sexual orientation — or who, according to the racist Nazi ideology, were deemed to have no right to live.

With the new documentation center, which the town of Neustadt in Holstein is establishing with the support of the federal and state governments, we are creating a place of remembrance, education and encounter. We see the documentation center as an important anchor point for future commemoration, remembrance and educational work here in Neustadt in Holstein and throughout the region.

For today, it is WE who bear the responsibility for shaping a future in which democracy, human rights and freedom remain our guiding principles.

We are all aware of the situation in the world. We see international law being trampled underfoot. We see the rise of right-wing populism and right-wing extremism in many European countries and here at home. Many of us feel powerless in the face of the news that reaches us every day.

Yet events such as today's, however sad their occasion may be, are also a sign of hope. Here, the descendants of the victims meet young people who are actively committed to remembrance and to democracy, peace and diversity.

This commitment is invaluable and deserves our support.

Thank you very much.

Eka von Kalben
Vice President of the Schleswig-Holstein State Parliament
May 3, 2026
Neustadt-Pelzerhaken

Mr. Spieckermann, Mayor of Neustadt in Holstein,
Ms. Letterie,
Mr. Cosnay,
Dear relatives and descendants of the victims of Nazism,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Eighty-one years ago, a tragedy unfolded in the Bay of Neustadt — a tragedy that was at the same time part of the greatest crime against humanity in history to date. More than 7,000 people died on board the passenger ship *Cap Arcona* and the smaller cargo ship *Thielbek* during an Allied air raid clearly anticipated by the Nazis.

These 7,000 dead represent only a fraction of the people who were murdered, tortured and enslaved by the Nazi regime and its accomplices. Each of these victims had a name and a face. Each of them had relatives and friends. Each of their fates forms part of a crime against humanity whose scale we can hardly imagine.

How can we remember these people? How can we give them a face and perhaps even a voice today, 81 years later? And how can — and how should — a place like Neustadt deal with this historical legacy?

Ladies and gentlemen, public reckoning with Nazi crimes in Germany began disturbingly late. The memory of what happened in the Bay of Neustadt on May 3, 1945 first had to be recovered through a slow and lengthy process, often far too late for the survivors of the Holocaust and of Nazi persecution.

But there were also initiatives that sent out important early signals, tracing the evidence of Nazi crimes on their own doorstep and organizing the first commemorative events and exhibitions.

Here in Neustadt, an exhibition on the events of May 3, 1945 at the municipal museum marked the beginning of that reckoning. It was an important beginning, a first step. A first step towards education. A first step towards remembrance and a step towards sounding a warning for the present and the future.

Remembrance has a future only if each generation is willing, time and again, to draw lessons from it and act on them in the present. And so I believe that the initiative launched several years ago to revise and reshape the commemoration of the victims of the *Cap Arcona* and the *Thielbek* makes exactly this possible — not only for the family members of those who were murdered, and not only for the initiators of the first exhibition, but for all the people who come here to Neustadt: to draw important lessons from remembrance and commemoration for the present and the future.

This, ladies and gentlemen, is all the more important in view of the challenges we face today.
In view of the harrowing images reaching us from war zones around the world. In view of the growing support in Europe for parties that no longer stand for democracy and European values.
In view of rising antisemitism, xenophobia and nationalism here in Germany and throughout the world.

Every single one of us in our society is called upon to act.
That is why I would like to thank all of you who are taking part in the commemoration today and tomorrow through a wide range of activities. I would also like to mention by name the cooperation partners, sponsors and supporters of this work:

The Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme, the Working Group Neuengamme, the Brunswik Foundation, the Schleswig-Holstein Memorials Community Foundation, the Children and Youth Network Neustadt in Holstein, the Schleswig-Holstein Commissioner for Civic Education, the Town of Neustadt in Holstein, the Foundation of Hamburg Memorials and Learning Centers Commemorating the Victims of Nazi Crimes. The State Parliament as well — my colleagues and I — also supported this project wholeheartedly.

I would also like to mention the students of the Neustadt schools, who in their own projects have grappled both with the events of 81 years ago and with the present-day challenges of antisemitism, racism and xenophobia.

Many hands, many minds and many hearts here in Neustadt have set something important in motion and built something meaningful. For that, I would like to thank each and every person involved most sincerely.

Philippe Cosnay
Cousin of Marc Bourguedieu (Neuengamme, Prisoner Number 61728),
Survivor of the Athen
Mai 3, 2026
Neustadt-Pelzerhaken

My name is Philippe Cosnay, I'm the President of the Amicale française de Neuengamme and I am the cousin of Marc Bourguedieu, a French deportee who was liberated in Neustadt on May 3, 1945 and died on July 11, 1945 as a result of his deportation.
With his story, I would like to commemorate all those who were deported and who suffered for our freedom, more than 7,000 of whom lost their lives in the tragedy in the Bay of Lübeck.

Marc Bourguedieu was born on January 18, 1925 in Saint-Laurent-du-Médoc, near Bordeaux. Like his father, he was a grocer and a resin tapper, collecting sap from pine trees.
His mother was the first cousin of my maternal grandfather and I learned at an early age of the existence of a deported cousin whose fate remained largely unknown.

My mother, who was five years old at the time, remembers that after his first arrest he hid with her in the forest in the Landes. My uncle, who was the same age, was close to him. These family ties made me want to understand the course of his life and honor his memory.

In April 1943, at the age of 18, Marc Bourguedieu founded a small resistance group in his town. In August 1943, they were arrested in connection with the Grandclément affair, tortured and then imprisoned in Fort du Hâ in Bordeaux from August 14, 1943 until January 17, 1944 and from January 17 onwards in Compiègne. His comrades were deported to Buchenwald on January 27.

For reasons unknown, he himself was released from Compiègne. After his return, he resumed his resistance activities on June 1, 1944 and was denounced by the collaborationist mayor of his town.

But I would now like to let Marc Bourguedieu speak for himself, so that he can tell you about his second arrest and the events that led to his deportation, through his deeply moving letter he wrote to his parents from Neustadt on May 15, 1945:

“My dear parents,
(…) I will tell you in a few words what I’ve gone through since my arrest [on July 15, 1944]: I was in Fort du Hâ. On July 20, I was taken to the Gestapo in Le Bouscat (…). They tortured me from 3 p.m. until 1 a.m. in every imaginable way to make me tell them where the Maquis was and other things as well. But I held out, I gave nothing away and I am proud of that. (…) You should have seen the state I was in, covered in bruises from head to toe (…).
*On August 9, we left Bordeaux for Germany (…). We passed through Toulouse, Nîmes, Avignon, Valence, Lyon, Dijon and then Germany. But the railroad lines were cut everywhere. In Germany, I was taken to the Dachau camp, 25 kilometers before Munich. To get from Bordeaux to Dachau, we spent 20 days in sealed train cars, 80 people to each cattle car. [**Here he is describing the horrific conditions on the so-called ‘ghost train’.**]*
*I remained in Dachau from August 29 until October 22. I was doing very well there. [**What terrible words to write about Dachau, once he had experienced the hell of Neuengamme.**] (…)*
*On October 22, I was then taken to the Neuengamme camp, 20 kilometers from Hamburg. This camp is an extermination camp. [**At least, that is how he experienced it.**]*
*[They] sent me, together with 2,000 other comrades, to a work detail near the Danish border. We stayed there from October 20 until December 15 (…). Of the 2,000 who had been sent there, 800 returned to Neuengamme together with the sick; the others had died from the beatings and from deprivation (we were digging anti-tank trenches). [**This refers to the Ladelund satellite camp.**]*
*On January 2 [1945], I was again transferred to a work detail near the Dutch border [**here he is referring to Meppen**]. The same work, but I was, so to speak, fortunate, because I did not have to work, since on January 11, my left hand was frostbitten, and then both of my feet. On February 1, I was taken to the infirmary, where I received good care and my hand and feet recovered. After that, I remained in the infirmary to help the doctors.*
On March 24, the British carried out air raids in our area. We were immediately evacuated and, after many hardships (shelling, etc.), we returned to Neuengamme.

We then had to leave Neuengamme again. They took us to Lübeck, loaded us onto a ship, took us out to sea and transferred us to another ship there, the Cap Arcona. There were three ships in total, loaded with [10,000] prisoners. And because there were too many on the Cap Arcona, they arbitrarily selected about 1,500 and moved them to another ship, the Athen. I was one of them.

The other ships were bombed because they were thought to be carrying Germans, they caught fire, but our ship was spared. It returned to Neustadt, where it fell into British hands.
We were liberated on May 3. I am now waiting for transport back to France to be arranged; it may take another two weeks (…).”

His return would in fact take longer. In a third letter to his parents, written from Neustadt on June 8, 1945, where he was still stranded, he explained that he had wasted away from 80 kilos to less than 40 and that, after his liberation, he had thrown himself immediately at the food. As a result, he fell ill with dysentery and an intestinal infection. He was eventually repatriated by medical aircraft on June 10, 1945 and admitted to the hospital at Kremlin-Bicêtre near Paris.
There he died on July 11, 1945.

Marc Bourguedieu was posthumously awarded the Croix de Guerre, the Resistance Medal, and the Legion of Honour. His official citation recounts his deportation to Dachau and his ordeal here in Neustadt, I quote: “Condemned to die of hunger and thirst in a ship’s hold, where he survived for 18 days.” Neuengamme is not mentioned, which already indicates how little was known about that camp.

It is often said that small stories make up great history. Through the life of Marc Bourguedieu, I wanted not only to share a family memory with you, but also to bear witness to the courage, dignity and resistance that all those who were deported showed in the face of Nazi barbarism. The question, “What would have we done in their place?” inevitably arises for each one of us. I have asked myself that question many times.

At a time when ideologies of hate are on the rise and the far right is gaining ground across the world, it is more necessary than ever to pass on this memory. That is why I am involved in commemorative initiatives, in order to make younger generations aware of the tragic consequences of exclusion and fanaticism.

Today as yesterday: “Never forget!” – as the title of the newsletter of the Amicale française de Neuengamme reminds us – for a “Never again!”

Küstengymnasium Neustadt in Holstein and
Working Group Neuengamme:
A Student Project on Waldemar Nods
May 3, 2026
Neustadt-Pelzerhaken

Students from the Küstengymnasium Neustadt in Holstein, together with their teacher Peter Günsoy and in cooperation with the Working Group Neuengamme, explored the life of Waldemar Nods and interviewed his grandson, Max Nods.

Who was Waldemar Nods?

He was born on September 1, 1908, in the South American country of Suriname, which was then a Dutch colony. His parents were among the first Surinamese to be born free after slavery.

At the age of 19, he traveled to the Netherlands to continue his education. There he started a family. He and his wife Rika, who had previously left her husband against her family's wishes, ran a boarding house in Scheveningen. They took in not only tourists, but also Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution. They were betrayed.

Rika took all the blame and was sent to the Ravensbrück concentration camp, where she died. In February 1944, Waldemar Nods was deported to the Neuengamme concentration camp, where he was initially able to survive because he spoke German. He died shortly before liberation, in the bombing of the *Cap Arcona* on May 3, 1945. Rika and Waldemar were survived by their son, Waldy. The writer Annejet van der Zijl later reconstructed the history of the Nods family, which also inspired the feature film *Sonny Boy*.

Our questions: How does the family remember Waldemar and Rika Nods today and what helped them face this terrible chapter in their family history? We must think of Waldemar and Rika as courageous and strong individuals. How do descendants such as Max Nods help ensure that their fate is not forgotten? What role did European colonialism on the one hand, and oppression under the German occupation on the other, play in the family's history?

In a short presentation at the commemorative ceremony on May 3, students will introduce Waldemar and Rika Nods and speak about their meeting with their grandson, Max Nods.

Martine Letterie
President of the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme
May 3, 2026
Neustadt-Pelzerhaken

I would like to thank Philippe Cosnay for his moving tribute to his cousin, Marc Bourguedieu. It put a face to one of the victims and gave us, listeners, a sense of how deeply his family was affected by his untimely death.

On behalf of us all, I would also like to thank Eka von Kalben; it is important that representatives of the state of Schleswig-Holstein demonstrate their commitment to remembering the horrors of the Nazi era.

I would therefore also like to thank Mayor Spieckermann, not only for his speech today, but also for his commitment to the documentation center, for which we held the groundbreaking ceremony last year, as well as for the excellent cooperation over the past years.

Last but not least, I would like to thank the students of the Küstengymnasium for their contribution and the joint choir of the students from Neustadt in Holstein. Your commitment gives hope for the future.

It is more important than ever to remember the horrors of the Nazi era. In doing so, we show what happens when truth no longer matters, democracy disappears and the rule of law no longer functions. Those who remember the past pass on a message to the present and the future.