

COMMEMORATION CEREMONY OF LIBERATION OF THE CAMP IN 1945

REMARKS OF ANDREW STERNBERG DELIVERED MAY 11, 2013 AT EBENSEE, AUSTRIA FOR THE COMMEMORATION CEREMONY OF LIBERATION OF THE CAMP IN 1945

At the end of the Second World War, American General Dwight Eisenhower warned:

“Get it all on record now – Get the films – Get the witnesses – because somewhere down the road of history, some bastard will get up and say that this never happened!”

Today, as in many past years, I return to Ebensee to remember those who suffered and perished here and to honor them, along with those of my fellow survivors, who, over the years, have passed away forever.

Past speakers have recalled the miserable conditions of hunger, pain, cold, and exhaustion we suffered here. Whether from hunger, cold, work-related accidents, sickness or beatings, each death was surely a murder!

The conditions in the camp in March and April of 1945 were unbearable beyond description. We should not forget that although this camp was designed to house no more than 2,500 prisoners, by the time of liberation, there were more than 18,000 of us here. 8,400 died at KZ Ebensee from November 1943 to May 1945. 18 months! In April, 1945 alone, over 4,500 died, just a few weeks before we were freed.

While in the camp, our diet consisted of less than 800 calories per day. The last 3 weeks, we ate grass and mud on the advice of prisoners who were doctors in order to get some nourishment.

There were thousands of people in the final stages of exhaustion, who were unable to walk or take care of themselves. These things should never be erased from memory!

Each death was the result of a series of increasingly greater criminal acts which ultimately delivered the victims to this place.

I was among the surviving prisoners of KZ Lager Ebensee. I was there & know what the smell of burning human flesh is like. You can take my word for it that there is no other smell like it. If there were such a thing as an agency to protect the environment, I am quite sure that there would have been an investigation as to what was being burned.

The air pollution must have been considerable. We are all victims of what happened here. There were the prisoners, the dead, the people who lived in Ebensee, and all the rest of Europe who have to live with the knowledge of the history of what happened right here, & in many other such places.

Before I arrived at Ebensee, it had been under the command of Otto Riemer, a notoriously sadistic drunk.

Following a night of drinking, Riemer would occasionally come through the camp with other SS, and begin shooting for no reason other than to terrorize and indiscriminately kill.

Riemer was succeeded by the camp's last commander, Anton Ganz. Just before Liberation Day, about half the guards had deserted or disappeared from the camp. Ganz, who usually addressed us, alone, in the company of only his dog, now appeared with armed SS guards.

Through a loudspeaker he told us the allies were coming and to ensure our safety, we should go to the tunnels and wait for them there. He said that the camp was not safe, because the

allies might bomb it, thinking that it was an army installation. His speech was translated into several languages so everybody would understand. Some among us thought the tunnels were filled with explosives to kill us once inside and hide the evidence of our murders. In response to his speech, almost as one loud voice, everyone said “NO”!

Ganz was surprised by the response and after a minute or so, he turned and left the camp. Although the U.S. Army wouldn't arrive for another day, we didn't know that when Ganz and the guards left, the end of our long nightmare had finally begun.

There were 7,223 deaths from May, 1944 to May, 1945 under the command of Anton Ganz. You may wonder what happened to Camp Commander Ganz after the war. He was sentenced to life in prison, but was released due to the condition of his health.

Ganz lived until 1972 after spending only 6 months in prison for his crimes, which equals 259,000 minutes served, or 36 minutes for each death!

We were liberated by the American Army, 80th division, 68 years ago, nearly to the day. At that time, I was 15 years old, alone in the world, and far from my home in Hungary. At the time of my liberation, I don't think I had any thoughts of ever returning here.

Later, I knew, that as a survivor of the camp, that was once at this very place, I had to return, & did in 1969, and many times since.

I want to tell you a short story of my experience a few weeks after being liberated from this camp. I went to a house asking for food. It was at 5 Shulgasse Street, the home of a Herr & Frau Pretner, a local taylor. They gave me food & asked me to return again, which I did. We became friendly in a very short time. They told me of the death of their only son in the war and they offered to adopt me. They were remarkable people that accepted me as a person, the first time since my deportation that I began to feel human again. For this I will never forget them. In fact, I visited their graves a few days ago to thank them again. Here were good people, who certainly smelled the smoke, lived with whatever they understood was happening here, and suffered for what was done.

I returned in 1969 & visited Frau Prettner, to find her with a group of people that were shocked that she was friendly to a former “heftling”.

I returned again in 1995 & spent a considerable amount of time with 3 high school students who sat with me until 3:00 in the morning questioning me about what it was like in the camps. They ended by apologizing for what was done 50 years before and asking me to forgive. I have been through a lot & am fortunate to have lived to see the change in the generations here in Austria. I pray that we have the ability to learn from the past and grow from these experiences.

I want to especially thank Dr. Wolfgang Quatember and all the people of Ebensee for giving us hope for the future.

Permission to copy & translate this speech to Polish, German, French, Russian, & Italian is granted by the author. Any alteration or deviation is not permitted.

Andrew Sternberg

Speech by Guy Dockendorf

Son of Metty Dockendorf, (KLM 64551, concentration camps of Hinzert (D), Mauthausen, Melk, Ebensee (A), October 1943 - May 1945)

Distinguished guests,

Dear survivors of Ebensee and other Mauthausen concentration camps,

Dear friends from the International Mauthausen Committee, from the Austrian Mauthausen Committee and from the Austrian Mauthausen Camp Community

Dear students from Bad Ischl,

Dear young people from Austria and from so many other countries who have a special relationship with Ebensee,

Dear artists giving this ceremony a special touch

Dear friends,

Thank you Andrew,

Djekujei Wladyslaw, (thank you Mr Mayor for bringing his words to us)

It is quite difficult for someone who was born after the Second World War to speak after the moving words of these two survivors: I am happy to see that many of us have had the opportunity of meeting both of them in the last years:

- Andrew, as a member of the International Mauthausen Committee where survivors and family members of former prisoners from 21 countries are represented
- Wladyslaw whom so many Luxembourg students and adults have been listening to when he was explaining to us what the daily life here in Ebensee concentration camp was like!

It is of paramount importance for people to be able to put faces on names. It is important for all these generations meeting here and whom we have met in the many years before, to know that celebrations of this kind must continue. Thank you all from the huge international Mauthausen family that, as every year, you come here to think of those who have had to bear the inhumanity of the Nazis.

I want to pay tribute to what has been achieved here in Ebensee: to give men back their names, their identity, their dignity! The multiplicity of tombs and monuments on this cemetery and the impressive international participation today is a clear sign how important Mauthausen and Ebensee are in the minds of so many people. May I, as a member of the International Mauthausen Committee repeat, what I have been trying to convey to our friends of the Austrian Ministry of the Interior (BMI): Mauthausen is not just an Austrian affair! Mauthausen was an international concentration camp where the whole of Europe met, against the will of the people imprisoned here. But it remains true that the diversity of languages and cultures was for many prisoners a burden and an enhancement. They were fighting for a free and peaceful Europe.

Let me speak also about Luxembourg prisoners. Out of the 176 men who had been deported to the different camps of Mauthausen, three died here in Ebensee: Pierre Fournelle, Camille Israel and Roger Mergen. 60 Luxembourgers have died in the different Mauthausen camps. We only have 2 survivors today: Jos Schlang and Jean Majerus. All of the Luxembourg victims and survivors have been recently honored by the visit of the Austrian President and the Luxembourg Grand-Duke when, in the framework of the Luxembourg State Visit to Austria on April 17th, they visited the Mauthausen concentration camp and paid homage to them.

My father, Metty Dockendorf, KLM 64551 was born in 1918. In October 1943 he was arrested by the Gestapo as he was actively resisting the Nazis who had invaded Luxembourg. He was a leader of the Luxembourg Catholic Boy-Scouts Association which had, as one of

the very first, engaged in a network of resistance against the Nazis. He was first imprisoned in the concentration camp in Hinzert, Germany and was then transferred to Mauthausen, Melk and Ebensee. He was liberated on May 6th, 1945 by the American army. As a multilingual Luxemburger he was able to help many prisoners during these hard times: after the liberation of the camp, he was elected international representative by the former prisoners. Metty died in 1987, at the age of 68.

There is one small photograph from here which he brought back home and which has impressed me all my life: on it you see ten Luxembourg political prisoners, in their prisoners' suits, standing by a huge black locomotive, on which someone has written in big white chalk letters: "Via Lëtzebuerg" - Going home to Luxembourg. This photo was taken some days after the liberation of the camp with a camera one of them had borrowed at the village of Ebensee. Since 1947, Luxembourg former Mauthausen prisoners and their families have come back to Mauthausen to pay tribute to the Luxembourg victims. It took many more years before they could come to Ebensee. Let me thank here all those who have opened this place, the cemetery and the memorial to a greater public. I'm thinking of you Wolfgang Quatember: you and your team have been incessantly working on the history of this place and have put into existence - often against the will of some! - the Museum of Contemporary History in Ebensee. The way you have been doing this is impressive: you have succeeded in combining sound scientific research together with the impressive testimonies of so many victims.

Since 1968 - this means for the last 45 years - Luxembourg has been taking nearly every year a delegation of young students from secondary schools to Mauthausen, Ebensee, Melk, Gusen, Hartheim. My father was the initiator and organizer of this pilgrimage for many years. As the secretary of the Luxembourg Amicale of Former Mauthausen Political Prisoners he put this pilgrimage under the motto: "Remember and understand" - Erënneren a Verstoen. His idea was that young people should get an opportunity to understand what had happened here and link it with their lives of today. Not in a spirit of hate but with the intent to make it understandable that mankind can be extremely brutal.

Towards the end of the 60s, my father began to introduce young people to the techniques of group dynamics. In nearly 20 years he was able to teach hundreds of young people to gain confidence in themselves and how to manage their own lives, respecting as well themselves as other people. His message to the young was the fruit of the hard experience he had made in the camps: he always said that there had been unimaginable cruelty and inhumanity in the camps. But he always also pointed out that there were so many actions of true humanism, friendship and solidarity. This experience which won over all differences of political, ideological or religious reasons was so strong that this international friendship has lasted many, many years after the war finished.

When I was still a kid, the name of Mauthausen meant for me so many different faces, my father's friends who came to visit him from France, Holland, Russia, Tchechoslovakia, Belgium, Germany, Austria... I truly believe that this "Europe in Mauthausen" has inspired many of them to work for a new and peaceful Europe after the war.

Let me finish with an appeal to young people which was written by the former President of the Mauthausen International Committee, Bob Sheppard, in a foreword in 1970 to a book called "Luxembourgers in Mauthausen". He was addressing the young people from Luxembourg but I believe these words will also ring a bell today to all young people united here in Ebensee:

You should know that your fathers just did their duty in the camps: they have done so with much greatness of mind and never pretended that this should bring them any glory, honors or triumph.

You should know that the excruciating pains they endured here opened their eyes, maybe a little more than to other people: they have understood that mankind has a lot of flaws but has

also good points. And if you happen to see that their eyes are sometimes drifting away, then it could be that they continue to see before their inner eyes events they would like that neither you, nor your children, nor any people in the world should ever again have to endure.

You should know that these ordeals have taught your fathers to be more understanding for mankind, that hatred has been changed in them into kindness and generosity. They want to help that this world, which can be so beautiful, never again becomes hell again.

And finally you should know that the importance and the value of a country cannot be measured along its square kilometers, its number of inhabitants, the strength of its business and certainly not along the glory of some of their people... No: the greatness of a country can only be measured along the lines its children have behaved in desperate situations.

Thank you for listening!

Speech by Werner Faeskorn

Dear Mr. Mayor!

Ladies and gentlemen!

My name is Werner Faeskorn.

As the son of Fritz Faeskorn, who survived prison and the Ebensee concentration camp, I speak here today. My father was born in 1901 as the son of a worker in Hagen / Westphalia. During the First World War, at the age of 14, he had to work hard in an armament factory. At 19, he struck against the "Kapp - Putsch". The "Kapp-Putsch" was a direct threat to Weimar's new government. He had contact with communists in his workplace and he became a member of the KPD in 1921. During the Great Depression in 1929, he was, like millions other workers, without work for several years. Before 1933, my father was an active opponent of the fascist danger for Germany. Because he distributed leaflets in a police training camp, he was sentenced to 1,5 years in prison in March 1933. After serving his "sentence" he was released from prison in October 1934 and had to report twice a week to the police. Again he had contact to the KPD in Hagen and donated 1,5 Mark for the "Rote Hilfe", a charity for imprisoned fellows and their families.

On 27 May 1935 during night, he was arrested with other members of the KPD. My mother was sick in hospital and my sister with relatives. The police left me alone back in the apartment at the age of four years. As a child many years I was afraid of the police. The Gestapo was able to prove my father's donation to the "Rote Hilfe" and this was enough for a new criminal case against him. In September 1935, my father and 21 fellows from Hagen were put on trial in Hamm / Westphalia and he was sentenced as a "recidivist" to 15 years in prison. For a donation of a 1,5 Mark, 15 years in the prison.

From late 1935 to December 1943 my father was in prison in Münster for eight years. Shortly before Christmas 1943, he and other inmates, including Paul Claasen from Solingen, were transported across Germany by a few weeks. From the end of 1943 we did not know where my father was and if he was still alive.

January 1944, they arrived in the concentration camp Mauthausen. In the documents of my father was written "RU" - which meant "Rückkehr unerwünscht - Return unwanted".

Beginning of February 1944 Paul Claasen, my father, and other prisoners were transferred to concentration camp Ebensee.

He worked with very young, Jewish prisoners in road construction. My father helped them doing the heavy work. A SS-man, who watched this, beat my father and kicked him the shins bloody. My father was deported to the camp Redl-Zipf. After a few weeks he came back to Ebensee and worked on tunneling.

The shins did not heal and my father became very ill and was sent to the infirmary.

There Paul Claasen worked as a nurse, and through his the help and a Czech doctor, he was

able to work again. Then he worked in a gravel quarry near "Marien"-restaurant.

Without the help of Paul Claasen and the Czech doctor, my father would not have survived the concentration camp. The shins never fully healed until his death in 1984.

After the liberation, by the American army on 6 May 1945, Paul Claasen and my father went the long way home by foot. For many years my father did not talk about his bad experiences. Not until he was almost 80 years, then he began to report.

In 1980, we were with my father in Mauthausen and Ebensee. From the beautiful mountain scenery around Ebensee he was very impressed. In his long imprisonment he had not seen this. As we stood at the former camps gate he looked around and said, "I cannot understand that people live here, where so many crimes and so much misery have taken place."

When my father was arrested in 1933 for the first time I was three, when he returned in June 1945, I was 15 years old. I was asked as a child, where my father was, but I had no answer. The 1945 liberated inmates from the concentration camps, the prisons, and other camps of Nazi torture and the people of the devastated countries wanted a new life, a life without war and fascism.

They demanded a severe punishment of the responsible and of all Nazis, who were involved in crimes. Unfortunately it did not happen.

Many SS-officers and other fascists fled across the so-called "rat line" and escape their punishment. They found safe haven in the US or in South American countries. In spite of their fascist sentiments, they were employed there. In Western Germany Nazis operated in several leading position after 1945. No judges, not even the ones who adjudged their defendants to death or imprisonments during the NS-regime, were punished or removed from their function. The industry, politics and administrations, schools and universities, the office for protection of the constitution, the intelligence service, the police or the German armed forces, were staffed by NS-functionaries, members of the SS and former officers of the fascist "Wehrmacht". They handed their fascist ideology to younger generations and many of them share this belief until today.

"The womb he crawled from is still going strong!", Bertolt Brecht wrote in 1941.

With sorrow we can see that the number of brutal fascists increases in many countries, even in Germany. In the recent years, according to newspapers, nearly 20.000 crimes were committed by Neo-Nazis in Germany; about 800 of these incidents were acts of violence. The "Amadeo Antonio Stiftung", an institution against racism and fascism, released a list of 182 people which were killed by right-wing-extremists since 1990. The exact amounts of victims were not published by the government. Neo-fascist groups are able to spread their ideology and commit crimes unopposed and protected by the police and the office for protection of the constitution.

How long will this still go on without punishment?

Together with all democratic people and organizations we must prevent this development in our countries. We owe it to the many dead bodies as well as the survivors of Ebensee.

Thank you for your attention.