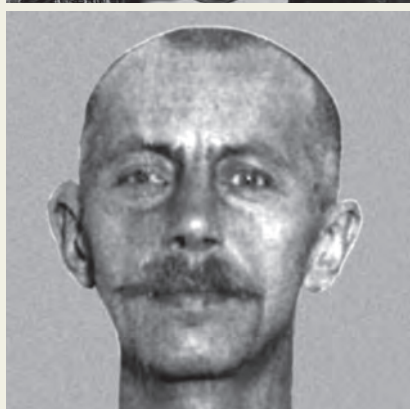


Dietlind Kautzky/Thomas Käpernick (Eds.)

# “My fate is but one of many thousands”

VSA:

The Death March from Hamburg to Kiel 1945  
Nine Biographies



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**Translated from german  
Cyntha and Rudolf Lies**

**VSA: Verlag Hamburg**

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Front cover portraits (for photo credits see page 186, in brackets the corresponding  
page numbers of the photos in the book are listed): 1st row: Sophie Nathan (p. 91),  
Wübbo Sielmann (p. 18), Margot Löbenstein (p. 45), 2nd row: Wilhelm Bornbusch  
(p. 56), Hilde Sherman (p. 28), Joachim Scharlach (p.112), 3rd row: Maurice Sachs  
(p. 104), Erna Pins (p. 66), Josef Tichý (p. 96)

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We dedicate this book to the people  
who were forced on the death march from Hamburg to Kiel  
in April 1945 and endured unimaginable suffering.

And we dedicate the book to Heinrich Kautzky  
(born on 5 April 1949 in Hamburg, died on 6 December 2018 in Kiel),  
who initiated the project to remember and commemorate  
these people.

# Foreword

by Daniel Günther, Minister President  
of the State of Schleswig-Holstein, Germany



When in April 1945 about 800 prisoners were driven from the “Kola-Fu” police prison in Hamburg-Fuhlsbüttel in the direction of Kiel-Hassee, to the Work Education Camp Nordmark, it was obvious that in the last days of the war this would be a death march. Some of the prisoners had to walk barefoot, they were undersupplied, there was hardly any food and water – the chances of survival were small. And those who refused to march on were shot by the SS. Even more people died after arriving in Kiel because of the ordeal.

It is thanks to a committed biography group, who researched the names and backgrounds of 235 people, that today we know about a quarter of these people by name. It gives the victims a face, wrests them from oblivion and also gives their relatives at home and abroad an opportunity for reconciliation. I was granted the opportunity to meet relatives, Fred Zimmak and George Nathan. The Nathan family always supported each other, survived the ghetto in Riga/Latvia as well as the death march and finally emigrated to the USA.

Those who know the past can understand the present and shape the future. We owe it to those who were persecuted, to those who survived, and to their descendants, but we also owe it to ourselves and our children to name and to address these crimes – on the one hand to clarify the historical and political facts in our minds, on the other hand to in-



crease empathy in our hearts. Without historical awareness we miss out on understanding the historical context. We need to critically argue with those who were there before us, in order to set a course for those who will come after us.

Knowledge of our collective history creates understanding of and empathy for individuals; and it strengthens the humanity of society. In confronting the past, a process of knowledge emerges that grasps the human depth of history and determines how we can act. In view of the terrible racist offences in recent times, this is more important than ever.

Nazi crimes concern us all. They happened “on our doorstep”, and then as now there are recognisable signs. Four columns of people marching, who walked about 100 kilometres in four days in mid-April 1945, just could not have been overlooked. Our thanks go to the biography group. They deserve merit for keeping history alive and for documenting these signs.

History is not a matter of the past, it concerns us today. The onus is on us; and we want to keep memory alive – in order to protect and strengthen our democracy.



# Introduction

By Dietlind Kautzky and Thomas Käpernick

*"We simply cannot stop the attempt to create a world based on law and justice, no matter how slowly we move forward."*

Thomas Buergenthal<sup>1</sup>

In April 1945, some 800 different people took part in the death march from Fuhlsbüttel prison in Hamburg to the "Arbeitserziehungslager Nordmark" (Work Education Camp) on the outskirts of Kiel. The stories of some of them are reported in this book.

The people who survived this march, some of whom became very old, were influenced and shaped by the cruelties and hardships they experienced. And what they experienced often also has had an effect on their descendants. Nine prisoners, including a former guard, were shot by the SS because they could not keep up with the march, because they attempted to escape or because the SS wanted to eliminate them as witnesses. This book, published on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the death march, would like to highlight the events of April 1945. It is the result of the research by a biography group that was formed in 2015 to compile biographies of people who were part of the march. Our group was set up after an encounter with Ruthy Sherman in April 2015. She is the daughter of Hilde Sherman, who was part of this march and who describes her experiences in the book "*Zwischen Tag und Dunkel, Mäd-*

*Unveiling of the plaque in Bad Bramstedt for Hamid Chamido, July 8, 2017*



*chenjahre im Ghetto*", Frankfurt am Main 1984 (Between Day and Darkness – A Girl's Years in the Ghetto). Since then we have researched the names of those who were forced to be part of this march and have been able to identify 235 people by name.<sup>2</sup> We have found further details about some people who were part of this march and used these to compile the biographies published in this volume.

The biography group maintains contact with relatives of participants of the death march and has set up memorial plaques in five locations in Schleswig-Holstein for those murdered during the march. The plaques were erected between 2016 to 2019 together with the "Schleswig-Holsteinischer Heimatbund" (Schleswig-Holstein Heritage Association), the "Arbeitskreis zur Erforschung des Nationalsozialismus in Schleswig-Holstein" (Research Group to Study National Socialism in Schleswig-Holstein) and many local supporters in Einfeld, Bad Bramstedt, Wittorferfeld, Kaltenkirchen and Kisdorf. While in these places communities and local initiatives were open to commemorate those murdered, there was also opposition. In April 2017, the community of Mühbrook refused setting up a plaque for two men shot in their village. In Kisdorf, unknown persons damaged the plaque twice.

## The biographies

A wide variety of people took part in the death march from Hamburg to Kiel. One large group was German Jews who had been deported to Riga in the autumn of 1941 and who had survived years of deadly violence, selections and forced labour.

The biographies of Hilde Sherman-Zander, Margot Löbenstein, Carla Pins and Thekla, Sophie and Emmi Nathan show the fate of Jews. We also report on the Hamburg businessman Joachim Scharlach: He was persecuted because of his Jewish background – in Nazi diction he was called a "Halbjuden" ("half Jew"). There is also a detailed report on this death march by Hilde Sherman in her autobiographical notes, which we document in this book.<sup>3</sup>

The second group that was forced to march to Kiel consisted of members of the resistance movement, those politically persecuted, and people acting and thinking in ways not in line with the ideological system. Among them were Wübbo Sielmann, who had been active in the labour movement for years, Wilhelm Bornbusch, who belonged to the KdF group ("Fighting Fascism"), Joachim Scharlach, who was accused of "behaviour detrimental to the state", and Josef Tichý, who had been found out to have an illegal shortwave radio attachment.

Among the approximately 800 police prisoners of the march to Kiel, the majority were foreign prisoners. The lives of the Czech Josef Tichý, who was murdered on the march, and the murdered Frenchman Maurice Sachs, who was a dazzling and ambivalent figure, are presented.

### The research situation

Basic facts about the death march from Hamburg to Kiel were established in 1946/47 in a British military trial. In September 1947 five defendants were sentenced, three of them to death. This trial was evaluated by the Bordesholm historian Uwe Fentsahm. His contribution, based on his many years of research and earlier publications on the subject, provides an overview of the events of April 1945.

Research into the “death marches” has received a lot of new input, inspired among other things by Daniel Goldhagen’s controversially discussed study “Hitler’s Willing Executioners”,<sup>4</sup> by numerous individual case studies and above all by Daniel Blatman’s book “The Death Marches 1944/45”.<sup>5</sup> But even if historiography has finally turned its attention to this chapter, the events of the death marches, which cost the lives of more than a third of the concentration camp prisoners, remain disturbing. Not only concentration camp prisoners, but also other prisoners of the National Socialist camps and prisons suffered on these death marches. We try to give a summary of the research results to date, what constitutes a “death march”.

With the evacuation transports of the concentration camps and prisons, the SS and police did not pursue the goal of murdering as many prisoners as possible. Rather, the prisoners should not be handed over to the armies of the Allied troops. They were to remain in the hands of



*Standard study on the death marches by Daniel Blatman*

*“March to work”;  
drawing of the  
Hungarian survivor  
Agnes Lukács – broken  
shoes and infected  
legs are shown in this  
drawing of marching  
female prisoners*



the Germans, and their manpower further to be exploited. The fact that these evacuation transports often turned into death marches was due to the brutality of the guards and their intention to remove any evidence and witnesses. The fact that prisoners, who dragged behind the column, left it or escaped, were shot is typical of the evacuation transports and marked the march from Hamburg to Kiel too. The bodies of those shot were often buried by the roadside.

The death marches touched many towns and villages and the way from Hamburg to Kiel also led along a busy main road from Hamburg-Altona to Kiel. Many of these marches or transports did not end with the prisoners being set free. Instead, the last weeks and days in undersupplied and often provisional camps cost the lives of many more people. At the destination of the march in Kiel, the Arbeitserziehungslager Nordmark (“work education camp”), around three hundred prisoners were murdered or left to die within a few days. The research situation lets it seem reasonable to call the march from Hamburg to Kiel a “death march”.

Any criminal prosecution and a thorough reconstruction of the event were made difficult by the chaotic conditions of the final phase of Nazi rule, especially by the escape of the guards. In our case the British investigators were therefore only able to punish three of the nine murders known by them on the death march from Hamburg to Kiel.

The German judiciary, which should have investigated the murders of German citizens, hardly investigated at all and did not open proceedings against the perpetrators.

### **Can we learn from history?**

We still cannot fully comprehend the events of the Nazi era. How could our fathers and mothers, grandmothers and grandfathers take part in, tolerate or simply endure such crimes? And what consequences have we drawn from this in the Federal Republic of Germany, in the German Democratic Republic and now afterwards in reunited Germany – and what can we learn from it today?

Surprisingly, many events from this period only now become known in more detail. In the immediate post-war period, many things were suppressed, some old Nazis were reinstated in high offices of judiciary and government, which in part has also only been dealt with in detail in recent years: Some of those persecuted (such as Wübbo Sielmann’s family) encountered perpetrators again after 1945 in the police or even in the offices dealing with compensation claims.

The fact that, even today, new scandals continue to bring to the surface fragments of National Socialist ideology, leads to the question: Which personnel and social structures remained in place after 1945?

Hardly any Jewish deportees returned to Germany. Even if the participants of the march received compensation, their suffering and their courage to resist were not recognized. Only a few could take up public office; and just a few, like Hilde Sherman, had the opportunity to share their experiences as witnesses of Nazi crimes. It remains an open wound to this day.

Our biography group wants to get to know the stories of the victims and make them known. How could they, the survivors themselves, live on with the events that are stored in their subconscious? What does this mean for their descendants?

Thomas Buergenthal took part in the death march from Auschwitz to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in January 1945 when he was ten years old. In his book “Ein Glückskind” he describes how his memory of Auschwitz flashed back at the ship’s railing on which he left Germany in December 1951 at the age of 17 and emigrated to the US: “... and I suddenly saw the reddish-brown smoke again in front of me ... I suddenly knew that I would never be able to free myself completely from this past and that it would shape my life forever. But I also knew that I would not allow the past to interfere with or even destroy the new life, the threshold of which I stood on. On the contrary, it would illuminate my future and give it meaning.”<sup>6</sup> He put this knowledge into practice. As a lawyer, he championed implementing human rights throughout his life and became a judge at the International Court of Justice in The Hague.

Many other people have been broken by experiences similar to those of Thomas Buergenthal or have been killed. With our book we want to offer a contribution to a reappraisal of this period of National Socialism, the concentration camps and the death marches. And we ask how today and in our world we can protect the human rights that were trampled underfoot on these death marches. We would like to see such grave violations of body and soul to be no longer conceivable in the future. Unfortunately, again we observe many threats of right-wing violence, racism and war. Our hope is that many people will say “No”, that many will stand up and show personal and moral courage (Zivilcourage).



*Memorial report by Thomas Buergenthal, survivor of the death march from the Auschwitz concentration camp to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in January 1945*

## A Word of Thanks!

We are happy that so many different authors<sup>7</sup> have been able to contribute and have made the publication of this book possible together with us. Many of them are active in local remembrance initiatives, others write as relatives of the persecuted from family experience and knowledge. We would like to express our sincere thanks to Marina Zander, George Nathan, Thomas Beck, Fritz Ostkämper, Dr. Hans Ellger, Anika Krümmel, Uwe Fentsahm and Johannes Grossmann for their efforts, for their detailed studies, for a fruitful exchange of ideas and for the trust they have placed in us by making their essays available for our joint publication.

Until autumn 2018, a major part of our work was done by Heinrich Kautzky, who died on 6 December 2018. We are grateful for his great commitment and dedicate this book to him. At the same time, we would also like to thank Fred Zimmak and Bernd Phillipson, who contributed many hours of hard work over a long period of time to this project. We would like to thank Frauke Greuel, who has accompanied the work of our biography group with us through all the problems. And we would like to give warm thanks to Gerd Siebecke from the publisher VSA: as well as Marion Fisch for her careful proof-reading and layout. The word of thanks is given to Cynthia and Rudolf Lies for their great work in translating the book into English. This makes it available to the relatives of the victims and a wider audience to read.



*On 5 December 2015 trees were planted in cooperation with the "Working Group Old Fruit Meadow Kieler Strasse 515" in Neumünster to commemorate participants of the death march. This meadow lies adjacent to the route of the march.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Buergenthal, *A lucky Child*, New York 2007. Published in German with the title: *Ein Glückskind. Wie ein kleiner Junge zwei Ghettos, Auschwitz und den Todesmarsch überlebte und ein neues Leben fand*, Frankfurt am Main, 2015, p. 246. (quote retranslated from German)

<sup>2</sup> See the name list in this book

<sup>3</sup> See below p. 34ff

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's willing executioners*, New York 1996. Published in German 1998 in

Berlin with the title: *Hitlers willige Vollstrecker. Ganz gewöhnliche Deutsche und der Holocaust*.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Blatman, *Die Todesmärsche 1944/45. Das letzte Kapitel des nationalsozialistischen Massensmords*, Reinbek b. Hamburg 2011 (*The Death Marches 1944/45, The Last Chapter of the National Socialist Mass Murder*, Reinbek b. Hamburg 2011)

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Buergenthal 2015 (see note 1), p. 238.

<sup>7</sup> Some details on the authors can be found at the end of the book.

# The Authors

*Thomas Beck*, retired police director, worked for 41 years in Lower Saxony, later with the Hesse State Police. After years of voluntary youth work, he took over the chairmanship of the historical and cultural society in his north Hesse residence in 2006. His historical interest is particularly focused on regional Jewish history. To accomplish this, he published articles at the Eschwege Historical Society in the Association for Hesse History and Regional Studies as well as in regional media. His interest extends further to the protection of monuments, nature and environment.

*Dr. phil. Hans Ellger*, born 1969, historian and currently senior teacher at the Gymnasium Othmarschen in Hamburg, active in strengthening a culture of remembrance since the end of the 1980s; numerous publications on various aspects of the Neuengamme concentration camp, among them: Forced labour and female survival strategies. *Die Geschichte der Frauenaußenlager des KZ Neuengamme 1944/45* (The history of the women's sub-camps of KZ Neuengamme), Berlin 2007.

*Uwe Fentsahm*, born 1956, taught history, mathematics and economic policy in Preetz from 1985 to 2020, lives in Brügge near Bordesholm. Since 1992 intensive research into the history of Nazi forced labour in Schleswig-Holstein, co-editor of the website [www.zwangsarbeiter-schleswig-holstein.de](http://www.zwangsarbeiter-schleswig-holstein.de). Numerous publications, including "Zwangsarbeit und Kriegsgefangenschaft im Amt Bordesholm 1939 to 1945" (Forced Labour and Prisoners

of War in the Bordesholm Region 1939-1945) (2016).

*Johannes Grossmann*, born in 1935 in Würzburg. Studied history, German literature and psychology in Würzburg and Marburg. He passed the state examination for the higher teaching profession. Subsequent positions as an editor at the *Kulturelles Wort* (Cultural Remarks) at the West German Radio (WDR) in Cologne, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and the *SPIEGEL* arts section. Then teacher for history, German, politics and psychology at the *Gymnasium Langenhorn* in Hamburg. Since 2008 active in the *Stolperstein-Initiative* Hamburg.

*Thomas Käpernick*, born 1967, is a historian and was born in Kiel. He studied in Freiburg and has lived in North Germany again since 2001. As a freelance historian, guide and journalist, he works for the Neuengamme and Kaltenkirchen concentration camp memorial sites, among others. In addition, he is actively involved in the politics of remembrance, e.g. on the board of the Neuengamme Association.

*Dietlind Kautzky*, born in 1950, was influenced by the student movement as a schoolgirl already. Since her youth, she has been interested in biographies, especially the way people deal with traumatic changes in their lives. She has done some advanced training in therapeutic work. With many others, she is puzzled why and how so many people were able to participate in the crimes of the Nazi era and



how we can work through this trauma of our history today. She has worked as a teacher for economy/politics and physics.

*Heinrich Kautzky* (1949-2018) followed the debate on Auschwitz and the statute of limitations on Nazi crimes closely as a pupil already, wrote critical articles for the school magazine and became involved in a “Third World Group”. Commitment for a just world and later for the environment turned out to be his issues in life. For him, commitment for human rights was the answer to questions raised by the events of Auschwitz and the student movement. For a long time, he was head of the regional nature conservation authority in Neumünster.

*Annika Krümmel* has lived in Kiel for ten years and studied history and European ethnology/cultural studies at the Christian-Albrecht-University in Kiel. She now works as a clerk in the private sector. She became aware of the biography group during her 18-months-term of employment at the Schleswig-Holstein Heritage Association.

*George Nathan*, born 1949 in Anniston, Alabama/USA, has intensively studied the history of his Jewish family in recent years, which for centuries had its roots in Emmerich and Elten. His grandparents were deported with his mother and aunt to Riga in December 1941. His father had emigrated to the USA just in time before the beginnings of the Holocaust. In 2016 George Nathan travelled to Germany for the first time to learn about the roots of his ancestors. He worked in real estate business and in the construction industry.

*Fritz Ostkämper*, former teacher at the König-Wilhelm grammar school in Höxter, supervisor of the student exchange with Arras (France) for 25 years. For more than 30 years researching the history of Jews in Höxter and at the grammar school, where he initiated erecting a memorial plaque for the Jewish pupils murdered in the Shoah in 1992. Co-founder of the Forum Jacob Pins in Höxter, which has since 2008 been exhibiting the work of this artist, who had emigrated from Höxter, and who commemorates the fate of Jews who once lived in the town.

*Marina Zander* was born in Berlin in 1960 and grew up in the East Frisian Norddeich town. She studied Romance languages and literature (French and Spanish) in Göttingen between 1981 and 1987 and developed an early interest in painting. Influenced by her family history, she has also been confronting the German past for a long time. While still at school she took part in a study trip to Sztutowo/Stutthof in Poland. After completing her practical teacher training to become a secondary school teacher, she worked for five years at a high school in Texas. Since 2000 she has been teaching at a grammar school in Oldenburg, Lower Saxony. Since 2017 she has been working on a graphic novel about the life of her great-grandfather and his family.