

## Herr Bruneckers Rede anlässlich der Eröffnung der Ausstellung

### ‘Lager Lindele: Leben hinter Stacheldraht’

Übersetzung von Karen Deibler

Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to the opening of the cabinet exhibition "Lager Lindele - life behind barbed wire".

My dear English guests, we are very, very pleased with your visit. Thank you so much for coming and making the long way to Biberach to see our small exhibition. It's not a big exhibition, but a great effort. We are very interested in your opinion about our presentation. It's a great honour for us, to see you, the former deportees or the families of former deportees or the families of former war prisoners, here in Biberach in our museum. It's a great honour for us to be your friends, the friends of Guernsey and the Channel Islands and the friends of Britain. Many thanks for coming tonight. It's too bad that I can't speak to you in English. Please listen to our whistling translators. Welcome to you all.

Dear guests, dear friends of the Biberach Museum, you know that I am very concerned about the reappraisal of the history of National Socialism in Biberach. You know that I am very happy to stand before you in order to bring such difficult topics closer to you. But tonight I shouldn't be standing in front of you. Tonight Reinhold Adler should be standing before you. Because everything we present to you today is essentially based on Reinhold Adler's many years of research.

Mr Reinhold Adler from Fischbach was a history teacher in Biberach, and already in the 1980s, together with his students, he conducted research on the Russian cemetery on Memminger Strasse and published many texts on the history of the Biberach camp on the Lindele and related topics. In 2002, he published his comprehensive book on the history of British deportees to the Lager Lindele, and in 2006, in a condensed form, he made these research results available to a wider public in a chapter of the volume "National Socialism in Biberach". He also participated as an important advisor in the very successful exhibition "National Socialism in Biberach" here in the Museum Biberach, and of course, he is a member of the Guernsey Circle of Friends. It's not me who should be talking to you today, it's him. I'm filling in for him

because he's unable to be here for health reasons. I ask for your understanding and emphasise that I speak first and foremost in Mr Adler's name.

The Lager Lindele in Biberach is a camp for prisoners of war and deportees during the Second World War. It goes back to the short episode of a Wehrmacht garrison in Biberach in 1939/40 and is led by the Wehrmacht and later by the Reich Security Main Office. Therefore it bears military administrative names like Oflag (officer camp) or Ilag (internment camp). The Biberach Municipality is not involved and receives little information about what is going on in the camp. The population of Biberach, however, give it the unofficial name "Lager Lindele", which refers to the location on the outskirts of the town near the Lindele vantage point.

The "Lager Lindele" is not a concentration camp, but a showcase camp in the German camp system of National Socialism, which is occasionally visited by the International Red Cross. Nevertheless, some 150 Russian prisoners of war die here, and for years innocent civilians - families, women and children – from the Channel Islands are held captive. It is a historic stroke of luck that we are able to welcome some former British deportees and their descendants as well as the relatives of former prisoners of war here and now to the opening of our cabinet exhibition. I'm very happy about that. It is a historic stroke of luck that Guernsey and Biberach enjoy a lively and cordial exchange today. It is fortunate - and brings along hope – that war and enmity, imprisonment in camps and injustice can turn into lifelong friendships and a close partnership that unites nations.

This means that we remember the dark chapters of our history again and again, let nothing fall into oblivion and do not gloss over anything. This is the reason for the cabinet exhibition we are opening today, and I will therefore briefly leaf through the following chapters of this history.

Since 1935 the then independent mayor Josef Hammer has been trying to station a Wehrmacht garrison in Biberach. After major industrial settlements have failed, a military location also promises economic revival. And at last, the army agrees. On 27 June 1939, the supplementary battalion of infantry regiment 56 arrives in Biberach. The marketplace is decorated festively and with many swastika flags and "*closely surrounded by the population*". The youth forms the "*front rows*", the functionaries and representatives stand guard of honour.

Do they think of war on this solemn June day in 1939? Two months later there will be war. The Biberach battalion is strengthened and moved to the western

front. Older soldiers and convalescents of the Landeschützen battalion stay in Biberach for less than a year until the Wehrmeldeamt informs the mayor of Biberach in August 1940 *"that officers captured in war will be accommodated in the barracks in Birkenharder Straße"*.

This marks the beginning of the conversion of the barracks into a prisoner-of-war camp. In December 1940 French prisoners of war arrive, and after Easter 1941 British prisoners of war. The capacity of the camp is about 1,000 people. Until October 1941 the French prisoners are withdrawn. The nearly 900 British officers set themselves up and organise an entertainment programme with theatre performances and language courses. The library contains 2,500 books. They are also making a number of escape attempts. The construction of an escape tunnel is spectacular. Under the cannon oven in barrack 6 they scrape out the stony Upper Swabian earth, with insufficient tools, with spoons, forks, knives and tin cans. In just under two months, 17 tons of soil are moved. Stools and shelves from cupboards and beds are used to support a 30 to 50- metre long narrow tunnel. On the night of September 14, 1941, 26 officers escape. The large-scale search begins on the morning after. Even the school kids have to look for the escapees. After eight days 22 escapees are caught. Four of the officers reach liberating Switzerland within two weeks.

After the escape the Wehrmacht wants to complicate further escape attempts. That is why the British prisoners of war are transferred to Warburg, far away from the Swiss border to the interior of the country. The German guards are nervous when the soldiers march off on 10 October 1941. Because 900 highly trained fighters are led openly through the city. At the station, 21-year-old Lieutenant Jacob Michael Sturton tries to escape under wagons which are to be loaded. There's a shot fired whose ricochet hurts a security guard. When Sturton comes out with his hands raised, he is shot dead with two more shots. A war crime. According to the Geneva Convention, prisoners of war may not be disadvantaged, let alone shot, even after an attempted escape. It's a tragedy. What a pointless death.

Many more war crimes occur shortly thereafter between November 1941 and February 1942 in the Biberach prisoner-of-war camp. In November 1941, the city administration receives a call from the Wehrmacht Command. The "Lager Lindele" will be occupied by 2,000 to 3,000 Soviet prisoners of war. One expects a mortality rate of *"70-80 Russians per week"* and demands the construction of mass graves. Immediately afterwards the Soviet prisoners of war arrive in nightly rail transports on 10 and 22 November 1941 - some of them already dead in the wagons. Eyewitnesses report that many prisoners can hardly walk due to weakness. Passers-by are said to have encouraged the

guards to give it to the prisoners "*solid*", while others hand them bread and potatoes.

There's maltreatment in the camp, especially after food thefts. The prisoners are fed potatoes and turnips. Johannes Wiest, a corpse collector from Biberach, reports that the dead, often already in rigoor mortis, are collected twice a week and placed in the graves in the neighbouring "Franzosenwäldle" without being identified, covered with oiled paper and sprinkled with chlorinated lime.

The background to these terrible events is the German war of aggression against the Soviet Union from 1941 onwards. Between July and October 1941, more than three million Soviet soldiers fall into German hands in the large battles of encirclement on the eastern front. The Wehrmacht is neither able nor willing to provide the Soviet soldiers with adequate supplies. For this is not a normal campaign, but an ideological war, an allegedly historically necessary confrontation for the annihilation of "Jewish Bolshevism" and for the conquest of living space in the east. The Soviet soldiers are not considered combatants, but racially inferior. In addition, the commissioner's order applies according to which accompanying political soldiers of the Red Army are not captured but shot. For fear of communism, the millions of prisoners are not to be returned to prisoner-of-war camps within the Reich's borders.

Only the realization that the "Blitzkrieg" against the Soviet Union cannot be ended so quickly led to a change of direction in autumn 1941, when the supply situation for the prisoners becomes precarious. Now everywhere in Germany, storage capacities are being sought, and so 2,000 to 3,000 Soviet soldiers come to Biberach. In February 1942 the Soviet soldiers are transferred once again for unknown reasons and to an unknown destination. The city administration of Biberach reports a total of 146 deaths. Causes of death are diarrhoea, intestinal rupture, frostbite on hands and legs, hunger oedema and pneumonia.

In 1949 - after the war - the French military government orders the transfer of the anonymous bodies from the mass grave in the "Franzosenwäldle" to the cemetery on Memminger Strasse. More than 600 victims are buried here among prisoners of war and forced labourers from the entire southern part of the French occupation zone. A memorial stone with Cyrillic inscription has stood here since 1954. Since the mid-1980s, the local Pax-Christi group has been taking care of the graves. It erects a four and a half metre high atonement sign in the form of a Russian cross. In 1991 a collection under the motto "*Give the nameless back their names*" raises enough money to give all 614 dead their own nameplates. Ladies and gentlemen, we have no photo and no object of these maltreated people. Nothing. Therefore, we cannot exhibit anything - in

the sense of nothing. All we have is the Russian cemetery on Memminger Straße with its worthy cross and nameplates. Go there once. That won't let you go.

Ladies and gentlemen, at this point I shall skip the following chapter on French, Serbian and Croatian prisoners of war in the Lager Lindele in 1942. Just this much: in August, 61 prisoners escape during a football match. One of the escapees, the 34-year-old Yugoslavian captain Petar Komadinovi, is shot dead at Altshausen station while fleeing and then buried in the Catholic cemetery in Biberach. That, too, is a war crime. 59 escapees are caught again.

And now the most important chapter in the history of the Lager Lindele: from September 1942, the prisoner-of-war camp on the Lindele becomes a deportee camp for civilians. From September 1942, about 1,000 British citizens are taken from the occupied Channel Islands to the "Lager Lindele ". After German citizens were deported to Australia and Siberia by the British and Soviet military in Iran, German government authorities plan to deport British citizens to Germany in return. The Wehrmacht distributes a total of 2,000 people from the islands of Jersey, Guernsey and Sark, who do not belong to the local population, to camps in Dorsten in Westphalia, Biberach and Wurzach. Biberach becomes an internment camp for people mainly from Guernsey. These are families with children or elderly people who have taken up residence in the Channel Islands, British conscientious objectors and pacifists. These innocent civilians are now taken into camp custody in order to be able to negotiate them as hostages for the exchange of German civilians in British hands.

The Wehrmacht hands over the guarding of the camp to the police. The deportees are then allowed to set up their own camp management system. The British camp captain Garfield Garland maintains contact with the German camp management and presents the concerns of the deportees. Every barrack has a barrack leader. The deportees even set up a police force to ensure peace and quiet during shift work. An internal camp court punishes indiscipline with its own "prison" so that the German camp prison does not have to be used in the first place.

Ladies and gentlemen, remember that there are about 1,000 people, all from the Channel Islands but from different social backgrounds, who are now being thrown together. Minor disgruntlement can dynamically become stronger and lead to a dangerous intervention by the German guards. Yes, the supply to the camp is good. From December 1942, regular deliveries of aid from the International Red Cross are launched. From then on, the deportees prefer to

live off canned food rather than camp soup and sauerkraut. Hundreds of packages arrive every month.

Yet many deportees suffer from being imprisoned. The barracks are incredibly cramped. Bad rumors are circulating. Although intended as a family camp, women and men are accommodated in separate barracks locked in the evenings. The community showers, which can be visited once a week, are degrading for the women.

Only a few weeks after the arrival of the deportees, temperatures drop on the plateau, the camp is exposed to wind and weather. It is winter in Upper Swabia. High snow drifts, ice flowers on the windows and stiffly frozen laundry on the line are absolutely unusual for the inhabitants of the Channel Island. Since the Wehrmacht does not send the deportees' suitcases with warm clothing from the Channel Islands until the beginning of February 1943, the women and girls without stockings and the men and boys in shorts freeze. But the first humanitarian miracles are already taking place. Some girls from Biberach, who have heard how cold the people in the camp are, get some coal at the station and throw it over the fence.

Ladies and gentlemen, these deportees do not let themselves be defeated, they show admirable discipline and perseverance. This is not possible without conflicts, envy and mistrust, for example towards the privileged camp captain Garfield Garland. But all in all, they create incredible things. The camp might almost be called a small town on top of the plateau north of Biberach.

In two barracks, one for women, one for men, an infirmary is set up. There are two doctors among the deportees. Once a week a German staff doctor comes for a visit. Several sisters and nurses, some of them from the Red Cross, do the infirmary work. Here, tooth imprints are also taken for dental prostheses ordered via the Red Cross in England. Glasses are supplied by an optician from Biberach. As a result of continued book donations from the International Red Cross and the YMCA, the camp library grows to more than 5,000 books. It is supervised by a librarian and several helpers. There is even bookbinding equipment for the repair of ripped volumes.

A compulsory school with eight teachers is being set up for the 170 children in the camp. Language courses are offered for adults. Theatre plays are performed regularly. Between 1943 and 1944 there are more than 30 plays. A colourful carnival event in August 1943 is the highlight, which is even captured in the film you can see above in the exhibition. Sports and gymnastics courses are also offered and football and cricket tournaments are organised. On

Sundays the four Anglican and Methodist clergymen hold worship services. From time to time the Catholic town priest Keppeler from Biberach says mass.

Nevertheless, life behind barbed wire is not a walk in the park. People suffer from imprisonment, from narrowness, from inactivity. Many are depressed, listless, apathetic. Only a few are available for voluntary work outside the camp. You don't want to collaborate with the enemy. It is only when it becomes known that chocolate, tea or coffee from the Red Cross packages can be exchanged for fruit, vegetables or eggs in Biberach that the willingness to work increases. Eighty deportees work in private households, at a watchmaker's or at farmers'. And that's how friendships develop - it's hard to believe.

The gardener Frederick Cockayne from Guernsey, whose wife dies in June 1943 in the hospital in Schussenried, works in the garden of the Haug family in Biberach and becomes a fatherly friend of the young Peter Haug, who picks him up from the camp and brings him back after work.

Accompanied by the popular Red Cross nurse Anny Sigg, pregnant women – this also happens in the Lager Lindele - can be hospitalized in Biberach or Ochsenhausen for childbirth. On 28 January 1943, little David Skillett is born in Biberach hospital, on the same night as little Heiner Koch from Biberach. The babies' mothers get to know each other in childbed. The families keep in touch, today in the third generation. Ladies and gentlemen, I find these stories incredibly beautiful. These are just two examples of wonderfully humane and human stories.

Towards the end of the war it is tough again. The supply of Red Cross packages is faltering. Coal deliveries are also reduced by a third. But it gets even worse when shocking transports from the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp arrive in Biberach in November 1944 and January 1945. The criminal treatment of people classified as Jews by the SS becomes obvious. In two trains on 17 and 18 November 1944, almost 150 North African Jews with British passports arrive. They are in shocking condition. Due to suspicion of typhus and spotted fever, arrivals are accommodated in two separate barracks.

On 23 January 1945 another transport from Bergen-Belsen brings 300 German and Austrian Jews with South American rescue passes to Biberach. They are to participate in a German-American exchange. But in Biberach forty passengers have to leave the train. Two deceased men are also unloaded. Forty-two internees from "Lager Lindele", who have valid US passports, are allowed to board the train. The following day another 40 people arrive at the camp. The

health condition of these people is even worse than that of the North African Jews. 42-year-old Elisabeth Joshua-Eisenmann weighs only 35 kilograms. Several men die in the next few weeks.

But on 23 April 1945 the British deportees and the Jewish deportees are liberated by French troops. Most of the deportees start their journey home on 27 May, initially to England, because the starving Channel Islands are still unable to accommodate any additional people. Before that, the liberated carry crates full of tins into town to thank their friends in Biberach.

Shortly after the war, the visits of former deportees to Biberach and Biberachers to the Channel Islands begin. Since 1997, these visits to Biberach have also taken place on official invitation of the city and the Guernsey Circle of Friends. In the meantime, partnership/twinning relations between Guernsey and Biberach have developed at various levels - administration, police, schools and churches. In 2005, the then Lord Mayor of Biberach, Thomas Fettback, is awarded the "Officer of the British Empire" (OBE) medal of honour by the British Queen at the celebrations marking the 60th anniversary of Guernsey's liberation from German occupation for his services to British-German reconciliation.

After 1945, the former Lindele camp served as a refugee camp and hospital for returnees. In 1951 the police of the state of Württemberg-Hohenzollern also moves in. 1970 to 1976 extensive construction measures are underway. The barracks are demolished and permanent accommodation and administration buildings are erected. After that, the Biberach Bereitschaftspolizei are repeatedly reorganized. In the course of the structural reform of the police force in 2014, Biberach is affiliated to the Baden-Württemberg Police College as a pure training location.

There is nothing to be seen anymore from the former camp on the Lindele. Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, it is important today that we erect a worthy memorial site there. The exhibition we are opening today is the preparatory work for this as well. At the same time, Prof. Löbermann from the University of Biberach is holding a seminar with students this winter term, at the end of which there will be various designs for such a memorial site at the former "Lager Lindele" in February. These designs are presented here in the museum. Hopefully one of them will soon become reality. Against Forgetting. To constantly remind and remember what people can do to people, in the most terrible and also in the best sense of the word.

thanks



