

**New Exhibit Reveals the Remarkable Story of a POW from Thüringen:
“Against Oblivion” in Idaho’s Camp Pocatello, 1945-46**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Bad Langensalza, Thüringen — [INSERT DATE]

What happens to a soldier when the fighting stops, but the war does not? A new exhibit at Haus der Spuren in Bad Langensalza explores this question — and seeks answers by tracing the stories of six **German prisoners of war** (POWs).

Opening **16 April 2026**, *Against Oblivion* tells the story of Helmut Kaufmann, a native of Thüringen whose journey through war, imprisonment and survival stretched far beyond the end of World War II. The **exhibit** features the creative work and experiences of a group of six men imprisoned at Camp Pocatello, in Idaho, with a special focus on Kaufmann, whose life provides the narrative thread linking captivity, displacement and memory, across continents and decades. Through his story, the exhibit invites visitors to confront enduring questions about humanity, dignity and the acts of survival that emerge under extreme conditions.

Kaufmann was captured by Allied forces in October 1944. What followed was a 16-month odyssey through prisoner of war camps across the United States — from Boston to Texas to Idaho — wherever labor was needed. In the desert of southern Idaho, at Camp Pocatello, it was Kaufmann’s idea to create a diary; together with five fellow prisoners, he brought this vision to life behind barbed wire. The result was a 206-page illustrated diary that reflects an assertion of selfhood and a profoundly human response to confinement. Within its pages, the men documented daily routines, humor, longing, music, memory and imagination.

While the diary captures a finite moment of shared captivity, for Kaufmann these pages would come to represent only the beginning of a much longer ordeal — one that would continue long after the war itself had ended. In the early months of 1946, he was sent back to Europe and handed over — along with tens of thousands of other German POWs — to French or British authorities as a forced laborer. After his release one month later, Kaufmann attempted to return to Thüringen to find relatives he had not seen for years. Instead, he was detained by the *Volkspolizei* (eastern German police in the Soviet-occupied zone), then transferred to Soviet authorities.

For the next 17 months, Kaufmann endured Soviet captivity — first near Erfurt and Berlin, at Oranienburg, then in camps in the Soviet Union. Only weeks after the establishment of the German Democratic Republic in October 1949, he was repatriated through Frankfurt an der Oder. On 22 November 1949, Kaufmann arrived in Pforzheim in West Germany, where he could finally begin to build a new life.

Throughout years of displacement and imprisonment, Kaufmann safeguarded the diary he had envisioned and helped create. The fragile pages became proof that even in captivity, creativity could function as an act of survival. As one of the six contributors phrased it: “We write to remember.”

Haus der Spuren director Dr. Michael Luick-Thrams, who interviewed Kaufmann decades after his captivity was over, says, “He spoke of his time in the U.S. as one chapter, but it was the years that followed — especially his Soviet captivity — that most shaped the rest of his life.”

Against Oblivion brings this story to life. The exhibit raises essential questions about what it means to remain human in inhumane conditions and how small gestures become strategies for survival. Visitors will encounter men who built “buses” out of cardboard to escape in their imagination, practiced music on a silent piano, and held onto joyful memories as forms of resistance. And, by centering the story of Kaufmann, a native of Thüringen, the exhibit connects a global history of war and captivity to a specific local individual’s life.

Complementing Haus der Spuren’s existing research into the 372,000 German prisoners of war held in some 600 camps across the U.S. during WWII, the exhibit deepens our understanding of captivity by centering individual lives within a shared experience. It serves as a reminder that history is shaped not only by events, but also by human choices.

The special exhibit will open on **16 April 2026**, at Haus der Spuren, Unterm Berge 24, 99947 Bad Langensalza. Members of the press and media are invited to view the exhibit at 15:00; as of 15:30 the building will be open to the public until 16:30. At 17:00, all are invited to a special “**Global Salon**” program, featuring first the presentation “*Deine Geschichte – Meine Zukunft*” by Ralph Neber (born 1960). As the son of German prisoner of war Alfred Neber (1924), who was also imprisoned in the US during World War II in some of the same regions as Helmut Kaufmann, Ralph will talk in his illustrated program about the years his father spent in the German Wehrmacht and in American captivity. The lecture will cover the period from his conscription into military service in October 1942 to his return home in March 1946. Furthermore, what did Alfred Neber take away from these experiences for his life and work until his death in 2021?

Then, a second guest speaker, Karin (Harten) Schramm, will speak about her German-emigrant family’s experiences as civilian internees during World War II. The US government forcibly removed the father, Wolfgang, from the life he had built in Ecuador exporting tagua “*Steinnuss*”, and brought him to Camp Crystal City in Texas. Tens of thousands of German and Japanese legal-alien residents in the Americas were held hostage, in part to exchange for Axis-held US Americans. Later joined by his wife and three children, in mid-1946 the Hartens made their way back to Ecuador, but their lives were forever changed.

Finally, Petra Monkowius will talk about the life Gert Schramm, the “Afro-German” who the Nazi regime arrested in Langensalza in 1944 because officials worried the (quote) “nigger half breed” could “contaminate Aryan maidens’ blood”. After stays in various jails, he landed in Buchenwald concentration camp, which he survived with the help of communist internees. Petra will also outline the memorial

event "*Wer hat Angst vorm schwarzen Mann*": In honor of Gert Schramm's 10-year death day, from 11:00 to 13:00 on 18 April on the City Hall Square in Bad Langensalza. Guest speakers will recall the significance of Gert Schramm's life, as will a mobile exhibit parked nearby, hung on the "History Mobile".

For more information, please visit [TRACES.org](https://traces.org) or contact Dr. Luick-Thrams by email at MichaelLuickThrams@gmail.com or by phone at 017634387065. The exhibit can be viewed online here: https://hds.traces.org/camp_pocatello/

About Haus der Spuren

Haus der Spuren is dedicated to preserving and sharing stories of historical significance through innovative exhibitions and community engagement. The museum aims to highlight often overlooked narratives from World War II and the lasting impact of those experiences on individuals and communities.

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