

Apolda – The Nonconformist

NARRATOR

Johann Ollik was arrested by the Gestapo for the first time in February 1939, six years after the Nazis had come to power. Together with three colleagues, he called for a strike at his workplace, the Tilgner Steam Brickworks in Apolda. He spent four days in “protective custody.”

This would be the first of multiple arrests. Johann Ollik, a trained locksmith, was a committed communist. From 1927 until the fall of the Weimar Republik, he was a member of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). He remained politically active even after 1933.

Ollik was forced to change jobs after the strike at the brickworks. He was obligated to work as a machine setter at the local *Rheinmetall-Borsig AG* plant.

The *Rheinmetall-Borsig AG* had already been integrated into the industrial conglomerate *Reichswerke Hermann Göring*, and was thus completely under state control. Over the course of the war, the company became the Nazi regime’s most important arms manufacturer. In addition to concentration camp prisoners, thousands of forced laborers – mostly from the occupied Soviet Union – were put to work in the factory. The majority of them were women.

As a result of the constant air raids in the last years of the war, the company began increasingly relocating its production. The *Rheinmetall-Borsig AG* in Apolda became increasingly important. Several camps were set up within the Apolda plant and surrounded with barbed wire. Up to 500 men, women and children from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were housed there – under deplorable conditions.

At the *Rheinmetall-Borsig* plant in Apolda, German workers and forced laborers were required to work closely together. The Germans were employed as “pace-setters,” i.e. as overseers. Johann Ollik, too, regularly interacted with forced laborers. But he treated them differently – and considered it his duty to help them.

In August 1943, Ollik was arrested for the second time, and sent to the Gestapo prison in Weimar. He was accused of having contact with an “Eastern Girl.” Presumably, the Gestapo intended to allege that he had a romantic relationship with a forced laborer. Ollik was sent to the Buchenwald concentration camp, and was

transferred to Sachsenhausen shortly afterwards. In July 1944, Ollik was released, possibly due to the lack of evidence for this charge. He had to return to his job at Rheinmettal-Borsig.

Shortly afterwards, Ollik was arrested for the third time. This time, he was charged. The charge was based on an incident that occurred in 1943: Johann Ollik learned by chance that his acquaintance Reinhold Runge, a member of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), had left a rifle from the Wehrmacht inventory at his home while on leave from the front. By that time, Runge was back at the front. Ollik got in touch with Runge's wife, and she gave him the rifle.

After the war, Reinhold Runge told the police:

REINHOLD RUNGE

Johannes [sic] Ollik, who used to visit me at home – and whom I had known of for four years as a member of the KPD, which was operating illegally in Apolda – asked my wife if he could have my rifle. My wife handed him the carbine as Biewald watched. (..)

The man watching this exchange, Erich Biewald, was a neighbor of the Runges and a member of the NSDAP. Shortly after this, an argument broke out between Biewald and Mrs. Runge. Biewald reported the rifle incident to a police sergeant he knew, presumably out of spite. Initially, the police took no action. Biewald followed up with another inquiry.

Later, after the war, Reinhold Runge told the police:

REINHOLD RUNGE

“He was fully aware that this would ruin us, because while I was gone, he had remarked to other residents of the building that this would “cost us our heads.”

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At Biewald's insistence, the police searched the Runges' apartment and Johann's apartment. The rifle was not found – but it was discovered the next day in the gateway of the Criminal Investigation Department.

Runge was subsequently arrested in Norway, where he had been serving in the Wehrmacht. He remained in custody for eleven weeks and was subject to torture.

REINHOLD RUNGE

During my pre-trial detention, I became seriously ill as a result of numerous abuses during the interrogations, including deprivation of food and other forms of harassment. My illness progressed to a serious heart condition, which required prolonged treatment in a military hospital; however, this did not cure my illness

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Runge was subsequently transferred to a “punishment battalion.” His wife was arrested as well, and sentenced to one year in prison.

Johann Ollik was arrested in September 1944. He was initially held at the Gestapo Prison in the Weimar Marstall, where catastrophic conditions prevailed. Later, he was transferred to the police prison on what is today Carl-August-Allee. In January 1945, he was admitted to the hospital with a skull fracture – according to the police, the result of a failed escape attempt. Given the conditions in Weimar's prisons, however, it seems more likely that it was the result of violent abuse. Johann Ollik died on January 10, 1945, from the consequences of his injuries.

After the end of the war, former comrades of Johann Ollik began gathering regularly at his grave. Later, the city named a street after him and placed a commemorative plaque at his former home. In 2009, a resident of Apolda provided the funds for a Stolperstein, or “stumbling stone,” to be placed in front of Johann Ollik's home as a reminder of his story.

A small, unassuming headstone, tucked away in Weimar's main cemetery, bears the following inscription:

"In loving memory of the anti-fascist resistance fighter Johann Ollik"