

THE LAST MONTHS OF ANNE FRANK

On 4 August 1944, everyone in the Secret Annex is arrested. Someone has betrayed them. They are deported first to the Westerbork transit camp, and then on to Auschwitz. Otto Frank is the only person from the Secret Annex to survive the camps. The others all die. The identity of their betrayer has never been established.

The Fate of the Men

After arriving at Auschwitz, Otto Frank, Fritz Pfeffer and Hermann and Peter van Pels manage to stay together. Most prisoners have to perform heavy labor digging trenches. Peter is luckier: he is assigned to the camp post office. Guards and non-Jews may receive mail. Because Peter handles the packages that arrive, he is sometimes able to “arrange” a bit of extra food.

Hermann van Pels Regularly there are selections: prisoners who are too sick or weak to work are sent directly to the gas chamber to be killed. It is a few weeks after their arrival and Hermann van Pels, exhausted, is no longer capable of working. He is selected and then gassed

Fritz Pfeffer is deported to the Neuengamme concentration camp in October 1944. Thousands of prisoners die there from a combination of heavy labor, lack of food and poor sanitary conditions. Fritz Pfeffer is among them. He dies in the sick-bay barracks on December 20, 1944, at the age of fifty-five.

Peter van Pels Shortly before his release, the Nazis evacuate the camp. Prisoners who can still walk must go with them. Peter van Pels is among these prisoners. He arrives at the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria at the end of January. The prisoners have to perform heavy labor. Peter van Pels probably dies between 11 April and 5 May from exhaustion.

Otto Frank On January 27, 1945, Russian soldiers liberate Auschwitz. Otto Frank is one of the 7650 prisoners who are still alive. He weighs less than 115 pounds, while he weighed over 150 pounds in the Secret Annex. Otto particularly remembers the snow-white uniforms the Russian soldiers were wearing and he later says: “They were good men. We didn't care that they were Communists. We weren't concerned about their politics, we were interested in being liberated.”

The Fate of the Women

After their arrival and selection at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Edith, Margot and Anne stay together in a barrack. Auguste van Pels is most likely sent to a different part of the camp. During the day, the women have to work very hard hauling heavy stones or grass mats. They often have to stand outside for hours on end to be counted for roll-call, no matter how awful the weather conditions might be.

Edith Frank In the winter of 1944, the Russian Army is on the advance. The Nazis decide to take as many prisoners as possible, who are still capable of working, back to Germany. The health of the women prisoners is a primary factor. Edith may not go along. Margot and Anne are then considered. Rosa de Winter-Levy witnesses this: “Then it was the turn of both girls...and there they stood for that moment, naked and bald. Anne looked straight at us with her innocent eyes, and then they were gone. We weren't able to see what happened to them next. We heard Mrs. Frank cry out: 'The children! Oh God...'" At the end of October or the beginning of November 1944, Margot and Anne Frank are crammed into a crowded freight train bound for the concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen. Edith Frank is left behind at Auschwitz. She falls ill and dies on January 6, 1945.

August van Pels At the end of November 1944 , another train load of prisoners from Auschwitz reaches Bergen-Belsen. Auguste van Pels is probably also among these prisoners. She is reunited with Margot and Anne. Though after a few months she must leave Bergen-Belsen again and is moved to Raguhn, which is part of the concentration camp at Buchenwald. From Raguhn she is sent to the camp at Theresienstadt. During that journey, between 9 April and 8 May 1945, Auguste van Pels is murdered.

Margot and Anne Frank As the Russian armies advance towards Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp in Poland, the Nazis evacuate as many of their prisoners as possible to Germany, especially those still capable of slave labour. Margot and Anne Frank are selected for a transport to Bergen-Belsen. They depart for Bergen-Belsen by train, in overcrowded cattle wagons, in the night of 1 November 1944. Their mother Edith remains in Auschwitz. After a terrible two-day journey, with barely anything to eat or drink, the train arrives. The prisoners still have to endure a six-kilometre forced march to the camp. Bergen-Belsen is already desperately overcrowded when the prisoners from Auschwitz arrive. The conditions are horrendous: even the most basic amenities are lacking, and there are raging epidemics of infectious diseases. Margot and Anne Frank remain in Bergen-Belsen for over three months, until they succumb to the effects of typhus and the other hardships of the camp. Anne Frank dies aged 15 in February 1945, shortly after Margot, who dies around her nineteenth birthday. The exact dates of their deaths are unknown.

New Research by the Anne Frank House

March 31, 2015 – It is 70 years ago this year that Anne Frank died of typhus in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, as one of the many victims of the camp. The exact date of her death is unknown. At the time, the Red Cross officially concluded that she died at some time between 1 and 31 March 1945. Now new research by the Anne Frank House has shed fresh light on the last months of Anne Frank and her sister Margot. It is unlikely that they were still alive in March; their deaths must have occurred in February 1945.

On the desolate expanse of the Lunenburg Heath, the former site of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, stands a small memorial to Anne and Margot Frank. Flowers and tokens of remembrance are often left there, as if it were their grave. In reality they, like tens of thousands of other victims of Bergen-Belsen, died at an unknown time in an unknown place.

The Red Cross concluded that Anne and Margot died at some time between 1 and 31 March 1945. The Dutch authorities later set the official date of death at 31 March for both Anne and Margot. But where does this date come from? The Anne Frank House has carried out new research into the last months of Anne and Margot. The archives of the Red Cross, the International Tracing Service in Bad Arolsen and the Bergen-Belsen Memorial were studied, together with as many eyewitness testimonies of survivors as possible. Research was also carried out into the existing literature.

The research sheds new light on the last months of Anne and Margot. It is unlikely that they were still alive in March. Seventy years later, we can state that the date of their deaths must have been in February 1945.

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