

Rebecca Teitelbaum-Buckman, from Ravensbrück to Sønderborg Denmark

Becky left Ravensbrück in the evening on 24 April 1945. She was part of a group of approximately 800 women transported by 15 ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) trucks and 6 Danish ambulances headed by Pontoppidan Sørensen. The transport was part of the 'Rescue Action Bernadotte' and the leader was the Swedish lieutenant Gösta Hallquist but no Swedish White Buses were involved. The trucks were stationed at the ICRC in Lübeck and primarily used for distribution of parcels for allied prisoners of war in various camps in Northern Germany. The drivers, many Canadians, were prisoners of war who had vowed not to escape. Among the women were approx. 250 Dutch, 300 Belgian, 100 French, 80 from Luxemburg and 70 Polish. Each truck held approx. 50 women, which meant that due to the lack of space, they could not all sit down at the same time.

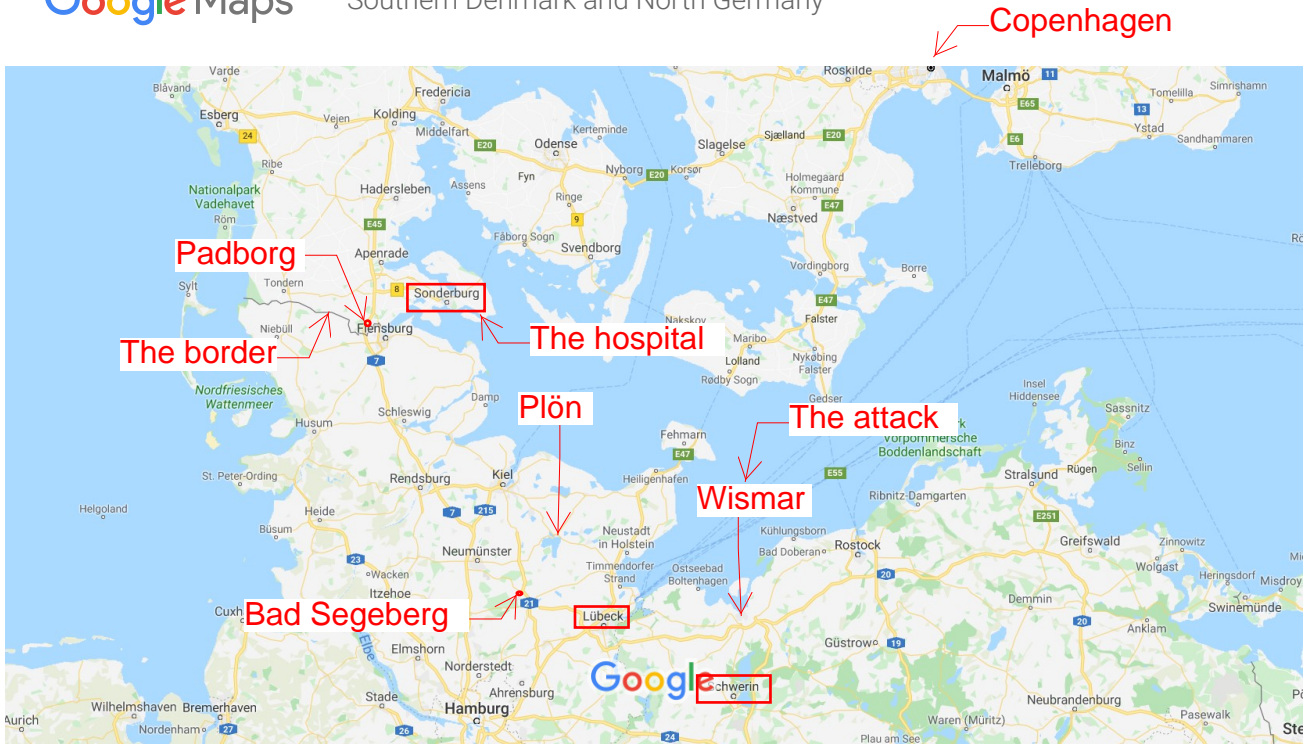
The night between 24 and 25 April was spent just a couple of miles from Ravensbrück. This night is duly mentioned in the memoirs of the women on the way to Sweden, the first night in freedom. On 25 April, the convoy continued its way to Denmark. It was a beautiful day. However, this circumstance led to increased activity of fighter planes. The convoy was split in two, the reason is not clear. One part chose the southern route via Schwerin and the other the northern, via Wismar. The Danish ambulances took the same northern route as one part of the ICRC trucks. This convoy was attacked about 15 miles east of Wismar. Allied, most likely British fighter planes emptied their guns on the trucks at noon on 25 April. We do not know how many of the 15 trucks took the northern route. My guess is only two. These two trucks were damaged to the effect that they could not continue their journey. Reasons for the Red Cross vehicles being attacked from the air by allied planes were either German army vehicles mixing with the Red Cross trucks or the enemy's practice of transporting ammunition by Red Cross ambulances or simply by mistake. At least three women were instantly killed, one a few hours later and three died later in Denmark. The Danish ambulances were not far behind the attacked ICRC trucks. On arrival at the place of devastation, they immediately offered first aid, emptied two of their ambulances and drove eight wounded to a hospital in Wismar. The approx. 100 passengers of the two damaged trucks were brought to a shed on a farm. These were picked up by two Danish buses that came from Lübeck accompanied by the Danish doctor Per Lous later in the evening. On the way to Lübeck, Per Lous went to see the wounded at the hospital in Wismar but their condition did not permit a transport to Denmark. In the meantime one Polish woman had died at the hospital. On arrival in Lübeck, Per Lous brought the four (?) dead to the Swedish church in Lübeck. The larger part of the convoy that took the southern route had also been attacked from the air at about the same time a few miles west of Schwerin. The wounded from this attack were brought to a hospital in Schwerin. Early Friday morning on 27 April, Pontoppidan Sørensen and Per Lous started on a journey from Denmark to collect the wounded in Plön<sup>1</sup>, Schwerin and Wismar. They took with five ambulances first to Plön where they visited some of the wounded from a third attack on 26 April near Plön (between Lübeck and the Danish border). These women were in a bad shape, and some had died. At this visit none of the wounded in Plön were picked up and brought to Denmark. They were however collected on a second journey on May 1<sup>st</sup>. The ambulance convoy stayed the night in Lübeck and on Saturday 28 April, six wounded were picked up in Schwerin and seven in Wismar. One of these seven must have been Becky Teitelbaum. The women in hospital in Schwerin and Wismar were relieved and very grateful to see the Danes who had come to bring them to Denmark. The convoy with the thirteen<sup>2</sup> wounded reached Lübeck in the evening of 28 April. After a meal break at the Swedish church in Lübeck they continued to Denmark and arrived in Padborg at the Danish border the next day, on 29 April at 11:30. They had stopped near Bad Segeberg during the night, since there was activity in the air and driving without light was not an option. After a stop for breakfast at Padborg quarantine station, the journey ended at the hospital in Sønderborg.

According to the records of the Rikshospital Sønderborg, Becky Teitelbaum was hospitalised in Sønderborg (not Copenhagen) from 29 April 1945 until 12 July 1945. As mentioned above, three of these died in Denmark. Two German women, Sofie Dehm and Änna Kassing had left Ravensbrück under names of Dutch women who had died before in Ravensbrück. They entered the hospital in Denmark with these false names and it took some time before I recognised their real identity. These were German communist women who faced execution. Their secret organisation in Ravensbrück had provided them with these false identities. Only Western European and Polish (primarily Jewish) women were allowed to leave Ravensbrück for Sweden. Sofie Dehm died the following day, 30 April 1945 and Änna Kassing on 10 May 1945. The Dutch women, named Maria van Ginkel died 14 August 1945 in Aarhus. Apart from Becky Teitelbaum, there were two further Belgian women in the ambulance transport from Germany to Sønderborg: Margrethe Aerts from Leuven and Irena Büff from Brussel.

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<sup>1</sup> The attack was in fact nearer Eutin than Plön and the wounded were brought to different hospitals in Malente but the story is better known as "the attack at Plön"

<sup>2</sup> The record of the hospital show 12, not 13 entries.



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Ravensbrück →

↖ Berlin

Jan van Ommen 8 November 2019