

Emil Falkenstein

*09/29/1870 (Hastenrath)

† 09/26/1942 (Treblinka)

Against forgetting



At the end of 2012, after a 40-year search, the first log book of the Gangelt fire department, with the records of 1899 to 1937 were found again. In the evaluation of the book many gaps in the history of the Gangelt fire department could be closed, but it turned out a new question. One of the log book writers, Emil Falkenstein, was a founding member of the Gangelt voluntary fire brigade in 1899 and from 1925 to 1933 he was, as the writer of the log book, a member of the Board of Gangelt fire department. From June 1933 on, his name was never mentioned again in the log book of the Gangelt fire department. That is why we wanted to find out more about the life of Emil Falkenstein.

Here is his story:

Emil Falkenstein was born on 29th September 1870 in Hastenrath close to Gangelt as the son of Helene Rosendahl Hindle and Voss Uri Falkenstein. His younger sisters Wilhelmine (later married Sassen) and Julia (later married Zeligman) were born on 8th June 1874 respectively on 14th April 1881. About his brother Aron Falkenstein is unfortunately nothing yet known.

Emil's mother Helen Hindle Rosendahl died on 7th February 1903. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery at the Wirtsberg in Gangelt. Her grave stone is still preserved. The family Rosendahl was firmly rooted for generations in the border town of Gangelt. Already Emil's grandfather Aron Rosendahl came on 28th January 1806 in Gangelt to the world.



Picture 1: Grave stone of Helene Falkenstein on the Jewish cemetery in Gangelt

Emil Falkenstein married Jeanette Henriette Lichtenstein. Jeanette was born on 1st March 1880 in Waldenrath. Her parents were Abraham and Amalia Lichtenstein, born Levi. Emil and Jeanette had two children together. Their son Hermann was born on 19th March 1907 and their daughter, Meta was born on 26th May 1910. Both children were born in Gangelt.



Picture 2: Grave stone of Voss Uri Falkenstein on the Jewish cemetery in Gangelt

On 27th April 1922 Emil's father Voss Uri Falkenstein died at the age of 97. At this time he was the oldest inhabitant of Gangelt. He lived until recently with his son Emil close to the Bruch gate (Bruchstreet 128), where they ran a tobacco and leather goods business, before they produced their own cigar's and sold them.¹. Even the grave stone of Voss Uri Falkenstein is preserved today in the Jewish cemetery at the Wirtsberg.

In the 19th century slightly smaller fires fell out of control and often put entire neighbourhoods in ruins. Following the example of other cities and towns, in Gangelt they called on the population to set up a volunteer fire department. Along with 47 other citizens, Max Rosendahl, Siegmund Morgenstern, Lion Leopold and Emil Falkenstein founded on 24th October 1899, the Gangelt volunteer fire department. Together with their comrades they fought several

¹ See Seferens, Heimatkalender 1998 p. 119

major fires in Gangelt and thereby risked life and limb for the belongings of other citizens. Emil Falkenstein's son Hermann was also actively involved in village life. He was a good winger (Left Wing) at the football club Victoria 08 Gangelt.

During the First World War, on 4th September 1916, the fireman Siegmund Morgenstern died. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Gangelt. His grave stone is well preserved today.

After the First World War in 1918 the volunteer fire brigades were banned by the French in the Rhineland. At the founding meeting on 4 October 1920 Emil Falkenstein joined without hesitation the fire brigade again. He was already 50 years old.

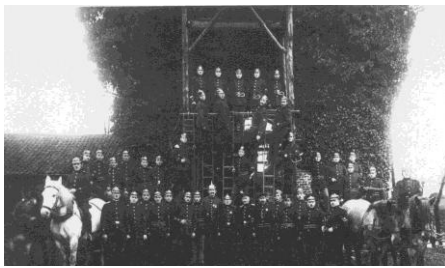


Picture 3: Grave stone of the firemen Siegmund Morgenstern in the jewish cemetery in Gangelt

Lion Leopold also joined the fire brigade again. He was elected by the members to the head of the water squad, so Lion Leopold was responsible for the water supply in case of fire. At the first general meeting on 15th March 1924 Lion Leopold was but no longer listed as a member of the fire department in Gangelt. About his reasons to leave, unfortunately, nothing is known.

The cattle dealer Max Rosendahl did not re-join the Gangelt fire brigade after the First World War. He was at that time already 48 years old, too.

On 12th July 1925 Emil Falkenstein was honoured along with seven other comrades for his 25 years of faithful membership in the Gangelt fire department with the Honorary Diploma of the Association of Fire brigades in the Rhine Province.²



Picture 4: Gangelt fire department during the 25-year jubilee

At the same day Emil Falkenstein was also appointed to the Board of the Gangelt fire department. He held the office of Secretary. His responsibilities included the documentation of the particular assignments and other important events in the log book of the Gangelt fire department. Thanks to the detailed documentation in the log book, the story of the Gangelt fire department is still preserved. In addition, he read at the annual general meeting the annual report, which he had previously created.

The Board meetings were usually held in local restaurants where the owners were also members of the fire department. Additional Board meetings were also held at Emil Falkensteins home.

However, Emil Falkenstein was an active volunteer not only for the volunteer fire department. From 1926 until the merger of the district Geilenkirchen and Heinsberg in 1932 he became chairman of the local branch of Gangelt from the Commercial Association of the district Geilenkirchen.

At the General Assembly on 15 February 1930 he was again elected to the Board of the fire department.

² See „Kreisfeuerwehr-Verbandsfest in Gangelt“, Geilenkirchener Volkszeitung of 13.07.1925

Immediately after the takeover of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) reprisals against dissidents and Jews began. Also in Gangelt was formed a small but powerful supporters of the Nazi Party and the Sturmabteilung (SA). A few days after the seizure of power of the Nazi party came into effect on 1st February 1933 under the member number 1441326 the mayor of Gangelt became a member of the NSDAP and he replaced the council of Gangelt with new NSDAP members.³ The "Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service" of 7th April 1933 was converted to the lowest administrative levels of the communities. The so-called Aryan paragraph took over not only the municipal facilities but almost all the way down to sports organizations and choral societies without state coercion.⁴ This had the effect, among other things, that Jews and Social Democrats were excluded from the fire departments. After nearly 34 years of service to the neighbourhood Emil Falkenstein was excluded without any comment from the fire department in June 1933. His last entry in the log book of the volunteer fire department Gangelt took place on 8th June 1933.⁵

In the following months the harassment of Jews increased constantly. Citizens who went shopping at Jewish stores were threatened and insulted. As well as the sales of tobacco products business Falkenstein steadily declined from about 20,000 Reichsmarks in 1930 to 12,292 Reichsmarks in 1936 and 5,132 Reichsmark in 1938.⁶

While Emil and his wife Jeanette remained in Gangelt, Emil's son Hermann Falkenstein wanted not longer to let the insults go through and moved on 23rd December 1936 to the neighbouring city Sittard in the Netherlands. He opened on 1st January 1937 a wholesale shop for chemical products. In September 1937 he moved the business into the city Roermond, where Albert Marx supported him and led the business together with Hermann. End of 1939 Hermann resigned from the business. In the meantime, he had met and married the Dutch women Mietje van der Sluis, who was born on 2nd August 1913 in Meppel. With her Hermann opened a retail store for Haberdashery in Bergstraat 3 in Roermond.⁷

Even Emil's daughter, Meta Falkenstein emigrated to the neighbouring Netherlands. She moved on 24th August 1938 to his friend Albert Marx and her brother Hermann to Roermond. Due to the sharp drop of his sales, Emil Falkenstein could not afford the dowry for his daughter's new apartment. The owner of the fashion house's in Gangelt, Albert Josephs, borrowed Emil the money for the dowry.

Meanwhile, the Situation in Germany worsened. At the end of October 1938 between 15,000 and 17,000 Jews were expelled in the so-called "Polish action" from Germany. These Jews were polish nationality, but they were living for many years in Germany.⁸ Because Poland could not, and didn't want to, record all these Jews, many of them lived in the "no man's land" between Germany and Poland under terrible living conditions. Among them was the family Grynspan from Hannover. When her son Herschel, who studied in Paris at this time, learned of the fate of his parents he wanted to murder the German ambassador in Paris. Instead, he shot the Counsellor Ernst vom Rath, injuring him seriously. On 9th November

³ See Municipal Archives Gangelt, Nr. 40

⁴ See Blazek, p. 11

⁵ See Gangelt Fire Brigade, p. 122

⁶ See RP Aachen, Compensation decision in favor of the heirs, AZ 14-BEG-ZK 48795-Mö/Ba, S. 5

⁷ See <http://www.joodsmonument.nl/page/360221>

⁸ See <http://www.bundesarchiv.de/gedenkbuch/zwangsausweisung.html.de?page=1>

Ernst von Rath died of his injuries. The Nazis used this act to incite hatred against Jews in the population. After the death of the Legation Council, the Nazis rage ran wild, and all over the country there were attacks against Jews.⁹ In the so called "Kristallnacht" in the Night from 9th to 10th November 1938 at about two clock at night, a troop of Geilenkirchener "Reichs workers Service" under the direction of Gangelter Nazis destroyed the inside of the Gangelter synagogue as well as residential and commercial buildings of the Gangelter Jews. The synagogue was built in 1819 therefore not only set on fire, as this would have been a danger to the directly adjacent farm buildings. The male Jews were arrested and briefly imprisoned in the dungeon in Heinsberger gate in Gangelt.¹⁰

Due to the boycott, Emil was forced to close his business and to sell his property significantly below value. On 5th June 1939 he and his wife Jeanette were forced by the Nazis to leave Gangelt. The transition parent Jews were herded together with the Jews of Waldenrath, Geilenkirchen and Übach-Palenberg to Setterich in a Jewish home. After the 19th September 1941 had all the Jews who appeared in public wearing the Star of David. On 20th January 1942 momentous conference in preparation for the "final solution" of the Jewish question took place in Berlin-Wannsee. The Jewish families, if they had not already been sold to neighbouring countries, were transported to Aachen.¹¹ In the course of Emil Falkenstein and his wife Jeanette on 3rd March 1942 were admitted to the Israelite nursing home Kalverbenden 87.¹²



Picture 5: Heinsberger gate in Gangelt

However, the Israelite nursing home Kalverbenden only served as a transit camp, because at Berlin's Wannsee Conference, the concentration camp Theresienstadt (Terezin, Czech Republic today) was adopted as the "age ghetto" for German Jews. Therefore, the Jews of the German Empire who were over 65 years old, the Jewish veterans of the First World War and the Jews with war decorations were housed in Theresienstadt.¹³ After a brief stay in a camp "Grüner Weg" in Aachen Emil Falkenstein and his wife Jeanette were on 25th July 1942 from Aachen in the Theresienstadt concentration camp (transportation VII/2, train 71, prisoner number 31 - Emil and transport VII/2, train 71, prisoner number 32 - Jeanette) deported.¹⁴ The Jews were offered home purchase contracts in which reasonable accommodation, food and medical care was assured. For this purpose, the deportees had to pay the still remaining assets in return. These services were never rendered, it ruled such horrible circumstances that around a quarter of the prisoners of the Theresienstadt ghetto (about 33,000 people) died.¹⁵

⁹ See Rosendahl, pp. 62f

¹⁰ See Seferens, Heimatkalender 1993, pp. 117ff - Of the detainees transition Gangelter Jews only Albert Josephs and Emil Hartog were deported to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Because Walter, the brother-in-law of Albert Joseph, had a school friend who was a senior Nazi official. On the morning of 11 November he phoned Walter Weil and offered him his help. After Walter Weil had described the events in Gangelt his school friend attended the release of the two Gangelter Jews and Emil Hartog and Albert Josephs.

¹¹ See Dr. Achten, pp. 44

¹² See Bierganz/Kreutz

¹³ See Wikipedia, Theresienstadt concentration camp, p. 6

¹⁴ See Terezin Initiative Institute

¹⁵ See Wikipedia, Theresienstadt concentration camp, p. 11

While Emil and Jeanette Falkenstein survived the Theresienstadt concentration camp, after about eight weeks, the two were deported again. As well as 16,098 other German Jews were deported to the east. On 26 September 1942 they were from the Theresienstadt concentration camp Treblinka extermination camp (transportation Br 538 - Emil and transport Br 539 - Jeanette) deported. The Treblinka extermination camp had the sole purpose of killing people. The arriving deportees were taught that it is a transit camp, as Emil Falkenstein and his wife Jeanette already knew from Theresienstadt. The newcomers, however, were either killed in gas chambers or if they were frail, shot directly. In the extermination camp, people were killed in 20 railcars simultaneously. From the arrival of a train in the camp until the assassination of the newly-arrived victim passed "as a rule not more than 1 ½ hours."¹⁶ Since no records exist about when and who were murdered at Treblinka, it must be assumed that Emil Falkenstein and his wife Jeanette were killed in the Treblinka extermination camp soon after arrival in late September 1942. The Reichsführer SS and Chief of German Police Heinrich Himmler decided in the spring of 1942, that all traces of murders of Jews to be destroyed ("Promotions 1005").¹⁷ In March 1943, they started to exhume the bodies and burn, so presumably the couple's Falkenstein. Himmler, the end of February / beginning of March 1943, personally visited the Treblinka extermination camp, and the action probably ordered orally,¹⁸ in addition to his post as Reichsführer SS was also the supreme leader of the fire departments in Germany, its member Emil Falkenstein had been for 33 years.

After Emil Falkenstein's son Hermann had married his wife Mietje van der Sluis in 1939, their son Emil Hans Falkenstein was born on 3rd September 1941. The German occupation forces closed their retail store and forced Hermann and Mietje from the 2nd May 1942 to wear the Jewish star. When the young family in August 1942, shortly before the first birthday of their son, the convocation was in a labor camp in the East, they fled with her son to relatives of Mietje to Amsterdam. Then, a few days later on 25 August 1942, the Dutch police came to the apartment of Falkenstein in Roermond to arrest them, but the apartment was empty. The Dutch police then issued an arrest warrant on the Falkenstein family.¹⁹ Since it was too dangerous for the young family, they brought their son Emil Hans to the childless couple Henk and Mimi Meinema in Amsterdam. To attract attention, the two called the child Eddy, because the name Emil Hans sounded too German. They moved the child as her own, with Hermann and Mietje, who were hiding nearby, their child attended regularly. During her visit on 6th July 1943 the police arrested Hermann and Mietje.²⁰ They were accused of having changed their place of residence without the required authorization and therefore taken to the Westerbork concentration camp. From there, a week later, on 13 July 1943, they were



Picture 6: Emil Hans Falkenstein with his family

¹⁶ See Judgment State court Düsseldorf

¹⁷ See Arad pp. 170 f.

¹⁸ See Arad pp. 173 f.

¹⁹ See Algemeen Politieblad, nr 39, 1 October 1942, 1113, notice 2121

²⁰ See <http://db.yadvashem.org/righteous/facebookFamily.html?language=en&itemId=5855056>

deported to the Sobibor extermination camp (Poland). Hermann and Mietje were murdered 16th July 1943.²¹ Her son Emil Hans was adopted after the war by his aunt Meta Marx.

Emil Falkenstein's little sister Julia Zeligman was at 29th October 1942 in Auschwitz concentration camp, as well as all her other family, killed. Julia's daughter Helena Croonenberg was together with the two grandchildren Erna (born 16th March 1929) and Julienne (born 20th March 1933) two days later, on 31 August 1942 murdered. Even Julia's son Erich and his wife Irma Auguste de Vries and the child Joseph were all killed in the Auschwitz concentration camp.

Emil's younger sister Wilhelmine Sassen was on 14th May 1943 killed in the Sobibor extermination camp.

During the World War II, in total about 6 million Jews were murdered, most synagogues and Jewish cemeteries were destroyed. Jewish life in Gangelt was firmly rooted since 1654. They engaged in volunteer associations, cooperatives and institutions such as the volunteer fire department. Although the Gangelter synagogue from 1819 and the Jewish cemetery from 1877 survived the Nazis, unfortunately a Jewish community does no longer exist in Gangelt. With this script we want to remember our founding member Emil Falkenstein.

²¹ See RP Aachen, AZ 14-BEG/ZK: 48.856 Bn/Sch

Bibliography

- Achten, Dr. Martin
Arad, Yitzhak
Gangelt im 20. Jahrhundert (Gangelt, 1999)
Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka (Bloomington and
Indianapolis 1987), ISBN 0-253-34293-7.
Juden in Aachen (Aachen, 1988)
- Biergan, Manfred and
Kreutz, Annelie
Blazek, Matthias
Unter dem Hakenkreuz – Die deutschen Feuerwehren
1933-1945
ISBN: 978-3-89821-997-6 (Stuttgart 2009)
- Gangelt voluntary fire department
Log Book 1899-1938, Archive of the district
administration Heinsberg
- Frenken, Wilhelm
Der Nationalsozialismus im Kreis Heinsberg
ISBN: 978-3-925620-31-7 (Heinsberg, 2010)
- State court Düsseldorf
Judgment of 3rd September 1965 (8 I Ks 2/64), first part,
section E
- Nederl. Oorlogsgravenstichting
In Memoriam - Nederlandse oorlogsslachtoffers, 's-
Gravenhage
- Rosendahl, Kurt
Zachor – Remember
ISBN: 978-0-595-43308-7 (New York, 2007)
- Seferens, Horst
Tat-Beobachtungen in Heimatkalender des Kreises
Heinsberg 1993 (Heinsberg 1993)
- Seferens, Horst
Der verwaiste „gute Ort“ am Wirtsberg in
Heimatkalender des Kreises Heinsberg 1998 (Heinsberg
1998)
- Terezin Initiative Institute
Terezińska pamětní kniha / Theresienstädter
Gedenkbuch
ISBN: 807-0-23209-9 (Praha 2000)
- Wikipedia
Theresienstadt concentration camp

Photo directory

- Picture 1: Karl-Heinz Hamacher, www.foto-hamacher.de
Picture 2: Feuerwehr Gangelt, www.feuerwehr-gangelt.de
Picture 3: Feuerwehr Gangelt, www.feuerwehr-gangelt.de
Picture 4: Feuerwehr Gangelt, www.feuerwehr-gangelt.de
Picture 5: Feuerwehr Gangelt, www.feuerwehr-gangelt.de
Picture 6: Yad Vashem,
http://yadmedia.yadvashem.org/yadvashem/Righteous_Among_The_Nations/klali/M/11435_1.JPG

Author

- Oliver Thelen
Gangelt voluntary fire department