

On 18 February 1937, 16-year-old Werner Angress describes his reaction to the suicide of his group leader in the Groß-Breesen retraining camp¹

Handwritten diary of Werner Angress,² entry for 18 February 1937

Groß-Breesen,³ 18 February 1937.

Hannio⁴ is dead! Three short, banal-sounding words, but what weight these words have. I didn't write about it straight away, partly because I couldn't and partly because I didn't get around to it. Hannio took his own life in the early hours of 2 February in a hotel in Breslau. It sounds so terribly brutish and cold when I write it like that, but I'm doing it so I don't get too sentimental – that would be worse. Hannio was physically weak, he was ill, he had a kidney disease and didn't feel capable of becoming a settler abroad. After so many failed attempts at other jobs and in other communities, he had finally built his whole life up on Breesen. That was his inner reason. What prompted it was that when the money from the canteen was counted during his shift, several hundred marks were missing. He was summoned and he claimed he didn't know where the money was. Although they believed him, the money was still missing. In this frame of mind, and with the feeling that he might not be able to come along and join the settlers,⁵ that he had to leave Groß Breesen due to his illness as well as the unresolved issue of the canteen money, that he didn't want to watch everyone else emigrate one by one while he would have to stay behind, and because he loved Gr[oß] Breesen, he took an overdose of sleeping pills, from which he died on Tuesday, 2 February, at five o'clock in the morning.

When it comes to the canteen matter, Hannio may have been rather slovenly and careless, but he was honest. Hannio was certainly not a dishonest person. Hannio was my leader, ever since he wrested me away from Gert's⁶ influence. Most recently he was also my friend. His loss is barely perceptible here any more, at least not on the outside.

1 Werner Angress, 'Tagebuch' [early May 1936 until 6 May 1941], (no pagination), Archives of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York, at the Jüdisches Museum Berlin, Sammlung Werner Angress. This document has been translated from German.

2 Dr Werner Thomas Angress (1920–2010), historian; apprenticeship in Groß-Breesen, 1936–1937; emigrated to the Netherlands in Oct. 1937 and from there to the USA in 1939; soldier in the US Army, 1941–1945; later professor of European history, first at Berkeley, then at Stony Brook, New York. Returned to Berlin in 1988. Author of works including *...immer etwas abseits: Jugenderinnerungen eines jüdischen Berliners* (2005). For more on his emigration, see Doc. 310, 20 Nov. 1937.

3 Groß-Breesen (Kreis Trebnitz in Silesia): the facility was set up in a rented manor by the Reich Representation of Jews in Germany in April 1936 as a retraining camp. The purpose was to provide agricultural training to groups of Jewish youths emigrating abroad. From 1939 Groß-Breesen was subject to increasing coercion. Its final residents were deported to Auschwitz in 1943.

4 Hermann Ollendorf (c.1917–1937) came from Breslau. His nickname was Hannio, an amalgamation of two literary figures in Thomas Mann's works, Hanno Buddenbrooks and Tonio Kröger.

5 The purpose of the camp was to organize a group migration abroad, which, however, failed. Nonetheless, most of the youths were able to leave Germany, with or without their families.

6 Gert Lippmann (b. 1914), the last nationwide leader of the youth organization Black Pennant (Schwarzes Fähnlein); emigrated to Paris in 1935 and fought for the Resistance during the German occupation; from 1946 lived in Australia, where he later became the owner of an insurance company.

Life goes on. Just like back then with Stella, there is just a gaping hole inside.⁷ Two friends, two boys from the group, from Hannio's group, in just half a year. Hannio is missed everywhere, and now Bondy is the group leader.⁸ Jochen⁹ is in charge of the technical standards division. But we miss Hannio. Of course we haven't forgotten him. You can't forget a person you liked, one you owe so much to, and one you miss. Hannio's wish was that we go on working, in the group and on ourselves, just the way he showed us. I'm only just writing about it today because I've calmed down a little. I have a heavy responsibility just like all the other lads who are important in the group, in his group. We're still 'Hannio's boys', on the outside at least, and hopefully on the inside too. When I read through what I've just written, I have the feeling I haven't written what I'm really thinking. But I suppose that's a good thing. I want to be tough. 'Toughen up, Töp,¹⁰ you've got to!' was what Hannio said at the end of every talk. Yes, I want to! Without wanting it to sound like a cliché, I keep going, and look ahead. I hope it works out with our group – I'll do my bit to make sure it does. I think the Prinz-Töpper-Stefan friendship is working. I want to do all I can to ensure that too. Hannio showed us all the way, we only have to follow it. 'The path to becoming a personality from being a member of the group is through toughness with oneself!' That's the path Hannio showed me and the one I want to follow.

Hannio was no coward. Hannio never acted on impulse, he was consistent. He did everything for Groß-Breesen! Once he had denounced this idea and saw it crumble, he packed it all in, he thought his life was pointless. People always praise the dead, but I don't. I knew Hannio's faults, but I also knew his strengths. And one of them was 'When I've decided to do something and I think it's right, then I do it.' With this thought in mind, he committed this deed. No, Hannio was not a coward. He will always be my leader.

7 A reference to Herbert Stern (1919–1936) from Nuremberg. He drowned while bathing in Groß-Breesen on 30 August 1936: see the diary entry of Werner Angress for 30 August 1936, Angress, 'Tagebuch'.

8 Dr Curt Bondy (1894–1972), psychologist; worked at the Hahnöfersand prison for young offenders near Hamburg, 1921–1923; later head of the Eisenach juvenile prison; professor of social education in Göttingen, 1930–1933; after his dismissal worked for the Jewish Relief Agency in Frankfurt am Main; leader of the Groß-Breesen retraining camp, 1936–1939; emigrated in 1939 to Britain and in 1941 to the USA, where he was professor at Richmond, VA; professor and head of the Psychology Institute of the University of Hamburg, 1951–1959.

9 Jochen Feingold (1919–c.2002), apprentice in Groß-Breesen from May 1936; emigrated in 1939 to Kenya, where he worked as a farmer and later as an advisor to the Kenyan government; later lived in England.

10 Werner Angress's nickname was Töp or Töpper.