

Other recommendations:



Max Eighty



40 tons of responsibility!

*Dear Helena,
We haven't met yet.*

You don't know how much your fate influences and motivates me and my work.

It stands for the many tragic road accidents in which loved ones are torn from the midst of family and friends from one moment to the next by a momentary lapse of judgement, often by someone else, causing profound suffering.

Let's push this realisation so that it creates a wave of confidence that helps to minimise the dangers at the end of traffic jams and reduce accidental deaths.

That's why I'm dedicating this book to you personally.

*Sincerely
Dieter Schäfer*

I would like to thank my friend Karl Gärtner from Mannheim for his support with the illustrations.

The cover picture and all the drawings are unmistakably from his brushes and pencils.

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Table of contents

Foreword	8
The accident	10
Attitudes and routines as a risk of accidents?	16
Root cause analysis	20
Scenarios for fatal accidents at the end of traffic jams ...	24
Poor infrastructure	28
The Max Eighty Idea	32
Technical prevention	38
Personalised prevention	48
Microsleep	54
Distraction	62
The Max Achtzig safety register.....	68
Active prevention measures.....	74
The imported alcohol hazard.....	80
What does the state do to avert danger?	92
What can Autobahn GmbH do?	96
The "silent" victims	100
Closing words	108
 Attachments	 112
The Max Achtzig poster.....	112
The Max Achtzig information brochure	113
Membership	125
Light at the end of the traffic jam.....	126
Dieter Schäfer.....	130

Foreword

For me, as the then responsible head of the largest traffic police directorate in Baden Württemberg, Germany, 12 February 2018 brought a turning point.

The fate of a 15-year-old girl ignited in me the anger and fire to fight henceforth against dying at the end of traffic jams in particular and the social superficiality regarding dying in traffic in general.

We have seen a pandemic in these years that has brought the constant pursuit of economic growth and corporate profits and the accompanying neoliberalism to an abrupt halt in an all-globalising world.

We have celebrated the drop of more than 500 road deaths in Germany in two years only to find that it has been mostly the result of the lockdown and the retreat to the home office.

During the pandemic times, we also celebrated the truck drivers who secured our supplies. However, we never gave them the required appreciation. Even an offer to meet their human need to defecate at the unloading/loading sites was and still is often not granted to them, not to mention rest and recreation rooms after long transport journeys.

While the casualty figures for all traffic deaths had decreased by 20 percent, those of dead truck drivers at the end of traffic jams increased by 60 percent. And the terrible numbers remain high. The ratio of truck drivers killed to car occupants killed at the end of traffic jams is about 3.5 to 1. In light of the shortage of drivers across Europe, however, every truck driver injured brings supply chains closer to their breaking point. Germany already has a shortage of 100,000 drivers¹ and 30,000 of them retire every year.

1 <https://www.tagesschau.de/wirtschaft/unternehmen/speditionen-lkw-fachkraeftemangel-100.html>

But this is offset by only 15,000 new recruits. Every driver who is injured exacerbates the situation.

A jolt must finally go through our society. Death at the end of a traffic jam is not inevitable. And the usual safety of supply chains is not guaranteed forever. We must actively contribute to an improvement of the situation for BKF and thus also increase road safety.

Not only the transport sector, but also the industry and the goods trade must realise that the driver is the most valuable link in a functioning supply chain. And they must live up to their responsibility.

Chapter 1

The accident

12 February 2018 is a cloudy Monday, cool but dry. 15-year-old Helena says goodbye to her grandmother in Karlsruhe shortly after 1 pm. After a visit, she sets off home by car with her parents and younger sister. They take the A5 motorway and want to drive via the A6 at the Walldorf junction to the A67 towards home in Cologne.

A 59-year-old experienced Polish professional driver was also travelling north on the A5 in his articulated truck. Shortly after 2 p.m., he passed the Bruchsal service station. Around this time, traffic begins to back up 25 km to the south-east at the permanent roadworks on the A6 from the Rauenberg junction during the daily rush hour and grows rapidly.

Our lorry driver swims along in the traffic and drives slightly faster than the 80 km/h allowed for lorries. The traffic volume is average and he thinks he is safe because he is being overtaken by cars in the middle and left lanes at 120 to 140 km/h. At about 2.17 p.m. he passes motorway kilometre 293.

The traffic jam on the A6 has now grown to such an extent that it has reached the turning pipe at the Walldorf junction from the A5 to the A6 and continues to back up on the right-hand turning lane of the A5 until km 292.

Helena's family has almost reached the Walldorf intersection and has to stop at the end of the traffic jam. Another car stops in front of them and in front of that an articulated lorry with a tanker trailer.

Less than 50 seconds later, the truck driver is abruptly jolted out of the monotony of his daily driving routine. With a terrible tinny bang he is catapulted into his seatbelt. Brakes screech. Then there is dead silence. He is frozen with shock.

The first responders who had stopped rush to the scene of the accident. The two cars were literally crushed between the articulated lorries, the rear one of the two crushed to less than half its length.

The front passenger car became wedged in the underride guard and was picked up by the rear passenger car due to the impact force and bent upwards and smashed against the rear wall of the tanker trailer. The 60-year-old driver must have died immediately.

The rear wreckage is so deformed that it is not possible to see how many people are in the vehicle.

The tank of the front articulated truck ruptures and 10,000 litres of liquid waste in the form of pig's blood flood the roadway. In the meantime, the rescue organisations have arrived. They have to wade around in the thick blood to get an overview. The musty, ferruginous smell of the blood overlays the horrific scenario and triggers retching in more than a few.

After agonising minutes of uncertainty, the rescuers hear a gasp from the rear wreckage of the vehicle. The Karlsruhe firefighters carefully handle the spreader and uncover the vehicle cabin.

When the emergency doctor looks inside from the passenger side to the back seat, he looks into the wide, shock-widened eyes of the girl Helena. She is fully conscious and asks him softly and in a pleading voice:

ARE THEY ALL DEAD?

In fact, her father, mother and 14-year-old sister are killed.

Helena is flown to hospital by rescue helicopter with multiple fractures, but not life-threatening injuries.

The truck driver himself remains uninjured.

The pig's blood, diluted with water by the fire brigade, finally flows into the Kraichbach, which crosses under the motorway, turning it red.

What an almost apocalyptic scenario. And also tragic, because yet another accident with fatalities had happened at kilometre 592. Because it was not the first serious accident on this „kilometre of death“. Since the permanent construction site for the reconstruction of the Walldorf interchange was set up in January 2017, the responsible Walldorf motorway police department has recorded a whole series of serious accidents.

Subsequently, the whole tragic extent of this accident becomes clear and with each further investigation result and finally the submission of the completed investigation file to the public prosecutor's office, it becomes clear that a momentary failure of a very experienced truck driver had led to the death of four people. It also raises the question of why serious accidents occurred so frequently at kilometre 592 in particular.

A few days after the accident, as the then head of the traffic directorate, I received a request from the Mannheim professional fire brigade to report on this accident at a training course for rescue workers. On one of the following

