WHAT HISTORY DID TO OUR FAMILIES

How 2 World Wars, then Nazi and later Soviet Dictatorships Wounded German Families, across Generations

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Dr. Michael Luick-Thrams



Aschaffenburg, den 13.2.44

Mein lieber Patenkind Horst!

Ich wünsche, wenn dein Einsegnung

Worlds Turned on Their Head:

How 2 World Wars, then Nazi and later Soviet Dictatorships Wounded German Families, across Generations

by Dr. Michael Luick-Thrams
www.TRACES.org
2026

Franz Lellmann
Hoffotograf

She was 15 when it happened… when the Soviet occupiers abruptly whisked him out the door, never to be seen or heard from again.

Last month, she turned 96:

Over the 81 years in between, Ursula [née Walter] Veller could never erase the excruciating memories of those unexpected, terrifying 15 minutes which would forever mark her and her family's lives, for generations.

Who was this man – Ursula's godfather – and what made him so special? Among the hundreds of millions of early-20th century witnesses to the horrors of dictatorship and war, why reflect upon Karl Walter's biography? In part, because his life was both "ordinary" yet extraordinarily eventful. And, it embodied multiple events and crises which changed world history - and, as a result, the lives of us all: His life is a mirror for ours.



PART I

KARL'S WORLD TURNED ON ITS HEAD BY BEING HELD A CAPTIVE OF THE FRENCH

Karl Louis Eduard was born 30 September 1892 at Kepfe 6 in Langensalza, the fourth of six children of master baker Eduard Walter and his wife Charlotte. Karl's family had lived in Langensalza for as long as anyone could remember.

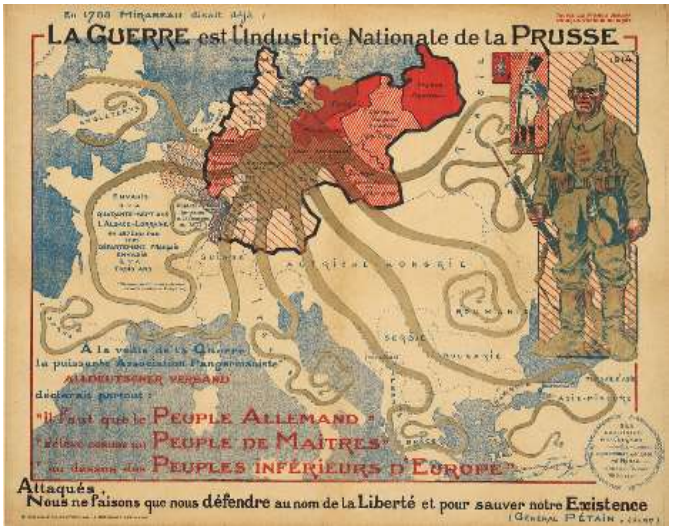




The recruitment poster reads "German Men Protect Your Homeland! Join the Stormtrooper Battalion Schmidt of the Guard Cavalry Rifle Division". Germany's General Paul von Hindenburg, Kaiser Wilhelm II and General Erich Ludendorff examining maps as they draft battle plans during WWI. [Photo of Kaiser with generals was AI-colorized and digitally enhanced.]

After school and commercial training, the Kaiser's imperial army called Karl up in spring 1915 and sent him to France to fight the "Great War", a global conflagration which would claim 16-20 million lives, military and civilian. There, he was wounded in 1916 and taken prisoner. According to Bad Langensalza chronicler Harald Rockstuhl, imprisoned Karl "stood up for fellow prisoners and was often severely punished for it; he was regarded as upright and principled".





German prisoners in a French prison camp during the latter part of World War 1. A French propaganda poster from 1917 portrays Germany as an octopus stretching its tentacles for control; the caption includes an 18th-century quote: "Even in 1788, Mirabeau said 'War is the National Industry of Prussia'." [The photo of prisoners was AI-colorized and digitally enhanced.]

Karl later wrote a 150-typed-page manuscript titled *Karl Walter, Reserve Non-Commissioned Officer, 11/201: My Escape as a Prisoner of War from France to Langensalza, 1919; Two Prisoners of War Fled through France and Belgium — Escaped Three Times, Caught Twice — and Finally Succeeded!* (His niece, Ursula, thought he likely dictated to his later secretary.) In it, he described the living conditions of his and his comrades' imprisonment:

> P.O.W. Company 363 lay about twenty minutes east of […] St. Quentin. Roughly 350 German prisoners lived in four barracks behind high barbed wire. The camp stood on a slope beside a small wood whose trees had been partly shot to pieces. Everything still breathed war: shell holes across the fields, ruined houses and torn woodland. We prisoners had to clear the area. It was mid-July 1919. None of us still hoped that the French

would soon release their cheap labor. For us there was no peace, only a bitter struggle for the little life we had in captivity.

At Harly, a small village, we did earthwork, clearance and other jobs in which unexploded shells still killed comrades. The French guards were generally friendly. We had made a plank hut into a canteen, and because I spoke French well my comrades chose me to buy our supplies. The camp commander, rarely seen without his riding crop, assigned me René, a pleasant young Frenchman of about twenty-one, and we got on well.

Although an NCO [Non-Commissioned Officer], I worked like everyone else. Twice a week René and I had the morning free to take a wagon into St. Quentin for preserves, tobacco, margarine and other goods.

Our clothing left much to be desired, for we had only the usual drill garments, on which the letters P.G. — *Prisonnier de Guerre* — were printed prominently everywhere. The food was tolerable: much mule or horse meat with rice or turnips. In the morning came the famous "coffee," known among men from different regions as "*Pritsch*," "*Lorke*," "dishwater," "concentrated little flower," and other names.

After roll call and coffee, groups marched under several guards to field work, railway construction or clearance. At noon the call "*à la soupe*" sounded and each man collected his portion. Amid neighing and mule cries we squatted before the barracks and swallowed our grub. At two we returned to work until six, sometimes seven, depending on the Frenchman's mood. Contractors bribed guards to drive us harder and keep us longer; then we showed how thick-skinned, foolish and slow prisoners could be, making the Frenchman furious.

We were supposed to earn twenty centimes a day, but payment was irregular. It bought a piece of soap, some bread and perhaps a cube of margarine. Everything was shared, especially parcels from home.

After supper came camp life: card games on the slope, a homemade football, solitary or group walks, writing, study, lying on the ground and smoking. Tobacco was a necessary distraction. Groups sang songs of home and soldiers' songs that awakened longing for loved ones.

Jokers repeatedly sent the entire camp into roaring laughter. There was also the usual rough music, made with accordions, mouth organs, homemade flutes and pipes, and several "devil's fiddles." A devil's fiddle was a thick stick carrying a large tin can; iron wires stretched across the open can over a bridge, while loose can lids at the top supplied a proper clatter. The result was less music than noise, but the louder and wilder the squealing, the more everyone enjoyed it. Even the French guards sometimes stopped and laughed heartily.

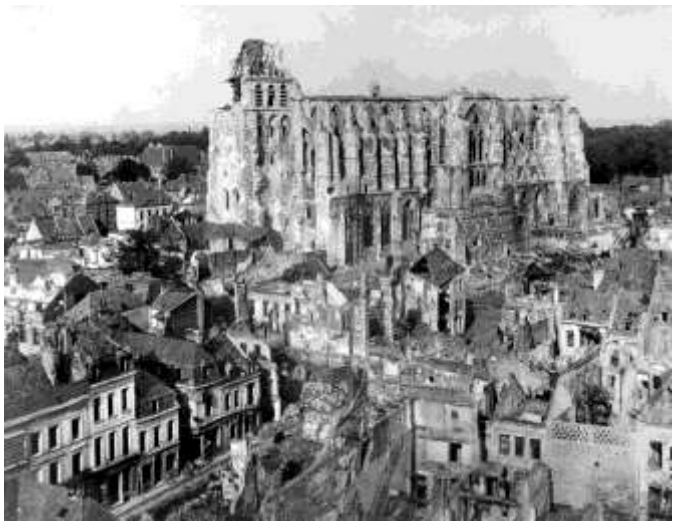
That was how evenings passed until everyone had to enter the barracks at nine. Day after day brought the same monotonous routine — for some only months, for many years. Captivity was a harsh and bitter fate. Such was life in [the eastern suburb of St. Quentin] Harly with P.O.W. Company 363.



German officers in a WWI-era French POW camp. The photo includes the father of Gerhard Sander, a young soldier himself captured in WWII and sent to the author's home state of Iowa, USA. In Gerhard's case, a former teacher and also a classmate later appeared as fellow POWs at Iowa's Camp Algona – as he cited in an interview with Dr. Michael Luick-Thrams, which spurred what would become a 30-year project resulting in historical works like this one. Gerhard provided the photo in black and white, 1998; in 2026, the photo was AI-colorized and digitally enhanced.

Following hospital treatment, then sporadic periods of labor, Karl and his comrade Johann Schumacher twice attempted to escape captivity; both attempts failed. Their third attempt succeeded: In autumn 1919, they safely reached Germany and Karl returned to his hometown of Langensalza. As Karl later recalled:

> On the evening of 20 July 1919 several close friends sat on a bench outside the barracks: Ludwig Wagner from Felchta near Mühlhausen, Thuringia; Walter Sonnabend from Nordhausen [also in Thuringia, like Langensalza], who helped me in the canteen; and Johann Schumacher from Ludwigshafen. They spoke of what occupied every prisoner — returning to Germany. "Don't believe that swindle!" Johann said. "The Frenchman will never let us go. He wants to keep us until everything has been paid for. We ain't ever gettin' home," he said in his Mannheim dialect. "Nonsense. Someday they must send us home. We can't just rot here," Ludwig broke in. "We have been betrayed and sold out, that is certain. Nobody gives a damn about us *P.G.*s — not our present [German] government, those old vagabonds, nor the old [imperial] one either; they threw that one out" during the recent attempted revolution in Berlin.





The ruins of St. Quentin Basilica after World War I; the reconstructed basilica today: The author does not know if German POW labor was used to rebuild it.

Karl joined his comrades upon leaving the canteen. As he later recounted:

> René had privately told me that Britain was releasing some prisoners, but France intended to keep its captives until the devastated region was rebuilt and much of the war debt paid — no one knew how long. The commander had also said that every German prisoner with outstanding punishment, whether prison cell or extended confinement, would have to serve it. The thought terrified me. If the commander examined my papers, I might not get home for years. Walter saw my face and asked what was wrong. I cursed the whole miserable business, sat with them and repeated René's news.
>
> Johann asked whether we should run. He had escaped once before, was already in trouble with the French, and said matters could hardly get worse. Did I have the courage and desire? I needed little time: In southern France in 1918 I had already considered escape but found no suitable companion; circumstances now made the question urgent. I still had about 168 days of punishment. Since 1916 I had been moved repeatedly, had used my language skills to defend comrades, and had constantly been sent to cells or punishment camps. My personnel record described me as "*intelligent et tête carrée*" — intelligent and stubborn. I had been punished for refusing work, and for incitement to strike I was once forcibly taken to the fortress of Blaye; then, because of mutiny, to the coal pile at La Pallice as a "*porteur*" (sack carrier). There I met, together with Ludwig Wagner from Felchta, my dear fellow sufferers from Langensalza Karl Schröter and Max Schneider, formerly a non-commissioned officer in the Mounted Jäger Regiment No. 2, for the first time.
>
> In Rochefort, a French adjutant had struck me with a riding crop, whereupon I knocked out two of his teeth. As a result, I was given 90 days of cell confinement, only part of which I had served because the Swiss Red Cross Commission intervened. But if my papers were searched now, then "good night"! I had become quite skilled at adapting my appearance and demeanor, inwardly and outwardly, entirely to the circumstances. Outwardly, depending on where I was, I had either a full beard and spectacles or a goatee without

spectacles. Often, I wore no beard, with or without spectacles, and when necessary I could appear with either kind of beard, with or without spectacles.

At Quai Deschamps, where I and 30 men mutinied against guards' mean treatment, I wore no beard and had spectacles. At the time the French called me only "*le lunettes*" and barely knew my real name. My attitude toward the French always depended on how the French treated my comrades. At first, before we knew one another, things went well; but whenever we poor "*Boches*" [a French derogatory nickname for Germans] were to be exploited, I always clashed with the Frenchmen. I stood up for good treatment and food, always speaking too freely, and then, "whoosh," came the order: "Walter, *la gemelle ... au prison* ..." ("Walter, take your mess tin ... to the hole"). That was how it had gone so far and, in all likelihood, how it would continue. I already had quite a lot on my record.

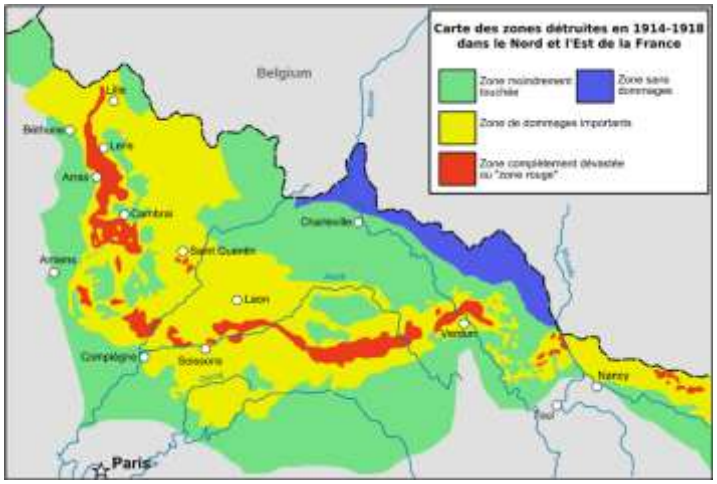
All these thoughts awakened. And while we were still talking about this and considering the future, Johann said to me: "You know, Karl, we're clearing out of here". I agreed, and a handshake sealed our decision.

Ludwig Wagner, who was married, could not yet make up his mind, nor could Walter Sonnabend. Both hoped that liberation would soon come and believed that they would not have any sentence left to serve.

Johann and I now began preparing for the escape. We had sufficient provisions. As for money, I had 40 *francs*, some of it still hidden in a hollow heel of my shoes, as well as a few more *francs* besides. Once, while working in the French barracks, I had taken from a French sentry's bedpost an entire bread bag with its bottle and a wallet inside containing about 15 *francs*. A pair of corduroy trousers, still in my possession today and worn on all three escapes, I had "acquired" weeks earlier from the stool beside a sleeping Frenchman's bed as I passed through the French barracks. At the beginning of July, I brought back a civilian coat and a sports cap from St. Quentin. With a small work party, we had helped various homeowners repair their roofs; a proper "*prisonnier*" is a tradesman of every kind: mason, roofer, plumber, carpenter, baker, butcher and so on—as long as there was something to "acquire".

I was a brick carrier and roofer. In the neighboring house I "inspected" an attic and took an "interest" in a few civilian items that happened to stick to my fingers during the work. While clearing another house, I found a partly-torn cyclist's road map of St. Quentin and part of Belgium. A proper P.O.W. can always use such things. Thus, I had civilian clothing, naturally hidden in a straw mattress. Johann was likewise equipped, with a pair of sturdy lace-up shoes, as well as a compass, which he carried around for a long time.





War-devastated Ypres, Belgium, was reduced to mere rubble. The map by Lamiot shows local conditions following the First World War: totally destroyed areas in red, areas of major damage in yellow, moderately damaged areas in green, and undamaged areas in blue.

Upon slipping away from the POW camp near St. Quentin, Karl and Johann navigated a war-torn landscape that at times resembled a littered moonscape. To inch nearer to Germany, they crossed into Belgium. Still, despite being as best equipped as they could, finally their provisions and luck ran out. Karl's detailed narrative resumed, explaining:

A few days after we had been caught, two gendarmes handcuffed us and took us by train back through Belgium, first to Ghent. While we waited on the platform, the population hurled insults such as "*sale Boche*" — filthy German — at us.

The gendarmes treated us decently and even gave us a cigarette when we were alone in the compartment. They took us to Torhout and were relieved there. We were surprised to travel west toward the sea rather than directly through Brussels to the French border; I still do not know why.

Still, the route the prisoners' captors chose unexpectedly offered the German captives an eerie yet pleasing *déjà vu*:



We now traveled along the same route by which our regiment had advanced in October 1914, from Ghent through Torhout toward Diksmuide. I was able to explain many details of that advance to the gendarmes.

As the train approached Diksmuide, passing Kortemark and Zarren toward Esen, the earlier fighting around Esen and Diksmuide rose before my eyes again. Near Esen-Kapelle I had suffered my serious abdominal wound. Standing at the train window, I told the gendarmes all of this and explained the countryside.

Via Veurne we reached Dunkirk and spent the night nearby after another change of gendarmes. The next day we continued on foot, still chained, through Cassel and Hazebrouck to Lille — a brutally hard march. We arrived in the evening and were delivered to an old fort. Without food, a coarse French corporal kicked us into a dark casemate and slammed the iron door. In the damp, airless darkness we heard movement: We were not alone, but among fellow sufferers. They lay on moldy straw, filthy blankets and rags — all runaways who had been caught. By the light of a candle stub and in lowered voices, we introduced ourselves and told our stories in broad outline. With true comradeship they shared bread and cold coffee. Even one cigarette went around, each man taking a puff: "One for all and all for one," as befits real front-line soldiers. We spent the night crouching against damp walls. It was too cold and wet to lie down, and we had no blankets.

In the morning, the door was thrown open and everyone driven out like cattle. Now we could see one another: escapees in every imaginable disguise, half civilian and half soldier. Like us, some appeared to be French laborers. One still wore a woman's blouse over cut-down military trousers; disguised as a woman, he had traveled five days from Brittany until a dog barked at him at night. Another had posed as a railway man. Two especially clever men, dressed as masons and laborers, had pushed a wheelbarrow for more than one hundred kilometers.

Their faces were changed by stubble and physical and mental strain, yet their eyes showed an unbroken will for freedom. Even in misery, their stories revealed joy and courage. During the day we did small earthworks on the fortifications, and the French guards were friendly.

The next day Johann and I were called to the orderly room to enter our personal details. We asked for several days' rest because our feet were raw from the long march from Hazebrouck. We were allowed to wash and powder our feet and were also given several blankets for the night. The following day we stayed in a somewhat brighter and less airless barrack, because I managed to pretend that my old abdominal wound hurt after the strain, while Johann feigned diarrhea. That day we recovered by lying in the sun on the grass outside the casemate.

After we had worked for three days, we were called to the office. The Frenchman told us that we had to be returned to our P.O.W. Company 333, because Lille was no asylum for captured runaways. I corrected the clerk: We did not belong to Company 333 but to Company 363 at St. Quentin. That went down badly. He roared that I must think him stupid. He could still read that the accompanying papers from Antwerp said

333, not 363. I nevertheless tried to convince him that it was an error, a clerical mistake. He stepped toward me with a smile and declared that he knew the *Boches* very well, especially runaways, who were the craftiest lot of all. I should not try to make him believe that we simply did not want to return to our old company because we would receive our 'beating' there for the escape. I was simply dumbfounded by the Frenchman's reasoning, because the idea had never occurred to us; we knew that the company number really was a clerical error. Johann, however, immediately had another thought and said to me: "Leave it, Karl. Let them take us to the wrong company. We may be able to slip away more easily there and have better luck!"

I gave in. Soon a thin young soldier, perhaps nineteen, came to take us away. The young guard received our papers and instructions, slung on his bread bag, took his rifle and set off with us. Johann's left wrist and my right wrist were chained together. The other "keep of runaways" remained in Lille until each man was sent back to his original camp. They watched us for a long time, waving sadly.

The guard took us to the railway and on to Cambrai. We recognized the station forecourt: About three weeks earlier we had crossed it at night after a railway worker showed us the way.

From Cambrai we continued on foot, unexpectedly west rather than south toward St. Quentin. A sign at the edge of town read "Arras 35 km." We no longer cared where we went, provided it was not yet St. Quentin.

The young Frenchman was genuinely a nice guy who walked alongside us, chatting away, as soon as we were on the road and he didn't have to worry about running into a superior. In the villages, however, he let us go ahead. He then followed, with his rifle slung over his shoulder, three steps behind, strictly on duty.

When Karl and his confidant Johannes arrived at the POW camp for Company 333, considerable confusion greeted them, even from the German Sergeant in charge of the prisoners. For his part,

The sergeant warned us not to do anything stupid here. He didn't want any trouble with the French camp commander. Of course, we said we wouldn't even think of it—we were far too weak and worn out to escape.

The French commander distrusted the pair from the start and imprisoned them in a shed, where a guard was appointed to "keep an eye on them". For them, however, a renewed escape attempt was a matter of when, not "if" – and within four hours of their arrival, they already planned to flee the next morning. Thus, soon they once again were on a directionless run in a ruined, foreign land.



French soldiers shelter in a trench at Verdun, 1916; right: Soldiers move to attack from their trench during the Battle of Verdun, 1916 – ruins till today.

Their freedom, however, would prove to be short-lived. After much dodging and conniving, the two runaways abruptly ran into the wrong people, in the wrong place, at the wrong time:

That's when the French noticed me. "*Par ici, leve tes mains!"* ("This way, hands up!") That's what I heard them shout. I stumbled forward, and after about 30 steps, I was standing in front of a group. *"Ah, tu parles français".* Just like that they grabbed us, tied our hands, and took us to the bridge leading to a little house. We had to give our personal details, and were then handed over to the gendarme in Crespin. He was a



terrible man who first whipped each of us—we were, after all, tied up and unable to defend ourselves—with a whip, then locked us in the basement of the gendarmerie station. The next morning, he threw us a piece of bread, gave us a cooking pot and some water, and then we had to empty and clean the latrine buckets in the school building, which were about to overflow. It was a disgusting and terrible job.

At lunchtime we were interrogated again: The next day we were to be returned to St. Quentin to rejoin our actual company, the 363rd. Oh my God! - just the thought of us arriving back there after nearly four weeks!

We spent the night at the gendarmerie station. The next morning, two mounted gendarmes arrived. Once again, they tied our wrists to the saddle with a horse lead rope about 5 meters long, and the journey began. It was a sad sight for everyone who saw us, but most of all for us. So much hardship and effort, yet in vain!

We now faced double punishment, and because of the damage to and destruction of French property—namely, the stable wall [the men had broken through, in order to escape]—we were in for particularly harsh treatment. It was a bitter journey through Cambrai. Sometimes people spat at us, thinking we were serious criminals being transported away, but we also encountered some compassionate people along the way.

Our feet ached because the horses had a harsh gait, and the gendarmes were merciless riders. At Le Catelet Johann, who was utterly raw and sore, could scarcely go on. At my urgent pleading, we rested in the grass for nearly an hour, and Johann bandaged his feet after washing them. Then we went on somewhat refreshed until we reached St. Quentin in the afternoon. We skirted the city, and turned toward Harly, our camp.

The reception there was dreadful. The two mounted men, having driven us a short distance ahead of them, rode into camp. Everyone then in camp saw the scene from afar, recognizing us only at the entrance. The news raced through camp like wildfire: “Karl Walter and Johann Schumacher have been caught; the gendarmes are bringing them in!” The guards greeted us with grins and the most ominous hints. The comrades stood at the fence discussing the news among themselves, for we had been gone nearly four weeks and only now had been caught. It was a mystery to them.

I can still see Ludwig Wagner’s sorrowful expression. He happened to be in camp that afternoon and, standing at the fence, saw us both being dragged in like criminals. Those were sad minutes, and we lowered our heads—not because we were ashamed, but because it all cut so deeply into our hearts.

In the French barracks the sergeant major received us with a few friendly curses and several jabs to the ribs. They were particularly angry with me because, in the Frenchmen’s view, I had so disgracefully abused my somewhat elevated position as canteen buyer. The sentries who had been on duty during our escape had also been punished, and poor little René had been transferred.

So, our reception was “most gracious” - but better was still to come. After scarcely fifteen minutes, the commandant entered. “*Ah, voilà mon ami Walter... Retour de votre voyage.... merci bien pour votre aimeable nuovelle d’anvers... Boche infame, que tu es.... et”* (“Ah, there you are, my friend Walter. Back from the journey, infamous *Boche* that you are”). With cracking sounds, the blows of his riding crop whistled across my back and head; I shielded my head with my hands and thus took some of their force. Johann, too, received several blows as well as kicks. “*Tout suite an Cellule!”* (“Straight to the cell!”) We were taken into cell confinement, and sorrowful days began: The commandant immediately sentenced us to 20 days in the cells and opened disciplinary proceedings against us. These now dragged on and on in the French fashion, until there was simply no getting out of the hole.




*French "*poilus*" (colloquial term for "soldiers", from "hairy ones") pushing through enemy barbed wire, 1915; "*poilus*" posing in a trench, June 1917 [AI-colorized and enhanced.]*

The following day we were questioned in detail. There was no point in denying or concealing anything, for they would have learned it anyway. While hearing our accounts, the commandant could not refrain from expressing a certain admiration at the various descriptions. But—"*quant même—la punition reste 90 jours cellule, 30 jours durés inclos!*" ("Nevertheless, the sentence remains: 90 days' cell confinement, including 30 days' aggravated confinement!") The days in the dungeon were hard. Our cell stood outside the prison camp and consisted of smooth plates of iron or even steel found somewhere in artillery positions. These plates had been set upright; they were about 1½ centimeters thick and 2½ meters high, assembled like a rectangular box, with another steel plate laid flat across the top, so that the roof and side walls were steel.

Inside were two cells, each of which held two men at a time. The worst was that each cell for two men was only about 1.50–1.60 meters wide and 2 meters long. There was one bunk above and another below; the space between was so small that neither the upper nor lower man could sit upright. One was always striking something: The upper man hit the iron roof, while the man below struck his head against the underside of the upper bunk. We could scarcely move and certainly could not walk about. Sitting on the edge of the bunk made our knees hit the smooth side wall. Added to this were the August heat, no ventilation, and a daily allowance of one liter of water and 300 grams of bread. Only every third day did we receive so-called "coffee", soup at midday and then evening soup. Every third day we were also allowed to walk around the barracks outside for half an hour, naturally under guard. In any event, it was a hard time for us.

They had taken our clothes and put everything into a sack. Once again, we wore drill-cloth P.O.W. uniforms.

After 30 days in the cell and for good behavior, we were assigned to construction work, but in the evenings, we had to return to the other prison, where the "minor offenders" served their short sentences.

We worked on the narrow-gauge railway for several days. There I "happened" to "find" a ten-*franc* note in the bread bag of a French sergeant belonging to a completely different work detail, and it obligingly remained between my fingers. The French then accused one another of the theft, for none of us prisoners had gone anywhere near the bread bag.

Then one day I pretended to be ill and actually had—*un jour repos*—a day of rest. The French corporal responsible for the horses and wagons nevertheless put me to work sweeping and cleaning the stable. In a side shed, tucked away in a corner, I discovered a sack containing our civilian clothes, still bundled together. The commandant had claimed that we had stolen all these things, and they now lay in the shed as additional incriminating evidence, alongside the charge of damaging French state property. A thought flashed through my mind: The sack had to disappear at once. Johann and I were resolved to escape again at the first chance.

I busied myself in the shed with broom and pitchfork, then took a feed sack, put the other sack containing the civilian clothes inside it, covered it with a bundle of straw, and, at an unobserved moment, ambled from the stable toward our barracks. The straw stuck out of the sack, and if a Frenchman or sentry had questioned me, I would have promptly replied: "*C'est puor les paillasses l'infirmerse*". ("The straw is for refilling the

straw mattresses in the infirmary".) No one stopped me. I reached Barracks No. 2. The sack of civilian clothes flew onto Ludwig Wagner's straw mattress. A comrade who was in the barracks and whom I trusted was told that the clothes had to be hidden immediately. I then ambled on with my straw to the infirmary and filled several straw mattresses a little more. Nothing had been noticed. I returned to the stable, cleaned a little more, received several cigarettes from the corporal in thanks for my diligent work, and strolled back to camp in high spirits with my wooden clogs on my feet.

In the evening, when Ludwig returned from work, he had been informed and the things had disappeared. Walter added several more items, and we had arranged to have them back immediately when needed. Both caps, jackets, trousers and *puttees*—everything was still there. The *francs* intended for the Mons–Antwerp journey were still sewn into the trousers. Ludwig and Walter had also promised to give us enough from their money reserve for a possible escape.

After several days of work, we were locked up again, apparently because proceedings against us had begun. We had, after all, served only 30 days of cell confinement.

In the days that followed, our comrades in the camp helped ease our stay in prison. Every morning we were led past the camp to the swamp behind it, where our P.O.W. drill uniforms had been sunk during the first escape. Our friends, especially Ludwig, often hid something for us under the trees by the washing place: sometimes a herring, sometimes a cube of margarine, sometimes bread and tobacco—always something. Former prisoners of war know exactly how we brought these things into the prison, and there was no part of the body that was holy enough not to serve as a possible hiding place. Only once did half a cube of margarine, which I had pressed flat to smuggle beneath my forage cap, nearly run into my eyes like sauce. I managed to carry it through only by holding the cap crushed together in my hand and pretending to blow my nose. In any case, our comrades eased our hard lot, and to this day both of us remain grateful to them all.

Then suddenly, on the evening of 1 November, the sergeant came to us and said that Johann and I would be leaving the next day, 2 November. He did not know, however, where we were going. We had already heard from another source that all German prisoners of war who had escaped, or who had been accused or punished for damaging or stealing French property, were to be gathered into a so-called punishment company and then sent to a penal camp. So, there it was. We could expect all sorts of things. Our "records of sins" were long enough. We also heard that such a punishment company was to be formed very near St. Quentin. Escapees and hardened criminals would be rounded up from all the neighboring camps. What splendid company it would make when such an elite assembled!

We quickly arranged with L. Wagner, W. Sonnabend and several other comrades that they should keep the civilian clothes ready every day, always packed together in a bundle. Somehow, we would come and collect them, or have them collected—perhaps as early as the following day. In any event, we were determined to try once more, although we ourselves did not yet know how.

The next morning we had to pack our belongings, and at about ten o'clock we said goodbye to our comrades. I whispered once more to Ludwig Wagner: "In a few days at the latest, we're clearing out. Just watch!" From him and Walter Sonnabend each of us still had almost another 50 *francs* in cash - the banknotes in our pockets, or hidden in a little pouch at the stocking, and the silver coins inside the cube of margarine.

Our dear comrades waved to us and shook our hands as, accompanied by the two guards, we walked along the camp lane toward Harly. The camp soon disappeared from view. After scarcely ten minutes we crossed the road to St. Quentin, then walked for another ten or fifteen minutes through completely shell-torn ground and old positions. Soon, we stood before a new prison camp, lying out in the open on a slight slope and surrounded by dense barbed wire.

A sentry at the entrance smiled at us and, as we passed, called to the Frenchman escorting us: *"Eh bien, toujours augmente"*. ("Yes, yes, there are always more".) At first, I did not quite understand what he meant, but half an hour later I did. More and more P.O.W.s arrived in groups of two, three and even four—all so-called "criminals" with "serious offences" on their records.



*Colorized portrait of Paul Tarnofsky and Johann Janski, German soldiers in WWI. Right, Belgian-witness Evariste Carpentier's 1918 painting "*L'exécution des notables de Blégny, 1914*" ("The execution of the notables of Blégny, 1914"); inset, corpses of some 674 victims of the "Sack of Dinant", Belgium, in August 1914: Clearly, the "Rape of Belgium" constituted myriad war crimes. Such wartime images – horrifically accurate or exaggerated for propaganda purposes – fed lingering prewar resentments, stoked hate and influenced subsequent behaviors on all sides of WWI. Such visceral hate only intensified and prolonged the war.* [Portrait AI-colorized and digitally enhanced.]

The weather was bad, as November weather tends to be: damp, cold and frosty. When the two of us reached the orderly room and our escort papers were examined, the adjutant looked at us with a satirical smile and exclaimed, *"Des beaux garçons, par dieu".* ("Fine fellows, by God!") After a brief examination he ordered us away, but would not allow us to keep the two blankets we had brought from Harly. *"Une couverture, c'est assez baste!"* ("One blanket is enough!") Thus, each man had only one blanket, and we withdrew grumbling.

This promised to turn out well. We were taken into one of the large square tents, each of which could have held almost eighty men. They were former German tents that had probably been left standing somewhere.

As we entered, a shock ran through us. There were no bunks. In one corner lay only about as much straw as would fit on a small cart, heaped up, and around thirty men were already crouching there. It was roughly twenty meters from the entrance to the corner. Near the entrance one walked through mud and filth, for the tents had been erected in the middle of the field without any preparation of the floor. There was no slag, no stone and no grass—nothing but bare earth and mud!

We remained standing at the entrance, speechless. "Well, come on in, you fine little gentlemen, into the good room. You'll soon get used to something even better. It'll be smashing, that's for sure" was roughly how a witty young Berliner greeted us. He was sitting barefoot at the front of the straw and had just been playing all sorts of cheerful songs on a mouth organ. We found ourselves a little straw and stretched out.

Most of the comrades had arrived only two or three days earlier. They reported that the company was expected to reach full strength within the next fourteen days. After that, we would be sent either to [?] or into the mines. Everyone here was supposedly "better society": either escapees with previous convictions and longer sentences already served, or men accused or punished for theft, destruction of French property and other such desirable things. The tents were still only lightly occupied. There were perhaps 180 men in all, but the number was expected to rise above 300. The guards were said not to be spiteful. The adjutant, however, had been a prisoner in Germany and had been badly treated there. He was a scoundrel. We had already come to know that side of him when he took one of our blankets away.

Might that French adjutant have been imprisoned, by chance, at the prisoner-of-war camp in Langensalza? If so, perhaps could some of his "scoundrel's" behavior have arisen as a reaction to what he experienced in German POW camps? Did he – did Karl – know about the so-called "Massacre of Langensalza" 16 days after the cessation of WWI, when German guards shot 16 prisoners in their "care", 10 of whom were French? Could the adjutant's behavior have been influenced by that incident – coincidentally in the hometown of this unruly German prisoner, who kept fleeing?





Karl Bergmüller's 1915 painting Heuernte der Gefangenen *(*Prisoners of War Harvesting Hay*); locations of the main POW camps in Germany, 1914-1919*

A Wider Context: Langensalza Prisoner of War Camp, 1914-1919

The prisoner of war camp in Langensalza was the only in Thüringen, and the largest in central imperial Germany. According to frwiki.wiki, it "had a reputation for being one of the toughest". Operating from November 1914 to March 1919, war-planning officials originally intended it to house 10,000 men, but by WWI's end it held up to 28,000 prisoners – almost three times the planned capacity. Most of whom were sent to external work details, such as extending a rail line from Langensalza to Kirchheilingen, 15km across fertile fields to the east. The camp had two annexes in Erfurt and Ohrdruf, the latter of which in Adolf Hitler's "Third Reich" became a concentration camp for "enemies of the people"; it was the first Nazi camp liberated by the U.S. Army near the end of WWII.



The 25-hectare Camp Langensalza site: upper view from circa summer 1916, lower view from summer 2026, taken by the resident author



Among the thousands of Allied and Axis POW letters and postcards (from both world wars) accessible online, this one stands out for its simplicity in the face of not only censorship, but wartime's paucity of understated poetry. This French POW sitting out the war at Camp Langensalza wrote tersely to a beloved:

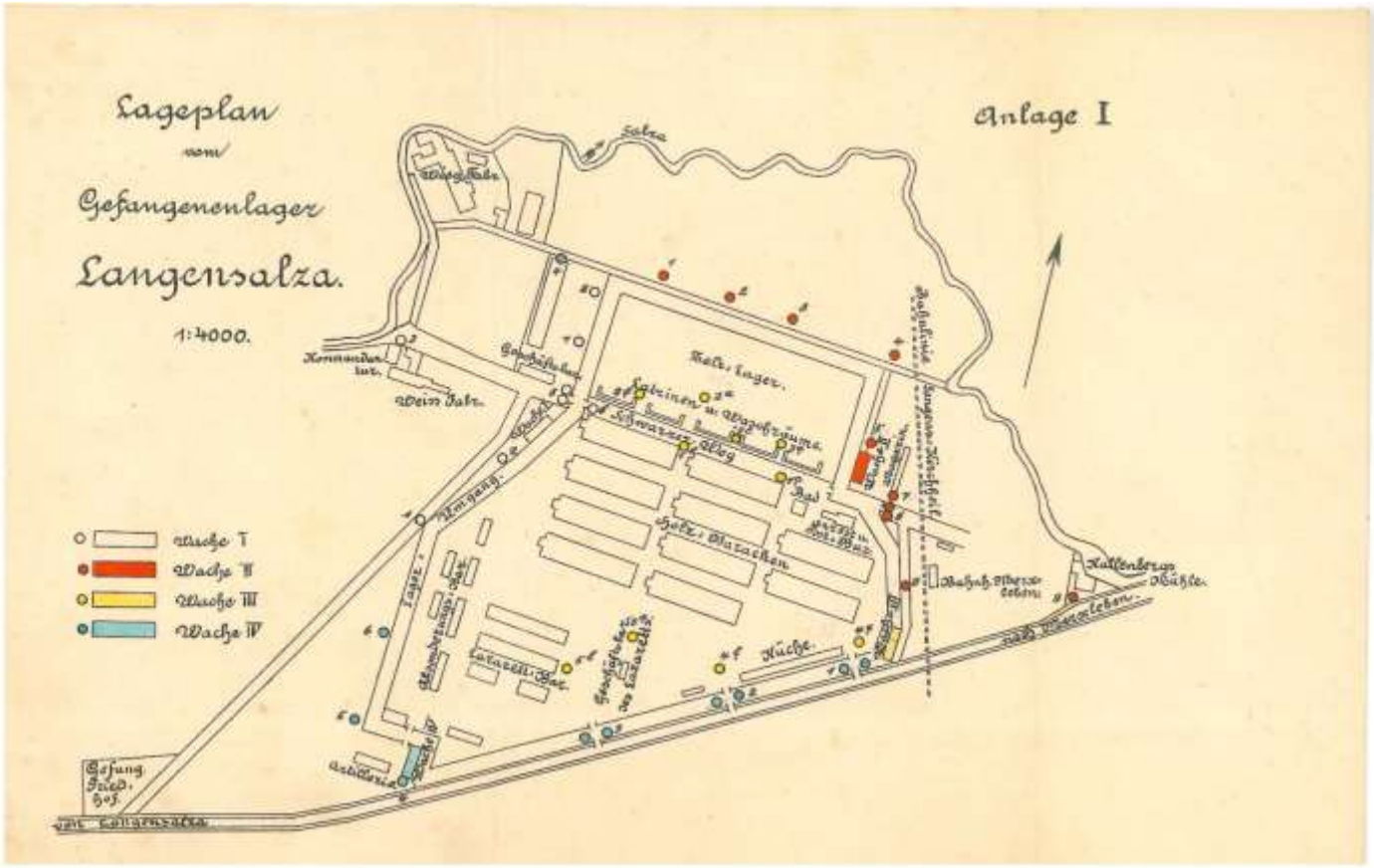
*CHASSERIAUX Joseph 7 ème colonial / 4éme Company No. 5172 / Prisoner of War Camp / Langensalza in Thüringen / 18 December 1917 / Mademoiselle / Henriette LATESTERE / Rue de Vincennes/ Caudéran / près [near] Bordeaux (Gironde) / France /**Best wishes. Tender kisses!** René / cancellation mark*

In an ironic coincidence, Joseph Ghasseriaux signed his name "René" — the same name as the "pleasant young Frenchman of about twenty-one [with whom Karl had been assigned as a chaperone for their weekly shopping trips to San Quentin, of whom Karl later wrote he] got on well".

During WWI, Langensalza's POW camp was a place of imprisonment for soldiers of various nationalities, especially French and Russians. The German government's list of prisoners taken by the Langensalza camp on 10 October 1918 contains 28,000 prisoners, including: 12,200 French, 9,400 Russians, 3,500 British, 2,300 Italians, 180 Belgians, 100 Romanians and 27 Americans. Civilians were also interned in Langensalza: Several hundred were taken prisoner in the regions conquered by the German armies.



Mostly Russian (standing) and French prisoners of war, held at Camp Langensalza; the dark-skinned man reclining in the front row cited as from Senegal, Africa – thousands of whose men were "recruited" to fight for France. Note the village of Merxleben in the background, where the church graveyard contains mass graves of German soldiers from a previous war, then some half-a-century earlier: It was the last "German-German Fraternal War" of 1866, yet this author argues that its outcome helped set the stage for the "Great War", which set the stage for World War 2. His theses on the topic are included in other works, available elsewhere.



plan of prisoner of war Camp Langensalza, circa 1914, with four colors denoting different guard sentries; later changes to and expansion of the camp – especially around the wars end – are not shown here

The history of this camp was marked by two severe typhus epidemics in 1915, which claimed almost a thousand lives, but also by the bloody shooting of prisoners by camp guards on 27 November 1918. The killings - 16 days after the armistice of 11 November - caused an international scandal, with 16 deaths, including 10 French prisoners, and 30 wounded. For further details about Camp Langensalza, see the TRACES-Spuren website. But, back to Karl's story:

> So, this was our new environment. It was anything but rosy. We left the tent and looked into the others. Everywhere there was the same tale of filth and misery.
>
> In the middle of the camp stood several barracks and a field kitchen housed in a shed. The guard detachment lived in these barracks; separated from them, in a little wooden hut, lived the French officer of the guard, together with the adjutant. Next to the shed containing the kitchen was another storehouse filled with all kinds of equipment—shovels, picks, axes, wheelbarrows and all sorts of other pleasant objects with which the P.O.W.s could pass the time.
>
> Along the long side of the cell was a latrine enclosed by a solid wooden partition.
>
> As mentioned, the entire camp was surrounded by a high, dense barbed-wire fence. A sentry stood at the entrance gate. From time to time small groups of ten to fifteen men returned from work through the gate, escorted by one Frenchman in front and another behind. The men worked among the positions, retrieved pit props and other valuable material from the trenches, and levelled the ground. New arrivals did not have to begin work until the third day, so we still had two days. We considered our options but arrived at no plan.
>
> Night fell. We crouched close together on the little straw we had. It had grown bitterly cold, and some snow even began to fall. I could not sleep for the cold, and the full misery of being a prisoner seized me. What was the purpose of all this suffering when we were not criminals, but German soldiers who had done their duty to the very end and now languished here, abandoned in enemy hands? No one at home seemed to care about us. Hot tears ran down my cheeks into the straw, and before my mind's eye I saw my late mother stretching her arms toward me with such longing. As I knew, I had always been something of her favorite boy, because I had done so well at school. Shadowy images of her grave illness passed before me as I tossed restlessly to and fro from the cold and groaned. My comrade Johann reached for me, called me by name,

and I woke in alarm from my half-sleep. “Why are you crying and groaning, Karl?” he asked. I hardly knew how I felt. Beside me, after all, lay another comrade, a married man who had already shared twice in all the hardships of my escapes and punishments. “Johann, I can’t stand it here,” I whispered, taking his hand. “I have to get away. I have to go home to Germany. Better to die while escaping than to perish here like a piece of livestock, or somewhere down a mine!” Those were my exact words.

“Johann, will you come with me?” “Of course,” came the reply from his lips. “How could you think otherwise of me?” Gratefully I pressed his hand. I had grown soft. Although I can otherwise be hard in the struggles of life, my heart was aching; the other comrades, however, had scarcely noticed anything. I could not sleep any more—the cold was too severe as well. Johann and I huddled together and discussed how we would do it. I had a plan. First, we had to recover our civilian clothes. We decided that Johann would obtain them. At about seven o’clock in the morning, the work details went out, accompanied by guards, into the positions to work. Because the jobs were so varied, it was not always possible for the guards to maintain very close supervision: Here trench timbers were being removed, there unexploded shells were gathered, and elsewhere trenches were filled in again. Some comrades also had to perform camp duties, such as chopping and fetching wood. In short, Johann had to get across to Harly, to the old Company 363. Moving stealthily through the positions, he had to *reconnoitre* the area near the camp and work with pick and shovel, like so many of his comrades behind the latrine. Then, he had to watch for an opportunity when no one was observing from inside or outside the camp. At the proper moment, the bundle had to be thrown over the rear fence, and Johann had to find his own way to get it into the camp. The rest would take care of itself. We intended to clear out that same day or the next; that much was settled in my mind.

Thus, the night hours passed while we considered our plans, and by dawn all the other comrades were already awake from the cold. I crept to the tent entrance and was alarmed to discover that it had even snowed a little. It was November, after all, so really a poor time for escaping.

After coffee we fell in. Once the men had already been counted and assigned, Johann skillfully attached himself to a work party armed with picks and shovels that was clearing the positions. Standing to one side by the exit gate, I watched him march out. Would he succeed in obtaining the civilian clothes? Those were my thoughts. It was after eight when he left with the detail. When would he return? Surely alone, for he had slipped out unnoticed as the twenty-first man in a party of twenty. I walked restlessly around the camp, devising a plan for how we might get away if Johann returned safely with the clothes. From our work with Company 363 by the railway embankment, I knew that every afternoon, a few minutes after half past three, the Paris–Brussels express passed through after stopping for several minutes at St. Quentin. We had constantly observed that in the train’s aisles, many workers with their axes, shovels, and other tools stood at the windows and often waved to us. There were a lot of Poles, Spaniards and others who worked here, partly around St. Quentin or Cambrai, but lived more cheaply over in Belgium in Mons and the surrounding area. I had often spoken with such people while working during the last few months, before our first escape. There were people among them who spoke barely a few words of French but only Czech, Polish or Spanish.

We were going to take our chances with this plan for the third time. As for how we’d get through border control, we’d just have to see. So, that afternoon, right after lunch, we had to make a run for it, right behind the work detail that headed out to work at 2 o’clock. I would get an axe and a saw from the shed or even from the kitchen, ostensibly to fetch wood outside. Both of us in prisoner’s uniforms, with our civilian clothes underneath, would have to try to persuade the guard to let us through. We’d surely make it out with our tools, especially if I told the guard that the commander and adjutant wanted wood. In any case, we had to get out of the camp. In the nearest shelter, we’d then toss our prisoner-of-war gear into an old hole, and in half an hour we’d be at the train station in St. Quentin, buy tickets, and take the train away. That had to be the plan. Yes, that was my plan. *Below: Verdun from Fort de la Chaume, looking northeast, before it was devastated by fighting in 1916*






*St. Quentin's rebuilt train station, late 1920s; the "*Deutscher Soldatenfriedhof *[German Soldiers' Cemetery]* Saint Quentin*" today; below,* Mémorial dédié à ceux qui sont morts pendant les guerres mondiales à Saint-Quentin (Aisne)*, Memorial to Those Who Died in the World Wars in St. Quentin*



Against incalculable odds, Karl's plan worked – and eventually landed him and Johann on the Belgian-Dutch border. There, by a stroke of pure luck, after they "had been walking along merrily for a good hour, whistling the occasional little tune or even humming to ourselves", they came to a small village. There and then - after months of plotting, bolting and then surviving figurative, at times almost literal gauntlets - their three escape attempts led them… **home**:

> I was just whistling some well-known German soldier's song from the bottom of my heart when we passed a garden fence behind which a man was digging up a flower bed with a spade. He paused when he heard the little tune and looked over at the two of us. In high spirits, I tipped my cap and called out "*Grüß Gott*" to him. His eyes lit up, and he returned the greeting with "*Grüß Gott*". "You must be Germans?" he asked cheerfully. We stopped, nodded in response, and in a single bound, the man—throwing down his spade—was at the garden fence. Laughing, he shook our hands and explained that he had worked in Germany for many years and loved Germany and its people. He proudly told us that his wife was German—from Silesia. We had to go into his house, where his wife and their two children, who spoke German flawlessly, welcomed us warmly.
>
> After a hearty breakfast with the family, we began sharing our stories. The people were happy to help us. The man warned us about the gendarmes, who had recently taken many prisoners of war back to the Belgian border. He promised to personally take us to Roosendaal so we could board the train to Rotterdam there.
>
> After a few hours of enjoying ourselves, the two of us and the Dutchman set off for Roosendaal. On the way, he advised us to go straight to the train station in Rotterdam, find the nearest transit official, and ask him about the German consulate—then everything would be fine. When we reached Roosendahl, the Dutchman bought our tickets. With heartfelt words of thanks and a handshake, we boarded the train that carried us on a beautiful journey through the splendid Dutch countryside to Rotterdam.
>
> The German consul received us warmly and had us accommodated with full board at the Hotel Wilson. His wife arranged for new underwear to be sent to us from a clothing shop. When we had also taken a bath, put on clean linen, and sat at a laid table in the hotel dining room, both of us were overcome by grateful joy that our escape had succeeded.

During the next few days we explored Rotterdam. The harbor district [bombed to ruins by the Germans in a second "Great War" to come, of which Karl or Johannes likely could not imagined] interested us particularly, and the city's gardens were so magnificent that we wandered through them for hours. Meanwhile, the consulate had issued papers for us, so after a six-day stay we could leave Rotterdam. With a few *guilders* for provisions in our pockets, we now traveled toward the German border — toward Germany, our homeland.

"Soon we shall be home", we rejoiced inwardly – yet, there had been a revolution in Germany. The French had even told us that the soldiers themselves had made the revolution: We could not grasp any of this, much less imagine what conditions at home might be like. What did we prisoners of war know of the November Revolution in Germany, when every piece of news we received had been "colored"? Until then only one question had occupied us: getting home. But the nearer we came to the German border, the more we wondered what our fatherland would look like and how we would be treated.



The trains that German soldiers rode to France as of August 1914 were diametrically different from those survivors rode back, circa 1919.

At a border station, the train stopped and the crew was relieved. Another train stood on a neighboring track, and we had to cross to it. A German Red Cross nurse, dressed in the uniform so comforting and familiar to every soldier, walked up and down the platform beside the train. When we saw her, we rushed toward her, grasped both her hands, and tears of joy came into our eyes. At first the nurse did not know what the two strangers wanted from her, but a few words quickly explained everything and she shared our happiness with all her heart. She warmly welcomed us home as the first German woman we had met in the fatherland.

After a short stay at the border station, we boarded a German train for the first time again. A shock ran through us when we took our seats in the compartment. Almost all the windowpanes were either missing, smashed or cracked. The straps used to raise and lower the windows had been cut off; the luggage nets were mostly torn or missing. When we looked into the 1st- and 2nd-class compartments, we saw the upholstery had been ripped from the benches and the curtains removed. Were these traces of the 'glorious revolution'; was this how the 'heroes' had behaved? Even more unbelievable to us "newcomers to the fatherland", was the conduct of some officials on the train and at certain stations toward the passengers: brusque, inconsiderate and at times extremely unfriendly — entirely unlike the exemplary Prussian officials we remembered.

Most astonishing of all was that the train often stopped in open country. We were told that since the revolution people worked only eight hours and the train therefore had to wait until a relief crew arrived. Delays naturally resulted, connections were missed and the other passengers became very angry.

All these observations made during such a short time were unfamiliar and new to us, so the other passengers soon noticed that we knew nothing about the “achievements of the revolution”. A peculiar anxiety took hold of us, for we had imagined our fatherland rather differently.

At Friedrichsfelde, we remained for two days in a barracks camp so that we could be formally discharged. Each man received a prisoner-release certificate and free rail travel to his hometown. Each man also received a pair of socks, a shirt, a pair of shoes and an old army coat made of a shabby kind of nettle cloth. Now, we were finally to go home! Unfortunately, the first unpleasant impressions of the train journey were followed by one especially fine personal experience. On the morning of departure, when I rose from my straw mattress, I discovered that one of the comrades who had slept with us in the barrack had stolen my new lace-up boots. No one admitted it. When I reported the theft to the duty NCO, he even implied that perhaps I had already sold the boots myself and merely wanted another pair. He said he knew what crafty fellows runaways were. This insinuation made me so furious that a terrible quarrel broke out and I almost attacked the man. Had meanness already advanced so far that such a suspicion could be cast upon a prisoner of war who had only just returned home?

We now longed twice as strongly for our loved ones. Johann and I traveled together as far as Cologne, where he left for Mannheim. I pressed my faithful comrade firmly to my breast, shook his hands warmly, and with my best blessings and greetings for his loved ones we took our leave. One final wave, and he departed, while shortly afterward I boarded the train that carried me through Hagen and Kassel to Thuringia.

It took me two days to reach Langensalza in Thuringia, where my parents lived. The trains stood for hours here and there, and after eight hours of work the train crews often left without regard for the passengers; we had to find our own way onward. At last I reached Leinefelde, and after a four-hour wait the journey continued through Mühlhausen toward Langensalza.

As I leaned at the compartment window and watched the now-familiar villages pass by, a wonderful, grateful feeling of attachment to home rose within me. And just beyond Schönstedt, the last village before Langensalza, the town’s pointed towers appeared and the first houses seemed to greet me. Tears of unfamiliar emotion unconsciously rolled down my cheeks. “Langensalza ... disembark!” I heard. “Now I am home again”, the words sounded within me.



Langensalza’s Rathaus on Neumarktplatz; Karl’s future shop would operate in the building to the far right.

The last time I had been there was in spring 1915, four and a half years earlier. In May 1916, as I prepared to take leave from the position near Verdun, fate swept me, seriously wounded, into French captivity.



Little could he have known it as Karl made his way down the streets of Langensalza that first day back from war, but the large building in the center of the above photo would come to play a major role in his life – a fatal one.

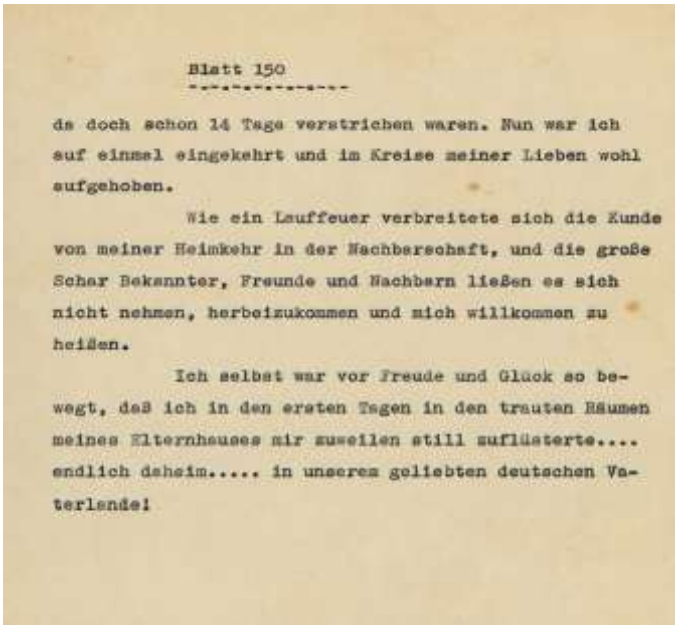
I walked slowly down Bahnhofstraße, across Steinweg and through Salzstraße and Steingrubenstraße to the market. Nothing had changed. The houses greeted me, old and familiar, with the comfortable air of a small town. Everything was as though I had never been away.

None of the passers-by paid attention to the man walking along in a broad dark peaked cap, with a smart moustache, dressed in an old army coat. I recognized many people, but I wanted only to reach my parents' house in the Kepfestraße, under the Stork's Nest Tower.

The water in the town-hall fountain splashed a talkative greeting to me. I crossed the market, and a few minutes later I stood before my parents' house, a bakery on the Kepfe. With quickened steps I entered through the shop door and went around the counter. The door to the back room flew open, and with a jubilant cry of "Father!" I fell into the arms of my father, who was in the room. My beloved stepmother and sister hurried in, and perfect happiness filled our familiar home. Again and again I had to tell my story and answer the many questions everyone wanted answered. On the table still lay the postcard that had arrived several days earlier, which I had sent before my escape, announcing my third attempt. My parents and siblings had become deeply worried because 14 days had already passed. Now, I had suddenly returned and was safe among those I loved.



*The Walter home and bakery is colored, with "*Bäckerei*" above the window.*



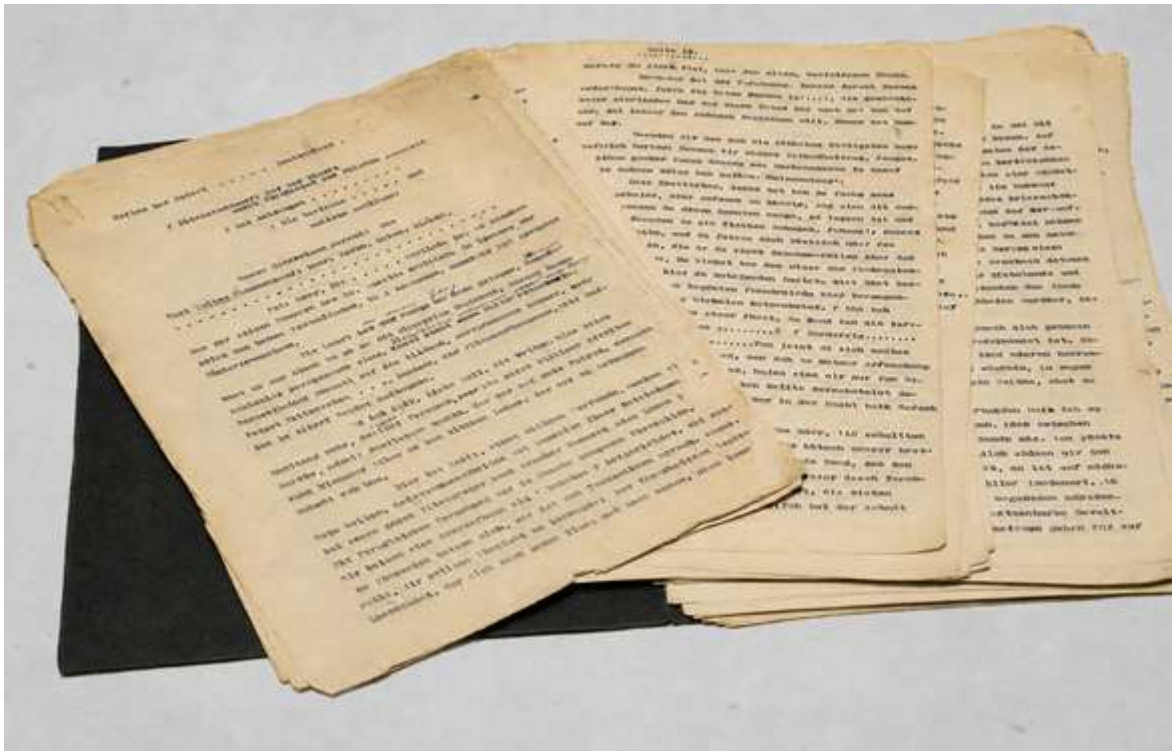
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da doch schon 14 Tage verstrichen waren. Nun war ich auf einmal eingekehrt und im Kreise meiner Lieben wohl aufgehoben.

Wie ein Lauffeuer verbreitete sich die Kunde von meiner Heimkehr in der Nachbarschaft, und die große Schar Bekannter, Freunde und Nachbarn ließen es sich nicht nehmen, herbeizukommen und mich willkommen zu heißen.

Ich selbst war vor Freude und Glück so bewegt, daß ich in den ersten Tagen in den trauten Räumen meines Elternhauses mir zuweilen still zuflüsterte.... endlich daheim..... in unserem geliebten deutschen Vaterlande!

The news of my return spread like wildfire throughout the neighborhood, and a large crowd of acquaintances, friends, and neighbors made a point of coming over to welcome me home. I myself was so moved by joy and happiness that, during those first few days in the familiar rooms of my parents' home, I would sometimes whisper to myself … 'finally home … in our beloved German *Vaterland*!'



The hand-typed, 150-page memoir Karl left to the world about his three-and-a-half years as a POW in France as a record - and a warning.

PART II

KARL'S WORLD TURNED ON ITS HEAD BY GERMAN POST-WAR SOCIAL INSTABILITY



Karl Louis Eduard Walter, shortly before World War 1
[This photo excerpt was AI-colorized and digitally enhanced.]

The world Karl had left four and a half years earlier, in spring 1915, was not the one to which he returned in 1919. That took getting used to…

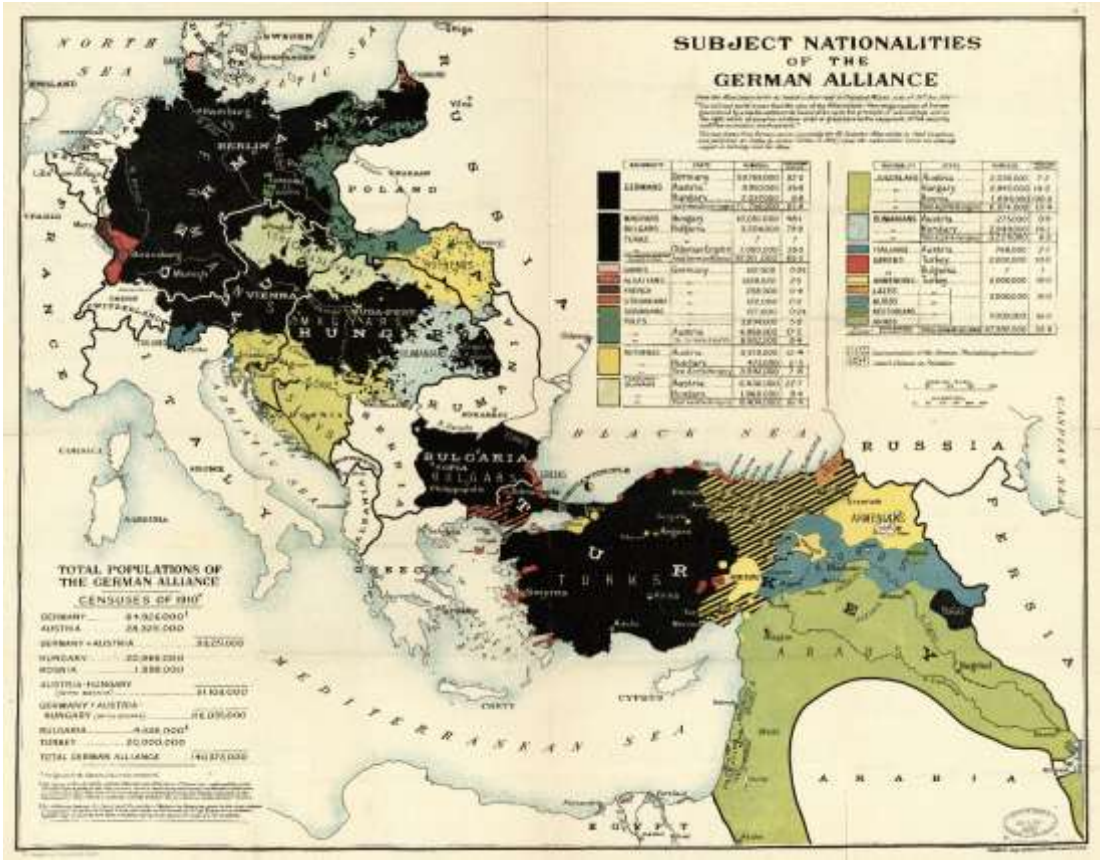
For one thing, the "beloved German *Vaterland*", which he celebrated at the end of his above account, had changed unrecognizably from the one he thought he had lived in before: Several "revolutions" had happened.

Alone in Langensalza, the myriad changes were palpable, even if not always conscious. Before the "Great War" the sleepy little city's richest individuals and some commercial companies possessed automobiles; now, Langensalza's streets were increasingly humming with traffic.

In those pre-radio days, the silent-film industry boomed, so that the town's cinemas were expanding and well-attended. Magazines were competing for newspapers' readership, while advertising now boasted more color and eye-catching designs: In short, media was on the march. How information was gathered and distributed was morphing radically; in turn, how the population processed, then lived it out was changing.

Within the Walter family's walls, Karl's stepmother, Wilhelmina, and his sisters donned shorter hemlines and more revealing lines; long curls shrunk into bobbed bangs; corsets disappeared overnight. In wartime, women's social roles had shifted: less at home, more in the open; less housekeeping, more career building. Some even smoked!

On a larger scale, the postwar world's changes were vast, and therefore also less comprehensible or confrontable. For one, Karl had grown to adulthood in the Second German Reich (1871-1918): The Prussian-led empire had expanded after serial wars with its neighbors since the mid-1700s, but ultimately succumbed to a war it could not control. Still, during its almost half-century existence, it offered a peaceable, all-pervasive stability in which German- and Austrian-ruled lands could mostly enjoy a solid, stable life marked by increasing prosperity. With exceptions, under Hohenzollern (Berlin) and Habsburg (Vienna) rule internal dissent was "manageable" and the multitude of ethnicities coexisting lived under a tacit consensus. That generally unquestioned unity fell apart when both of those dynasties collapsed at the end of the "Great War" – along with those of Russia (Romanov), the Ottoman realm, etc.



During the war, almost all fighting and subsequent physical damage had taken place outside of Germany. After the guns fell silent, however, the most violent, destabilizing social damage unfolded on German soil. Foremost, the Kaiser's abdication on 9 November 1918 came as a blow to millions of Germans; for many, his abrupt flight to the Netherlands was an unexpected loss of an esteemed father figure. Then, Germany's unconditional surrender two days later, on the 11th, felt like a visceral betrayal – one begging for a scapegoat, first deemed "the enemy within", later a hodgepodge of "traitors": pacifists and "internationalists", the Left and eventually "Jewish-led Bolshevism".





Sailors on the deck of the battleship Prinzregent Luitpold *holding a sign that reads: "Soldiers' Council, Warship* Prinzregent Luitpold. *Long live the Socialist Republic". Right: The* Thüringen *was one of the first battleships whose sailors mutinied.* *[Both photos were AI-colorized and digitally enhanced by TRACES volunteer-intern staff, August 2026.]*

For some, the emperor's departure left a welcome open playing field. In the ensuing political vacuum, armed bands roamed the streets: Might meant "right". After the so-called "November Revolution" began, political posturing and often fragile coalitions resulted in fluid, at times bizarre partisan alliances. At least 2,400 people lost their lives – not to mention those injured - during fighting alone in Berlin and Munich between November 1918 and May 1919: The resultant social instability, worsened by growing economic chaos, shook all of the now-crumbling vast German empire. Its unsettling aftershocks were physically felt even in small, relatively isolated Langensalza.




A truck carrying revolutionary sailors and soldiers drives through Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, 9 November 1918. Right: A Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) poster for the 1919 elections to the Weimar National Assembly. It reads: "Women! Same Rights = Same Duties; Vote Socialdemocratic!" *[Truck photo AI-colorized and digitally enhanced by TRACES staff.]*

With the vestiges of imperial rule in Berlin discredited and waning, eager communists in staid München declared a "Soviet Republic" which was quickly squelched by the provisional government. In response, a socialist-centrist coalition met in the roughly geographic middle of the two capitals, in Weimar – at the far southeast corner of the same broad valley, the *Thüringer Becken*, in which "Salza" had been growing rich on woad and other agricultural goods for almost a thousand years. After months of pomp and playing political poker, the conveners proclaimed the "Weimar Republic". Until recently the subjects of a conservative albeit often socially-minded empire, most Germans received their new republic critically, if not skeptically. Some were made happy by thoughts of its quick demise.

The "Kapp *Putsch*", for example, was one of several efforts to sabotage democratic culture on German soil. Also called the Kapp–Lüttwitz Revolt, it was a right-wing attempt to overthrow the nascent Weimar Republic. It began in Berlin on 13 March 1920. Its main leaders were General Walther von Lüttwitz and the conservative politician Wolfgang Kapp, supported by members of the military, nationalist groups and a Freikorps unit. In part, they strove to

resist the young government's goal to reduce the armed forces and dissolve certain Freikorps units, as required by the Versailles Treaty, which officially ended the First World War, yet inadvertently set the conditions for a Second.

As adapted from the German Historical Museum's account (links to the following excerpts are in the footnotes),

> When Lüttwitz refused to accept such orders, armed troops entered Berlin, the legal government fled the capital, and Kapp declared himself chancellor. Senior army leaders did not provide reliable military protection to the elected government. The putsch failed because trade unions and democratic political leaders called for a general strike, which some twelve million people joined—the largest strike in German history. Millions of workers stopped working; public transport and communications were interrupted; factories and government offices closed; and Berlin's basic services were affected. Berlin civil servants also refused to implement the putschists' orders, making it impossible for the putschists to govern, so Kapp and Lüttwitz abandoned their attempt after only a few days. Although the republic survived, the crisis revealed its weakness. Many people involved in the putsch received limited punishment, while armed workers who had resisted the coup were later confronted by the Reichswehr and Freikorps. The events deepened political mistrust and violence in Germany. Still, it was an early exercise in popular, grassroots direct action.

As further summarized by German Wikipedia,

> The national putsch in Berlin had especially serious consequences in Thuringia. At the time, the region was politically divided, with both strong socialist and conservative movements. News of the coup in Berlin led to strikes, demonstrations, the formation of workers' defense groups, and armed confrontations. In parts of Thuringia, the conflict developed into a civil-war-like struggle rather than remaining only a political protest. Important events took place in Weimar, Erfurt, Eisenach, Gotha, Suhl and surrounding towns. Workers opposed the right-wing coup and, in some areas, also demanded broader socialist changes. Government troops, local security units, Freikorps formations and armed workers faced one another. This made the situation more complicated than a simple conflict between supporters and opponents of Wolfgang Kapp.





A demonstration in Germany against the Kapp–Lüttwitz Putsch, 1920 – per the inscription it attracted "a quarter-million participants". Right: Centered around the Volkshaus zum Mohren in Gotha [here shown in 1910], during the Kapp crisis local workers participated in resistance and armed conflict.

> Gotha became one of the centers of the conflict. After shootings and growing tension, a workers' guard expanded and fought Reichswehr formations on 18 and 19 March. The workers temporarily gained control of the city, but approximately 110 people were killed during the fighting in Gotha. Violence continued even after the putsch in Berlin had already collapsed.



*The Ruhr Fighters' Memorial was erected in 1934 during the Nazi era in the Horst district of Essen. It was dedicated on 4 November 1934, with a National Socialist mass rally featuring swastika flags and other staged events. The monument was erected in memory of fallen members of the Freikorps, "*Einwohnerwehren*" (citizens' militias), Reichswehr and police units who fought against revolutionary workers in the Ruhr region between 1918 and 1920, and who were particularly involved in suppressing the general strike in March 1920, and the subsequent crushing of the so-called Ruhr Uprising of the miners.*

Reichswehr or Freikorps units later re-established government control. Repressive actions, executions and revenge attacks followed in several places. Events in Thuringia showed that the Kapp Putsch was not only a short, failed coup in Berlin: It triggered a wider regional conflict about democracy, socialism, military power and Germany's political future. The violence did not end, however, with the coup's collapse in Berlin. In Langensalza, street fighting on 18 March 1920 took at least two lives – those of Otto Winter and Karl Golik. On 25 March, the Marburg Student Corps shot 15 workers who were en route to Gotha. The Thuringia State Archive describes the killings as a calculated murder later shielded by military, university, conservative and judicial institutions.



right: A overlooked memorial stone at the medieval "West Gate" of Langensalza, facing suburb Ufhoven, recalls that "the freedom fighter Otto Winter fell here on 18 March 1920 during the Kapp Putsch."

How did freshly-returned war veteran Karl Walter react to all this social turbulence? The records are unclear and at times contradictory. For example, according to a document published by painstaking local historian Gerhard Wuttke,

> Before 1933, [Karl Walter] had been a member of the "*Stahlhelm*," an association of participants in the First World War that developed into a large military association, [but] was later brought into line by the Nazis, and was dissolved in 1935. Walter claimed that he had always been an opponent of the National Socialists. In 1934, however, like other *Stahlhelm* members, he had allegedly been pressured to wear swastika armbands, and 80 percent of the *Stahlhelm* members became members of the *NSDAP*. When questioned about his relationship with Social Democratic circles, he replied that the Social Democrats and the *Stahlhelm* were not hostile toward one another. This prompted protests from the audience.

What was the *Stahlhelm* association, and what were typical values and stances held by its members? Answers are, well, complicated. Again, according to texts adapted from a summary on the Bundesarchiv website:

> *Der Stahlhelm*, or *Bund der Frontsoldaten*, was not a conventional political party. Founded in Magdeburg in December 1918 by reserve officer and industrialist Franz Seldte, it initially presented itself as an association representing returning First World War veterans and bereaved families. Membership was at first restricted to men who had served as soldiers for at least six months during the war and retained their civil rights.





Uniformed Stahlhelm *members stand in formation at a rally in Berlin in September 1932, under the Reichskriegsflagge, the war flag of the former German Empire. Right: As co-founder Franz Seldte watches atop steps at a* Stahlhelm *rally in Magdeburg in 1929, uniformed members hold an organizational banner.* [Both photos AI-colorized and digitally enhanced.]

> During the 1920s, the *Stahlhelm* developed into a nationalist, anti-republican mass movement with a paramilitary structure. It cultivated uniforms, military discipline, mass rallies and military-style physical training. The uniforms, banners and carefully arranged formations were a form of political communication, which presented military discipline, obedience and national unity as alternatives to parliamentary debate

and compromise. The above photographs document both a veterans' organization and the wider militarization of political culture during the final years of the Weimar Republic. The *Stahlhelm* organization described itself as a "silent reserve" of the Reichswehr, and training for younger members was organized in cooperation with the military. By 1930, it had approximately 500,000 members, making it the largest paramilitary association in Germany.

Further information compiled from the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* maintains that:

> The *Stahlhelm* was not originally part of the Nazi Party and should not be described as a Nazi organization. It was a separate national-conservative and anti-democratic movement that both cooperated and competed with the *NSDAP* [the "*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*", in English the "National Socialist German Workers' Party", or "Nazi"]. Their rivalry became particularly bitter in 1931–32, even though both movements opposed the Weimar Republic. Although it claimed to be above party politics, the *Stahlhelm* intervened directly in major political campaigns. In 1929, for example, it cooperated with the DNVP, the *NSDAP* and the Pan-German League in a campaign against the Young Plan - a 1929 attempt to settle issues surrounding war-reparations obligations which Germany owed under terms of Treaty of Versailles. Then, in October 1931, it joined the *NSDAP* and the *DNVP* in the Harzburg Front, an alliance created to unite right-wing opponents of the republic. After Hitler became chancellor in January 1933, Franz Seldte entered the government as Minister of Labor. A large proportion of *Stahlhelm* members was transferred into the *SA* during 1933, while the remaining organization faced increasing pressure. In 1934, it was brought under full Nazi control and reorganized as the "*NS-Frontkämpferbund*". It was completely dissolved in 1935.

Karl Walter, however, wasn't an organization with half-a-million members: He was an individual, one man struggling to make sense of his innate instincts or values and his own experiences (i.e., the world war during which he had been a prisoner) vis-à-vis the swiftly changing times in which he found himself, upon returning to a country he'd been held separate from for almost half a decade. How did he tick as a person; how did his public personas mirror his private thoughts, beliefs, values and, in turn, political predilections? Three locatable documents or photos offer clues:

Along with his young brother Hugo, Karl found time and energy to invest in the wellbeing of young people, despite the fluid conditions around him – to cite just two examples, political violence and assassinations only a few streets from their familial home, or the hyper-inflation felt acutely personally in the Walters' in-house bakery. Clearly, even in times of chaotic social instability, Karl continued to feel it important to spend time with the rising next generation.





Hyper-inflationary times are expressly unsettling, felt in every financial interaction, large or small. Left: A 1,000-mark banknote dated 15 December 1922 was overprinted in 1923 as "one billion marks"—a visual record of the speed of Germany's postwar hyperinflation. By mid-November 1923, one US dollar cost 4.2 trillion paper marks. On the right, an AI-colorized, enhanced photo shows the two Walter brothers with a Jahn sport group of youths, in an outdoor setting. Reportedly a "good athlete", in at least the 1920s Karl was active in the "Jahn Sports Club" and also served on its board, assuring others access to sports, too.

Another clue? As local chronicler Holger Schneider documented in the *Thüringer Allgemeine* on 21 January 2017:

> On 15 December 1906, ten grammar-school pupils from Langensalza founded the association "The Ten". Alongside their school subjects, they wanted to learn about more advanced and new matters. Scientific discussions, lectures and experiments were intended to help them do so. At the place where they regularly met, the Hotel "zum Schwan" [later quite damaged during an Allied bombing on 24 March 1944], the pupils founded the "Order of the Swan." The growing number of members required it to be divided into historical, natural-science and literary sections. After the wartime period, the "Order of the Swan" succeeded in being re-established at the Hotel "zum Schwan" [*shown below, right*] on 7 February 1925 and resumed its activities.

Presumably, the accompanying photo portrays that event - and Karl Walter served as one of the alum chaperones.





The most moving documentation of Karl's willingness to invest in young people is a heartfelt letter he wrote on 13 March 1944 to his godchild, his brother Hugo's 13-year-old daughter, Ursula, upon the occasion of her confirmation:



Aschaffenburg, 13 March 1944

My dear goddaughter Ursel!

I don't know when your confirmation will take place, so I'd like to write you a few lines in advance of your special day. Unfortunately, I won't be able to be there when you receive the blessing of our Christian church, because I can't get time off for it. Dear Ursel, with all my heart I hope that God's blessing and protective hand may rest upon your steps as you embark on the young life that lies ahead of you. I know that you are a good and well-behaved girl who takes pride in bringing joy to your father, mother and all members of your family, and in always being a grateful daughter. Endowed with the church's blessing, approach all the things in your young life with joy; our Father in Heaven tests us human children in heart and soul by sending us sunshine and storms. In both, be strong and full of life. Your father and mother are still close to you; you still stretch your feet carefree beneath the set table of your parents, who care for you and work for you. But little by little you are becoming more independent; temptations of all kinds approach a young person and beckon you. Remain strong and pure, kind and loving toward your parents, siblings, and all people, and then you will mature into a true German woman and, later, a loving mother. This is what I wish for you from the bottom of my heart as your godfather, who once held you up at your baptism and is deeply close to you.

Give my regards to your father, mother, and grandparents, and celebrate this special day as you step out into life with dignity and joyful contentment.

Warmest regards

Your godfather uncle

Karl

By the time Karl had written his moving letter to young Ursula, however, much of irreversible gravity had taken place since those turbulent times of the mid-1920s, when the other two "clue" photographs were taken. In the intervening two decades, the political and social chaos of the German inter-war years had morphed into the relative "stability" of the Nazis' "Third Reich": Touted as to last "a thousand years", it was the realization of extreme-rightist theories and ideals into daily-life practice and an established, all-present system. That surface "stability" came at a price, though, which even right-of-center individuals – such as Karl Walter – would have to pay, if they wanted to or not.

MARCH

1941




aiser
Trikotagen
Wollwaren


Kurt Schröter


tto Kaiser


Otto Kaiser

PART III

KARL'S WORLD TURNED ON ITS HEAD BY BEING HELD A CAPTIVE OF THE NAZIS

Adolf Hitler and his inner-circle band of careerists, sociopaths and fiends did not just appear on Germany's national political stage like magic. From the time of their failed *Putsch* (a sudden, armed overthrow of an existing regime) in November 1923 to *Reichspräsident* Hindenburg's unwilling appointment of Hitler as *Reichskanzler* in January 1933, a decade of corrosive and explosive events unfolded in front of the eyes of tens of millions of "ordinary" Germans. If the majority initially - albeit cautiously - tolerated Nazi moves to replace the tottering Weimarer Republik with an iron-fisted dictatorship, did their mostly silent inaction equate condoning the demise of democracy? That's open to debate – and it *should* be examined, both to understand past political disasters *and* to preempt possible future ones.

What is irrefutable, however, is that while Germany's populace went on living their daily lives, extremist ideologies and ensuing actions led to epic events which would end in death for over 60 million Germans, occupied Europeans and others drawn into global warfare. Later often horrified by the final outcomes of the Nazi experiment, millions of Germans nonetheless passively allowed it to take place—or even actively collaborated in its creation, or assured its expansion. Typically consciously unaware at the time of their national situation's gravity and of dangers arising from their daily choices, individuals, families and groups of people lived out "ordinary" lives that ended extraordinarily. One such "ordinary" German was Karl Walter – whose life unfolded mostly unnoticed by those close around him, even as several "ordinary" individuals living literally a few meters from him also suffered from larger developments.

Between when he walked back to Germany in early winter 1919-20 and when the Nazi "*Machtergreifung*" (the seizing of [absolute] power, in English) took place in late winter 1932-33, Karl's life had taken several unexpected turns. Over those thirteen and a half years, he came to work in the renowned Modehaus Thilo, a clothing store located only 15 meters from Langensalza's city hall, the *Rathaus*. In 1921, he became its co-owner by marrying Herr Thilo's widow, Magdalene: To their union were born two children: Ingeborg in 1923, after their son Gerhard in 1922 – who as a sailor in 1944 never returned from a submarine mission. The couple apparently enjoyed above-average wealth: They built a villa in the spa resort town of Tabarz, in Thüringen's central mountain chain, the Thüringer Wald.





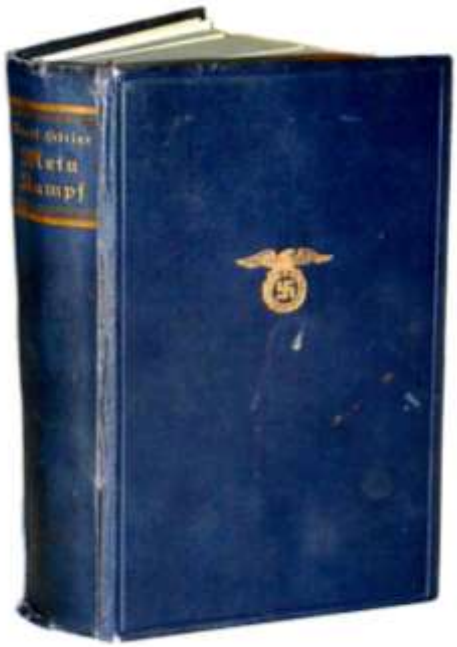
Likely intentionally, Karl and Magdalene's chosen refuge in the spa town of Tabarz (left) was a world away from the socio-political chaos of places like Berlin and München. In the turbulent Germany of the interwar years, drama and decadence often unfolded in the exact same places – usually at different times but occasionally concurrently. A photographer standing at the junction of Munich's Residenzstraße and Odeonsplatz took the above-right photograph of Karneval *revelers in 1932. Nine years earlier, on 9 November 1923 – just a few meters from where laughing carnival-goers later paraded with linked arms in carefree merriment – a cordon of Bavarian State Police officers opened fire on participants in Hitler's attempted Putsch as they marched in solemn formation toward the "Feldherrnhalle". Is it historical irony, that such contrasting scenes took place on the same spot, nine years apart? In a similar vein, as of 1941, in Karl and Magdalene's quiet "refuge" more than 100 POWs and forced laborers had to work at the Adloffwerk, the Richard Engel Company and Tabarz' Ducal Forestry. Below: Citizens flocked to Odeonsplatz following the attempted* Putsch*, while defeated conspirators fled in various directions; Hitler sought refuge in the home of his press agent Ernst Hanfstaengl, whose American wife Helene stopped him from committing suicide, saying "The movement still needs you, Adolf".*



Ironically, for a man seeking quiet in secluded Thüringer woods, Fate intended anything but "quiet" for Karl Walter.

Surviving documents – often narrative – record the experiences of about a dozen of Karl's Langensalza "neighbors" who led lives parallel to his, yet who succumbed to diverse fates: Together, they illustrate the nuanced complexity of "ordinary" Germans' lives under Nazism, 1933 to 1945. Ideally, the accounts speak for themselves – starting with those recounting the travails of Langensalza's tiny Jewish population - in 1905 it numbered 16 out of 12,545 souls. In this adapted account by onetime leather-and-shoe factory worker Gerhard Wuttke titled *Jüdische Einwohner in Langensalza zur Zeit des 3. Reiches* ("*Jewish Residents in Langensalza during the Third Reich*"), he recorded that

> Aversion and hatred toward the Jews, a centuries-old phenomenon, led to continual persecutions of Jews. In medieval Langensalza, too, Jews were expelled and persecuted. H. Schütz wrote: "When the plague broke out in Thuringia in 1349, there was also a great loss of life in Langensalza. Since the Jews were blamed for this terrible disease, a general persecution of Jews followed in that same year, and in Salza and Thamsbrück all the Jews, insofar as they had not escaped, were killed or expelled."





The 1940 film Der Ewige Jude *("The Eternal Jew") was intended to prepare Germans for the planned* Endlösung.

Over the centuries, Jewish persecutions repeatedly occurred in many European countries. It was Adolf Hitler, however, who first placed a central emphasis on a "struggle" against the Jewish "race," both in his speeches and in his principal work *Mein Kampf* (1925). The Nazi Party program of 1920 had already envisaged excluding Jews from German economic and cultural life. Anti-Jewish statements dominated the press organs of the *NSDAP*, but also the right-wing German party press. With the Nazis' seizure of power in 1933, the anti-Jewish measures in the German Reich intensified dramatically, boycott measures against Jewish businesses were issued, bans on the employment of Jewish people in public service and discrimination against artists and intellectuals were put into practice.

At the entrances to towns and at businesses, signs were posted bearing the notice "Jews unwanted." The enactment of the Nuremberg Laws at the 1935 Party Rally, however, brought the most serious measures. Jews were declared foreigners. The "Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor" regulated relations between ["Aryan"] Germans and Jews. The persecution of the Jews reached its peak before the outbreak of the Second World War, however, in 1938. Following the killing of a German diplomat in Paris by a Polish Jew, hatred toward the Jews in Germany increased to unprecedented proportions.

Cynically referred to as the "Reich Crystal Night", numerous cities in Germany saw the destruction of most synagogues and of Jewish businesses, and the imprisonment of tens of thousands of Jews.

The destruction of Jewish houses of worship and the arrest of [male] German Jews intensified during the night of 8 to 9 November 1938. The world reacted with revulsion and protests, without, however, initiating effective measures and sanctions against Germany.

Approximately 12 to 15 Jewish people lived on Langensalza in the 1930s. From newspaper reports of the time, it is unclear if there were riots against Jews in our town. In any event, they were affected by the laws and regulations of the Nazi government. The population of Langensalza was systematically informed about the Nuremberg Laws and called upon to visit a traveling exhibit about the Thuringian racial system, the "Jewish plague" and the "Jewish question".



Above, German boys scour the antisemitic newspaper Der Stürmer *and Nazi propaganda posters. The Hitler regime – like authoritarian ones the world over, across history – strove to reach youth in order to form more compliant adults… and soldiers. To view a propagandistic exhibit aimed at adults, see:* https://youtu.be/2-YUVhy1zow

According to the *Langensalzaer Tageblatt* of June 1938:

> The exhibit brings clarity to the Jewish question, about those of foreign race and mixed-race persons. It shows the influence of the Jews in all areas of our lives as doctors, lawyers and scientists. It reveals to us that the family tree is an important means of proof for our Aryan ancestry. The Führer's family tree goes back to 1672. So, this concerns you too, fellow German!
> Visit this exhibit, everyone – it is your duty as a bearer of German blood.

That exhibit took place at the Reinhardtbrunner Hof, Entenlaich 3. Previously, in April 1938, Hitler, with the last Reichstag election, also found broad support for his program in Langensalza, with 99.9% "yes" votes. The daily newspaper carried the headline on 10 April 1938: "All Germany – Support for the Führer"



*In the "*Polenaktion*" decreed by Hitler, more than ten thousand Polish Jews were expelled from Germany on 28 October 1938. They were forced to leave their homes overnight and allowed only one suitcase per person to carry possessions. As they were deported, their remaining belongings were looted by both Nazi authorities and neighbors. Poland's government then renounced the citizenship of Polish Jews living abroad for at least five years as of the end of October, leaving them stateless.*

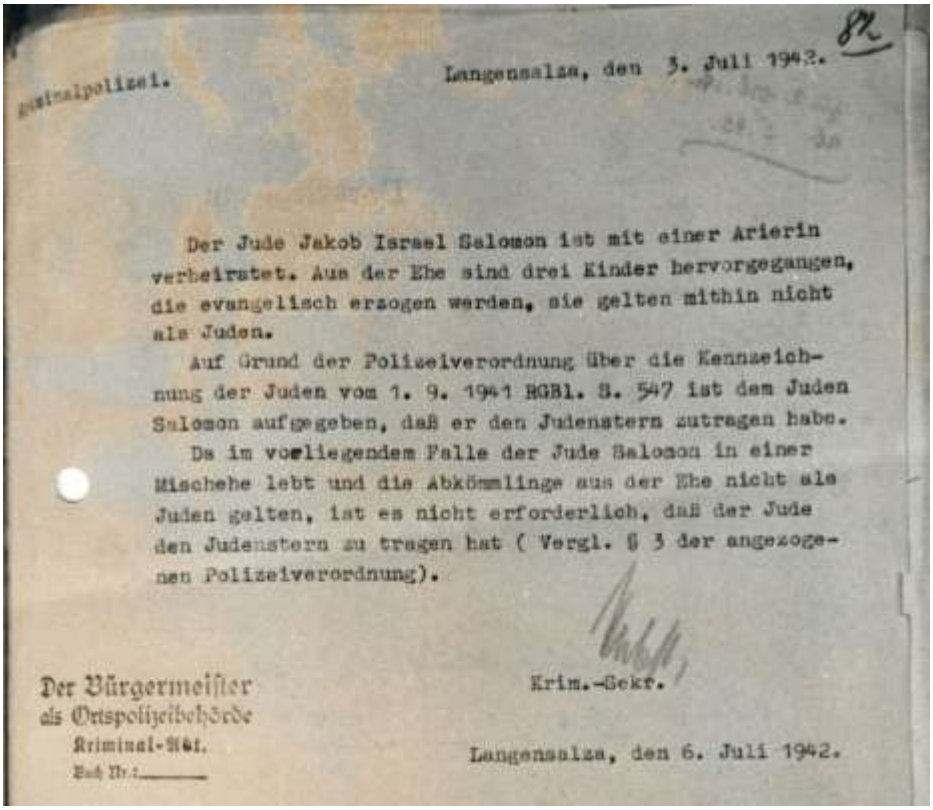
Recognizing their extremely difficult situation, most of the Jews residing here had already attempted to leave Germany before the "*Reichs Pogrom*", or so-called "Night of Broken Glass". Documents in Bad Langensalza's city archives reliably document during which periods their emigration took place.

A police regulation stipulated that foreigners - among whom the Jews were counted following the adoption of the Nuremberg Laws - were required to report regularly; all arrivals and departures of foreigners were also recorded: Finances and assets had to be disclosed. Wearing the Jewish star was made compulsory. Ultimately, on 1 November 1938, police statistics reported that no Jew was living in Langensalza anymore.

What follows is a compilation of primary and secondary documents, woven together by this account's author:

Russian-born tailor Jakob "Israel" Salomon (1900) served in the German army, then settled in Langensalza after WWI. He briefly joined the Reichswehr, but was discharged due to being Jewish and non-German. He worked in a clothing factory in Gotha, married a Christian woman from Langensalza and later ran his own tailor shop at Bergstraße 21. He was not listed as a Jew in police records: Married to an "Aryan", as archival documents show he did not have to wear a Star of David. Their children were raised as Protestants and therefore were also not considered Jews. He was deported to Buchenwald for a few weeks in 1938, however, and in 1943 to Auschwitz. His knowledge of Russian proved to be an advantage during the Soviet occupation of postwar Langensalza. He died in 1977 and lies in Langensalza's cemetery.





Kriminalpolizei. Langensalza, den 3. Juli 1942.

Der Jude Jakob Israel Salomon ist mit einer Arierin verheiratet. Aus der Ehe sind drei Kinder hervorgegangen, die evangelisch erzogen werden, sie gelten mithin nicht als Juden.

Auf Grund der Polizeiverordnung über die Kennzeichnung der Juden vom 1. 9. 1941 RGBl. S. 547 ist dem Juden Salomon aufgegeben, daß er den Judenstern zutragen habe.

Da im vorliegendem Falle der Jude Salomon in einer Mischehe lebt und die Abkömmlinge aus der Ehe nicht als Juden gelten, ist es nicht erforderlich, daß der Jude den Judenstern zu tragen hat (Vergl. § 3 der angezogenen Polizeiverordnung).

Der Bürgermeister
als Ortspolizeibehörde
Kriminal-Abt.

Krim.-Sekr.

Langensalza, den 6. Juli 1942.

Some bureaucrat protected Jakob… What, however, was the fate of other Jewish citizens of Langensalza after 1933?

> On 25 November 1933, the merchant Arnold Schächter, his wife Ruth, and their children Heinz and Suse emigrated to America. On 31 December 1934, the family of shoe merchant Adolf Jahr, who had lived in Langensalza since 1918, was able to make its way to Tel Aviv. The family included wife Lilly and son Joachim.

Compilated documents show that Max Stern – who had been decorated for bravery in the Vosges battles of WWI - settled in Langensalza with his wife Frieda and their children Lothar and Ilse. There, as of 1920, they ran the "Kaiser-Bazar" at Steingrubenstraße 6b. A law student, son Lothar emigrated to Lisbon in April 1935: From there, two years later, he succeeded in immigrating to Palestine. His sister, Ilse, traveled via Amsterdam in September that year, then continued on to Palestine, where she worked as a maid. Max Stern and his wife Frieda emigrated to Palestine in March 1939. First, they had to transfer their assets to a special account at the "*Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland*" (the "Reich's Association of Jews in Germany"), which had been created by Nazi decree: All persons deemed Jews per the Nuremberg Laws were forced to join this association and required to pay mandatory dues. This Reich's Association came under the control of the Reich Security Main Office (*RSHA*) and the *Gestapo* beginning in September 1939 and was required to carry out their orders. Jews from mixed marriages were initially exempt from mandatory membership; however, they were later required to join as well. In this and uncountable other ways, the parasitic Nazi system milked Jews as well as other "enemies of the people" as a way not only to rid Hitler's New Germany of human "vermin" (a term casually used by many dictators), but to make Hitler's ruling circle *very* rich.



Left, the Stern family's "Kaiser-Bazar" at Steingrubenstraße 6b, circa 1930; right, the same building in summer 2026. It has stood empty and derelict for many years, while the Gossmann-Lachmann shops (story below) have, tellingly, recently housed a tattoo studio, a Thai nail salon and a late-night convenience store.

As Gerhard Wuttke's invaluable account continued to document:

> Records note that on 1 September 1936, Walter Nußbaum had moved to Vienna.
>
> The departure of Jewish families continued in 1937 as well: Livestock dealer Jakob Jakob and his wife Paula moved to Amsterdam on 1 September 1937; Berta Katzmann, the wife's mother, joined them. That same year, Hirsch Jakob also followed his son to Amsterdam. The livestock dealer Siegmund Nußbaum, who lived on Niederhöferstraße, and his wife Gisela moved to Zittau on 21 May 1938. Siegmund Jakob and his wife Toni, with one child, initially registered their departure for Borken on 14 June 1937: Their journey, however, took them onward to America. Livestock dealer Isfried Katzenstein made his way to America with his wife Lina and three children: They were said to have become prosperous in the USA.



1st Mountain Division soldiers resting while patrolling Caucasus mountains, December 1942

During research in Langensalza's town archive, the name Lothar Kahn, born 17 March 1916, attracted special attention. Born in Mühlberg, in the Weißensee district, and a trained baker, he lived in Langensalza until 1944. He worked in various bakeries and served as a soldier from 15 November 1938 to 7 August 1940 in the Mountain Infantry Regiment 98. He was classified as a "Jewish Mischling of the 2nd degree". On 30 January 1944, the entries on his index card at the police registration office come to an end. Laconically, it reads: "Auschwitz Concentration Camp".

Whom of the above did Karl Walter know personally? As the co-owner of a major fashion house in Langensalza, he likely knew most of them, at least by name and face. Given those professional ties squared with his socio-political values, what might he have thought or even felt about the accelerating disenfranchisement of Langensalza's Jewry?

As Karl and his wife, Magdalene, are not documented as having sold hardware (as shown in the photo of the Sterns' "Kaiser-Bazar") or livestock (as in Nußbaum's or Jakob's cases, listed above), they likely felt no economic threats from the unfortunate individuals or families cited so far. The fates of Karl's Jewish clothing-store "competitors" three doors down from Modehaus Thilo, however, might have been an all-together different matter – but those of us alive today cannot know that with certainty. What is unquestionable, is that the three-generation Gossmann family suffered a particularly cruel series of humiliations before their travails ended in disaster. The *Bad Langensalzer Allegemeine*'s Holger Schneider recounted the woeful tale's details in an article on 12 April 2019:

The Jewish merchant Artur Aron Gossmann (born 1875) was the sixth owner of the house at Rathausstraße 6, which was built in 1891 next to the Brauhof School (today the Wiebeck School). He lived there with his wife Nette (1880), daughter Irma (1905), who once had been married Fritz Schlesinger, and her son Günter (1926). Artur used the shop space in the Rathausstraße for his department store. Only from him could poorer families from Langensalza buy their shoes by installment payments. The space at the corner at Bornklagengasse had been rented by the Catholic merchant Ernst Lachmann.

During the pogrom night of 9 November 1938, his department store was looted and devastated. On the morning of 10 November, he was tied standing up onto a horse-drawn wagon and dragged through the streets of Langensalza. Shouting, throwing stones, spitting and taunts—he had to endure all of that. He was taken to the Buchenwald concentration camp. He was supposed to return home, however, in order to sell his property in the Rathausstraße. With his family, he lived in his own house in fear for several more days. [According to Gerhard Wuttke, "The entire family registered their departure for Frankfurt am Main on 3 April 1939".] It has been handed down that on 4 April 1939, the district administrator of the Langensalza district received the written notification: "The Gossmann family has just departed in the direction of the East!"

The entire family died in concentration camps thereafter.



One did not have to be Jewish, however, to draw the Nazis' attention or win their ire: It was enough just to be black.

Gert Lothar Schramm was born in Erfurt on 25 November 1928. His mother, Marianne, worked in her father's tailor shop after completing her apprenticeship as a seamstress. Little is known about Gert's father, reportedly an African-American [in some accounts, a "Cuban Californian"] engineer who lived temporarily in Germany while working for an American company on the construction of a railroad bridge in Jena. The only sure thing is that Gert, as an illegitimate

child of a “white” mother and a “black” father who was officially “unknown”, grew up first in the household of his Erfurt grandparents (Kurt Schramm with his second wife and his daughter Marianne), then in Langensalza, to where his mother had moved when she had managed to find a job as a seamstress. When Marianne realized that she could not cope with the dual task of working and raising her child alone, she gave up her son into the care of his “other grandparents” – Marianne’s mother Johanna and her second husband, in the village of Witterda. Gert was now four years old. From then on, he spent his childhood in Witterda, which he described as carefree and sheltered. Despite Nazi rule and the Catholic-conservative village culture, there was apparently little racially-motivated discrimination…





the village school Gert Schramm attended in Witterda; right, a classroom scene from the period with “ghost” of Gert as white cutout, symbolizing his absence

…until 1939, when *everything* changed.

Shortly after the war began that September, Gert's class teacher - whom he later remembered as being fair, level-headed and patient - was drafted into the *Wehrmacht*. The new class teacher was also the local group leader of the *NSDAP* [Nazi Party] and from the outset made clear to Gert that he regarded him as inferior. This treatment ranged from ostracism in class to the insults “*Saustück*” or “*Dreckschwein*” [“sow” or “filthy pig”] up to corporal punishment for alleged misdemeanors. Gert reacted with ever more frequent truancy, which led to further punishments and school truancy reports, as a result of which fines were imposed on his grandmother. The teacher called in the Youth Welfare Office, which had guardianship over Gert because of his illegitimate birth. The rivers of paperwork that coursed thereafter between the various state agencies responsible for cases like Gert’s reveals much about not only the embattled boy’s struggles but the worldviews and assumptions held by the very people appointed to “help” him:

In May 1941, District Administrator Massimo in Witterda suggested that

> My personal view regarding Gert Schramm, however, is that we need not place too much emphasis on the boy’s intellectual education. He is a Negro bastard and must, after all, eventually be expelled from the German national community. As for his moral neglect, the public health department will be dealing with the boy in the foreseeable future. I consider it appropriate to consult with me on this matter. *Heil Hitler!*

In June 1941, the District President to the School Superintendent of the Weißensee District warned that

> In order to remove the Negro half-breed Gert Schramm from the town and thus spare the schoolchildren there from his harmful influence, his placement in a welfare reformatory should be considered.

Then, the teacher who had begun this process obtained a court-approved order to commit Gert to a welfare home. That ultimately failed only because no home wanted to accept a “negro mongrel” described as highly troublesome.

Meanwhile, rather than "only" Gert's behavior, but also his ability to "defile Aryan blood" became a reason given for accelerating the process of segregating him from "German" girls. In July 1941, the Youth Welfare Office urged that

> Gert Schramm is in a coeducational class, meaning he is also with girls. He will turn 13 in November of this year. The utmost caution is required as he reaches sexual maturity. He must therefore be expelled from school. At the same time, however, he must also be removed from the village so that, following his expulsion from school, he does not enjoy unrestricted freedom while his classmates are required to attend school; this would allow him to remain in contact with them unsupervised and unobserved, thereby continuing to exert his harmful influence. The children also reject him as a mixed-race individual of a different race and do not want to sit at the same desk as the "Negus".

In August 1941, a Youth Welfare Office caseworker complained that

> In the homes I regularly visit, the educational program is designed to train the pupils to become useful members of the community. It therefore presupposes racial affiliation. I am therefore at a loss as to where such a Negro half-breed could be placed, and I request that you inform me whether a suitable home can be recommended from there.

At that point, Grandmother Johanna considered it immediately necessary to get Gert out of the line of fire, so convinced his mother Marianne to bring him back to Langensalza, where in 1938 she had meanwhile married and had three young children with her husband, Willi Löcher.





Ludwig Motorhaus today, where Gestapo *agents arrested Gert at what then was Greiner Autohaus; right, Geschwister Greiner billing stationary, 1930s*

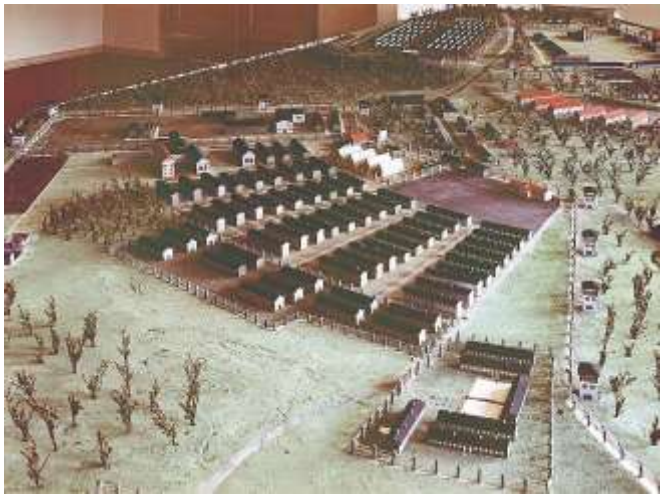
Gert completed his last year of compulsory schooling in Langensalza. Thereafter, he wanted to begin a formal apprenticeship as a car mechanic. As a "non-Aryan" that was denied him, but in 1943 he could at least start as an unskilled "young worker" in Greiners' car dealership. One day, in May 1944, two *Gestapo* members showed up at the workshop to arrest him. Thus began an odyssey of several months through detention first in Langensalza's *Rathaus* – only 15 meters from Modehaus-Thilo - then in the police prison on Erfurt's Petersberg, in the *Gestapo* prison in the Weimar Marstall and a forced labor camp at the Weimar train station. Gert was never charged with a crime. Finally, he was assigned so-called "protective custody", in which he was designated "a danger to the people and the State".

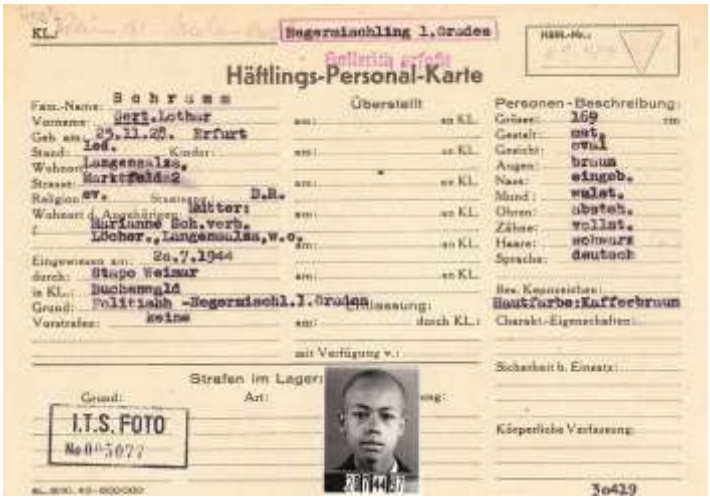
Based on his "race", on 20 July 1944 he was placed indefinitely to Buchenwald concentration camp. There, just 15 years old, he was marked as a political prisoner #49489, with a red triangle, indicating a left-wing dissident. Gert would hardly have survived the nine months in the Buchenwald concentration camp if he had worked in the quarry – as he was initially assigned. Communist fellow prisoners, who created a kind of subversive shadow-administration in the camp, saved him from this and ensured that he was transferred first to the construction commando, then to the camp's carpentry shop. He could not know that the U.S. Army would liberate the camp on 11 April 1945, just in time.



Before its liberation on 11 April 1945 by Patton's troops, Buchenwald had become increasingly unmanageable. An internal resistance movement had arisen, which then sowed chaos. Dead prisoners who were not burned before the U.S. Army arrived were left on a trailer. After liberation, mass graves were exhumed, as recorded here.






KL. Buchenwald

Begersdachling 1.Grades

Häftlings-Personal-Karte

Fam.-Name: Schramm
Vorname: Gert Lothar
Geb. am: 25.11.26. Erfurt
Stand: led. Kinder:
Wohnort: Langensalza,
Strasse: Karlfeld=2
Religion: gv. Staatsang.: D.R.
Wohnort d. Angehörigen: Mutter: Marianne Sch.verw. Löcher, Langensalza, w.o.
Eingeliefert am: 2o.7.1944
durch: Stapo Weimar
in KL.: Buchenwald
Grund: Politisch -Begersdachl.1.Grades
Vorstrafen: keine

Übersiedelt
am: an KL.
am: an KL.
am: an KL.
am: an KL.
am: an KL.
am: durch KL.:
mit Verfügung v.:

Strafen im Lager:
Grund: Art: ung:

I.T.S. FOTO
No 05072

Personen-Beschreibung:
Grösse: 169 cm
Gestalt: mit.
Gesicht: oval
Augen: braun
Nase: eingeb.
Mund: wulst.
Ohren: abstch.
Zähne: vollst.
Haare: schwarz
Sprache: deutsch

Bes. Kennzeichen: Hautfarbe: Kaffeebraun
Charakt.-Eigenschaften:
Sicherheit b. Einsatz:
Körperliche Verfassung:

3e429

Buchenwald concentration camp as a model; Gert's "Prisoner ID Card", noting him as a "Political-Nigger-Mongrel, 1st Degree", with no existing criminal record

By the time the "Amis" (German slang for "Yanks") came through the camp's gates, Buchenwald would not have held only Jews and "Afro-Deutsche" but also "Aryan" Germans convicted – or even just suspected – of "wrongdoings" in Nazi eyes. One of those hapless, short-term inmates was the same man who co-owed the fashion house only a few meters from where teenager Gert Schramm had been detained for a few days in Langensalza's *Rathaus*: Karl Walter!

Years later, all that could be found of that surprising turn of events was Karl's own testimony at a trial, proceedings of which included this terse allusion: "When questioned about his relationship with the National Socialists, he is said to have answered that, because he had insulted a lord mayor in a letter to Fritz Sauckel [then Gauleiter of the *NSDAP* in Thuringia, later in charge of securing forced labor by Poles, Russians, Czechs, etc.], he had to spend six months in a concentration camp in 1935". After being set free, however, he did not waste any time in trying to prevent a later sojourn there; as one reporter summarized Karl's post-incarceration strategy: "After his release from the concentration camp, he nevertheless attempted to join the party and asked the *SA* and *SS* leaders for a letter of recommendation." It is not clear what happened next – but those of us who have come after can only imagine how all around Karl, in a system that had forsaken humanity, were other German men, women and youth trying to survive with as much integrity as they could - some literally in front of his own eyes!







from the left: ovens at Buchenwald's crematorium in April 1945; inscription on the camp's entrance gate, "To Each His Own,"; SS notice to Adolf Mahlmann's widow
Ironically, the camp gate's wording was designed by prisoner and Bauhaus student Franz Ehrlich (1907-1984) in a modern typeface—an unusual choice for Nazi-era buildings and a bizarre "contribution" from an anti-Kapp Putsch fighter and anti-fascist activist, later forced into the German army and sent with its "Penal Battalion 999" first to Greece, then to Yugoslavia, where he landed in a POW camp for a year. The SS' explanation to Helena Mahlmann in Bremen on 5 March 1945 of her husband's death was a cynical fiction: "On 20 February 1945, your husband, Adolf Mahlmann, passed away at the local hospital. I offer my condolences on this loss and assure you that he received excellent care here. Despite the use of the best medications and outstanding medical care, it was not possible to overcome his illness. Your husband did not express any final wishes". Is it not noteworthy that camp officials working for a dictatorship even bothered to write to families at all?

In every photo of Karl after 1919, he is wearing glasses. Visibly, he had utilized the expertise of some optometrist – likely in Thüringen, plausibly in Langensalza, possibly around the corner from his and Magdalene's shop – that of young Werner Deubner. Like Karl… like probably most thinking, reflective, benevolent adults in the Third Reich, all indications gathered during research suggest that Werner struggled to live at peace within his own skin as much as he could, salvaging as much self-respect as possible, even while living for the sake of his wife and two little boys… keeping up appearances and his stamina as he tended to his responsibilities to his family and adopted home town.

Karl Werner Deubner was born in Thamsbrück on 7 March 1911, the son of a senior postmaster. Typical of imperial "Prussia," his father - a Protestant and staunch supporter of the Hohenzollern dynasty - was the patriarch of the

Deubner family, which belonged to the up-and-coming middle class. The classic values of the time included diligence and thrift, deference to hierarchy and a sense of duty. At the time of Werner's birth, the 40-year-old empire was booming, yet soon to become embroiled in a global war, then in cascading crises which shaped Werner's generation.







from left to right: the Deubners in the courtyard during a work break; Werner with Dieter at a public swimming pool; the façade of Deubners' shop, early 1940s
When the author asked Dieter Deubner during their first interview in autumn 2020 – by sheer coincidence held in his parents' former shop space – about the swastika to the left of the courtyard window, he said "The boy upstairs, in the Hitler Youth, had scrawled it there in a fit of Nationalsozialist patriotic zeal".

After World War I, Germany reeled under waves of hyperinflation and political instability, hardship and hunger, punctuated by waves of booms and busts. As a young man seeking his own fortune, Werner left his home village and moved to nearby Langensalza. There, he opened an optician's shop in 1933 – intentionally doing so one day before the Nazi order which stipulated that only party comrades were allowed to set up their own businesses.


Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei
Gau Thüringen
NSDAP. Kreis Langensalza
Amt für Volkswohlfahrt
Langensalza, Bornhlagengasse 10
Fernruf: Sammelnummer 597, 598
Bankkonto:
Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt e. V.,
Kreisverwaltung Langensalza
Kreissparkasse Langensalza Nr. 284/7
Aktenzeichen:
Bei Beantwortung unbedingt angeben.
, den
Ortsgruppe

With his wife Johanna, Werner had two sons: Dieter (born in 1938) and Helmut (1941). Although his optical business thrived, Werner increasingly felt the tightening presence of the Nazi dictatorship as well as the threat of approaching war. Friends got him a job at the air base between Langensalza and Thamsbrück, where he occasionally provided optometry services to pilots. With the onset of war, though, Johanna struggled to raise young boys *and* feed them.



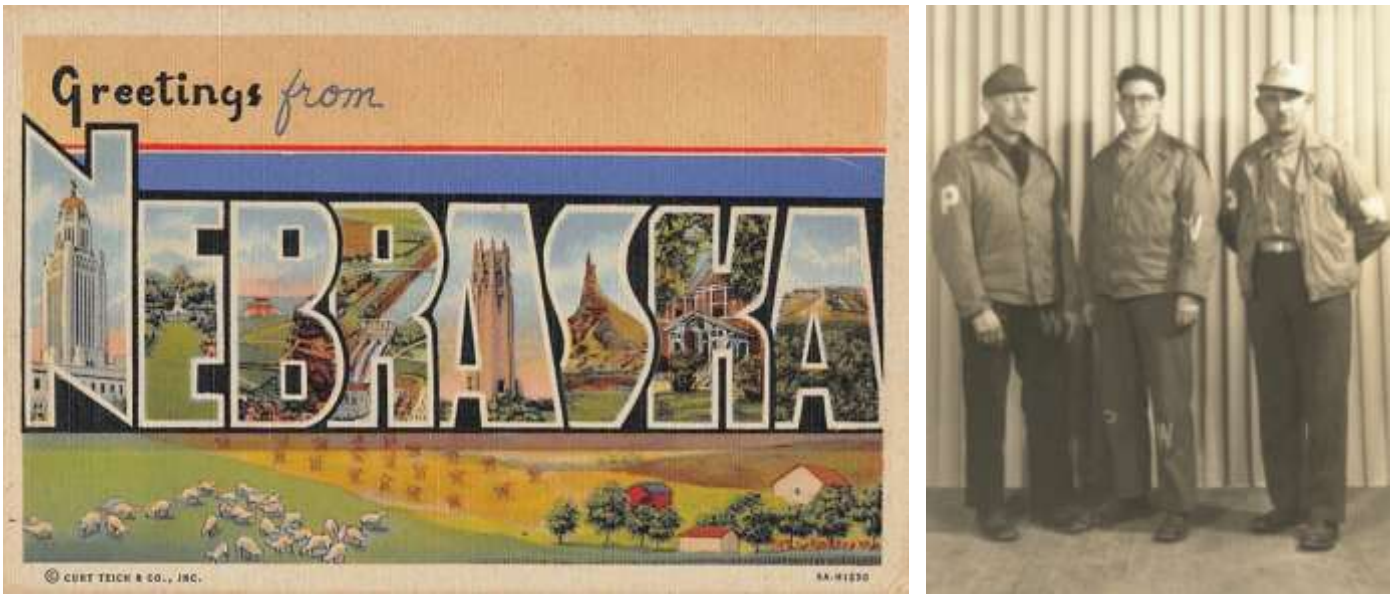
Then, despite all efforts, in 1942 the young father of two children was drafted into military service. He was 31 years old when, with a heavy heart, this reluctant soldier left not only his loved ones but also the business he was building.



Werner being marched (left) with other newly-captured German soldiers from a Southern Italian mountain to (right) an initial U.S. Army ration distribution

In September 1943, Werner's unit was transferred to Italy, where it was to fight Allied troops near Salerno. On 22 September, a four-year period of captivity began for him: He had been deliberately hiding in a forest with others when he was caught, then was taken first to Tunisia, then to the USA. After his arrival on the East Coast - along with 372,000 other German POWs – his involuntary odyssey through the USA began. The German Red Cross informed his family in Langensalza of his imprisonment, but it was to be months before his letters sporadically made it home.

Werner was sent to work in the American heartland, first to Ohio, then to Wisconsin and via Iowa to Camp Indianola in Nebraska. There he enjoyed working as a projectionist and optician – in an ironic twist of fate, also for a former client from his shop in Langensalza! Werner's experiences mimicked Karl Walter's as a POW in France one world war earlier, when he, too, met and befriended several fellow soldiers from his home region back in faraway Thüringen.



postcard of Nebraska which Werner brought back with him to Germany from Camp Indianola, where he was photographed (center) with colleagues – all wearing the obligatory "P" and "W" on their clothing for "Prisoner of War", so that in the event of escape attempts, locals could immediately recognize them

Finding empathetic comforters in times of stress is a tremendous asset, yet it can't completely erase the agony of separation from loved ones, especially while not knowing of their ongoing well-being. The surviving letters anxiously sent between the Midwest and the middle of Germany confirm that while he sat out the war on the faraway prairies of America's heartland, Werner was too aware of frightful and finally devastating developments back home:

In her husband's absence, Johanna Deubner had meanwhile leased the store to an optician from the Thüringer Wald, whose own store had been bombed some time before. On 24 March 1944, her family narrowly escaped death… During a extra-bomb drop by an Allied bomber over Langensalza's old town, both the Deubners' apartment and shop were badly damaged: The business equipment was completely destroyed; much of their home was, too – with infant Helmut laying in his crib when the walls and windows in his room exploded, covering the uninjured baby with shards.





the remains of the Deubners' apartment and garden (left) and of the wider area, including the building which had previously housed their shop and home

Only three kilometers north of Langensalza, Werner Deubner's hometown of Thamsbrück was spared aerial bombing in WWII, but not being the theater of a different kind of tragedy – one which two local pupils would research and publicize 75 years later. In 2020, Enna Leinhos and Charlotte Lorenz interviewed some of the last living witnesses to it as part of their Upper Secondary Seminar Paper requirement at Salzmannschule Schnepfenthal, a state boarding/ day school near Gotha specialized in language instruction. Adapted excerpts from their work document it in detail:

"Thamsbrück is a tiny town in the green heart of Germany, whose stories - which the walls of the houses contain - are being forgotten and whose witnesses are disappearing. During WWII, the city was characterized by forced labor, a topic that was little discussed during the National Socialist era. Still, around 13.5 million people in the Third Reich were affected by forced labor. They were separated from their homes, families and friends to work in the defense industry, factories, road construction, agriculture and private households. In summer of 1944, the deployment of foreigners was at its peak. At that time, Germany utilized six million civilian forced laborers. A large number of them came from the Soviet Union and Poland. In the city of Thamsbrück, however, only Poles were forced to work.









Different patches existed in the Third Reich to designate "OST"-workers, identifying subgroups of Eastern European laborers. A single "P" stood for Poles.

"There was a total of 1.7 million Polish workers in the Third Reich, only about five percent of whom were volunteers. If they received any wages at all, they were so low that they could hardly afford anything due to inflation and limited resources. Polish-Jewish prisoners of war fared particularly badly: Almost all of the 60,000 of them were murdered

or died from inhumane conditions in ghettos, labor or concentration camps, and were often victims of abuse. The strategy of 'extermination through work' prevailed in the camps: Very few of them were left alive at the war's end.

"The word 'forced' in the term already suggests that the laborers did not volunteer to work, but were coerced to do so. In return, the Polish workers received little or nothing at all and were systematically underpaid. 66.7 percent of Polish forced laborers were used and employed in agriculture, the rest in the armaments sector, industry and road construction. Women were often employed in private households – and at times able to work and live in private households in the city, a prerequisite being that they had to be between 15 and 35 years old and to appear 'Aryan'.





Enna Leinhos and Charlotte Lorenz used these and most of the following related photos of forced laborers to illustrate their Upper Secondary Seminar Paper.

"From the outset, Polish prisoners of war were considered the cheapest agricultural workers in the Third Reich. Most Polish forced laborers were also deployed in the countryside because that was where the loss of men was felt most acutely. The majority of them lived directly on the farms where they were deployed. Contemporary witnesses maintained they were happy to have stayed there; some had their own rooms and their own bed. The Poles were usually not viewed as inferior workers, but rather as servants. The low wage neither compensated for the hard work nor did it have a motivating effect. […] However, there was a contractual obligation to work towards the employer. If any service was refused, the police were called in and a breach of contract resulted in imprisonment.

"The working day began early in the morning and ended before dinner. As a rule, the forced laborers worked twelve to sixteen hours a day - slightly less in winter. Sunday was considered free, although animal care still had to be done. They 'had to work in all weathers, in rain and in frost'. Still, there were different working conditions in various areas of activity. The relationship with the Germans was also considered difficult. Despite the fact that the forced laborers were lucky to be able to live and work in private accommodation and not have to live in barracks next to factories, there was no guarantee that they would be treated humanely. Per arrangement, however, they should at least be treated in such a way that they were able to work and benefit the industrial and food sectors.

"The racist hierarchy and anti-Slavic prejudices in the German Reich formed the basis for countless insults, slights and mistreatment of the Polish workforce. In Thamsbrück, the treatment of forced laborers was regulated by guidelines, laws and unofficial norms. But, as with all requirements and subsequent opinions, there were views in favor of and against these regulations at the time: There were strong differences between what was asked of the residents and how this was implemented by them. In 1940, it was expressly pointed out that 'Polish agricultural workers, like prisoners of war, must fundamentally be viewed as our enemies'. Then, in 1942, the Labor Science Institute of the *Deutschen Arbeitsfront* [German Labor Front] wrote 'Now that National Socialism, after a long political struggle, has helped racial nationalism gain a foothold, it cannot under any circumstances abandon this in favor of employing foreigners'.

"If a German resisted these regulations by treating the workers with equal rights or even preferential treatment, she or he was considered a traitor to the larger community. This did not stop many residents from integrating them into their families and society; however, this was not easy, as the laborers were forbidden to do many things that would have helped them with their work and strengthened their relationship with Germans. They were not allowed to take part in the residents' festivals or celebrations, nor were they allowed to attend public church services. Also, long

visits to restaurants were prohibited and interpersonal contacts were to be avoided. Relationships between male forced laborers and German women were punished and resulted in the latter being excluded from the community. As a rule, Poles were removed immediately after such an incident and handed over to the *Gestapo*. A leaflet dated 15 March 1943 urged 'Keep your distance from the Poles! Don't become traitors to Germany's national community! Keep German blood pure! Germans, be too proud to get involved with Poles!' Nevertheless, it was recommended that 'humane, work-enhancing treatment' be maintained, which many Thamsbrückers adhered to. According to one contemporary witness, the relationship was 'completely correct […] unless they were doing something stupid'.





outdoor scene of laborers being forced to work, watched by armed guards; right, the Thamsbrücker Bahnhof (train station), early 20th century

"The forced laborers had more opportunities to maintain social contacts with each other. By separating the Poles from the Germans, the forced laborers were closely connected to each other – for example, celebrating together or attending Pole-only church services. The owner of the restaurant in Thamsbrück's train station, however, did provide Poles with a separate room in which they could meet – although there was a ban on contact between forced laborers from other communities. In Thamsbrück itself, they were allowed to spend free time together, have love affairs or even get married". In all, Polish forced laborers could survive the larger madness well – until the war's end.

The Poles' cultural cousins, the Russians, also succumbed to having to work for Germans, in many cases their foreign occupiers and active enemies. One, known to the author only as "Elena", was forcibly brought to Ruhla, to work for the family of lawyer Victor Kircher. After the German military appointed him to be "*Standortältester*" ("Base Elder") in Langensalza in 1942, in his absence his wife Gertrud found herself solely responsible to raise four young children. As her daughter Renate (later "Bähring", and a teacher) explained in her 2005 book about her father *Victor Kircher, 1893-1945, Ein Lebensbild* ("*A Profile*"), to aid Gertrud, the authorities assigned the family

> …Elena, a teacher who had been abducted from the street and taken to Germany. Victor and Gertrud were kind to her and treated her the way people should be treated. Elena was grateful for even the smallest gestures of kindness and wanted to reconnect with the Kirchers after the war. Presumably, however—like many Russians who had fallen into enemy hands—she was ostracized or even executed by her own people. Once, a message reached her from the Soviet Union informing her that family members had been killed in one of Stalin's "purges." She expressed her views to the Kircher family: "I love Russia, but Stalin is a big pig."



from the left: Gertrud Kircher (Victor's wife) with Renate, Gertrud Kircher (Victor's sister), Klaus und Robert, 1940; Elena, circa 1943; Victor with Robert, 1939





Victor Kircher received angry letters from the National Socialist Women's League because he and his wife did not even respond to invitations to attend "Ost" training sessions, and because their maid, who was decently dressed, was "indistinguishable from a German woman"—even though she was ultimately required to visibly wear the "OST" emblem.





Karl Müller in a Nazi-era uniform; right, forced laborers working in fields

Wartime forced servitude left deep impressions as well as scars on Eastern European forced laborers. It often also left the same on those Germans to whom they were assigned – either as, for example, farmer "bosses" of one or a handful of workers, or - even more explosively - those appointed to oversee forced laborers in large numbers. With the vast majority of young-adult males away on one of the war's several fronts, such tasks fell by default to older or disabled men unable to fight - many of whom came from professional backgrounds totally unrelated to such posts.

Such was the case with Karl Müller of Langensalza, whom this tome's author came to know about through the Bad Langensalza architect who oversaw the rebuilding of a private family house at Unterm Berge 24 into the *Haus der Spuren*'s museum, with a Public Room for Workawayers and special events, and residences for staff. It was three of Dr. Michael Luick-Thrams' Universität-Erfurt students who analyzed the available documents, then presented their findings. In 2021, Johanna Paschka, Lena Marmann and Sarah Hesse wrote the following summary as coursework:

History is everywhere and affects us today, as it did back then. Have you ever wondered about the history of *your* house, for example? Two Bad Langensalza residents, Thomas and Katrin Kühmstedt, asked themselves this question and discovered that, during the Nazi era, a family named Müller had lived in their house at Kornmarkt 5. The last male resident of the house was Karl Müller, born on 15 August 1898, in Langensalza. His father ran the *Gasthof zum Hirsch* there, and his uncle owned the house next door, where he operated a butcher shop. During World War II, Karl was assigned to supervise Russian prisoners of war in Großengottern [7km from Thamsbrück]. Reportedly, he treated them well and provided them with extra food on occasion.



Thomas Kühmstedt in front of Kornmarkt ["Grainmarket"] 5





Holger Schneider's typed notes that accompanied the family photo read: "KARL MÜLLER & CHRISTA MÜLLER in 1934 and OMA Anna Ziegler born (circa) 1860 in the courtyard of the house at Kornmarkt [Grainmarket Square] 5 - Christa Lueders (born Müller): '…very child-unfriendly stone paving in that courtyard; I fell constantly'." The postcard on the right shows exterior and interior views of "Gasthof zum Hirsch" - in English, "Inn of the Stag Deer" - circa 1920.

What at first seemed like a "harmless" career substitute for an innkeeper deprived of customers during wartime shortages of foodstuffs to cook and serve, though, would later – unexpectedly - prove to be a deadly assignment...

Kidnapped or coerced Slavs were only one group of forced labors carrying out the Third Reich's dirtiest work. Another were German and other nationals held at concentration camps. The base camp nearest Langensalza was Buchenwald, with more some 140 branch camps scattered across the heart of Germany, which imprisoned around 266,000 people from all over Europe between 1937 and 1945, with around 56,000 deaths. As of 1942, camp inmates were used as slave labor for the war economy, primarily for the armaments industry. The main camp became a busy transit camp that briefly took in people, then sent them on to the subcamps: Langensalza, too, housed inmates sent there to toil under what, essentially, were "work-to-death" conditions. In mid-1943, the Reich's Aviation Ministry decided to set up a second assembly plant at the Kammgarnwerk ["Worsted Yarn Mill"] GmbH on Klausberg Hill on the town's northwest corner, specifically for the assembly of Junkers fighter aircraft - in addition to the air base in Langensalza – the Langenwerke AG. The company had been producing uniforms for the *Wehrmacht* since 1936.

According to Bad Langensalza chronicler Hartmut Rosinger,

> From the end of 1943, the worsted-yarn works' spinning machines on Klausberg Hill were dismantled. In their place, production facilities for the partial assembly of aircraft parts were set up in the vacated factory halls. After consultation with the *SS*, the increased demand for labor caused by the war was covered from 1944 onwards by bringing in concentration camp prisoners from Buchenwald concentration camp. On 21 October 1944, the *SS* transferred the first 100 concentration camp prisoners to Langensalza, the Langenwerke AG satellite camp. Two further transports of 50 and 182 prisoners increased the total number of prisoners in the subcamp to 327 within a few days by the end of October 1944. At the beginning of January 1945, the Langenwerke AG satellite camp had its highest occupancy rate with 1,458 inmates. Work was carried out under the supervision of engineers from the main factory and the *SS* guards on six days of the week ,in two shifts of 12 hours each. The prisoners' quarters were cordoned off from the factory halls and the outside world by an electrically charged fence, with six snarling, biting dogs running along it.

One day, unexpectedly, an elderly man rang Haus der Spuren's doorbell. When asked what he sought, he said he "needed to talk with someone". Over the next hour, he explained that as a boy his family owned a house and garden alongside a row of provisional barracks built on a hill on the north edge of Ufhoven, Langensalza's suburb to the northwest. "I was just a boy, when *Oma* [Granny] gave some half-rotten potatoes through our fence to a few of the starving innates on the other side. A few hours later the *SS* stormed into the garden and told me, that if my family *ever* fed 'those people' again, *Oma* would be shot. Shaken, I can recall their barking words up until this very day".

How long did the people of Langensalza think their extremely stressed, splintered community could withstand the pressures of not only sending most menfolk to one of the Third Reich's various fronts, but of "hosting" forced laborers of various kinds among themselves, under the threat of violence or execution of they resisted such cruelty?

Despite most Germans having "arranged" themselves with living in a dictatorship for almost a dozen years, at some point the hollow claims and disingenuous promises began to deflate, then collapse upon themselves. As they did, the deferred reckoning of having expressly, but also implicitly condoned the questionable premises of Nazi ideology, not to mention the criminal means necessary to realize them in tangible form, could no longer be stalled. In the process, a swath of destruction and death cut through the entire German society. That social apocalypse came to be tangibly felt, but less collectively than personally - on one's own body or on the bodies of people one cared about.

Even 14-year-old schoolgirls were not spared witnessing the horror of it all - first the violent spasms of an unraveling, dying dictatorship, then the arbitrary destruction of a murderous war the regime had plotted for years. In 2005, Karl Walter's beloved niece and godchild, Ursula, recorded her most poignant "Memories of the Last Weeks Before the End of the War in 1945". Even six decades later, it all waged on still in her mind – especially her uncle's shocking fate.

> Starting in late 1944, our middle school on Poststraße was used as a military hospital for wounded soldiers [Victor Kircher would die there], so our classes were held at the high school. As a result, we had classes in the mornings one week and in the afternoons the next. Classes were often interrupted by air raid alerts. Sirens blared loudly throughout the city, often preceded by preliminary alarms - distinguishable by different tones. We would then quickly grab our schoolbags and dash home to take shelter in an air-raid shelter.

A teen unavoidably having to deal with forces confronting her own body, Ursula also had to monitor the skies:

> On the radio, we heard which airspace the enemy British or American bomber aircraft were in. Gotha and Erfurt, which were nearby, were often targets for their bombing raids. Here in Langensalza, in March 1944, an aerial bomb fell right in the middle of town, destroying several houses and causing numerous casualties. Among the victims was the entire family of a girl from our school.
>
> We also often had air raid alerts at night. We would then spend some time in the basement until the all-clear was given by the sound of the sirens. Our classes would then begin an hour later at school.
>
> To protect our Langensalza air base from bombing raids—and to confuse enemy aircraft—a so-called "dummy airfield," designed to look deceptively similar to the real one, was built between Zimmern and Thiemsburg.



photo of the "real" Fliegerhorst Langensalza taken during U.S. Army military occupation, as of early April 1945; as of July, it was under Soviet occupation



Starting in the fall of 1944, a great many people also came here to Central Germany. They had to leave their homes in East Prussia, Pomerania or Silesia because the advancing Russian front was drawing ever closer. They brought only the bare necessities with them. They were women with their children and elderly people. The fathers and younger men were away at war as soldiers.







As of 1944, for at least a decade, the Nazi regime and its resultant war caused millions of dislocated Germans and other nationalities – like these in Berlin (left) but also, later into the 1950s, Germans "stranded" in what was now Polish or other "lost" territories, wanting to "return" to Germany from "abroad".

As the Second World War and the Third Reich entered their last stages, it was not just Germans living in far-flung regions of the collapsing country who were plying the crowded, chaotic roads: Starving, dying concentration camp inmates were, too – including in and around Langensalza. Again, per Bad Langensalza chronicler Hartmut Rosinger,

> At the beginning of 1945, Heinrich Himmler ordered the "evacuation" of concentration camps and satellite camps outside the German Reich to prevent their inmates from being liberated by the advancing Allies. Thousands of prisoners were transferred in freight cars or marching columns, first to the main Buchenwald camp and later to other concentration camps in the Reich territory. Those prisoners who could not keep up the pace, were ill or tried to escape were shot and left lying by the wayside. In total, around a third of the prisoners died during the death marches.



On 1 April 1945, 1,177 prisoners had to set off from Langensalza on the several-day journey to Buchenwald. On 6 April, the "evacuation" of the main Buchenwald camp finally began. In total, over 45,000 inmates were taken on 60 different routes to other concentration camps in Flossenbürg, Dachau and Theresienstadt. The last transport from Buchenwald arrived in Dachau on 28 April 1945. After the end of the war, the American military administration demanded that the German population bury the bodies by the wayside with honor and that the mass graves be exhumed and reburied. This resulted in cemeteries of honor and special burial plots in municipal cemeteries.

As Ufhoven's weary inmates were being herded through the streets of Langensalza (including at the end of the one in front of today's Haus der Spuren), the remaining military personnel in the town – by then, largely *SS* members – were herding the civilian population to fight in a "Final Showdown" in the partially-walled medieval town, soon to be declared a "fortress". Ursula watched the entire, doomed drama unfold from the Walters' family home on Kepfe 6:

> Here at home, the "*Volkssturm*" was formed around 1944. It consisted of older men who were not soldiers and boys aged 14–15. They were supposed to defend their homeland! My father—who was 46 at the time—also had to join the *Volkssturm*.
>
> On the radio news, we constantly heard about the advance of the American and British armies from the west, and the Russian army was pushing further into Germany from the east.
>
> In the first days of April 1945—we no longer had school—we heard gunfire and the roar of artillery in the distance. The soldiers here in our Langensalza barracks had already left them.




the Langensalza barracks; right, German soldiers who looked less like "fighters" than "partiers", hoping to forget the larger world around them and its woes

The approach of the U.S. Army did not only empty out Langensalza's barracks, but apparently the mental clarity and human decency of *SS* officers stationed in nearby Thamsbrück, "in the *Ratskeller*, [where] there was an *SS* recovery company housed in the hall. They were then divided up among the people for meals. They couldn't cook, after all..."

Enna Leinhos and Charlotte Lorenz documented the *SS* members' desperation and ensuing madness in the "Execution" section of their 2020 research paper, included here slightly edited:

"In 1945, an *SS* recovery company was housed in Thamsbrück's *Ratskeller*, the city hall's public beer cellar. Fearing the bombing as the American troops drew closer and closer on 4 April, the city's residents retreated to their cellars – as did Frau Harnisch's family. [Frau Harnisch was ten years old at the time of this tragedy; she turned 11 the next day.] The family's two Polish forced laborers, Stanislawa Pilzka ('Stazka') and Alexander Jacubiec ('Alex'), were also housed in the basement. Stazka's husband was also there. Alexander had been out with his friend Clemens Wojtyra all morning. In the afternoon, he briefly returned to the household to get sausage and bread. Then, he went back to his friend. During the second half of the day, the *SS* rounded up the Poles and Russians and locked them in the *Ratskeller*. The *Schutzstaffel* also knocked on the Harnisch family's door and asked if they harbored any Poles. Frau Harnisch's mother, however, refused to give them Stazka because she was heavily pregnant – and the family did not mention her husband's presence to the *SS*.

"A short time later, the neighborhood heard gunshots. The victims were the Poles Thomas Stanuck (48), Stanislaw Ziesteki (35), Clemens Wojtyra (20) and Alexander Jakubiec (19). No one knows exactly how the crime occurred, however, as the residents were all said to have all been in their cellars. We do know, though, that the place where the event took place was the Eichsfeld in Thamsbrück. It is also assumed that the perpetrator was drunk. He was said to have sat down on a staircase and smoked a cigarette after the shooting. The shooter's name remains unknown.






scenes of the 2018-rebuilt graves of the four murdered Polish forced laborers, separated by a contemporary view of the Eichsfeldstraße where they were shot

"One or two hours after the *SS* left, the gravedigger [a native of Poland, who had stayed after the First World War] came to Frau Harnisch's family. He reported on the event, then borrowed a horse and cart to take the dead to the morgue. He also told the family that Alexander still had his sausage and bread in his jacket pocket at the time of his

death. The death was documented in the list of deceased citizens of other Allied nations in Thamsbrück, with the cause of death stated thus, that the four men were shot during fighting with the *Wehrmacht*".

Enna and Charlotte titled their paper *Polish Forced Laborers in the Second World War: Slave or Friend of the Family?* exactly because of the findings of their research, vis-à-vis through their interviews with Frau Harnisch and Gerhard Frank, who was a boy during the time that trafficked Polish laborers were forced to work on his family's three-generation farm. The interviewees' responses suggested an amicable relationship between bosses and laborers, but:

"With the collected findings, the authors concluded that the Polish forced laborers in WWII were more likely to be slaves than friends for the Germans. Despite disregard of the guidelines, the Polish workforce should and has often been viewed as a means to an end. The authors agree, however, that this result cannot be applied to the city of Thamsbrück because, according to contemporary witness interviews, a humane and less racist attitude towards forced laborers prevailed there. [Frau Harnisch stated: "They were actually part of the family, our Poles here. We called them our 'children'". Dr. Frank said about "our" Polish woman: "She sat at the table. She wasn't sitting alone, she was sitting at the table with my grandparents or my parents".] One must question, though, the credibility of such statements. For example, incomplete memory or a personal connection to what happened contribute to a more subjective than an objective assessment of the situation at the time. Nevertheless, by creating this work, the authors managed to largely compensate for the fragmentary sources of information about the events in Thamsbrück".





Enna and Charlotte were only two young people out of hundreds afforded a chance to pursue their historical interests through collaborating with the TRACES-Spuren project - since 2020 at home in the retrofitted house shown above and to the right. Over 70 international Workawayers and hundreds of Universität-Erfurt students have "learned by doing" while there, ranging from weekend seminars to sojourns of several weeks or even months. Ukrainian refugees have also found a safe haven there and in the "Juedengasse 1", where as of August 2026 over 80 had found refuge, administrated by Spuren e.V. The Haus der Spuren *["traces" in English] has also hosted over 45 Thursday-evening Global Salons, plus festivities, uncountable other programs, etc. Join us!*

above left, Anna Weißenborn emptying a bucket into a courtyard drain behind the house shown at right, Unterm Berge 24, on a postcard from circa 1930

Back in wartime Langensalza, similar chaos and suffering as that in surrounding villages was also taking place.

Again, Ursula Walter-Veller had recalled the military as well as fraying social situation from a schoolgirl's perspective:

> In the first days of April 1945—we no longer had school—we heard gunfire and the roar of artillery in the distance. The soldiers here in our Langensalza barracks had already left them.

Where did they go? Everywhere and nowhere – and at times, it seems from remaining documentation, both at once.

As “the American enemy” neared the increasingly desperate city, German-on-German conflicts began playing out, spiraling out of control and beyond what in “normal” times would have been imaginable, let alone acceptable. Acting moment by moment, making decisions based on emotions rather than reason led to massive, fatal mistakes…

The few documents found by the author and his staff regarding the surrender of Langensalza are short and provide varying information: By compilating two, a fuller picture emerges. One comes from historian-journalist Gerhard Wuttke, with the title *Volkstrauertag 1997 – Commemoration of a Courageous Man*; the other from a son or daughter (the first page of that person’s letter of 10 March 1996 to Bad Langensalza’s then-mayor Bernhard Schönau is missing, along with the writer’s name) of Wilhelm Victor Kircher. He had given his life in order to save hundreds, perhaps a few thousand lives hanging in the balance by *SS* attempts to declare the medieval city a “*Festung*”, a fortress to be defended from the attacking Americans to the bitter end, at whatever material or human costs.





The Volkssturm *was a German military unit formed in the final phase of World War II. In October 1944, the Nazi Party appealed all able-bodied men between 16 and 60 to defend the Third Reich “until a peace securing the future of Germany and its allies, and thus of Europe, is guaranteed”. The goal was to reinforce* Wehrmacht *troops after the U.S. Army had crossed the German border near Aachen for the first time in September, with clear intentions to advance further.*

Here, the reconstructed story, woven from strands from both accounts:

“In Langensalza’s war diary, during the Easter holidays of 1 and 2 April 1945, archivist Eduard Thomas wrote: ‘With a heavy heart and in deep concern for the continued existence of our beloved Fatherland, I wish to entrust to this war report the worries that trouble me. Personally, I had looked forward to the celebration of nature’s resurrection with all its wonders and had wanted to enjoy the two holidays in quiet happiness and, beyond that, to reflect upon what the future might bring: Either the offensive planned on our side has succeeded and we are saved, or—we are heading toward certain ruin’.

“By this point, American troops were already outside Eisenach, Gotha, and Mühlhausen, and the remaining distance to Langensalza was only a stone’s throw for them. Alarmed by the threatening situation, those responsible in the Nazi Party and the state decided to defend the town of Langensalza: Surrender to the Americans was out of the question for *Landrat* Späing. During the Easter holidays of 1945, he issued a proclamation calling for the defense of the town of Langensalza, which stated, among other things:

> If white flags or cloths are hung out, the entire male population of the house or locality will be shot. Hardness, courage and steadfastness will decide war.
>
> (It should be noted that *Landrat* Späing was among the first authorities to withdraw from the town.)

“At the same time, the then town commandant, a Major (his surname has been lost to history), and Victor Kircher, the senior garrison officer, agreed that Langensalza should be surrendered without a fight, since there were no conditions whatsoever for a defense and this would only have meant senseless bloodshed.

“When the town commandant officially announced this intention, he was relieved of his post and taken away by the *Waffen-SS*; in his place a young *SS* officer named Wolf was appointed town commandant. He did everything possible to make the city capable of defense and equipped and deployed Hitler Youth members as well as *Volkssturm* men.

"Victor Kirchner tried in several conversations to convince the young *SS* officer (in terms of age, Wolf could have been his son) of the irrationality of what he was doing - but without success. On the contrary, the *SS* officer threatened severe consequences against anyone who resisted the orders. *Below: passport altered to join the* Volkssturm



"Events then moved rapidly, and as early as 2 April another announcement was issued. It was signed by the *Kampfkommandant*, apparently the young *SS* major Wolf, a holder of the Knight's Cross. It announced that all *Wehrmacht* personnel present in the town were required to report to the *Kradschützenkaserne* for the defense of Langensalza. Anyone who defied this order would be brought before a *Standgericht* [a special court for suppressing uprisings and civil unrest].

"*Wehrmacht* personnel from various units and *Volkssturm* men were to hold back the advancing American troops. One *Wehrmacht* battalion (construction unit) and two *Volkssturm* battalions were to be deployed. Only a few of them, however, were willing to take part in the defense of the town, as is evident from the reports at hand. Antitank barricades on the roads leading out of the town were likewise intended to stop the American advance.

"Among those responsible in Langensalza, some had meanwhile recognized that, under these circumstances and in view of the evident strength of the American units, defending the town was pointless, indeed suicidal. Among them was also the senior garrison officer, Captain of the Reserve Victor Kircher. Entrusted with this military duty in the town since 1942, he knew the local conditions extremely well and correctly assessed the futility of resistance against the Americans. Among the population, too, there was heated debate over whether the town should be defended or surrendered without a fight. The mayor, too, had advocated surrendering the town because of the limited fighting strength of their own troops, but the *Landrat* had objected, the war diary reports on 4 April 1945 - the day on which Gotha was surrendered to the Americans. Meanwhile, the noise of war was drawing ever closer to Langensalza.

"On Thursday, 5 April, the shelling of Langensalza began at 13:00, according to archivist Thomas' report. A handful of *SS* men, *Wehrmacht* personnel, and *Volkssturm* had entrenched themselves and fired on the advancing American troops. Because of a bladder-kidney ailment, Victor Kircher had been admitted during the final days of the war to the *Lazarett* established in a school [as reported by Ursula Walter, one of its pupils at the time]. From there he was able to observe the 'goings-on', and on 5 April 1945 - despite warnings from *Wehrmacht* colleagues - he went out into the street in front of the *Lazarett*, where the *SS* officer was, and called out to him that he 'should prevent senseless bloodshed and surrender the town without a fight.' In his responsibility as senior garrison officer, using the arguments of reason and the experience of an older man, Victor attempted to dissuade the self-appointed '*Kampf-kommandant*' from the pointless fight against General Patton's armored units and from the irrational defense of the town of Langensalza. All his remonstrations, however, fell on the fanatical *SS* officer's deaf ears.

"In reaction to this, the *SS* officer accused Captain Kircher of treason and then cold-bloodedly shot him down from behind in the head and nape of the neck, with a burst of submachine gun fire. Then, under threat of punishment, Wolf forbade anyone from tending to the severely wounded man - as evident from the statement by Hugo Faulborn of the Langensalza *Kriminalpolizei*.

"The crime took place at the corner of Rathenaustraße and Gothaer Landstraße, by Dr. Runge's house. A short time after this event, the severely wounded Captain Kircher was found by a Red Cross driver. Assistance to and recovery of the severely wounded man were, however, prevented by the *SS* captain, who was still present. Only after the nearby hospital was notified was assistance provided. A doctor and two nurses rendered medical aid. Captain Kircher was then transported to the hospital. Victor succumbed to his severe injuries three days later, on 8 April in the Langensalza military hospital (*Lazarett*). The local ancient cemetery became his final resting place, in a mass grave in the section designated as the *Ehrenfriedhof*, the 'Honors Cemetery', on the grounds of the *Gottesackerfriedhof* - no longer in existence today: The burial took place on 10 April 1945".



Victor Kircher's initial resting place, but only briefly: During her research, Renate [Kircher] Bähring was told "The Amis loaded up all the dead Germans onto Jeeps an' just dumped 'em into a mass grave". It is plausible but unknown, if her father's remains lie with Mayor Kraushaar's or Hauptmann *Lohberg's or...*



Wilhelm Victor Kircher, 20 January 1893 - 8 April 1945; here circa 1940: According to Isolde Sinke, Victor's corpse was "the first thrown into the pit".

As Victor Kircher still lay bleeding and dying from Wolf's attempted assassination, the fight between Germans ready to accept the Third Reich's defeat, and those still in so much denial that committing any crime against anyone – even fellow Germans – seemed worthy of delaying, or even acknowledging the inevitable end of the Nazi experiment. As in villages and cities across Germany, in Langensalza the final outcome was clear only after series of clashes between pro- and anti-surrender factions. Tragically, Victor Kircher, then, would be only one of the victims of fanatics' crimes.



Hitler Youth "Flakhelfer" (born 1927) on the Flak tower Berlin-Gesundbrunnen (Humboldthain), 1943

The "Battle of Langensalza" unfolded over some seven tense hours. While most of the populace hid in their cellars, a handful of their most responsible representatives above ground sought to at least lessen the pending but almost certain loss of life and destruction. Ironically, each of those brave men paid for their selfless acts with their own lives.

Victor Kircher's oldest daughter, Renate [née Kircher] Bähring, later documented in her book an omen of the senseless carnage to come, just weeks before her own father's attempted execution and subsequent death:

Victor Kircher told Hitler Youth "soldiers", like those to the left, "go home - you don't yet belong in war". GDR-era historians may have not known or been allowed to do research, since officially "the Red Army liberated Thüringen", but an unverified U.S. Army report cited "150 soldiers killed, 550 taken prisoner" in the Battle of Langensalza.



Between Langensalza and Merxleben there was a Russian prisoner-of-war camp headed by *Hauptmann* ["Captain"] Lohberg, with whom Victor Kircher maintained a friendly relationship. Captain Lohberg treated the prisoners humanely and, as far as possible, allowed them to pursue their interests outside of work hours. In March 1945, Captain Lohberg was taken away by his own men because he had treated the prisoners like human beings. His family never heard from him again. The camp's prisoners were presumably forced to join the death march to Buchenwald on April 3. *left: Victor's "*Bursche*" Hornung, his wife & Kirchers' sons; right: Per Renate Bähring, "The circumstances surrounding the death of Langensalza Mayor Kraushaar on 5 April 1945 remain unclear till today."*



As Renate Kircher-Bähring learned in May 2005 during research about her own father's demise in April 1945,

> surviving eyewitnesses—Heinz Kraushaar, a resident of Bad Langensalza; Dr. Rolf Kraushaar, a resident of Berlin; and Isolde Sinke, a resident of Bad Langensalza—[saw] Mayor Kraushaar tell his relatives that only a surrender without a fight could save the town of Langensalza from destruction, but that the district administrator was opposed to this. According to statements by Dr. Rolf Kraushaar and Isolde Sinke, the mayor then called on women and children in Jüdengasse to leave the town in the direction of Nägelstedt. Frau Sinke, née Holzapfel—who lived on Jüdengasse then and still does today—further reported as an eyewitness that, in response to his call, the laundry owner Rückbeil (nicknamed "Hacke") came out, grabbed the mayor by the collar, shook him, and shouted severe accusations in his face. Mayor Kraushaar then drove off toward Schönstedt with a white cloth tied to his car. His subsequent death—the circumstances of which remain unexplained to this day—is well known in Bad Langensalza.

After – and despite – the mayor's failed attempt to save the town, toward evening several courageous citizens raised a white flag on the *Marktkirche* tower, the city's tallest. It disappeared again after a short time, as Hitler Youth members had taken it down, at which point the shelling began again. Later in the evening, when it became known that Langensalza would be surrendered, the shelling finally ceased for good. Until then, however, the Americans continued to fight to conquer the little medieval city – as reports by some of them later recapped in detail.

The U.S. Army divisions which met in Langensalza came from the northwest, via Heiligenstadt and then Mühlhausen, and the west - from Brittany and Paris, then, closer, Eisenach and finally Langensalza's western suburb of Ufhoven.

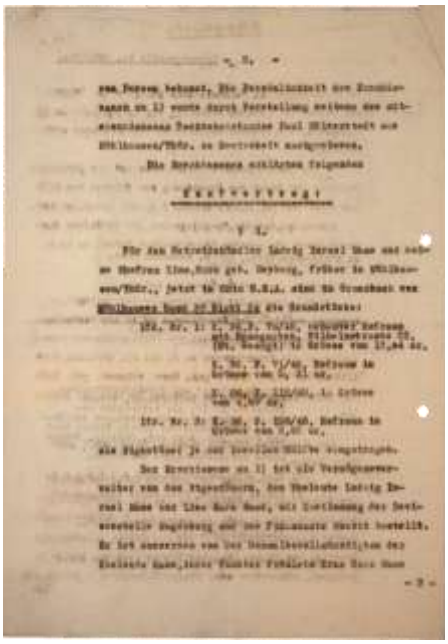


Ironically, from the northwest - seen “chronologically” from Mühlhausen, then southeasterly towards Langensalza – the first report is not of a “real” American at all, but a German-Jewish refugee who was translating for the U.S. Army:

Julius Maas was born in 1908, the son of a Jewish grain and animal feed merchant in Mühlhausen, near the “top” of the *Thüringer Becken*. In 1936, he emigrated to Ohio, in America’s Midwest; his family followed shortly afterwards. In 1940, the Secret State Police (*Gestapo*) confiscated the family's property as “Jewish property” and sold it.

Julius M. served in the U.S. Army and returned to Germany as an officer of the occupying forces in 1945, where he took part in the Nürnberg war crimes trials as an interpreter. While passing through Mühlhausen, he demanded the return of his family's “aryanized” property: In 1945, the sale of the property was reversed on the basis of the Thuringian Restitution Act, so the Maas family were awarded the property back, then leased the house and land.

Six years later, the GDR seized the property as in “foreign ownership” – so the Maases lost it *again*, this time to a far-left dictatorship. After reunification, they decided to forego restitution proceedings and accept compensation.





left: forced-sale contract for the Maas’ feed mill in Mühlhausen to “Aryans”, circa 1940

Several veterans later contributed to a compilation, *Stories by the Men of the 65th Infantry Division in WWII*. Each reveals both individual as well as dovetailing details of the U.S. Army’s liberation of Langensalza from Nazi rule.

Major Neill H. Alford, Jr. later wrote:

> We came up route 84 and stopped about a half mile from Langensalza. Our regimental commander sent in a civilian to advise the German troops to surrender - which they decided not to do and shot the messenger. The 2nd Battalion under Hunt was then ordered to move in and take the place, which it did. I was first involved on our right where our “G” company, supported by our anti-tank platoon, was trying to get some Germans out of a stone house. When I got “G” company and the anti-tank platoon diverted from this mission and back on the road to Langensalza, Hunt and the rest of the battalion and Zielinski’s tank destroyer platoon were already in the town close to that overpass which had been barred by an iron framework. It was about dark before we got beyond that railway line and into the town.

The next account, from Jerry M. Jackis, recounted a personal, anecdotal version of the “Battle of Langensalza”:

> On April 6th, 1945, I was a 24-year-old Private First Class in the fourth platoon at Company F, 2nd Battalion, 259th Infantry Regiment, 65th Infantry Division of General George Patton’s famed 3rd Army striking out at the very heart of the reeling German army. On that morning, I was riding on top of a noisy tank of the 6th Armored Division headed Langensalza, where diehard Germans had decided to resist the advancing Americans. We Americans had our own ideas, however. [The 259th Infantry used code name “TOURIST”.]
>
> On the outskirts of Langensalza, the tank I was on stopped abruptly, and I was told to go to the door of a house across the street to pick up two or three German soldiers, who by their wild gestures indicated they wanted to surrender. With my carbine at the ready, I ordered the prisoners to throw their guns to the

ground and raise their hands, and then I marched them back to the rear of the column. I noticed on one of the raised wrists a beautiful wristwatch was waiting to be "liberated." This I accomplished in no time.

I stopped an officer to ask what I should do with the prisoners. He told me to take them to the rear area. At this point, the German soldier who had been relieved of his watch complained to the officer that I had taken his watch. The officer then ordered me to return it, which I reluctantly did; however, at the first corner we turned, I liberated the watch for a second time.

The next thing I remember, I found myself atop a high railroad embankment lying on my stomach behind some tracks firing at the entrenched Germans across the way. To this day, I can still hear the pinging sound of the Germans' bullets as they struck the tracks, while I desperately tried to squeeze myself behind them. While the heavy fighting continued, an elderly German soldier had somehow been caught in the crossfire of no man's land and was lying there motionless and helpless while bullets from both sides raised the dust around him. The man's face was totally white and I never knew his eventual fate. *Below:* Volkssturm *"fighters"*



I was pulled away from the embankment and told to go up to the second story of a deserted house which stood parallel to the tracks to try to pick off some snipers on the other side. Inside the house, I met a fellow soldier named Jeter, from Arkansas, who had along the way picked up a bazooka and some shells. The fighting on the embankment below was still going on when Jeter asked me to put the bazooka on my shoulder while he would attempt to wire the shell in back. Neither Jeter nor I had any training as to how to use a bazooka, but this did not in any way impede our enthusiasm. We decided this was just a great thing to do. While I knelt with the bazooka on my shoulder, Jeter wired the shell and tapped me on the behind, then aimed the bazooka out the window, pulled the trigger, and the shell took off with a big "swoosh" sound. The concussion knocked both of us to the floor, but this was the least of our troubles — when we got up, we noticed that the backfire from the bazooka had set the wallpaper behind us on fire! Needless to say, we didn't need orders to hightail it out of the burning house.

Next, I recall being back at the embankment with a big, young, inexperienced 2nd lieutenant named Duda (from Missouri) who ordered me to go through an underpass and bring the company's communication jeep up to the firing line. I took one look at the underpass and could practically see the German machine gun bullets like a long steel wire pouring through the opening. I told Lieutenant Duda in no uncertain terms that I was not going through the underpass, for it was sheer suicide, but that I would opt for a roundabout way. He

hemmed and hawed, telling me how he was going to have me court martialed for disobeying a direct order. Nevertheless, I worked my way back to the jeep and rode it back with the radio and radioman intact. Later, Duda acted as if the incident has not even occurred, which suited me just fine.

Just when most of us thought the Germans were retreating, they opened up with a mortar attack. I scrambled for shelter in a doorway waiting for the barrage to lift. Amidst the barrage, I spotted a group of about six German civilians armed with brooms, shovels and dustpans, who duly began cleaning up the mess in the streets! Amazing, to say the least.

In the morning, we departed Langensalza while thousands of white bed sheets of surrender fluttered in the spring breeze, signifying the eventual surrender of all Germany exactly one month later.

Frank Zielinski of Chicago, in contrast, spoke of military tactical aspects of that same battle:

Many of us thought that the Battle of Langensalza ended on April 6, 1945, however one officer is still fighting for recognition of his men and their actions during the battle for this town. The battle of Langensalza was a stubborn battalion action. It was more than the average city fighting operation, it had an element of daring in that a sizeable city was virtually captured through seizing and skillfully holding, a single thoroughfare which wound from a suburb to the hub of the city.





After U.S. Army forces "opened" Nazi Germany, the 65th Division passed through Langensalza about half way to its destination, central annexed Austria.

The 2nd battalion, 259th infantry, approached Langensalza from the southwest on April 5. It entered by the way of Ufhoven, a suburb that abuts the city proper. Railroad tracks laid on a high embankment mark the dividing line between Ufhoven and Langensalza. The defenders of the city had completed this separation with a substantial barricade across an underpass which acts as the principal gateway to Langensalza from the southwest.

The main highway through Ufhoven was lined with houses from which the GI's received their first sniper fire as they advanced to the blocked underpass. The doughs in the street were covered by "G" company, from the heights to the southeast of the highway. When Jerry [British and US slang for "a German"] had been flushed from his suburban quarters, TDs from the 691 ST tank destroyer Battalion, attached to the 259th and under the command of 1st Lieutenant Frank Zielinski, blasted a way through the road block with deadly accurate 90 MM cannon fire which was like handing the keys to the city to the foot soldiers.

Riflemen from "E" company, treading wearily beside tanks from the 748th battalion, led the way through the rubble of the barricade. "F" company deployed on top of the railroad embankment from which vantage point they overlooked the southern half of Langensalza. Company "G" meanwhile, descended from the high ground south of Ufhoven, to follow the assault company through Langensalza's shopping district.

The battle was also a race against darkness, for the 2nd battalion had pulled into Ufhoven at 15:00. Because of the approaching darkness the battalion had time to capture only the single broad street running east across the southern half of the city, then north to reach the square fronting the city hall in the extreme northwest portion of the city at 23:00. Tanks from the 6th armored division had attacked from the Northwest, but were stopped by enemy roadblocks after a short advance.

The most detailed account came to the author nameless, titled “The Battle for Langensalza on April 5, 1945”:

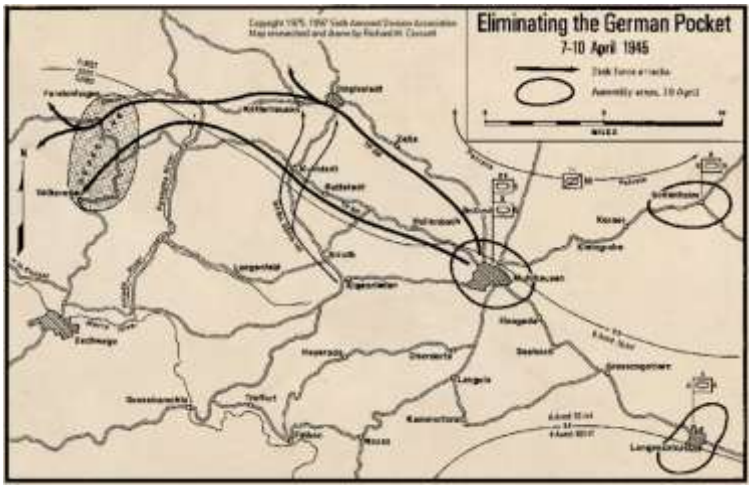
> The advance of TF 44 and 69 continued from Muhlhausen toward Schlotheim — Ebeleben. TF9 and 15 drove toward Langensalza. They occupied the airfield without significant resistance. Here they discovered a number of undamaged German planes in the hangers. Coming from Schönstedt, TF15 encountered prepared defensive positions on the edge of Langensalza. The approach roads were blocked with tank traps and the firing positions and trenches manned by regular German troops.
>
> On the 5th Langensalza was attacked in a two-sided pincer movement. TF15 from the northeast, TF68 from the southwest. TF69 with the 259th Infantry, 65th Division, advanced toward Langensalza from Zimmern over the Ufhoven suburb. The town was occupied by German forces. A continuous fight erupted. Around 15:00, the American infantry with tank support gained the center of the village. The German resisters made a stand at the tank barrier in the railroad underpass of the *Dammtor* bridge. By maneuvering, the Americans gained the high rail bed and from this advantageous position pushed into the southern half of the city. Prior to the advance the Americans laid a concentrated artillery and mortar barrage on the known and suspected positions of the defenders. The running battle continued even after dark as the expected German counterattack failed to materialize. In the late afternoon, the American advance reached the wide boulevard that runs from the southern part of town, curves north toward the plaza in front of the city hall. About 23:00 units of the 259th Infantry met the advance elements of TF15. By midnight about 1/3 of the city was in American hands and the battle was suspended. The defenders abandoned their positions under cover of darkness and evacuated the city in retreat. On the morning of the 6th the Americans encountered no more resistance and white flags appeared here and there. After a large mopping-up operation Langensalza was completely occupied by the Americans by 07:45 in the forenoon.

As Ursula Walter-Veller recalled decades later, the “Fight for the *Marktkirche* Tower” was the beginning of the end – an end which was actually a new beginning:

> On 5 April, the Americans arrived from the direction of Harth. There was already heavy gunfire in Ufhoven.
>
> My father was stationed at the *Schloßhof* [the castle courtyard] as part of the “*Volkssturm*.” That unit was disbanded there. Arthur Greiner—known for his Langensalza bus company, “*Langensalzaer Schwalben*” [and for being the man willing to offer Gert Schramm an apprenticeship, when no one else would take him]—and my father decided to climb the tower of the *Marktkirche* and attach a large white cloth up there so it would be visible in the direction of Ufhoven. The shooting stopped for a short while, but an *SS* officer took down the “white flag” again, and the American tanks came rolling back in, firing as they advanced.

As the first tanks of the American victors rolled in, the last remnants of the Nazi regime ran away - literally...







Yes, as "Amis" rolled in, Nazis ran out – but at a price:
A quarter-million American soldiers died in Europe. Below is the story of just <u>one</u>, shot in Oberdorla… in that street…

Robert Wynne was born 18 August 1925 to Raz and Winnie Wynne in Eastland, Texas. Growing up, Robert was active in Boy Scouts, where he earned the rank of Eagle Scout. In an autobiography he wrote his senior year in Eastland High School, he recalled some of his best memories at Camp Billy Gibbons, a summer Boy Scout camp he attended every year. He went on to attend college at Texas A&M University, where he majored in chemical engineering.
In 1943, he volunteered for the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP). The program was soon dissolved, so Robert was moved to regular Army Infantry Training. In September of 1944, Robert was "shipped out" to England and assigned as a replacement for the 6th Armored Division, which was under the command of General George S. Patton. He landed on Omaha Beach in France and travelled to Paris to meet up with the "Super 6th". He was wounded in November 1944, one month after taking part in the front-line combat and was therefore shipped back to London, where he was awarded the Purple Heart by the U.S. Army. There, he also had portraits of himself made by a photographer— which turned out to be the last images of him his family could set sight upon [the one shown below]. In fact, in mid-January he was released from the hospital in London to regroup with his division in France, which was shortly after sent to Germany. On 4 April 1945, while fighting in the village of Oberdorla, Thuringia, Robert was shot and killed by a Nazi sniper. His body laid in a temporary grave on-site for a few days, then was moved to another temporary grave in the Netherlands. His final grave lies in the Netherlands American Cemetery in Margraten, Netherlands, Plot B Row 2 Grave 6.
On 6 May 1945, Robert's family had a memorial service for him in Eastland, Texas. Due to his death in combat, Robert was awarded a second, posthumous Purple Heart.





…and they just kept marching on, rifles cocked, bullets whizzing past. They filed ever onward, into danger - they had *to.*

Eichsfelder Nachrichten

Verordnungsblatt der Militärregierung und der Behörden

1945 — Heiligenstadt, 22. Juni — Nr. 6

Militärregierung - Deutschland
Kontrollgebiet des Obersten Befehlshabers

Gesetz Nr. 77

Aufhebung bestimmter Arbeitsorganisationen und Arbeitsämter

1. Die im Anhang verzeichneten Organisationen, Behörden und Amtsstellen werden hiermit in dem Umfange geschlossen, in dem diese in dem besetzten Gebiete tätig gewesen sind.

2. Die Arbeitsgerichte haben ihre Tätigkeit bis auf weitere Anordnung der Militärregierung hiermit einzustellen.

3. Alle Gelder und Guthaben, Schriftstücke und Eigentum der geschlossenen Organisationen, Behörden und Amtsstellen, müssen durch die Personen, die dieselben gegenwärtig in Verwahrung haben, unversehrt erhalten werden. Die alleinige Verfügungsgewalt darüber steht der Militärregierung zu. Bis die entsprechenden Verfügungen erlassen werden, stehen Schriftstücke und Eigentum den Offizieren der Militärregierung zur Einsicht offen. Die dafür verantwortlichen Personen und Verwaltungsbeamten haben ihren Dienst fortzusetzen, bis anderweitige Anordnungen ergehen. Sie sind der Militärregierung dafür verantwortlich, daß alle Maßnahmen unternommen werden, um die Gelder, Guthaben, das Eigentum, die Ausrüstungen, Geschäftsbücher und Schriftstücke in gutem Zustande und unversehrt zu erhalten, und daß Anordnungen der Militärregierung hinsichtlich Sperre und Kontrolle von Vermögen befolgt werden.

4. Jeder Verstoß gegen die Vorschriften dieses Gesetzes wird auch Schuldigsprechung des Täters durch ein Gericht der Militärregierung nach dessen Ermessen mit jeder gesetzlich zulässigen Strafe, einschließlich der Todesstrafe, geahndet.

5. Dieses Gesetz tritt am Tage seiner Verkündung in Kraft.

IM AUFTRAGE DER MILITÄRREGIERUNG

ANHANG

Aufhebung bestimmter Arbeitsorganisationen und Arbeitsämter

Generalbevollmächtigter für den Arbeitseinsatz
Reichswohnungskommissar
Reichstreuhänder der Arbeit
Sonderbeauftragter für landw. Arbeiter
Ehrengerichte
Auskämm-Kommissionen
Das Amt der Reichsarbeitseinsatzingenieure
Das Amt der Reichsinspekteure.

Durchführung des Lebensmittel-Kartensystems für die 77. Zut.-Periode (25. 6. - 22. 7. 1945).

I. Festsetzung der Rationen

Die Höhe der Lebensmittelrationen der 77. ZP. werden für jede Woche bekanntgegeben. Für die erste Woche betragen die Rationen:

Kart.-Nr.	Verbrauchergruppe	Woche	Fleisch 50 g	Fett 75 g	Brot 1000 g	Brot 500 g
1	E	1.	1—3	Kleinabschn.	Kleinabschn.	
2	Jgd	1.	1—3	"	55	40
3	K	1.	1 u. 2	75	55	
4	TSV/BE	1.	101—103			
5	TSV/B Jgd	1.	101—103		155	140
6	TSV/B K	1.	101—102		155	
8	TSV/Schl. Jugd	1.			255	240
9	TSV/Schl. K	1.			255	
12	Reichsbrotkarte SV	1.			401—402	
14	S	1.	501			509
			503—504			510
15	Sut	1.	601—606	auf 615 = 125 g	614	613

Alle Brotabschnitte berechtigen auch zum Bezuge von 75:100 Mehl.

Im Rahmen der vorhandenen Vorräte können anstelle von 500 g Brot 375 g Kindergetreide- und Kinderreisnährmittel, jedoch nur an Kinder bis zu 18 Monaten ausgegeben werden. Anstelle von 75 g Nährmittel können je 75 g Mehl oder je 100 g Brot bezogen werden.

Kinder bis zu 2 Jahren erhalten ¼ Liter Milch täglich, wenn sie auf 1000 g Brot in der Zuteilungsperiode verzichten.

Kinder von 2—6 J. erhalten wie bisher täglich ½ Liter Milch.

Die auf der Zulagekarte (M II) vorhandenen Abschnitte über je 125 g Butter dürfen nicht beliefert werden, weil die Zulage in Butter in Fortfall kommt.

Kinder und Jugendliche von 6—18 Jahren erhalten wöchentlich 1 Liter Vollmilch. Als Bestellschein ist der Abschnitt „J 4" (Karten Nr. 2) und „J 204" (Karten-Nr. 8) zu verrechnen. Die Milch ist an 2 Tagen der Woche mit je ½ Liter auszugeben. Als Zeichen der Milchabgabe sind die Abschnitte „J 5" und „J 6" in der 1. Woche, „J 11" und „J 12" in der 2. Woche, „J 17" und „J 18" in der 3. Woche und „J 23" und „J 24" in der 4. Woche vom Milchhändler zu entwerten.

Für die Inhaber der Karte Nr. 8 (Teilselbstversorger in Fleisch und Schlachtfetten) kommen die entsprechenden Abschnitte in Frage.

Nährmittel, Zucker, Käse usw. werden in der zweiten und dritten Woche aufgerufen.

II. Kartensystem

1. Gestaltung der Lebensmittelkarten.

Die Lebensmittelkarten sind gegenüber den vom REA. für die 74. ZP. herausgegebenen Karten in einigen Punkten geändert worden. So sind insbesondere auf den Karten Nr. 1 bis 9 einheitlich 60 Nummernabschnitte vorgesehen. Dadurch ist es möglich, auf allen Karten die gleichen Lebensmittel und weitgehend auf denselben Nummern dieselben Mengen aufzurufen. Außerdem wurden die Einzelabschnitte mit den Anfangsbuchstaben der Lebensmittel versehen, um den Verteilerstellen und Verbrauchern die Warenabgabe zu erleichtern und die Abrechnung der Einzelabschnitte übersichtlich zu gestalten.

Der Aufdruck der Lebensmittelmengen läßt sich nicht durchführen, da sich im Zeitpunkt der Kartengestaltung die Versorgungslage noch nicht übersehen läßt.

III. Regelung der Fettabgabe

Um eine geordnete Versorgung mit Fett zu erreichen, ist es notwendig, für Fette eine Bindung der Verbraucher an bestimmte Geschäfte, und zwar wie folgt vorzunehmen:

Die Verbraucher haben sich sofort nach dem Empfang der Lebensmittelkarten 77 bei der Verteilerstelle, von der sie Fette (Butter, Butterschmalz, Speiseöl, Margarine) beziehen wollen, anzumelden. Die Anmeldung ist von der Verteilerstelle durch Aufdruck des Firmenstempels auf der Lebensmittelkarte zu bestätigen.

Gleichzeitig ist der Abschnitt Nr. 60 bei den Karten Nr. 1—3, Nr. 160 bei den Karten Nr. 4—5 und 260 bei den Karten 7—9 abzutrennen. Die einbehaltenen Abschnitte sind baldmöglichst dem Ernährungsamt vorzulegen.

Das Ernährungsamt stellt den Verteilerstellen Bescheinigungen über die Zahl der entgegengenommenen Abschnitte aus. Die Bescheinigungen sind von den Verteilerstellen der zuständigen Molkerei vorzulegen. Die Molkerei ist verpflichtet, die Butterlieferungen an ihre Kunden im Verhältnis der nachgewiesenen Verbraucherzahl auf Grund der Bescheinigung und der eingereichten Bezugscheine für Großverbraucher zu bemessen.

Die Verteilerstellen dürfen Fette nur auf Karten ausgeben, die ihren Firmenstempel oder den Vermerk „Reisekarte" tragen. Verbraucher, die nach der Vorbestellung aus dem Bezirk ihres Ernährungsamtes verziehen, müssen die Lebensmittelkarten beim Wegzug der Kartenstelle vorlegen, die den Firmenstempel mit „Reisekarte" überstempelt.

Die Kundenbindung gilt auch für die Kleinabschnitte für Fett, soweit diese nicht für die Gaststättenverpflegung benötigt werden.

Die von den Vorlieferanten ausgelieferten Fettmengen sind nach wie vor durch ordnungsmäßige Bezugscheine abzudecken, die auf Grund der abgerechneten Einzelabschnitte der Lebensmittelkarten einmalig nach Schluß der Zuteilungsperiode ausgestellt werden. Ob die Vorbestellung im 78. Zuteilungszeitraum in der gleichen Weise durchzuführen ist, wird zu gegebener Zeit noch bestimmt werden.

Bezugsrechte

Das Landeswirtschaftsamt Weimar hat folgende Anordnung getroffen:

Die vorhandenen wenigen Warenbestände und die geringen Neuproduktionen müssen ausschließlich zur Befriedigung der dringendsten Notfälle eingesetzt werden. Auf Grund der von der amerikanischen Militärregierung gegebenen Vollmacht ordnet das LWA. an:

1. Folgende in den Händen von Letztverbrauchern befindlichen Bezugsmarken ohne Ausstellungsdatum und Bezugsberechtigungen mit einem Ausstellungsdatum vor dem 15. Juni 1945 verlieren sofort ihre Gültigkeit.
Bezugsscheine und Bezugsmarken für Spinnstoffwaren, Reichskleiderkarten (einschließl. Säuglingskarten), Zusatzkleiderkarten, FI-Sammelbezugsausweise und deren Abschnitte,
Schuhbezugsscheine und -Marken,
Bezugscheine für Rucksäcke und Aktenmappen, Schulmschecks aller Art,
Bezugsmarken für Wecker, Stoppuhren, Taschen- und Armbanduhren und Chronographen,
Bezugscheine für Rundfunkgeräte,
Bezugsmarken für Möbel,
Bezugsmarken für Schreibmaschinen,
Bezugscheine für Elektro-Raumheizgeräte.

2. Der Handel und die Herstellungsbetriebe dürfen Bezugsrechte über Waren der vorgenannten Art nur noch annehmen, wenn sie vom Landeswirtschaftsamt Weimar oder einem zu seinem jetzigen Bereich gehörenden Wirtschaftsamt ausgestellt und mit einem nach dem 14. 6. 1945 fälligen Datum versehen sind.

3. Die Wirtschaftsämter dürfen Bezugsrechte für Spinnstoffwaren und Schuhwaren nur in den dringendsten Notstandsfällen ausgeben.

Neue Raucherkarten können erst dann ausgegeben werden, wenn das Landeswirtschaftsamt die Zustimmung hierzu gibt.

Die letztere Anordnung ist notwendig, um dem Landeswirtsch[illegible]samt eine einheitliche Versorgung des ge[illegible]ten Gebietes zu ermöglichen.

Hierzu bemerkt das Wirtschaftsamt: Diese Bd.-Verfügung bezweckt nur eine Regelung für die Uebergangszeit. Die näheren Bestimmungen über die Weiterbewirtschaftung sind in Vorbereitung. Ich bitte die Bevölkerung über diese Anordn[illegible] des LWA. durch öffentlichen Anschlag zu unterrichten.

Anträge auf Spinnstoffwaren können nur in den dringendsten Notstandsfällen eingereicht werden und sind eingehend zu begründen, andernfalls Ablehnung der Anträge erfolgt.

Antragsteller nach hier zu verweisen ist zwecklos.

Achtung! Kartoffelkäfer!

Die Gefahr einer allgemeinen Verseuchung unserer Kartoffelfelder durch den Kartoffelkäfer wird immer bedrohlicher, infolge seiner großen Gefräßigkeit und raschen Vermehrung ist er in der Tat der schlimmste Feind des Kartoffelbaues. Die Nachkommenschaft eines einzigen Kartoffelkäferweibchens vermag während seiner Lebensdauer von 2 Jahren bis zu 2500 Morgen Kartoffelpflanzen durch Blattfraß zu vernichten. Aus diesen ernsten Tatsache ergibt sich die unerläßliche Pflicht für jeden Kartoffelanbauer, die Kartoffelfelder allwöchentlich nach Kartoffelkäfern abzusuchen. Ganz besonders wichtig ist der gemeindeweise angeordnete Suchdienst. Gefundene Käfer sind bei gleichzeitiger Kennzeichnung der Stelles sofort zu vernichten und unverzüglich dem Landratsamt oder der Bezirksstelle für Pflanzenschutz — Wirtschaftsberatungsstelle — zu melden, damit rechtzeitig die Bekämpfung vorgenommen werden kann.

Rapsanbau.

Der diesjährige Fehlschlag im Rapsbau darf keineswegs zur Aufgabe desselben führen; dafür ist seine Bedeutung für die Fettversorgung viel zu groß. Der Ernst unserer Ernährungslage fordert daher gebieterisch die Beibehaltung der vorjährigen Pflichtfläche auch für das kommende Jahr. Jeder Betrieb hat schon jetzt durch die Auswahl eines geeigneten Vorfruchtackers die frist- und ordnungsgemäße Aussaat im August zu planen und sicherzustellen.

Dienst an der Scholle heisst, das tägliche Brot sichern!

Angesichts des großen Mangels an menschlichen und tierischen Arbeitskräften ist nachdenn je gegenseitiges Helfen und Unterstützen das Gebot der Stunde. Niemand halte sich für Landarbeit zu schade! Auch für nicht aus der Landwirtschaft stammende Mithilfemöglichkeiten gibt es bei gutem Willen genug Möglichkeiten, sei es der Bauersfrau in Küche und Hof, sei es dem Bauern auf Acker und Wiese eine wirksame Hilfe zu sein. Deutscher Volksgenosse, bedenke stets, daß die Ernte des Bauern auch dein Brot sichert!

Wichtige Terminänderung!

Der erste Tag für die Hauptkörung der Ziegenböcke, versehentlich auf Freitag, den 29. 6. 45 angesetzt, wird auf Montag, den 2. 7. 45 verlegt. Alle Gemeinden, die unter dem 29. Juni 1945 im Körplan aufgezeichnet stehen, müssen alle erst am Montag, dem 2. 7. 45 zu dem gleichen Zeitpunkt und an den vorgeschriebenen Körorten erscheinen.

Der 2. vorgesehene Körtag für Sonnabend, den 30. 6. 45 bleibt unverändert.

Feld- und Gartendiebstähle

In letzter Zeit ist es wiederholt vorgekommen, daß Erwachsene wie auch Kinder Obst von den Bäumen an den Straßen und Feldwegen unberechtigt entwendet und die Bäume durch Abreißen der Zweige beschädigt haben. Auch wurde in verschiedenen Fällen Obst aus den Gärten gestohlen. Die zur Anzeige gebrachten Personen wurden empfindlich bestraft. Diese Tatsache bringe ich der Bevölkerung zur Kenntnis mit dem Hinweis, daß ich auch künftig diese Unsitte fühlbar bestrafen werde. Für die noch nicht strafmündigen Kinder sind die Erziehungsberechtigten haftbar und werden entsprechend bestraft.

Wir wollen hierbei an dem alten Grundsatz festhalten: „Was du nicht willst, das man dir tu, das füg' auch keinem andern zu."

An die ordnungsliebende Bevölkerung der Stadt Heiligenstadt richte ich die Bitte, bei Bekämpfung dieser Roheiten tatkräftig mitzuhelfen und jeden überführten Täter zur Anzeige zu bringen.

Arbeitskräfte für landwirtschaftliche Betriebe

Durch Abzug der ausländischen Arbeitskräfte ist in den landwirtschaftlichen Betrieben eine Notlage entstanden, die nicht sofort restlos behoben werden kann.

Im Zusammenhang mit dem hiesigen Arbeitsnachweis (früher Arbeitsamt) wird alles getan, um den Betrieben Hilfe zur Verfügung zu stellen. Die Erfassung aller augenblicklich Nichtbeschäftigten hier in Heiligenstadt hat inzwischen seinen Abschluß gefunden und die Vorarbeiten zur Verpflichtung derselben sind im Gange. Vorerst stehen fast ausschließlich Kräfte weiblichen Geschlechts zur Verfügung und laufen Verhandlungen mit der Militärregierung zwecks Einsatz derselben in der Landwirtschaft. Die Betriebsführer werden darauf aufmerksam gemacht, daß bei Zuweisung einer in der Landwirtschaft unkundigen Kraft die nötige Anleitung zu geben ist. Durch den restlosen Einsatz aller verfügbaren Kräfte muß es möglich sein, die Lage zu meistern, die Ernte zu sichern und somit das Volk vor einer Ernährungskatastrophe zu bewahren.

Im übrigen wird nochmals auf das Rundschreiben der Arbeitsvermittlungsstelle Heiligenstadt hingewiesen, in welchem aufgefordert wird, alle im Ort anwesenden Evakuierten zu landwirtschaftlichen Arbeiten heranzuziehen, bei denen der Termin zur Abreise in das Heimatgebiet noch gar nicht feststeht. Wer nicht arbeitet, erhält keine Lebensmittelkarten. Etwa auftretende Fälle der Arbeitsverweigerung sind unverzüglich dem Arbeitsnachweis (früher Arbeitsamt, 2. Stock) zu melden und werden diese Personen bestraft. In besonderen Fällen wird der Haftbefehl erlassen.

Arbeitsnachweis Heiligenstadt

Für folgende Berufe werden Arbeitsstellen gesucht:

Kaufmännisches Personal
Verkäuferinnen
Stenotypistinnen
Telephonistinnen
Buchhalter
Buchhalterinnen
Ingenieure

Gesucht werden:

Arbeiterfamilien für Landwirtschaft
Schweizer und Schweizerfamilien
Melkerinnen
Schuhmacherlehrlinge
Stellmacherlehrlinge

Krankentransport

Der Krankentransport innerhalb des Kreises wird zum größten Teil durch die Krankenwagen des DRK. durchgeführt. Ein Telefonanschluß für die Krankstelle würde jedoch durch den Herrn Kommandanten noch nicht genehmigt. Um den Einsatz von Krankenwagen zu ermöglichen, ist es daher erforderlich, daß Notfälle der Ortspolizeibehörde in Heiligenstadt mitgeteilt werden, die für die Weitergabe an das DRK. Sorge tragen wird.


Kommgarnwerke
Langensalza


Frohe Ferientage für alle Kinder


Es lebe das Lager des Friedens,
der Demokratie u. des Sozialismus





1 MAY 1954

PART IV

KARL'S WORLD TURNED ON ITS HEAD BY
BEING HELD A CAPTIVE OF THE SOVIETS

> Around 8 p.m. on 5 April 1945, we saw the first Americans in our street, driving up in tanks and off-road vehicles in their casual khaki uniforms.

So begins Ursula Walter-Veller's telling of the end of the Nazi era in Langensalza. Once the Americans came…

Factual and concise, Ursula's account continues:

> Over the next few days, the soldiers took up quarters in barracks, at the airport, and in several private homes, including the Hotel Mohren on Gothaer Street. The apartment building on Grabenweg, where mostly older people—including my grandparents—lived, had to be evacuated, and the Americans moved in there for a few weeks. In the days that followed, the American military administration established a provisional German administration.
>
> During this time, when American soldiers were already here with us in Langensalza, fighting was still taking place in various parts of our country until, on 8 May 1945, the unconditional surrender of the German *Wehrmacht* finally put an end to the senseless fighting and the deaths of so many people.


1943
Deutsches Heldenlied
Die Toten des Jahres 1942



*Some five million German soldiers died or went missing in WWII – likely while some civilian, somewhere, sang the "*Deutsches Heldenlied*", a "German Heroic Ballad". No one is known to have sung for Robert Wynne of Texas, while he bled to death in a sewer in an unknown village in "the Green Heart of Germany".*

There had been *many* deaths, uncountable deaths, across all of Europe – across Africa, Asia, South America… with senseless fighting on land and sea, on mountaintops and valley bottoms; in farmyards and village squares and big-city streets; in market halls and city halls, churches and synagogues, classrooms and living rooms, freight cars and gas chambers. It had been a worldwide war, set into motion by bellowing, arrogant malcontents who met at night in smoky beerhalls at the indecisive end of an earlier "great war". Unwilling to own their own losses, sadness and fears, unable to bear wounds that had been both physical and imagined, they pinned the blame for their internal suffering on external sources: brutal capitalists and bloodthirsty communists, journalists, professors, artists… "the Jews" and treasonous "internationalist" pacifists… "gypsies", "homos" or other "asocial elements" – on *anyone* but themselves.

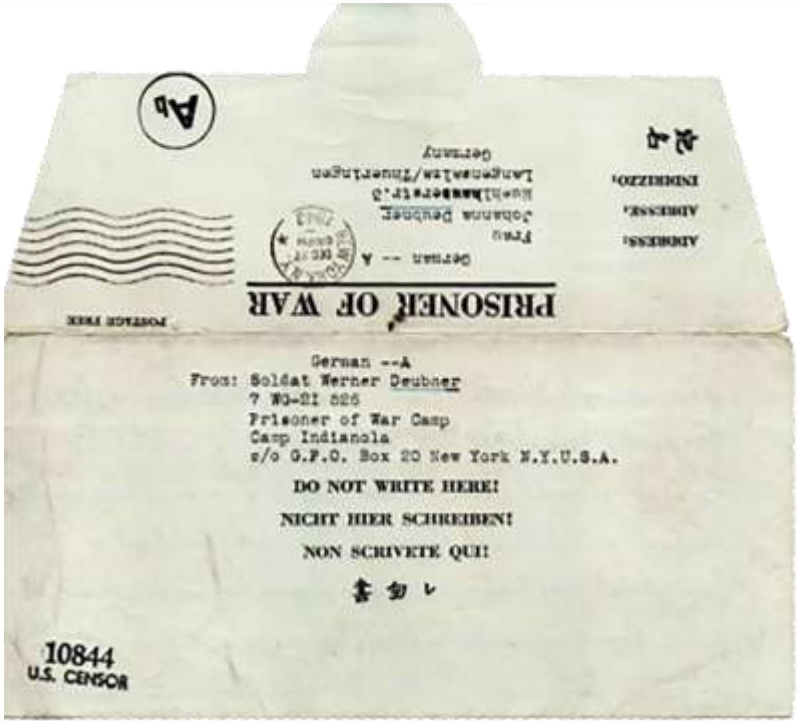
Then, clever but cynical careerists saw in the beer-soaked misery of such wretched souls a chance to tap those black pits of inner desolation as the fuel to unleash great, all-consuming bonfires of contention across all of society; in turn, they would amass great power and wealth as they drove others to commit a horrendous plundering of the existing, but now wobbling social order. Out of the ensuing chaos, they brewed a hollow alchemy, a poisonous gas containing its own destruction – assured to go up in flames one day but tied to a timer no one could set or control.

That – or *any* – war would not, *could* not have happened without being fueled by emotions stirred by an idea. In this case, it was the Nazi idea, its followers' "ideal" of how society "should" be ordered, out of which *Nationalsozialist* "ideal-ogy" arose. From its dubious, back-alley inception, it "needed" a war, a total and totally destructive war to erase the old order, then build its heralded New Order on the pulverized ruins. A problem was: No enemy, *no* war! So, an enemy – *many* enemies – had to be created, then abused: The Jewish livestock dealer; the half-black teenage boy who "might" impregnate the full-white "Aryan" girls; the Polish "subhumans" fit only to pitch hay around a field or milk the cows; the gullible innkeeper happy to take a thankless overseer's post to compensate for lost revenues;

the “reluctant” optician who had to be ordered to fight but instead merely waited under an arid bush in Southern Italy for a chance to put up his hands as he walked into the “enemies’” arms, offering in bad English “Take me, Boys”.

But, once unleashed, wars don’t take place on the ephemeral clouds of ideology. Wars play out on the ground, in the everyday lives, in the moment-to-moment experiences of exhausted refugees, of bored prisoners of war and civilian internees, of starving concentration camp inmates, of lowly farm folk slogging through the fields alongside enslaved laborers in the name of reaching wartime production quotas… of sad teenage girls missing their locked-up godfather uncles, of children still innocent, unaware of how adult follies play out in the “real” world in which we *all* must live.

It was one of the last, a ten-year-old boy “from upstairs” who Werner Deubner’s son, Dieter, some eight decades later recounted as having “almost brought death into our shared apartment house. We were all standing in the front doorway with our mother and some neighbors, watching American tanks rumble by, when the boy from upstairs ran down holding a toy gun that looked exactly like a real one. Thinking that war is a game, he stopped at the threshold and began to take aim at the ‘Amis’ just as one of the old men grabbed the barrel and shoved it behind his leg. For sure, if the Americans had seen it,” Dieter recalled, shaking his head, “they’d have shot that boy, and likely all of us, thinking we were snipers”. War is *not* a game, but the real results of greedy, deceitful, mal-intentioned governance.





As Werner’s news kept arriving, on U.S.-government-approved stationary – made to show any secrets - Johanna took care of Dieter and Helmut the best she could under the circumstances. In their papa’s absence, however, Helmut almost got blown to bits and Dieter almost got shot in the doorway of their building.

Dieter Deubner (then 7) and his upstairs neighbor weren’t the only Langensalza youth whose lives were war-torn…

On 11 April 1945, the U.S. Army liberated Buchenwald. Fifteen-year-old Gert Schramm would remain for two more months in the camp to help in the orderly room during the process of liquidating the camp. In June, he returned to his mother and her family in Langensalza. When the American military occupation sought an administrator for its food depot in the town center, its choice fell on Gert, who, though only 16 years old by this point, had been a former Buchenwald prisoner and so above any suspicion of Nazi loyalties.



Right: receipt for textiles from the City of Bernburg, June 1945

Werner turned 34 on 7 March 1945. For that occasion, six-year-old Dieter penned and illustrated…

Dear Daddy, 22.11.44/26.2.45

Happy birthday, and I wish you the very best of health. When are you coming home? Helmut and I are already missing you so much. Today we went to the movies with Mom. They were showing The Brave Little Tailor. It was really nice, and the theater was packed. I like going to school. Lots of love and kisses from your two little rascals

Dieter and Helmut




MILITARY GOVER ENT OF GERMANY

TEMPORARY REGISTRATION

Bernburg

QUESTIONAIRE OF NAZI PATRY M MBERS AND OFFICERS OF THE SA, SS AND HJ

Fragebogen für Mitglieder der NSDAP und Offiziere der SA, SS und HJ

Soon after occupying parts of Germany, the U.S. Military Government began instituting measures to "de-Nazify" the territories it controlled. Here, examples:

The "half-black" teen, hoping to salvage what he could from his earlier life, was not the only person trying to make his way to Langensalza through a Thüringer landscape still pocked by the remains of a failed fascist regime, the ruins of warfare and by chaos. Victor Kircher's widow, Gertrud, only learned of the course of events which had claimed her husband's life only four weeks later, when she managed to travel by vegetable truck from Ruhla—the Kirchers' place of residence, some 45 kilometers away—to Langensalza. Immediately, she sought solace and support for her family.

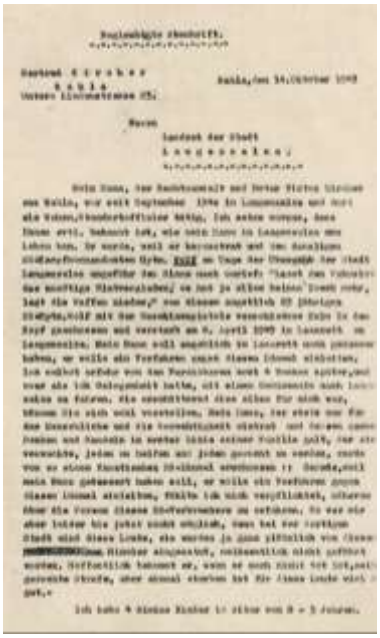
Despite a widespread search by Frau Kircher, the perpetrator, *SS Hauptmann* Wolf, disappeared amid the turmoil of the postwar period. His senseless fanaticism cost not only the senior garrison officer, Captain of the Reserve Victor Kircher, his life; the unnecessary defensive measures also led to the deaths of 20 young people in Langensalza.

As one of her children later wrote to Langensalza's mayor in a letter appealing for redress for the family's loss:

> Despite my mother's intensive efforts, we learned nothing about the whereabouts of the *SS* officer Wolf. A rumor merely suggested that a *Wehrmacht* serviceman who had been severely wounded in the fighting in Ufhoven had said shortly before his death, "He had avenged his Captain Kircher"—whatever that may mean. My father must have been a very highly regarded and well-liked superior.

As Gertrud Kircher later wrote in a notarized letter to Langensalza's district administrator – here in condensed form:

> My husband, the attorney and notary Victor Kircher of Ruhla, had been in Langensalza since September 1940, where he served as a *Wehrmacht* garrison officer. I assume that you may be aware of how my husband lost his life. Because he stepped forward and, on the day the town of Langensalza was surrendered, called out to the then *SS* combat commander, Capt. Wolf, approximately to the following effect: "Stop this madness, this needless bloodshed; there is no point in any of it any longer—lay down your weapons," this allegedly 23-year-old *SS* Capt. Wolf shot him several times in the head with a submachine gun, and he died on 8 April 1945 in Langensalza's military hospital. My husband is said to have stated while still in the hospital that he intended to institute proceedings against this lout. I myself did not learn of this terrible event until four weeks later, when I had an opportunity to travel to Langensalza in a vegetable truck. You can surely imagine how devastating all of this was for me. My husband, who always stood only for humanity and justice, whose entire thought and conduct were devoted first and foremost to his family, and who constantly tried to help everyone and to do justice to everyone, was shot by such a fanatical *SS* lout!! Precisely because my husband is said to have stated that he intended to institute proceedings against this lout, I felt obliged to learn more about the identity of this *SS* criminal. Unfortunately, I have not been able to do so thus far, because these people were not registered with the municipal registration office there, having been deployed quite suddenly by Himmler. Hopefully, if he is not already dead, he will receive his just punishment; but to die only once is far too good for people like this.



Gertrud Kircher's letter to Landrat *der Stadt*



Victor (right) & Gertrud at Privat Mäder's wedding, 1944; Klaus 2nd & Renate 3rd from left, front row

I have four small children between the ages of three and eight. The grief over the loss of my dear husband was and is so great that during the first weeks and months I was in no condition to take any action whatsoever. Only gradually did I also become conscious of the financial hardship in which I find myself as a result of my husband's death. I have neither parents nor parents-in-law and am entirely on my own with my four small children. I have thus far received no financial support whatsoever from any quarter. At present I am dependent on public assistance. I should therefore like to ask whether support can be granted from there to me, or rather to my children, since in my opinion my husband did, through his convictions, act on behalf of the town there. Or can you tell me to which office I should address my application for support? My husband received a captain's pay; since April I have been without any income whatsoever and for a long time now have had no cash funds at my disposal. If necessary, I would come there for a personal interview and ask that you inform me accordingly.

Respectfully!

[signed] Gertrud Kircher

Victor Kircher's widow, however, was not the only Thüringer seeking compensation for material or other losses occurred during the U.S. Army's conquest of Langensalza. Even if public offices were being filled by Soviet lackeys, they remained the sole channel through which any form of redress might be officially – and financially – granted.







Association of Innkeepers of Langensalza and the Surrounding Area, 33rd Anniversary Celebration, 1 December 1925; right, Johannes Fischer, circa 1940 [Both photos AI-colorized and digitally enhanced by TRACES staff in August 2026.] The author thinks that that the man fourth from the right in the front row appears to be Karl Müller, the innkeeper whose story was told in the previous chapter and soon will be concluded to its senseless, tragic end in the next chapter.



In Johannes Fischer's case, since 1938 he had run an inn in what today is Bad Langensalza's cultural center, formerly known as the *Schützenhaus* (1834–1906) and *Volkshaus* (1907–1963). At the same time, due to poor health, he fulfilled his military service at the Langensalza Reserve Hospital as a kitchen manager and cook. When the U.S. Army troops reached and occupied Langensalza on 5 April 1945, Johannes initially mistook them for British soldiers. According to his later testimony, those American soldiers removed all valuables from the inn, including pieces of furniture, clothing, paintings and weapons. Johannes then drew up a detailed list of all the items allegedly taken. He submitted the application for compensation to the mayor of Langensalza - then soon thereafter received a total of 500 Reichsmark [in 2025 the equivalent of about 1750 euros; 1 RM equaled about 3.50 euros in 1945]. This author does not know if other area inns were similarly sacked by first American, then Soviet troops, or if other innkeepers also submitted bills to the mayor for recompense. What is clear, is that plundering a store or warehouse of useful items was a lot less work than individually ransacking random family houses for such items as Johannes listed below:

Johannes Fischer, currently in
Thamsbrückerstr. 1 Langensalza, 9 October 1945

to the Mayor of the City
Langensalza.

Re: Occupation damage. Up to 30 June 1945, English occupation.

Stolen:

1 wristwatch	60,--
1 pair of field glasses — purchase value	125,--
1 Mercedes typewriter	370,--
1 Leica camera	225,--
3 oil paintings cut out of the frames	2300,--
1 watercolor	90,--
1 fountain pen	20,--
1 desk set	60,--
2 decorative cushions	55,--
5 pairs woolen stockings	12,--
1 leather jacket	45,--

Destroyed:

1 large mirror	25,--
2 panes	10,--
1 feather bed	100,--
2 tulle curtains	90,--
1 writing desk broken open	15,--
1 display cabinet broken open	25,--
1 bookcase broken open	20,--
1 complete writing cabinet broken open	30,--

Handed over:

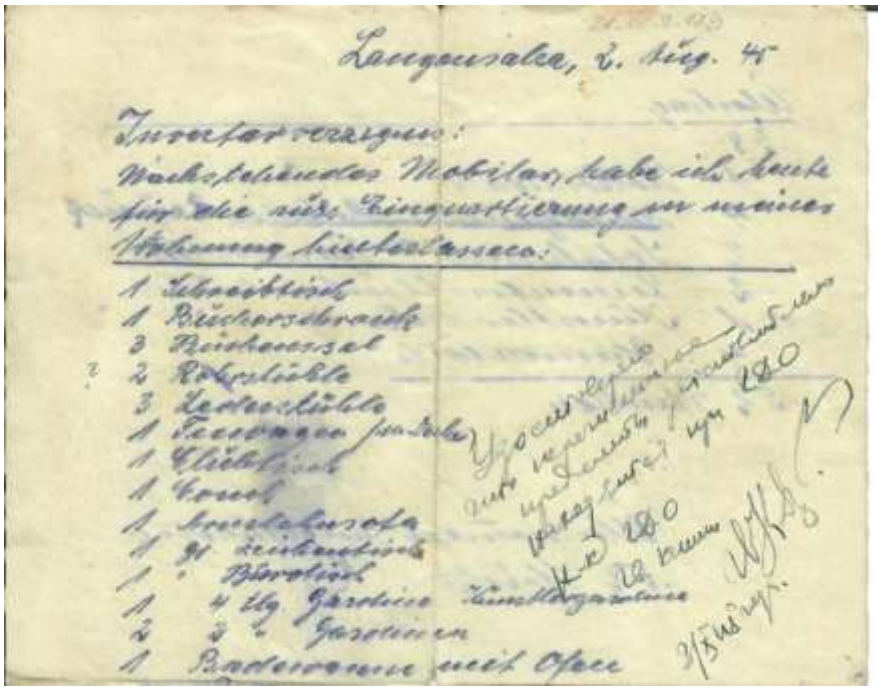
1 drilling hunting gun	375,--
1 small-caliber gun	60,--
1 dagger	25,--
1 box camera	12,--

Re: Occupation damage from 1 July to 30 September 1945.

Handed over to the Russian occupation forces:

1 writing desk	70,--
1 bookcase	150,--
3 armchairs	70,--
3 cane chairs	10,--
3 leather chairs	75,--
1 tea trolley	60,--
1 club table	75,--
1 couch	125,--
2 sofas with armrests	180,--
1 large drawing table	35,--
1 beech table	30,--
1 four-piece curtain	60,--
1 two-piece curtain	45,--
1 blind	35,--
1 bathroom fitting, stove with tub	120,--
1 rolling shelf	25,--
1 enclosed toilet mirror	20,--
1 wooden console	5,--
1 mat	8,--
1 doormat	2,--
1 cloakroom mirror	25,--
1 globe lamp, 1 gentlemen's-room chandelier, 1 bedroom lamp,	
1 floor lamp, 1 hall lamp, 1 bathroom lamp	170,--
7 pictures, oil reproductions, watercolors	400,--
1 coir mat	30,--
1 runner	175,--
3 handwoven runners	120,--
3 artist's blankets	40,--
sofa cushions, flower pots	60,--
1 small-animal housing	120,--
1 automobile top	45,--
1 gold gentlemen's pocket watch	350,--

Perhaps in going to great lengths to reclaim a relatively modest sum of money compared to the loss of a farm or shop, Johannes was thinking about the financial future of his baby daughter: Kerstin Fischer was born in 1942 in Langensalza. She approached Dr. Luick-Thrams in 2021 at a History Mobile showing in her adopted city of Eisenach, to tell him her family's story and reposit records from it which she had held close for almost 80 years. During that spontaneous "interview" he could feel the dark weight of her family's experiences, and how it still bore down on her. The savings book given to her parents at her birth (below) spoke volumes:





Diligence and work alone do not make life if they are not combined with the strength and will of a people. Diligence and strength, work and will — they belong together.
- Adolf Hitler



A gift from Stadtsparkasse in Langensalza
- a safe place to save -
Founded in 1833
If you learn to save when you're young, you'll be set for later in life!



The Stadtsparkasse [Municipal Savings Bank] of Langensalza presents Kerstin Ute Fischer, born on 2 October, 1942 in Langensalza, with a gift certificate worth 3 RM to start a savings account as a gift to mark the beginning of her life.

In the museum world (as defined by Professor Pedia), "realia" refers to "elements of everyday life, which can shed light on the history, culture, politics, etc., of a particular people, country, or place that has no equivalent among other peoples, in other countries, or in other places". In this case, a "simple" card from a saving's bank celebrating the birth of a child says *so* much, on *so* many levels: The medieval motives on the cover [the *Haus der Spuren* sits behind the *Bergkirche*, pictured on the left] speak of timelessness, of tradition, of stability; moreover, that the bank officers thought it good to quote the nation's leader - even regarding children learning the value of saving money – shows how thoroughly, in shocking minutiae, "the Great Leader's" presence had penetrated Germany society. In any authoritarian regime, a Hitler – or a Mussolini, Stalin… a Putin, Xi, Kim… a Trump – knows all things, can do all things, decides all things. It wasn't enough that Langensalza's "*Rathausplatz*" was remained for a few years as "*Hitlerplatz*"; even newborn babies' certificate of savings-account seed money also "had" to have upon it the name "Hitler". *Wow!*

In any case, Johannes was contemplating his own future, too, when he requested a letter of recommendation from his previous albeit short-term place of employment, Langensalza's makeshift military hospital:

Reservelazarett
Langensalza

Langensalza, 15 July 1945

Testimonial!

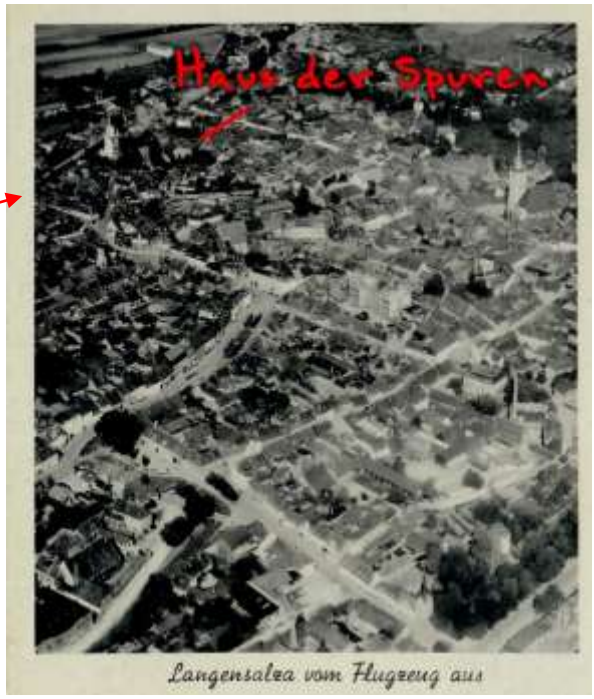
Mr. Johannes Fischer, born 2 February 1895, was employed from 1 November 1942 until 15 July 1945 at the local reserve military hospital, Amtsgericht, as kitchen manager and cook.

During this time, he carried out his duties with great devotion and conscientiousness. Mr. Fischer was always ready for service; we were pleased to have him as a member of staff, and he was always a good adviser and organizer to us. His meals were varied and always tasty, and he often knew how to prepare, from limited means, substantial and enjoyable meals. His conduct gave us no cause whatsoever for complaint.

As a result of the sudden dissolution of the local reserve military hospitals, we must also part with our member of staff.
We wish Mr. Fischer all the very best for the future.

[signed: former Stabszahlmeister]
[Army Garrison Administration]
Reserve Military Hospital
Langensalza
Amtsgericht Section -





*Would Johannes recognize "his" "*Volkshaus*" as today's "*Kultur- und Kongresszentrum*"?*

While Johannes Fischer busied himself with checking drape damage and counting flower pots, other Langensalzaer had larger concerns – like those of how to take a district of some 15,000 souls and restore to them functional daily lives? Clean and reliable water sources had to be checked and restored – as well as electrical service and heat; stores of edible potatoes had to be counted, as had to be heads of cattle, pigs, etc.; grain had to be sowed, later harvested; roads must be repaired, unexploded munitions dealt with, shrapnel removed, bomb damage mitigated; trains and buses would need to be brought back to working order in order to carry workers to work; pupils would need sound education… and all remaining components of a functioning daily life fitting a "civilized" society – even one that had just suspended civil life for a dozen years, and committed unspeakable barbaric acts upon others and its own people.

During the 40-year existence of the so-called German Democratic Republic, independently and publicly examining – let alone critically judging – the end of the Nazi regime and transition to the early Soviet occupation was taboo. By the mid-1990s, however, former leather-factory worker Gerhard Wuttke had morphed into an avid chronicler and reporter. He assigned himself the tasks first of shifting through the dust of long-hidden and -forbidden local historical events, then of popularizing the findings: Several of his histories were then published as articles in local newspapers, with the super title "Langensalza 50 Years Ago". In reporting post-Nazi rule in Langensalza, for one, he noted tersely:

> The first acting District Administrator after the end of the Second World War, Hermann Koch, directed the affairs of the District of Langensalza for only one month. He then returned, at his own request, to his hotel "*Zum Schwan*" ("The Swan"). [Wuttke didn't even mention what then-schoolgirl Ursula Walter later cited as if common knowledge: "These were men who had not been members of the Nazi Party during the Nazi era, such as Herr Reichmann, the druggist, who served as mayor, followed by Koch…"]

Then, Wuttke dove into the treasure trove of historical "gold", the complex but compelling story of Koch's follower. For contemporary historians, reconstructing the events around that person's ensuing brief term in office presents challenges, yet its dramatic culmination that August warrants all of the precision and patience one can dedicate to it.

For one thing, following Herr Wuttke's death, differing versions of the same stories were discovered, some with his handwritten markings – one with the note "*v. Herrn Wuttke aus Nachlass!*" ("from Herr Wuttke's estate!"), leaving academically-trained historians (like this author) the task of weaving disparate strands together. In the center of all the pieces of the puzzle stood one man who had learned in a previous world war how to survive – Karl Walter. It was he who the American military commandant appointed to take charge of the rudderless district on 18 May 1945.

As Wuttke sympathetically explained, "As a native of Langensalza and proprietor of the Thilo textile store, Karl Walter was thoroughly familiar with the circumstances of the District of Langensalza". For Karl's part, however, soon after the American military administrators had appointed him as *Landrat*, to head a new, post-Nazi local council, the innate fighter issued a blunt, unambiguous proclamation "To the Population of the District of Langensalza!":

The Military Government has appointed me Acting District Administrator of the District of Langensalza.

Following the complete collapse of the National Socialist system, a new beginning must be built upon the ruins. Through this announcement, I call upon all residents of the District of Langensalza to cooperate in this work.

It is my firm intention to administer the District of Langensalza, within the framework of the existing regulations, in a manner that promotes its social, economic, and cultural well-being.

The formation of an acting district council will be undertaken immediately.

The Acting District Administrator:

Karl Walter



Upon liberating, then occupying Langensalza, U.S. Army command took residence at Haus zum Mohren (right) and billeted its soldiers in private residences, including in young Ursula Walter's elderly maternal grandparents' Grabenweg home, along the city wall.

By compilating two of Wuttke's preserved but disjointed writings - one subtitled "Langensalza 50 Years Ago – District Administrator in the Period of the Military Governments" - the passionate history-buff-cum-activist penned the following, leaving a fuller picture of the task of restoring order in a climate of total chaos and ensuing uncertainty:

> Reports and official announcements published in the *Allgemeiner Anzeiger* for the City and District of Langensalza provide us with information about District Administrator Karl Walter's activities.
>
> Only a few days after his appointment, the newly appointed district administrator met on 24 May with all the mayors of the municipalities in the District of Langensalza to discuss conditions in the district following the collapse of the Third Reich and to establish priorities for future work.

Further, Wuttke reported:

> Still during the period of the American military administration and with its blessing, a district committee was formed for the District of Langensalza. An official notice concerning the founding act exists and was published in the *Allgemeiner Anzeiger*. Some excerpts follow: "With the approval of the American Military Government, the district committee is composed of the following gentlemen:
>
> 1. Herr Rudolf Fischer, Mayor of Thamsbrück
> 2. Herr Oskar Griesbach, farmer, Sundhausen
> 3. Herr Otto Ittershagen, works foreman, Langensalza
> 4. Herr Lorenz Maier, stonemason, Langensalza
> 5. Herr Bernhard Kaufmann, Thamsbrück
> 6. Herr Arno Ostückenberg, farmer, Mülverstedt
> 7. Herr Alfred Schnabel, engineer, Langensalza
>
> District Administrator Walter holds the chair.

At the first meeting of the district committee, six administrative departments were formed. As departmental heads, the committee members assumed responsibility for directing the respective areas.

The task of the departments is to place the administration of the district upon broader shoulders, so that the major reconstruction work can be carried out more effectively. In close cooperation with the Anti-Nazi Committee, the district committee will also ensure that the civil-service apparatus is cleansed of the former pernicious National Socialist spirit.

A major reorganization has already begun in this field, and it will gradually affect the entire apparatus of the district, but always with consideration being given to ensuring that no excessively severe disruption of official business occurs. Through their personalities and reputations, the men at the head of the district administration provide a secure guarantee of this. Signed: The District Administrator. ***K. Walter***

The *Allgemeiner Anzeiger* further reported, in exacting detail:

The first meeting under District Administrator Walter, held on Thursday, 24 May, in the presence of all the mayors of the District of Langensalza, offered an interesting insight into the extraordinarily extensive administrative work awaiting the new head of our district's affairs, while at the same time vividly demonstrating the hardships of our time.

First, District Administrator Walter introduced himself personally to those present and then dealt with the various issues concerning the structure of the district, the duties of the mayors, the food situation, police affairs, livestock registration, agricultural labor assistance, fuel supplies, family support, industrial development, and much more.

It is evident that even at this first meeting an extensive program of work had already been established.

The most pressing problems of the time demanded swift action and numerous practical decisions and measures. Above all, food supplies, fuel supplies, family welfare, and securing the harvest had to be addressed as the highest priorities.

Possessed by a pervading sense of urgency commensurate to the dire state of almost all things at the time, under Karl's direction the District Council deliberated over which of the several crises to handle foremost. The council's final list of which tasks to tackle first reflected the nature of Langensalza being, in essence, a town consisting mostly of landed farmers, where almost everyone had a direct stake in agriculture's well-being – thus the starkness of Karl's proclamation, as announced 11 June under the guise of being an Employment Office-issued public appeal:



The need for labor in agriculture has become extraordinarily great due to the repatriation of foreign workers. It is not right to wait until it is too late before helping agriculture.

Only through IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE can the conditions be created for a satisfactory or even good harvest that will protect us from a winter of hunger.

Therefore, for the final time, all persons who are currently not employed are called upon to register with the Employment Office in Langensalza, Dryburg Castle, for work in agriculture:

- men aged 14–65
- unmarried women aged 14–35

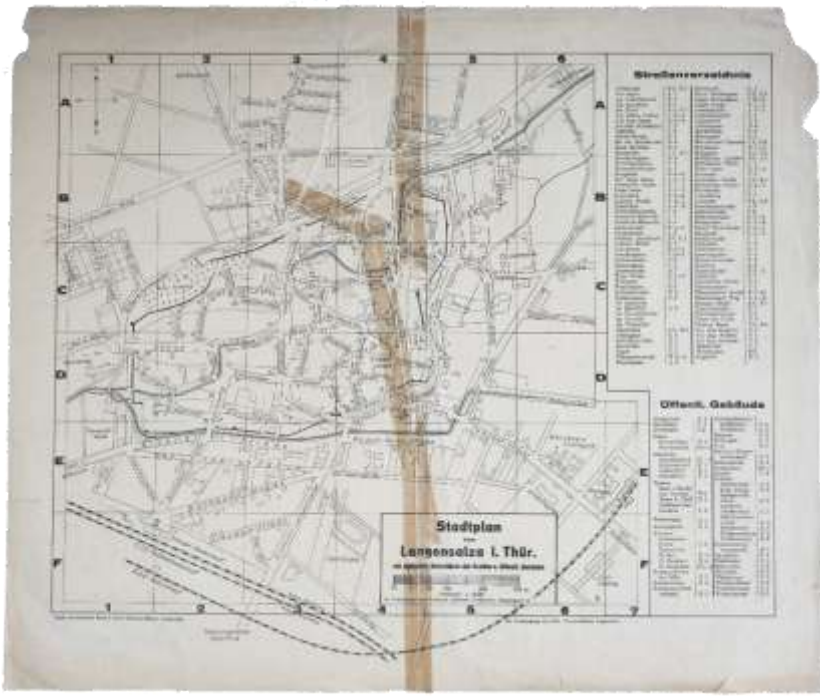
Anyone who lacks this understanding—that is, anyone who continues to refuse agricultural work offered to them, although such work is reasonable to expect of them, anyone who chooses hunger instead of work—should not be surprised if, in accordance with the principle

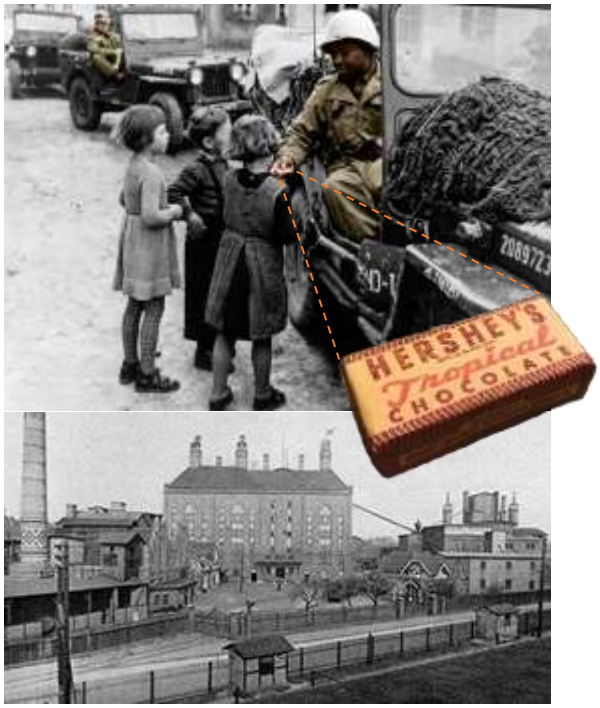
'HE WHO DOES NOT WORK SHALL NOT EAT',

they are no longer issued food ration cards in the future. The responsible authorities are now compelled to take this measure.

Employment Office Langensalza
Beubler, Acting Director of the Employment Office

Addressing what seems to have been a real or at least perceived (by Karl?) problem arising in the socio-civil vacuum left after the collapse of the Nazis' iron-fisted "*Ordnung*", on 22 June Karl issued a second, more contentious decree:





Perhaps Karl's fear of chaos came from recent events in Arnstadt: Due to lost occupied territories and wartime labor shortages, Germany's food supply collapsed in January 1945. In March, the regime admitted that rations had fallen below subsistence levels. This resulted in lootings, such as at the naval depot in Arnstadt's malt factory on 3 March, as related by one observer: "Everything a ship's crew needed was stored there in abundant quantities, including items long inaccessible to ordinary mortals: coffee, butter, spirits, rice, etc. As the Americans were approaching, the aim was to prevent food from falling into their hands. It's hardly possible to describe what we experienced here. Humans had become animals." On 26 April, General Eisenhower instructed U.S. Army occupational troops that the Germans should provide for themselves out of their own work and resources; additional supplies would only be considered in order to "prevent starvation, widespread disease or civil unrest". A sign of the times, Ingrid H., born in 1933, later reported: "The American soldiers were friendly. Our women were asked to wash 22 uniforms. [...] But then came the big reward: We were given food that we hadn't had enough of for years: sausage, bacon and liquid chocolate to make cocoa and more. We learned our first English sentence: 'Have you chocolate?'." An iconic item U.S. soldiers distributed immediately? Hershey's chocolate bars!

> Recently it has repeatedly been observed that young people are creating disturbances in the streets of our towns, especially during the evening hours. Minors who have scarcely left school wander about unsupervised—often in pairs of boys and girls. Discipline and order, especially in matters of morality and proper conduct, are thereby being called into question. Therefore, based on the Police Act, I hereby order:
>
> The curfew for young people under 16 years of age is hereby immediately set at 8:00 PM, and for young people 16 to 18 years of age at 10:00 PM. Only where young people are under the supervision of those responsible for their upbringing (parents, guardians, teachers, employers, master craftsmen, etc.) shall the regulation previously issued by the military government (5:00 AM – 11:00 PM) remain in force.
>
> The mayors of the rural municipalities are responsible for ensuring that young people working in the fields return from their workplaces to their homes under the supervision of adults and in a proper manner.
>
> For every violation of this police ordinance, a compulsory fine of 100 Reichsmarks shall be imposed upon the persons responsible for the young people's upbringing. The District Administrator, ***Karl Walter***

Gerhard Wuttke then commented at the end of his account of Karl's draconian decree:

> This order undoubtedly led to many protests from young people, for only a quarter of a year earlier there had still been a war, and many of them had experienced it firsthand, without regard for either age or time restrictions.

Characteristically, Wuttke then branded his cloaked commentary simply by typing "Wu.-" at the lower-left corner of that closing page of his draft article. In any event, such severe orders would not have much time to be implemented, for as Wuttke later noted, elsewhere:

This committee was able to work under American supervision, however, for only a few days. As early as 2 July, with the arrival of the Soviet occupation troops, the cards in the municipal sphere were reshuffled. Members of the KPD shoved their way to the forefront.



Churchill (left), Roosevelt & Stalin met in Yalta:



Thus, U.S. soldiers watched Soviet ones roll into Weimar, replacing one occupation with another.

The arrival of the Soviet occupiers – and the municipal power grab by resurfacing prewar Communists - should have been of no surprise: Even as a teenage schoolgirl, again Karl's niece Ursula Walter [later Veller], had heard already

> in May/June 1945, there was talk that the Americans would leave Thuringia again, and that the area would be handed over to the Soviets under the 1944 agreement. That was indeed the case. In the last days of June 1945, the Americans left our town, and Russian soldiers entered Langensalza in trucks, with artillery, and in some cases with horse-drawn carts. Naturally, everyone was very afraid of the new occupying power.
>
> More and more German refugees from the east continued to arrive in our city, having lost their homes and all their possessions. At first, people were housed in some of the barracks buildings, but months later, the barracks were used exclusively by the Russian army.

While some Germans feared the Soviets – for most of them, then, "the Russians" – others stood to gain from their presence, themselves having been labeled "victims of fascism". Langensalza had at least two such residents – as cited above, one was Jakob Salomon, whose native-speaker knowledge of Russian proved to be an advantage during the Soviet occupation of postwar Langensalza. His previous home and workshop – in his absence, while in Nazi camps – had been confiscated and turned into a nursery for young children. As a perk upon Jakob's return given his victim status, he was given the chance to "pick out one of the biggest houses in Langensalza" as his own. So, he did:





Langensalza native Walter Jadke and his wife Elfriede from Frankfurt-Oder were trained photographers, shown with Walter's mother, Alvina – a single-parent factory worker - and their baby, Harald, in the doorway of their studio, circa 1938. The house extended into the side street. On the left, they work with an aid.

Who was a second recipient of postwar largess on the part of those now placed into positions of power? Exactly the previously miserable, powerless Afro-German boy who no one other than his grandmother seemed to really want:

In July 1945, after the American occupation was replaced by the Soviet occupation, Gert Schramm was left out of a job again. Now, however, he benefited from the fact that he had learned a few scraps of Russian in Buchenwald, and that in Langensalza, a local antifa committee was headed by a former Buchenwald prisoner who had the trust of the Soviet military administration: Through that former inmate's intercession, Gert was hired as an interpreter.





Buchenwald inmates welcomed U.S. Army soldiers as liberators, then wasted no time in making the camp there own: The sign reads: "We ANTIFASCISTS want to go home to DESTROY the NAZI CRIMINALS". For their part, the American command forced about a thousand Weimar residents to tour the camp as to see crimes committed there by the Nazi regime – top left. One of those involuntary "citizen witnesses" was the author's later mother-in-law, Helga Wagner. Their first meeting spoke volumes about the lasting impact of such a de-Nazification strategy: "Wolfgang and I took a bus from Nürnberg to their village to join his parents for Christmas 1991. From the first moment we met, his mother starred at me with cloaked disdain. Wolfgang said to me, in our room, that I had done nothing wrong, but I couldn't imagine why she glowered at me so. After dinner and quite a bit of red wine, she explained: 'When I was 14, I was sent from my hometown of Essen to Weimar, to be away from the heavy bombing of the Krupp factories. There, I was assigned an apprenticeship as a seamstress. When the Americans arrived, they forced me – a girl! – to march with the others to the top of Ettersberg to tour Buchenwald. I have never forgotten what I was made to look at – nor forgiven Americans for having forced me to go there. For a time, I considered joining Werewolf partisans to sabotage the U.S. Army'."



For the time being, professionally Gert seemed to thrive, but once again not academically - based on an excerpt from a statement made in November 1946 by the District Administrator of Weißensee during a juvenile-court proceeding:

> ... I inform you that the youth first came to attention as early as 1941 because he eagerly skipped school and showed a penchant for adventure and vagrancy. Even purely in appearance, the youth embodies the Negro

half-breed. According to his own statement, he claims to have been at the Buchenwald concentration camp. However, this statement cannot be corroborated either by the genetic records of the State Health Department or by the files of the Criminal Investigation Department. Schramm is naturally plagued by psychological conflicts due to his mixed-race characteristics. If he was indeed at the concentration camp, this period must also have had a detrimental effect on the youth.

Gert's struggles with local school officials would end one day, but other of Karl Walter's contemporaries' woes would not. As Gert left Buchenwald, his spot on that hilltop hell was almost literally filled in short order by a new kind of Langensalza victim of dictatorship – a Soviet one.

Already upon their arrival via what photos show were road-weary trucks and wagons pulled by emaciated horses, Soviet occupiers wasted no time in wading into the task of researching who among the occupied might have been Nazis or sympathetic collaborators. Eventually, their dragnet led them to Karl Müller, who the formidably named "Operational Group of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs of the USSR (NKVD)" division in Langensalza arrested on 10 November 1945. The reason it gave for his arrest was his – he thought "harmless" - role as the head of that Russian POW camp. On 1 December 1945, he was then transferred to Special Camp No. 2 in Buchenwald.



Per Holger Schneider's notes, "Photo 1934; Karl Müller (born 1898) and CHRISTA MÜLLER born on 24 December 1932, in Langensalza"

His thirteen-year-old daughter, Christa, was left behind, unaware of what had happened. Never informed of her father's fate, she spent years hoping in vain for a sign of life. (Thomas Kühmstedt relayed a telling story she had confided to him – that "As a teen, I'd gone to Langensalza's train station almost daily, searching the arriving trains with anxious eyes, awaiting my father's return. One day, however, a woman returned to Langensalza from Buchenwald and advised me quietly 'You can stop waiting for your daddy, Dear'.") But, when Karl reportedly died on 25 December 1948 in Buchenwald's "Special Camp", his family was not informed of his death nor of the alleged cause of death, later given as "pulmonary tuberculosis". It was not until 2006—61 years after her father's arrest—that Christa was able to obtain an official death notice.

The author's three students concluded their summary of Karl's fate – and Christa's – by noting: "In 1951, however, Karl's daughter, Christa, left the family home in Langensalza and fled across the 'green border' from the GDR to Bad Harzburg, never looking back". In truth, her story was not that simple, nor so painless – as will be revealed in Part V. On the surface, it seems straightforward: Upon closer examination, however, its details warrant further exploration, for they help weave together the larger German national drama, 1914-49.

It was Karl Walter's beloved niece and godchild, Ursula (Walter) Veller who sparked this author's interest in her uncle's and related stories by making a short, faint and choppy phone call in June 2026 to *Haus der Spuren*. Then only a few days short of her 96th birthday, she once again was urgently, emphatically trying to attract interest in the tragic fate of her cherished uncle. It was she who had convinced Harald Rockstuhl in 2014 to print Karl's story of his three 1919 escapes from French POW camps; it was also she, a decade earlier, who herself strove to memorialize her family's wartime stories in a four-page, hand-typed summary. Despite the fervency of her repeated pleas, and her insistence that the wider world take note of her uncle's heartbreaking end, her own summary was terse and - given the gravity of both the events and the story's ending - understated; in it, she had muted her own undying emotions:

> For the provisional German administration appointed by the Americans, a sad event occurred at the end of July 1945.
>
> District Administrator Karl Walter was removed from office and arrested. (He was my father's brother.)

10

Öffentliche Sitzung der
2. Zivilkammer des Kreisgerichts Bad Langensalza, den 22.6.1961

2 A 34/61

Gegenwärtig:

Richter Kannenberg
als Vorsitzende

Franz Czisor,
Karosseriestellmacher

Rudolf Tietz,
Expedient

als Schöffen

Just.-Ang. Rommeis
als Schriftführerin

In der Todeserklärungssache

Karl Walter

erscheinen bei Aufruf:

für die Antragstellerin niemand

Herr Otto Fleischhauer
als Zeuge

Der Zeuge wurde zur Wahrheit ermahnt, auf die Bedeutung des Eides, sowie auf die Folgen einer falschen eidlichen, auch uneidlich falschen Aussage hingewiesen und wie folgt vernommen:

Z.P.: Otto Fleischhauer, 75 Jahre alt, Kaufmann, jetzt Rentner, Bad Langensalza, Steinweg 19
Mit der Antragstellerin nicht verwandt und nicht verschwäger

Zur Sache: Ich war am 23. Juli 1945 mit dem Verschollenen zusamme zu einer Wirtschaftstagung in Erfurt, die vom Land Thüringen angesetzt war. Nach der Tagung sind wir zusammen wieder nach Langensalza gefahren, u. zw. mit dem Dienstwagen.
Wir haben uns wieder in das Landratsamt begeben, u. zw. jeder in sein Dienstzimmer. Nach Dienstschluss -17,00 Uhr- kam die Sekretärin des Verschollenen, Frl. Tschepe, zu mir in mein Dienstzimmer und überbrachte mir die Nachricht, daß der Verschollene
x russ. eben von der x politischen Militärpolizei abgeholt worden sei.

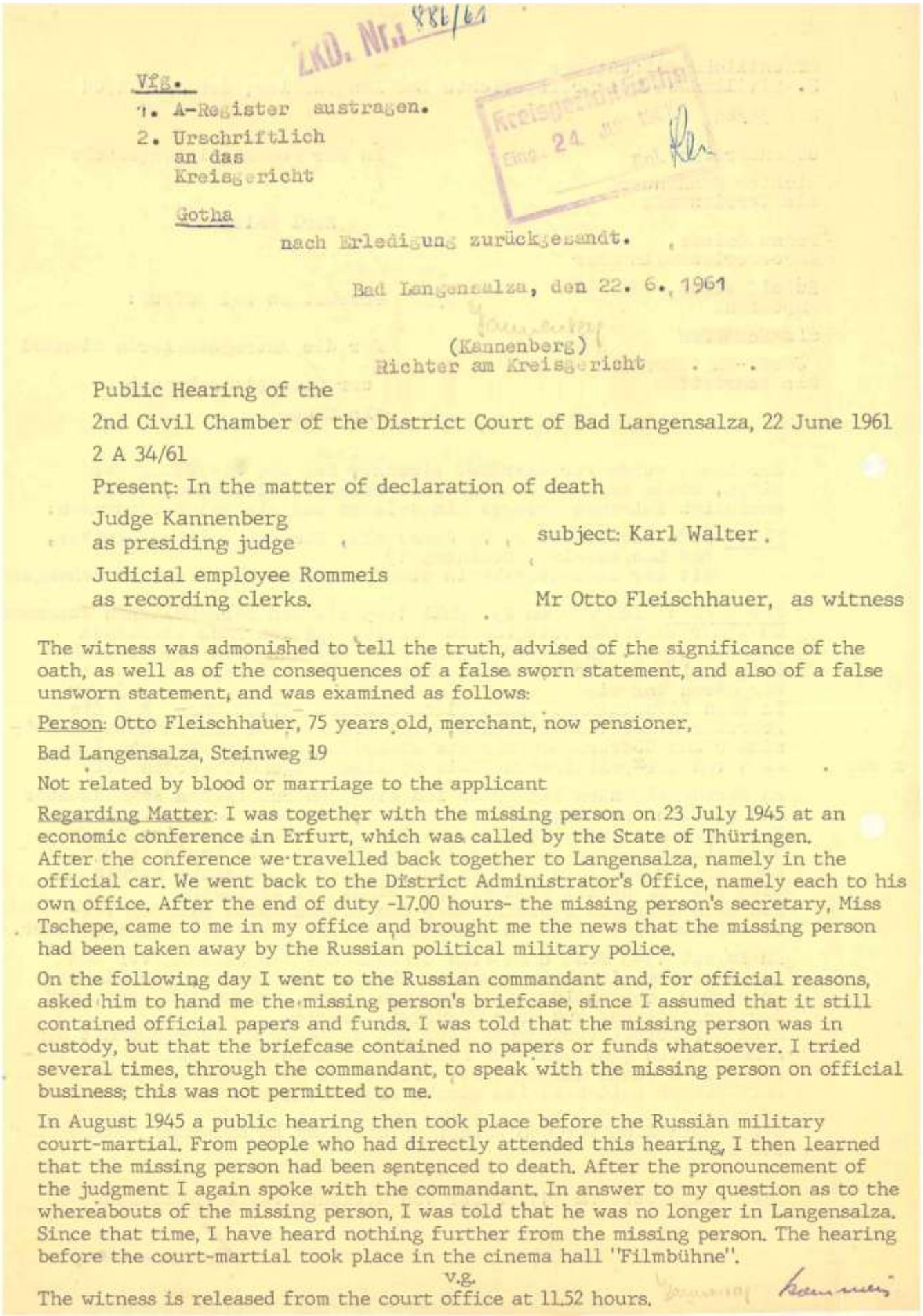
Am darauffolgenden Tag begab ich mich zum russischen Kommandanten und bat ihn aus dienstlichen Gründen, mir die Aktentasche des Verschollenen auszuhändigen, da ich vermutete, daß sich darin noch Dienstpapiere und Geldmittel befanden. Mir wurde gesagt, daß der Verschollene in Haft sei, in der Aktentasche würden sich aber keinerlei Papiere und Geldmittel befinden.
Ich habe mehrmals versucht über den Kommandanten mit dem Verschollenen dienstlich zu sprechen, dieses wurde mir nicht gewährt.

Im August 1945 fand dann eine öffentliche Verhandlung vor dem Russischen Militärkriegsgericht statt. Von Leuten, die direkt an dieser Verhandlung teilgenommen haben, erfuhr ich dann, daß der Verschollene zum Tode verurteilt wurde.
Nach der Urteilsverkündung habe ich nochmals Rücksprache mit dem Kommandanten genommen. Auf meine Frage nach dem Verbleib des Verschollenen wurde mir erklärt, dieser sei nicht mehr in Langensalza Seit dieser Zeit habe ich nichts wieder von dem Verschollenen gehört.
Die Verhandlung vor dem Kriegsgericht fand im Kinosaal "Filmbühne" statt.

v. g.

Der Zeuge wird um 11,52 Uhr von Gerichtsstelle entlassen.

Exactly a month and a day short of sixteen years after Karl's arrest, the last civilian to have interacted with him – local merchant Otto Fleischhauer – recounted the two men's last hours spent together, in a sworn court testimony:



Vfg.

1. A-Register austragen.
2. Urschriftlich an das Kreisgericht

Gotha

nach Erledigung zurückgesandt.

Bad Langensalza, den 22. 6. 1961

(Kannenberg)
Richter am Kreisgericht

Public Hearing of the

2nd Civil Chamber of the District Court of Bad Langensalza, 22 June 1961

2 A 34/61

Present: In the matter of declaration of death

Judge Kannenberg as presiding judge — subject: Karl Walter.

Judicial employee Rommeis as recording clerks. — Mr Otto Fleischhauer, as witness

The witness was admonished to tell the truth, advised of the significance of the oath, as well as of the consequences of a false sworn statement, and also of a false unsworn statement, and was examined as follows:

Person: Otto Fleischhauer, 75 years old, merchant, now pensioner,

Bad Langensalza, Steinweg 19

Not related by blood or marriage to the applicant

Regarding Matter: I was together with the missing person on 23 July 1945 at an economic conference in Erfurt, which was called by the State of Thüringen. After the conference we travelled back together to Langensalza, namely in the official car. We went back to the District Administrator's Office, namely each to his own office. After the end of duty -17.00 hours- the missing person's secretary, Miss Tschepe, came to me in my office and brought me the news that the missing person had been taken away by the Russian political military police.

On the following day I went to the Russian commandant and, for official reasons, asked him to hand me the missing person's briefcase, since I assumed that it still contained official papers and funds. I was told that the missing person was in custody, but that the briefcase contained no papers or funds whatsoever. I tried several times, through the commandant, to speak with the missing person on official business; this was not permitted to me.

In August 1945 a public hearing then took place before the Russian military court-martial. From people who had directly attended this hearing, I then learned that the missing person had been sentenced to death. After the pronouncement of the judgment I again spoke with the commandant. In answer to my question as to the whereabouts of the missing person, I was told that he was no longer in Langensalza. Since that time, I have heard nothing further from the missing person. The hearing before the court-martial took place in the cinema hall "Filmbühne".

v.g.

The witness is released from the court office at 11.52 hours.

No civil servant, but rather Karl's devoted, beloved godchild and niece, Ursula continued in her report, decades later:

> A member of the KPD or SPD was appointed district administrator. District Administrator Karl Walter's home had suddenly been searched, and several weapons (a rifle and a pistol) were found.
>
> According to a previous public announcement, weapons—as well as cameras, binoculars, daggers, swords, etc.—had to be turned in to city hall for destruction.
>
> He failed to comply with this order, which led to his arrest.
>
> His case was heard on 30 August 1945, by a Russian military court at the *Film-Bühne*.



*The "*Film-Bühne*" in the 1950s, in the large building on the right – the site of the Soviets' makeshift "courtroom" for public spectacles. Ironically, it was only a few doors further down, on the right, that in May 1944 the* Gestapo *had arrested Karl's fellow Buchenwald veteran, Gert Schramm. And, in the opposite direction, a similar short distance and on the same side of the street, sits Hotel Mohren, where the U.S. military local command which appointed Karl district administrator at its headquarters. Now, only a year and a half later, Karl was under arrest.*

Who was in that "courtroom"? With any certainty, only a half-dozen individuals can be named – among them a 15-year-old schoolgirl. Ursula was there almost by chance – as she retold it uncountable times: "Our family only got a sudden tip, by word of mouth, that Uncle Karl was to be appear in a public hearing. My grandfather and his other sons had to work, so Mother told me, 'Take a sweater and go see what all of the excitement is about. Surely, it will all end all right – and when it does, bring your Uncle Karl home'. So, I went - but *never* expected what followed".

Again, it would be exacting Gerhard Wuttke who – unlike devoted Frau Veller – could research, then tell the story with the emotional and journalistic distance required to leave a more enlightening, detailed record of actual events.

LANGENSALZA FIFTY YEARS AGO

> Soviet orders and decrees defined this period. Among them was the instruction that weapons and ammunition were to be surrendered immediately. Anyone who resisted was to be held strictly accountable under the laws of war.
>
> This severity struck District Administrator Karl Walter with full force.
>
> At around 20 July, investigations showed, Walter was arrested for no previously apparent reason. By August, a hearing before a military court had already taken place. Unfortunately, the Thuringian archives contain no records of those days. All that remains is the report on the trial, published in the *Thüringer Volkszeitung* on 2 September 1945.
>
> The headline read: "Military Court against *Stahlhelm* District Administrator Walter." The text states:

On 30 August 1945, at 8 o'clock in the evening, a military-court session against District Administrator Karl Walter was held at the *Film-Bühne* in Langensalza. The military court consisted of a major, a captain, a first lieutenant and a woman lieutenant. The hall was overcrowded. Not a sound could be heard when the defendant, with shorn hair and a pale face, was led into the hall." [In July 2026, his now-aged niece Ursula – tears welling up in her sad eyes - lamented "They led him around in chains like he was a common criminal!"]

Loud Protest

When questioned about his relationship with the National Socialists, he is said to have answered that, because he had insulted a lord mayor in a letter to Fritz Sauckel [then Gauleiter of Thüringen's *NSDAP*], he had to spend six months in a concentration camp in 1935. After his release, he tried to become a member of the Party and asked *SA* and *SS* leaders for a favorable character reference. Before 1933, he had been a member of the *Stahlhelm*, an association of participants in the First World War that developed into a large military association, was later brought into line by the Nazis, then dissolved in 1935. Walter claimed that he had always been an opponent of the National Socialists. In 1934, however, like other *Stahlhelm* members, he had allegedly been forced to wear swastika armbands, and 80 percent of the *Stahlhelm* members became members of the *NSDAP*. When questioned about his relationship with Social Democratic circles, he replied that the Social Democrats and the *Stahlhelm* were not hostile toward one another. This prompted protests from the audience.

The indictment ultimately read: "Violation of the Weapons Act and subversive activities against the Red Army." Walter was in possession of three pistols and three rifles. He said he had kept the hunting rifle because he was a passionate hunter. The military rifle had once saved his life, and the other was a gift from his father-in-law. One pistol was a memento of his service; the other was in the desk without his knowledge, and the third had been forgotten in the safe.

The presiding judge asked Walter why he had kept and concealed the files concerning the *Stahlhelm*. This had come to light because Walter had given a fellow prisoner a message to his wife, asking her to destroy the material and the photographs, together with the swastika armband. Walter replied that, once the Americans moved in, he had intended to arm the farmers and detain the foreigners. He also asked for a lenient punishment. He acknowledged his guilt, he said, and could cite only family circumstances as an excuse. The subsequent deliberation lasted a quarter of an hour. The judgment was then read out: death by shooting, for counter-revolutionary activities and sabotage of the laws of the Red Army. Walter signed a petition for clemency addressed to the Russian government before disappearing forever.

In her 2005 summary, Karl's goddaughter niece ended her account 60 years after the event by merely concluding:

There was no trace of where he was taken.

Then, she signed off with:

Bad Langensalza, 14 March 2005

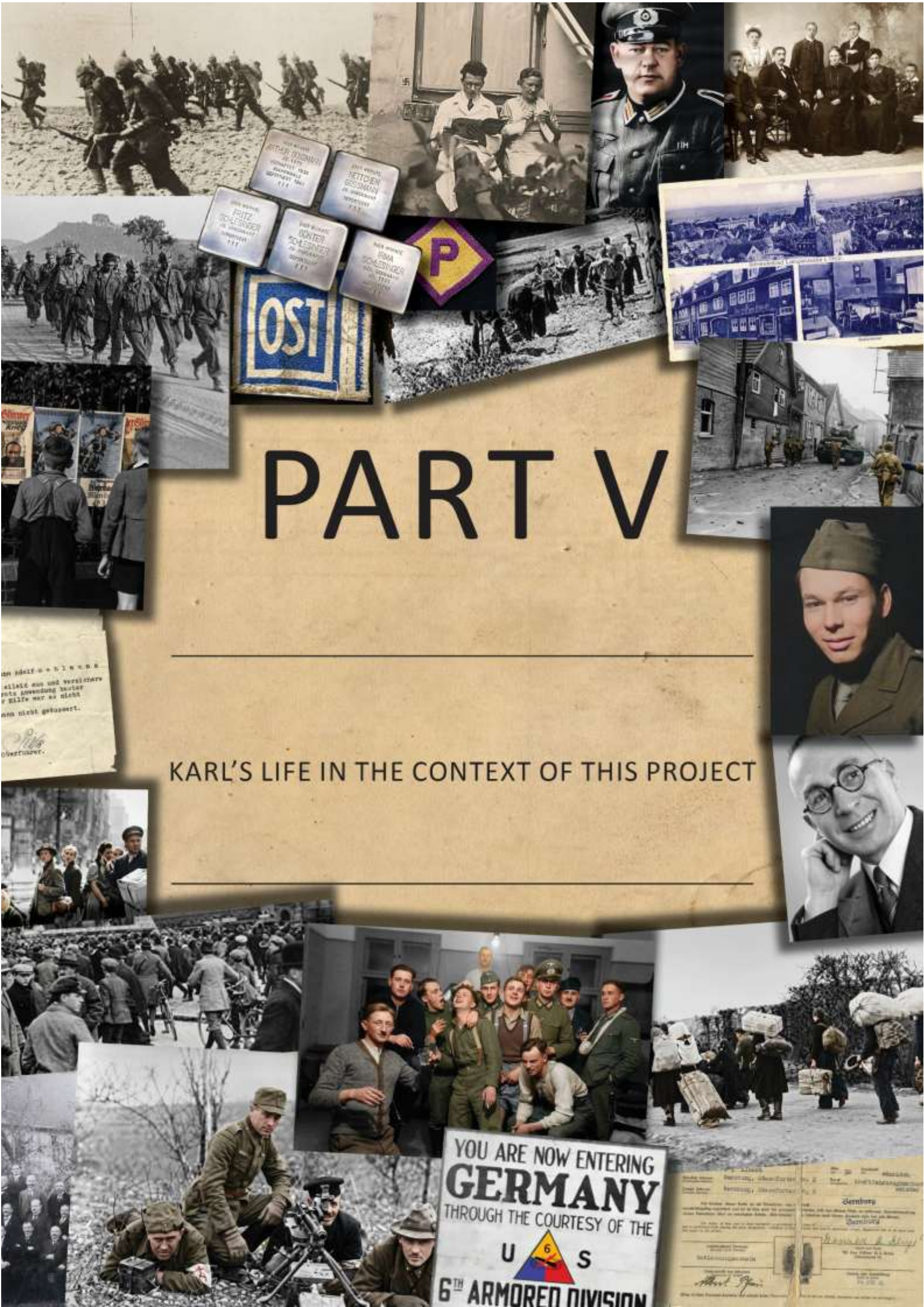
Ursula Veller, née Walter

Kepfe 6



Ursula [née Walter] Veller in August 2014 in her familial home at Kepfe 6, showing Harald Rockstuhl her father's family portrait, as part of his research prior to publishing Karl's autobiography


So schön ist's in
Schwefelbad Langenaltza
Die Teufelin von Rom
Klingemühle
August Pabst



PART V

KARL'S LIFE IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS PROJECT

A Larger Context:

This project began with one question: "How did 20th-century events influence current-day Germans' lives and psyches?" What was intended to focus on the Walter family, soon began to weave into itself strands from other families… until a larger picture emerged – the story of how one prosperous, cohesive community could be so quickly and profoundly wounded by recurring wars and two dictatorships. As much as possible, this portrait of those ten or so families who found a place in the unifying biography of Karl Walter, consists of their own words, photos or realia. For the deepest, fullest possible examination, where pertinent each family's story has been divided into serial eras.

Postscripts:

Jakob Salomon

When Jakob was awarded "a big Nazi's house in Langensalza" he surely never could have dreamt of how his story of discrimination and persecution could come as full circle as it has. The house he chose, in a streak of historical irony, now houses Zwiwel, which in turn houses *DemokratieLeben*, the body which is funding this TRACES-Spuren project!



*The Jadkes' and Salomons' former home now houses Zwiwel's Family and Youth Office. By coincidence, it also was the site of one of Langensalza's two known fatalities during the Kapp-Putsch; and, on the sidewalk in front of the house a brass "*Stolperstein*" ["Tripping Stone"] keeps alive Jakob's memory and legacy.*

Gert Schramm

Another "veteran" of the Buchenwald concentration camp – like Jakob Salomon and, for time, Karl Walter a survivor of it, while Karl Müller was not - Gert also had to cobble together a postwar life. His later career subsequently led him to work at the Wismut uranium mine in the newly formed "German Democratic Republic" and then to a colliery in Essen in West Germany. He later returned to the GDR to work as a car mechanic and head of the civil engineering combine in Eberswalde, until he finally (still in GDR times) started a taxi-driving and haulage business. As a member of the board of the Buchenwald Committee he engaged in battling right-wing extremism and was honored for this with the German Federal Cross of Merit in 2014. He died on 18 April 2016 in Eberswalde, outside Berlin.

"Haus der Spuren" attends to the biography of Gert Schramm

Contemporary Witness of the Holocaust also lived in Bad Langensalza. Exhibition opens in April

by **Friedemann Mertin**
translated from German by **Karin Schramm**

Bad Langensalza. The "Haus der Spuren", Unterm Berge 24, takes further shape. The History Society "Spuren", which is the name giver for the house, investigates the experiences of prisoners of war, either Germans in the United States or Americans in Nazi Germany, based on talks with contemporary witnesses, letters, drawings, and photographs. The biographies will be found on presentation boards, as well as those of people from the district of Unstrut-Hainich.

Part of the house will be dedicated to Gert Schramm (1928 – 2016), who grew up in Bad Langensalza and in Witterda, which is only a few miles away. He survived the concentration camp in Buchenwald, engaged himself against fascism, and wanted to enlighten National Socialism. For his engagement he received the "Bundesverdienstkreuz" (Federal Cross of Merit).

Gert Schramm was the son of a German woman and an American man with Cuban roots. His father came to Erfurt as a contract worker for an American Steel Company. There he met Marianne Schramm, Gert's mother, and fell in love with her. After finishing his contract work he returned to the US, as Gert Schramm writes in his book.

The boy came to Langensalza when his mother found a job as a dressmaker. Aged four, he moved to his grandparents in Witterda, who could take better care of him than his working single mother.

According to Gert Schramm, he spent his childhood safely in the country. Apparently, there was no racism. Unfortunately, that changed when a new school teacher took over. The committed Nazi began to harass his pupil. Gert Schramm ditched school and the Youth Welfare Office started to take notice of the boy and wanted to put him in a Youth institution. In 1941, Gert Schramm's grandmother decided to send him back to his mother in Langensalza, away from the teacher.

The corresponding official exchange of letters contains extremely racist taunts. In them, the boy's fate is discussed. These letters are also part of the exhibition. Volunteers around the Chairman of the History Society, Michael Luick-Thrams, did research work and wrote the texts – establishing regional connections.

In 1943, Gert Schramm worked for the Car Repair Shop Greiner. Today, in that house in the Erfurter Straße among other things bicycles are sold.

In 2014, during an interview with this newspaper, Gert Schramm reported that on 6th May 1943, he was arrested by the Gestapo. The 14-year-old was brought to Buchenwald after having passed several stations. He stayed there for nine months until the camp was freed by Americans.

In June 1945, he returned to Langensalza, where at first he worked in a Food Storage run by the American Military Administration. After the replacement of the occupying power, he worked as a translator for the Soviets. At last, he found his permanent life center in Eberswalde (Brandenburg).

The biographies of Gert Schramm and others will be exhibited in the "Haus der Spuren", the aimed date for its opening is 15th April 2021.

In the foreseeable future, the house will become a museum.



Contemporary witness Gert Schramm – a photograph made in 2005 –survived the Holocaust. In Bad Langensalza he spent part of his childhood and youth.

ARCHIV FOTO: ALEXANDER VOLKMANN



Häftlings-Personal-Karte – Gert Schramm's Prisoner Card from the Buchenwald Concentration Camp

FOTO: SPEICHERSTIFTUNG ARCHIVES

Other Families devastated by Buchenwald Concentration Camp

From July 1937 to March 1950, Langensalza sat in the middle of a "Triangle of Death" anchored by the main camp at Buchenwald – one of Nazi Germany's largest – in the east, Ohrdruf to the south and Mittelbau-Dora in the north. As a "franchise", in the Third Reich that system grew, stretched out and shrank based on perceived need and forced-labor maximization, squared with production means and available personnel. It could have closed in April 1945 but then swelled again with new demand for its deadly "services", first by use of the U.S. Army occupational forces, then those of the Soviets directly, later in conjunction with their East German protégés. In the process, some half a million humans were shuffled around like so many cords of wood between 139 side and sub-camps. Ironically, for most of the GDR's existence, tours by school and other groups to witness "the evils of fascism" were standard curriculum, but with *no* mention of Buchenwald as a recent center of Soviet intimidation, "re-education" and deadly detention.



Italian exchange pupils leaving a tour of the Buchenwald memorial in April 2026, guided by Dr. Luick-Thrams and his English intern

Buchenwald – used here to refer both to the main camp itself, and to its extensive satellite system spread across central Germany from the Rhein to the Elbe, and from Magdeburg to Coburg – was many things, to many people. Almost a small city in itself, it literally contained: an infirmary (used not to treat inmates but to murder them through injections), laundry and cooking facilities, a cinema in a barracks (prisoners could watch expired UFA films for a fee, and hold small, *SS*-approved sporting or cultural events), a camp brothel for prisoners (intended as an "incentive for higher performance"), as well as a canteen and library for prisoners. More infamously, there were installations for medical experiments, executions and a crematorium, built when Weimar's municipal one did not suffice. Solidly imbedded in the capitalist system, much more importantly for the camp's "clients" it included a quarry, workshops, a railroad connection which could efficiently move people and goods, and a "work statistics" administration office, which oversaw the flow of innates between camps within the larger system, often working for private or corporate firms "leasing" what were essentially slaves. For such a production-focused system to survive, however, it required a constant flow of new arrivees, especially to replace their predecessors "lost" through physical exhaustion or murder.

The rate of mortality varied year to year, seasonally and depending on outside developments — i.e., the approaching U.S. Army troops slugging their way ever nearer from the west, en route to the Elbe and occupied Austria. During the Nazi period, roughly every fourth or, at Mittelbau-Dora, every third inmate perished; under the Soviets, interment at Buchenwald resulted in roughly a quarter loss in human lives. It was the mere threat of being sent into this living hell short-term (Langensalza Jews such as Artur Gossmann and Jakob Salomon, then later Gert Schramm and reportedly Karl Walter) or "terminally" (e.g., Karl Müller), that kept most Thüringer in line under both the Nazis and the Soviets.

Still, even "survivors" left their sojourns there forever marked – some being "released" from Buchenwald only to land in other camps, elsewhere - even if "elsewhere" meant across time zones, as in the case of **Helmut Kaufmann**:



A native of Thüringen, 27-year-old Helmut was captured by the Allies in October 1944. Over 16 months, he was transferred between POW camps across the U.S. — from Boston to Idaho — as forced labor.

In February 1946, he was sent back to Europe, where he and hundreds of thousands of other German POWs were given the to French or British as forced labor. Upon his release one month later, he set off to Thüringen to visit relatives. On the way, he was detained by the Volkspolizei and turned over to Soviet authorities. Helmut spent the next 17 months in Soviet captivity, first at Buchenwald, then in camps in the Soviet Union. In October 1949, he was repatriated to the newly declared GDR through Frankfurt-Oder. On 22 November 1949, he finally found a lasting home in Pforzheim in West Germany.



Left: Helmut as a clowning soldier; above: after being released, circa 1950; on the next page, on the right: a handmade card made for another German prisoner of war while held in the west of the United States, circa 1945; below left, Helmut and his wife Lore on the terrace of their garden in suburban Pforzheim, circa 1980s. Lore presented all these materials to Dr. Luick-Thrams during an interview on that terrace in 1998 during one of seven tours across Germany with a film-audio team to record German-POW narrative stories. Helmut's and 49 others' were the genesis of the Haus der Spuren museum and related projects.





Helmut Kaufmann came away from his captivity relatively quickly and in good shape. That was not the case for all former Buchenwald inmates – as embodied in the protracted misery of the two oldest male **Noble family** members:

Born in Hesse as "Karl Adolf Spanknöbel", in 1922 the self-reinvented "Charles Noble" emigrated to the American Midwest in 1922, where he ran a successful photography business in Detroit. In 1938, the Noble family moved to Dresden from Michigan after Charles acquired a camera factory from the "non-Aryan" Benno Thorsch, who in turn bought Noble's Detroit company. Charles brought his wife, fifteen-year-old son John and youngest, Georg, with him. The camera factory had a good reputation worldwide at the time. With war's outbreak, punitive measures were imposed on the factory: The family came under house arrest as of late 1941, enabling the factory to still operate as a "war-essential industry" yet baring them all freedom of movement. Still, they survived the firebombing of Dresden.

When Soviet troops invaded in 1945, the Nobles initially felt safe and hoisted the American flag on their house. Just a few weeks later, however, Charles and John were arrested by Soviet authorities. The family was dispossessed; the mother and young Georg fled back to the USA, while father and eldest son were taken to Russian labor camps. John spent seven months in a prison in Dresden, where he had the gruesome task of documenting deaths and assisting with executions. They were later transferred to Buchenwald, to wretched "Special Camp No. 2". Charles was taken to Waldheim and released in 1952, while John was sentenced to 15 years of forced labor in Siberia in 1950. There, he worked under extremely harsh conditions – including at the infamous Workuta camp - until political changes finally made his release possible. In 1955, with help from U.S. President Eisenhower, he returned to the USA, where he kept his promise to inform the world about his experiences in the gulag system. The press conference held after his release attracted international attention, but East German propaganda agents tried to undermine his credibility.

John Noble later received special honors and worked as a political advisor to U.S. President Reagan. In the 1990s, he returned to Dresden to fight to regain the camera factory, but in the end, he lost everything. He met Katharina Förster and married her in Washington; seven years later, John Noble died in Dresden on 10 November 2007 after suffering a heart attack. His legacy, however, lived on: Katharina Förster-Noble founded the Förster publishing house and published books and made a film about the gulag system to keep alive the memory of the horrors of that era.





Charles (seated) and John Noble, circa 1955; The "Kamera-Werkstatten" in Dresden, which brought the Nobles to live in Nazi Germany before WWII erupted.



Karl Müller & Christa (Müller) Lüders

The tale of Karl Müller and his hapless daughter, Christa (Müller) Lüders, is one of endless travails – well, almost, as soon will be revealed. Still, the earlier parts of their shared story are worth examining closely, because it is its details which so uniquely embodied several strands of 20th-century German history lived by millions of others besides Karl and, perhaps even more so, Christa.

A crucial part of the larger post-war story was Thomas and Katrin Kühmstedt's visit to Christa on 15 October 2009, in her adopted hometown, Stade. The opportunity for the two to meet was arranged in large part by Holger Schneider, a local Langensalza historian who after 1989 worked in what had been a state-run propaganda press. In preparation for Thomas' and Katrin's visit to a past resident of the Haus at Kornmarkt 5-6, which the Kühmstedts were restoring, Herr Schneider conducted a telephone interview which revealed Christa's own story of experiencing war's evilness:

▶ Satz- und Mediengestaltung
▶ Opti-Copy
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Druckhaus »Thomas Müntzer«

Notizen/Mitschriften aus den Telefongesprächen mit der Frau
CHRISTA LÜDERS geborene MÜLLER ; einst Kornmarkt 5

Vater Karl Müller - geb. ~~XXXXXX~~ 15.August 1898 in LSZ -
wurde unmittelbar nach Einmarsch der Russen in Langensalza Juli 1945
von diesen nach BUCHENWALD verschleppt; die Familie bekam
keine Nachricht mehr von ihm!
Chr. Lüders erhielt erst 2006 61 Jahre später die konkrete
Todesnachricht zugesandt !

Eltern Müller wurden 1936 geschieden
Mutter & Tochter verzogen nach Erfurt, dann Berlin und später nach dem Sudetengau
1945 bei Einmarsch der Russen aus Sudetengau vertrieben
Flucht der beiden nach Berlin, aber wieder aus Berlin ausgewiesen und nach Langensalza gekommen.

In Zwischenzeit war aber VATER KARL MÜLLER bereits wieder verheiratet und weiterer Junge war geboren.
Mutter Müller wurde in Sperlingsgasse 1 oder 2 einquartiert und Christa MÜLLER kam zur Familie ihres Vaters ins Haus Kornmarkt 5 .
JULI 1945 =Abholung des Vaters durch Russen
kurze Zeit später warf die Stiefmutter Christa Müller aus der Wohnung, sie solle bei ihrer eigentlichen Mutter leben.
aber Mutter Müller in Sperlingsgasse war wieder mit einem Manne zusammen ...

CHRISTA LÜDERS begann später eine Lehre als PUTZMACHERIN bei Firma Anneliese THOM AS(vermutlich im Hause MOHREN APOTHEKE); Lüders lernte sehr schlecht und mit mäßigem Erfolg ihr Handwerk ;
wurde deshalb auch nach der LEHRE n i c h t in Beruf übe übernommen.

Im Jahre 1951 mit etwas Geld von der Oma über die grüne Grenze gelaufen und im HARZ nach Bad Harzburg übergelaufen.
Ihre Mutter war bereits in Langensalza wieder neu verheiratet

Ihr Mann HANS LÜDERS - Beamter - am 3. Oktober 2003 gestorben !

H Schneider

Telefon 03603 399-0 • Telefax 03603 399-103 • e-mail: info@dhtm.de • www.dhtm.de

Here, in English:

Notes/transcripts from the telephone conversations with Frau CHRISTA LÜDERS, née MÜLLER; formerly of Kornmarkt 5

Father Karl Müller - born 15 August 1898 in LSZ - was taken to BUCHENWALD immediately after the Russians entered Langensalza ["July 1945" is written in blue ink immediately after this word]; the family received no news from him! Chr. Lüders did not receive the definite notification of his death until 2006, 61 years later!

The Müller parents were divorced in 1936. Mother & daughter moved to Erfurt, then Berlin and later to the Sudetenland. In 1945, when the Russians entered, they were expelled from the Sudetenland. The two fled to Berlin, but were again expelled from Berlin and came to Langensalza.

In the meantime, however, FATHER KARL MÜLLER had already remarried and another boy had been born. Mother Müller was quartered at Sperlingsgasse 1 or 2, and Christa MÜLLER went to her father's family in the house at Kornmarkt 5.

JULY 1945 - Father taken away by the Russians.
Shortly thereafter, the stepmother threw Christa Müller out of the apartment; she was to live with her own mother. But Mother Müller in Sperlingsgasse was again together with a man ...

CHRISTA LÜDERS later began an apprenticeship as a HATMAKER at the Anneliese THOMAS company (presumably in the MOHREN APOTHEKE building); Lüders learned her trade very poorly and with only moderate success; for that reason, after the APPRENTICESHIP she was n o t retained in the profession.

In 1951, with some money from her grandmother, she crossed the Green Border and, in the HARZ, crossed over to Bad Harzburg. Her mother had already remarried in Langensalza.

Her husband HANS LÜDERS - civil servant - died on 3 October 2003!

For Christa (Müller) Lüders, it seems that years of travails may have ended on a good note – a long marriage to a solid, settled person, with both of them living to a ripe age, in a cosy little Northwest German city, far from the sad communist experiment in the occupied east. For other actors in this epic German national drama as embodied in the biographies – and as much as possible their own words – of twenty or so Langensalzaer, years of trials and tears did not end gently or satisfyingly. To the contrary, some ended in brutal tragedy with no visible redeeming aspects at all.

Perhaps, like the following family's:

Johannes & Kerstin Fischer

It was the end of a long day of showing TRACES-Spuren's History Mobile on Eisenach's market square – a late Friday afternoon on 17 September 2021. Tired and ready to call it quits, Dr. Michael Luick-Thrams' jaw dropped when a frail-looking but determined woman shuffled up to him and demanded "Are you in charge of this show?" Surprised, he stuttered "I guess so" – which began a long, lively conversation about the aged woman's childhood in her beloved Langensalza ("In my day" she noted crisply, "Bad" was not yet officially added to the spa town's name), especially her father's experiences there at the end of WWII. As she pulled out a large, battered, faded cardboard envelope, she teased "You're in for some surprises! Now" she smiled faintly but resolutely, "these are going to *your* house!"

The ancient envelope contained myriad scraps of faded, brittle paper – mostly receipts her innkeeper father had penned or typed to give to a new, Soviet-imposed mayor to reimburse for "stolen or broken items". Kerstin asked a few times "Might these old pieces of paper be of interest to your archives? Could you one day make use of them?"

She was correct – perhaps more than she expected, especially about the savings-account gifts: They spoke volumes, not only the one quoting the "*Führer*" but the one below, too, with its stern Germanic lecturing softened by childlike drawings and printed in playful *Sütterlin* font – ironically, banned by the Nazis in 1942 for being too "modern".

Stunned that she was willing to part with such personal, precious documents, Kerstin replied "I'll be 79 in less than a month. I have no children, nor living relatives: What shall become of these childhood mementos when I'm gone?" With that, she solemnly stared into the speechless traveling-museum director's teary eyes, placed them in his hands, then turned and disappeared into the thinning crowd as swiftly as she had emerged from it. Like that, she was gone – as was her father's last living link to a world where he once checked damage to drapes and counted flower pots, as all he had worked for his entire career lay around him, broken and never to return. His despair had lived on, in *her*...



Geschenk
für Kerstin Fischer
geb. am 2.10.1942
in: Langensalza

Volksbank Langensalza
e.G.m.b.H.
Sparkasse seit 1860

Gift
For: Kerstin Fischer
Born: 2 October 1942
In: Langensalza

Volksbank Langensalza
e.G.m.b.H.
Savings Bank since 1860

Sparbuch

Sparen in der Kindheit
wird dich lehren, klug
über die Güter und
Kräfte zu herrschen, die
deinem Leben bis
ins hohe Alter einen Rückhalt geben.

Savings Book

Saving as a child will teach you
to manage wisely the resources
and strengths that will support you
throughout your life, well into old age.





Froh hinein
in das
Leben,
suche und
finde das
Glück.
Doch halte es
fest durch
sparsamen
Sinn.

Sparbuch

Go joyfully through life;
seek and find happiness,
but hold on to it by spending wisely.

Savings Book

Der Weg ist geöffnet, es wartet das Leben,
schaff in der Jugend, spar weislich dein Gut,
denn in der Zukunft bringt es dir Segen,
bringt's dir ein sicheres, donnerndes Glück.

The path is open; life awaits.
Achieve great things in your youth;
save your wealth wisely, for in the
future it will bring you blessings and
secure, overwhelming happiness.



Werner Deubner

By the war's end, Werner landed in California, where - still a prisoner - he was put on a ship that then sailed through the Panama Canal. The released POWs did not know that they would not be coming home soon: In March 1946 Werner landed in Britain, where he would spend the next year and a half making lasting friends as a farm laborer.

In October 1947, after an absence of four and a half years, Werner returned as a free man to Langensalza. There, he found his family worn out by the years of war - and now they were living again under dictatorship. Initially a stranger to his own sons – who at first did not recognize him - he soon resumed the life of a busy optician and valued father.





Like the majority of German POWs held in the U.S., on the ship "home" Werner thought he'd finally be released from captivity in Germany – only to be "given" to the French or British governments as slave labor. His British odyssey took him through serial camps across England and, later, in Robert Burn's hometown of Mauchline, Scotland. When he finally did reach Langensalza, his Dieter (above, second from the right, in the second row from the back) was in Gymnasium.

The years spent as an involuntary soldier and as a "much-traveled" prisoner of war had changed him. Werner spent the rest of his life dealing with dissonances between a quiet provincial life and his experiences of the wider world. But, he was not alone in that friendless, officially "gagged" state: Of the 50 German former POWs who had been kept in the author's native Midwest during WWII, when Dr. Luick-Thrams interviewed them, almost all of those men who later lived in the "*DDR*" said they were not allowed to speak about their time in the "primal enemy" of America: They were "politically contaminated". What was it like for men such as sensitive, thoughtful Werner Deubner, to never speak openly about one of the biggest experiences of his life? How does one process what one may not name?



Menschen an unserer Seite

Vier Jahrzehnte zum Wohle der Menschen

Ein nichtalltäglicher Beruf ist der des Optikermeisters. Werner Deubner übt ihn seit vier Jahrzehnten aus. Sicherlich hat sich in dieser Zeit die Einstellung unserer Bürger zu einer „Sehhilfe" grundlegend gewandelt. Sie ist in unserer Zeit nicht etwa nur modisches Attribut — sehr große Sorgfalt verwendet man darauf, Augenfehler und Sehschwächen rechtzeitig zu erkennen, um durch eine Korrektur eine Besserung zu erwirken. Deshalb ist es auch nicht verwunderlich, daß der jüngste Kunde des Meisters erst acht Monate zählt. Sein Brillengestell wird ganz individuell angefertigt, damit es dem Näschen und den noch winzigen Ohren angeglichen werden kann.

Die Arbeit des Optikers setzt zu einem großen Teil handwerkliche Fertigkeiten voraus, dauert es doch oft bis zu zwei Stunden, ehe ein Brillenglas auf die gewünschte Form geschliffen wird. Immerhin sind etwa 75 modische Gestelle — rund, eckig, golden und silbern glänzend — im Handel, und diese wieder in durchschnittlich sechs Größen, ganz wie es der persönlichen Note des Brillenträgers entspricht. Und sicherlich hat es nicht nur etwas mit Eitelkeit zu tun, wenn unsere Damenwelt wählerischer ist.

In der Werkstatt von Optikermeister Deubner arbeiten vier Spezialisten. Bemerkenswert ist, daß hier jährlich nicht weniger als 4000 Brillen angefertigt werden. Nicht eingerechnet sind dabei die unzähligen Klein- und Kleinstreparaturen, mit denen der Kundschaft aus mancher Schwierigkeit geholfen wird. Damit ist die Optikerwerkstatt zugleich ein ganz beachtlicher Dienstleistungsbetrieb. Hinzu kommt, daß die Ladenfläche vor wenigen Jahren erweitert werden konnte und eine moderne Ausstattung die exakte Sehschärfenbestimmung gewährleistet, so daß vielen Kunden der Weg zum Augenarzt erspart bleibt, wobei allerdings die Zusammenarbeit mit der Augenabteilung der Poliklinik sehr eng ist.

Wer heute Optiker werden will, braucht den Zehnklassenabschluß, eine zweieinhalbjährige Lehre und eine Ausbildung an der Fachschule, die er nach zweijährigem Studium als staatlich geprüfter Augenoptikermeister verläßt.

Waltraud Laeschke

Optikermeister Werner Deubner, der kürzlich 40jähriges Meisterjubiläum feiern konnte. *Foto: Jadke*

Das Volk 5. Juli 1973



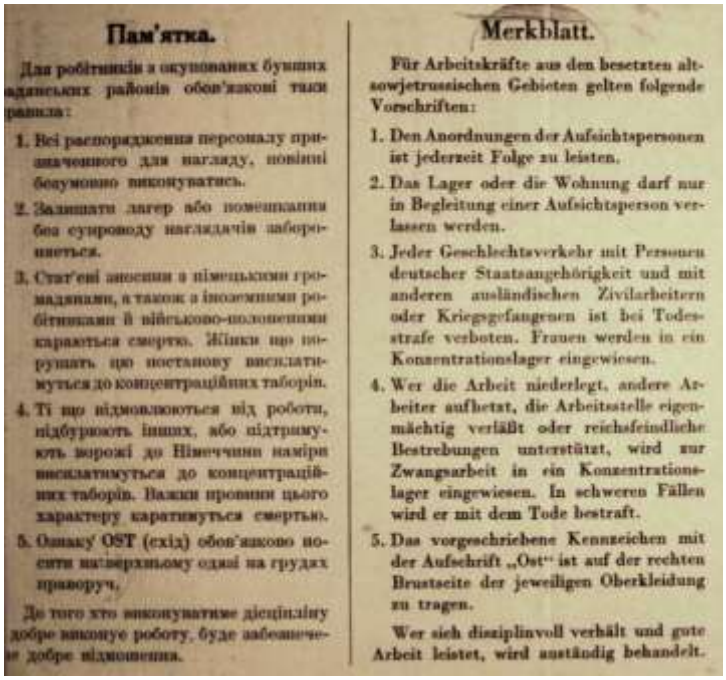
What was that national train wreck all about, for which so many Germans so willfully, so gleefully bought tickets in advance of a doomed journey?

Stazka, a Polish forced laborer

Stazka had been forcibly assigned to work for the family of Frau Harnisch, then a girl of around 10. Some 80 years later, the now-elderly woman told her teenage interviewers of her family's relationship with Stazka… and of their contact with her over decades later. As Enna Leinhos and Charlotte Lorenz recorded that interview, here adapted:

"[...] because the many men, the German men, were at war and [...] we all had agriculture, including my parents, they needed help and then the forced laborers came up. We first had a Polish woman. Her name was Stanislawa Pilzka and she came to us […], I can still remember the evening when we sat at the dinner table. She was there too and she couldn't speak a word of German. […] From the neighborhood near […], there was [a second] Polish woman who had been there for a while, who knew a bit of German and we brought her in […] and she was asked if she needed anything and she said, I can remember it clearly: Yes, she didn't have a comb. But she was only wearing a black dress and she had been a waitress in such a big hotel. When she came to us, she had her bedroom upstairs and we actually had a very good relationship with her as children. She could also speak German quite well. I also have a letter that I can show you that she later wrote to us when the war was over. In any case, she didn't have anything to wear, then they got her clothes and she actually felt very, very comfortable. Her [nick]name was Stazka, we called her Stazka. […] It was like that, more and more of these forced laborers came. There was still the train station back then, when the small train ran there. The innkeeper had provided a guest room for the Poles and Russians who were there and they met down there every Sunday afternoon. The Poles actually had a good life in Germany or here in Thamsbrück and this also led to love affairs. Our Stazka then met a [….] who was at […] back then - the farm was called [...]. Well, they were hanging out together and I can still remember it clearly, it must have been in the fall of 1943, my mother was amazed that Stazka hadn't gotten up early and then she went up and then she was lying in bed and she had a miscarriage. Then I [took care of Frau Harnisch's twin siblings] and my mother got the midwife here in Thamsbrück. She said: No, the doctor has to come. There's nothing she can do anymore […]. Don't know if that's the right term, scraped out, the uterus, and yes. That was '43 and at that time the Pole, Alexander, came to us. And he came to us at the suggestion or advice of his aunt, as I said, who was with […]. Alexander was also a young man and well, because Stazka already knew German, there was quite good communication there too. […] I can also remember one weekend that he didn't go to the train station in the *Ratskeller* to meet his friends, he just stood there like that. My father was on vacation, he was a soldier, and he said: 'And Alex, aren't you going?' And then he showed us that he was only wearing a pair of breeches, you know, and nothing. And then my father gave him a pair of boots. He was

definitely happy about that. Anyway, they were actually part of the family, our Poles here. Our Stazka loved eating raw dumplings so much that she always said to my mother on Sundays: 'Boss, dumplings again?' She had specially peeled and grated potatoes to make dumplings […]. Alex also had to go down to the French border for a quarter of a year, where they had to dig up earth because the front was getting closer and when he came back they had stolen his boots. Well, he then had to wear something else and our Stazka [...], she had blonde hair and kept it curly, she always washed and rinsed with vinegar so that it was even blonder, so she was really a chic woman and she then married […]. She was able to get married here in Germany, they were Catholic, and she was pregnant again".



Пам'ятка.

Для робітників з окупованих буших радянських районів обов'язкові такі правила:

1. Всі распорядження персоналу приставленого для нагляду, повинні безумовно виконуватись.
2. Залишати лагер або помешкання без супроводу наглядачів заборонюється.
3. Статеві зносини з німецькими громадянами, а також з іноземними робітниками й військово-полоненими караються смертю. Жінки що порушать цю постанову висилатимуться до концентраційних таборів.
4. Ті що відмовляються від роботи, підбурюють інших, або підтримують ворожі до Німеччини наміри висилатимуться до концентраційних таборів. Важки провини цього характеру каратимуться смертью.
5. Опаску OST (схід) обов'язково носити на верхньому одязі на грудях праворуч.

До того хто виконуватиме дисципліну добре виконує роботу, буде забезпечене добре відношення.

Merkblatt.

Für Arbeitskräfte aus den besetzten altsowjetrussischen Gebieten gelten folgende Vorschriften:

1. Den Anordnungen der Aufsichtspersonen ist jederzeit Folge zu leisten.
2. Das Lager oder die Wohnung darf nur in Begleitung einer Aufsichtsperson verlassen werden.
3. Jeder Geschlechtsverkehr mit Personen deutscher Staatsangehörigkeit und mit anderen ausländischen Zivilarbeitern oder Kriegsgefangenen ist bei Todesstrafe verboten. Frauen werden in ein Konzentrationslager eingewiesen.
4. Wer die Arbeit niederlegt, andere Arbeiter aufhetzt, die Arbeitsstelle eigenmächtig verläßt oder reichsfeindliche Bestrebungen unterstützt, wird zur Zwangsarbeit in ein Konzentrationslager eingewiesen. In schweren Fällen wird er mit dem Tode bestraft.
5. Das vorgeschriebene Kennzeichen mit der Aufschrift „Ost" ist auf der rechten Brustseite der jeweiligen Oberkleidung zu tragen.

Wer sich diszipliniert verhält und gute Arbeit leistet, wird anständig behandelt.

The Nazi regime printed the text to the left to distribute among forced laborers – in Ukrainian (left), Russian and other Eastern European languages, as well.

Information Sheet

The following regulations apply to workers from the occupied former Soviet Russian territories:

1. The instructions of the supervisors must be obeyed at all times.

2. The camp or dwelling may be left only when accompanied by a supervisor.

3. Any sexual intercourse with persons of German nationality, and with other foreign civilian workers or prisoners of war, is forbidden on pain of death. Women will be sent to a concentration camp.

4. Anyone who stops work, incites other workers, leaves the workplace without authorization, or supports activities hostile to the Reich will be sent to a concentration camp for forced labor. In serious cases, he will be punished by death.

5. The prescribed badge bearing the inscription "*Ost*" must be worn on the right side of the chest of the outer garment.

Those who behave in a disciplined manner and perform good work will be treated decently.

Humans are sexual beings by nature. What is not inborn is the intent to use sex as a tool to coerce or harm others. Physical attractions or sexual tensions, as well as subsequent acts, often resurfaced in documentation of German-forced laborer relationships. Frau Harnisch said: "Relatives in Nordhausen had so many clothes, they were happy if they could give our family something in exchange for food, which didn't fit them anymore, so we had to take them to the hospital. My aunt brought them in and the doctor said: 'Who is the Polish woman - she is such a pretty one and always really well dressed.' Excuse me!"

The source of the photo (right) captioned it so: "Female forced laborers from Eastern Europe in Osnabrück, who were rescued shortly before their planned murder, 7 April 1945". It's plausible that the woman on the pavement had been (publicly?) sexually attacked. Note the British soldier with an armed aid.



In the Third Reich, sexual violence was not practiced only against non-Germans. Ernst Winkler, from a prominent family of shop-keepers in Arnstadt, caught the eye of a high SS officer at Buchenwald concentration camp, who then took Ernst there and held him as a sexual slave for twelve days, before simply setting him out in the countryside and letting him find his own way back to Arnstadt - alone, wounded and weak, by night and in the rain.



It was the birth of that child that would tie Stazka's head and heart to Thamsbrück – and to the Harnisch family - for the rest of her life. The day the war ended in Thamsbrück, Stazka's life changed forever – as did her connection to her German "hosts" – as the elderly Frau Harnisch related to her two eager young interviewers in 2020:

"It was April 4th and that's when you noticed that the front was getting closer and closer and we locked ourselves in the basement, my grandparents and us children - I also had two [twin] brothers here. We also slept downstairs. And our Stazka and her husband were also with us in the basement. By then they had gotten a small room where the Rösners lived - upstairs, at the gate entrance, there were rooms and it was through Alexander, who was related to

[...] so they had a room there, but they didn't have a cellar so then they were in the cellar with us. And we were sitting in the basement one afternoon and Alexander came, he had been away. He had a friend called Clemens, who is also lying back there [today] in the cemetery. They were busy at the back of the house here, where the Poles now lived. There was a small house that belonged to […] and a family lived there, a father and mother and two children, a girl called […]. I know we also played with her and Clemens. The two of them were friends, Clemens and Alexander, and my mother said: 'That's really nice. Clemens is also such a nice guy, Alexander is good to deal with.' And the day came, we were sitting in the basement and my grandma said: 'Alexander', or Alex we said, 'you haven't eaten anything. Go up here in the kitchen. There's sausage and bread, get something there!' and then he took it and went back to Clemens and they were sitting in the little house. But there was another Pole who was busy, who probably lives here now. […] these, the men and the family were called 'the children'. In any case, the *SS*, the Poles and the Russians brought everyone together and locked them in the *Ratskellersaal* because they thought they were going to do something and why did they take them out now and shoot the four of them? The neighborhood only noticed it late when the shots rang out and they took you to the wall of a house […]. The *SS* also came to us and asked whether we had Poles here in the house and my mother said: 'Yes, our Polish woman, but she is very pregnant, I won't give her away, she will stay here, you can't take her with you.' And then they were a little bit upset. 'Yes, if something happens, it will be your fault.' or 'You will be held responsible.' My mother said: 'I'll put my hand in the fire for them.' They didn't know that the husband was also with us - we didn't tell that and Stazka was with us in the cellar".

On that fateful day, Stazka's husband, Alexander, along with his friend Clemens and two other Polish forced laborers were shot by the *SS* quartering in the village's *Ratskeller*. With her unborn child now fatherless, Stazka's ties to the Harnisches were now more important than ever – as the family's young daughter would explain, decades later:

"And on April 5th - a day later, exactly on my birthday, I turned eleven - the Americans shelled Thamsbrück because they noticed that the *SS* was still there, even though some of them had already disbanded, and accepted them in the church - then this sacristy was shot at. At [that point] the mayor and others raised the white flag and surrendered. Then the Americans came to us. I can still see that, they had their tank driving along there and there were [German] soldiers sitting on it who they captured and then we had the Americans here for a few months - before they were withdrawn and the Russians came here".

At that point of the interview, Enna asked to confirm "Good gracious. Yes, so the family had a pretty good relationship with their Stazka and Alexander?" In response, Frau Harnisch brought out a letter Stazka later wrote.

"Yes, wait for the letter. … Through this she also learned German. She wrote it in '47. […] There was another letter, but I don't know where it is, and it was she who wrote it there. The daughter was baptized here in Langensalza, in the Catholic church and there was my mother, and another woman [...] who also lived up there in this house [...] And she needed a birth certificate and baptism certificate, and that's where she wrote the first letter, but I don't know where I put it [then after some searching added] This is the second letter."

Frau Harnisch hesitated, then added:

"I don't know if you're still interested in that, [but] then the contact broke off. And many years later, there was another woman who was employed at the bakery [...] and she had also met someone, a Pole and they also got married and that must have been in the 1970s, when the old woman was still alive - his mother. I took the bus home from work and she said: 'Do you know who is here? That's [...] and you [...].' There was also a letter here about what was written by the couple they were there to visit. I said: 'That's nice - and what about Stazka, why didn't she write more? And then she said: 'Yes, her husband died in an accident on the railway, he worked on the railway, his legs were blown off and she couldn't write to us. That meant she didn't write to us anymore, but then she got cancer and then she said: 'When I'm healthy, then we'll go to Germany - I definitely have to go to Germany again.' But that didn't happen. I found out about this through this couple".

A dictatorial regime forced foreigners into the homes of farmers in isolated Thamsbrück, then the brutally ugly end of its long-planned war bonded some of the Poles' and Germans' hearts for the rest of their lives. About century ago now, in the lush but remote *Thüringer Becken*, divergent worlds briefly collided, then parted, yet those "chance" meetings changed all their lives – for better or for worse.





According to the left photo's source: "Soviet war veteran Anton Kaliuzhnyi and his wife Paraska from Znamjanka; his wife was abducted by the Nazis and only returned home in 1945." Right, the Thamsbrücker Ratskeller*, where the* SS *headquartered while in the village at the end of WWII: Assassins once stayed there.*

Victor Kircher

A machine gun can discharge its bullets not only rapidly, but with flesh-ripping force. When *SS* officer Wolf tried to murder Victor Kircher in the midst of a confrontation on an open street intersection, his split-second, rage-driven act would have indelible repercussions not only for decades, but generations. For at least over half a century, Victor's widow, then children would directly, repeatedly confront the loss and anguish of having lost their partner or father.

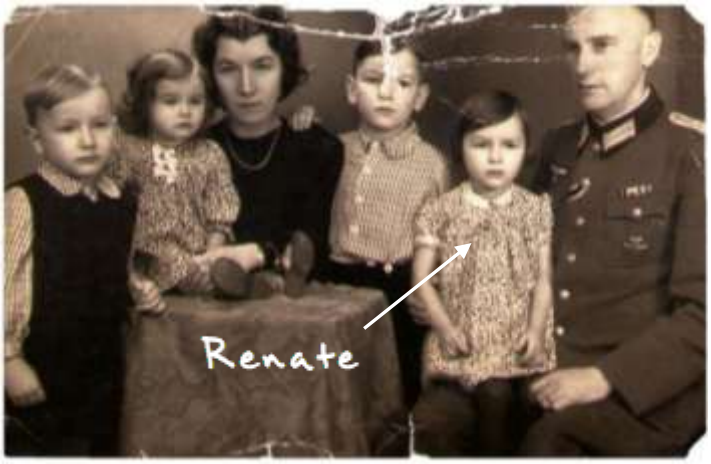
Already upon arriving almost a month after his agonizing death in Langensalza, Victor's devoted wife Gertrud had to find the strength and resolve to face an unending succession of emotionally-challenging discoveries: first of all, that her husband had not survived Hitler's war; worse, that he had succumbed at the hands of a fellow officer while trying to save human lives. But, those were only the beginning of taxing revelations to come. Among the next was that Victor's secretary, Fräulein Strobel, had helped herself to anything she thought valuable in her murdered boss' office above Sparkasse Bank, including a radio, bedding and porcelain meant to go to his faithful page, Konrad Lomp. It would be Konrad who later offered comfort in the face of Gertrud's loss, in the form of overdue letters, excerpted and compilated here from two from Victor's "*Bursche*", dated 10 March and 2 June 1946, and sent from "Alsfeld":

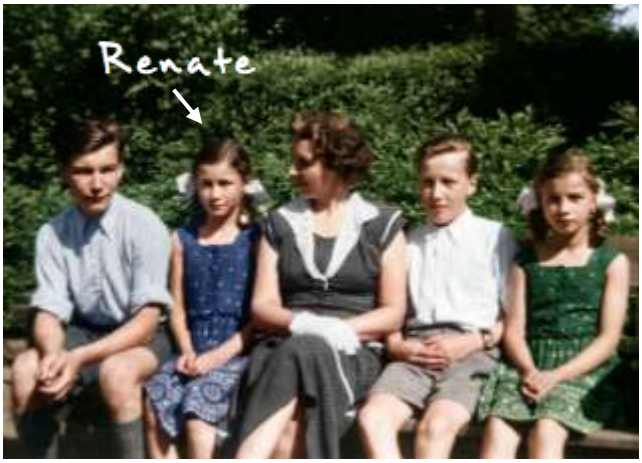
> The painful loss of your beloved husband has still not allowed me to find peace. Please accept, albeit belatedly, my heartfelt condolences. The loss of your beloved husband is and remains a heavy loss for me as well, since we were not separated as boss and subordinate, but were good friends. He told me this himself on 5 April '45, and referred to me as a good friend. I admit that I have never had such a good superior, and I've had quite a few before. I served your dear husband for nearly five years. Not only in business but also in our personal lives, we always complemented each other. You can believe me when I say that the name Kircher has become a part of my family. Hardly a day goes by when I don't speak of your dear husband. You can be proud that you were fortunate enough to live by his side. He was very popular among the soldiers in Langensalza. Many a person has said to me, "I'd like to have a boss like that, too," and that always made me happy. Those were unforgettable years for me as well. That's why I sometimes find myself thinking that such a good heart can't possibly be dead. […] I was kept informed of everything, and I was also the first to visit your dear husband—whom I still admire deeply—at the military hospital. When I wanted to visit him again on Sunday, he was unfortunately already dead, and by Monday he had already been buried. I had agreed with my landlady, Frau Blüchner, that we wanted to have him buried; but as I said, I arrived too late.



Other letters over the next decades would further vindicate Gertrud's drive for justice and honor: Considering that personal-initiative projects were discouraged in the GDR, Klaus Dieter Abeßer' letter of 9 July 1979 from his home in Magdeburg to Bad Langensalza's then-mayor inquiring about Victor's legacy was the more unique and noteworthy:

> Dear Mr. Mayor!
>
> In 1945, on Hitler's orders, every German town was declared a "fortress" and was to be defended by every means. To my knowledge, at that time there was a captain in your town, Victor Kircher, who was the "senior garrison officer" and responsible for its defense. He recognized the senselessness of such an order; blind compliance with it would have prolonged the war, destroyed Langensalza, and cost many people their lives. For "failure to comply with the Führer's order," Captain Kircher was shot by an *SS* officer. He gave his life so that your town might live.
>
> Have the more precise circumstances of this incident become known, and has Bad Langensalza preserved the captain's memory, for example in the form of a commemorative plaque, honorary citizenship, or a mention in the museum? I would be grateful for any information!
>
> Yours sincerely, *Klaus-Dieter Abeßer* [*whose father had been a close friend of Victor Kircher's*]





The Kirchers: left, circa 1944; right, 1953. In the GDR, Gertrud did not receive a survivor's pension because, as a rule, there were no pensions for war widows in East Germany. Because of their middle-class background, her children faced difficulties accessing higher education in the "Workers' and Peasants' State".

It would be the fall of the Berlin Wall, the subsequent dissolution of the "German Democratic Republic" and the opening of long-sealed chapters of mid-20th-century German history which would revive interest in Victor Kircher's legacy, let alone allow cloaked details of his tragic demise to emerge. Above all, it would be his oldest daughter Renate (later "Bähring") who would tenaciously insist in advancing her devastated mother's search for truth and justice. By 2005 a retired elementary-school teacher with time now to devote to painstaking archival research, to conduct interviews and to reflect, Renate wrote a 62-page record of her family's irreversible tragedy. Local-history publisher Harald Rockstuhl (a TRACES-Spuren patron) took interest in what she referred to as *das Büchlein* - "that little book". Ironically, he not only introduced the Kircher family's story to a wider audience exactly 60 years to the day of Victor's being shot, but in the building where he had an upstairs apartment during his sojourn in Langensalza.





Right: Renate Bähring (center) and, right of her, brother Robert on 5 April 2005, at Friederikenschlößchen palace for launch of The Battle for Langensalza and Ufhoven in 1945. *She is shown speaking with reporter Matthias Schenke (*Thüringer Allgemeine Bad Langensalza*), 2nd from left, and Harald Rockstuhl, right.*

Not one to act passively, shrug his shoulders and shuffle off with his hands in his pockets, Gerhard Wuttke also organized – and spoke about Victor Kircher's legacy at – the "*Volkstrauertag 1997*", the "People's Day of Mourning, 1997". That the event took place was something unheard of and likely unimaginable in the "*DDR*", where WWII-era officers – if not all soldiers – were seen as "criminals" in the "Workers' and Peasants' Paradise". As planned, it was:

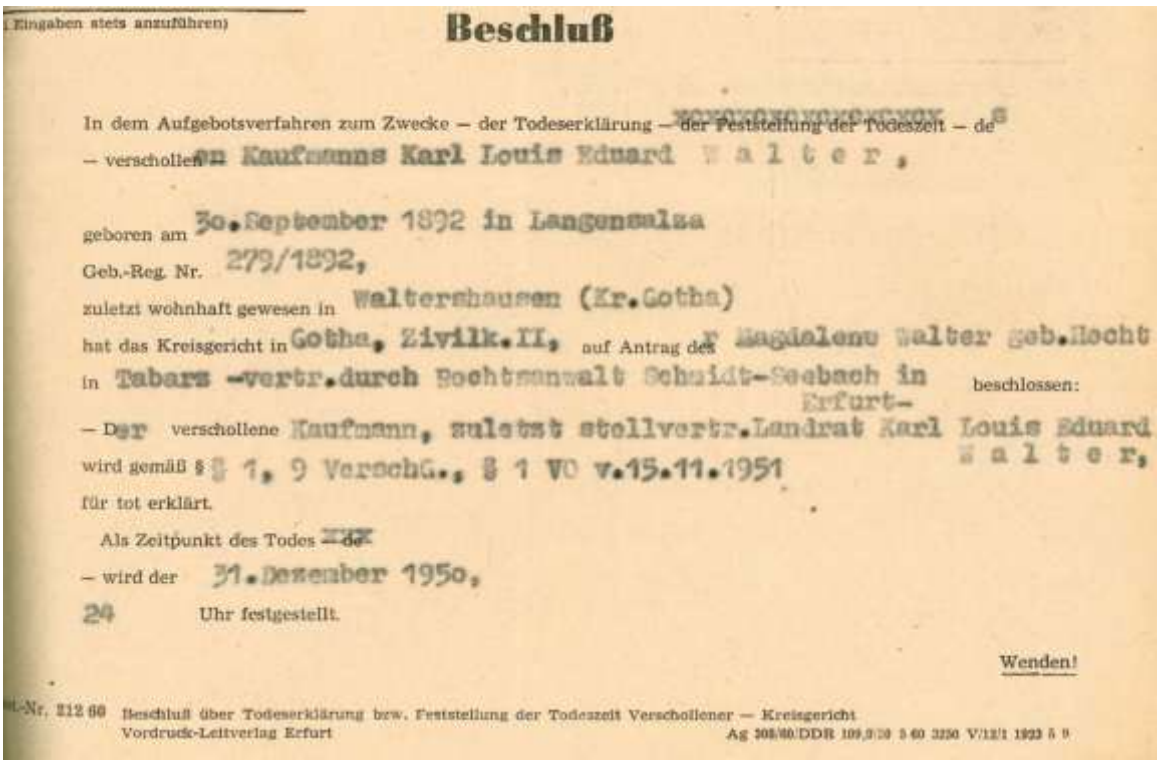
> …a day of remembrance for the victims of war and violence, providing an occasion to report on the events of the final days before the Americans entered Langensalza in April 1945.
>
> The question remains unanswered whether this senseless act could have been prevented. Perhaps no one wanted to intervene? Today, after 52 years, contemporary witnesses who could provide an explanatory answer are surely no longer to be found.
>
> This year provides the occasion, after 52 years, to inform the inhabitants of Bad Langensalza that a courageous officer, the senior garrison officer Captain of the Reserve Victor Kircher, risked his life to save our town from shelling and destruction. Let us remember Captain Victor Kircher as a responsible officer, a man who, despite the danger that threatened him because of his advocacy for the town's surrender without a fight, thought only of the common good and sacrificed his life.

Karl Walter

The man, the innate fighter, the loud-mouthed, head-strong, irritating-but-somehow-loveable friend of youth (like his beloved niece-godchild Ursula) and of the imprisoned – the otherwise "ordinary" man who inspired this entire, extraordinary epic work - went out not with a bang… not even as a whimper… but as if a mere puff of breath:

One wisp of a moment there, then gone forever.

His widow, Magdalene, might have had similar feelings when, in November 1951 - more than a half decade after that 15-Minute Soviet Show Trial in the standing-room-only makeshift "courtroom" in Langensalza's *Film-Bühne* - she appointed the law firm Scmidt-Seebach of Erfurt to plead in a Gotha court for a formal declaration of "missing". This, she was granted, with the arbitrary "time of death" assigned to 31 December 1950 - a time and date that most likely had zero relation to even a shred of reality. A bit absurdly, his titles and names were listed as: Merchant, most recently Deputy County Administrator Karl Louis Eduard W a l t e r , resident of Waltershausen, District of Gotha



(Eingaben stets anzuführen)

Beschluß

In dem Aufgebotsverfahren zum Zwecke – der Todeserklärung – der Feststellung der Todeszeit – de
– verschollenen Kaufmanns Karl Louis Eduard W a l t e r ,

geboren am 30. September 1892 in Langensalza
Geb.-Reg. Nr. 279/1892,
zuletzt wohnhaft gewesen in Waltershausen (Kr. Gotha)
hat das Kreisgericht in Gotha, Zivilk. II, auf Antrag der Magdalene Walter geb. Hecht
in Tabars -vertr. durch Rechtsanwalt Schmidt-Seebach in Erfurt- beschlossen:
– Der verschollene Kaufmann, zuletzt stellvertr. Landrat Karl Louis Eduard W a l t e r,
wird gemäß § § 1, 9 VerschG., § 1 VO v. 15. 11. 1951
für tot erklärt.
Als Zeitpunkt des Todes ~~der~~
– wird der 31. Dezember 1950,
24 Uhr festgestellt.

Wenden!

St.-Nr. 212 60 Beschluß über Todeserklärung bzw. Feststellung der Todeszeit Verschollener — Kreisgericht
Vordruck-Leitverlag Erfurt Ag 308/60/DDR 109,0/30 5 60 3250 V/12/1 1923 5 9

Can it be – looking at the lower-left corner of the above form, summarily given upon conclusion of such proceedings, that after the uncountable Nazi crimes were finally stopped by the Americans and Soviets, with help from their allies the British, French, Poles, etc. – that there were so many myriads of similar cases, across not only Thüringen but also the other Soviet-occupied regions, not to mention those in the West under western occupation, that the final decision was to simply mass-printed as an emotionless time-saver, ready to be handed to anyone brave enough to endure the process? If so, what does that say about the magnitude of the injustices – Nazi and Soviet, American… – that took place, 1933 to 1948? That summarily-issued declarations of "missing" or "dead" were handed out like so many napkins at a restaurant or scorecards at a bowling alley – what does it say about the vastness of death brought about by serial dictatorships and their "necessary" wars? Does that happen still today? If so, how do we stop it?

His earlier biographer, Gerhard Wuttke, wrote four decades later:



Karl Walter, born on 30 September 1892 in Langensalza, was the proprietor of the Thilo textile house on Rathausstraße. As a participant in the First World War, he found his way to the *Stahlhelm*, the League of Front-Line Soldiers. Loyal to the Kaiser and anti-parliamentary, this organization was no pillar of the Weimar Republic. After the conviction on 30 August 1945, every trace of Walter disappears into darkness. The date and place of his death are unknown. What remains after 50 years are many unanswered questions, to which Russian archives might perhaps provide an answer.

Today, however, like a puff of breath restored, his memory revives: TRACES-Spuren exhibits Karl's portrait and other artifacts related to his contemporaries in *Haus der Spuren* ["House of TRACES"] in Bad Langensalza, Thüringen. Tour the museum digitally or make an appointment to visit in-person (internships and class visits are welcome) at: https://hds.traces.org/ or call/WhatsApp +49 (Germany) 17634387065

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Acknowledgments and "Thank You's!"

When does "history" begin? What about "the history of a history" – when does *that* begin?

This current project – the fruits of which you're holding in your hands or staring at on a screen – is the product of a five-month process of distilling mountains of text and images into a document as concise as possible. The names and roles of those who directly made the distillation (and colorization and layout, translations and…) are easy to list here:

Heartfelt thanks goes to our most recent Workaway volunteers – but a few, out of some 75 over the past six years (see https://de.traces.org/mitarbeiter) - and university interns or graduate students; the combined group included:

Liam Way (England), Emelyne Cambou (France), Danny Kim (South Korea), Leyi Shen (China), Valeriia Taranenko and Pawlo Lebediev (both from Ukraine), Antonia von Hassell and Johannes Schillert (both from Germany)




Showing the History Mobile in Weimar, fall 2021; Dr. Michael Luick-Thrams working with Emelyne Cambou and Danny Kim at Haus der Spuren, June 2026.

It's unwieldy to name the scores of Uni-Erfurt students and Workawayers who literally built, then accompanied the History Mobile on a half-dozen tours around Thüringen, conducting interviews, scanning documents and… Without them, however, the "mountain" of narrative history woven through this tome would not be here now; it'd be gone. Instead, have a look at our record of the HM and its prototype, the "BUS-eum" in the US, at: https://traces.org/tour/

Past Universität-Erfurt students or Salzmannschule Schnepfenthal gymnasium pupils whose works were quoted or directly integrated into this repository of histories entrusted to the TRACES-Spuren project included:

Johanna Paschka, Lena Marmann and Sarah Hesse (who researched and wrote about Karl Müller); Antonia Dürr and Loreen Lohr (the plundering in Arnstadt); Emma-Lee Illert, Paulina Deutschmann and Tobias Betschel (Buchenwald); Pauline März (Buchenwald + the Nobles) – all from Uni-Erfurt; Enna Leinhos and Charlotte Lorenz (Polish laborers)

Of course, I could not have built the History Mobile nor launched its serial tours across Central Germany and, by now, much of Europe, without the initial appointment by and support of my "boss" at Uni-Erfurt, Christiane Kuller: Besides co-teaching courses which led to the creation of the History Mobile, she inspired me with "Citizen Science". Similarly, without Spuren's board of directors – Joerg Seiler and Martin Fischer – or members (including former teaching colleague Sabine Schmolinsky, who conferred "Haus der Spuren" to our headquarters)… nothing. In Bad Langensalza itself, a handful of collaborating partners and repeating volunteers deserve to be named: Stadtmuseum Bad Langensalza director Stefan Schuchardt, Stadtarchiv head Katherina Walter [no relation to Karl], Nick Böttner and later Julia Fuchs with DemokratieLeben, and other "LSZ" officials too many to name; the most consistent and generous of our volunteers include: Horst Jerina, Hans-Georg and Waltraud Raschke, Andreas Frank, Andreas Deiseroth, Karin and Wilfried Schramm [no relation], Marianne Fritsch, Petra Monkowius and Karin Gottschling, Herbert Schere (†), Christoph Böwing and… *you*? I acknowledge gratefully how Ralph Neber's "delivery" last April (2026) of Aloys Kock's portrait paved the way…

Individuals who directly contributed to telling this story by donating information or interviews were: the initiators of recording this saga, Ursula [née Walter] and son Jürgen Veller; Dieter Deubner; Hartmut Rosinger; Gert Schramm's half-brother (†) and his wife, the Lochers; Thomas and Katrin Kühmstedt; Harald Rockstuhl and the lady to whom he connected me, Renate [née Kircher] Bähring; Katharina Förster-Noble; and many more, no longer "here".

Demetre Chinchaladze's brilliant website, design, film-production and other skills are key to all we do: ***"Thanks!"***

See Demetre's and all of our tireless, voluminous work at: www.TRACES.org – which stands on giants' shoulders! So, finally, let us acknowledge their invaluable contributions to the preservation of such stories, soon after 1989:





Holger Schneider (born 25 January 25 1944; died 6 February 2010) directed the "Werner Eggerath" Pioneer House from 1977 to 1989. To make his work with the students more engaging and interesting, he collaborated with Werner Kliem, then director of the VEB "Thomas Müntzer" Printing Plant, to develop the idea of setting up a print shop equipped with historic machines and manual typesetting. The Pioneer Print Shop, inaugurated on 13 December 1978, taught students the traditional craft of printing. In 2008, this evolved into the city's Historical Printing House, located in the former coach house in the park of the Friederikenschlößchen. On 9 November 1990, Holger Schneider founded the Drei-Türme-Verlag publishing house, which operated until early 1995. Its catalog included books on regional history and reprints. He enjoyed a friendly collaboration with Harald Rockstuhl on numerous book projects. Manfred Lippert also supported him by providing source material for his book *Das Druckerei- und Verlagswesen in (Bad) Langensalza 1680–2010* (*Printing and Publishing in [Bad] Langensalza 1680–2010*), which was published by Rockstuhl in 2010. Holger reached a wide audience through his newspaper series: "*Langensalza früher und heute*" (*Langensalza Then and Now*), with 100 installments; "*Langensalza einst und jetzt*" (*Langensalza Once and Now*); and "*Fundstücke*" (*Findings*), with 280 articles. Using historical photos, documents, and insightful explanations, Holger vividly illustrated the changes in the town and everyday life in times past.

Gerhard Wuttke (born 24 December 1928; died 14 February 2020, in Bad Langensalza) was a dedicated local historian, author and chronicler. He devoted a large part of his life to researching, documenting, and preserving the regional history of Bad Langensalza and the surrounding area.
Gerhard Wuttke spent most of his life in Thuringia and remained deeply connected to the Bad Langensalza region. After the collapse of the GDR, this onetime leather-and-shoe factory worker "reinvented" himself: Gerhard made significant historical contributions to the study of Jewish life and persecution during the Nazi era in Langensalza. He published his findings and eyewitness accounts in the mid-1990s in regional newspapers such as the *Mitteldeutsche Allgemeine*, among others. To this day, his works serve as important historical sources (including for archives and school research projects).
In addition, Gerhard was an active advocate for historic preservation in the city. He was one of the driving forces and supporters of the Marktkirche St. Bonifacii Association, which, beginning in the 1990s, successfully campaigned for the restoration and preservation of the historic landmark in the heart of the city, which had been threatened by disrepair.
On his 90th birthday in December 2018, Gerhard Wuttke was honored as a prominent citizen of the region. He passed away in 2020 at the age of 91.

The printing of this material was made possible by a generous grant from DemokratieLeben, without which it could not have been given gratis to all upper schools in Unstrut-Hainich-Kreis.

Scan the QR to access List of **Image Sources**:
https://hds.traces.org/wtoh/

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Page 89 Telephone notes on Christa Lüders
Schneider, H. (2009). Notizen/Mitschriften aus den Telefongesprächen mit der Frau Christa Lüders geborene Müller [Typed notes]. Kühmstedt Family Collection.

Page 90 Conversation with Kerstin Fischer
Fischer, K. (2021, September 17). Conversation with M. Luick-Thrams, Eisenach [Personal communication].

Page 93 “Stazka had been forcibly assigned”
Leinhos & Lorenz (2020), appendix: interview with I. Harnisch.

Page 97 “the more unique and noteworthy”
Abeßer, K. D. (1979, July 9). Letter to the Mayor of Bad Langensalza. Renate later wrote: “We ‘Kircherkinder’ didn’t learn about Dieter Abeßer’s efforts until after German reunification. I then conducted research, including at the Lutheran church. Even there, the records simply stated: “Death by external causes.”

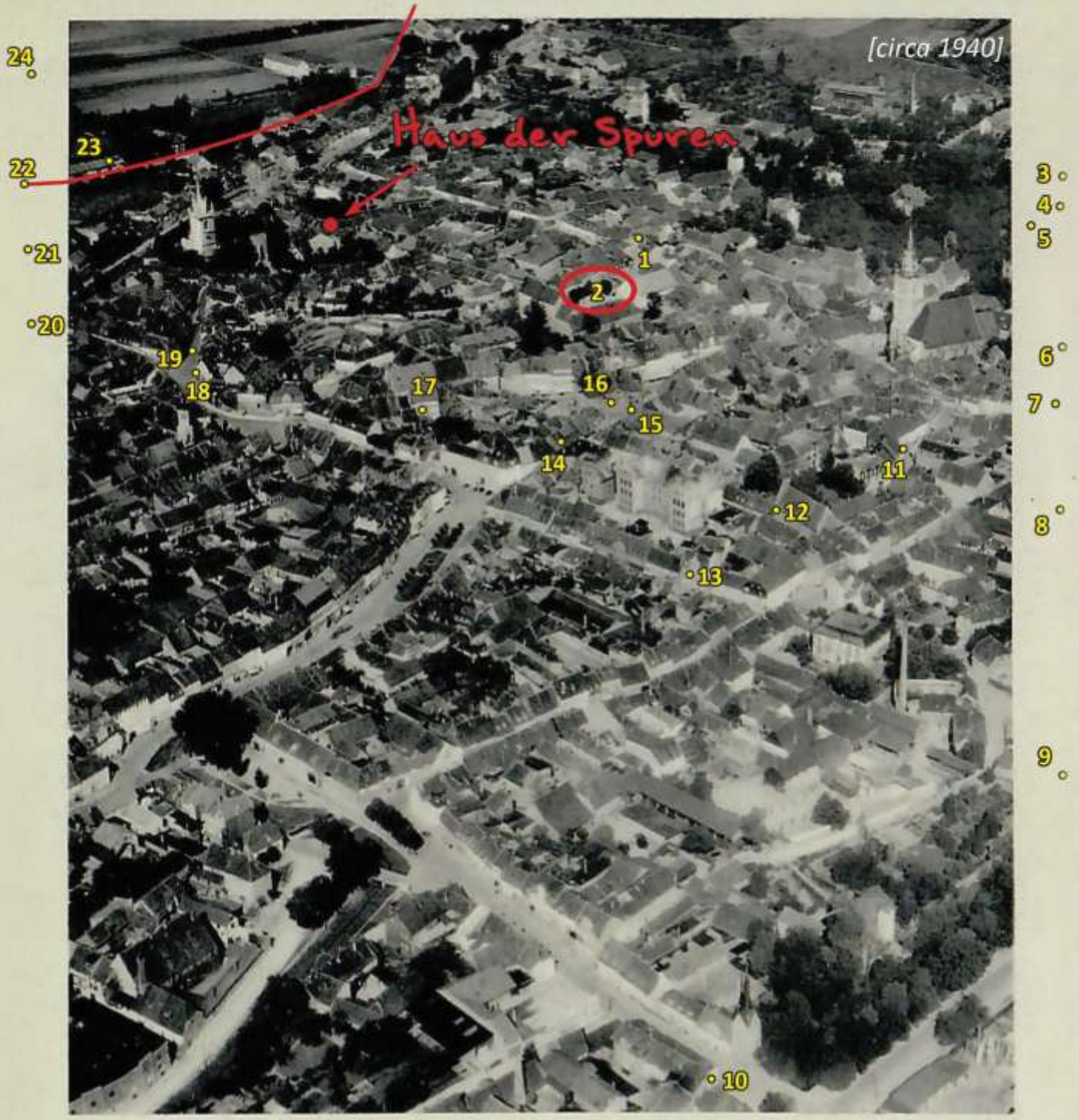
Page 98 “Not one to act passively”
Wuttke (1997).



This GDR-era monument directly across from Bad Langensalza’s train station has for decades reminded passersby: Remember the past “In honor of the dead, a duty for the living”



In April 1945, American soldiers not only had never seen anything like the hell they discovered in Thüringen’s concentration camps, but they struggled to know what to do with piles of dead, stacked like so many cords of wood.



Langensalza as Seen from an Airplane

1- Karl Walter's birthhouse
2-the *Volkssturm* assembled here
3-Gert Schramm arrested here
4-*Film-Bühne* "trial" held here
5-Victor's Kircher's "palatial" apartment
6-U.S. Army's local headquarters
7- Müller family's inn and home
8-where SS Wolf shot Victor Kircher
9- Lazarette where Victor Kircher died
10-Otto Fleischhauer's home
11-site of 1938 anti-Jewish exhibit
12-Jakob Salomon's earlier home/shop
13-Stern family's "*Kaiser-Bazar*" shop
14-Gossmann family's department store
15-*Modehaus Thilo* & Karl/Magda. Walter's home
16-city-hall jail where Gert Schramm was kept
17- Deubners' optical shop & home
18-Jadkes', then Jakob Salomon's home/shop
19-site of 18 March 1920 Kapp-Putsch shooting
20-what Johannes Fischer knew as "*Volkshaus*"
21- Johannes and Kerstin Fischers' home
22-route 1,177 prisoners "marched" on 1 April 1945
23-Langensalza garrison, with barracks
24- Jakob Salomon's grave in municipal cemetery

Notes



How did the events of the 20th century shape Germans' lives, thoughts, values and choices?

Taking the Walter family of Bad Langensalza in Thuringia as its starting point, this book traces the fates of about ten families whose life stories are interwoven with that of escaped WWI-veteran Karl Walter. Their stories paint a picture of a prosperous, close-knit community that was profoundly shaken by two world wars and two dictatorships within a single generation.

Five eras. Ten families. A century of German history

from **World War I** through the **Weimar Republic**, **National Socialism**, and the **Soviet occupation** to the **GDR**, up until the post-**reunification** era—personal accounts, rare photographs and original artifacts bring the past to life. Whenever possible, the families themselves have their say, in their own words.

Originally compiled for historical education in schools and universities, this unique record of regional contemporary history is now aimed at both experts and those with a special interest in history. It preserves for future generations personal memories and a legacy that is often little known.