

Excerpts from the Memoirs
of
Werner Mork

“Aus Meiner Sicht (From My View)”
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For me it was, "Adieu Africa!" But the parting was not painful, what was painful was what was to come next and it became very painful very quickly. My great good luck was that I was loaded into the very last aircraft to leave Derna. After us no plane got out, and no one else in the hospital could be evacuated. The Tommies quickly entered the city. All of the German and Italian soldiers in the city and in the hospital were taken prisoner. I was one of the very few soldiers who got to the airport and got into the air on one of the brave little JU-52's. We took off and headed to Crete without incident. Once again my very good luck held.

The flight in the brave little JU-52 went smoothly, something that was not necessarily the norm in these times. We crossed the Mediterranean to Crete. We landed there and sat for a very long time while it was decided if we should stay there or be sent on to Greece. Finally, we were sent on to Athens and from there by ground transport to Piraeus, the famous port. Because of the lack of beds in the wards, we new arrivals in the army hospital were placed in the ward for sexually transmitted diseases, or what in army jargon we referred to as "Ritterburg." It wasn't very nice there but it much better than what we would have experienced in Derna. The main thing for us was that we managed to get out of Africa; we didn't give a damn about anything else.

The events in Africa were also having their effects here in Greece, the clinic was overflowing. Competent and professional care of the sick and wounded was no longer feasible. No wonder, this was a rear echelon facility that was only used to treating 'normal' cases such as in the "Ritterburg" where we were situated. We could only wait and see what was going to happen to us. Rumors were rampant that we were going to be sent back to Germany. These were only rumors and for the merely 'sick' there was only the slightest chance of transport back to the Reich. The wounded, without question, had the first place in line and after them only the most critically ill. So we were at the mercy of only what was possible with the local medical knowledge and care.

I was examined by a young staff physician, who was apparently on active military duty. He was not particularly interested in my jaundice, it was too ordinary a case for him to waste his time with. He was much more interested in my right arm. It was covered with countless sandflea bites and the inflammation so advanced that it was quite deformed, thick with swelling and ulcerated. It was extremely painful and I could hardly move it.

The staff doctor studied it with great intensity then gave instructions for its care. He followed that by saying that if it did not get better in a few days, and he doubted that it would, then my right arm would have to be amputated. It would have to be a total amputation, right up to my shoulder. He gave me the impression that amputation would be the only option and that he was more or less looking forward to doing the surgery himself. It was in keeping with the motto, "Learn by doing." Apparently in his previous practice he did not have anywhere near the opportunities for 'learning' as he did as a doctor in the army.

Hearing that was a great shock, but I also felt a certain calmness rather than horror. When I looked at my arm, I too, thought that the knife was the answer to the problem. To lose an arm would not be good, but in the balance it would be a fair trade for not becoming a "Dead Hero." The possible loss of an arm seemed better to me than a hero's death on any of the many fronts developing in this war. The earlier euphoria of conquest was fading. In the short time I was with the Afrika Korps I got to experience and live the true horror of war. I also had the uncomfortable feeling that victory for Greater Germany was not so sure any longer, and the possibility that the war could come to a good ending was becoming more and more doubtful. I could not see victory for us on any of the many fronts we were fighting on. Such doubts were taking hold of me and my enthusiasm and confidence in victory was

dampened. Now I saw an amputation as my chance to spend the rest of the war not as “kv,” [Kriegsverwendungsfähig: Combat Capable] but as a soldier in a garrison back home.

Obviously this was not a very good attitude. It was not very patriotic, but I was not alone, I was not the only one in the godawful world of war to think like this, even if I was still not yet totally against the war and nationalism. In spite of all of these bad thoughts there was still the idea that the loss of my entire right arm would leave me forever a cripple. How could I continue my profession [radio sales and installation] with only one arm and hand? That thought was very disturbing and I fell into a depression. The loss of an arm was not a trifle and the loss of a right arm even worse, but I could think of no way to prevent it. I railed at my fate which no longer seemed to mean well for me.

There was a doctor in the clinic who was subordinate to the staff doctor, the young active-duty one who gave me the pessimistic prognosis. This doctor was not on 'active' status, he was in the reserve and was a few years older. He was not so sure that I would have to go under the knife in the next few days, the amputation of my arm was not a certainty in his view. This doctor gave me a glimmer of hope that I might be included on the hospital train that would be leaving soon for home, in spite of the opposing opinions.

It worked! The good doctor smuggled me onto the departing train and I was able to move out.

On November 23, 1942 I noted in my diary: “Wednesday by train toward home. Out of 10 men 3 were allow to travel, and I was in that group. Can I do it by Christmas?” By that I meant get well.

The only reason that I could still write notes is that the fingers of my right hand still functioned, although painfully.

November 24, 1942: The train departed today; we left Piraeus around 20:30 hours.

We were traveling in the direction of Salonika and everyone hoped that we wouldn't be unloaded from the train before getting back to Germany.

I was laying in a very nice bed and was being wonderfully taken care of. The head doctor in the hospital train was an older man. When he came to visit me on his first rounds I told him the history of my arm infection and the probable impending amputation. I will never forget his response, “What idiot told you that? It is total nonsense. We are a long way from exhausting our treatment options.” He gave orders that the nurses should take special care of me. My arm was placed in a frame at right angles to my body. The nurses came to me every few hours day and night and swabbed my arm with alcohol and gave me shots of some sort. The injections were not antibiotics, those were hardly seen on our side. Penicillin was unheard of, only the English and the Amis [Americans] had that.

What happened next was a miracle, my arm stayed there, where it belonged and was not hacked off. Thanks to the good care I received I arrived back in Germany with my arm. We descended in [Halberstadt](#) and were taken to the “Prinz Eugen” reserve hospital.

But back to the ride on the hospital train, as there is more to tell about this journey.

My calendar notebook was coming to an end as the end of the year 1942 got closer. Unfortunately, I did not have a calendar notebook for the following year and these notes stopped then. However, in my little book I wrote, “We are traveling through Greece with its full autumn splendor into Serbia.” My

bed was next to a window and I had the best possible view throughout the whole trip.

Sunday November 29, 1942: “Reached Belgrade; Christmas gifts already handed out. Greetings from Belgrade armed forces radio and even from the [Banat Germans!](#)” [Banat: German minority in Roumania]

November 30, 1942: “We crossed the German border. The word on the train is that we are headed for central Germany.”

The trip was not without its problems. There were a few rough spots on the trip as we went through occupied territory. These little problems were prepared for us by the partisans who wanted to make life difficult for the occupying troops. It began at the pass at Thermopylae, Greece. Just as our train came to the bridge it blew up and was impassable, yet again, for a while. The partisans had set a demolition charge. Then we had problems in Serbia where the local partisans seemed to have something against the rail lines where the Wehrmacht needed to run its trains, without any regards as to the contents of the carriages. A hospital train could be derailed just like any other train. It was very unsettling when the train had to halt for a long time while waiting for help, and hoping it would arrive before something even worse would befall it. Our train had to wait for long periods on sidings while stretches of track were repaired.



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-L01399
Foto: Rutkowski, Heinz | Januar 1940

German Hospital Train from 1940

These were very uneasy situations because no one knew what would happen and if we would be able to continue on our way or not. But we were lucky and came through everything unscathed with only a few delays “Home to the Reich!” At many train stations we were heartily greeted, particularly in areas where there were German populations. And in Austria, now called 'Ostmark,' there were always little gifts handed out to us by young girls of the BDM [[Bund Deutscher Mädel = League of German Girls](#)] and women of the NS-Frauenschaft [[National Socialist Women's League](#)], especially in the Vienna rail station where we had a long layover. The Austrians were no less proud of the German soldiers than the Reich Germans were.

I also have to mention the feeling that overcame me when on the train one of the nurses set up a gramophone and put on a record of the [Toselli Serenade](#). This music was something wonderful for me and I broke down and cried. It awoke in me memories of my youth when I would, and still could, listen to a great deal of music. Music that I enjoyed in bars and Sunday Cafe Concerts together with my girlfriend, Ilse. In listening to this music I felt myself to be rescued from a time that was full of only misery and horror, my time in Africa. Although it was only a short time for me, I wasn't an “old Africa Fighter,” but what I experienced and what I survived was a very painful acquaintanceship with the real war. The time of my almost playful association with the war was over, I had gotten to know it, war in all its repulsiveness. I felt its terror in my own body. Many times in those few weeks I was nearly wounded or killed. For me war was now nothing but horror, fear and terror. I had learned to hate the war. I could no longer see the necessity for any war. My first pacifist thoughts became apparent to me. Having seen death and misery close up unhinged my previous convictions that had become part of me during the early years of the Third Reich. In the weeks to come my new convictions would grow and become well formed. But for now the misery and terror lay behind me, I was in the Heimat [Homeland] and could once again allow myself to think happier thoughts. Some of the troops got out in Goslar and went to the Hotel Achtermann which had been turned in to a reserve hospital. Others of us went to Halberstadt to the “Prinz Eugen” Reserve Hospital. It used to be a first-class hotel in peace time.

HALBERSTADT

I was now a guest in the Ex-Hotel Prinz Eugen, even though as an injured little soldier of the German Wehrmacht. Here I was hoping to get well and keep both of my arms. The initial dumb thoughts I had about the possible amputation were gone now for good. I wanted to keep the arm even if it meant being declared fit for front line duty again. The healing would take some time and then we would see where things stood. The war would come to an end sooner or later even if it did not end with a German victory. There would certainly be a cease fire to follow that we could live with. It was sure that the cease fire would not be like the one made in Versailles in 1919. Everyone would have learned by now that a treaty that consisted of brutal subjugation would only be the harbinger of future conflict. This was my hope, but it was not in accord with the views of the Allies. However, that was not necessarily the last word. A treaty would have to be hashed out by all of the involved parties and Germany must have a say in it, or so I thought!

What was it I wrote just a short time ago? [“It's so great to be a soldier.”](#) It often was, if not 'great,' at least not terrible to be a soldier in the peaceful times away from the front lines in spite of the war. Although there were some unpleasant conditions to endure and happenings to get past, on the whole it

wasn't so bad. However, now these 'good times' were over, and over for good. They were never coming back and now I could only say, "It is *no* longer good to be a soldier." In truth, it wasn't all that good before, either. To say it was, was just stupid chatter, typical soldier talk, trying to make something good that wasn't good. It was no longer good to be a soldier!

But now I was in for a better time, back home in the homeland! My notebook says, "December 3, 1942, 16:00 hours, left the hospital train for quarters in the Reserve Hospital. Reception impeccable, we were handled with care and great respect because we were coming out of Africa." We were the first Afrika Korps to come to this hospital.

December 4, 1942: Telegram (we could still send them during the war) to home telling them of my arrival in Halberstadt.

December 5, 1942: Telegram from Ilse telling me that she will be in Halberstadt tomorrow at 14:00 hours.

Sunday December 6, 1942: Ilse arrives, my feelings are a mixture of happiness and shame. In my notebook I remark that my feelings of shame are due to my not very good behavior in the past. I am not being very honest with myself. How long will this shame and regret stay with me? I already know that these feelings will not last long. I remain a lover boy.

December 7, 1942: Ilse leaves at 17:00 hours, but Christmas will be here soon!

Now come the last few entries in my calendar notebook: "My arm is getting much better, blood count is good. The problem is the jaundice."

The days pass with reading and letter writing. The quiet is really nice, but after a while it is getting boring. Hopefully, soon I will be able to get up and about and see a little of Halberstadt. Existence is very agreeable, the care is good, the treatment is exceptional and the hospital library is excellent. We got an early Christmas dinner along with a bottle of Mosel wine, in spite of my jaundice, a welcome surprise. My health improved slowly but surely. My request for a recuperation leave has been made, it might work out. The Christmas season holiday feelings are not quite there yet, but that is often the case right up until Christmas Day itself. But for now I am filled with anticipation because on New Year's both my mother and Ilse will be coming.

This ended my notes in my little notebook. Unfortunately, there were no more notebooks to follow. It is good, though, that I was able to hold on to this one. I have Ilse to thank for that, who held on to it in spite of all that happened later. Thanks also to Elke who returned the notebook to me later. It was an invaluable reference for my descriptions of my experiences in Africa.

Although my notes have come to an end, my time in Halberstadt is not yet ended. Besides these written notes there is still much to report, and I will do that right now.

The time in the hospital in Halberstadt was very influential and left me very much changed. Some very serious things happened that made a decisive impression on me and changed the direction of my life. One result was that I radically altered my thoughts and opinions as a soldier, but also as a German citizen in respect to National Socialism. Halberstadt was the beginning of a path, a path that led from my earlier simple beliefs to a more developed and critical view of politics.

On this path I had in the hospital a wonderful guide who not only led, but who also informed and explained. This was my comrade, Claus Brauer!

First, though, some information about our life in Halberstadt and in the hospital. In our hospital room there were three of us. One was a Fallschirmjäger [paratrooper], then me, a Private First Class who had once been in the Signal Corps, and another Private First Class who was still in the Signal Corps. He was also my friend in Baumholder and managed to stay in the Signal Corps [Werner Mork was transferred out of the Signal Corps to drive supply trucks in Africa] until he was assigned to work with General Rommel's staff. It was an incredible coincidence that we should land in the same hospital room at the same time and both with Hepatitis B. My buddy, Claus Brauer, was plucked out of his unit and sent to Africa because he was totally fluent in English, having been raised in Great Britain. Because of this ability, he was assigned to Rommel's staff as a translator, and our ways separated. Here in Halberstadt, incredibly, our paths crossed once again. He had arrived on the same hospital train. Sometimes things happen that are nearly unbelievable even when they happen to you. Without running into each other along the way we suddenly found ourselves together in the same hospital room. It is truly hard to believe, but it did happen.

We couldn't understand how out of millions of soldiers, and so many hardships and problems, separation from our units, the confusion of Africa, multiple ways back home and all the hospitals, that we should find ourselves in the same room in the Prinz Eugen in Halberstadt. It wasn't an accident, we thought, but fate. For me, it truly was fate. I have a great deal to thank my friend Claus for, and it is a shame that we were not able to keep up contact with each other after the war. On two occasions he came through Lesum. He was with the C.A.R.E organization and had business in Bremerhaven. He stopped by to see me. He still had my address that I wrote down for him when we had to part in Halberstadt. My circumstances at the time were not good and the visit did not go well. I will talk more about this later. We tried again but it did not work either.

As ex-Afrika Korps we enjoyed a special status, not only in the hospital, but also outside the facility. We took care to continue to wear our tropical uniforms in spite of the Winter cold. We were still crazy enough to strut about in these uniforms to attract attention. It often paid for itself when we went to a cafe or restaurant where the 'old men' met and would spend some coin on these Afrikaners.



Uniforms of the Afrika Korps

Particularly nice was that it increased our chances with the young ladies and also with the ladies of a more ripe age. In these uniforms we were always the center of attention, and we wanted it to stay that way. We did everything we could to keep these uniforms even though it was technically against regulations. We kept them and continued to be a point of interest to those around us. This was a typical schizophrenia of young soldiers. On the one hand we were fed up with the army, but on the other hand we wanted to keep the uniforms so as to appear as very special soldiers!

But in spite of everything, we still thought of ourselves as soldiers who served their country even

if the war didn't enthuse us anymore. We intended to remain brave and true because we could never betray our Fatherland and leave it in the lurch. We saw ourselves as good upstanding soldiers and we were viewed as such by everyone in the homeland. We did not feel ourselves to be possible murderers or Hitler-Fascist beasts, and none of us, not even the Waffen SS would have been looked at with disdain by the people. Certainly not the highly decorated heroes, who in all truth were singled out because of their killing of the enemy. There was no question of disdain; killing the enemy was not murder! It was necessary in order to protect the Fatherland, to defend it and to bring it to victory. Wasn't this a form of schizophrenia? However, no one thought of it at the time because this way of thinking was ages old and was part of the very being of all humanity.

On the other hand the enemy bomber crews were looked upon as murderers because of their terror attacks on the defenseless people in the cities of the Reich. The propaganda machine took care to characterize such attacks as cowardly and underhanded. That was not schizophrenia, that was good and healthy public opinion.

So it was then. And how is it now with good and healthy public opinion? What has changed? I, the heretic, believe that nothing has changed besides the contemporary details. Even the good opinion of the German soldier has not changed very much. The deserter and the conscientious objector are now, like then, not particularly revered individuals. Civil service instead of military service enjoys only a very limited acceptance.

At the end of 1942 the people still had a very positive attitude toward the war. This basic attitude remained in spite to of the length of the conflict, the poor reports coming out of Russia and Africa, and in spite of the enormous losses on all fronts, in spite of the ever more intense air raids on German cities that killed so many people. After more than three years, more bad news daily, more death notifications and ever more wounded and cripples seen in the streets. All of that still did not change the common opinion that Germany would win the war, that we *had* to win the war in order to avoid total destruction of the German people.

Slight reservations were, however, often to be heard just a few weeks later as the horror of Stalingrad became known. And yet, the people were still ready to make the required sacrifice in order to have victory. The German people were still ready to sacrifice even after the next loved one died. They were proud of their soldiers even when now there were very few victories and more 'backwards' movements were executed than 'forward' movements. The soldiers fought a self-sacrificial battle for the German people and for the future existence of the Fatherland. Especially now when the news out of Russia was so bad. There was a struggle against the evil Bolshevism, an imperative necessity, in order to protect the Reich. Too bad that the reports from Africa were no longer as they were in Rommel's hey-day, but the people trusted that the wonderful soldiers, their commanders and General Feldmarshal Rommel along with the other military leaders in Africa would push the Americans back into the sea once they had laid the foundations for a counterattack. Above all, the fairy tale about the 'chivalrous war' in Africa was not spoken of very much any more, because the Americans had no concept of "Fair play" like the British did, or so thought the Germans.

In the weekly movie newsreels the reporters always made a striking impression when they showed the German soldiers frying eggs on the hot metal of the Panzer tanks. Such pictures made more of an impression than the sad fact that this front had generated a huge number of dead and wounded, in spite of the genius of the Desert Fox, Rommel. This opinion from the former officers has endured even to this day. What has changed? Nothing!

The war, the crucible of the nation, was not exhausted, the drama that led to the fall of Germany stood right at our door, but no one would acknowledge it. Still, the majority of the population in all classes and circles trusted the greatest commander of all times, the Leader, the Reich's Chancellor and highest Commander in Chief of the Wehrmacht, Adolf Hitler.

The situation in Russia was, perhaps, looked at differently. It was yet incomprehensible that the Asiatic hordes, these incompetent Bolsheviks, were in the position to mount an offensive against the Germans, and even to do so with success. That gave one second thoughts, but they were banished by the conviction that the Germans were better soldiers, and that above all the German Führer, Adolf Hitler, was superior to Stalin in every way, not the least in the role of Field Commander. Anyone who thought or spoke differently was a defeatist, a bellyacher and did not belong in the sacred community of the German people. He could, and should, pay for such treachery with his life.

The people thought this only right in a time when soldiers were giving up their lives for Führer, Folk and Fatherland. A defeatist had no place in German society and belonged in a concentration camp. The people had no sympathy for traitors, possible antagonists or even 'only' conscientious objectors. In the German struggle with fate, such creatures met with the full weight of the law even to a death sentence. Therefore, one held one's tongue when they had another opinion. At least one held back with other folks and soldiers and one was very careful just like Claus Brauer and I. Above all we were careful in the presence of our hospital room companion, the Bavarian Fallschirmjäger, Max Grassl, who was a confirmed National Socialist, who had already proved himself in the Hitler Youth, and eventually volunteered for the Fallschirmjäger. Truly he was an elite soldier.

Even an elite trooper can get sick and so it was with our paratrooper. He saw his illness as a cop-out and wanted to get back to his outfit, the [Ramcke Brigade](#) as soon as possible and get back to Africa.

Of course there were many discussions among we three soldiers in our hospital room. Naturally, they covered the military situation, especially the situation in Russia, which by December of 1942 was going very badly. Above all, for us, Africa was an important topic and we expressed ourselves quite openly on the various vital topics. We noticed, that is to say Claus and I noticed, that Max would either fall silent or suddenly become very active and swear at us because of our opinions which he thought were unworthy of German soldiers. We tried to convince him that it was understandable that one had to express an opinion even on events that were not going well. It had nothing to do with defeatism, but rather with a wise observation of what was happening today and also what might be considered as critical information in a military report. People had to talk about these things. However, we realized that we could not talk to Max and refrained from using a critical tone in his presence. As soon as we were well enough to stand up and leave the room, we conversed only with each other, and always outside of our room.

I was still of the opinion that it wouldn't come to a 'bad end' for the Reich, simply because such a thing must not happen. What would happen or could happen I did not know. I could not see the way out. Now more than ever I felt that the death, misery, terror, fear and doubt must end soon because the German people could not bear it for much longer. The thought grew stronger in me that we must come to a negotiated peace. This must, I thought, also be in the Führer's mind because his compassion for his people would also take him down this path and our opponents in the West would follow us there. For me the enemy in the East was the evil enemy, and we must unite with the West to present a united front against this threat from the East in the interest of all Europe. I maintained the conviction that Germany must remain the central power in Europe in order to counter that threat and that we needed to retain the

German lands and people, also in Poland, that had been annexed prior to the war.

Germany in its present form, the Greater German Reich, must under any circumstances be retained.

These were the opinions I held before the magnitude of the disaster at Stalingrad became known to us. I was also looking at things from a point of view that no longer was valid, but I did not see that at the time. I had to absorb other thoughts and opinions first in order to form a basis for a change in my consciousness. I would not have to wait long.

In the hospital we listened with great misgivings to the reports from the front lines in 'our' Africa. We listened with rage in our gut about the French troops in the French zone who renounced the Vichy government and joined the battle on the side of the Americans. We heard that Rommel's commanders and others such as Kesselring, who was a Luftwaffe general and not a Panzer specialist, were facing not only the English General Montgomery, but also an American General named Eisenhower. Immediately after the American landings in Tunisia Hitler sent German troops along with some Italian contingents to meet them, but the Americans were advancing in strength and in our view the situation there was screwed up. Hitler dropped his 'darling' Rommel in favor of an air force general, [Kesselring](#), who would quickly become Field Marshal was the newest 'great man' in that part of Africa where Axis troops could still maneuver. This 'great man' would later be the commander of the Italian front. He was one of the most absolute devotees of "GRÖFAZ," the "Greatest Commander of All Time." [GRÖFAZ stands for "größten Feldherrn aller Zeiten" that is to say, Hitler.]

Germany had sent its soldiers all over Europe, and one might say that it dissipated its forces. The result was that there were manpower shortages on all fronts, not only that, there were also shortages in materiel, weapons and ammunition. Under normal circumstances this would have led one to question how a war could be expected to continue under such conditions. This forced one back to the idea that a negotiated peace was necessary. Nothing of the sort happened. The opposite was the case. Efforts would be increased and a hundred thousand German soldiers would be disposed of on the orders of the the greatest commander, the venerable Führer Adolf Hitler. With that something began to rip apart in me and collapsed.

Claus Brauer was not only my friend he was the one I could talk to about whatever was bothering me. Our talks gave me a great deal, above all the changed my very small world view and brought me to a more realistic view.

Claus Brauer was transferred out of Naples and directly assigned to Rommel's headquarters due to his perfect understanding of English and his ability to speak it completely without accent. There was good reason for that. His family lived in London. Claus was a student there and eventually went to university at Oxford. The war wrecked everything. In the heated political atmosphere of August 1939 the family returned to Germany. Claus became a soldier and volunteered for the Afrika Korps. After the assignment to Africa he was attached to the command staff of the DAK as translator. He was still a private, because it was never intended to put him on track to become an officer. Before he could make sergeant, he became sick with hepatitis B and came back to the Reich in our hospital train.

It is worth mentioning that very few 'merely' sick were transported back to the homeland given the attitude toward giving precedence to wounded over the sick. There were some other sick soldiers on the train sent by other hospitals, so I wasn't the only exception. What was exceptional was that the doctor in the the hospital in Piraeus took my side. Apparently the chief of staff made his own beliefs the rule of thumb, as an active-duty doctor.

At any rate, three Afrikaner were the only sick who came out of the desert and went to Halberstadt in

the hospital train, the rest were wounded.

After our first surprise and joy at finding one another in Halberstadt, and our getting reacquainted, the friendship grew that I am so thankful for.

In our three-bed room the paratrooper had his bed by the door, next to it was Claus' bed and I was by the window. While in the hospital, the paratrooper received his promotion to Private First Class, which came from his unit in Africa. Very often the military was quite efficient. Everything else could be going to hell, but the bureaucracy worked.

We were cared for by nurse Elli. She was a pretty, neat dark-haired nurse who served in the Red Cross. She lived in Halberstadt and lived by herself because 'he' was in the field in Russia. She needed attention and she needed affection and she made no bones about it. I don't want to appear presumptuous, but I gained her sympathy and she often demonstrated it to me. Nothing could come of it. A door led from our room into the neighboring bath room. This bath would be used by the patients in the other rooms. One day a lieutenant was admitted to the hospital. He had a single room with an attached bath. Elli and I had a certain flirtation when she learned that the lieutenant was granted leave. Nurse Elli worked it out so that I she invited me into the lieutenant's bath room, where dear, good Elli lay in the bathtub. She innocently asked if I would scrub her back, and if I really wanted to. I gave her lovely back a good scrubbing, but following some obvious awkwardness on my part nothing would come from this chance. However, what was not possible now, might be possible later, we both agreed on that. Nothing would come of it, because the next day in the single room, in spite of the intervening bath room, some very unusual 'sounds and noises' reached us in our room. We three soldiers could guess the origin of those sounds. They meant that there would be no more back scrubbing and no invitations to her house in town. But nurse Elli remained the good, caring and loving nurse even when we sometimes gazed at one another sadly with loud sighs. I was, in spite of what I wrote in my notebook about my feelings of shame, still a lover boy.

But getting back to my wide ranging discussions with Claus Brauer, they covered everything that interested us in all areas, and re-awoke in me my unquenchable thirst for knowledge. It began with an interest in literature, in particular the classics. In a bookstore in Halberstadt, we made intensive searches and found books that had escaped the purges. They were often the so called Field Post editions that at the beginning of the war were published especially for the soldiers. I still have most of the books I picked up then. They include books by Fred Endrikat [a popular satirist, well known in the literary cabarets] with text that the Reich Censor office would not have approved of. Looking around the hospital library we found books that had somehow escaped the censors of the Third Reich and landed in the hospital library as donations.

We very quickly came to speak of other things. We talked about politics and particularly what had transpired in Germany after 1933. We spoke about all the ways that Germany had changed. These talks open up to me new perspectives and new ways of looking at things. I saw these things through the eyes of a foreigner, because that is what Claus really was, having been raised there for the largest part of his childhood. He was a German youth in a time when Germany transformed itself from Reich to the Greater German Reich, but he experienced all of that in England.

Our discussions widened my horizons on the Reich also. From his descriptions I got to know the country better than he lived in and where he had his schooling. I heard about the country, the people and life in England as well as about the daily lives of the people. But above all I learned about Democracy in England. We spoke about the country that we were now at war with and about what we

heard, and would hear and realized that it was propaganda of the worst sort. Our understanding of Democracy and Parliamentarianism was very limited, and after 1933 it was commonly referred to as “the English sickness.” Combine it with the concept of Plutocracy and it was seen boldface criminality. We had to be very careful with our discussions, because talking about Democracy and its advantages could be considered treason. Anyone who heard us talking about such things could put a rope around our necks.

I was able to learn, truly first hand, what the English understood as Democracy, in all its details and fine points, its practical application in daily life. Claus did not hide from me the fact that there was often much abuse of Democracy in England and everything was far from perfect. It was not a panacea that brought happiness and prosperity to all of the people in the empire. There was a lot that was not good and much that was publicly criticized. Even such criticism was a basic element of a functioning Democracy that along with a true Parliament yielded true freedom of speech and absolute freedom of the press. Every citizen could speak his mind out in the open and he would be heard and listened to. I learned about the use and need for political parties with differing opinions and that the parties had to pay close attention to the wishes of its members in order to get reelected. I began to understand that it was not necessarily a danger to the State when another party got elected to take over power. I learned that Democracy in England was borne and supported by the people, even though there were some things that could be improved.

In a Democracy it was possible that anything that was criticized could be changed and improved and that doing so in public was fundamental. It was necessary to allow time for changes, above all time to rebuild and stabilize the changes for the people, because it was the people who would use them. It was interesting that in England, the land with a resplendent monarchy, House of Lords, Peers and other nobility, that Democracy could flourish there. I thought on the past German monarchies and their totally non-democratic stance. In spite of the blood relationships between these monarchs they were worlds apart.

I could not reconcile all of this with the fact that Great Britain was also a great colonial power, but that their colonialism spread through the world in the most brutal and violent way oppressing and subjugating native populations. This did not seem to jive with their Democratic ideals. However, I thought that it also had to be viewed as a product of the competition throughout Europe in the drive to gain colonies. Not least was the cloak of Christianity and conversion of the heathen natives which was fully supported by the church and its leaders. The appearance of nation states led quickly to the spread of brutal oppression. The inhuman behavior in the colonies was, unfortunately, a very normal activity. The German Kaiser's Reich also earned its 'merits' in its colonies.

In taking a critical look, one had to see that the national states, not only Germany, had to take the blame for in unleashing not only World War I, but also the current war! Weren't these wars righteous wars in terms of Democracy, freedom and human rights? Weren't these wars the only possible means for Democracy, as the Allies understood it, to enforce its ideals against the Germans who were so undemocratic and disdainful of the common man?? Weren't the western democracies truly the 'good guys' and we hateful Germans the 'bad guys' in the world? These were many of the questions surrounding me that I couldn't (yet) answer. To do so would require that I learn more about history but also that I go against my own people and also against my self in order to reach a truly objective view. I was not yet ready to do so. There was still too much of my upbringing as a good German and also mixed in was a lot of German spirit and patriotism. What was important for me now was to grasp the difference between a Democracy and a dictatorship. That was something I could do, I was ready for that. In the coming weeks I trod a path toward Democracy and along the way I rediscovered the [Social](#)

Democratic roots from my childhood that I had learned and had already lived.

I was beginning to develop an appreciation for the parliamentary system, a parliamentary Democracy and the need for multiple political parties. Also an appreciation for public discussion in Parliament, one that was not a 'gossip hall' like the Reichstag in Germany was characterized before 1933. Even the Kaiser showed no respect for it. I came to understand that dissenters had the right to state their opinions, that it was not an offense to the people that could be punished with the death penalty. It was important that varying opinions be heard, and even more important that it was not one single man who as dictator should make the decisions that could be wrong and injurious to the people. Free discussion should not carry the death penalty. Respect for other people and their opinions had to be the first consideration.

My attitude toward the National Socialistic ideology, to the Third Reich, to Adolf Hitler and to all my previous world of ideas began to change more and more. It did not lead to a full renunciation of the spirit of National Socialism because it was still too closely associated in my mind with the Fatherland and patriotism. There was still something within me that resisted change. It wasn't entirely everything the Nazis stuffed into us. What was holding me back was not totally the result of Nazi indoctrination. There was much that was part of my own upbringing and thoughts. It was the same with Claus, who in spite of his English upbringing still felt himself to be German. As a German he volunteered for the DAK [Deutsche Afrika Korps] because he thought and felt himself to be a German, without being a Nazi. This feeling was not different from the majority of Germans who in 1939 saw their Fatherland in danger, without necessarily being fascinated with the Nazi ideology. The bond with the Fatherland was stronger than politics and even men who opposed the Nazi spirit joined the army to fight for the Fatherland.

There were men who did not want to relive the evils that befell Germany during the peace following 1918 with the Treaty of Versailles. These men, rightly or wrongly, separated the Nazi spirit from the blame they thought falling on Germany. Therefore, there arose an unusual behavior pattern in relation to the man who arose from Nazi party leader to the Führer of the Reich. He was not vilified by everyone in every case, because he was the man who took the beaten Reich of 1918 and remade it into a great and powerful Germany as many dreamers had imagined for Germany since 1848. Naziism was one thing and the Führer was another. As strange as that might sound today, that is the way it was for many people of the Third Reich. These people did not want to go back to a weak Reich, they wanted everything that went with a strong Reich, with everything that the other nations in Europe took for granted. They wanted a great Reich in the center of Europe of a status worthy of the successor to the Holy Roman Empire's German Nation.

These people, and I was one of them, were convinced that the current rubbish in the party and the state would be purged once this battle for the very existence of the Reich had come to a victorious end. The party dictatorship could then be eliminated and the Führer would become a historical monument in a well deserved time of peace. That this was an incredibly abstruse idea did not occur to most people. They believed with a simple naivete in this possibility. They didn't know and did not want to know about what crimes and mischief were happening. They also did not want to believe removing the Führer would create another center of power. Without question this would be the SS under their leader Heinrich Himmler, who, in his own way felt himself bound with the concept of the new German Reich. He lived in the conviction that only his SS was in the position to build and lead the new Reich.

This was the very odd situation that many Germans seriously considered. But everyone wanted to win the war first and then live in 'everlasting peace' in the true Greater Germany, the central power in

Europe. Even the national conservative powers in the Reich thought the same way. They were not all Nazified, but they had the old spirit in their heads that already had been the goal of the First World War. This spirit was unbroken, it was not invented by the Nazis.

What got Claus and me excited was the idea that in the Greater German Reich it might be possible to arrive at a functioning Democracy, do away with the dictatorship and make way for a Parliament. We felt that it must be the intention of world history for England and Germany to unite in assuring the peace in Europe and the world. It must be the final result of the war that these two states would eventually come together to determine European politics in the future. This would require changes not only in the German political system, but also in England where a new generation of politicians would arise that were not in the mold of a Churchill. Thus, we two began to change the world.

In my talks with Claus I came to the conclusion that Democracy was the only correct form of government, in spite of its few failings and drawbacks. It is a creation of man and therefore will embody the failings and drawbacks of the men who created it. There is no question but that it is better than any type of dictatorship where men are merely things to further the goals of the dictator and are treated with brutality, violence and inhumanity.

With all of our thinking, imagining and new ideas, I must say that we did not give very much thought to the Jews or to their fate. We didn't know what to do with them, besides that, they were totally shut out of the national life in Germany. We did not see that as a criminal act or a damnable act of inhumanity. Both of us had a long standing aversion to the Jews who we saw as foreigners in our land. Even the nearly-British Claus saw it the same way. The Jews were so interlaced with each other internationally that one could not speak of a national character, even if there were a few exceptions. In spite of England, Claus had very decided opinions about the Jews. In England they were not particular darlings of the state either even though there were Jewish politicians and statesmen.

Our conversations took on a more and more conspiratorial character. We were traversing dangerous terrain. Even when we were both alone together we kept our conspiratorial tone and continued to change the world. Then I never imagined that these conspiracies would one day would put me in great risk to lose my life. Near the end of the war when I was in Eastern Germany I thought it incumbent on me to blab about my ideas on Democracy. I was denounced by a 'good comrade.' I managed to put a halt to it although under the most difficult of circumstances. More about that when the time comes.

While I was still somewhat shaky in my opinions about the behavior of the Germans in regard to the leadership of Adolf Hitler, in Halberstadt I had my own Damascus to experience. That was the fall of Stalingrad. The most terrifying experience for me was the speech by Goebbels in the Berlin Sports Palace, that we were required to hear over the radio in the mess hall of the hospital.

On January 31, 1943 [General Paulus](#) ended the insanity in Stalingrad when he surrendered the scanty remains of the 6th Army to the Russians. Before doing so he allowed 'his Führer' to promote him to Field Marshal. The regular soldiers died in Stalingrad under orders to hold out at all costs because the Führer wouldn't have it any other way. The commander of the 6th Army, Herr Paulus obeyed with full devotion to his superior officer and refused to be influenced by his own generals in Stalingrad. Then, when he finally realized that there was no longer any choice for him or the few men left under his command but to surrender, he quickly applied to his superior officer for promotion to General Field Marshal. This was the man who brought the troops under his command to near total annihilation. As a brand new Field Marshal by Hitler's good graces he surrendered then to the victorious Russians. In my eyes that act made him a blaggard and he forfeited any respect one may have ever had for him.

The territory where he surrendered was south of the city. The troops to the north surrendered on February 2, 1943. Stalingrad once again totally under the control of the Russians. All of the German tough talk and stand-fast orders from the Führer could do nothing to change the outcome. This was a fiasco of unparalleled dimension, not only because an entire army, and support units also, were almost totally destroyed, but also because the mystique of German invincibility was put to rest forever. And the big-headed Hermann Göring had totally lost face. The speeches he upchucked guaranteeing air support for the 6th Army were shown up for what they were, noise and smoke, without any chance of succeeding. The mad attempt to supply the ground troops from the air didn't work, the cost was too high in men and aircraft. The only thing they were able to pull off from time to time was the evacuation of the wounded, although that too had its share of terror and failure. One plane was designated to fly in to Paulus his Marshall's baton and insignia so that he could have these 'honorable decorations.' I could not grasp any of this, I could not understand it. It was a crime of pure ambition on the one hand and pure delusion on the other and all accomplished at the expense of the ordinary German soldier.

The alleged military genius of our great Führer had totally failed. This man had thoughtlessly sacrificed an army for his own delusions. A breakout, if it were even possible, was forbidden by him, and the commanders on the ground that should have known better bowed to their Führer and allowed the army to be destroyed. There was no longer any question of any possible, and yet promised, relief because the pocket would not allow for it nor was it even possible to mount the operation. It was too late to stop the closing of the encirclement, or to create a path of retreat. The Russians, the sub-humans, these dumb Bolsheviks had now shown the German generals, the Führer and the German people where things stood. Stalingrad was the beginning, a synonym for the start of the fall of the Third Reich. There in Stalingrad is where Hitler's delusion about ruling the world, subjugating the Russians and getting rid of the Bolsheviks turned to dust. He could no longer speak of destroying the sub-human Russians. The so high and mighty German generals in the high command of the Wehrmacht now had to begin to doubt their haughtiness in so far as they were capable of doing so. The reassessment wasn't very successful as one could see in May of 1945 from the way these types came forward to sign the German papers of surrender.

As I listened to the special broadcast from OKW [Oberkommando der Wehrmacht: Military High Command] about the surrender in Stalingrad, I was surprised by the tone of the report. In the report it said that the 6th Army remained true to their oath to the flag, to their last breath under the exemplary leadership of General Field Marshall Paulus and succumbed to unfavorable conditions and an overwhelming enemy. For me this report was a horror. There was no mention of the miserable deaths of the soldiers, of the huge casualties. All it talked about was exemplary leaders and soldier's oaths. It made me want to puke. It was to get worse. There were two more broadcasts of this sort. One was the stupid statement by Göring with the quotation about the Greeks, and the other, far worse, was Goebbels' speech from the Berlin Sports Palace [Sportpalast] on February 18, 1943.

[People arise now and break loose the storm!](#) That was the slogan that Goebbels hurled at the fanatic masses in the Sportpalast. The masses began to roar and rave non-stop, not with anger and distrust, but with an as yet unknown delirium of boundless war fervor for the 'necessary' total war Goebbels was calling for. A war like no one had ever seen before. And the masses cried out, "Yes!" to this total war when Goebbels asked them, "Do you want total war?" They responded that they did want it with a bellowing roar, "YES!" They were in agreement and would follow their Führer on this path. "Führer attack, we will follow you!" These were no longer ordinary people that roared unbelievably. They took the destruction of an army as an act of God that they had to bow before. There were soldiers in the crowd, with grievous wounds and they joined the crowd's roar as the radio announcer reported to

the listeners.

This mad outpouring of war lust was not happening only in the Sportpalast, but also in the meeting room here in the hospital in Halberstadt. An uproar arose here also and included nearly all of the wounded soldiers present, even the severely crippled. I was already surprised by the cracking voice of the screaming Goebbels, and the roar from the crowd in the Sportpalast. My surprise became disbelief when I witnessed the behavior of the audience here in the hospital.

I couldn't stand it any more, I had to get away from the madness. I got out of the meeting room and began to weep bitterly. I couldn't help it, it came over me out of an incomprehensible horror. I cried over the unthinking fanaticism, the shameless tirade by a German minister, and the failure of the State and Army leadership to take responsibility for the disaster. I also wept because I knew it was going to get worse. Not only would more soldiers in the field be consumed in the coming conflagration, but also women and children in the cities would die as the bombs fell in monstrous quantities.

For the first time in my life I was ashamed to be a German, I was no longer proud to be a part of the people who so unconsciously submitted to what the good Führer wanted of them. That was my Damascus, from now on I saw everything in a very different light. I hoped and wished with all my heart that after all of this senseless killing a world with other people would arise, with people who would not kill other people and never more make war. Should there again come a day when such an order were given, then the order would not only be refused, but the one who gave the order would be treated as a criminal, because such a thing is clearly a crime against mankind. This would have to be the outcome of this miserable war where millions of people have been sacrificed. With this hope also came the belief in a world wide humanistic Democracy where the people have the power, the people would make the decisions and it would no longer be a single dictator who determines everyone's fate.

The grave of an entire army in Stalingrad must now become a memorial for all of mankind, that never again will a new delusion arise that will lead to such destruction. A memorial that will make it clear to the entire world that such crimes are to be banished forever, that bloodthirstiness is no longer tolerated, and that 'Führers' drive unthinking people such things simply to satisfy their hunger for power. People must understand that it is up to them to decide if they want to be mass murderers, kill their fellow man and spread want and misery in the world or if they live with mankind in peace and mutual respect. They shall not tolerate any criminal 'Führer' ruling them.

These feeling and thoughts came out of the deep pain I was feeling at the time. I wanted, and hoped and believed that this was not just a vision, but that it would become a reality, because Reason must be victorious. This war would not end with victors and conquered, but only with men in despair searching for a new meaning in life, without which they can not exist. Reason would finally enter the minds of all men in the whole world. So I thought.

I was, and remain, a fool. Later I lived the 'new' reality which was completely different from my vision and I had to bury my Utopia deep inside me because there was no hope of it coming true. Mankind has not turned to Reason, quite the contrary, the madness of un-reason and destruction from so called "enemy populations" is unbroken, if not become stronger.

So I was still in the hospital as this 'brilliant' crime was perpetrated and I waited to get well. Once I did, what would happen to me, where would I go? Once I was again "kv" [kriegsverwendungsfähig: combat capable] I would be sent to the front again, but where, which one of the fronts? These were the anxious questions that beset me. My jaundice, the Hepatitis B, wasn't fully healed but it would be soon

and my recuperation time here would be at an end.

After these days in February 1943 there was, in spite of the uproarious reaction to Goebbels' speech, a very pronounced mood change to be felt in the hospital. There was a certain bewilderment paired with fear to be noted with many of the soldiers, although no one spoke about it. But, and this was very bad, there were loud voices who said that the defeat at Stalingrad had to be the work of betrayal, sabotage and cowardice! Many of these comments came from soldiers who had been seriously wounded on the Russian front. The 'third man' in our room, the paratrooper, was also of the same opinion. He said that out of the disaster of Stalingrad, the German eagle would arise anew. Under the leadership of Adolf Hitler Germany would reclaim victory. Stalin with his Bolsheviks would be destroyed, erased. Such spirit and such gibberish was still around. But it was only the beginning of the year 1943 and these defeats were only the first, the first great losses. So, many men could retain their good hopes and disposition at least until the next bust, the fall of North Africa.

On the day of the surrender in Stalingrad on January 31, 1943, the ones in the hospital who were able to travel went on a jaunt toward Blankenburg in the Harz mountains. There we went to a little place called Wegeleben where neatly attired waiters served us roast rabbit. The mood was good, not as oppressed as it would be a few days later.

On February 1, 1943 the three Afrikaners, Grassl, Claus Brauer and Werner Mork together with nurse Elli went up to the roof of the Prinz Eugen to pose for a souvenir photograph. We were not aware of the calamity at Stalingrad because it was not being reported on. Only when they could no longer keep secret the surrender on February 2nd did the High Command hold the special radio broadcast, without the victory fanfare, to tell the people the bad news.

I might also add to my description of the group listening to the February 18th Sportpalast speech that the medical chief of staff gave a short address before the broadcast that was not very euphoric. Nevertheless, as I described, the sound of Goebbels' heated tone of voice over the radio, transfused the audience in the hall and by the end of the broadcast nearly everyone roared, "Sieg Heil" and raised their arm high in the Hitler salute, even when their right arm was only a stump. If they no longer had a right arm, they raised their left arm. Everyone, so it seemed in the moment wanted total war, now including all men from ages 16 to 65 and all women aged 17 to 45.

These people who roared their approval had sanctioned the deaths of millions of people, not just the loss of a few. Total senselessness reigned. From this day on, from February 18, 1943 until May 8, 1945 millions of people, friend and foe would die in the insanity of war. The tidy little town of Halberstadt itself would be a victim of a very intense bomber attack that would destroy the majority of the city all because a Junker aircraft factory was located there. Everyone had to pay a heavy price for the total war they cried out for. Now civilians would no longer be considered defenseless victims, but would be seen by the enemy as part of the war machine. On this day the German people gave up unconditionally all control and would truly share the guilt for everything that followed. The mass deaths caused by the hail of bombs dropped by the Allies can not be laid on them alone. The guilt must be shared by the German leaders with their delusions that they shared with the world from the Sportpalast.



Halberstadt April 1945

1943 was also the year when the extermination of the Jews went into high gear. Most of the German soldiers were not aware of what was going on. The majority knew nothing of the crimes that were happening in the KZ's [Konzentrationslager: Concentration Camps]. Very slowly we began to hear about it, but not yet with much detail. There was talk of the finally successful removal of the Jews, particularly the Jews of Eastern Europe. That was unfortunate, but it was not seen as a crime, it was simply a necessity in order to free Europe from the far, far too many Jews, that could not be accommodated any more. It was so easy to deal with the Jewish Problem without problem. Not only for the Germans, there were plenty of helpers and advocates in all lands, even those that were not occupied by us. Even the Allies had a problem with the Jews in their lands!

The German people as a whole, not just the screaming Nazi sympathizers in the Sportpalast, had taken the remnants of their intellect to the closet and left it hanging there. After May 8, 1945 the ex-Nazi sympathizers who had survived the inferno searched through the rubble of the Greater German Reich for the intellect they had given away. They found it one day in the limited-time special bargain basement warehouse known as the "[Economic Miracle](#)." [Wirtschaftswunder] Once they had found it again, their fully dry-cleaned intellect, they were suddenly free again from the burdens and torments, free from everything that was once done in the name of the German people. They mutated into good and true Democrats, now as shining examples, ready for inspection as pure businessmen in civilian dress, at least for the time being.

The people had again found a unified intellect and used it for the task at hand, to go against the new/old enemy, the Russians, but this time in a "Cold War." This time they would have the help of the West which had finally seen that for all of the good people in the West there was only one evil enemy, namely the bad Russians and their allied communist states. Many of the newly laundered ex-Nazi sympathizers believed that the Allies should have joined the Third Reich against the Russians instead of joining with them and giving them free and open access to the West. The guilt was on the Allies, because we, with weapons in hand, fought against the threat of Bolshevism, a threat that Hitler tirelessly warned us about from 1923 on. Finally, the world was following us in the struggle against the Red Menace.

But back to Halberstadt and to my/our thoughts and discussions that were heightened now after the horror in Stalingrad. That the people in its majority, in spite of this catastrophe did not rebel, there came with it a feeling that we were now in a war where the only acceptable outcome was unconditional victory. The people were supported in this sentiment by the behavior of the Führer, the military leaders and the generals in the High Command on all fronts. The military leaders of all ranks without exception were prepared to carry on the war to victory. The leaders, furthermore, took everything that was available for their own profit and use. Even their military honor required new ranks and privileges. Included here were promotions and titles that they willingly accepted from their Führer and medals of the highest level. A Field Marshal's baton emblazoned with swastikas, received from the Führer with great ceremony was the symbol of the highest military honor and delight. A hundred thousand soldiers might go on to a hero's death or 'only' become cripples, but the important thing was to gain a promotion or receive a decoration for a heroism that you did not earn, but that others earned for you. For that, 'one' had good German manpower that allowed themselves to be used and abused for the purpose. Since we had such magnificent leadership the common sentiment was that we were assured of victory and Stalingrad was unfortunately something that was unavoidable – Simple as that! And for these exemplary military leaders it really was 'Great to be a soldier.' They lived and loved their war where they could cut a fine profile as commanders and strategists.

The swastika, which up to this time was only a Nazi Party symbol, now decorated all military insignia and documents. Everyone was proud when they could carry such a document. Even the men from the 20th July 1944 assassination attempt on Hitler allowed themselves to be decorated by the man they saw as a tyrant. Why did it happen then? Why not closer to the beginning of the war? Was the war so unpleasant for them? Had they not done everything they could for the Führer and the Fatherland? Did they first take note of the lunacy of this war after it was so far along that they realized they could not defeat the Bolsheviks? A war that they would have gladly fought along side of the Allies in order to protect their Germany from the Bolshevik danger? And this, after they did nothing to stop the campaign against Russia. On the contrary, they were all convinced of the necessity of conquering territory for the expansion of the German people in the boundless steppes of the East. The ride into the East was an old idea particularly for the descendents of the German knightly orders, the famous and bloodsoaked orders of the Christian West.

I have a very reserved opinion of the seemingly brave men of the so called revolt of July 20, 1944. These were men from the arch-conservative camp, and from the Church's right wing. Especially Herr Gördelers! They were very far away from espousing true Democracy and Parliamentarianism. What they wanted was a different type of dictatorship. Their goal was a new government under military leadership. After overthrowing Hitler they wanted to continue the war, but only against the East.

I have gotten off on a tangent, which I did not want to do, but it happened because my thoughts galloped away with me. Now back to the time that I spent in Halberstadt and what followed.

The events that shook me so violently did not fail to have effects on Claus also. We primarily talked about the events that had just happened and how things might turn out. We were both angry about what we heard on the radio broadcast and saw in the hospital. We both had the intention that if we got out of the war safely we would do whatever possible to help build a democratic Germany. Neither of us could figure out how we might go about it. We only had speculation and guesses about the possibilities. If the war was won, then Hitler would be triumphant and only a revolt of the frontline soldiers could lead to a change, which appeared very questionable. Otherwise if the war ended in defeat, there would be changes in Germany that would lead to an overthrow of Hitler along with the Nazis. That implied a revolution in Germany but not one like in 1918! The big question was how would our enemies behave? Would they simply destroy the Reich, or help to rebuild it as a Democracy? These were questions that occupied us, but to which we had no answers. There was nothing to do but resign ourselves and wait for more events to unfold.

What we did know was that as soldiers we could do nothing but hope for a good ending. It could come to a revolt that would rip us all apart, but who could or would be in a position to make that happen? We would have to wait for the defeat that we felt would only bring another dictatorship. Was there any possibility that the German people would under their own power rise against the leaders who we now saw as a threat to the further existence of the Reich? Although we were just ordinary soldiers we had to be ready to do everything we must or could do to help the Fatherland toward Democracy and build a new humanitarian spirit. These were very grand thoughts, but in order to act on them we first had to survive the war, and we had very little control over that.

We wanted to remain friends and to stay in contact. It was toward the end of 1947 when Claus visited me in Lesum. He had gotten the Lesum address from me in Halberstadt and held on to it all that time. That was in contrast to me. I had destroyed all of my personal papers on the Eastern front as the Soviets approached. We thought it better not to have anything personal on us when captured.

Claus did not come to Bremen just to see me. He lived in Bonn and worked in the German office of [C.A.R.E.](#), and he was looking to go into the diplomatic service if the opportunity presented itself. Unfortunately, our meeting was strained due to my behavior. This was a time of true hardship in Germany and it did not generate the same feelings that bound us in Halberstadt. It was more a feeling of relief when Claus departed. I had the feeling that Claus found himself on the side of good fortune during these hard times and I was on the side of great misfortune. Also, my job was going nowhere, I felt like I was in a deep pit. This was very unfair to Claus, but I was not thinking straight. Claus was able to visit me because he had a task to do for the C.A.R.E. organization in Bremen and Bremerhaven. Claus had kept true to his promise, but I failed him. It was my fault that our friendship did not continue for reasons that had only to do with my cowardice and shame. Regardless of what and why, it is still a shame that we could not emotionally find each other again.

The time in Halberstadt was coming to an end. My recovery was making good progress, everything was back in order, the jaundice conquered and also the infection in my arm had left nothing behind but a few scars. I was once again fit and ready for duty. Once again I had some very serious thoughts about my future as a soldier. I wondered if I should be happy about my arm getting better or if I would have been better in the long run to lose it. With all of these unhealthy thoughts, one thing was very clear, I wanted to avoid serving in Russia if there was anything I could do about it. How I was going to manage it, I had no idea.

I was released from the hospital near the end of February where I had spent nearly three months. I obtained a medical leave from my temporary unit which I knew nothing more about than the name on the leave slip. The army took care of everything without you thinking about it, and individual thought was not needed (or desired); one thought would engender another and another and so forth.

The last days in Halberstadt were very nice. We could leave whenever we wanted to once the doctor's rounds and treatments were finished. We very actively visited the town, especially a cafe in the Hauptstraße (Cafe Hellmann?). Up until the idiotic proclamation of Total War and the required military service of all men, there was still music to be heard here played by the Dance Cafe Orchestra, just like in peacetime. Here many friendships were forged that only lasted a short time. Even in public soldiers were required to salute. On entering a bar the hat had to be removed and the arm raised in salute. In walking through the bar looking for a free table, one had to pause before each officer you encountered and acknowledge them with a sharp nod of the head, even if they were totally unknown to you. We had to carry out this greeting also when the officer at the table was totally preoccupied with the girl he was with and could hardly be bothered to look up. There were other types of officers who would look for you to miss the greeting, then he would jump up and act like a wild man and dress-down the poor private in a loud voice just to impress his girlfriend. All that in the middle of a war! Where was the much celebrated comradeship of the front lines? When you left the bar you had to turn and once again salute the room with raised arm. The army had and has its very original customs paired with a huge amount of nonsense, but meticulously written down in its code of conduct.

Claus and I also discussed all the reading materials we were able to get from the local book shops and the hospital library. While reading them I would make notes on slips of paper. I still have them and will use them as I write this memoir.

In the hospital library I found a very special book called, "Ceterum recenseo," by Emanuel bin Gorion, critical speeches and essays. It was published in 1929 by Alexander Fischer Verlag in Tübingen. This book which was forbidden in the Third Reich was especially useful to me. So much so that I simply took it home with me and I have it still. It was and still is very interesting to read as are the notes that I

made in the margins which are still there. They give a good indication of my thoughts then.

With the end of my stay in the hospital in Halberstadt my account of my time in the army from 1939 to the beginning of 1943 also comes to an end. The next section will cover 1943 through 1945. This account will also show that my life as a soldier wasn't as 'normal' as most other soldiers. I had the 'pleasure' of serving many functions and many different duties. I was in several temporary units and as a result was never at home in any of them. It was very different for me than many of the other soldiers. But I experienced a lot and I learned a lot, both good and bad. All of this will be described in the next section. The worst times of the war were ahead of me. Times that even today I can not believe that I survived and did not have to 'Die for the Fatherland' or become a cripple.

[To be continued...]

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