

ANITA FARKAS

OUT OF OBLIVION



THE BIBLE STUDENTS OF
ST. LAMBRECHT WOMEN'S CONCENTRATION CAMP

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of St. Lambrecht Women's Concentration Camp

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It has happened, and therefore, it could happen again:
this is the core of what we want to say.

Primo Levi

1 Heimo Halbreiner: Foreword

More than 60 years ago the women's concentration camp St. Lambrecht was established in the Benedictine monastery St. Lambrecht, which had been confiscated by the National Socialists in 1938. Anyone who might want to follow the trail of this Ravensbrück sub camp, established in 1943, and the concentration camps brought under supervision of concentration camp Mauthausen in 1944 – as a matter of fact also in the case of the other Styrian sub camps – must make do with little evidence. The reasons are manifold. To begin with, there is a dearth of sources available concerning the history of the small sub camps. Secondly historical investigations into the sub camps began only relatively late, and in addition there is no scientific institution in the field of the memorial monuments of the concentration camps. And thirdly, the prisoners in the women's concentration camp St. Lambrecht after all belonged to a victimized group that until a few years ago was one of the 'forgotten victims' of National Socialism: *die Bibelforscherinnen*, as Jehovah's Witnesses were called until 1931 and were still called by the National Socialists.

But not only in scientific publications are there hardly any clues to be found, neither have the 23 Bible Students who performed forced labour at St. Lambrecht left any marks in the public memory. For example, in the monastery St. Lambrecht nothing nowadays indicates that here for three consecutive years there were sub camps of the Ravensbrück, Dachau and Mauthausen concentration camps respectively. The local population too hardly remembers the camp's women – unlike the Spanish prisoners of the men's concentration camp. Besides the small size of the women's camp a reason might be the presence of other 'strangers' there – Slovenian women in compulsory service, a few hundred female convicts from the East and French and British prisoners of war, all of whom had to perform forced labour in the dynamite factory in St. Lambrecht. The 23 women therefore were hardly conspicuous as a separate group – as prisoners from a concentration camp – when they had to work outside of the monastery.

Dietmar Seiler had already been confronted with the female prisoners going unnoticed during his investigations in the middle of the last decennium [of the previous century], when a female contemporary eyewitness heard of a women's concentration camp for the first time during the interview.

This is the Black Hole of memory – into which not only the women of St. Lambrecht had fallen since 1945 – from which Anita Farkas has now hauled back the history of the monastery from 1938 to 1945. She focused on the 'repressed' history of the women's concentration camp St. Lambrecht, and in particular that of the twenty-three women who endured forced labour on account of their religious beliefs.

The Italian Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi, cited above, has written in protest against such obliteration and repression. CLIO too strives to work for this same goal, using its publishing activities, lectures, exhibitions and the publication of this book.

Graz, April 2004

Heimo Halbreiner

CLIO – Verein für Geschichts- und Bildungsarbeit

2 Acknowledgements and Word of Thanks

I started this research in 2001. In autumn 2003 it was accepted as a thesis in the discipline of educational sciences of the University of Klagenfurt, and it was updated for publication in 2004. I acquired new insight before publication had been incorporated.

Much has been published about people who were persecuted in the Nazi era. This book gives an account of religious persons who were persecuted because of their faith in God.

Since 11 July 1998, the Austrian government has officially recognised the religious community of Jehovah's Witnesses (formerly also known as Bible Students) as a religious society, after they had faced decades of discrimination. The public's view on this religious community varies from open and interested to distrusting and rejecting. People are often sceptical of the believers; their house to house preaching work is not always met with acceptance and tolerance. In Nazi times they were ruthlessly persecuted by the National Socialist rulers, but that did not break the community's loyalty to their faith.

Jehovah's Witnesses have a strong sense of religious unity and collectively resisted the demands of the fascist-dictatorial 'Third Reich'. This unity helped the religious community to even endure the hardship of concentration camps. This book tells the history of a small group of female Jehovah's Witnesses, whose life stories and experience of persecution have not been given a place in history until now. As female inmates of St. Lambrecht they belong to the forgotten women of history. This thesis will bring their life stories back into the here and now, thus giving them a place in our society's collective memory. As women and sisters in faith, the inmates of St. Lambrecht concentration camp made up a minority in a double sense of the word. The fate of the female victims of the Nazi regime, as well as that of the persecuted religious ones, has had much less attention in scientific research than that of their male fellow-sufferers.

Not being a Jehovah's Witness, the field of research was unknown territory to me. During my research I was confronted with many of my own prejudices and reserve I held toward this religious community. I had to overcome some hesitation and fear. An interpreter translated a number of my interviews with the survivors. The mechanisms of communication

that were used made explanation and editing necessary. My critical distance to the faith doctrines and organizational structure of the Watchtower Society remains unchanged. At the same time, I feel a deep respect for those Witnesses who did not lose their respect for life despite the severe oppression under the Nazi regime. In their steadfastness and actions that resulted therefrom, they were a paragon of compassion. I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to get to know female Witnesses of Jehovah who supported and motivated my activities in every possible way. For allowing this work to be made public 'the Bible Students of St. Lambrecht' ought to receive all possible recognition.

My presentation of this theme is also meant to fill a gap in the annals of the National Socialist past of Styria, in which a concentration camp for women existed alongside six concentration camps for men at St. Lambrecht. The history of this sub camp of Ravensbrück and Mauthausen is so intertwined with the life stories of 23 exploited women from different lands that they should be wrested away from oblivion, to make this history part of the collective memory of society once again.

This project would not have been possible without support and many valuable suggestions. I would especially like to thank both my scientific mentors, Professor Doctor Peter Gstettner and Professor Doctor Karl Stuhlpfarrer for their patience and extensive advice on my work.

I would also like to thank Heidi Gsell (historical archives of Jehovah's Witnesses in Vienna, Austria) and Meinard Tydeman (historical archives Watchtower Society in Emmen, the Netherlands). They made it possible to interview the Dutch survivors of the concentration camp at St. Lambrecht and provided the collected archive material of the Watchtower Society.

My sister Sonja Sommersguter I would like to thank from my heart for the countless checks she made on my manuscripts; Judith Langwieser I thank for her excellent translations of the video-interviews from Dutch.

I owe special thanks to the former inmates Jans Hoogers, Gerdina Huisman and Toos Berkers. My interviews with them made it possible to reconstruct the main part of the history of the women's concentration camp St. Lambrecht. I also thank Cobie Pronk, who was also willing to be interviewed.

I would like to thank Margarete Günter, who was willing to talk to me and gave me a tour of the St. Lambrecht monastery. She recounted her memories to me and made photographs available for publication.

My greatest thanks go out to my husband Peter Farkas, who coached me, motivated me and supported me in every possible way. I especially thank him for the constructive talks and discussions that inspired me and at the same time helped me to maintain a good balance during the often taxing and time-consuming studies. I want to dedicate this work to him.

Anita Farkas

3 Preface

Introduction

After the National Socialists came into power they developed in their territory a micro societal climate, in which discrimination resulted in ruthless persecution and the destruction of unwanted groups. For many women, it was the start of their 'via dolorosa', a period of great suffering, in prisons and concentration camps. If they survived, it left an indelible impression on their histories as a group and on their individual life stories.

Among the first women to be persecuted were Jehovah's Witnesses who, much like political non-conformist women, stood out to the Nazi's and were persecuted with increasing intensity. The female Witnesses of Jehovah were known as Bible Students in those days and their religious conviction offered the believers a lifestyle of strict non-violence, focusing on the commandments of the Bible and in recognition of only one authority, their God, Jehovah. This brought Jehovah's Witnesses practising their religious beliefs into conflict with the National Socialist regime. Consequently, the religious group was systematically and cruelly persecuted. Many Bible Students were robbed of their freedom for years, subjected to economic exploitation and put under pressure to break their loyalty to their faith. The women were subjected to continuous humiliation and dehumanisation in the Nazi concentration camps. Many of them did not survive the Nazi regime and its machinations of destruction.

The fact that there ever was a concentration camp for women as a sub camp of Ravensbrück, besides the six sub camps of Mauthausen for male camp prisoners, has been almost erased from regional memory. Its absence from the collective consciousness is because there are no memorials to this concentration camp for women and the life stories and suffering endured there. No commemorative plaque brings the fate of the victims to attention and so they are robbed of a place in the present and in the future. In the light of the present findings, it is my intention to change this situation and bring it to the attention of the public, for example by erecting a tangible memorial.

Theme of Research

The theme of this research is the concentration camp for women in St. Lambrecht in Upper Styria, Austria. This concentration camp is remarkable because its group of inmates consisted exclusively of Bible Students. My scientific interest goes out to both the historical and psychological viewpoints because they are intertwined with the Holocaust history which is responsible for the collective as well as the individual trauma.

The starting point is a specific concentration camp situation with certain characteristics which had a concrete impact on the imprisoned Jehovah's Witnesses. I've assumed that the members of this group were able to maintain their spiritual and moral integrity but at the same time were injured mentally and physically.

In this context, questions pertaining to the specific characteristics of the women's concentration camp at St. Lambrecht are answered, such as: how did the experiences of the inmates differ from the experiences of the inmates of the main camp Ravensbrück? What can be said about the difference of resistance in the concentration camps? And what was the purpose of the work to which the Bible Students were forced? The establishment of the women's concentration camp seems to have no connection with the establishment of the men's concentration camp a year earlier, and so the question arises: what reasons could there have been for establishing the women's camp and what effect did it have on the men's concentration camp?

In advance it may be stated that, the homogeneity of St. Lambrecht concentration camp inmates is an important feature which lastingly influenced the psychological situation of the individual Bible Students. My psychological presentation of the question chiefly concerns signs of identity breach and effects of traumatic experiences, given the individual's history. What will also be reviewed is how they were psychologically processed during captivity and after liberation. How the survivors viewed the differences from the main camp is also important to ascertain.

Considering this query, the microcosm of the concentration camp will be reconstructed and thus provide insight into this thesis. No research has been carried out on observations of the women's camp from the outside, for instance by the local population, because they were not relevant to the answers of the research queries.

After the description of the sources and methods of research, in chapter 1 a short overview is provided of the religious community of Jehovah's Witnesses and their religious doctrine, the origin of their organisation and the history of their persecution during National Socialism. Because the entire group of prisoners that was transferred to the so-called work camp in Styria came from the women's concentration camp at Ravensbrück, chapter 2 deals with the situation in the main camp and specifically that of the Bible Students who were later added to the transport list for St. Lambrecht. This description is an important and necessary facet for gaining insight into the traumatising of those concerned who underwent specific stages.

The following chapter will define the history of the monastery at St. Lambrecht being seized by the National Socialists who seized it to be used as an SS estate. Also discussed will be the board appointed by the military authority and the establishment of the men's concentration camp St. Lambrecht, because these affairs are directly connected to the women's concentration camp and therefore consequential to this context.

Chapter 4 will, insofar as oral and written source material allows, reconstruct the history of the women's camp as accurately as possible. The life stories of all 23 former inmates of St. Lambrecht in chapter 5 will be a monument to these victims of the Nazi regime. None of the women ought to be forgotten, even if there is only a little biographic material available on a few of them.

Chapter 6 will outline the relationship between the opinions on traumatization in the concentration camps and chapter 7 will deal with the results of the interviews.

Sources

Scientific and literary publications were principally used in the chapters that describe Jehovah's Witnesses as a religious community and the chapters in which the theories on the origin of traumatization are discussed. In addition to this, written and oral source material is referred to.

Files from archives formed the basis when determining the date of transformation of the St. Lambrecht monastery into an SS estate. These can be found in the former Berlin Document Centre, which manages most staff files of the National Socialist officials, after the

takeover by the German Federal Archives. Also involved in this research are the restoration records relating to the Benedictine monastery possessions, which are on view in the Styrian Provincial Archives.

There are hardly any notes available from prosecuting institutions like the Gestapo, the SS or the camp management of the St. Lambrecht concentration camp for women. Notes from the camp management of Ravensbrück about St. Lambrecht are also scarce. Transport lists of the prisoners' detail of St. Lambrecht no longer exist. However, references to the Bible Students of St. Lambrecht and also to a female guard, appear on several name lists.

Documents in the archive of the Mauthausen Memorial mainly concern the concentration camp for men. Sources on the concentration camp for women are very limited. This is also the case in the archives of the Benedictine monastery at St. Lambrecht.

Much more extensive was the source material in the five historical archives of Jehovah's Witnesses in the countries where the inmates of the women's concentration camp at St. Lambrecht originated.

The largest number of documents about the victims by far, was found in the historical archives of the Watchtower Society in Emmen, The Netherlands. Archivist Meinard Tydeman diligently collected a variety of documents and so managed to bring them to safety. What remains from the five Dutch survivors are: camp identity badges, letters, identity cards and residence statements issued by the occupant powers after liberation. Also present are photographs and handwritten life stories from the former inmates. The archive in Emmen gave me access to video-interviews¹ of the women concerned.

The documentation material in the historical archives of the Watchtower society in Austria, Belgium and Germany is more than adequate. Only the archive of the religious organization in Warsaw did not have sufficient material to use to complement this work. Other information comes from other archives mentioned in the back of this book.

A special place is reserved for the interviews I conducted with the female Witnesses who were still alive at the time. These interviews took place in The Netherlands in October 2002. In these descriptive biographical interviews, a psychoanalytical conversation technique was used. This made it possible for me to form an image of the psychological and physical effects the camp imprisonment had on these women and at the same time they gave me insight into the actual situation in the camp.

Meinard Tydeman simultaneously translated these interviews. The interviews were recorded, and form transcribed source material.

Interviews with two other contemporaries made it possible to obtain supplementary information on the camp situation in St. Lambrecht. One of the interviews was held with Margarete Messnarz-Günter, who described her memories from the viewpoint of someone who was put to work by the Nazi's. The second interview I conducted, was with the former head of housekeeping of the SS estate. She told her story from the perspective of those who had put the Bible Students to work.

Oral History and its Significance

Without the witness reports it would have been impossible to reconstruct the history of the women's concentration camp at St. Lambrecht. In this context the method of oral history has a special significance.

In contrast with historical documents from archives, which are available for scientific adaptation, revealing oral history is bound to a process of interaction between people. The process takes place in the present and demands a different form of recording. To my mind, calling on the knowledge of the Holocaust survivors is societally more significant than the mentioned written sources from the time of events. For that reason, I wish to add some opinions of the psychoanalyst Dori Laub with reference to oral history and involve the origin of oral source material into my research.

History that has been orally passed down from survivors of concentration camps exists, apart from memories that have been deformed by the current living circumstances of the interviewee, mainly in the form of testimonies. The listener, in this case the interviewer, becomes a witness to the testimony.

So, the testimony is no historical text ready to use, but a process that can only begin in a safe environment. The listener's presence, in the person of the interviewer, should encourage the interviewee to get deep into his own core and his memories.² A narrative situation must be a safe situation as mentioned before, so that traumatic experiences which a survivor often relates for the first time, can surface. I experienced this in the interviews I

conducted with the Dutch female Jehovah's Witnesses. My interpreter confirmed that the interviewees were disclosing new content and displaying new reactions.³

Telling his concentration camp experiences to a sensitive listener gives the survivor the opportunity to restore the dialogue with the Self during the testimony.⁴ The empathetic attitude of the listener brings out the Self as a psychological structure that in concentration camp prisoners is linked to the destruction of the inner You.⁵

During the narration the survivor is bearing witness to the trauma caused by history, which — according to Laub — has not yet become reality for those concerned, despite the distressing events. For that reason, survivors relate their experience in captivity as if they have only witnessed the events and not as if they were personally afflicted. In the process of listening and being heard is the moment when the traumatic experience is acknowledged. This means that the listener is directly involved in bringing home this knowledge.⁶

The interviewer, who is being used as a blank page to put an event into words, is thus a forming element during the testimony of concentration camp experiences.

The listener keeps his own position and perspective during the interview. If he begins to (pseudo-)identify with the victim, then this should be recognised and considered as a coping mechanism. First and foremost, the interviewer provides the means to externalise and historicise the events.

The interviewer witnessing the stated traumatic testimonies, finds himself confronted with his own vulnerability, mortality and the question what the meaning of life is, during the narration and the reactions of transferral that result therefrom. Psychoanalyst Dori Laub puts these observations into the following words: 'Insofar as they remind us of a horrible traumatic past, insofar as they bear witness to our own historical disfiguration, survivors frighten us.'⁷

Survivors who have a positive attitude toward a life that resulted from the decay and a disappearance of the old culture (which was the case with the female Jehovah's Witnesses that I got to know), unconsciously embody a cultural shock experience, which has not been integrated into society yet.⁸ Scientists who make use of the precious few opportunities left to talk to the survivors can contribute to the externalisation and historicizing of concentration camp experiences and in that way free the victims of their trauma.

The testimony that comes into being by using the oral history method, carries with it the obligation of making the knowledge about the event that was passed down, available to society in such a way that lasting learning processes are possible. Perhaps then it will also be possible to integrate into society, the 'cultural shock experience' which Laub discerned in the Holocaust victims.

Thus, oral history is not just a method for safeguarding oral source material. It is also an instrument for gaining access to the survivors and bringing history through authentic narration to life and for contributing to bringing about and guaranteeing a historic consciousness and as result, giving part of the collective memory back to society.

4 History of Jehovah's Witnesses

On the Religious Community of Jehovah's Witnesses

The independent religious group of Jehovah's Witnesses can be categorised with chiliasm.⁹ Based on the Revelation of John (20:1-10) in the New Testament, chiliasm originated with early Christianity. The early Christians expected Jesus to establish a peaceful kingdom, before the end of the last days, that would last a thousand years and that would bring about the restoration of paradise on earth and to return all things to their original state.¹⁰

A characteristic of the chiliastic way of thinking is the concept of a united world in the last days, seeing the present as a time of trials and tribulations. Equality is anticipated in the coming society of the thousand-year kingdom reign.¹¹

According to the history of religion one can especially see chiliastic beliefs in Christian minority groups and marginalised groups. In the age of Enlightenment chiliastic ways of thinking mostly disappeared. They only resurfaced in the 19th century in North America and England within revolutionary-socialist and religious movements.¹²

One of the youngest chiliastic groups is the religious community of Jehovah's Witnesses, who originally called themselves 'Earnest Bible Students' at the end of the 70s in the 19th century. The central theme of their religious world view is the belief in an apocalyptic victory resulting in the destruction of the antichrist. The belief that history is predestined with a continuous run of time forms the basis for this chiliastic expectation. The theory of this independent religious community is marked by the time of the end and is focused on the proclaimed 'kingdom' of God, that under Jesus Christ's direction all problems of humanity will be resolved by the establishment of his reign of peace. According to Jehovah's Witnesses the end of our days is determined by the decisive battle of 'Har-Magedon', in which God will defeat the power of Evil, resulting immediately in the 'thousand-year reign of Christ'.¹³ True worshippers of Jehovah will live in this new paradise on earth and the 144,000 'anointed' will rule with Christ in heaven.

Origins and Evolution of the Religious Community

Around 1870 an American businessman raised as a Presbyterian, Charles Taze Russell,¹⁴ brought together a small Bible study group, calling themselves Earnest Bible Students. At the



end of the 70s of the same century the magazine Zion's Watch Tower first appeared, declaring it to be the central organ of the new religious movement. In 1881 the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society was founded. At the start of the 20th century its headquarters were established in the borough of Brooklyn, New York. From the early 1890s Russell endeavoured to spread his teachings to the European continent. To unite all believers, the International Bible Students Association, also known as the International Association of Earnest Bible Students, was founded in London in 1914.¹⁵

Russell had predicted that a visible establishment of the kingdom of God on earth would take place in the year 1914. To the Bible Students, the start of World War I was a fulfilment of this prophecy. But the 'thousand-

year kingdom' did not come into effect. This was a problem for the religious community, and they had to contemplate the consequences of this unfulfilled prophecy. Russell reinterpreted the delayed kingdom of God as the end to the right of rulership by all earthly governments.¹⁶ During World War I, the question arose as to whether a Christian could perform military service, which led to much discussion within the movement of the Bible Students. The Watchtower Society had advised the members of the International Bible Students Association to make use of the right of conscientious objection on religious grounds wherever possible. Russell stressed that, on principle, a Christian must not kill. Though they did not openly call upon their fellow believers to refuse to perform military service, recruited Bible Students would try to serve as non-combatants, for example, in health care troops.

Therefore, around 1916 still several hundred Bible Students were in combat in the field for the German Empire.

Because of the heated discussions as to whether a Bible Student should take a 'neutral' stance, more and more of them refused military service. This stance caused governments and church bodies to take notice of the activities of the Bible Students' movement at the end of World War I.¹⁷

From 1916 onwards, the American Judge Rutherford led the International Association of Earnest Bible Students. The relatively slow growth of the religious community changed at the beginning of the economic crisis at the end of the 20s.

Women especially were 'converted'. The mission of the Bible Students held a great attraction for those in socially weaker circles and for the elderly.¹⁸ Many people in 1931/32 saw the film 'The Photo Drama of Creation' and became Bible Students, convinced of their religious teachings.¹⁹

In 1931 the religious community took the name 'Jehovah's Witnesses'. They viewed themselves as witnesses in the Biblical tradition, in particular that of the New Testament, and still do to this day.²⁰ A scripture in the Gospel of John explains the name of the religious community: 'To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should

Hören Sie
RICHTER RUTHERFORD
Montag, den 7. Sept., 20 Uhr
im Kunst- u. Kongreßhaus
LUZERN
über das Thema:
HARMAGEDON
Die Schlacht Gottes

Richter Rutherford ist kein Schwärmer, wohl aber ein Mann mit starkem Gottesglauben; er wünscht das Volk durch die Verkündigung des Vorhabens Gottes zu trösten und in ihm die Hoffnung auf eine gerechte, göttliche Regierung auf Erden zu stärken.

Während leichtlebige Optimisten sich mit lächelndem Achselzucken über die drohenden Krisen und Katastrophen unserer Zeit hinwegsetzen, sind es heute aber auch Staatsmänner, die am fieberhaft beschleunigten Pulsschlag des politischen und sozialen Lebens das untrügliche Symptom erkennen, das, einmal im entscheidenden Stadium angelangt, eine alle menschlichen Begriffe übersteigende Erschütterung auslösen muß. —

Ruhige Kulturgeschichtsphilosophen müssen heute bekennen: Eine wichtige Epoche der Menschheit ist im Vergehen, und eine neue steht vor der Tür! —

Wie wird nun nach göttlicher, untrüglicher Prophezeiung diese Epoche eingeführt werden? Zum Nutzen oder zur Vergeltung welcher Menschen? —

Besuchen Sie deshalb diesen Vortrag, durch welchen Ihnen alle diese zeitgemäßen Fragen beantwortet werden.

EINTRITT FREI!

JEHOVAS ZEUGEN
(Bibel-Forscher-Vereinigung)
Gruppe Luzern

Invitation of Jehovah's Witnesses to an assembly with Rutherford.

bear witness unto the truth' (Joh. 18:37; 21st Century King James Version), indicating that the preaching work would take a more prominent place in their activities.

Das Schöpfungsdrama

(ganz neu zusammen gestellt)

eine einzigartige Aufführung, umfassend:
Prähistorisches Altertum—Neuzeit—Gegenwart—Wissenschaft
Philosophie—Geschichte—Fortschritt und Bibel in Harmonie

Großer öffentlicher Lichtbildervortrag

in zwei Teilen (über 500 Lichtbilder)

1. Teil am **Dienstag, den 21. März 1933**
je um 3 Uhr nachm. und um 8 Uhr abends
2. Teil am **Mittwoch, den 22. März 1933**
je um 3 Uhr nachm. und um 8 Uhr abends

Salzburg, „Großer Kurhausaal“

1. Teil: Entstehung und Bildung der Erde aus dem gasartigen Zustand — Die ersten Menschen — Ursache des Todes — Ursprung der Götter und Heldenjagen — Die Gefahren durch unsichtbare Geschöpfe im Spiritismus. — Der Untergang der ersten Welt durch die Sintflut und alle markanten Ereignisse des alten Testaments bis zur Geburt Jesu, sein Leben und Kampf gegen eine teuflische Organisation.
2. Teil: Pfingsten — Die Urfluthe — Die Christenverfolgungen — Das organisierte Christentum — Mittelalter — Zeichen der Zeit — Zunahme der Erkenntnis — Technik — Der Weltkrieg im Lichte biblischer Prophezie — Warum verlagert der Völkerbund? — Der Untergang dieser Weltordnung durch Harmagedon — Das Königreich, die Hoffnung der Welt — Friede auf Erden.

Eintritt frei!

Salzburger Gruppe der Zeugen Jehovas
und Wachturm Gesellschaft, Wien

The slide show of the 'Photo-Drama of Creation' brought many to join Jehovah's Witnesses.

Jehovah's Witnesses have been active in Germany since 1896. They came to be recognised under the name of Internationale Bibelforscher Vereinigung and reached a total of 25,000 followers in 1933.

The religious community was also established in Austria at the beginning of the 20th century, stimulated by visits of the leaders Russell and Rutherford. The activity of Jehovah's Witnesses as an association dates back to 1911. In 1923, the Watchtower Society opened their office in Austria's capital.²¹ Ten years later this office was registered as a branch office of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. The politics of the Ständestaat forced the organisation of the Bible Students to dissolve the association in 1935. From then on Jehovah's Witnesses continued activities for their faith underground. In 1938 there were 550 members who actively contributed to the expansion of the faith.²²

History of Persecution in Germany

Immediately after the National Socialists came into power and Hitler was appointed Chancellor of the Reich by Hindenburg in 1933, the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in

Germany began. The reason for the persecution was to be found in the beliefs of the Witnesses, who would comply with measures and regulations of the state provided they did not clash with religious teachings. For instance, their adherence to the commandment that one must obey God more than man would inevitably lead to an authority conflict, because the authority of the National Socialist's leaders went against Bible principles. Because they believe that glory belongs to God, Jehovah's Witnesses refused to make the Nazi salute or take the oath.²³ It was unacceptable to them to ascribe salvation to man.²⁴ To honour the Nazi flag and hang the flag out of their houses would be a denunciation of their faith.

Every Jehovah's Witness received the commission to spread their teachings and thus bear witness to the 'truth', thereby causing an additional conflict with the National Socialistic government.

The absolute prohibition on killing according to the fifth commandment, made it essential to refuse military service and all activities connected to armament or war economy.²⁵

The persecution began on 28 February 1933 with the Verordnung zum Schutz von Volk und Staat. The government suspended the constitutional rights of the Constitution of Weimar thus providing conditions for house searches and confiscation of the Witnesses' printed matter. By the end of June 1933, a ban on Jehovah's Witnesses in Prussia followed, for the following reasons:

'The International Association of Bible Students and associated organisations have in word and writing, under the cover of so-called scientific Bible research, made an unmistakable smear campaign against State and Church. Because they stigmatise both as organs of Satan, they undermine the pillars of civil society. In their numerous writings (according to the publications: Millions Now Living Will Never Die, page 18 onwards, War or Peace, Prosperity Sure, Banner for the People, Crimes and

*Despite persecution
Jehovah's Witnesses
continued to spread
their teachings.*



DAS GOLDENE ZEIT ALTER

„IHR WERDET GEHASST WERDEN VON ALLEN NATIONEN“
(Matth. 24: 9)

Semi-monthly — Halbmonatlich
The Golden Age — German edition

Vol. XII

Nr. 281

BERN
1. Juni 1954

Disasters, Heaven and Purgatory, The Crisis and other writings) they mock the institutions of State and Church by consciously and maliciously twisting Bible teachings.

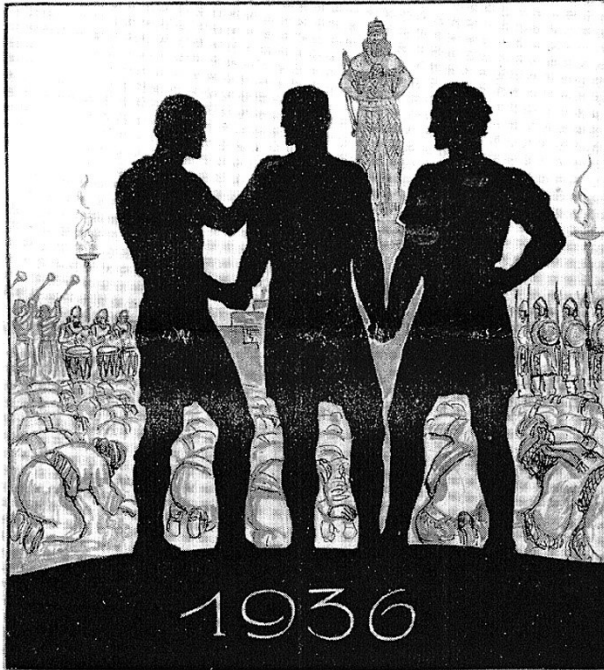
‘Their battle methods are characterised by fanatically influencing their members. By no mean amount of funds, they gain a strong offensive by using their Cultural-Bolshevik defragmentation methods.

‘Their influence on a large section of the population rests in part on peculiar ceremonies that turn followers into fanatics and directly disrupts the spiritual balance in the circles concerned.

‘The association mentioned is clearly in opposition to the current State and its cultural and moral structures. That is why the ‘International Bible Students’, according to their own battle goals of course, see the Christian National State as an especially formidable opponent, against which they must fight radically. [...] The threat of this Society’s schemes to the current State is enhanced because they have a striking number of former members of communist and Marxist parties and organisations in their midst. They had hoped to find a hiding place in this seemingly pure religious society, that would make their camouflaged political battle against the current government system possible. The Association of Bible Students and their societies are therefore favouring Communism and are on the brink of becoming a gathering place of the most diverse elements with hostile intent towards the State. [...] For protection of the people and the State against communist favouritism and to bolster the public order and safety, they will be disbanded.’²⁶

With this ban the Prussian Ministry of the Interior made it clear that the government would stop the activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses, which they held on par with the activities of communists. As early as 1933 a few Jehovah’s Witnesses were arrested and searches of the homes of members of the religious community increased.

KONGRESS



In Lucerne Jehovah's Witnesses passed a resolution that demanded that Hitler cease persecution of their religious community.

LUZERN

The American representation protested against the ban on Jehovah's Witnesses exercising their religion in Germany and referred to a decision of the Reich from 1930 which confirmed that the International Association of Bible Students was a philanthropic and non-political organization. They gave the assurance that the religious community was associated with neither Jews nor communists and was solely based on Bible teachings. This resulted in the restoration of the impounded possessions of the Watchtower Society Magdeburg (Prussia). However, the preaching activities and the meetings of the Bible Students remained prohibited.²⁷

In 1934 Rutherford wrote a letter to Hitler in which he protested against the unjustified persecution and discrimination of Jehovah's Witnesses. Rutherford urged Hitler to stop the persecution and to accept the scriptural basis of the religious community.

This letter went unanswered, and the result was that the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses intensified. Thereupon the organization started its first international campaign. Groups from Europe, America and Canada made known their indignation about the bad treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses by sending thousands of telegrams to Hitler urging him to stop persecuting their brothers and sisters or else God would destroy the national party.²⁸ Meetings in Lucerne (1936) and in Basel (1937) were held, in which resolutions were sent to Hitler and to the Pope. In June 1937 an open letter was distributed in Germany in which they protested against the torture and abuse by judicial authorities and the hostile attitude of the Nazi party towards Christianity. Swiss documentation includes acts of protest by the Society of Jehovah's Witnesses, termed a 'Crusade against Christianity'. This corroborates the application of resources, as well as Jehovah's Witnesses' opposition to a totalitarian regime of the Nazi dictatorship.²⁹

According to Zipfel, the resolution of Lucerne in 1936 was a direct declaration of war on Hitler, an attack on the State. Arrests followed swiftly and harsher punishments were imposed on the Witnesses. Upon interrogation, the persecuted Bible Students were presented a so-called renouncement declaration, which they had to sign.

It read as follows:

'I,.....

born on

in.....

herewith make the following declaration:

'I have come to know that the International Bible Students Association is proclaiming erroneous teachings and under the cloak of religion follows hostile purposes against the State.

'I therefore left the organisation entirely and made myself absolutely free from the teachings of this sect.

'I herewith give assurance that I will never again take any part in the activity of the International Bible Students Association. Any persons approaching me with the teaching of the Bible Students, or who in any manner reveal their connections with them, I will denounce immediately. All literature from the Bible Students that should be sent to my address I will at once deliver to the nearest police station.

'I will in the future esteem the laws of the State, especially in the event of war will I, with weapon in hand, defend the fatherland, and join in every way the community of the people.

'I have been informed that I will at once be taken again into protective custody if I should act against the declaration given today.

....., Dated.....

.....

Signature'³⁰

Neither abuse nor contempt could persuade the imprisoned Jehovah's Witnesses to sign the document. Only a few caved in under pressure and (formally) renounced their faith by signing the written statement presented. The Bible Students saw in their being persecuted not a judgement from God, but the end battle of 'Harmagedon' for the establishment of the

thousand-year reign of God's kingdom. To them it was the battle of the righteous against the antichrist, who was also proclaiming a thousand-year reign. For Jehovah's Witnesses, this was an imitation of the Devil and a test which had to be resisted. To faithful Jehovah's Witnesses, signing the declaration that would free them, would be a denial of their faith.³¹

The Bible Students, type-cast as 'religious fanatics', were not only imprisoned but also locked up in sanatoria and psychiatric institutions. As early as 1938 Zürcher mentions a Bible Student who died in a sanatorium and whose body was covered in syringe marks.³² This indicates that the authorities of the Nationalistic Social regime had tried to 'bring Bible Students to their senses' by means of pseudo-medical practices. The measures they used usually resulted in death.

The Nazi government took targeted action to destroy the economic existence of Jehovah's Witnesses. Post Office and railroad employees were discharged almost without exception, as were labourers and other civil servants. Even though their superiors and colleagues knew them to be very conscientious, honest and industrious employees, the National Socialist authorities were rigorously against Bible Students in service of the government. The reason usually was that they refused to bring the 'Hitler salute'. Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums usually formed the legal base for dismissal.³³

The National Socialist authority increasingly extended its influence on all groups in society and focussed its attention on the education and care for the youth. 'The state wanted the upcoming generation body and soul.'³⁴ The National Socialist powers watched over the execution of their highest command, 'the exclusive love for the Fuhrer, loyalty to the state'³⁵ and they did their best to achieve this. Many Bible Students were relieved of their parental rights and their children were taken away and placed in special reprogramming camps or Nazi institutions.

Abschrift.

Geheime Staatspolizei
Geheimes Staatspolizeiamt
II B 2 - 875/37 - 5

Berlin, den 21. Juni 1937.

An

alle Staatspolizeileitstellen
und Staatspolizeistellen

- nachrichtlich den Herren Ober- und Regierungspräsidenten
in Preußen -.

Betrifft: Internationale Bibelforschervereinigung.

Vorgang: ohne.

Um die Verbreitung der Lehre der IEV unter der Jugend zu verhindern, ist es erforderlich, die Kinder der bereits in Erscheinung getretenen Bibelforscher dem Einfluß ihrer Eltern zu entziehen.

Zu diesem Zwecke ersuche ich, bei den zuständigen Amtsgerichten darauf hinzuweisen, daß denjenigen Anhängern der IEV, die durch ihre illegale Betätigung und ihr Bekanntnis zur Lehre der IEV das geistige Wohl ihrer Kinder gefährden, das Personenfürsorgerecht gemäß § 1666 BGB entzogen wird.

Das Amtsgericht in Zwickau hat bereits durch Beschluß vom 4.5.1937 in einem Falle dem Vater das Personenfürsorgerecht für seinen Sohn gemäß § 1666 BGB mit der Begründung entzogen, daß er das Wohl seines Kindes durch die Erziehung im Sinne der Bibelforscherlehre gefährde. Für den Sohn selbst, der bereits unter dem Einfluß dieser Lehre stand, wurde durch Beschluß vom 13.3.1937 gemäß § 63, Absatz 1, Ziffer II RJWO Fürsorgeerziehung angeordnet (Aktens. d. Amtsgerichts Zwickau 56 XII S. 226/36). Auf diese Entscheidung sind die jeweils zuständigen Gerichte hinzuweisen.

Von jedem Fall der Entziehung des Personenfürsorgerechts gemäß § 1666 oder der Anordnung der Fürsorgeerziehung wegen Betätigung für die illegale IEV ist mir zu berichten.

Im Auftrage:

gez. M u l l e r .

Beglaubigt:

(L.S.)

gez. Unterschrift,
Kanzleiangestellte.

To stop the influence on young ones, several Bible Students were relieved of their parental rights.

Some Bible Students were denied the right to take care of their children, because according to Nazi ideology the mental welfare of the children was in great danger because of their parents' beliefs. It was impossible for children and teenagers to evade nationalistic propaganda, which was everywhere. At school, in Hitler's Youth organisations or in youth camps – they were constantly confronted with the 'Hitler salute' or singing the national anthem.³⁶ Jehovah's Witness Hermine Schmidt, survivor of the Stutthof concentration camp, relates the following in her biography:

'I liked school [...] but now, at this time [1935, addition by the author] everything was different. You had to learn to make yourself small and invisible in a way, to put up with the contempt, the ridicule and bullying, and to bear injustice, great or small. This was an [...] assault on your self-consciousness, [...] a great challenge for a child who would in normal circumstances seek recognition. It wasn't just about the Hitler salute. It was the festivals, the gifts, the pressure to join the Young Girls' League. So many things were involved that I usually went to school with a real sense of dread.'³⁷

Hermine Schmidt relates in her memoirs that she had tummy aches because she feared the marches, the singing and the Hitler salute in school, which were forbidden by her religious conviction.

Pupils refusing to bring the Hitler salute disrupted the order in school, according to the Nazis. The school management would request the court to expel these pupils from school and give them a temporary re-education, a 'vorläufige Fürsorgeerziehung gemäß §67 des Reichsgesetzes für Jugendwohlfahrt'. That was to ensure an adequate upbringing.³⁸

Particularly contradictory in the National Socialist ideology, is that many who were incarcerated in concentration camps were put to work in childcare in SS officer's families. On the one hand the Bible Students were accused of having a harmful influence, even threatening the mental well-being of their children. On the other hand, the National Socialist machinery exploited the inmates – putting them in charge of their own children. In the women's concentration camp of St. Lambrecht, a Dutch Witness, Toos Berkers, was entrusted with the care of SS officer Stadler's children, who lived in the town of St.

Lambrecht. Berkers's arrest and deportation separated her from her own children, who were sent to a monastery, to be brought up there, far from the influence of the Bible Students.³⁹

The enforcement of 'Schutzhaft', later also called 'Nachhaft' led to many Bible Students being robbed of their freedom long after the court-ordered punishment. If an immediate transfer to a concentration camp was not possible, an incarcerated Jehovah's Witness would be locked up in a police jail.⁴⁰ The living conditions there were degrading as well.

Jehovah's Witnesses were, along with 'political opponents', among the first victims of the Nazi regime to be incarcerated in concentration camps. The original purpose of this 'protective custody' was to make someone inactive as a 'political opposer' combined with his re-education, but as the war dragged on their exploitation as 'work-slaves' became more important.⁴¹

Because they were known as reliable workers, the camp authorities had little interest in releasing the Bible Students. They would only be released by signing a statement in which they denounced their faith. Despite the bullying, the mistreatment and the executions in the concentration camps, only very few Bible Students made use of this possibility.⁴²

In the summer of 1944 Heinrich Himmler 'discovered' Jehovah's Witnesses for his National Socialist conquest policies. In a letter to the head of the Gestapo, Ernst Kaltenbrunner, Himmler wrote:

'A couple of experiences and insights of recent date have led me to concoct a plan that I would like to bring to your attention. It involves the Jehovah's Witnesses, the issue with the Cossacks and with that, the matter of Vlasov. My considerations further address the full query: how are we to govern and pacify Russia after we have conquered it – which in the coming years most certainly will happen – and we have conquered vast stretches of its territory? [...] We must do even more to bring the people in the hinterland into a peaceful and disarmed situation with us. The thought of letting them have their own form of National Socialism is madness. But the people must have a religion or world view of some sort. To support the Orthodox Church

and let it revive is foolish, because they oppose the organisation of national unity again and again. To allow the Catholic Church in, would be equally foolish. It is unnecessary to discuss this viewpoint. [...] All forms of religion and the sects that cooperate in pacification should be supported. For all Turkish peoples the Buddhist faith comes to mind and for all other peoples the teachings of the Bible Students. It is known that the latter have characteristics that are unbelievably positive for us: aside from their refusing to do military service and of having anything to do with war, all “destructive activities” – as they see it – they fiercely oppose the Jews and the Catholic Church and the Pope. Besides that, they are incredibly sober, they don’t drink, they don’t smoke; they are good, honest workers. They keep their word. They aren’t out for wealth and status, because that would endanger their everlasting life. It’s obvious that these are ideal characteristics, and sincere, staunch, idealistic Bible Students [...] have enviable qualities. [...] Therefore, the opportunity arises of giving all the reliable Bible Students positions of trust in the concentration camps in which a monetary or otherwise material responsibility is involved; to make use of them for this purpose and treat them exceptionally well. With that we give ourselves the basis for the deployment of Bible Students in Russia in the near future and with that to have messengers through whom we can pacify the Russians by letting them spread the teachings of the Bible Students.’⁴³

This letter, that creates a place for the religious community of Jehovah’s Witnesses in the ‘Thousand Year Reich’, forms an image of Himmler’s barbaric and absurd delusions of power.

There is no indication that Jehovah’s Witnesses received any better treatment in the last months in the concentration camps before the caving in of the Nationalist State, aside from the fact that they were given more agricultural duties. From reports of survivors, it seems that some female Bible Students were deployed in the household of the SS as caretakers and maids, because the beliefs of the Bible Students allowed for no thoughts of escape.

A b s c h r i f t

Der Reichsführer-SS
RF/Dr. I 37/43 Bd 5

Feld-Kommandostelle, 6. Januar 1943

G e h e i m !

Lieber P o h l !

Lieber M ü l l e r !

Anliegend ein Vorgang über die 10 Bibelforscherinnen, die auf dem Gut meines Arztes K e r s t e n arbeiten. Ich habe die Gelegenheit, dort die Frage der ernsten Bibelforschervn=allen Seiten zu studieren. Mir wurde von Frau Kersten ein sehr guter Vorschlag gemacht. Sie sagte mir, dass sie noch nie ein so gutes, williges, treues und gehorsames Arbeitspersonal hatte wie diese 10 Frauen. Aus Liebe und Büte tun diese Menschen sehr viel. Interessanterweise verdunkeln sie dort nicht deswegen, weil sie den Krieg unterstützen wollen, sondern deswegen, weil zwei unmündige Kinder da sind, denen dadurch etwas passieren könnte, und die noch nicht bekehrt seien. Jehova hätte ihnen aber den Auftrag gegeben, auf das Leben dieser Kinder aufzupassen. Sie halten sich streng an ihr gegebenes Wort. Sie gaben alle Frau Kersten das Wort, mit keinem Menschen über ihre Bibelforscherlehre zu sprechen. Einzelne Fälle, wo lediglich Leute, die auf den Hof kamen und sie einmal fragten, was für eine Lehre das denn wäre, bewiesen klar, dass sie ihr Wort halten. Sie sagten: "Wir haben versprochen, darüber nicht zu reden." - Eine ihnen zum Lesen gegebene Zeitung wiesen die Frauen zurück, denn im Lager wäre verboten Zeitungen zu lesen und sie hätten sich an diese Gebote zu halten, denn auch diese stammten von Jehova. - Eine der Frauen bekam einmal RM 5.-- Trinkgeld von einem Gast. Sie nahm das Geld an~~am~~ das Haus nicht zu blamieren, lieferte es aber bei Frau Kersten ab, weil der Besitz von Geld im Lager verboten wäre. Die Frauen übernehmen dort freiwillig jede Arbeit. Am Abend stricken sie; Sonntags sind sie ebenfalls in irgend einer Form tätig. Im Sommer haben sie, bei 10-, 11- und 12-stündiger Arbeit, als Pilze im Walde zu finden waren, es sich nicht nehmen lassen, zwei Stunden früher aufzustehen, um Körbe voll Pilze zu sammeln. Insgesamt ergänzen diese Tatsachen mein Bild, das ich von diesen Bibelforschern habe. Es sind unerhört fanatische, opferbereite und willige Menschen. Könnte man ihren Fanatismus für Deutschland einspannen oder insgesamt für die Nation im Kriege einen derartigen Fanatismus beim Volk erzeugen, so wären wir noch stärker als wir heute sind. Natürlich ist die Lehre dadurch, dass sie den Krieg ablehnt, derartig schädlich, dass wir sie nicht zulassen können, wenn wir nicht den größten Schaden für Deutschland haben wollen.

Interessant ist, dass sie Juden, Papst und katholische Kirche fanatisch ablehnen und bekämpfen.

Strafen verfangen bei ihnen gar nicht, da sie mit Begeisterung von jeder Strafe erzählen. Sie nehmen uns die Strafen nicht übel, da wir nach ihrer Ansicht von Jehova ja unsere Aufträge haben und sie durchführen müssen. Jede Strafe ist für sie ein Verdienst im Jenseits. Deshalb wird sich jeder echte Bibelforscher und jede echte Bibelforscherin, unter Hintansetzung aller persönlichen Gefühle - Liebe zu Frau und Kind oder Liebe zu Mann und Kind - ohne weiteres hinrichten lassen und ohne weiteres sterben. Jeder Dunkelarrest, jeder Hunger, jedes Frieren ist ein Verdienst; jede Strafe, jeder Schlag ist ein Vorzug bei Jehova.

Sollten in den Lagern mit den Bibelforschern oder Bibelforscherinnen wieder Schwierigkeiten auftreten, so verbiete ich, dass der Lagerkommandant eine Strafe ausspricht. Jeder Fall ist für die nächste Zeit mir unter kurzer Darstellung des Sachverhaltes zu melden. Ich beabsichtige in Zukunft bei einem solchen Fall das Gegenteil zu machen und der betr. Person zu sagen: Ich verbiete, dass Sie jetzt arbeiten. Sie sollen besseres Essen erhalten als die anderen und brauchen nichts zu tun.

Denn während dieser Zeit ruht nämlich nach dem Glauben dieser gutmütigen Irren jedes Verdienst, im Gegenteil, es werden frühere Verdienst von Jehova abgezogen (seine Buchführung muss eine phantastische sein).

Nun zu dem Vorschlag:

Ich ersuche, den Einsatz der Bibelforscher und Bibelforscherinnen in der Richtung zu lenken, dass sie alle in Arbeiten kommen - in der Landwirtschaft z.B. - , bei denen sie mit Krieg und allen ihren Toppunkten nichts zu tun haben. Hierbei kann man sie bei richtigem Einsatz ohne Aufsicht lassen; sie werden nie weglaufen. Man kann ihnen selbständige Aufträge geben, sie werden die besten Verwalter und Arbeiter sein.

Nun noch eine Verwendung und dies ist, wie oben erwähnt, der Vorschlag von Frau Kersten:

Nehmen wir doch die Bibelforscherinnen als Personal in unsere Lebensbornheime, nicht als Pflegerinnen, aber als Köchinnen, Hausmädchen, Wäscherinnen und für derartige Aufgaben. Auch als Hausmeister, wo wir da und dort noch Männer haben, können kräftige Bibelforscherinnen genommen werden. Ich bin überzeugt, dass wir in den wenigsten Fällen mit ihnen Kummer haben werden.

Auch mit sonstigen Vorschlägen; wie Abstellung einzelner Bibelforscherinnen in kinderreiche Haushalte bin ich sehr einverstanden. Geeignete Bibelforscherinnen, die das Können dafür haben, bitte ich einzeln herauszusuchen und mir zu melden. Ich werde sie dann auf entsprechende Haushalte kinderreicher SS-Familien persönlich verteilen. In solchem Haushalt dürften sie dann allerdings keine Sträflingskleidung tragen, sondern einen anderen Anzug, und man müsste den dortigen Aufenthalt, ähnlich wie für die freigelassenen und internierten Bibelforscherinnen in Harzwalde, gestalten.

Bei allen diesen für solche Aufgaben abgestellten Halbfreigelassenen wollen wir schriftliches Abschwören oder sonstige Unterschriften vermeiden und lediglich die Verpflichtung auf Handschlag vornehmen.

Ich ersuche um Vorschläge für die Durchführung und Bericht.

Heil Hitler !
gez. H. Himmler



B.d.R.

gez. Unterschrift

SS-Obersturmführer.

*Reichsführer-SS
Heinrich Himmler on
the 'advantages' of
female Jehovah's
Witnesses*

In the inhumane circumstances in prisons and concentration camps Bible Students kept their moral integrity because they stayed faithful to God and drew strength from their faith. A later chapter will discuss whether the persecuted Bible Students were able to keep their psychological integrity as well.

Persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Europe

Regarding the persecution of the Bible Students in Europe,⁴⁴ we will only discuss the countries from which the women incarcerated in the concentration camp at St. Lambrecht came. That involves besides Germany and 'annexed' Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium and Poland.

In Austria the Bible Students had already been restricted in their activities during the Ständestaat of the Dollfuss government. The government banned the meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses in the early 1930s in Graz. An appeal against this ban was granted, but the foreign Bible Student missionaries had to leave the country because they lacked a residence permit. From 1933 on the authorities regularly issued summons to the members of the religious community. In 1935, during Schuschnigg was in office, the Watchtower publications and meetings of members of the religious community were banned.⁴⁵ This forced the Bible Students in Austria to continue their activities underground during the time of Austrian fascism.

On 12 March 1938 Hitler's army marched into Austria. At that moment there were 550 registered members of Jehovah's Witnesses in Austria.⁴⁶ A month later the population spoke out, under pressure and with very little opposition, in favour of joining Austria to Nazi-Germany. Simply not participating in the 'referendum' led to reprisals. One inhabitant of Knittelfeld, was driven out of her home for refusing to vote.⁴⁷

In Vienna, after the Anschluss, Jehovah's Witnesses made their own copies of Biblical reading material. Due to the increasing inspections of the Gestapo, it became harder and harder to bring reading and study material into the country. Because many male Bible Students were already in prison, courageous women made themselves available for underground work.⁴⁸

II/II 1134 - 10033

15. Dez. 1939

C 422 - 2

Stf./Lz.

1. An den
Führer des SD-Abschnittes G r a z.

15. DEZ 1939

Betr.: Illegale Tätigkeit der IBV, in Obersteiermark.
Vorg.: Dort. Lagebericht v. 29.11.39 AZ: III Dr. Ja/Kg.

Im obigen Lagebericht wurde über eine erhöhte Tätigkeit der Bibelforscher in dem Industriegebiet der Obersteiermark und über vorgefundene Unterlagen, die auf Verbindungen nach Graz, Wien und andere grössere Städte der Ostmark hinweisen, berichtet.

Zwecks Feststellung evtl. ~~weiterer~~ ^{bestehender} Verbindungen der dortigen illegalen IBV-Organisation zu IBV-Kreisen im Sudetenland, gegen die vom SD-Leitabschnitt Dresden z.Zt. eine grössere Aktion durchgeführt wird, wird um entsprechende Zusammenarbeit mit dem SD-Leitabschnitt Dresden gebeten.

Es wird ferner um ausführliche Berichterstattung ersucht, welche Massnahmen in Zusammenarbeit mit dem ~~zuständigen~~ ⁱⁿ Staat ~~polizeistellen~~ gegen die ill. IBV-Organisation ~~in der Ost-~~ ^{in der Ostmark} ~~mark~~ bereits durchgeführt wurde.

Shortly after the Anschluss the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Austria began.

2. v. II 1134.

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Kanzl. II 11
15.12.39

Therese Schreiber was arrested in 1939 because she copied and distributed the magazine 'The Watchtower' in Vienna. In 1940 she was deported to Ravensbrück. She belonged to the group that was transferred in May 1943 to the work camp St. Lambrecht, which until then was a sub camp of Ravensbrück. Therese Schreiber survived five years and six months of captivity.⁴⁹ Like all other Bible Students in concentration camp St. Lambrecht, she was freed by the British Army there in May 1945, after the surrender of the German army.

When the Germans troop invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, Polish Bible Students also fell victim to the Nazi regime. Five Jehovah's Witnesses, who were in St. Lambrecht at the end of their captivity, came from Poland. One of them, Paula Wölfle, was arrested as early as October 1940 and was one of the first Polish Bible Students to be deported to the women's concentration camp at Ravensbrück. Three years later she was transferred to the sub camp of St. Lambrecht.⁵⁰

On 10 May 1940 the army units of the 'Third Reich' invaded the Netherlands, four days later the entire Dutch territory was under the rule of the Nazi regime. By the end of May, the former Austrian interior minister and governor of Ostmark, Arthur Seyss-Inquart, as Reich Commissioner of the occupied Netherlands issued a ban on the Bible Students association. Soon thereafter the Branch Office of Jehovah's Witnesses was searched. The presses remained in use until July. Despite the ban and the confiscation of the society's possessions, the believers organised themselves underground. In 1940 they made it publicly known there was an investigation into their persecution in Germany. They also distributed editions of Informant, the brochure Refugees, the book Enemies and the publication Fascism or Freedom.⁵¹

In September 1941 Gerdina Huisman-Rabouw⁵² who only a short time earlier had 'come into the truth', was arrested. She was deported, after a brief stay in the Gestapo prison, to the women's concentration camp Ravensbrück and was transferred with 22 other Bible Students in 1943 to the concentration camp at St. Lambrecht.⁵³ Arthur Winkler, who led the society's activities in the Netherlands, was arrested together with several others in 1942.⁵⁴

Just as in other countries, members of the Bible Students were heavily persecuted in Belgium. In July 1941 Léon Floryn was arrested; his wife Maria fell into the hands of the Nazi's in May 1942. She too was sent to the sub camp St. Lambrecht to be put to work there after the living conditions in Ravensbrück drastically worsened.⁵⁵

In 1939 and 1940 the persecution reached its first peak.

Abschrift !

Der Generalstaatsanwalt
474 - 1.8.

Wien, am 29. März 1940.
I., Justizpalast.

An die

Herren Oberstaatsanwälte bei den Landgerichten
in

W i e n ,
K o r n e u b u r g ,
K r e m s ,
S t . P ö l t e n ,
W r . N e u s t a d t ,
Z n a i m .

Betrifft : Internationale Bibelforschervereinigung.

Anlagen : 3 Schriftstücke.

In der Anlage übersende ich Auszüge aus einer Denkschrift (S.1-6) des Geheimen Staatspolizeiamts aus dem Jahre 1935 sowie aus zwei Urteilen des Sondergerichtes Weimar vom 21. Dezember 1935 (So.G.89/35) und des Landgerichtes Dresden vom 26. Mai 1934 (III A 40/34 Nr.8) zur Kenntnisnahme. Die Auszüge geben einen umfassenden Überblick über Wesen und Charakter der Internationalen Bibelforschervereinigung.

Da, wie aus den mitgeteilten Auszügen erhellt, die Internationale Bibelforschervereinigung neben ihren sonstigen staatsfeindlichen Grundsätzen auch die Verweigerung des Wehrdienstes fördert, fällt jegliche Betätigung für die Internationale Bibelforschervereinigung unter die Strafvorschrift des § 3 der VO, zur Ergänzung der Strafvorschriften zum Schutz der Wehrmacht des Deutschen Volkes vom 25. November 1939 (RGBl. I S.2519). Hierbei ist insbesondere zu berücksichtigen, dass unter wehrfeindlicher Verbindung im Sinne des § 3 aaO. jeder -wenn auch noch so lockere-Zusammenschluss zu verstehen ist, der eine wehrfeindliche Einstellung pflegt; ein besonders organisatorischer Zusammenhalt ist nicht erforderlich (vgl.

in einzelnen die Ausführungen des Ministerialrats Rietzsch in der Deutschen Justiz 1940, Seite 79). Ich ersuche daher, gegen Anhänger der Internationalen Bibelforschervereinigung soweit nicht § 5 der KriegssonderstrafrechtsVO. vom 17. August 1938 (RGBl. I, 1939 S. 1455) in Betracht kommt und daher nach § 2, Abs. 4 d. KStVo. die Kriegsgerichtsbarkeit begründet ist, aus der Vorschrift des § 3 der VO. vom 26. November 1939 (RGBl. I, S. 2319) vorzugeben, in der Hauptverhandlung die vorstehenden Gesichtspunkte zur Geltung zu bringen und auf Strafen hinzuwirken, die der Staatsgefährlichkeit der Internationalen Bibelforschervereinigung Rechnung tragen. Es bestehen keine Bedenken, in nichtöffentlicher Sitzung in den Ausführungen über die anzuwendende Strafe den Inhalt der Denkschrift zu verwerfen. Gegen Funktionäre wird grundsätzlich für Zuchthausstrafe einzutreten sein.

gez. Dr. Stich

Beglaubigt:
Unterschrift
Rundstempel.

Das Ende einer Hetzorganisation

Internationale Bibelforscher- vereinigung aufgelöst

(Von unserer Haager Schriftleitung)

Den Haag, 8. März.

Auf Grund einer Verordnung des Reichskommissars für die besetzten niederländischen Gebiete vom 29. Mai 1940 hat der Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei und des Sicherheitsdienstes die Internationale Bibelforschervereinigung in den Niederlanden aufgelöst. Ferner hat er die Beschlagnahme und Einziehung des Vermögens der Internationalen Bibelforschervereinigung einschliesslich ihrer sämtlichen Organisationen angeordnet.

Die Internationale Bibelforschervereinigung und die ihr angeschlossenen Nebenorganisationen betreiben in Wort und Schrift unter dem Deckmantel angeblich wissenschaftlicher Bibelforschung eine unverkennbare Hetze gegen alle staatlichen und kirchlichen Einrichtungen. Indem sie beide Einrichtungen als Organe des Satans bezeichnen, untergraben sie die Grundsätze des völkischen Gemeinschaftslebens und gleichzeitig auch die staatliche Autorität in anarchistischem Sinne, wodurch im Falle eines Weiterbestehens dieser Organisation die öffentliche Sicherheit und Ordnung ernstlich gefährdet werden.

On Sunday 9 March 1941 the Deutsche Zeitung in den Niederlanden stated that Jehovah's Witnesses had been banned

HET GOUDEN TIJDPERK

*Front page of the
Dutch edition of
the magazine
The Golden Age*



SCHEIDING DER VOLKEN

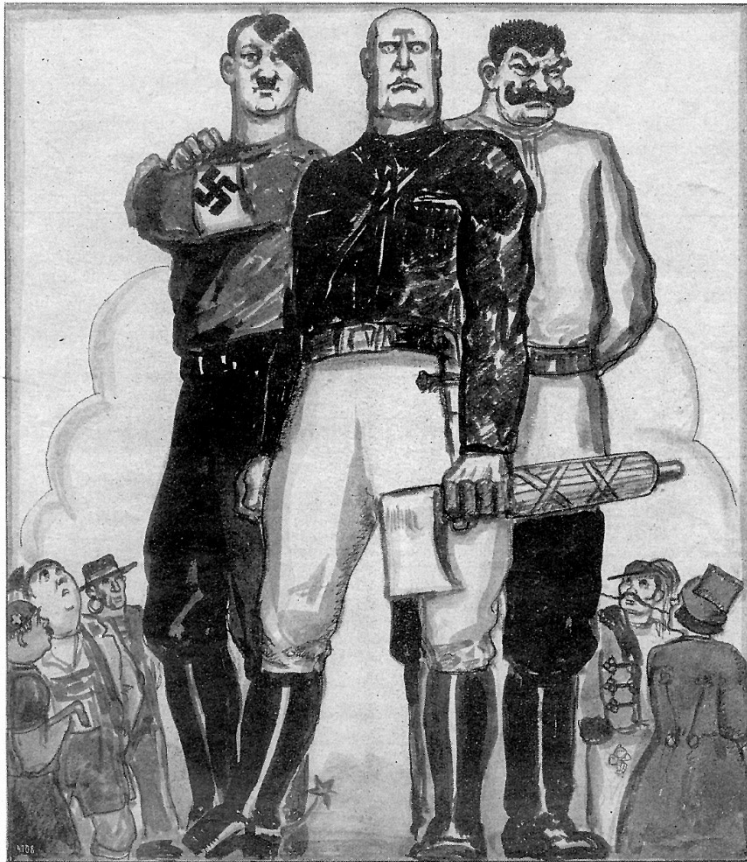
Monthly — Maandelijks
The Golden Age — Hollandish edition

Prijs 10 cent

Nr. 42

HEEMSTEDE
Juni 1936

HET GOUDEN TIJDPERK



DE REUZEN VAN KANAAN

Monthly — Maandelijks
The Golden Age — Hollandish edition

Prijs 10 cent

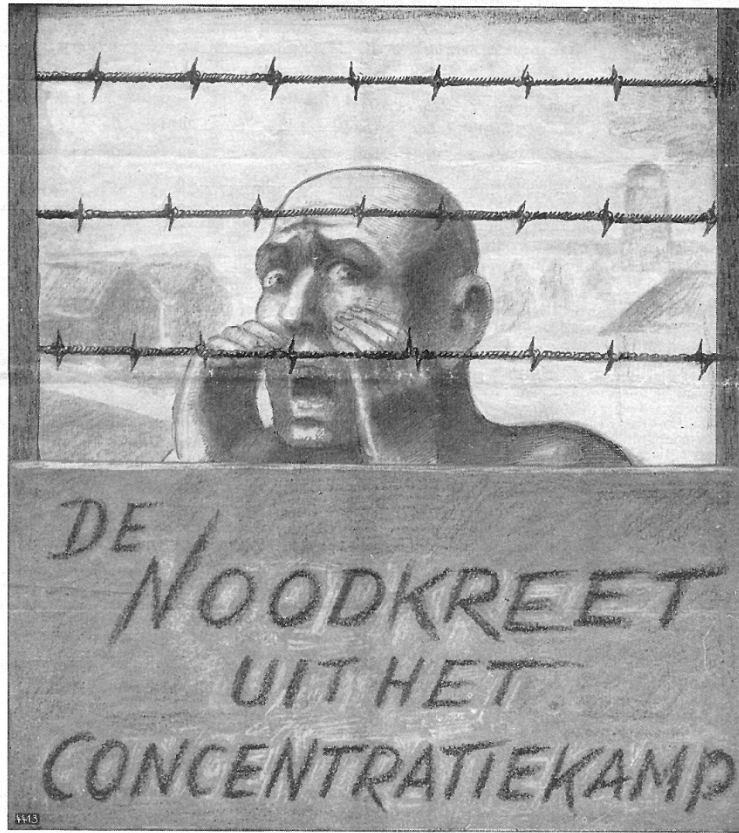
Nr. 50

HEEMSTEDE
November 1937

*Front page of the
Dutch edition of
the magazine
The Golden Age*

VERTROOSTING

Front page of the magazine Consolation (successor to The Golden Age) in which Nazi practices were revealed.



(Zie Feitenbericht op bidz. 12)

Monthly —Maandelijks
Vertroosting — Hollandish edition

Prijs 10 cent

Nr. 65

HEEMSTEDE
Mei 1938

The examples mentioned here show the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in countries under Nazi regime. They show how fast the net closed in on the persecuted group during the growth of the totalitarian regime.

Jehovah's Witnesses' Resistance

The German anti-Semitism researcher Wolfgang Benz describes resistance against National Socialism as a common denominator for the attitude, stance and actions against the ideology of the National Socialist rulers.⁵⁶ In a strict sense resistance had the purpose of contributing to the demise of the dictatorship. In fact, resistance means to act in rejection of National Socialism, contributing to the end of the regime. Motivation could be political, religious, ethical, socialistic or personal. This means that every conscious attempt to withstand the totalitarian regime and the willingness to take on the dangers that come with it, can be viewed as resistance.⁵⁷

The question of what should be regarded as resistance against National Socialism, is not without controversy.⁵⁸ In the Federal Republic of Germany resistance was defined until the 1960s as being 'motivated by a troubled conscience and love of the fatherland and was aimed at recovery of freedom and justice by using means such as conspiracy and subversion by civil, clerical and military elites.⁵⁹ A definition characterised by the effect an act would have on the relationship between the authorities and society followed. For example, according to Hüttenberger resistance would lead to a deed that would lead to rejection of certain actions.⁶⁰ In Austria the definition of resistance varies. As was originally described in the law on victim support, members of the resistance are in a narrower sense, 'persons, who took up arms for an independent, democratic Austria, conscious of their historic task [...] who battled for and have made an unconditional effort in word and deed'. A broader definition is given by Karl Stadler: Given the authorities' demand for absolute obedience, 'every form of opposition in the Third Reich can be viewed as a deed of resistance', even if this only involved a 'personal attempt to remain honourable'.⁶¹

109/42
Wien, den 17. Dezember 1941. 17
300

Abschlussvermerk:

Die Internationale Bibelforschervereinigung übte bis zum Jahre 1935 in der Ostmark ihre Tätigkeit im Rahmen des Vereines "Wachturm-Gesellschaft, Zweigstelle der Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, Brodlyn NY" aus. Als dieser Verein durch Bescheid des ehem. Sicherheitsdirektors von Wien vom 17.6.1935 und den Beschluss des ehemaligen Bundesgerichtshofes vom 7.2.1936 endgültig verboten wurde, nahmen die führenden Vereinsfunktionäre die Arbeiten zur Schaffung einer illegalen Bibelforscherorganisation auf. Es wurde für jeden Wiener Gemeindebezirk ein "Bezirksbruder" bestellt, der die in seinem Wohnbezirke ansässigen Bibelforscher zu betreuen hatte. Auch wurden bald gemeinsame Fahrten zu Bibelforscherkongressen, bezw. Vorträgen in das Ausland veranstaltet. Es ist erwiesen, dass dort den Bibelforschern aus jenen Staaten, in denen die Betätigung für die IEV verboten war; Anleitungen zur illegalen Arbeit gegeben wurden. Es wurden verbotene Bibelforscherlektüre in die Ostmark geschuggelt und von Hand zu Hand weitergegeben.

Nach der Wiedervereinigung Österreichs mit dem Deutschen Reich flüchteten die bisherigen Führer der illegalen Bibelforscherorganisation von der Ostmark in die Schweiz, bezw. nach England. Die Leitung übernahm nun der Vertreter August K r a f t, geboren am 13.10.1886 in Kiöwen, DR., chr. freist., ledig, Wien VII., Neubaugasse 45 whg. Die Bibelforscher, d.h. "Zeugen Jehovas" wurden jetzt in ihrer Tätigkeit vorsichtiger. Sie trafen sich nur mehr in kleineren Gruppen, teils in Privatwohnungen, teils in öffentlichen Parkanlagen, um dort die Bibel "auszulegen" und Bibelforscherschriften gemeinsam zu lesen. Zu diesem Zweck ließ August K r a f t einem Großteil der Bekenner durch

Decision of the Gestapo in Vienna in 1941 in which the activities of the Bible Students were banned.

Gerhard Botz made a distinction between the purpose of individual resistance and consciousness on which it was based. He describes the following forms of resistance: 'political resistance' (distribution of pamphlets, graffiti, hanging up posters, attacks, coup attempts, organised strikes, petitions, pastoral writings, passing on messages, conspiring, sabotage, partisan battle); 'social protest' (just keeping contact, aid actions, go-slow strike actions, refusal to comply, memoranda, sermons, jokes about leaders, criticizing the regime, spontaneous strikes, stepping down from an office, emigration, demonstrative visits to church, refusing to bring the Hitler salute, spreading rumours, contact with enemies of the regime, listening in on conversations); 'rejective behaviour' (clandestine slaughter, absenteeism, desertion, vandalism by youngsters, 'apolitical' crime).⁶²

According to Detlef Garbe Jehovah's Witnesses did not commit any acts of resistance against the National Socialistic dictatorship from an antifascist-democratic sentiment. Their steadfastness based on a religiously motivated refusal of the demands of the Nazi regime, was a matter of spiritual self-preservation. Jehovah's Witnesses decided to oppose the National Socialist regime completely consciously. Their motivation was religious by their wish to exercise their faith without restraints, according to Garbe. It was not the intention of Jehovah's Witnesses to change the political order by their reluctant attitude.⁶³ Although the members of the Bible Students community in word and writing opposed Gleichschaltung or the process of Nazification in organised form, Garbe is of the opinion that their resistance was not a purposely political opposition. In the ideology of Jehovah's Witnesses, their striving for a replacement of the National Socialist authorities, was the expectation of not a worldly government, but a Divine government, ruled by God and not by man.⁶⁴

Because the religious community of Jehovah's Witnesses sees itself as outspokenly politically neutral, the question arises as to whether their non-conformist behaviour against the National Socialist regime was a matter of entirely spiritual conflict, as uninvolved 'witnesses'. And although the motivation for the oppositional behaviour of the Bible Students was not antifascist or democratic, it in any case complied with humanitarian ideas and Christian values. In this I would like to refer to Reinhard Moos, who for every factual act looks at how it relates to the political dimension.

Dortmund, den 24. Juni 1936.

II B - 2436/36

Vertraulich!

Betrifft: Internationale Bibelforscher-Vereinigung.

Vorgang: Ohne.

In der Wahlzeit zur Reichstagswahl am 29.3.36 konnte insbesondere im Bezirk der Staatspolizeistelle Dortmund eine überaus rege Betätigung von ehem. Anhängern der I.B.V. wahrgenommen werden. Es setzte eine starke Flut von Broschüren- und Traktatverteilung sowie eine Mundpropaganda ein. Diese staatsfeindliche Betätigung hatte auch zur Folge, dass Anhänger der I.B.V. ihrer Wahlpflicht nicht genügten und weiter, dass Wehrpflichtige sich weigerten sich zur Musterung zu stellen.

Um diese staatsfeindliche Betätigung mit allen Mitteln zu bekämpfen und die Beschuldigten der gerechten Strafe zuzuführen, wurde bei der Stapo ein Sonderkommando gebildet, das die Aufgabe hatte, nach besonderen Richtlinien die Ermittlungen mit aller Energie durchzuführen. Es gelang in kurzer Zeit eine grosse Anzahl von Dienst- und Ortsgruppenleitern zu ermitteln, die wegen staatsfeindlicher Betätigung überführt werden konnten.

Es konnten rund 120 Personen festgenommen werden; in 90 Fällen wurde richterlicher Haftbefehl erlassen. Weiter wurden ca. 25 Zentner illegales Bücher- und Schriftenmaterial der verbotenen I.B.V. erfasst.

Infolge des Umfanges der durchgeführten Säuberungs-Aktion sah sich die Staatsanwaltschaft veranlasst, in ei zentrale Sachbearbeitung ebenfalls einzutreten. Für den Bezirk des Sondergerichts in Dortmund wurde bei der Staatsanwaltschaft ein Sonderdezernat eingerichtet.

Die

*The protest of Jehovah's
Witnesses was crushed by
'all necessary means'*

Acting from a religious motivation cannot be viewed separately from its political effect, according to Reinhard Moos. The rejective stance of Jehovah's Witnesses was thus not a neutral sentiment, because this religious community consistently refused the absolute demand for obedience by the totalitarian State. The National Socialist system declared them enemies of the State – so they were treated as such and were radically counteracted.⁶⁵

The refusal of Jehovah's Witnesses, for instance, to wage war on Hitler's ideology, to honour him with the prescribed salute and recognise his authority, to make themselves useful for the war economy and thus profiting the ideological system, cannot be seen as passive, politically neutral behaviour of individual members of the religious community. I do not think that what constitutes resistance is determined by where the motivation originated or what the reason is for the continuation of anti-ideological (or in this case anti-fascist) behaviour. Resistance means not heeding political guidelines, pitting oneself against the existing system and to question the existing regime and thus not only to doubt the existing regime but to bring about change by actions against the system.

The underground work of Jehovah's Witnesses also shows similarities to the organisation of a political resistance group. The Witnesses fixed up illegal printing presses, constantly recruited new members, and supported their repressed sisters in the faith with gathered funds.⁶⁶

The 'logic of absolute faith'⁶⁷ made it possible for the Bible Students to resist without violence, so that even the vicious methods of the National Socialist authorities could not force them to do otherwise. The price they paid for this pacifistic resistance was in many cases their own life. 'Jehovah's Witnesses can rightfully say they have defied evil. The Biblical commission to be true followers of Christ, they have fulfilled in a literal sense.'⁶⁸ That is exactly what survivors expressed when they said that they have come out of the concentration camps as winners. They were true to God and above all, to themselves and their conviction, under the most inhumane circumstances imaginable.

Jehovah's Witnesses in Concentration Camps

The great extent of the harshness with which the persecutors of the Nazi regime acted against Jehovah's Witnesses has been related. Many arrested members were sent to concentration camps without any form of trial. Jehovah's Witnesses were also among the

first group of victims to be incarcerated in the ‘first generation of concentration camps’.⁶⁹ They formed a separate category of prisoners, who from 1938⁷⁰ systematically wore the purple triangle on their clothes. Jehovah’s Witnesses were a closed community through the extraordinarily strong sense of togetherness in the group and their own group code. The concentration camp evolved into a gathering place of people who were persecuted for different reasons. Each group of inmates viewed the other group in their own way.⁷¹ The effect that the group of Jehovah’s Witnesses had on the other groups, will be clarified with the help of several quotes from fellow inmates who were persecuted on other grounds.

Hans Maršálek, political prisoner and ‘camp secretary’ in Mauthausen, viewed the group of Bible Students as homogeneous:

‘Jehovah’s Witnesses in the concentration camp at Mauthausen were a group of people bound by a shared sense of destiny. They were a modest, industrious, tolerant people that stayed true to their International Bible Students Association and with that, true to their faith. They remained strictly neutral in illegal political discussions in the camp. There was no political cooperation with them, and they refused to take part in actions against the SS. Not one of them would attempt to escape from the camp.’⁷²

It should be mentioned that Jehovah’s Witnesses did not take on any prison functions. They refused to join in any actions which could have targeted the SS or fellow prisoners.

The former political prisoner Margarete Buber-Neumann lived closely with the Bible Students as Block Senior in the women’s concentration camp Ravensbrück.

‘The Bible Students [...] were the only kind of prisoners in Ravensbrück that remained a closed religious community. [...] Faith gave the Bible Students enormous strength and during the years in the concentration camp they proved that death did not frighten them and that they could endure indescribable suffering in the name of Jehovah, without weakening. [They] refused every kind of work that promoted the war.’⁷³

Jehovah's Witnesses stood firm for the principles they found in the Bible and drew therefrom the strength necessary to withstand the terror of the Nazi regime. It was their courageous faith within the totalitarian system of the concentration camp which made them an object of hatred for the SS, who tried to force them to deny their faith by abusing them.

Their will for self-preservation and above all their sense of community helped them come up with collective survival strategies that enabled them to alleviate the pressures of everyday camp life. They developed, for instance, a network of mutual help in which they shared food parcels.

Occasionally Bible Students helped other groups of prisoners. Ms Buber-Neumann related that when she underwent harsh punishment in 'the Bunker' a Jehovah's Witness who worked in the Zellenbau,⁷⁴ functioned as go-between for her and smuggled food parcels to her cell.

In later years the situation of Jehovah's Witnesses changed in the concentration camps. In mid-1942 the economic deployment of the prisoners gained in several areas in importance. Jehovah's Witnesses were sought after workers, because they did their work, in as much as it did not contradict their faith, with diligence and care.⁷⁵ Therefore, they could be deployed outside the camp because they would make no attempt to escape, on account of their religious beliefs. They were placed in so-called positions of trust, for instance as household-help for SS officers. This enabled them to make contact with the outside world and made it possible to smuggle Bible literature into the camp. In secret Jehovah's Witnesses came together for 'Bible study' and they managed to hold their religious meetings.⁷⁶ They even conducted baptisms. In compliance with their preaching commission, Bible Students also recruited new members for their religious community in the camps. Margarete Messnarz-Günter, who was employed as a kitchen help in the monastery of St. Lambrecht as part of the Reichsarbeitsdienst, related how Ella Hempel attempted to evangelise. Ella Hempel worked as a prison cook with Messnarz-Günter at the same stove. It is evident that the commission to spread the 'truth' was carried out resolutely even in the concentration camps.

The diligently spread message of the coming 'kingdom of God' also repeatedly found response in other concentration camps, so that prisoners of other groups wanted to join the

Bible Students and asked the SS for a 'purple triangle'. More than 3000 Jehovah's Witnesses all together wore this mark.⁷⁷

5 Female Jehovah's Witnesses in the Ravensbrück Concentration Camp

The Situation of the Bible Students in Women's Concentration Camp Ravensbrück

All female inmates of the sub camp St. Lambrecht had been first imprisoned in the women's concentration camp Ravensbrück. They share that part of their life story during a specific time period of the largest women's concentration camp of the Nazi camp system (next to that of Auschwitz-Birkenau). That is why this chapter deals with the situation of Jehovah's Witnesses in the women's concentration camp at Ravensbrück, to illustrate the kind of conditions the women were exposed to before they were transferred to the concentration camp at St. Lambrecht.

Situation and Organisation

The Nazis started construction of Ravensbrück concentration camp at the end of 1938, making use of the Sachsenhausen male prisoners' labour. The camp became operational in May 1939. It was situated approximately 100 kilometres to the north of Berlin, near the railway station Fürstenberg on the river Havel. They may have chosen this location specifically because of its being close to the rail and road network, and its relatively remote location. The concentration camp was surrounded by large, forested areas to the north and



An impression of the women's concentration camp Ravensbrück.

the east, and in the south the river Havel formed a natural border.⁷⁸

Originally the concentration camp was a transit camp for female prisoners arriving from Germany and Austria. As early as May 1939 all women from the Lichtenburg concentration camp⁷⁹ were transferred to Ravensbrück. Almost half (400) of the nearly 900 transferred women were Bible Students. In the beginning, they formed the largest group of inmates.

The camp leadership at Ravensbrück was divided into five departments: the post of the deputy commander with the commander's office, the political department, the prison camp, the board's office and the hospital department. The organisation of the women's concentration camp at Ravensbrück differed only from the men's concentration camp in the way that security was arranged within the camp area. The SS-Totenkopfverbände were responsible for guarding the exterior of the camp. All leading functions were occupied by males inside the camp offices, and camp borders were safeguarded by male units. Female guards, who were subordinate to the Waffen-SS, were employed in the grounds of the prison camp and their senior overseer was Johanna Langefeld. She was responsible up until March 1943, around the time of the Bible Students' transfer to the sub camp at St. Lambrecht. Her attitude towards the Witnesses could be described as 'favourable'.⁸⁰

From the start the purpose of Ravensbrück was to exploit the female inmates. But when the SS from Lichtenburg took over the camp's security, a new situation arose. The women had to perform senseless tasks as a form of punishment and humiliation. In later phases the women were involved in keeping the camp in working order.

The mechanism of a concentration camp was aimed at destroying a prisoner's gender characteristics and his or her personal identity. The violence of the SS took specific forms and its effects were different for women than for men.⁸¹ That women stopped menstruating⁸² was the most characteristic trait of gender depersonalisation caused by personality fragmentation. This kind of physical reaction to which many of the imprisoned women fell victim, was the result of severe psychological stress caused by inhumane conditions.

Training Facility for Female SS Guards

The women's concentration camp Ravensbrück also served as a training facility for newly recruited and newly hired female SS guards, who after completing their training, were deployed to other concentration camps and sub camps. Approximately 3500 female camp guards were trained at Ravensbrück from September 1942 to April 1945. This period roughly coincides with the time served by commandant Fritz Suhren. The training facility in Ravensbrück was set up to meet the growing need for human resources. This was in part because of the enlargement of the women's concentration camp. But there was also a growing need for female guards because of the increasing number of inmates who had to work in the various sub camps. Compared with 1941, there were about three times as many female guards starting their service in Ravensbrück in 1942.⁸³ The inmates had to address the SS guards with Frau Aufseherin (Madam Overseer). The security guards' names were thus mostly unknown to the inmates. Frequent transfers were to prevent inmates and guards from getting to know each other and to ensure that guards and inmates remained anonymous.⁸⁴

The female guards were also to make sure that the women would write no more than the permitted number of letters and postcards. In concentration camp Ravensbrück an inmate was only allowed to write one letter a month and to receive one letter a month. When a prisoner arrived at the camp, they had to give an address of the recipient.

'In the first years there was a strict censorship [...] All outgoing letters had to be written on special camp paper with a printed heading, "Ravensbrück Concentration Camp for Women", and underneath the censorship rules. [...] The paper on which the Bible Students wrote was printed in green, and had, in addition, the words: "I am still a Witness of Jehovah." They were allowed to write only five lines at a time.'⁸⁵

This special limitation for Jehovah's Witnesses in their contact with the outside world was an example of the bullying with which the Nazis hoped to break their commitment to their faith. The postal censorship was also to give the SS guards insight into the inmate's disposition.

The SS guards were standardly equipped with guns, whips, and dogs.⁸⁶

The Living Circumstances of Female Prisoners

From the moment the women arrived in the concentration camp, they left their everyday life behind. The whole system, with all its psychological and physical terrors transformed their minds and bodies, so they could not be who they were before.

Bible Student Gerdina Huisman was kept in detention in seven prisons and was deported by train to Ravensbrück in the winter of 1941 where she contracted an illness. Her first impression of the Schutzhaftlager she describes as a nightmare. Seeing the numbed state of the inmates was horrifying. The biggest humiliation upon arrival was that all new arrivals had to undress themselves to 'shower' together, under the prying eyes of the male SS guards.⁸⁷

Up until the end of 1939 Jehovah's Witnesses formed the largest group of prisoners in the women's concentration camp at Ravensbrück. At first, 16 barracks served as accommodation. Each barrack had bunk beds of three tiers high, for a total of 135 sleeping arrangements. Also, each barrack had two canteens, a washroom with toilets and an adjoining office for the female SS Block Leader.⁸⁸

In the first years of the camp Jehovah's Witnesses were put up in Blocks 3, 5 and 7. Block 3 was an inspection block to show to visitors, it was therefore called the 'model block'.⁸⁹

As a former political prisoner Margarete Buber-Neumann was a Block Senior of a group of Jehovah's Witnesses in 'model block' 3 and got to know the Witnesses. At that time 275 women lived in her block. She said:

'With the Bible Students my life ran very smoothly. Everything went like clockwork. In the mornings, when everyone was intent on getting her jobs done before the roll-call, no one spoke a loud word. In other blocks the Block Seniors and Hut Seniors had to shout themselves hoarse before they could get their charges out into the open and into line, but here the whole procedure went off silently and without a word from me, and the same was true of everything else – the distribution of food, lights out, and all the rest of the prisoner's day. [...] Nothing was ever stolen in Block 3. There was no lying and no tale-bearing. Each of the women was not only highly

conscientious personally but held herself responsible for the well-being of the group as a whole.⁹⁰

'All of them knew the camp rules and regulations inside out and obeyed them to the letter. One locker looked exactly like the other, and all of them were models of cleanliness and neatness. All the towels hung on the locker doors in exactly the same regulation fashion; every bowl, plate, cup, etc., was clean and highly polished. All combs were cleaned daily, and each toothbrush was carefully searched for any stain or clogging. Not a fingerprint was visible on any door. The stools were scrubbed spotlessly clean and always neatly stacked when not in use. Not one of the prisoners ever broke the regulation that feet must not be put round the legs of stools for fear of marks. Dust was removed everywhere, even from the beams across the hut, for our hut had no ceiling and we looked up straight into the roof.'⁹¹

Buber-Neumann further describes the group of Jehovah's Witnesses in Ravensbrück as a homogeneous religious group, who did all prescribed work with great effort, if it did not go against their beliefs. This is also clear from the description of the abovementioned 'model block'.

In 1941 the Bible Students were transferred to Blocks 17, 18 and 19. Among them in that period, there were several Dutch women. Block 17 was made the new 'model block'.⁹²

Gerdina Huisman never had her own bed in Ravensbrück. She slept on the third level of the bunk bed, in the middle of two adjoining beds, which made it impossible to sleep normally.⁹³ At that time – in the autumn/winter of 1941 – about 400 prisoners had to share one block and so it became completely overcrowded. There were not enough stools for everyone to sit on and only the older prisoners had the privilege of sitting down.⁹⁴ Buber-Neumann mentions this situation of overcrowdedness from 1940.⁹⁵ In the summer of 1942, there were busy building activities in the women's concentration camp. But the number of prisoners grew quicker than the numbers of barracks. For a long time, three women would share a straw sack and two women would share one stool. The meagre possessions of four inmates were kept in one barrack closet.⁹⁶

The Bible Students were put to work on various camp details. Gerdina Huisman's task was to unload train wagons. 'It was so cold, that my hands stuck to the metal.'⁹⁷ Sundays were usually a day off, but not if there were wagons to unload. The prisoners would frequently suffer abuse while they worked. On one occasion, another Dutch Jehovah's Witness, Froukje Volp, was cruelly beaten up.⁹⁸ Violence and unpredictability of the security staff were a hallmark of camp life in Ravensbrück.

The Bible Students became valued workers because of the fast-changing importance of 'work' in the concentration camp and to the SS 'they were the most highly prized and most sought-after workers'.⁹⁹ Because they were conscientious, industrious and absolutely honest – not to impress the SS, but because it was part of their faith – they formed the ideal work slaves for the SS. They even received special passes for going through the camp gates without the escort of guards when they went to work.¹⁰⁰ They worked as house maids at the homes of SS officials for example. They went without guards because it was known that Bible Students would never try to flee, because of their faith. They mainly used this greater freedom to smuggle Biblical literature into the camp and to establish contact with the outside world.

Bibles found their way to the camp through the storeroom or the boiler room. Smuggling religious literature was dangerous because, if discovered, it would be severely punished.¹⁰¹ Jehovah's Witnesses were completely aware of the risks and continued their resistance in the camp through smuggling.

At night and in their free time on Sundays, they conducted Bible studies and sang religious songs. During the day Jehovah's Witnesses hid their biblical treasures behind a removable loose board of the barrack's wooden paneling.¹⁰² A high point for their religious activities was when they held a 'public meeting' during the Christmas holidays of 1942 and their celebration of the 'Lord's Evening Meal' in 1943.¹⁰³ These were remarkable forms of religious resistance in the concentration camp, where the Bible Students made anything but a passive impression.

In the women's concentration camp at Ravensbrück the Bible Students besides other assignments, worked in the vegetable garden. They also had to feed the bloodhounds of the SS, pigs, chickens and the Angora rabbits.

Early in 1942 the Bible Students debated among themselves which kinds of work ought to be defined as work in support of war. They did not decide this as a group but made their decision individually. Among them three factions formed: the extremes, the doubting moderates, and the liberals. These categories were probably not made by the Witnesses themselves, but by other inmates who observed them.

‘The first group to take action were those who up to then had been looking after the Angora rabbits.’¹⁰⁴ Jehovah’s Witnesses believed to have determined that the wool of the rabbits was used for war purposes and refused to work at caring for the rabbits. Toos Berkers,¹⁰⁵ who at that time had only been in the women’s concentration camp Ravensbrück for two weeks, was sentenced to imprisonment because of refusal of work at the work force ‘Angora breeding’. The first few days she received no food or drink and she had to finish her term in complete darkness in the unheated ‘Bunker’. After that, the food in the detention centre consisted of ‘three potatoes that were rotten, so you couldn’t eat them’.¹⁰⁶

The women who worked in the vegetable plot put their work down too, the same day as the ‘Angora breeding detail’, because they found out that the harvested vegetables were meant for an SS hospital. They were sentenced to the ‘Bunker’ and detention in complete darkness, together with about 90 other women. The Dutch Jehovah’s Witness Froukje Volp was also among the garden workers.¹⁰⁷ Before she was detained in the ‘Bunker’, she was forced to stand in the courtyard of the Zellenbau for three days and three nights, and they threatened her, saying: ‘Oh, these Dutch women, we’ll get them, these stuffed swine. We’ll break them yet.’¹⁰⁸

*Rabbit cages –
work terrain of the
work force for the
Angora detail.*



*Inmates at work
in the vegetable
plot.*



There was so little room in 'the Bunker' that the SS had to think up another way to carry out the punishment. Margarete Buber-Neumann relates:

'However, there were not enough dark cells to hold them all, so one wing of Block 25 was cleared, everything taken out and the windows painted over, and they were put in there. The already exhausted women had no blankets, no mattresses and nowhere to sit except on the floor. Here they received their bread ration every day and normal rations once every four days. Whilst the struggle was still proceeding a new order came from Berlin that refusal to work was to be punished with seventy-five lashes, and all these women, many of whom were between fifty and sixty, received three floggings of twenty-five lashes each. I saw them in the washroom about a month afterwards. They were like walking skeletons, and their thighs and buttocks were covered with ugly weals. Many of them looked as though they had gone off their heads. In the end they were released, but then they refused to stand at roll-calls, declaring they would stand up for Jehovah, but not for the SS.'¹⁰⁹

A few of the so-called extremes were dragged to the roll-call. Despite this, they refused to do any work that supported the war and would not attend morning roll-call voluntarily. Afterwards, the work on the Angora breeding farm was done by Czech and German political prisoners.¹¹⁰

The different factions within the group of Bible Students were mainly caused by the various forms of work they had to perform, and because the importance of the work they did changed when the function of the camp system changed. The women had to consider whether the detail they worked in could be reconciled with their principles of faith. Thus, they had to decide individually and so the separate factions did not act as a group. Whether a Bible Student was categorised as an 'extremist' or a 'liberal' depended mostly on the work she did. That is to say, the coincidental assignment to a specific work force could make one a so-called 'extreme', while others, who did not have to do this work, may not even have been confronted with the issue of refusing work.¹¹¹

Also, during the year 1941, the two groups, the 'liberal' and the 'extreme' Bible Students, had to think about whether they would eat the blood sausage given to them. Ilse Unterdörfer discovered in the Old Testament Jehovah's command to 'pour out the blood on the earth'. About 25 Jehovah's Witnesses therefore decided not to eat the blood sausage which came cold with supper for a while. Katharina (Toos) Berkers remembers that it was mainly the German Bible Students who had no objection to eating blood sausage. A sister in the faith tried to convince them: 'Listen, it says here in Numbers: "You must not eat the blood, because it is something despicable to Jehovah, but you must pour it out onto the earth."' ¹¹² Toos Berkers convinced some of the Bible Students of her point of view and others 'stubbornly' ¹¹³ clung to eating the blood sausage. It was no longer a closed unity. Two fronts, each with their own convictions, had formed.

The SS took this refusal to eat certain foods as a provocation, for which the Witnesses received punishment. The punishment differed and varied from bullying (by giving blood sausage especially to the women who had refused to eat it) to beatings and locking the women up. ¹¹⁴

The solidarity among the Bible Students was strong despite the difference of opinion on some points.

The group of prisoners developed their own way to divide tasks, for instance, giving a sister in the faith the task of sharing out the food. They also shared the content of food packages that some of them received from home. ¹¹⁵

The 'black transportations' began under the euthanasia operation Aktion 14f13 ¹¹⁶ early in the year 1942. The women who were not fit for work were selected by the doctors for transportation to the gas chambers. Many of the Jehovah's Witnesses were physically weakened by that time and fell victim to this cruel annihilation.

The industrial killing machine of the Nazis missed the 23 female Jehovah's Witnesses, whose names were on the transport list of May 1943. This small work force was taken by train to the so called Ostmark, to St. Lambrecht in Styria, where a Benedictine monastery was turned into an SS estate. The history of this business enterprise of the Schutzstaffel and the situation there up until the arrival of the work force of female inmates, will be dealt with in the next chapter.

6 The Monastery of St. Lambrecht

A Short Introduction to the History of the Monastery of St. Lambrecht and the Situation before the Anschluss in 1938

Historically, the Benedictine monastery was the cultural centre of the municipality of St. Lambrecht in the district of Murau in West Styria, close to the Carinthian border.

The monastery was founded by margrave Markward von Eppenstein in the eleventh century.¹¹⁷ His son, duke Heinrich III of Carinthia, completed the establishment, and by means of a donation provided the materials necessary for the monks' livelihood. The donation of churches and properties also included spiritual care for the local population. In the course of the following centuries this kind of care developed into an important field of activity for the Benedictine monks. The history of the monastery is characterised by a train of events, such as the collapse of the Romanesque abbey church, destruction of the abbey by fire and its rebuilding. The monastery was dissolved in 1786 during the reign of Joseph II. The emperor Franz II re-established it at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Between 1835 and 1932 there was a convent grammar school here, which was closed down in 1932, together with the choristers' convent.¹¹⁸ The

Sängerknabenkonvent offered the opportunity to attend the first classes of grammar school in St. Lambrecht. The teaching staff consisted of priests but, if necessary, secular teachers were also called in to provide some support. The boarding school averaged twenty to thirty choir boys, of whom only a few had to pay a small monthly fee for board and lodging. This led to such high



St. Lambrecht, post card from the 1940s

costs that the decision was made to close the school during the bad economic situation in the 1930s.¹¹⁹

Bankruptcy was averted by the sale of some buildings and intervention by the trustee. The monastery recovered economically after the enforced settlement. According to Father Stefan Jagoschütz however, the reputation of the monastery was so severely damaged that the Nazi propaganda could use that to their advantage in the year 1938.¹²⁰

Confiscation of the Monastery by the National Socialists and its Further Development into an SS Property

The National Socialist coup was received with great approval in Austria. The inhabitants of St. Lambrecht also welcomed the invading troops with great acclaim in March forest, and flags were hung out of houses. In this agrarian community with fourteen hundred residents, the new system was above all expected to provide debt relief for the farmers. The rulers of the new regime however soon showed their true colours, and shortly after the Anschluss¹²¹ they consistently took a very hard line against the Benedictine convent community. As early as 17 and 18 March around a hundred SA and SS soldiers, under command of subdistrict court judge Ingomar Held from Neumarkt, conducted a search of the premises, supposedly in order to confiscate a large number of weapons. It is likely that even then they were searching for letters and documents, thinking to find evidence of moral offences.¹²² The abbot and the priests who were present in the abbey during the search were confined in the common room for two days. The search left an enormous havoc,¹²³ obliging Viktorin Weyer, abbot at that time, to inform the Gestapo in Graz in a report. In this context he also demanded an investigation into this high-handed action. But instead of a 'settling of this incident' another search of the premises was made, probably by way of revenge. This time the abbot was charged with accusing the SS and SA men of theft.¹²⁴ Again, the abbot informed the Gestapo at Graz of the events, which resulted in the fathers and the abbot being confronted with an indictment of slander and



*Hubert Erhart
(photo from SS identity card)*

enmity against the state. The monastery was closed on 7 May 1938 and the provisional administration was transferred to Hubert Erhart, who was appointed by the military authorities.¹²⁵

Concerning this matter, a letter from Heinrich Müller, chief of Department IV in the Reichssicherheitshauptamt and leader of the Gestapo, to the Reich Commissioner for reunification of Austria with the German Reich, states:

‘Because of serious transgressions in the Benedictine abbey St. Lambrecht and the Benedictine monastery Admont (Styria) the state police branch office Graz has confiscated the Benedictine abbey St. Lambrecht by order of 19-5-1938 and the Benedictine monastery Admont by order of 9-9-1938.

‘In accordance with §1 sub 2 of the Decree for the Confiscation in Austria of Property Belonging to Enemies of the People and State of 18-11-1938 (RGBl. I. S. 1620), I find that the aspirations of the Benedictine abbey St. Lambrecht and the Benedictine monastery Admont have been hostile to the public and state.

‘I request that the properties be confiscated for the benefit of the district of Styria, with the exception of the lots described in the added survey, that I wish to confiscate for the benefit of the Reich.

‘Based on §1 sub 3 of the order, I grant permission for these measures.

‘The state minister for food and agriculture will establish a model estate on the lots to be confiscated for the benefit of the Reich. Arrangements for the use of the lots to be confiscated for the benefit of the district of Styria have been made between SS-Sturmbannführer Mr Röhrich as manager of the Reichsverein für Volkspflege und Siedlerhilfe and the Gauleiter of Styria.

‘I request a report on carrying out the confiscation, by return of post. I request the Gauleiter of Styria be informed of the completed confiscation.’¹²⁶

The alleged mismanagement of the monastery and a hostile attitude to the state on the part of the convent were given as the chief arguments for the measures taken.

Moreover, the new rulers motivated their actions against the monastery and convent with such completely unproven accusations as illegal possession of arms, the smuggling abroad of precious art treasures and even with totally untenable accusations of alleged unbridled debauchery by the monks.¹²⁷ The abbot, Viktorin Weyer, did his utmost, including help from a lawyer, to cancel the dissolution of the monastery. These initiatives failed as the constitutional state existed only in name.¹²⁸

Gauleiter Siegfried Uiberreither acted harshly against the Catholic Church and tried to break the influence of the Church by all and every means. The Benedictine monastery of St. Lambrecht was the first monastery in Austria to fall victim to the Nazi regime. Immediately after its dissolution the monastery of Admont met the same fate. It too was transferred to Erhart's trust administration on 19 July 1938 and confiscated on 9 September, as shown by the above-mentioned protocol. In April 1940 the monasteries of Seckau and Voralpe were added, and both also came under management of Hubert Erhart, by which means he considerably strengthened his position of power.¹²⁹

On 7 May the management of the monastery of St. Lambrecht was handed over to the new Verwalter, Hubert Erhart, and the convent had to vacate the abbey. The convent was absolutely refused access, only two priests¹³⁰ were at first allowed to stay in a few rooms of the abbey. Due to Erhart's harassment, both priests finally left St. Lambrecht.¹³¹

In a letter to Heinrich Himmler, the Reichsführer of the SS in Berlin, the 'agent of the State Commissioner for Private Enterprise' in Vienna, Johannes Hardegg, wrote:

'SS-Obersturmbannführer Hubert Erhart [...] was appointed as Verwalter for the management of the property of the St. Lambrecht monastery, [...] subject to your approval. This appointment seems to be all the more urgent due to there being an extremely dangerous situation regarding the property (the siphoning off of assets). Mr. Erhart is very well known in this district; he knows all the right people and without any doubt has the energy necessary to solve the difficult economic and political problems.'¹³²

On 15 May 1938, four days after the official confiscation of the monastery, Erhart reported on the current situation regarding the assets of St. Lambrecht monastery. He also reported

on the changes he intended to carry out regarding staff. He proposed SS-Oberscharführer Alois Liebhard as agriculture manager, NSKK-man Willibald Reiner¹³³ for forestry and SS-Untersturmführer Hans Hösele as steward.

Erhart described the situation of the agricultural labourers of the monastery as follows, at the same time mentioning the beneficial impact on the social environment under his authority through the measures for improvement he had taken immediately:

‘I totally fail to understand how children can be fed, clothed and schooled from the wages they receive, which are not enough for the people to acquire even the tiniest things. It is therefore understandable that nearly all staff is unmarried, there are hardly any children, and the region is threatened with extinction. Apart from the wages, the following farmhands have also had to sleep in the stables. [...] Moreover, the men have neither trunk nor cupboard, and decent living conditions are practically non-existent. The poor devils were treated worse than the livestock. I have immediately lodged these people in rooms, as far as possible. For the other four farmhands the housing will be ready in a few days. And to think they had packed six or seven farmhands together in a small room, while the gentlemen of the monastery lived in several rooms. The most incredible was the situation at the Schloss Lind property. There the farmhands were put up in the worst corner of the stable (a deep litter house), without light and hardly any air supply. I could mention hundreds of irrational, antisocial circumstances. None of the farmhands had a wardrobe, whereas in the abbey itself there is an enormous storage space with furniture. The very worst poverty to be seen was a herdsman from the monastery in the Steinschloss. I have seen labourers’ dwellings in the stable building where water dripped down from the ceiling and the stone walls, the bedding was wet through, and the walls of all dwellings were covered in mould and dirt. Most of the dwellings hadn’t been cleaned for years.

‘Food was insufficient [...] On the large farms for some time now, the herdsman have been treated very cruelly, like slaves, by being forced to cut the fodder for all the livestock with a hacking knife. This has so exhausted these men that they are not even conscious of the brutal treatment they receive.

‘Simply shocking was the moment when I had gathered all the staff to inform them about the take-over of the administration by the military authorities. I believe that among the staff there was no male or female worker whom I could call healthy. They stood there, totally emaciated, starved, bent or misshapen, in threadbare clothes that were virtually rags. Many had tears in their eyes when I told them that I intend to compensate the damage done to them to the best of my ability by raising wages, providing welfare, work according to capability, etc. Moreover, I paid them their April wages that were partly in arrears.’¹³⁴

In this report Erhart also mentioned the sudden decease of the former forester Kajetan Pölzl. He had committed suicide a few days before the confiscation of the monastery. The reasons might have been a severe depression, together with the fear of losing his job and so losing a steady income.¹³⁵ Erhart appointed Willibald Reiner in his place, who in the course of the Nazi supremacy has risen to burgomaster and Volkssturmkommandant in St. Lambrecht. Reiner too, who counted as ‘second in line’ after Erhart, had great influence.¹³⁶ In carrying out his duties he was assisted by secretary Käthe Pfeiffer and two office-clerks.¹³⁷

Erhart appears to have been dismayed by the miserable living conditions of the monastery’s agricultural personnel. Nevertheless, there is nothing to indicate that later on he was similarly affected by the situation of the female and male prisoners whom he constantly saw because of his frequent presence in the abbey. Erhart had absolutely no interest in the prisoners.¹³⁸ Allegedly the prisoners never saw Erhart between June 1942 and June 1943. This also suggests that the SS leaders, were definitely not concerned with the living conditions of the prisoners, only with organizing their labour.¹³⁹

Jagoschütz and Seiler have already clearly shown how harshly Hubert Erhart acted against the convent and evidently tried everything possible to get rid of the last members of the convent community still residing at St. Lambrecht. The monks finally spent the Nazi era in Mariazell, where also father Viktorin Weyer died in 1939.

Already in July 1938 Erhart asked for leave of absence. At this early point in time the ‘take-over’ of other monasteries between the ambitious SS-Verwalter and the Gestapo was an open-and-shut case. This situation proves Erhart’s purposeful activities which he had planned long beforehand, and which greatly enhanced his power. Moreover, the satisfaction

Erhart derived from the work in his new sphere of authority is clear from his words. He saw this as compensation for the persecution suffered in the Ständestaat and expressed this openly:

‘The leaders of the national farmers’ union in the district of Styria have requested me, in consultation with the Secret State Police in Graz, to take over management of the monastery at St. Lambrecht. I have accepted the position in good consultation with the SS sector. The property of 5400 hectares, with numerous collections, archives, libraries and certificates, representing a very great value, was confiscated by the Gestapo and a request for confiscation was submitted because of the abominable mismanagement and the social and moral evils. I gave a copy of my report on my work up until now to the Gestapo in Graz, SS sector I, and I request you to enclose my request for three months’ unpaid leave along with this report.

‘As I have settled well in the work for the administration of the monastery and am very familiar with the intrigues of the papists, the Gestapo in Graz later also requested me to take over the administration of other monasteries in Austria. This work is for me the best compensation for the persecution I have had to suffer under the Systemzeit in Austria.’¹⁴⁰

From 30 July to 1 August 1940 a business inspection was held in the monastery St. Lambrecht by the financial authorities in Graz. Up to that moment it had not been decided who would have the legal right to make use of the stolen goods:

‘The business was in the possession of the Benedictine monastery St. Lambrecht until 7 May 1938. The Secret State Police carried out confiscation on this date. A management company was founded. The head of the management company is SS-Obersturmführer Hubert Erhart at St. Lambrecht. Taking control of the properties was ordered on 15 November 1939. It has not yet been determined whether the property should go to the Reich – the Forestry commission – or to the district of Styria.’¹⁴¹

The report also mentions contributions paid to SS-Obersturmbannführer Erhart, Käthe Pfeiffer,¹⁴² forester Reiner and inspector Liebhart in December 1939. This also makes clear who in particular benefited from the favor of the acting administrator: in the first place he himself.

Finally, a binding lease was to be concluded between the district of Styria and the Reichsverein für Volkspflege und Siedlerhilfe. Purpose of this lease was the creation of a great number of 'hereditary' farms. These farms would be unsaleable, and therefore protected against forced sale. This propaganda was used with the intention of compelling the farmers to have an approving attitude towards National Socialism. This also explains why Heinzl, leader of the national farmers' union, was committed to Hubert Erhart taking over the administration.¹⁴³

In a letter to SS-Gruppenführer Rodenbücher in Salzburg, the head of the Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt (RUSHA) of the SS in Berlin announced that

'negotiations with the district of Styria on account of the leasing of the monasteries of Admont and St. Lambrecht [have] advanced so far that we will probably take over both these properties on 1 January 1940. Furthermore SS-Obersturmbannführer Hubert Erhart is proposed as administrator.

'For the rest we shall begin setting up new farms as soon as possible, perhaps already in the spring. In the meantime, I first have to investigate the financial basis and possibilities.

'As SS-Obersturmführer Erhart belongs to your main sector, I will of course be very grateful if you should agree to the transfer of Erhart to the RUSHA. His main position in this office would then be that of an SS leader [...]. In the meantime, there is a possibility that Erhart will be conscripted into the army, which would not be very opportune at this moment. I therefore request you to immediately provide his temporary exemption from military service.'¹⁴⁴

Erhart, who had been declared disabled for forty percent because of a (healed) knee injury, was not conscripted to the Wehrmacht and resided as the administrator of the four confiscated monasteries in St. Lambrecht until 1945.

The lease contract between the Reichsgau of Styria as the lessor and the German Reichsverein für Volkspflege und Siedlerhilfe as the leaseholder, which finally was concluded only on 14 April 1942, came into force as retroactive from January 1941.

On the purpose and value of this action in the sense of National Socialist propaganda measures however, they had reached an agreement already in 1939:

‘Starting from the thought that an accumulation of properties held in mortmain does not harmonise with the common good of the national community, Styria and the SS-Reichsführer have agreed to return the confiscated monasteries of Admont and St. Lambrecht to the national community. To this end the Reichsgau Styria has leased the monasteries to the German Reichsverein für Volkspflege und Siedlerhilfe e.V., a foundation of the SS-Reichsführer, for a period of 99 years, on the reference date of 1 January 1941, with the intention and in the expectation that the SS-Reichsführer will administrate these estates in a manner conforming to the National Socialist idea and to the benefit of the population. In particular, new hereditary farms will be set up on these properties, while existing farms will be combined and enlarged.

‘The SS-Reichsführer and Reichsstatthalter in Styria have personally made themselves familiar with this idea and on 27 April 1941 explicitly approved the lease contract that had already been made in 1939, on the condition that the transfer and take-over of the lease object will be regarded as having been effected on 1-1-1941.’¹⁴⁵

The art treasures and archives of the monastery, as well as the collections and libraries, were excluded from the lease.

‘Furthermore, it was laid down in writing that as a guarantee for the continuity of the centre for biological education [...] buildings, parts of buildings and pieces of land will be excluded from the lease.’¹⁴⁶

Himmler kept the monastery’s museum for folklore for himself.¹⁴⁷ This collection of Peter Hanf, consisting of folkloristic objects pertaining to agricultural traditions, was in good

hands. Dutch female prisoners worked at cleaning the museum, under supervision of Lore Kröll, who had been appointed head housekeeper from June 1942 in the abbey that had now been turned into an SS property.¹⁴⁸

These buildings later served various purposes. For example, at the beginning of 1944 the Publikationsstelle Wien was transferred to the rooms of the SS property at St. Lambrecht. Among other things it was the duty of this institution, which stemmed from the Südostdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft der Hochschullehrer, to do scientific research in the fields of geography and the history of Southern Europe.¹⁴⁹

In the rotunda, the pavilion in the middle of the vegetable garden area, there was an office set up for the drawing of maps for Southern and Southeast Europe.¹⁵⁰

In 1943 the concentration camp for women was established on the ground floor of the southern wing, the present wing of the fathers. This wing, which was closed off by a wrought-iron gate, with barred windows already in place, was very suitable as a prison. The barred windows at present still form a silent witness of the women's concentration camp at St. Lambrecht, as one of the few authentic traces.

Moreover, the Lehrerinnenbildungsanstalt (LBA) from Kainbach near Graz moved to St. Lambrecht in September 1944, because the school building there was turned into a hospital. This school existed for exactly a year and was discontinued in September 1945. In this training centre, under leadership of Rudolf Hübler, a staff of 10 teachers taught about 30 students. Franz Ziegler acted as the caretaker.¹⁵¹ Members of the training institute for female teachers took care of the convent garden.¹⁵² For that matter, the female prisoners, who also had to work in the convent garden, made no mention of any contacts with either the teaching staff or the pupils of the LBA. The work in the garden took place at different times to avoid social contacts with the civilian population.

When the wartime activities spread to the district of Styria all students from the non-occupied regions were sent back to their parents. Shortly before the end of the war in May 1945 the school administration gave marching orders, and the students were transferred to the English and American occupied territories. Shortly before the discontinuation of the school, on 1 September 1945, the contracts of all the staff ended. Management of the abbey's inventory, which had been kept in the board room of the training institute up until

then, was handed over to the administrator of the monastery, Rischaneck.¹⁵³ Hans Wotke remembers the transfer as regards the relocation of eyewitness reports:

‘I came to St. Lambrecht with the LBA in the autumn of 1944. In the imperial hall I saw various learning materials and textbooks of the school. As far as I know, these things were transferred to the convent, or to the board at that time.’¹⁵⁴

There had been a search conducted for these eyewitness reports in July 1946, but they had possibly disappeared with this change of board.

Following the explanation of the functions of the various buildings, the situation of the monastery being used by the SS before it was turned into a concentration camp, will be dealt with further.

In the spring of 1941 Erhart sent a budget of the SS estate to Hans Hohberg.¹⁵⁵ A lively correspondence followed.

Seiler interprets this superabundant information to Hohberg as evidence of a great interest in ‘Erhart’s monasteries’ by the highest SS circles. This was partly because the SS Reichsführer, Heinrich Himmler, accompanied by Hans Hohberg, auditor and economic adviser at the Deutsche Wirtschaftsbetriebe (DWB), personally paid a visit to Erhart at St. Lambrecht on 26 April 1941.¹⁵⁶ It is said, by the way, that Himmler did not stay on the SS estate but stayed as a guest in Erhart’s own home.¹⁵⁷

On 4 May, shortly after Himmler’s visit, Erhart addressed a handwritten, very personal letter to Oswald Pohl:

‘Dear Gruppenführer,

The great, and for my work, decisive days have come to a happy conclusion through the acknowledgement by the Reichsführer and your letter.

‘Gruppenführer, I hardly know how to thank you for all your good companionship!

‘When I had to leave my country to escape the gallows as one of the SA officers in the Juliputsch of 1934 and arrived stateless and without resources in the Empire with my family, with my companion Kammerhofer [...] and was received there with

great ingratitude, then it was the Schutzstaffel who through SS-Gruppenf. [sic] Rodenbücher stated that the crime committed against me by the SA would be redressed by the Schutzstaffel. Thus, we were included in the Schutzstaffel and could cooperate in the advancement of the Third Reich. We have never forgotten this.

‘As a lover of the forests I [...] especially suffered from homesickness. Therefore, I requested discharge as an SS officer immediately after the Anschluss of the Ostmark and, supported by the leader of the national farmers’ union Heinzel, took over the administration of the monastery at St. Lambrecht. I then also took over the monasteries of Admont, Seckau and Vorau. The enormous properties with the delightful forests and ancient cultural heritage of the Ostmark could in my opinion only be assigned to the Schutzstaffel, because an order without possessions will end up being lifeless, dependent and therefore short-lived.

‘I had to fend for myself for nearly 3 years. I reconstructed the degenerated farms, tried again and again, with moderate success, to interest the Schutzstaffel in the properties, warded off the many interested parties, all the while struggling to act as quietly, politely and harmoniously as possible. Until finally there came help, from you, Gruppenführer.

‘There with my self-imposed duty had come to an end.

‘If on top of this I should succeed in helping my fellow-countrymen with the properties of the former monasteries, in offering the SS soldiers places for study, schooling and recreation and in giving you, Gruppenführer, more joy than worries, then I shall be happy.

‘Heil Hitler! Your Erhart.’¹⁵⁸

Erhart’s special affinity with the Schutzstaffel is clearly shown in this letter. The SS would redress ‘the crime committed against him by the SA’. The ‘compensation’ at a later stage may have involved the assignment of concentration camp refugees as labour slaves to the SS estate at St. Lambrecht. By their exploitation the economic position of the agricultural enterprise was strengthened and Erhart’s struggle for power was speeded up.

47 207
H. Dembrant, den 4. Mai 1911.

Sehr geehrter Gruppenführer!

10
Pohls

Sie danken für meine Arbeit und meine Beziehungen zu
sprechend, sprechen Sie, haben sich durch die Anerkennung unserer
Beziehungen und Ihren Brief einen freudig starken Eindruck
geändert.

Gruppenführer, ich weiß keine, wie ich Ihnen für all Ihre
Kameradschaft danken soll!

Als ich, als einer der St. Führer im Juli 1904 meine
Heimat verlassen mußte, um den weiteren Folgen zu entgehen,
rückwärts zu, vermögendes mit meiner Familie ins Ober-
hann, mit meinen Kameraden Kameradschaft, darüber sind
Meyners dort mit Verhandlung empfangen werden, da von 2 die
Schlichter, die durch den Mund des 412 Grif. Oberleiters
erklärte, daß der Verbrechen, das durch die St. an uns begangen
würde, durch die Schlichter festgestellt werden wird.
So würden wir in die Schlichter aufgenommen, konnten am
Aufbau des 2. Reiches mitarbeiten und haben dies über nie
vergessen.

Als Waldmannsch. hat ich wieder uns wieder am meisten am
Gemeinlich. So selbst ich selbst mich selbst am besten der Mensch

Letter from Hubert
Erhart to Oswald Pohl

Regarding the events of this 'eventful' spring of 1941, Seiler is of the opinion that the founding of the settlement in the Eben area had already been decided between Pohl and Erhart. According to him it had been decided in advance that concentration camp prisoners should serve as labourers.¹⁵⁹

The afore-cited letter furthermore suggests that the plans to partly change the landed property into 'hereditary farms' in order to 'help his fellow-countrymen', must then still have been sincere.

Hohberg quickly responded to the letter addressed to Pohl. He stated that Erhart had pleased the Gruppenführer very much with his missive and that a date had been determined for a discussion in Berlin on 20 May 1941. In this letter Hohberg used the opportunity to thank Erhart for his hospitality with the words: 'A holiday in the Alps is always quite an experience for those of us who reside in the lowlands.'¹⁶⁰ The visit to St. Lambrecht may have been a personal inspection to get acquainted with the conditions at the SS estate. About a year later Hohberg sent a staff member to St. Lambrecht, SS-Untersturmführer Riecks, who had to draw up a financial plan for the Reichsverein für Volkspflege und Siedlerhilfe.

Under Erhart the monastery also became a holiday resort for SS members who went hunting in the 'delightful forests'. Requests from Berlin for permission to go hunting in the mountains of Styria regularly reached Erhart:

'The lawyer at my head office, Will Haaga, has requested permission to shoot a deer, chamois or grouse in the hunting grounds of the estates of Admont or St. Lambrecht in the course of this or next year [...] Should Mr Haaga come to you with these wishes, I request you to provide him with the opportunity of going hunting.'¹⁶¹

29.4.1942 7

-Stab W- WL/Ex

Maria Klein

An
H-Obersturmbannführer E r h a r d t
Zentralgüterdirektor der Stiftsverwaltung
St. Lambrecht/Steiermark.

Betr.: Kontenplan.

Obersturmbannführer!

Wir beabsichtigen, das Angenehme mit dem Nützlichen zu verbinden. Der Prüfer beim Stab W, H-Untersturmführer R i e c k s, im Zivilberuf Direktor einer großen Handelsschule in Hamburg, möchte zusammen mit seiner Frau ein paar Ferientage bei Ihnen verleben. Als Ferienantrittstermin hat er den 13.5.1942 vorgesehen.

In seiner Hand liegt der Kontenplanentwurf für Admont und St. Lambrecht. Falls ein Einverständnis Ihrerseits vorliegt, kann Untersturmführer Riecks seinen Aufenthalt in St. Lambrecht benutzen, um unseren vorläufigen Entwurf des Kontenplanes mit Ihren Wünschen abzustimmen und eventuell einzurichten. Gleichseitig ist Untersturmführer Riecks dann beauftragt, die schwebenden steuerlichen Fragen, vor allem hinsichtlich der Körperschaftsteuer, mit Ihnen zusammen zu erledigen.

Falls Ihnen der vorgesehene Termin genehm ist und Sie mit den Vorschlägen einverstanden sind, bitten wir um freundliche Mitteilung.

Heil Hitler!

i.A.

HK

*'Combining business
with pleasure':
holidays in the
concentration camp
St. Lambrecht*

Erhart furthermore conducted a lively correspondence with Rudolf Querner, chief superintendent of police in Vienna, which also involved invitations to the hunt.¹⁶² Allegedly guests for the hunt frequently stayed at St. Lambrecht.¹⁶³ During the hunting season there was often haunch of venison, also for the civilian workers and staff members. Often there was so much game brought in that it was canned because there was much more than required.¹⁶⁴ Erhart was a 'commanding figure, tall and broad, a real hunter',¹⁶⁵ according to the description of the kitchen help.¹⁶⁶ The Verwalter and Willibald Reiner only exchanged their hunting costumes for the SS uniform when 'distinguished visitors' arrived.¹⁶⁷ And this must often have happened, as the guest rooms, that were situated in the present manager's wing, were usually occupied. Tiled stoves warmed the rooms, partly from the hallway. In the beginning the caretaker of the monastery, Klösch, was assigned to this duty. Later several female prisoners were given this chore.¹⁶⁸ Lore Kröll was responsible for refreshments for these 'esteemed guests',¹⁶⁹ and among other things served them meals.

The female prisoners too came into contact with the guests. They were in the abbey most of the time as they had to clean the guest rooms.¹⁷⁰ From mid-1943 onwards female prisoners served the holiday guests in striped camp clothes. Physical contact between the groups was certainly not desirable. Still, it doubtlessly did happen.¹⁷¹

From 1942 to 1945 the number of labourers and staff members grew constantly. There were now 220 persons to be cared for. To this end two kitchens were equipped with a common kitchen range.¹⁷² At first male prisoners cooked for about 100 camp prisoners at one end, while civilian female servants did the same work for the care of the SS guards and the civilian personnel. When in the spring of 1943 the female camp prisoners from the women's concentration camp Ravensbrück arrived at St. Lambrecht, they took over the work of the male prisoners in the kitchen.¹⁷³

In the winter of 1942/1943 construction was begun for a higher situated villa for Verwalter Erhart. This work was done by male prisoners from the concentration camp that had by then been in existence for six months.

Under harsh winter conditions the prisoners had to begin digging in the frozen soil. Two children from the Hillberger family at play in the construction pit came to grief and

could only be recovered dead.¹⁷⁴ Unlike the settlement in Eben, the Verwalter villa was not completed during the 'Third Reich'.¹⁷⁵

The cellar of the abbey served among other things as a warehouse for stolen goods. It was 'crammed with wines, spirits, clothing – whatever one may imagine'.¹⁷⁶ When the English occupying forces moved into the rooms that had formerly been inhabited by SS guards, the British Army confiscated the stolen goods as being 'German military goods'.¹⁷⁷

The Administration Appointed by the Military Authorities

Hubert Erhart was a confirmed National Socialist and extremely ambitious. As acting administrator and leader of the expropriated monastery at St. Lambrecht he managed to considerably expand his sphere of power by seizing the monastery at Admont in 1938 and the monasteries at Seckau and Vorau in 1940.¹⁷⁸

Hubert Erhart was born in Leoben, Austria, on 3 January 1899 and took his finals at the Staatsrealschule in Bruck an der Mur. After graduating from the Higher school for forestry, also at Bruck an der Mur, he attended the school for reserve officers at Windisch-Feistritz. During World War I he served in the Gebirgsschützenregiment Nr. 1 (1st Mountain Regiment Infantry) in 1917 and 1918. After the end of the monarchy Erhart entered the army in November 1918 and stayed there for two months. In 1919 he took part in the Kärntner Abwehrkampf (Carinthian Defensive Battle) within the framework of the Student Battalion and therefore was awarded the Carinthian Cross for Courage.¹⁷⁹ In 1921 Erhart found a job as an official at the lumbermill at Niklasdorf and he became a member of the national German Gymnastics Association.

On 1 October 1922 he became the administrator of a newly built and modern lumbermill in Mautern near Leoben, where he was in charge of a work force averaging 50 men. 'Tirelessly [he dedicated himself to the] elevation of the working class and he succeeded in raising it completely to the national level.'¹⁸⁰

According to him he became a member of the NSDAP in 1923. He only worked as a party member for a short time because the NSDAP split into several groups. Erhart felt that the party thereby weakened its decisiveness, and membership no longer appealed to him. From 1924 onwards Erhart worked incessantly at the side of Walter Pfrimer for the Styrian

Heimatschutz (or Homeland Protection). As of 1927 he took part in many marches, including suchlike in the Viennese Neustadt, Leoben, Bruck, Graz, Knittelfeld and Rottenmann as a voluntary soldier, Gauführer of the municipality of Liesingtal. He supplied all equipment, arms and training of his command. In 1928 he took over military leadership of the regions of Liesingtal and St. Michael.

In 1931, on 13 September, Erhart at Pfrimer's side, attempted to seize power. The coup failed. In May 1933¹⁸¹ he was sentenced to a week's detention and a fine for participating in a protest march. After the Styrian Heimatschutz joined the NSDAP in 1933, Hubert Erhart became SA-Sturmbannführer for the above-mentioned region. In this capacity he – in his own words – established two SA battalions, a motorised battalion and an SA reserve battalion, which in spite of a police ban allegedly had 550 members.¹⁸² Additionally, it was Erhart's intention to restore the regional enterprises to 'Aryan' hands, as he indicated in his biography:

'During the ban, supplies to the Reich were made almost exclusively by Jewish merchants. They kept the profits entirely for themselves and forced prices far below cost price from the producers. This threatened the wood industry, which was Aryan for the most part and of which the workers and staff were almost without exception National Socialists, with total ruin (85% of the enterprises had already been brought to a complete stop by the end of 1933). I worked therefore to establish an Aryan sales organization, a department of wood industry. Then the people's representative Sepp Heinzl and I worked out the commercial part of this plan in Pöls near Judenburg. The plan was then submitted by Heinzl to state minister Darre [sic] in December 1933 and was also sent by courier to the regional centre at Munich. A copy that I sent to SA-Brigadeführer Kammerhofer, was confiscated by the authorities and I was sentenced for continuing forbidden party activities to four weeks detention and a fine of S 100.'¹⁸³

At the Juliputsch by the National Socialists Erhart with his Sturmbann V occupied the towns of Kraubath and St. Stefan on 25 July 1934. At St. Michael, above Leoben and Mautern, battles took place, costing several human lives. After a day the rebels gave up and Erhart

with Kammerhofer fled to the mountains, where they stayed in a tree-bark shack built by their own hands until 29 July. After a warrant for his arrest Erhart decided to flee to Yugoslavia, and had his family join him there.¹⁸⁴

In Yugoslavia Erhart reported to the refugee aid. There he worked as a manager at the department for family care at the refugee office in Marburg in August 1934. After this he worked for three months – until the departure of the refugees to the ‘Reich’ – as head manager for public safety of refugee camps in Yugoslavia.¹⁸⁵ A testimony of Erhart’s diligence exists, which again shows his National Socialist involvement:

‘We herewith confirm that party member Hubert Erhart functioned at the refugee office in Marburg as department manager for family care during the period from 30 July 1934 until 22 August 1934, and subsequently from 23 August until 28 November 1934 (until the departure of the refugees to the Reich) first as head manager for the economic division and then as head manager for the entire public security of the refugee camps in Yugoslavia.

‘Party member Erhart has always performed his duties totally in the National Socialist spirit and distinguished himself by his great diligence.’¹⁸⁶

Together with his family Erhart went to Munich and Rummelsburg, where, disappointed by the SA, he joined the Schutzstaffel and where he acted as acting camp leader.¹⁸⁷ From here he quickly managed to make a career for himself within the NSDAP. Other party members, driven by jealousy, tried to prevent this.

Erhart was accused of serious transgressions against National Socialism by party members Oberhaidacher, Plachotta and Lackner. At that time Erhart was transferred to the SS border patrol in Munich. The accusations were mainly based on a missing formal party membership in Erhart’s name. A letter by Ortsgruppenleiter Friedrich Lackner states it thus:

‘Until 15 July 1933 he could not be moved to become a member of the NSDAP. Until the take-over of power [... he] dedicated himself exclusively to purposes regarding the conservation of Styrian monuments.’¹⁸⁸

At the end of May 1936, a disciplinary legal procedure before the SS law court IIIa/G 131 against him was stopped. The documents on this case are marked 'secret'.¹⁸⁹ Decisive for the discontinuation of the procedure was the fact that Erhart had led the SA-Brigade Obersteiermark and until 'the events of July 1934' had belonged to the SA-Sturmabteilung V/3 Mautern.

'Therewith for him [...], in our opinion the formal joining of the SA and therefore the NSDAP was a fact. Hubert Erhart as leader of the Sturmabteilung has functioned extremely well. [...] After the failure of the people's rebellion of July 1934 he had to flee to the Reich because he was under suspicion.'¹⁹⁰

Erhart however did not flee to the 'Reich', but – as described above – to what was then the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and there ended up at the central relief centre for refugees.

Erhart had succeeded in rising to Sturmabteilungsführer already in 1935:

'SS-Sturmabteilungsführer Erhart was appointed according to RFSS/Pers. 20574 as head at the SS meeting place (head of SS border patrol) as from 25-10-1935.

'On 19-03-1936 Stubaf. Erhart was transferred to the SS Department VII Königsberg.'¹⁹¹

From October 1936, Erhart was already working his way into the SS Division I as a Standartenführer. In March 1937 Erhart was appointed to replace Standartenführer Hebron, who had taken ill, as stated in communications by SS-Brigadeführer Diehm to the personnel department in Berlin.¹⁹² From Diehm he also received an exemplary testimonial of his devotion in accordance with the National Socialist spirit. This may have had a favourable influence on his career and may have made it possible that he later attained the position of administrator of the confiscated monasteries. The next step on his career ladder followed on 12 September 1937: Himmler promoted Erhart to SS-Obersturmführer.¹⁹³

The SS staff report describes Erhart as a 'Dinaric figure' with a calm, open and cautious character. Erhart, an energetic type of man, knew how to get his own way. This he

would prove in the course of his administrative career at St. Lambrecht. The Nazi leaders regarded him as a confirmed fighter for National Socialism who acted correctly, both within and outside the scope of his employment.¹⁹⁴ The inhabitants of St. Lambrecht seem to have had great respect for the administrator. Seiler spoke with his contemporaries from the local population about this. According to them Erhart was a fair and honest person.¹⁹⁵

In July 1938 Erhart informed the Reichskanzlei that he was going to move with his family¹⁹⁶ from Munich to St. Lambrecht in order to take over the administration of the monastery there. Here in his own native country Hubert Erhart successfully continued his party career, partly due to his own commitment. From 21 June 1944 Obersturmbannführer Erhart, reserve officer of the Waffen-SS, held the rank of SS-Standartenführer.¹⁹⁷ This promotion came about as the result of 'extraordinary and independently developed activities'¹⁹⁸ in the field of Nazi interests.

After the end of the National Socialist rule Hubert Erhart was arrested and on 4 December 1948 the court at Graz sentenced him to three years' imprisonment.¹⁹⁹

The Men's Concentration Camp

Here the description of the men's concentration camp appears necessary as there is a connection with the later established women's concentration camp. Besides the fact that the female detail fell under the same camp commander, there was also contact between both groups of prisoners. Furthermore, the presence of the women's concentration camp changed the working conditions of the prisoners in the men's concentration camp.

The operation of both concentration camps was not isolated from the community. The camps were no secret. The fact was that maintenance of the equipment for the concentration camps required an infrastructure, for example power and water supply and waste disposal within the abbey walls. Contact with the outside world was therefore necessary. And the gate of the monastery was always open during daytime. The population was not forbidden to enter the premises.



*Former prisoners of
concentration camp
St. Lambrecht after
liberation (names
unknown)*

On Sundays, part of the village community attended church services in the convent church. So, neither the men's nor the women's concentration camp was hidden from public view. Additionally, for two years the space underneath the abbey archway was used for taking the roll call of the female prisoners' detail, which brought the presence of the women's concentration camp under the general attention of the local inhabitants.

Use was also made of service industries, such as restaurants which were frequented by the SS security guards. This connected officials of the internal camp system to the social outer world.

It is uncertain whose idea it was to establish a concentration camp at the monastery of St. Lambrecht, which was managed as an SS estate. The establishment of the settlement²⁰⁰ in Eben, a part of the St. Lambrecht territory, which had begun already in July 1941, certainly played a part in the employment of camp prisoners. Seiler suspects that the delayed employment of these prisoners had to do with the establishment of the Wirtschaftsverwaltungshauptamt (WVHA). Delay was also caused by the incorporation of the 'inspection of the concentration camps' in the WVHA. In any case from that moment onwards, putting prisoners to work on agricultural jobs at SS estates was no longer exceptional.²⁰¹

On 12 May 1942 the first prisoners' detail intended for St. Lambrecht was put together in the concentration camp at Dachau. The detail arrived there the next day. According to several sources²⁰² the convoy consisted of between eighty and a hundred men. A few weeks later another convoy from Dachau followed and about eighteen prisoners were taken to Schloss Lind, a property of the former monastery.²⁰³



Wing of the monastery St. Lambrecht where the men's concentration camp was accommodated (this picture was taken after liberation)

The group of male prisoners at the concentration camp St. Lambrecht consisted of different nationalities. The Poles initially formed the greater majority. There were also several Germans, some Austrians and Yugoslavs imprisoned there. They found accommodation on the top floor of an outbuilding overlooking the west,²⁰⁴ with garages underneath. The prisoners first had to organise the accommodation for themselves and for some twenty guards.

By separating a space on the grounds of the prisoners' wing, a small sick bay was created, which from autumn of 1942 onward was manned by a Slovenian physician. Next to the sick bay, the prisoners organised a workshop where they carried out repairs.²⁰⁵

The security guards were accommodated on the ground floor of the monastery building. The camp commandant's room was in the present private chapel next to the church. The Sicherheitsdienst (SD) moved into the adjoining rooms. The doors were kept closed.²⁰⁶

The employment of the prisoners first began with agricultural activities and then they were forced to work on the construction of the settlement in Eben, including waterworks, canalisation and a purification plant. During this hard labour the prisoners were severely mistreated. However, this soon came to an end, apparently because it was thought important that the work should proceed quickly.²⁰⁷



Monastery St. Lambrecht, guards' wing

Lore Kröll, former head housekeeper, evaluates the building of a settlement at St. Lambrecht as follows:

'This new settlement is a good development, brought about by [the new rulers using camp prisoners; author's remark]. Nowadays the population is glad to have this in St. Lambrecht.'²⁰⁸

The building supervisor was the young architect SS-Untersturmführer Herbert Goschin,²⁰⁹ who had been sent to St. Lambrecht by the WVHA in July 1942. The prisoners developed a good relationship with this SS-Untersturmführer. He was the one who warned the prisoners about eavesdropping when a new group of guards arrived. The leader of this building detail originated from Upper-Silesia and could speak the Slavonic languages. The Czech, Polish and Yugoslavian prisoners had until then been able to communicate freely with each other in their languages. Collective and individual punishments increased in number. Furthermore, from 20 November 1942 onwards, when St. Lambrecht became a sub camp of the Mauthausen concentration camp, a few Poles were transferred to the latter camp, something which may be called unusual.²¹⁰ These actions must be ascribed to the Silesian leader of the building detail who informed the guards of the content of the conversations between the prisoners.²¹¹



SS-Untersturmführer Herbert Goschin, right (probably from 1943)

SS-Hauptscharführer Ernst Angerer soon replaced²¹² the first camp commandant Remle.²¹³ According to statements by prisoners Angerer 'was no brute, no murderer. He was basically different from the others. The forced labour was thus rendered relatively bearable.'²¹⁴ Angerer befriended a girl who had been ordered to work in the dynamite factory at Weissenbach near St. Lambrecht, as part of the Arbeitsdienst. In October 1942 he was 'replaced because of a too liberal leadership of the forced labour at St. Lambrecht' and sentenced by an SS law court because of 'favouring prisoners'.²¹⁵

In the abbey kitchen mentioned earlier, a prisoner called Gustav Mayer²¹⁶ cooked for the prisoners' group that was made up of various nationalities. The prisoners received the same food every day: white cabbage, potatoes and tinned meat. When there were enough vegetables from the convent garden available, these supplemented their diet. Breakfast consisted of milk diluted with water or coffee and a piece of bread.²¹⁷ There was a kitchen range in the middle of the kitchen. At one side of the range a female cook, assisted by a kitchen help, cooked for the roughly thirty members of the civilian staff then at the SS estate. The civilian staff used this opportunity to secretly push leftovers of the kitchen ingredients across the range to the prison cook. Besides the kitchen help Margarete Messnarz-Günter, who had been ordered to work at St. Lambrecht within the framework of the RAD on 1 February 1942, three Yugoslavian girls and a female cook called Anna worked there.²¹⁸ Anna was very popular with the prisoners as well as with head housekeeper Kröll. She supported the prisoners at every opportunity, for example, by slipping them food.²¹⁹ She wrote letters for the prisoner Hubert Henkel²²⁰ from Munich and then smuggled the letters out of the camp.



From left to right: unknown Wehrmacht soldier, cook Anna, kitchen help Margarete Messnarz-Günter, camp commandant Schöller, kitchen help from Slovenia, unknown Wehrmacht soldier (picture probably from 1944)

An SS man guarded the male prisoners at work in the kitchen until they were replaced by the female prisoners in 1943.²²¹ In a room next to the kitchen, camp secretary Ludwig Lach²²² carried out his work. His job included the household administration, the registration forms and the menu, with information provided by Lore Kröll.²²³ Furthermore it was his duty to set the table for the SS guard in another room next to the kitchen.²²⁴

Ludwig Lach succeeded in repeatedly receiving visits from his wife from Graz. When the SS guard discovered these forbidden meetings in the spring of 1943, 'he received a

proper thrashing'.²²⁵ Subsequently Lach was returned to the Mauthausen concentration camp. He was sent to the sub camp Eisenerz, from where he was released in 1944.

In November 1942 the concentration camp at St. Lambrecht came under the administration of the Mauthausen head camp. This involved a total replacement of the guards; the staff at St. Lambrecht was replaced by personnel that had come from Mauthausen. SS-Hauptscharführer Heinrich Schöller became the new camp commander.²²⁶

With his arrival the atmosphere worsened, and the camp punishments normally meted out at Mauthausen were also introduced at St. Lambrecht. Margarete Messnarz-Günter remembered the maltreatments she had seen for herself:



From left to right: Slovenian kitchen help, unknown Wehrmacht soldier, cook Anna, camp commandant Schöller, kitchen help Margarete Messnarz-Günter, unknown Wehrmacht soldier, Slovenian kitchen help (picture probably from 1944)

‘From the beginning they beat prisoners savagely! We stood there and watched. If anybody had protested or had done something they struck! We then complained to Mr Reiner or to Erhart: “We can’t bear to watch it! We don’t want to witness this!” There were a few brutal guards, they were so cruel. There were always two or three like that.’²²⁷

This shows that the memories of the civilian staff corresponded with those of the former prisoners. Josef Nischelwitzer, a former political prisoner from Carinthia, reports that after the replacement of the guards by the new guarding command²²⁸ from Mauthausen camp punishments like Bock and ‘tree’ were introduced at St. Lambrecht. With Bock ‘the victim had to lie down on a bench and was given 25 strokes of the cane on his bottom. The ‘tree’

was when the prisoner was hung from a bunk bed by his arms which were bound at his back, his body thus hanging free in space. The pain of this torture could lead to unconsciousness.²²⁹

Another torture used was when 'they were hung without support for their feet and with their head leaning backwards. And with a constant drip of water on their head. Like a dripping tap. Drip, drip. drip. Always on his forehead, until he went mad.'²³⁰

The most dreaded punishment, causing great terror, was returning the prisoner to the Mauthausen main camp. This stood for an immediate life threat because it was very likely the victim would not survive until the evening.

Thus, on 29 June 1943 for the first time fourteen prisoners, among whom the Slovene physician-prisoner, were fetched and taken back to the Mauthausen concentration camp. At the parade ground in Mauthausen the dogs were set on them. Nine of them were killed by this attack. The wounded were transferred to the punishment group, where they died the next day. On 30 June the other prisoners at St. Lambrecht, more than eighty men, were transported to the Mauthausen head camp. There they were assigned to the punishment group at the sub camp Gusen, which was tantamount to a death sentence.²³¹

The kitchen help Margarete Messnarz-Günter spoke of this event as the most terrible she had experienced in the course of her employment at St. Lambrecht.

Seiler suspects that the reason for the cruel murder of nearly the whole prisoners' detail from St. Lambrecht, was the planned or merely discussed preparations to make their escape:

'Through contacts with Slovenian women in enforced employment and also imprisoned partisans, the prisoners received information on Yugoslav partisan groups. It seems the idea of escaping and founding a resistance group in the surrounding forests had arisen from the discussions. It was however rejected because "in our region" help from the inhabitants could not be counted on. Nonetheless discussions about the possibilities are said to have broken out time and time again. Just before the return of the detail, the afore mentioned Silesian leader of the building detail had eavesdropped on a group of Poles at a discussion about preparations for their escape.'²³²

Messnarz-Günter tells she had discovered how a Pole who had worked in the kitchen had betrayed them. 'The prisoners especially wanted to go to Yugoslavia because there was already a partisan conflict which they had wanted to join. And now that has failed.'²³³

The female prisoners, the Jehovah's Witnesses, also remembered the replacement of the whole prisoners' detail and have felt this as a drastic and tragic experience. However, the reason was not suspected to be an escape attempt, but the betrayal of a planned attack on Schöller. An SS man, probably an emigrated German who understood the Polish language, allegedly had warned the commander of this.²³⁴ This version would also better explain why a small group of prisoners had already been returned to Mauthausen concentration camp the day before the replacement of the whole pool of prisoners, and why the starved dogs were cruelly set against these men. The whole story just cannot be pieced together anymore. The fact remains that for most of these prisoners, returning them to Mauthausen resulted in their death.

For two days at the beginning of July 1943 there were no male prisoners at St. Lambrecht.²³⁵ On 2 July a transport of 99 Spanish prisoners and a Polish imprisoned physician, Telesfer Jankowski, arrived. This man was later made responsible for the care of the female prisoners and partly also for the care of the civilian staff.²³⁶

After the defeat in the struggle against Franco, these 'republican Spaniards' had fled to France where they first had been imprisoned in camps and subsequently were deported to concentration camps. The new prisoners' detail consisted mainly of skilled workers. Among them were bricklayers, decorators, roofers, carpenters, cabinetmakers, electricians, mechanics, a car welder, a tailor and a cobbler.

The prisoners worked at the ongoing building of the settlement in Eben and the Verwalter-villa. But they also made and repaired all the tools necessary on the SS estate. The choice of skilled workers in this regard was a logical one: when they arrived the women's concentration camp already existed, and the female Bible Students took over much of the work done by male prisoners. Within the SS estate this included work in the kitchen, but also the cleaning jobs and partly the work in the market garden.



'24-9-43: Españoles de Mauthausen' — inscription on the underside of a plank from the roof boarding, found during renovation work in the 1990s

From July 1943 onward, there was no surveillance in the kitchen because the imprisoned female Jehovah's Witnesses now had to cook for the male prisoners. Contact with the kitchen personnel only took place when food was fetched. Emilio Viana, one of these prisoners who was authorised for the transport of food, fell in love with the kitchen help Margarete Messnarz. He used to write letters to her, which he secretly sent to his beloved by means of Bible Student Ella Hempel, the prison cook. During one of these 'smuggling actions' an overseer discovered a letter. The prisoner was cruelly beaten. When the SS guard also wanted to punish the kitchen help, cook Anna prevented the attack and reported the incident to the Verwalter Erhart. Margarete Messnarz was sent to the Verwalter and was reprimanded. Prisoner Emilio Viana was sent back to the main camp at Mauthausen on 15

131 118
KONZENTRATIONSLAGER MAUTHAUSEN
Lagerschreibstube

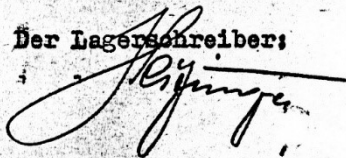
Mauthausen, den

Veränderungsmeldung für den 29. September 1943

Vom Aussenkommando St. Lambrecht wurden rücküberstellt:

- | | | | |
|------------|------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Spanier | 5301 | Soria Belando Enrique | 22.5.15 zu Gran |
| 2. Spanier | 5834 | Vargas Botella Mateo | 25.4.20 zu Malaga |
- 265

Der Lagerschreiber:



May 1944.²³⁷ It is still a mystery how he managed to be transferred back to St. Lambrecht the following day.

Anyhow, the consequence was that this prisoner was no longer used for transporting food and Bible Student Hempel no longer supported the smuggling of love letters.

At the beginning of 1944 the so-called Publikationsstelle Wien moved into the SS estate. The advance of the Red Army had made the location of this institute in Vienna insecure. The 'evacuation' of the voluminous material consisting of maps and books was a large-scale operation. Therefore, Wilfried Krallert, head of the institute, requested the authorities in Berlin to provide twenty extra camp prisoners for this work and four extra guards. The cartographers from the institute had to take over guarding the prisoners who were making bookshelves.²³⁸

On 17 February there were 72 male prisoners at St. Lambrecht,²³⁹ who, besides the building work, now also had to work for the Publikationsstelle. Having the prisoners doing other work delayed



Emilio Viana (left), physician-prisoner Telesfer Jankowski (right)



Spanish prisoners in front of the abbey at St. Lambrecht after liberation in 1945

the progress of the building. This at least is what happened at the Verwalter-villa, which could therefore not be completed.

In March 1944 the SS-Wirtschafts- und Verwaltungshauptamt promised that the requested prisoners would be transferred to St. Lambrecht. The assignment of more concentration camp prisoners took place on condition that 'there would be no problems if the prisoners should be recalled'.²⁴⁰ This letter stated that returning the promised prisoners after about two months had to be considered. By the beginning of April 1944 eight camp prisoners were transferred from Mauthausen concentration camp to the labour camp at St. Lambrecht.

On 16 June 1944 SS-Obersturmführer Hachmeister as a staff member of the WVHA obeyed a command by Himmler demanding that eight of the prisoners who had been made available immediately be transferred to Mauthausen. A week later the eight prisoners went from St. Lambrecht to Mauthausen. After hardly a month this same number of prisoners was again transferred from the main camp to St. Lambrecht. Thus, the management of the 'alternative place St. Lambrecht' lent force to their demand to have the disposition of cheap labour of prisoners for 'duties of great military interest'.²⁴¹

Returning two prisoners to the Mauthausen main camp, one on 24 May and one on 18 October 1944 was in all likelihood meant as punishment. The last change in the prisoner population at St. Lambrecht occurred on 19 October 1944 when a prisoner was transferred from the Gusen concentration camp to the Styrian sub camp of Mauthausen.²⁴²

It is a fact that living conditions, despite harassment,²⁴³ were better than in the main Mauthausen camp. The prisoners were not starved, although the food was insufficient for the men who had to perform hard physical labour. All the 'prisoners were emaciated'.²⁴⁴ The prisoners' diet will be dealt with in the next chapter.

Clothing and accommodation too were better than in the main camp, but there is certainly no way it could be said that conditions were humane. It is a fact that the prisoners were used as labour slaves for all kinds of work for the benefit of the 'Reich'. Even Erhart didn't shrink back from using the skills of the prisoners. For example, prisoners carried out repairs on the electricity at his house in St. Lambrecht.²⁴⁵

Arolsen

15

VI G = Tgb.Nr. 224/44 -

Berlin, den 24. Februar 1944

1) Reg. eintragen

2) Vermerk

Betrifft: Bewachungsmannschaft für das Häftlingsarbeitskommando in St. Lambrecht.

Bei der Errichtung der Ausweichstelle in St. Lambrecht ist eine grosse Zahl von Kz.-Häftlingen tätig. Dieselben sind zum Teil als Hilfsarbeiter mit der Herstellung von Buchstallagen beschäftigt, zum anderen Teil bei Bauarbeiten tätig. Für die Bewachung sind bisher Männer von der Gruppe VI G verwendet worden. Bei diesen handelt es sich um hochqualifizierte kartographische Zeichner. Es kann nicht verantwortet werden, diese Männer länger mit der Bewachungsaufgabe zu betrauen, umso mehr als sie für ihre eigentliche Aufgabe dringend gebraucht werden. Ich bitte deshalb für insgesamt 20 Häftlinge 4 Bewachungsmänner bei IB zu beantragen. Die Unterbringung der Häftlinge kann gemeinsam mit den Häftlingen der Guts-Verwaltung St. Lambrecht erfolgen, für die ein eigenes Bewachungskommando der Waffen-SS vorhanden ist. Die angeforderten 4 Mann können unterbringungs- und versorgungsmässig diesem Wachkommando angeschlossen werden. Ich bitte mit Rücklicht auf den dringenden Bedarf nach Zeichnern um möglichst baldige Zurverfügungstellung der erbetenen 4 Mann. Dieselben sollen sich auf der Dienststelle von VI G Potsdamerstr. 29 melden und werden von hier aus nach St. Lambrecht, in Marsch gesetzt.

3) Hauptsturmführer Dr. Funk mit der Bitte um Mitzeichnung u. Weitergabe an I B

4) I B mit der Bitte um Beistellung der Männer.

5) VI G z.d.A. Personal

*To relieve the cartographers,
four more guards were
requested*

HA 1/10

G - Tgb. Nr. 322/44 -

Berlin W 9, den 22. März 1944.
Potsdamerstr. 29/II

1. Tgb. austr.
2. Schreibe

Telefon : 22 35 26

An die
Anweisungstelle

St. Lembrecht
Stift Steiermark

Betrifft: Abstellung von Häftlingen

Vorgang: Dortiges Schreiben vom 17. II. 44
- Gr. VI G -

Auf Grund einer am 21. 3. 1944 mit dem Vertreter des
H-Obersturmbannführers Maurer, H-Obersturmführer
Sommer, gehalten Rücksprache wurde erreicht, dass
das H-Wirtschafts- und Verwaltungshauptamt in Oranien-
burg dem Konzentrationslager Nordhausen Anweisung er-
teilen wird, die angeforderten Häftlinge nach St.
Lembrecht abzustellen.

Es wurde jedoch die Auflage erteilt, bei Abberufung der
Häftlinge keine Schwierigkeiten zu bereiten. Es muss
damit gerechnet werden, dass eine Abberufung in 1 1/2
- 2 Monaten, vielleicht auch später, erfolgen muss.
Dringende staatspolitische Aufgaben müssen auf Befehl
des RFSS durch Einsatz von Häftlingen erfüllt werden.
Die befristete Freigabe der erwähnten Häftlinge wurde
unter ausdrücklicher Zusage, dass bei einem Abruf
keine Einwendungen erhoben werden, erreicht. Die dort
durchzuführenden Arbeiten müssen daher zweckmäßigerwei-
se sofort bei Eintreffen der Häftlinge in Angriff ge-
nommen werden und sind beschleunigt zum Abschluss zu
bringen.
Das Eintreffen der Häftlinge, die im Lager des H-Ober-
sturmbannführers Erhart unterzubringen und zu verpflegen
sind, ist hier kurz anzugeben. Im Übrigen wird noch
bemerkt, dass auch ein Abzug von Häftlingen aus diesem
Lager in Kürze erfolgen wird. I.V.

3. Wv. 5.4. 1944

B. 22/10
H-Obersturmführer.

(Hesse) 11, 110

*To be able to perform the
extra work, more prisoners
were requested*

The work of the male prisoners was sometimes combined with that of the imprisoned female Bible Students. Both male and female prisoners worked together at the afforestation work, the men digging the holes for the young trees and the women placing the trees. Of course, conversations arose between the two groups of prisoners. This was forbidden, to be sure, but 'the two SS guards couldn't be everywhere at the same time!'²⁴⁶

Additionally, prisoners in the vegetable garden worked together with a great number of imprisoned women. Two male prisoners also worked in the adjacent Alexanderhof, the stables.

Contact grew between the Spanish prisoners and the female Bible Students within the former convent. These contacts, as well as liberation in May 1945, are the subject of the next chapter.

7 The Concentration Camp for Women at St. Lambrecht

Setting up a Women's Concentration Camp in the Monastery

To introduce the description of the 'labour camp', the following is a reconstruction of the possible reasons for setting up a concentration camp for women in the SS rural estate of St. Lambrecht, which was established originally as a sub camp of Ravensbrück women's concentration camp and taken over by Mauthausen concentration camp in September 1944.

The constant number of 23 female prisoners²⁴⁷ in St. Lambrecht women's concentration camp indicates a purposeful and planned 'filling' of jobs. Various reasons can be produced for setting up the camp in May 1943.

In the first place the building activities had grown significantly as work was being carried out on the Verwalter-villa. The women's detail presumably was intended to free the male prisoners for 'male' building labour. So-called 'female' work, such as work in the kitchen, cleaning and gardening, could efficiently be carried out by female prisoners.

Secondly there were often guests at the SS estate. Possibly women were expected to deliver a higher quality of supposedly female cleaning work. Moreover other institutes, such as the so-called Publikationsstelle Wien or the Lehrerinnenbildungsanstalt from Kainbach, gradually started occupying the rooms of the SS estate. This meant a greater need for more workers to clean the property.

Equipping the concentration camp with female prisoners from the 'category Bible Students' was obvious: Jehovah's Witnesses did not require extra security guards because previous years had shown that trying to escape was out of the question for these female prisoners, as they would not do it even if given the opportunity. So, the shortage of staff in the SS may have been another reason for choosing the female Bible Students. At that time so-called ethnic Germans took on the job of surveillance in the concentration camp for men, and Schloss Lind concentration camp had to make do with Wehrmacht soldiers.

Another reason for claiming a group of prisoners consisting exclusively of female Jehovah's Witnesses may be that they were reputed to be exemplary, conscientious workers who carried out all their work with great application. The former head housekeeper, Lore Kröll, described them in her own characteristic way as follows: 'They were young, strong

girls, some of them Dutch. They worked very hard. There were no problems. I enjoyed their company. They were always kind to me.²⁴⁸

Lore Kröll's statement indicates what the foremost requirement for the group of prisoners was: hard workers with no attempt at sabotage, so that no problems were to be expected.

The idea of establishing another concentration camp in the unused rooms of the former monastery after the men's concentration camp had already been in existence for a year, likely came from the ambitious Verwalter Hubert Erhart. At that time, he was already in charge of the four great monastery properties in Styria and thereby had acquired considerable power. Because of his good contact with SS leaders, whom he entertained by grand invitations for hunting and relaxation at 'his' SS estates, it must have been simple for him to achieve the establishment of a small concentration camp for women. Probably the economical aspect – making a prosperous and profitable organization of the SS estate as quickly as possible – was the prime consideration for choosing to get the work done at practically no cost.

Transport of the Female Prisoners

A prisoners' detail of 24 female Bible Students was assembled in Ravensbrück concentration camp at the beginning of May 1943.²⁴⁹ Probably on 4 or 5 May they were transported by train from Fürstenberg to Styria, to the sub camp at St. Lambrecht. The prisoners' detail consisted of women from Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria and Poland who had been imprisoned for a shorter or longer time period. Especially the German and Dutch Jehovah's Witnesses had suffered long years of imprisonment and had endured the living conditions in various prisons. As evidenced by their low registration number, some of them had also been made acquainted with first generation concentration camps, such as Lichtenburg or Moringen.

With a rucksack for the most essential necessities such as clothing, cutlery and a blanket, the 24 Jehovah's Witnesses arrived totally worn out at the station of Mariahof on 8 May 1943. The first impression they got and which they later still remembered was the cold. Although it was already May, the mountains around St. Lambrecht were still covered in snow.²⁵⁰

At the Mariahof station the group of female prisoners saw soldiers of the Wehrmacht who had been given soup to eat. The Bible Students received no food but immediately had to climb on the trailer of a tractor. They were driven to the SS estate.

Camp Guard

While being transported from Ravensbrück to St. Lambrecht, the female prisoners were accompanied by camp guard Jane Gerda B.²⁵¹ B. had been trained as a kindergarten teacher and so had a social-educational background. In response to an advertisement in a newspaper she had applied for the position of camp guard in 1939.

This change of occupation was mainly intended to keep her ensured of an income as an official. B. began her work in the concentration camp at Lichtenburg in February 1939 and even then, had her first dealings with imprisoned female Bible Students. When Lichtenburg concentration camp was relocated to Ravensbrück, B. also ended up in this concentration camp. In 1940 she worked in Mauthausen concentration camp for about three months, after which period she was called back to camp Ravensbrück. Probably in 1942 she was again transferred to Mauthausen. After having worked at Mauthausen for nine months, she undertook the supervision of the Bible Students at St. Lambrecht concentration camp. She served at St. Lambrecht until the autumn of 1944. Around that time, she was offered a job as a camp guard at a concentration camp near Vienna, which she declined. At first, she was sent back to Ravensbrück²⁵² and subsequently worked in the concentration camp at Gross-Rosen, where she was employed until liberation of the camp in 1945. After 1945, B. was never brought to justice.²⁵³

The Dutch Witnesses I interviewed remember B. as a 'likeable woman',²⁵⁴ who was open to the problems of the imprisoned Bible Students, but with the comment that she also could be aggressive. Gerdina Huisman-Rabouw tells how this guard had once made tea for her because she suffered severe menstruation pains. All the same Huisman-Rabouw experienced that B. could be violent, because suddenly and without further explanation she cuffed her on the ear. The immediate cause for this abuse was a broken dish and B. showed the broken shards to Gerdina later without comment. She thought that Huisman-Rabouw, who served as a chambermaid at that time, had committed this 'punishable' offence.

Guard Jane B. evoked mixed feelings by her strongly varying conduct. She was regarded as an unpredictable person who operated within a totalitarian system that breathed intolerance and violence. The female prisoners also regarded her as a homosexual.²⁵⁵ It is not known whether this view was because of sexual violence. The question therefore remains by what actions the guard was labelled a lesbian.²⁵⁶

On 14 September 1944, 58 female prisoners from Ravensbrück concentration camp were recorded in the card index of Mauthausen. These women had already been working in the sub camps at St. Lambrecht and Mittersill for a considerable time and from then onwards were considered prisoners of Mauthausen.²⁵⁷

Time and again tensions arose between the inmates and the female guard, especially between guard B. and Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen. As a chambermaid Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen had all the keys to the offices and guest rooms and she was completely trusted by Lore Kröll.²⁵⁸ These conflicts were aggravated as the direct superior of the guard, camp commander Schöller, took the women under his protection. Because he was especially interested in Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen, he frequently spent time in her vicinity. Publications show that the Dutch Bible Students in particular did not always obey commands. One such incident was when Jans started to yodel, although the guard Jane B. had repeatedly forbidden her to do so. For this disobedience, she gave Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen a sharp blow to the head. Immediately after the incident Schöller asked Jans for the reason and she asked him to see that Jane B. would be transferred²⁵⁹ and a short while later she was reassigned to Ravensbrück. It is doubtful whether the request of the prisoner had brought this about, but it is not completely inconceivable.

The exchange of the female guard in the autumn of 1944 was in no way an improvement to the living conditions of the Bible Students. To the contrary, the second female guard was regarded as being even more cruel than the first one. Her name was not discovered during the investigation. This second and last female guard – after her appointment no more replacements followed – is described as a small, obese woman without any empathy for the inmates whatsoever.

The guard allegedly kept a lot of totally neglected cats in her room, which directly adjoined the prison rooms, and which had to be cleaned by a Witness. Because of these cats,

which she never fed herself – the inmates had to do this – the room was extremely filthy, and it stank to high heaven.²⁶⁰

Once a day the guard appeared in the kitchen, apparently only to show her presence. She never stayed long and moreover hardly ever spoke.

‘This second one, an older one, was stupid! She never said anything. But that didn’t matter’, says Margarete Messnarz-Günter. According to her it probably had to do with the guard’s pride. She was convinced of the racial ideology of the Herrenmensch.²⁶¹ Even after liberation of the concentration camp by the British army she issued commands to the former prisoners, but as they had realised that they were free, they no longer followed her orders.

Structure of the Camp Community

The camp community consisted of a homogenous group of female Jehovah’s Witnesses of different ages. Most of the women had been born at the beginning of the twentieth century and were well over forty when they arrived in the St. Lambrecht women’s concentration camp. There were only two young Dutch Bible Students. The youngest, only 22 years old, was Gerdina Huisman.²⁶² Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen was three years older than Gerdina and therefore the second youngest Dutch woman of the camp community. The oldest Bible Student at St. Lambrecht was the Viennese Therese Schreiber, who was nearly 54 on arrival in Styria. That made the average age in the sub camp higher.

The camp community was composed of five Dutch, two Austrian, one Belgian, ten German and five²⁶³ Polish women.

Within the group there were strong friendships. There was for instance a strong bond between Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen and Sjaan Pronk. Froukje Volp and Gerdina Huisman had already become friends in camp Ravensbrück. These friendships also showed in the choice of sleeping places, where these women shared a bunk bed.²⁶⁴

As far as is known none of the female inmates at St. Lambrecht held the post of Blockälteste.

However, within the religious community a ‘leader’ was chosen who issued directions in religious matters. This was the German Bible Student, Alwine Blöbaum. She was reckoned to be an ‘anointed’ one and therefore had special authority.²⁶⁵

Within the group discussions principally arose about matters of faith. One of the reasons was that the German Witnesses because of their long years of internment were not aware of the current situation regarding the interpretation of Bible texts and religious matters.

Furthermore, the difference in national character had its influence on the resistance of the religious community. The German Bible Students, in contrast to the Dutch ones, for instance were regarded as very docile. The Dutch women were very courageous. They had the reputation of being 'cheeky Dutch women'.²⁶⁶

Although some of the women enjoyed privileges because of their place of work, this evidently did not cause problems within the group. The good mutual relationships and the willingness with which all Jehovah's Witnesses shared all advantages with each other as far as possible, were of vital importance. Those who by their work had ended up in better positions, took considerable risks into the bargain. The women working as chambermaids for instance, smuggled – because they received their meals in the kitchen – food for the other sisters in the faith into the camp.²⁶⁷

The group felt like the closed unity of a family of which the members were bound together by the special value of their common religious convictions. Differences between the various women mainly had to do with their country of origin. All in all, according to Gerdina Huisman, there was 'a genial atmosphere within the group, that was beneficial'.²⁶⁸

Accommodation and Hygiene

The women's concentration camp was accommodated on the ground floor of the southern wing where the windows were already barred. At present this is the wing where the priests are accommodated. The entrance was reached through the archway at the left and was shut off by a wrought iron gate that too was already present and stands to this day as a silent witness. The space beneath the archway was the muster place for roll call for the small group of prisoners.

Every morning and every evening the Bible Students had to present themselves for the roll call that took only a few minutes.²⁶⁹ It was performed according to the principle the Bible Students were already familiar with from Ravensbrück.²⁷⁰ Participation in the roll call at St. Lambrecht concentration camp was not refused by the Bible Students. The so-called 'extremists' too presented themselves. Contrary to the German inmates, who stood to



attention during the roll call, the Dutch sisters in the faith were merely present and 'just stood there'.²⁷¹ This example clearly shows the variety in national socialisation of the different women.

The Jehovah's Witnesses had a room for eating and sleeping and a room with sanitary equipment at their disposal. This room had previously been used for the detention of British and French prisoners of war, who probably had been transported to Schloss Lind shortly before the arrival of the female prisoners.²⁷²

The room for eating and sleeping was furnished with wooden bunk beds two high, a long dinner table and chairs. The opportunity to sit after work was felt to be a luxury. Most of the sisters in the faith took their meals in the camp. An exception were the women who were put to work as chambermaids, they had permission to eat in the kitchen. This was a privilege, as they did not have to eat the prison food

but got to eat the same food as the staff and the guards.²⁷³

Each Bible Student had a private drawer for storing her personal belongings. A great difference from the degrading situation in Ravensbrück was that the women were not obliged to share the pallet on which they slept with someone else. They also had their own pillow and blankets. The resulting night's rest was an important improvement on conditions in the main camp.²⁷⁴

There was a row of washbasins on a broad shelf in the washing room with only cold water and pieces of clay for soap. There was also 'a toilet that was very deep. You could make all kinds of things disappear in there.'²⁷⁵ Unlike the eating and sleeping areas the washing room was not heated, so there was sometimes ice in the washbasins in winter.²⁷⁶

There was a tiled stove in the sleeping area, which was tended by the Belgian Maria Floryn. The eating and sleeping areas must have been sufficiently heated. Gerdina Huisman could 'not remember ever having felt cold there'.²⁷⁷ Floryn was responsible for cleaning the camp facilities of the Jehovah's Witnesses as well as the adjoining room of the female camp guard.²⁷⁸

Clothing

Just like the male prisoners the Bible Students wore striped prison clothes. In winter these consisted of a knitted woollen skirt, a woollen coat and bonnet. The shoes they wore were mountaineering boots covering the ankles. Summer outfit was composed of striped cotton dresses and headscarves also with a striped pattern. The headscarves had to be ironed by the Polish Bible Student Antonia Kurczewski. The rules for clothing also required that the women's hair should be tucked up under the headscarf. No one had their hair shaved off because in Ravensbrück the women who were not troubled by lice could keep their hair.²⁷⁹ The purple triangle and the registration number were attached to the left side of the upper garments. There were no tin bracelets with punched registration numbers like those in Peggau concentration camp. The women themselves were responsible for washing their clothes, which they washed in wooden tubs.²⁸⁰ The Jehovah's Witnesses set great store by a well-groomed look and neat clothing even in the camps.²⁸¹ This was a successful endeavour to keep their integrity through their outward appearance, which indicates an active expression of inner refinement.

Bible Students who were put to work as chambermaids wore an apron over their camp clothes, which made them look like housemaids so that they were not immediately conspicuous as camp inmates.²⁸² This clothing measure was probably taken with a view to the guests at the SS property, with whom the women came into contact. Camp commandant

Schöller is said not to have spoken out against this change in the usual apparel. His attitude may perhaps be explained by the personal interest he had developed in Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen. She related that he often watched her at work and that she resisted the invitation to kiss him. Her resistance remained unpunished.



Maria Florn in prison clothing (picture taken after liberation)

Food

The food supply at St. Lambrecht women's concentration camp was considered adequate compared to that of the main camp at Ravensbrück, at least regarding quantity. But the quality of the food was inferior and the diet unvaried. Breakfast consisted of diluted milk and, at times, coffee. The female inmates additionally received a measured quantity of bread, that was weighed out daily by kitchen help Margarete Messnarz-Günter and Bible Student Ella Hempel. The daily quantity of bread for around two hundred persons (sixty loaves) was always baked by the female inmates and the civilian staff together on Tuesdays and Fridays.

This was so-called sour bread, made with flour, potatoes and salt water. Now and again, there was some butter and jam for breakfast.²⁸³

The midday meal was always a casserole of white cabbage, potatoes and tinned meat. A slight improvement on the quality of the food, only happened when the kitchen personnel managed to slip the prisoners some extra vegetables across the stove. The



evening meal was turnips. The food was the same on Sundays as on weekdays. The male inmates received the same food as the female Bible Students.²⁸⁴

The amount of food for the female Bible Students performing hard labour being relatively sufficient, can be explained by the fact that the women's metabolism had slowed down and they were somewhat older. The women appeared to be well-nourished in comparison to the male inmates who were 'all skin and bone'.²⁸⁵ They were generally considerably younger than the female Bible Students and had to carry out more exhausting labour.

But because of the poor quality of the food the female inmates were also undernourished. Though they did have more opportunities of obtaining better food by their work in the garden, in the household or by herding the sheep. Furthermore, the female Bible Students

regularly received parcel-post packages that were not withheld but handed over to them. The extra foodstuffs were divided among the group.

Besides that, food packages were a popular means of transport for secret messages. Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen remembered a package with rye bread. Her 'mother had inserted a piece of ham and a letter when baking the bread. When the SS cut the bread in two the letter suddenly fell out. Gerdina Huisman-Rabouw snatched this letter away and put it in her apron to hide it from the SS guards.'²⁸⁶

The female Bible Students ate their meals in the eating and sleeping area of the concentration camp. The tableware they had brought along from Ravensbrück consisted of a tin bowl, a coffee cup and cutlery.²⁸⁷ When the inmates were at work in agriculture or forestry, the food was brought to their place of work in a tub.

The meals of the inmates who worked as chambermaids or cleaning women in the abbey formed an exception. They had the privilege of taking all their meals in the kitchen and of receiving the same food as the guards and the civilian staff. 'The food in the kitchen tasted good.'²⁸⁸ Because breakfast was so frugal, these female Bible Students could also ask for a second portion, which was always given them by cook Anna or kitchen help Margarete Messnarz-Günter.

Through their work at the SS estate, there was social contact with the guests, and this offered another opportunity of getting extra food. In this manner Gerdina Huisman was once given a piece of chocolate by a female guest.²⁸⁹

Now and then the head housekeeper, Lore Kröll, also supported the female Bible Students who 'worked for her', with something extra such as coffee or sweets.²⁹⁰

Labour

After the sub camp had been set up the female Bible Students were put to work at various duties. Sometimes their task remained unchanged. Ella Hempel, for example, was assigned the duty of cook and she held that position during all her time in the camp. She had to cook for all the inmates, both male and female,²⁹¹ between 120 to 130 persons in all. The day began at four o'clock in the morning for all kitchen personnel. Ella Hempel additionally had to waken the head housekeeper, Lore Kröll, every morning.

The bread was prepared in the kitchen for all inmates and for the civilian and security staff. Toos Berkers too was put to work in the kitchen at the beginning of her stay at St. Lambrecht. She remembers it as follows:

'Each of us had her own work. I was assigned to the kitchen and had to cook for the inmates. We received tinned meat and out of a few tins we had to make something good for so many men, regardless of what was on hand. Furthermore, we had to

bake bread in an oven that had to be stoked with wood. I was no baker, but I managed to learn how to do it. We got up at four a.m. and we returned to the camp at eight o'clock in the evening.²⁹²

Berkers did not only work in the kitchen of the abbey. Later, she was put to work with officer Stadler's family, where she cooked for the family and cared for the boys, Harold and Peter, as well as for the newborn baby. This family home was situated right by the convent garden along the road to Mariahof. There Toos managed in the first place to satisfy her own hunger by tasting liberally of the food she prepared. But she also smuggled leftovers for the other inmates into the camp.²⁹³

Removing rotten cabbage leaves was one of the first tasks a rather large group of women had to perform in the cellars of the abbey immediately upon arrival. During this work, that lasted for several days, the female Bible Students suffered terribly from the cold. The frozen cabbages they handled, froze their fingers.²⁹⁴ Occasionally, the women could warm their fingers over a small lamp. Moreover, in the convent cellars they had to clean potatoes and remove the rotten ones. This work was done by the German Jehovah's Witnesses.²⁹⁵

The first tasks also included forestry activities that were performed together with a group of male inmates. The men had to dig holes for the young trees while the women had to place the trees and tamp down the surrounding dirt. The terrain was very steep. For the women who were not used to this, it was difficult to keep their balance on the incline because their shoes were far too big or didn't fit. The female Bible Students were greatly aided at this work by the male inmates, who took over part of the women's work. In addition, the inmates sabotaged this work by planting more than one little tree in one hole in order to finish earlier. Because of the size of the group the two SS guards could not prevent communication between the men and women.²⁹⁶ The women were guarded by the SS only while doing this work. The guarding was not intended for them but for the male inmates.

Haymaking too they did together with the men, the women mostly being called up on Sundays if more workers were needed. The female Bible Students were usually free on

Sundays. This however was not the case for the Jehovah's Witnesses who worked in the kitchen. They also had to work on Sundays and holidays.²⁹⁷

The former monastery had a very large convent garden, that was extensively cultivated under the new authorities. Male prisoners were assigned to take care of the garden. The female Bible Students were also put to work here. Froukje Volp, Anna Schädlich, Therese Schreiber and occasionally also Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen, all worked in the vegetable garden.²⁹⁸ The inmates had to grow food and vegetables that were preserved in the autumn. They hardly ever received anything from the great quantities of products they had helped cultivate. The women also worked in the garden in winter. For storage of the vegetables, they dug accessible pits in the garden which were covered with straw and closed off with earth.²⁹⁹ Male prisoners were also used for the gardening work.

Most of the female Bible Students were put to work in the forestry activities in the summer of 1943. Corstiaantje (Sjaan) Pronk too did this work along with the others. Thereafter she worked as a shepherdess until her liberation. She spent summer and winter without SS guards in the mountainous landscape of Upper Styria. In winter the camp leaders put male prisoners to work shoveling snow, thereby enabling Sjaan to reach her flock in the mountains. In a letter that she wrote to her family in March 1944 or 1945, she stated that she had become 'steadily healthier'³⁰⁰ and was already sunburnt by working outdoors. Her work enabled her to supplement her diet with goat's milk. Due to the nature of her work her colleagues gave her the nickname 'Himmler's shepherdess'.³⁰¹ To assist her in her work Sjaan Pronk was given a sheepdog called Stumpert (Dutch for 'Poor thing'). After liberation she took a batch of wool home as a keepsake from her work.

The work outside the SS estate also included heating the 'staff dwellings'. Prisoners were assigned to this work when there was nobody present in the houses (the higher SS staff also worked during daytime). In this way all contact was avoided. Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen had to clean the house of architect Goschin and keep it heated with the tiled stove.³⁰²

Besides the kitchen work already described, a few inmates were also given various other duties within the SS property. It is impossible to reconstruct according to what criteria

the work was distributed. However, it is striking that the youngest female Bible Students had to clean the guest rooms, the offices of the Verwalter and the rooms of the staff. Possibly it had to do with the youthful age of the head housekeeper, Lore Kröll. She was only a few years older than both Dutch Witnesses, Gerdina Huisman and Jans Hoogers. Maybe because work in the household required intensive contact with the head housekeeper, this work was entrusted to these youngest inmates in order to prevent conflicts of authority.

Until the arrival of the female inmates' detail from Ravensbrück the guestrooms were cleaned by Margarete Messnarz-Günter.³⁰³ When the women's concentration camp at St. Lambrecht was established, she was transferred to the kitchen and assigned to cook Anna as a kitchen help. The cleaning was then done by Gerdina Huisman and Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen, who also had the task of polishing the guests' shoes.

Gerdina Huisman did this work only for a short time as she soon fell ill. The German Jehovah's Witness, Franziska Herold, took her place. Both Bible Students also had to do cleaning work in the kitchen, such as cleaning the large pan in which the milk for breakfast was heated. They also had to make sure that all the kitchen planning was carried out according to schedule. For instance, they fetched potatoes from the cellar or cleaned the vegetables that were to be prepared for the staff meal.³⁰⁴

Antonia Kurzewski, a Polish woman, worked in the laundry and sewing room of the SS estate. This place of work still exists in the same room of the wing above the monastery gate.³⁰⁵ It is not quite clear how extensive her work was. Probably she had to wash and iron the clothes of the male inmates as well as those of the SS security staff.

As described earlier, the Bible Students had to wash their own clothes. The civilian staff was also responsible for keeping their own clothing clean. Now and again Margarete Messnarz-Günter asked the Polish Bible Student to wash and iron her working clothes. Antonia Kurzewski was rewarded for this 'favour' with food that was slipped to her on the sly.³⁰⁶

Chambermaid Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen did the ironing for the guests staying at the SS estate. She also ironed all laundry of head housekeeper Lore Kröll. Her clothes were therefore always 'impeccably clean and neat'.³⁰⁷ Additionally, the so-called chambermaids had to stoke the many tiled stoves in the various rooms, a duty that was performed by the gatekeeper before the women's concentration camp was set up.³⁰⁸

Cleaning the camp rooms of the female inmates, including the room of the female guard, and cleaning the tiled stoves was the duty of the Belgian Maria Floryn. The Bible Students also took up duties voluntarily. Maria Floryn knitted a jumper for camp commandant Schöller which he later wore. In a letter from Heinrich Himmler to Pohl and Müller from 1943 he too mentioned such voluntary efforts: 'The women [...] voluntarily take on [...] work. In the evenings they knit, on Sundays they also keep busy in one way or another [...] They are exceptionally fanatic, self-sacrificing and obliging people.'³⁰⁹

The conversations with the formerly imprisoned Dutch women sketched a very different picture of camp commandant Schöller. He was, as Gerdina Huisman stated, 'very nice to us. He never caused us trouble, didn't lift a finger against us.'³¹⁰

The description of Schöller's personality by the interviewees seems to indicate that he even treated the women courteously. Schöller sympathised with the Bible Students and took a stand against the high-handedness of the female camp guards. However, the female inmates were aware of his cruel treatment of the male inmates and kept him at a distance. The image of a split personality of an SS henchman fits Schöller too. On the one hand the kind, even helpful way he treated the female Bible Students. On the other hand, he sent most of the men from the first inmates' detail back to Mauthausen concentration camp, which for them almost certainly meant death.

Illness and Care of the Sick

If inmates became ill, it was possible that they would be sent back to the main camp. This however seems to have happened very seldom. One Polish Bible Student³¹¹ fell ill soon after arrival at St. Lambrecht and was therefore sent back to Ravensbrück main camp.³¹² After the take-over of the sub camp by Mauthausen concentration camp in September 1944 this never happened again, although a few female inmates had an accident or fell ill.

The Polish physician-inmate Jankowski was responsible for the medical care of the female Bible Students. Of course, one cannot speak of adequate medical care.

Infections and physical injuries became serious problems under camp conditions. Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen suffered from a festering inflammation of her nail bed. The female SS guard drilled a hole in her fingernail with a needle calling it a necessary 'therapeutic'

measure. The result was that a blood-poisoning affected her whole arm, which was successfully treated by the general practitioner from the village. Because no pain killers were available, she had to suffer without pain relief. This absence of active medicines was a huge problem when she had to have a painful molar out. Gerdina Huisman, who was present at the operation, tried everything to stop the pain caused by the festering molar, though without success.³¹³

The sisters in the faith supported each other in such critical situations and helped each other within the scope of the means and possibilities available to them. When Sjaan Pronk got nettle rash, the German female Bible Students brewed stinging-nettle tea and herbal teas for her and thereby supported the healing process. This Dutch Bible Student already suffered from blood in her stools in Ravensbrück women's concentration camp.³¹⁴ While there she was cared for by Froukje Volp, who smuggled oatmeal porridge to the sick bay through a German sister in the faith.³¹⁵ Sjaan Pronk suffered from malnutrition when she arrived at St. Lambrecht, and there her sisters in the faith continued caring for her.³¹⁶ Maybe it was because of her bad state of health she was given the task of shepherding the sheep, a job which required relatively little physical strength compared to the other types of work.

Ella Hempel too was in bad health when she arrived in Styria from Ravensbrück. Toos Berkers remembers Ella Hempel as often being ill at St. Lambrecht. Therefore, Toos Berkers took over the physically strenuous kitchen work from her. Berkers incurred oedema, which made her stomach, her arms and legs swell up. She thought the cause of this was a stress reaction of the body.³¹⁷ I deem it more probable that the cause must be sought in the malnutrition to which she had been exposed for several years. This syndrome was ignored and there followed no treatment for the ailment. When Toos Berkers incurred influenza, she was released from work for two days and had then to resume work although she hadn't recovered.³¹⁸

Gerdina Huisman skidded with her hobnailed climbing boots on a slippery spot, caused by the extinguishing of a fire opposite the entrance to the abbey. She fell and fractured her right forearm. The Polish physician could not treat this complicated multiple fracture properly. He only splinted the arm with two wooden strips. The result was that Huisman suffered severe pains and the arm swelled up. Even in this case there were no pain killers available. As Gerdina Huisman could not work with her broken arm, she feared that she would be sent back to the main camp, but she wasn't. Now she had to assist in activities

she could manage with her handicap. The male detail had a cobbler, the Spanish inmate Jose Lopez Saez. He made a leather splint for Gerdina, that relieved the pain in her arm and enabled the healing of the multiple fracture. But the unprofessional treatment left the forearm clearly misshapen.³¹⁹

The exceptional situation to which the inmates were exposed also left psychological marks. Froukje Volp for instance became depressed. She often cried. The other sisters in the faith responded by comforting her and offering her the support of the religious community.³²⁰

Living conditions in the concentration camp damaged both body and spirit. All the Jehovah's Witnesses who could be interviewed or who have left a biography, have experienced physical problems or have incurred physical damage due to their camp experience.

The psychologically difficult situation was made easier to bear by the mutual bond and the influence of the religious community. Coping with the events depended on the psychological reserves and the individual personality structure of each female Bible Student. This allows for the conclusion that the varied potential was transformed into different coping strategies.

Contact with Other Social Groups

Contact between inmates and people from other social groups was forbidden on principle in St. Lambrecht women's concentration camp. Yet this happened, as the Jehovah's Witnesses did meet other layers of society through their work. They were relatively free to go wherever they wanted because of the lack of security staff and because they were to be trusted by reason of their well-known religious principles.

Thus, they could meet with the male inmates, the civilian staff and – although sporadically – with the local population. A few Jehovah's Witnesses managed to develop close relationships through their work.

Such a close relationship arose between the German Jehovah's Witness Ella Hempel and the civilian kitchen help Margarete Messnarz-Günter. Both women worked in the kitchen. They cooked across from each other at the same kitchen range, which separated the

inmates' part of the kitchen from the part for the civilian staff. As already indicated, there were no more SS guards in the kitchen after the arrival of the female prisoners. This enabled a virtually unrestricted communication between the inmates who worked there and the kitchen staff. Margarete Messnarz-Günter developed a mother-daughter relationship with this twenty-five-year older German Jehovah's Witness and sustained a close friendship with her.

Moreover, Ella Hempel helped to exchange letters between the Spanish inmate Emilio Viana and the young kitchen help. The German Bible Student used the opportunity of her unguarded place of work to speak about her faith and she attempted to convince kitchen help Margarete Messnarz-Günter of the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses. 'I listened to it all and thought: It would be nice if paradise should come in the way Jehovah's Witnesses portray it. But I didn't believe in it. I could not be convinced that it really would happen someday, knowing mankind. The Bible Students working in the kitchen time and again told me they didn't understand why I didn't spread the message. I should spread it!'³²¹

This example demonstrates the resistance of Jehovah's Witnesses at St. Lambrecht. They used every opportunity to live according to their religious principles, such as that of preaching. Whereas this was as a violation of the rules and precisely the reason for their imprisonment.

Personal contact with relatives was also possible at St. Lambrecht. Ella Hempel for instance was visited by her husband and children. Her children pleaded with her to come home, which would have been possible if she signed the declaration of renouncement. For Ella Hempel this was out of the question: she answered that she would remain in the concentration camp just 'until Jehovah says that it has been enough'.³²² Even these family visits could not break the religious conviction of this Bible Student.

Elisabeth (Lisbeth) Schütt, a Polish Bible Student, managed to contact a sister in the faith living incognito in St. Lambrecht. Seemingly Elisabeth Schütt met this Jehovah's Witness through her outdoor work and was able to persuade her to smuggle bread and wine into the camp for the 'Memorial Service'.³²³

'On a certain morning there was a large cardboard box left beside the gate at the place where roll call was held. Lisbeth immediately knew what it was. The female

guard kicked the box and wanted to know what it was. When the guard had left, she immediately removed the box. That is how the bread and wine came into the camp. In this way the Memorial Service could be held.³²⁴

This incident is typical of the steadfastness of the Jehovah's Witnesses, who looked for opportunities despite risks, and found them too, to live according to their faith even in the concentration camp.

The example just cited concerns one of the rare contacts with the population outside the convent walls. Conversation with the local population was strictly forbidden. Allegedly conversation with the convent apothecary took place now and again. The female interviewees described him as a 'dear man who hated the Nazis'.³²⁵ He detested the sight of the roll call and after liberation generously gave many medicines to the Jehovah's Witnesses for the return journey to their home country.³²⁶

As a shepherdess, Corstiaantje Pronk had contact with a war invalid who hadn't been conscripted because of his handicap. He seemingly often helped her take care of the sheep.³²⁷ The SS guards didn't suspect a threat through contact with the local population at the remote sheep pasture grounds.

Toos Berkers, who worked as a nanny with officer Stadler's family, had to get bread from the village bakery now and then. The baker inquired after the reason for her imprisonment, whereupon she told him that 'she obeyed God rather than men'.³²⁸ Thereupon the baker gave her a Bible, which she hid in her straw mattress. This too shows that various contacts with the outside world were used to obtain help to enable them to actively practice their faith.



Sewing box of Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen, 2001

Within the walls of the SS property, the young Dutch women especially who worked as chambermaids managed to contact a few Spanish inmates. Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen, who was trusted by the head housekeeper, was in a special position to do so. Lore Kröll – probably for practical reasons – gave Jans the keys to the various rooms she had to clean. In this context it is interesting that Lore Kröll used to address both chambermaids as ‘Fräulein Gerdi’ and ‘Fräulein Jans’.³²⁹ The social contact with this civilian employee in a high position thus took on a clearly personal character.

Household appliances were repaired by mechanic Juan Anguera

Canals. Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen remembers him repairing a broken-down vacuum cleaner that she took to the workshop underneath the men’s camp.³³⁰ The mechanic, who harboured a special sympathy for Jans, made a little wooden sewing box for her and gave it to her along with a copper thimble. She continued using the sewing box after leaving the camp.³³¹

That the Polish physician-inmate took care of the sick female Bible Students has already been referred to here. Besides the leather splint for her fractured arm, the cobbler, Jose Lopez Saez, one of the Spanish inmates, also made a pair of shoes for Gerdina Huisman.³³² A kind gesture that he somehow managed to contrive within the concentration camp. Both young Dutch Witnesses, as well as the kitchen help Margarete Messnarz-Günter had come to the attention of the usually young Spanish prisoners. The Spaniards left no stone unturned in trying to contact them and build up friendships.

The male inmates who came to the kitchen to fetch food also crossed the path of the chambermaids nearly every day. The Spaniard Manuel Amoros Lafuente used the opportunity to slip letters to Gerdina Huisman, who had drawn his special attention. When

she once lost one of these letters, it was found by an SS man. Gerdina Huisman feared that the Spaniard would be sent back to Mauthausen and wanted to prevent this. She asked camp commandant Schöller for a voluntary 'punitive transfer'. Gerdina argued that further contact would be impossible if she were to work outside the SS estate. Schöller accepted her proposal. Manuel Amoros Lafuente was allowed to remain at St. Lambrecht. Guarding the food transport was intensified. Yet the contact between Gerdina Huisman and the Spaniard continued. Even after liberation – when Gerdina rejected his request that she should follow him to Spain – the two kept up correspondence until Gerdina's marriage.³³³ The Nazi power had not succeeded in smothering a close friendship by punitive measures.

Neither could contact between the female and male groups of inmates be totally prevented during activities outside the SS estate. In fact, when the concentration camp for women was first set up, security was more rigorous and stricter. Through shortage of staff and by bringing in ethnic Germans (so-called Volksdeutschen), who tolerated contact between the inmates, the conversation prohibitions were relaxed.³³⁴

For instance, besides the female Bible Students, male inmates including the Spaniard Emilio Viana also worked in the vegetable gardens. Male inmates could also communicate with the Witnesses during forestry activities.

Based on the above it may be stated that the female Bible Students kept in touch with various social groups, letting themselves above all be guided by their religious faith. Attempting to obtain religious literature through outside contacts put them at risk. They also tried, just as they had done in Ravensbrück women's concentration camp, to give Biblical witness and even to convert people.

Camp Punishment

In St. Lambrecht women's concentration camp there were apparently no collective punitive measures imposed upon the female Bible Students, apart from a one-time prohibition to receive mail.³³⁵ It is also not known that any punishment was imposed upon individual members of the female detail by either the camp management or camp commandant Schöller. The 'punitive transfer' of Gerdina Huisman, which was voluntarily proposed by her to avoid contact with the Spanish inmate Manuel Amoros Lafuente, has already been described. This, however, was an exception.

The female inmates were however humiliated by the female guards and were also physically maltreated, at least by the younger Jane Gerda B.³³⁶ Small matters that were not tolerated by this guard, such as yodelling, were sufficient reason for her to dole out blows.

This guard's bullying was however kept within bounds because the inmates and their working efficiency were useful to the Nazi administration. Apart from that, as already stated, camp commandant Schöller protected the female Bible Students against the high-handedness of the female guard.³³⁷

Religious activities

Practicing their faith was of the highest priority for the Witnesses, also during their imprisonment. At every opportunity they held their Bible discussions. Because the female Bible Students were usually without guards when within the camp, they regularly managed to find time to practice their beliefs. For instance, they were able to say a prayer before meals. The religious community also managed to put as much of the content of their religious beliefs as they could remember down in writing.³³⁸ Allegedly by making copies on typewriters in the offices, the German sisters in the faith succeeded in making copies of Watchtower literature. Toos Berkers hid a Bible in her straw mattress, along with the brochure *De vijfde kolonne* (The Fifth Column).³³⁹

'We often used to sing in Austria', stated Froukje Volp.³⁴⁰ She meant religious hymns, the so-called Kingdom songs, that were sung at St. Lambrecht concentration camp. Gerdina Huisman learned in the camp all songs she had not previously known, because the women of various nationalities would praise God in this way in their mother tongue. These songs were later forbidden by the camp management.³⁴¹

Although it was difficult for the Witnesses who had been imprisoned for years to find out the memorial date of Christ's death without a calendar,³⁴² the women managed to keep the 'Memorial'. They also managed to obtain the symbolic gifts, the bread and the wine, through outside contacts.³⁴³

The female Bible Students often had Bible discussions in the camp. Still, they felt they had too little 'spiritual food'. The older sisters in the faith were often consulted by the younger ones regarding Bible interpretation.³⁴⁴

The Jehovah's Witnesses had as far as possible made use of the group's homogeneity to support and encourage each other by means of Bible discussions. Other religious activities, like attempts to convert the kitchen staff, were also undertaken. Without success, however. It is a fact that the female Bible Students imprisoned at St. Lambrecht gave a witness of their faith according to their religion and within the scope of their restricted possibilities.

Size of the Female Inmates' Detail

As stated, there were no fluctuations within the female inmates' detail. The number of inmates, namely 23, of Jehovah's Witnesses remained unchanged for the whole period the concentration camp existed. The only exception is a not quite certain returning of a Polish Bible Student to Ravensbrück camp, probably just after setting up the women's camp at St. Lambrecht. Thereafter the number of inmates remained the same.³⁴⁵

When the so-called Publikationsstelle Wien took possession of a few rooms at the SS property in 1944, a greater need for cleaners arose. So, supervisor Wilfried Krallert³⁴⁶ wrote to Oswald Pohl in June 1944:

'The group VI G of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt has established a retreat in the monastery of St. Lambrecht (Styria) where the processing of maps, records and other documents takes place.

'We request that you provide us with four female Bible Students for cleaning the work and living areas.

'St. Lambrecht houses the estate administration (SS-Obersturmbannführer Erhard) [sic], that comes under the Wirtschafts- und Verwaltungshauptamt. There are a great number of female Bible Students available for cleaning work. Therefore, we request the same kind of workers, because these can be housed and can eat with the workers at the property, which yields an important administrative reduction of providing for the cleaning personnel. It is impossible to employ local workers. The use of other female prisoners meets with great difficulties regarding housing and providing food.'³⁴⁷

The costly evacuation of the enormous collection of maps and huge library to St. Lambrecht, as well as organising working space for about forty staff members of the institute was not to Erhart's liking. He refused to accommodate the staff members of the Publikationsstelle in 'his' monastery and refused to provide meals from the kitchen.³⁴⁸ The bad relationship between the monastery Verwalter and the management of the Publikationsstelle resulted in a rejection of the request by the St. Lambrecht retreat for the assignment of four female Bible Students and that no extra Jehovah's Witnesses were sent to St. Lambrecht. The number of inmates remained unchanged.

It cannot be ascertained whether the Jehovah's Witnesses already at St. Lambrecht were also put to work at cleaning the work rooms of the Publikationsstelle or for washing the staff members' clothing, but it is quite likely.

Liberation

At the beginning of April 1945, the Soviet army had advanced to Styria. At the SS estate the situation grew more and more tense. The female inmates were also aware of the changes at hand. The SS men had changed their uniforms for civilian clothing. 'Everywhere you heard that the war was nearly over. The Hauptscharführer was angry, everything went wrong. The Germans intended to load the inmates into wagons and blow them all up.'³⁴⁹

Juni 1944
1)

Reg.einträgen.

2)

An den
Chef der Konzentrationslager
H-Obergruppenführer Pohl

122

Berlin.Betr.: Abstellung von 4 Bibelforscherinnen für Reinigungs-
zwecke in der Ausweichstelle St.Lambrecht.

Die Gruppe VI G des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes hat im Stift St.Lambrecht (Steiermark) eine Ausweichstelle eingerichtet, die die Bearbeitung von Karten, Unterlagen und sonstigen Führungsbehelfen durchzuführen hat.

Für die laufenden Reinigungsarbeiten in den Arbeits- und Unterkamfräumen wird um Abstellung von 4 Bibelforscherinnen gebeten.

In St.Lambrecht befindet sich eine dem Wirtschafts- und Verwaltungshauptamt unterstehende Gutsverwaltung (H-Ostufar Erhard), der für die Durchführung des Küchenbetriebes und der Reinigungsarbeiten eine grössere Anzahl von Bibelforscherinnen zur Verfügung steht. Es wird deshalb ebenfalls um derartige Kläfte gebeten, weil dieselben gemeinsam mit den Kräften der Gutverwaltung untergebracht und gepflegt werden können, woraus sich eine wesentliche verwaltungsmässige Vereinfachung in der Betreuung des Reinigungspersonals ergibt. Ortseigene Kräfte zu gewinnen ist unmöglich. Die Verwendung anderer weiblicher Häftlinge stösst auf grosse Unterbringungs- und Verpflegschwierigkeiten.

Mit Rücksicht darauf, dass in den nächsten Tagen der Betrieb in St.Lambrecht in vollem Umfang aufgenommen wird, wird um möglichst baldige Entscheidung über den Antrag gebeten.

H
Hauptsturmführer
Gruppenleiter VI G.

9. Juni 1944

VI A zur Mitzeichnung
Amt II zur Mitzeichnung.

3) Zw. 20.6.44.

1910

*For cleaning work, four Bible
Students were requested*

The inmates were ordered by the SS guards to pack their belongings and prepare for the return transport. They received a 'last meal' consisting of fried potatoes and carrots. The female Bible Students however didn't touch it. A sense of panic spread through the women's concentration camp. None of the Jehovah's Witnesses managed to sleep, until an SS man told them there would be no more return transport. The Bible Students supposed that the reason for not carrying out the planned execution was the advance of the partisans and the Soviet army. Also, the SS guards now were only interested in making their own escape.³⁵⁰

Just before the arrival of the Allied forces, treatment of the inmates had apparently improved and personal contact with the population was permitted.³⁵¹ The female Bible Students were invited by the camp management to visit and view the most beautiful spots in the region.³⁵² This event stayed very clear in the memories of the Dutch Jehovah's Witnesses. The beauty of the landscape fascinated the women, who came from a flat country. Gerdina Huisman seriously considered taking up residence there. The forester, SS-Untersturmführer Willibald Reiner, invited the Bible Students to stay and marry here.³⁵³

Hubert Erhart ordered the liquidation of concentration camp Schloss Lind on 3 May 1945 by ordering that the inmates be transported back to Mauthausen. The Allied troops were advancing quickly, however, so this was already impossible. There was no attempt made to evacuate St. Lambrecht. Instead, during those last days, they started to wipe out the traces and evidence of the Nazi practices. 'For days on end documents were burned at the gate to the vegetable garden.'³⁵⁴ The perpetrators were very thorough concerning destruction of registrations regarding the concentration camp at St. Lambrecht.

The British Army troops arrived at St. Lambrecht only after 11 May 1945, because advance in the Mur valley was difficult.³⁵⁵ The German Wehrmacht had already capitulated on 8 May. The British liberated the 23 Jehovah's Witnesses and an unknown number of Spanish prisoners out of the hands of the last SS men who had maintained the Nazi regime up till then. Verwalter Hubert Erhart and camp commandant Schöller had long since fled St. Lambrecht. On 12 May the once so powerful lord of St. Lambrecht, Hubert Erhart, who had determined the fate of four stolen monasteries, was arrested in Admont and transferred to Graz.³⁵⁶

The SS men who had remained at St. Lambrecht were arrested there and the British soldiers moved into the rooms in the abbey where SS men had previously lived. The goods

that had been stolen by the Nazis and had been stored in the cellars of the abbey, were confiscated by the British and designated 'German military goods'.³⁵⁷

After liberation the population of St. Lambrecht donated clothing to the Jehovah's Witnesses. They put their prison clothes in their rucksacks and took them, along with the cutlery from Ravensbrück women's concentration camp, on their homeward journey. They didn't immediately leave St. Lambrecht and the monastery but remained for about two weeks³⁵⁸ because it took some time to organise their return journey.

When the British troops arrived, the German female camp guard was still at her 'place of work'. It isn't clear whether she was arrested at St. Lambrecht, but it certainly is probable. It is said that denying the situation she even tried to command the Bible Students after liberation, but they no longer obeyed her orders.

Before the Jehovah's Witnesses left their prison, they gathered in front of the abbey beside a tree and gave thanks for their deliverance and survival of the imprisonment in the camp by singing the song Die Ehre sei Jehova (Giving Jehovah the Praise).³⁵⁹ They regarded their salvation as coming from Jehovah, the God of their religious community, in answer to their prayers and requests.

Travelling to the Various Native Countries

After liberation of St. Lambrecht camp all former inmates received an identity card containing the fingerprint of the holder. The mayor of St. Lambrecht handed these over along with the liberation documents that would allow for a return journey without hindrance. Their final destination was also written on the documents.

The inadequate organisation of the transports forced the female Bible Students to remain longer in the liberated camp. The women were virtually left to their own devices. As they had no travelling experience whatsoever, they were very grateful when the Spanish former prisoners offered their help for the return journey. The British occupying forces had put a lorry at their disposal, in which the women also began their return journey. The exact date of the joint departure cannot be ascertained. It is a fact, however, that the female ex-prisoners and the Spaniards left the place together.³⁶⁰

The mixed company set off in a southerly direction. In Klagenfurt the men and women parted ways. The liberated female Bible Students from the St. Lambrecht camp were accommodated there in a school that had been damaged by bombs. The care in this refugee camp was extremely inadequate.³⁶¹

From Klagenfurt the Dutch and Belgian women continued their journey through Italy. The German and Viennese Bible Students left the refugee camp in a northerly direction. Subsequently they worked in the vegetable garden of an Evangelical home in Weyern, Carinthia. From there they went to Salzburg, where Therese Schreiber and Hedwig Hummel took leave of the German women who travelled from there to their native country. Both Viennese Jehovah's Witnesses were taken from Salzburg to Krems on the Danube by the Red Cross. From there they finally arrived in Vienna by train.³⁶²

It is not known whether the Polish female Bible Students also travelled to their native country by way of Weyern and Salzburg.

The group of women who wanted to go to Belgium and the Netherlands travelled to Italy. In a refugee centre at Treviso the Dutch Jehovah's Witness, Sjaan Pronk, fell ill. She had appendicitis and could not travel further because she had to undergo an operation at a monastery in Veneto. Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen stayed with her, took care of her and thus put up with a delay of her own journey home.³⁶³

The other three Dutch women and the Belgian Maria Floryn continued their journey by train through Switzerland and France. The small group had to remain in Paris for weeks in a hotel that was used as a refugee centre. There the women were given more civilian clothing and their administration was checked. Additionally, they had to undergo medical examinations. Finally, they could continue travelling through Belgium and arrived at their destination after more than six weeks.³⁶⁴

Sjaan Pronk and Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen did not arrive at their hometown until August 1945. The homeward journey had taken more than three months.³⁶⁵ Depending on the destination, the available means of transport and the individual physical condition, the time and effort it took for the Witnesses' homeward journey varied. Whereas both Viennese women evidently managed to return home relatively fast, the home journey for Sjaan Pronk became a true odyssey due to illness and enfeeblement. The experience of their return journeys to their homes formed a specific part of the life stories of the former concentration

camp inmates. These are inextricably bound up with the individual experience of their unlawful detention and their exploitation by the concentration camp system.

8 The Women of St. Lambrecht: Their Life Stories

Female Jehovah's Witnesses from the Netherlands

Of the five female Jehovah's Witnesses who survived the National Socialist movement in different concentration camps and were liberated in Styria, Austria, the life stories of the Dutch women stand out clearest. I spoke to three of them in person. These discussions were complemented by interviews conducted some years earlier by Meinard Tydeman, the archivist for the Dutch Branch of Jehovah's Witnesses. There are also notes about the other two Bible Students.



Katharina Berkers-van Lierop, prisoner identification card for Ravensbrück concentration camp

Petronella Katharina (Katja/Toos) Berkers-van Lierop

Petronella Katharina Berkers was born on 4 November 1911 in the Netherlands.³⁶⁶

Katja, who was brought up a strict Roman Catholic, became acquainted with the religious community of Jehovah's Witnesses in the 1930s. She became deeply absorbed in religious literature from Germany and encouraged her husband to also study the faith of the Bible Students. Katja was fascinated by the promise of a Kingdom on earth where war would no longer exist. Towards the end of the 1930s, she began 'pioneering', although she was only formally accepted within the religious community when she was baptised in 1941. From Helmond, her home town, she started spreading the 'truth' by means of religious literature, in the Eindhoven area. After the German invasion in 1940,

when this religious faith was banned, Toos – as she was known to her sisters in the faith – carried on with her missionary work.



Katharina Berkers-van Lierop several years after her liberation



Katharina Berkers-van Lierop in October 2002

During one of these preaching missions, Toos Berkers was betrayed and arrested by the Dutch police on 14 March 1941. At the time of her arrest, she had four children between the ages of eighteen months and eight years old. After being interrogated by the Gestapo, the Nazis had Toos Berkers sent to a prison in Düsseldorf. She remained there for more than six months. In November 1941 Berkers was deported to Ravensbrück women's concentration camp. She was one of the first female Dutch Jehovah's Witnesses to be sent to



Katharina Berkers- van Lierop's four children (photo December 1945)

this concentration camp. Her registration number – 8188 – was relatively low. Together with other female Bible Students, she was assigned to block 12.

What particularly made an indelible impression on her was the women having to walk in their bare feet on the gravel roads in summer. It was only in the cold season that they got shoes – odd ones, which did not fit.

Toos was assigned to the 'Angora breeding' detail. This was the first time that work was refused for religious reasons, because the women had heard that the Angora rabbit's wool was to be used for military purposes. Toos had only been in the camp a short while when she and the others who had refused work, were given a six-week bunker punishment. Undergoing this punishment in the icy cold of 1942, she almost froze to death. Under these harsh conditions, the Bible Students encouraged each other chiefly by discussions about the faith and through prayers. Even though the food situation in Ravensbrück deteriorated by the day, Toos shared the little food she had with her sisters who were worse off than she was. She even threw her bread over the fence to the male prisoners because she was so shocked by the sight of these walking skeletons and she felt herself to be strong enough to give up some of her own frugal rations.

After six months in Ravensbrück, Toos had lost so much weight that you could 'hang a hat on her hip bones'.³⁶⁷

The selections were extremely traumatic experiences. Toos found out later that the women who had been selected were to be gassed.

Toos Berkers was among the five Dutch female Jehovah's Witnesses transferred to St. Lambrecht in Austria in May 1943. She was put to work there in the kitchen. It was her task to cook and bake for both the men's and the women's concentration camps. Later on, she had to take care of the children of an officer. The Stadler family lived quite near the monastery. Despite being separated from her own children, she still well remembered both little boys and the baby she had to care for.

Although the living conditions in the concentration camp for women at St. Lambrecht were better than those at Ravensbrück, they could not yet be considered normal. Toos Berkers contracted oedema – presumably hunger oedema – due to the unvaried and frugal meals.

According to Toos, she had more freedom in the concentration camp at St. Lambrecht than at Ravensbrück. She managed to get hold of a Bible from the local baker and she hid it in her straw mattress. In order to retain their dignity, the Bible Students also indulged in some joking among themselves. Toos Berkers told how they once made a set of false teeth out of some orange peel and chased each other with it. Despite the conditions in the camp, the Witnesses set great store by being well-dressed. Toos Berkers was particularly proud of always being well groomed.³⁶⁸ It was distressing for her that there were not enough means or possibilities in the camp for dealing with the monthly hygiene problems. This was very unpleasant for her, but apparently it did not result in disruptions in her gender identity.

The Jehovah's Witnesses from Germany set a good example for Toos. She respected her German sisters in the faith for having undergone persecution for much longer than she herself had.

During her incarceration, Toos even ventured to voice some criticism of the Nazi regime. On one occasion in St. Lambrecht, she asked a German soldier who had lost both his legs during gunfire, how this had come about. When he answered that this was just what happens in war, she reacted fiercely: 'That's the difference. We do not take part in warfare

because the Bible says that it is wrong to kill. Go back to Hitler and ask him to give you a new pair of legs!’³⁶⁹

Shortly before liberation by the British forces, an SS officer bid Berkers farewell and told her that she was the cheekiest of all the women there. Nevertheless, he thanked her for the work she had done at St. Lambrecht. This was the first time that an SS officer had addressed Toos by name.

After they were liberated, Toos Berkers and the other Dutch Jehovah's Witnesses set out on the journey back home together. The priests in a monastery in Belgium took care of her for a short while before she reached her home town, Eindhoven, by train. She went in search of her husband and children there. Her husband, Nico Berkers, had also been deported by the Nazis to a concentration camp. After she had been arrested, Toos' parents took her four children to a monastery. Nico Berkers fetched them back after a short while



Nico Berkers (date of photo unknown)

and brought them to various Bible Student families to have them cared for. After that, Nico worked underground and was also arrested, as already mentioned. Toos Berkers' children were separated from each other for the entire period that their parents were imprisoned. By the time the family was reunited, they had become strangers to one another. The youngest son did not recognise his mother. He looked upon his foster mother as his mother, which was very painful for Toos. The children also hardly recognised each other. Husband and wife, who had both spent years incarcerated in concentration camps, had to get to know each other once again. The traumatic experiences hadn't left them unchanged.

Living conditions in the years after the war, were exceptionally bad for the Berkers family. In order to survive, Toos even sold her striped camp clothing. She tried to get support from the Institute for War Victims. It took eight years before the formalities had been dealt with. Toos was declared permanently invalid. Incarceration in the camp had left its traces. Toos often dreamt about both the Ravensbrück and St. Lambrecht concentration camps. She used to be jolted awake by these nightmares and then sought solace in prayer. The already difficult situation deteriorated because both her parents broke off contact with Toos due to her remaining an active Jehovah's Witness. Her Roman Catholic parents no longer regarded her as their daughter – a bitter pill to swallow under those already difficult circumstances.

Toos considered her experiences in both concentration camps as a test of her faith. She remained true to her faith. Summarizing, she said: 'I received the good things in life, therefore I must also accept the bad things.'³⁷⁰

Gerdina Huisman-Rabouw

Gerdina Huisman-Rabouw was born on 30 August 1921 in Gouda, in the Netherlands.³⁷¹

She became acquainted with the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses through Jo Wildschut in 1941. Gerdina took part in the underground activities, even though at that period the Netherlands were under German occupation. She was arrested by the National Socialist Movement in the Netherlands (NSB) in Gouda on 5 September 1941, in the presence of both of her parents. In the prison Haagsche Veer in Rotterdam, she was subjected to interrogations that lasted for days. The intention was to break the spirit of this 20-year-old woman by interrogating her so that she would give away the names of other Bible Students. Gerdina did not betray any names. She was taken from the prison in Rotterdam to a prison in Düsseldorf. There she was kept in detention for five days before being transferred to prisons in Bremen, Hamburg and Hannover. This lasted for about six weeks, but her religious conviction was not broken. Towards the end of 1941, this young Jehovah's Witness was finally deported to Ravensbrück concentration camp for women. Due to the long days of transport, standing in the icy cold of a railway carriage for cattle, she became ill. In this condition, she had to undergo the 'disinfection' along with all the other newly arrived prisoners and was finally taken to the sick bay. After a fever lasting for days, during which she sometimes lost consciousness, Gerdina started recovering thanks to the care of the female political prisoners who worked in the sick bay. After her dismissal from the infirmary barracks, she landed in an overcrowded block where two or three women shared a bed.

It was exceptionally traumatic to have to be present at the numerous executions of prisoners – mostly Polish women – at the parade ground. Weakened as she was and severely shocked by the conditions in the camp, Gerdina became deeply depressed. Even the smallest events could cause fits of weeping. The numbed women, who 'walked around as if they were zombies',³⁷² left an indelible impression on her. She was overwhelmed by fear that she too one day should become so indifferent and expressionless. Moreover, her spiritual sisters

thought that this markedly frail woman had very little chance of surviving. But she held fast to her convictions – her faith – which gave her the will to survive.

In Ravensbrück women's camp, Gerdina was first of all put to work in a detail of unloading railway carriages. During this work, 'it was so freezing cold that while unloading, [...] your hands would stick to the metal'.³⁷³



Gerdina Huisman-Rabouw after her liberation

The scanty clothing worsened the living conditions in Ravensbrück. Eventually Gerdina was put to work in the market garden, where she got to know Hildegard Kusserow. Gerdina became good friends with this Jehovah's Witness, which relationship gave her great moral support. Religious discussions with this Bible Student served to strengthen Gerdina's religious convictions.

In May 1943 Gerdina was assigned to the 'labour camp' at St. Lambrecht. Despite the season, it was just as bitterly cold as her arrival in the Ravensbrück camp had been. It snowed for days on end. Working together with the German Bible Students who had been transferred from

Ravensbrück to St. Lambrecht, Gerdina was first put to work in the cold cellars of the monastery stripping cabbages of their rotting leaves. Then she was assigned to the work detail that had to carry out forestry work along with the male prisoners.

The living conditions in the women's concentration camp at St. Lambrecht were evidently better than in Ravensbrück. The fact that Gerdina had a bed of her own at her disposal, she described as an important factor showing the more humane conditions in the camp. This was luxury indeed, to have a chair of your very own where you could sit and have a moment of repose after work. She also had a drawer of her own in which she could keep her few personal belongings, such as letters or pictures of her loved ones.



Gerdina Huisman-Rabouw, 2002

Gerdina was put to work as a chambermaid in the guest wing of the 'SS 'estate'. In this way she came into contact with the guests, the civilian personnel and also with the male prisoners who had to use the wing as a throughway to the kitchen where they had to collect food. Her being addressed by her first name as 'Fräulein Gerdi', contributed to making the circumstances more humane. Owing to this she could at least temporarily extricate herself from the notion of being only a number on the prisoners' list. That was especially conducive to her psychological stability.

As a chambermaid, Gerdina could eat her meals in the kitchen at the SS estate. This gave her the opportunity for smuggling food to the others. In this way she assisted in strengthening the group in which she had now a place in her own right because of the risks she took. Being no longer accustomed to the relatively high-quality food after the period of starvation in Ravensbrück, she contracted a biliary colic, or an infection of the gall-bladder at St. Lambrecht.

Through her association with Margarete Messnarz-Günter and the cook, Anna, the civilian kitchen staff, Gerdina experienced fellow-feeling by their little acts of support. That strengthened her trust and motivation enabling her to endure the tribulations of being a camp prisoner.

Against all odds, when Gerdina broke her arm, she was not sent back to the main camp. However, the Polish doctor-prisoner did not treat the complicated splintered fracture competently, resulting in the arm not healing well. The permanently deformed forearm is the external evidence of the physical damage caused by imprisonment in St. Lambrecht. The leather splint made by the camp cobbler for Gerdina, helped to reduce the pain.

When it became known that Gerdina had been corresponding with a Spanish prisoner, she asked of her own volition for a transfer. This meant an end to her being employed as a chambermaid at the SS estate. Schöller, the camp commander, agreed with her proposal to carry out work outside the camp and in this way to avoid contact with the

Spaniards. Gerdina was assigned to garden detail and Schöller therefore addressed her as 'my vegetable girl'.³⁷⁴ In this manner she achieved that the Spanish prisoner who had written the letter to her was not sent back to the main camp at Mauthausen – the most severe punishment at St. Lambrecht concentration camp.

Gerdina experienced the homogeneous camp community as a beneficent entity. Yet even among those of the same religion, the differences between persons from five separate countries were clearly perceptible. The sisters in faith tried to learn each other's language. They learned, for instance, how to greet one another in their respective languages and prayed and discussed the Bible together in various languages. This is a good example of respect for what is alien or different, and at the same time, showing dedication to their own national group.

Gerdina attributed her liberation from the Nazi concentration camp to her God, Jehovah. Under a tree in front of the monastery, the Witnesses sang a religious song of praise. Although she had come to love the beauty of the surrounding countryside, Gerdina decided to return to the Netherlands.

She must have been strongly fascinated by the mountainous landscape, because she visited St. Lambrecht several times in later years. Two other possible reasons for revisiting this historically laden place, were the wish to confront herself with the area where she had been held prisoner for two years, and the attempt she made to see things in perspective.

During the journey back home from the concentration camp after liberation, while traversing Italy, Gerdina was taken ill and was advised to remain there. Without having had medical treatment, she carried on towards home. She accompanied Froukje Volp as far as Gouda and from there on travelled alone. When she arrived in Waddinxveen, she had lost her voice due to having had no medical treatment. She got her voice back later, but the pitch was altered.

On top of the traumatic experiences of the concentration camp and the stressful journey home, Gerdina had to deal with the terrible ordeal of the sudden death of her fiancé. During her reintegration period into Dutch society, she suffered strong paranoid feelings. While being among large crowds, she felt aggressive feelings arise, which she tried to suppress. The young woman was very much aware of this inward stressfulness. She wondered what could be causing this. She came to the conclusion that her experience in the

concentration camps was the cause, and that she was different from other persons who had not gone through such an ordeal. Gerdina described herself in this context as a very tightly wound up spring, a definition that makes it clear that this woman was extremely fearful of a sudden release of tension resulting in loss of control. 'After liberation I was always so tense. If people walked behind me, I got the feeling I had to turn around and attack them.'³⁷⁵

RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE
Ministère des Prisonniers, Déportés et Réfugiés

FICHE DE TRANSPORT 1203048

(26) Nom **RABOUW** (27) Prénom **Gerdina** (28) Nom jeune fille
(29) Date naissance **30.8.21.**

(30) Nom, prénom, adresse de la personne chez qui vous vous rendez
chez ses parents à Gauda (Hollande) Smoijshaat 115 51.

(31) AVIS SERVICE SANTÉ	REGULATION				OBSERVATIONS
	Moyen locomotion	Date	Heure	Départ	
D R	VF	24	16		B
					GARE DESTINATAIRE
					GARE DÉPART

Cette fiche donne droit, par priorité et sans paiement, au transport ou rapatrié de jusqu'à sa destination définitive, par tous les moyens mis à la disposition des Services de rapatriement (à l'exception des autorails de liaison de la S. N. C. F.). Toutefois, si le rapatrié emprunte des moyens de transport secondaire (autocars, compagnies aériennes de chemin de fer, etc.), il devra acquitter le prix de sa place et inscrire au dos de cette fiche les trajets effectués et les services payés. Les lui seront remboursés sur présentation de cette fiche à la Direction départementale des P.D.R. de sa résidence.

N.P.C.A. "En cas d'arrests, intermédiaires" (voir sur dos)

Timbre Gare Départ: **100**
Guichet-Dornoch
S.O.M. PARIS 2

Gerdina Huisman-Rabouw's travel permit

What she wished for most of all was a safe place where she could count on feeling secure. The sudden death of her fiancé marked yet again an extremely drastic event in her life. Eventually Gerdina married a man who looked very much like her deceased fiancé. He was, however, not one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

First and foremost, she endeavoured to inculcate her faith into her children. It was only years later that she told her children, who were very interested in her past and all their mother had gone through, about what she had experienced in the concentration camps. She did not want to shock them or burden them with her stories. Because of all she had been through in the concentration camps, Gerdina felt that she was not a good mother, and she wondered whether she should have had children at all. 'I think then that if I had never had children, they would have been better off. That they had never been there at all.'³⁷⁶

These words indicate a strong identification with the aggressors. At the same time, this defense mechanism prevents her from coping with her identity as a victim of the concentration camps. She relates her camp experiences to her religious conviction. She finds in her faith, which led to her imprisonment, the explanation for all she has suffered as well as for having been able to endure it.

Jansje (Jans) Hoogers-Elbertsen

Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen was born on 11 April 1919 in Wekerom.³⁷⁷

She first came into contact with members of the religious community through her sister in 1940. She was baptised in that same year. Jans began working as a courier for the religious organisation and she hid religious literature. On 14 May 1942, while preaching for the first time, Jans was arrested by the Gestapo in Arnhem and was imprisoned there for three months. After having been interrogated in vain, she was then transported to various houses of detention. She was imprisoned in Cleves, Germany, for two weeks, then in Düsseldorf, Berlin and Hannover. Finally, she was deported to the women's concentration camp at Ravensbrück, where she arrived on 2 October 1942 and received registration number 14.164.³⁷⁸ Just like Toos Berkers, she was assigned to block 12. Living conditions at Ravensbrück were characterised by daily torment, such as having to wear badly fitting, worn-out shoes. That made life difficult to bear. Jans was assigned to garden detail at Ravensbrück, where she also had to work in a greenhouse.

She was at Ravensbrück when *SS Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler paid a visit. While inspecting the concentration camp on 19 March 1943 Himmler remarked that the women who were part of the group of Bible Students, were *fremde Vögel* (odd characters).³⁷⁹ Her being classed as an obscure being was something that this attentive woman would never forget.

At Ravensbrück she became friends with Tinie Mulder, a Bible Student who had been part of the religious community for a longer time period. Jans regularly asked her opinion about issues concerning religious matters.



Der Häftl. ist be-
rechtigt, durch das
Tor des FKL. zum Ar-
beitsplatz zu gehen.

Der Ausweis ist bei
Verlassen und Betre-
ten des Lagers, der
Wache vorzuzeigen.

Verlust des Auswei-
ses, ist sofort der
Oberaufseherin zu
melden.

AusweisNr: 38

Zuname: Elbertsen Der Lagerkommandant

Vorname: Jantje

Geb. Dat: 11.4.19

Häftl. Br: 14 164 *14*-Hauptsturmführer.

Block: 12

*Jans Hoogers- Elbertsen's
prisoner identification card
for Ravensbrück
concentration camp*

Eventually Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen's name came up on the list for transport to the labour camp at St. Lambrecht. Only absolutely necessary items were allowed to be taken along on this transport, such as clothing, cutlery and a blanket. Jans suffered from the cold. The group of female prisoners left Ravensbrück on 4 May 1943 and arrived in Styria on 8 May 1943. For most of her time at the St. Lambrecht concentration camp, she worked as a chambermaid. Now and again, particularly at the beginning of her stay, she was also put to work in the market garden.

As a 'chambermaid'³⁸⁰ she enjoyed the confidence of Lore Kröll, the head housekeeper. She entrusted her with the keys to all the rooms under her care. Lore Kröll 'appreciated' the efficiency of her 'servant'³⁸¹ so much, that she would have wished to always have such a reliable employee: 'Jans, you will always be my chambermaid.'³⁸² The head housekeeper made good use of Jans' efficiency, particularly her skill at ironing. Lore Kröll expressed her appreciation regularly by the gifts she gave. She gave Jans things like clothing and shoes. Jans had a good relationship with the head housekeeper and really liked her. Kröll gave her various tasks to do, such as taking damaged household appliances to the workshop for repairs. In this way they were introduced to the Spanish camp prisoners. Juan Anguera Canals, the mechanic, fell in love with Jans through these encounters. He made a sewing box and a copper thimble for her. After liberation she took these objects home with her as a 'wedding gift from the monastery'.³⁸³ She used them up until her death.

Jans even managed to keep camp commandant Schöller at bay, as he was partial to being in her proximity.

Besides cleaning the guest rooms at the SS estate, Jans also had to clean several offices. She also had the key to the office of *kommissarischen Verwalters* Erhart at her disposal. She learned that Erhart's son, who served with the German *Wehrmacht*, had been killed in action in Arnhem, the place where she had been arrested.

During her imprisonment at St. Lambrecht, Jans contracted a carbuncle (a group of boils) on her thigh. Because she had constantly been in trouble with the female SS guard, she refrained from reporting this. Instead of which, she turned to camp commandant Schöller, who personally treated her with ointment and sticking plasters. She made a good recovery. Shortly after this, Jans suffered a festering infection of the nail bed that resulted in an

infection of her whole arm, due to the amateurish treatment method of the female SS guard. The head housekeeper, Lore Kröll, managed to get the *Verwalter* to permit treatment by the local doctor for Jans. This doctor provided professional medical treatment and his medical instructions were for Jans to be allowed to spare herself for a while. This took the shape of joining Sjaan Pronk in the tending of a flock of sheep. Jans also needed to have a molar extracted. The Polish doctor-prisoner extracted the tooth without anaesthetics or pain killers. Despite all the difficulties which determined everyday life in St. Lambrecht, imprisonment in this place was, as she emphasises, 'a different way of life, where we had much more freedom',³⁸⁴ in comparison with the women's concentration camp Ravensbrück.

In this camp she also had to be on the alert, but even so, the situation was much easier to bear than in the main camp. Especially the better food situation and the more humane manner of housing made for a considerable difference between the two concentration camps. Her good relationship with Sjaan Pronk, with whom she frequently discussed the Bible, gave Jans the encouragement and motivation she needed to bear up under these circumstances. This motherly woman gave her something to hold on to and was a walking encyclopaedia for Jans. She could rely on her opinions.



Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen, October 2002

In spite of the difficult situation, Jans could appreciate the beauty of the surroundings, just as Gerdina Huisman-Rabouw did. She was very impressed by the landscape. She too internalised her incarceration in the concentration camps as a time in which she grew in faith. She therefore resolved to view the torments and deprivation of that period as a conscious decision to defend her religious convictions and to accept all the consequences thereof. Being released from imprisonment in the concentration camp was seen by her as an act of salvation by Jehovah.

She travelled back to the Netherlands with her sisters in the faith. In Italy she bade the rest of the Dutch group farewell, so she could remain with her friend, Sjaan Pronk. Her friend had been taken ill and Jans stayed with

her until she recovered, taking care of her and eventually continuing the homeward journey back to Holland together. On 4 August 1945 Jans arrived in Maastricht³⁸⁵ and two days later she reached her home in Gelderland by getting a lift on a motorbike. Jans was a domestic servant and she eventually found work again. She immediately took up her religious activity, preaching and going into the pioneer service. That is where she got to know her husband-to-be, Jakobus Hoogers. Thus, her dream came true: finding a marriage partner with the same faith as herself.³⁸⁶

Jans kept in touch with her friend, Sjaan Pronk. She often visited Sjaan. The traumatic experience in the concentration camps resulted in a build-up of a strong potential for aggression in Jans, for which she found an outlet by often spontaneously screaming loudly. She spoke with Sjaan Pronk about this need. Sjaan helped by giving her 'permission' to scream in order to reduce her aggression.

Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen's
St. Lambrecht discharge
notice

Bescheinigung:

Die Gefährtinnen Srl. Jansje Elbertsen.....
Häftling Nr. 14.160..... geb. 11.4.1919... in Wickron
Raasdorf
ist hiermit frei und aus dem Konzentrationslager Raasdorf
SS-Arbeitslager St. Lambrecht entlassen worden.
Derselbe begibt sich nach Gm. Tschers. - Wickron.....
Land

Um ungehinderte Reisemöglichkeit wird gebeten.

St. Lambrecht, den 9. Mai 194



Ortspolizeibehörde
Bürgermeister:

Pirkus

Ausweis:

Name: Srl. Jansje Elbertsen...
Geb. 11.4.1919... in Wickron... Eden
Staatsangehörigkeit: Gebirgsland.
Augen: grün.....
Nase: normal.....
Mund: normal.....
Haare: blond.....
Besondere Merkmale:

Handp. Handp......
Fingerabdruck
rechter Daumen

Die Ortspolizeibehörde
Bürgermeister:

Pirkus



10 -

Years later, after being freed from the concentration camp, Jans had a nervous breakdown, from which she recovered fairly well.

She likened her life to a train into which the entire human race is packed and headed for an abyss. 'It all comes down to what each one of us does personally. The question is, whether or not you remain on this train.'³⁸⁷ In this expressive way, she gave her view on autonomy. Each individual must choose his own path in life and bear his own responsibility for his actions and behaviour.

Corstiaantje (Sjaan) Pronk-van den Oever

Corstiaantje Pronk-van den Oever was born on 3 October 1902 in Scheveningen, the Netherlands.³⁸⁸

Through Kloose, one of Jehovah's Witnesses, she was introduced in 1939 to the religious community. She was baptised a few months later by her brother in the faith, Winkler, in Amsterdam on 25 December 1939.

Sjaan Pronk was arrested by the Gestapo in The Hague on 24 August 1942. Her three children were left to fend for themselves. To start with, the Nazis put Sjaan into prison in Scheveningen (in the so-called *Oranjehotel*), and afterwards she was kept in a prison in Utrecht until 14 December 1942. Eventually she was taken to Germany via Cleves and passed through the houses of detention in Düsseldorf, Hannover and Berlin. Finally

Sjaan Pronk was deported to Ravensbrück, where she arrived on 7 January 1943. There she was given the registration number 15.986.

It was especially traumatic for Sjaan to witness the murder of small children in the concentration camp. The babies of the female prisoners who arrived at Ravensbrück, were torn away from their mothers, and then bashed against the wall until they were dead. Later on she advised her daughter never to have children. She probably wanted to wipe out her memories and thus avoid the sadness of the atrocious things she had seen happen to small children in Ravensbrück women's concentration camp.

Sjaan Pronk was assigned to garden detail at Ravensbrück. She belonged to the group of Jehovah's Witnesses who refused to eat food which contained blood. In the middle of February 1943, Sjaan found blood in her stools (due to bleeding in the gastrointestinal

tract) which was probably caused by stress. She was moved to the sickbay and remained there until 25 April 1943. Froukje Volp and other sisters in the faith smuggled oatmeal porridge into the sickbay with the help of a German Witness-sister, and thus saved Sjaan's life.

On 4 May 1943, Sjaan was deported from Ravensbrück to the sub camp at St. Lambrecht along with 23 other female Jehovah's Witnesses ¹. This group of prisoners spent two days at the railway station of Fürstenberg before being transported to St. Lambrecht.

At St. Lambrecht, Sjaan was initially put to work with the forestry working group. After that she was set to work as a shepherdess looking after the flock of sheep at the SS estate. This was totally new to Sjaan, who had never before in her life even seen a sheep. This work had a beneficial effect on her. It also gave her the opportunity of adding sheep's milk to her rations. Her health improved substantially. Also, working without supervision in the silence of the mountains eased the tension. Despite the better nutrition in the concentration camp at St. Lambrecht, Sjaan was still in poor health. She suffered from nettle rash, which the German Bible Students tried to treat with various kinds of tea. Sjaan was esteemed by the other Bible Students as a sister in the faith who was supportive. She and Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen had a particularly close relationship. After liberation, when Sjaan took ill with appendicitis in Italy during the return journey, it was Jans who stayed behind with her, while the other Dutch women continued travelling. Sjaan's appendix was removed in a convent, and after her recovery, they organised their return journey together.

¹ Translator's note: initially there were 24 Witnesses sent to St. Lambrecht, but a Polish Witness became ill and was sent back to Ravensbrück the same day.

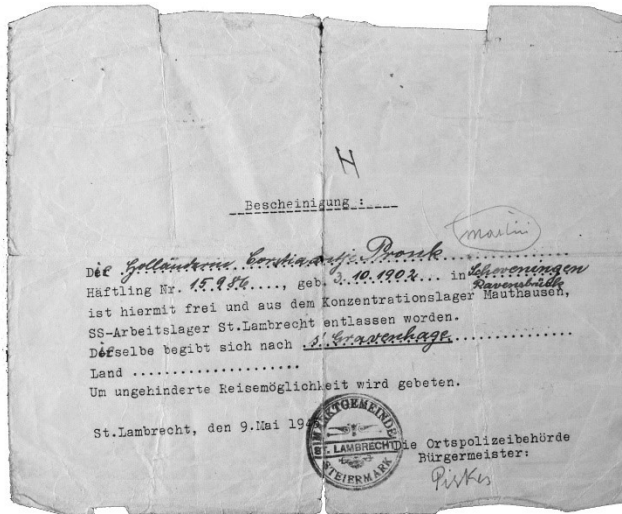
st Lambrecht
 Liebe Allen. Teile Euch mit
 dass ich noch immer gesünder
 und munter bin und Euch
 dass silbe endlich zu hören.
 Dass letzte Nachricht van Eud
 ist dass van 27 Nov und in die
 Zeit kan viel passiert sein.
 Von Hannie habe ich 2 Briefe
 erhalten und sie had geschriben
 dass Maarten so goed gear
 den ist. Und Coie bist Du
 auch viel gewachsen. In
 ein Brieff von December an
 Euch habe ich gefragt nach
 ein paar schube die schwarz
 der die Offene schube den
 von er hier warmer werd
 kan ich sie gut gebrauchen
 Es ist hier am Tage schön
 warmes Wetter aber alles
 liegt nach dek unter Schnee
 Ich bin jetzt schon braun von
 die Sonne den wir arbeiten
 drause. Miip bist du bei Han
 nie gewesen und arbeitet Dat
 nach? Lieber kan lassen wir hof
 fen dass es bald Friede sein wird
 und wir eenan da gezond wieder
 sien darfe. In der Hoffnung gute
 Nachricht van Euch zu erhalten
 bleibe ich Euer Liefhebber Sjaan
 und Mutter C. Pronk - vd bene

Fam. M. Pronk
 Beekstraat 137
 Sjaan en Hage
 Holland

Concentrationslager Mauthausen
 Oskar Laska
 Lager- und Anordnungsamt
 1. Lager- und Anordnungsamt
 2. Lager- und Anordnungsamt
 3. Lager- und Anordnungsamt
 4. Lager- und Anordnungsamt
 5. Lager- und Anordnungsamt
 6. Lager- und Anordnungsamt
 7. Lager- und Anordnungsamt
 8. Lager- und Anordnungsamt
 9. Lager- und Anordnungsamt
 10. Lager- und Anordnungsamt

K. I. Mauthausen - Arbeitslager
 St. Lambrecht, Steiermark
 K. I. Mauthausen - Arbeitslager
 St. Lambrecht, Steiermark

Letter from Sjaan Pronk to her parents from St. Lambrecht concentration camp



Sjaan Pronk, discharge notice St. Lambrecht

When she finally arrived in The Hague on 25 August 1945, Sjaan weighed only 37 kilogrammes. Her health was very bad; she was continually ill and her physical reserves had been exhausted by her imprisonment. Soon after her return, Sjaan had to go into hospital. Sjaan had not only changed physically, she had become a different person. Her daughter, Cobie, remembers the period when her mother returned from the concentration camp as follows:

‘She had been living in a different world in the concentration camps. Now she had to reconcile herself to housekeeping. She never really succeeded. Six weeks after returning home, she had to go into a convalescent home, Te Werve. Then six months later, she was taken into hospital again.’³⁸⁹



Cobie Pronk, daughter of Sjaan Pronk, in October 2002

Sjaan spent three months in Zuidwal Hospital. Six months after returning home from hospital, a further four weeks in hospital was deemed necessary. The years of imprisonment and concentration camps had taken their toll.

Sjaan's psyche had also suffered serious damage. Driven by an inner restlessness, she would often unexpectedly leave home, leaving only a short note: 'I will be gone for a few days.'³⁹⁰ Her family always heard about where she had been only after her return. She was usually with her friends, Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen and Froukje Volp, her confidantes in the concentration camps.

Sjaan told her children very little about the various prisons. Mostly she spoke of St. Lambrecht, because these memories were the easiest to bear. She couldn't bear the smell of turnips anymore. The characteristic smell evoked recollections of the terrible Ravensbrück images, which were indelibly stamped on her memory.

She also forbade her daughter to wear striped clothing. Cobie still held to this even after Sjaan had passed away.

Sjaan Pronk had a stroke and was paralysed down one side. She passed away in 1979 at the age of 77.



*Corstiaantje Pronk-van den
Oever after her liberation*

Froukje Volp-Rinzema

Froukje Volp was born on 10 July 1913 in the Dutch town Drachten.³⁹¹



Froukje Volp aged 24 (photo from 14 May 1937)

She grew up in a working-class family of seven. They were brought up in the Dutch Reformed faith, though not very strictly. While she was still at school, she worked in a greengrocer's shop. After she turned fourteen, she found a position with a sexton from a Baptist Church in Utrecht. A year later Froukje changed jobs and was baptised at the age of 16. She met the Bible Students for the first time in 1930 in Heerlen. Shortly after her marriage in 1939, she was baptised as one of Jehovah's Witnesses by her brother in the faith, Hartstang, in the Keulse Vaart (canal) and then took part in the preaching work.

On 7 September 1941 Froukje was arrested and was taken to the prison in Scheveningen. By coincidence, she met the Jehovah's Witness, Sophie Hemmink, while here in custody. Both were deported to the women's concentration camp in Ravensbrück and Froukje was given the registration number 9143. She was also assigned to block 12. Froukje was set to work in a garden detail outside the camp. Her job there was to plant dandelions, which were used for medicinal purposes. In order to stave off the hunger of her friend and sister in the faith, Annie van Basten, she stole dandelion leaves and smuggled them into the barracks where two hundred women were crowded together trying to stay alive. In Ravensbrück Froukje refused to line up for roll-call, for which she was flogged. She attempted to give support to Sophie Hemmink by giving her some of her food rations, but Sophie refused. Sophie Hemmink belonged to the group of so-called 'extremes' who were constantly being punished for their attitude of refusal. When Sophie contracted typhoid fever, she was deported to Auschwitz and murdered there. Froukje did not hear about this until August 1944 when she had already been in St. Lambrecht concentration camp for a year. At the same time, a letter from her sister, Pietje, reached her, saying that her mother had passed away. Froukje then fell into a deep depression. In the women's concentration camp at St.

Lambrecht she was first assigned to forestry detail. Afterwards she was put to work in the former monastery garden.



*Prisoner identification
card belonging to
Froukje Vold for
Ravensbrück
concentration camp*

4303/24
4.

Woknum 27 Aug '44

Liebe Schwester.

Meine Briefen von 9 und 20 Juni bekommen.
 Traurig das die Mutter nun gestorben ist.
 Für dich und Gjoerd ist es wohl schlim. Aber
 vor unser liebe Mädelchen ist es ^{so} besser
~~die~~ die letzte Jahre war sie immer
 krank und weende viel. In ihre Krankheit
 hat sie alles übergeben und ist ruhig
 von uns been gegangen. Wir missen die
 Mutter immer wenn wir nur haarse kommen
 der Vater ~~bleibt~~ in sein eigen Haus und Mira
 hat die arbeit. sie ist in Weutsland.
 Sjoerd weiss nicht das unsere Mutter in
 geslaffen ist ^{wir} ~~wir~~ ^{haben} ~~keiner~~ ^{keiner} Adres. Kaaf
 haben wir die Briefen geskrikt kaaf hat
 die Mutter letzt gesproken und der 10 Juli
 auf deine geburtsdag ~~mit~~ ^{mit} nach ihre ~~laste~~
 Ruheplaats ^{gewesen} nun liebe Schwester ~~ix~~ van
 Marke geüsst und geküst von deiner
 liebhabende Schwester Pietje de Markelyje geüsst
 von der Vater und andere Verwandten und
 hatte dich ~~also~~ ^{so} nun Stark und nuttig so
 net eine Brief von Gjoerd auffangen es ist
 da gut.

Liebe tante.

Ik wird Sie auch ein paar Wörter schreiben

sie müssen die grüssen haben von tante
 Rienkje aus Utrecht. Ich bin auch versetzt
 worden auf die Schule: ~~so~~ ^{so} ~~mit~~ ^{mit} liebe tante
 geküst von deine nichte
 afje

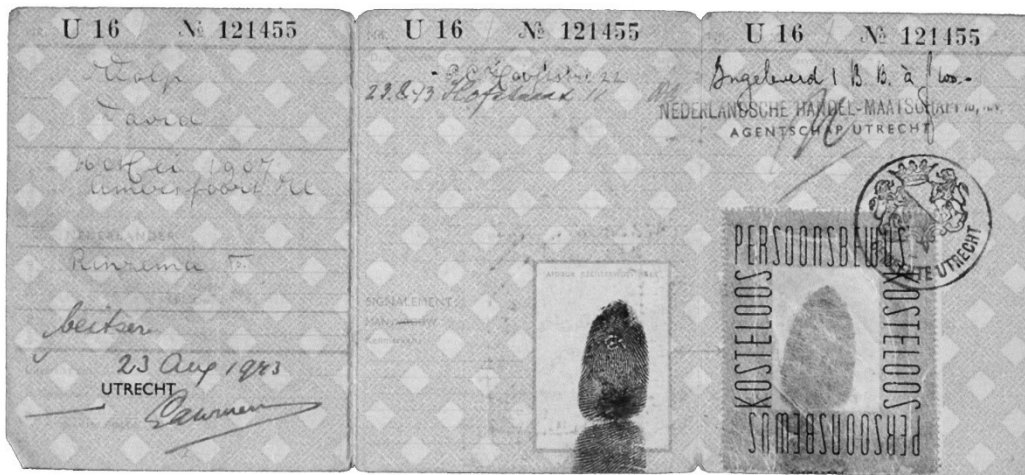
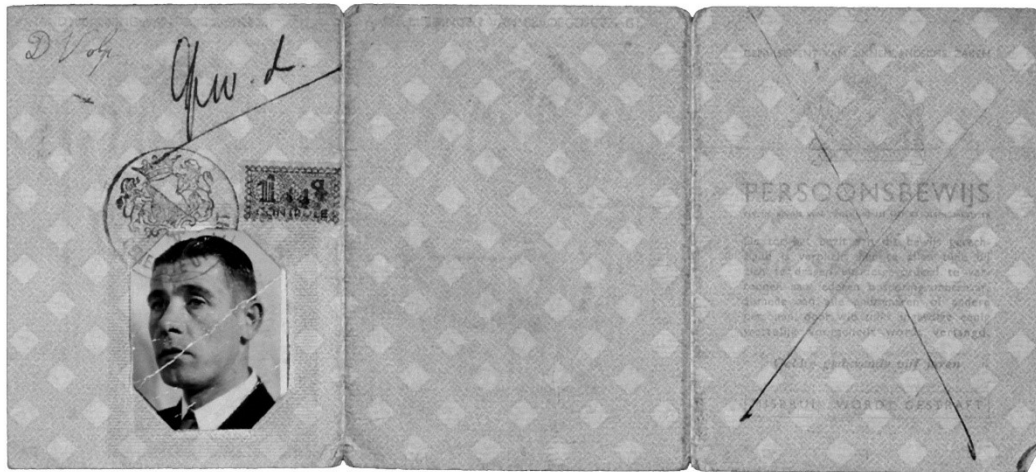
Letter to Froukje Volp
from her sister, August
1944

In September 1943 she received a letter from her parents in Drachten, who let her know that her husband, David Volp, had been released from imprisonment after two years in camp Amersfoort and had returned home.³⁹² This message must have been of great comfort to Froukje, as she now knew that her husband would be taking care of their children again.

Froukje's memories of the situation in St. Lambrecht camp have remained clear in her mind. She sang religious songs with her sisters in the faith, they discussed the Bible with each other, and they even managed to celebrate the so-called Memorial together. Froukje tried to keep her spirits up by actively witnessing. However, her psyche suffered heavily under the circumstances. She cried a lot.³⁹³



David Volp (date of photo unknown)



David Volp's identity card during the Dutch occupation

After capitulation of the German *Wehrmacht* on 8 May 1945, and after four years of imprisonment, Froukje was finally liberated by the Allies. When she arrived in the Netherlands after a huge detour through Italy, France and Belgium, she found her house occupied by former collaborators. With the help of the Public Housing Authorities, she eventually found a new home and she took up the preaching work of Jehovah's Witnesses again.

Female Jehovah's Witness from Belgium

There was one Jehovah's Witness from Belgium among the prisoners in the women's concentration camp at St. Lambrecht. This French-speaking Bible Student kept in close touch with her fellow believers from the Netherlands. Her life story can largely be followed from her birth to her death in 1986.

Maria Floryn-Hernalsteen

Maria Floryn was born on 1 September 1901 in Molenbeek/Brussels. She moved to Tervuren with her husband, Léon Floryn. Maria was baptised as one of Jehovah's Witnesses on 15 July 1939. Her husband also belonged to the religious community. He had already been arrested by the Gestapo on 8 June 1941.³⁹⁴



Under the German occupation of Belgium, Maria carried on with her preaching work underground. She established a small group of fellow believers in Antwerp, where they endeavoured to spread the faith at their peril. She made an undergarment for the preaching work, in which she could hide a Bible, five booklets and three original magazines.



Der Häftl. ist be-
rechtigt, durch das
Lager des PKL. zum
Arbeitsplatz zu ge-
hen.

Der Ausweis ist bei
Verlassen und Betre-
ten des Lagers der
Wache vorzuzeigen.

Verlust des Auswei-
ses ist sofort der
Oberaufseherin zu
melden.

AusweisNr: 278

Zuname: Floryn

Vorname: Marie

Der Lagerkommandant

Geb. Dat: 1.9.01

Häftl. Nr: 14981

[Handwritten signature]
Hauptsturmführer.

Block: 12

*Maria Floryn's prisoner
identification card for
Ravensbrück
concentration camp*

Maria was arrested by the Gestapo on 23 May 1942. Both of her children, then six and ten years old, were left to fend for themselves. On top of the psychological pain of worrying



Maria Floryn's children (photo presumably made in 1942)

about her children, she also suffered physical maltreatment by the Aachen State Police in the German prison. On 11 November of that same year, Maria was deported to the women's concentration camp at Ravensbrück. There she was given the registration number 14981 and was assigned to block 12, where German, Polish and Dutch Jehovah's Witnesses were housed. In Ravensbrück she was put to work outside the camp.

When Maria was transferred to camp St. Lambrecht in May 1943, her husband Léon had already been in a whole series of concentration camps. He had been transferred from Natzweiler concentration camp in France to Stutthof in Poland, and afterwards to Dachau concentration camp.³⁹⁵ At the beginning of January 1944 he sent a letter from Neu-Ulm Unterfahlheim to his wife, Maria, at the St. Lambrecht camp. This letter shows that Léon was put to work in this sub-camp of Dachau in a SS school for cabinet makers.³⁹⁶

In St. Lambrecht, Maria was set to work cleaning part of the camp as well as the female SS guard's room. It was also one of her duties to keep the ceramic wood stove burning. Furthermore, she voluntarily knitted a jumper for camp commandant Schöller.³⁹⁷

On 9 May 1945, mayor Pirker of St. Lambrecht confirmed Maria Floryn's liberation from the concentration camp. Maria probably bade farewell to her German and Polish sisters in the faith at Klagenfurt on her return journey and travelled further via Udine, Verona and Bolzano to Dornbirn, where she arrived on 21 June 1945.

Meine Anschrift:	Leon Floryn Nr. 14982
Name:	Leon Floryn Nr. 14982
geboren am:	17. Oktober 1914
Gef.-Nr.:	14982

Konzentrationslager Dachau 3K

Folgende Anordnungen sind beim Schriftverkehr mit Gefangenen zu beachten:

- 1.) Jeder Schutzhaftgefangene darf im Monat zwei Briefe oder zwei Karten von seinen Angehörigen empfangen und an sie absenden. Die Briefe an die Gefangenen müssen gut lesbar mit Tinte geschrieben sein und dürfen nur 15 Zeilen auf einer Seite enthalten. Gestaltet ist nur ein Briefbogen normaler Größe. Briefumschläge müssen ungefüllt sein. In einem Briefe dürfen nur 5 Briefmarken à 12 Pfg. beigelegt werden. Alles andere ist verboten und unterliegt der Beschlagnahme. Postkarten haben 10 Zeilen. Lichtbilder dürfen als Postkarten nicht verwendet werden.
- 2.) Geldsendungen auf Postanweisungen sind gestattet, doch sind dabei genau Namen und Vornamen, Geburtsdatum und Gefangenennummer anzugeben.
- 3.) Zeitungen sind gestattet, dürfen aber nur durch die Poststelle des K. L. Dachau 3 K bestellt werden.
- 4.) Pakete dürfen durch die Post in beschränktem Maße gesandt werden.
- 5.) Entlassungsgesuche aus der Schutzhaft an die Lagerleitung sind zwecklos.
- 6.) Sprechertribunals und Besuche von Gefangenen im Konzentrations-Lager sind grundsätzlich nicht gestattet.

Alle Post, die diesen Anforderungen nicht entspricht, wird vernichtet.

Der Lagerkommandant.

An Frau
 Barbara Floryn Nr. 14981
 44 Lager St. Lambrecht
 Steiermark

Letter from Léon Floryn to
 Maria Floryn from Dachau
 concentration camp

Raum für Zensurstempel:	Kontrollzeichen des Blockführers: zuzunnt Wollmisch 44 Oberh. Kommandobefehl
-------------------------	---

04 8 42 81

16 24 6 41

Bescheinigung :

Die Belgierin Fr. Maria Floryn.....
Häftling Nr. 14.9.81....., geb. 1. 9. 1901... in Wolbeek
Reverendbrück
ist hiermit frei und aus dem Konzentrationslager Mauthausen,
SS-Arbeitslager St.Lambrecht entlassen worden.
Dieselbe begibt sich nach Düssell. Torवन.....
Land

VERZAMELCENTRUM

Um ungehinderte Reisemöglichkeit wird gebeten. to
Mensch agent

St.Lambrecht, den 9.Mai 19



Die Ortspolizeibehörde
Bürgermeister:

Pirker

Maria Floryn's
discharge notice from
St. Lambrecht

04 8 42 81

16 24 6 45

Ausweis :

Name: Fr. Maria Floryn.....
Geb. 1. 9. 01..... in Wolbeek-Düssell
Staatsangehörigkeit: Belgierin.....
Augen: grünbraun.....
Nase: normal.....
Mund: klein.....
Haare: schwarz.....
Besondere Merkmale:
Stumpf. Hollenwägen...
Fingerabdruck
rechter Daumen

Die Ortspolizeibehörde
Bürgermeister:

Pirker



56

CARTE DE PRISONNIER POLITIQUE
1940-1945.
KAART VAN POLITIEKE GEVANGENE
1940-1945.

(Loi du 26 février 1947)
(Wet van 26 Februari 1947)

Délivrée à HERNALSTEEN Marie
Afgeleverd aan

Né à ST. JANS le 9.01
Geboren te MOLENBEEK de

a été prisonnier politique;
is politiek gevangene geweest;
ayant subi une captivité de
gedetineerd zijnde van

1134 dagen suivant décision
volgens beslissing

de la Commission de BEROEP
van de Commissie van
en date du 27.3.50
in dato



Numéro d'ordre 24.751./15.550
Volgnummer

Signature du titulaire,
Handtekening van de houder,
DE MINISTER,

Le Ministre de la Reconstruction,
De Minister van Wederopbouw,

CARTE DE PRISONNIER POLITIQUE
1940-1945.
KAART VAN POLITIEKE
GEVANGENE 1940-1945.

(Loi du 26 février 1947.)
(Wet van 26 Februari 1947.)

délivrée à M. FLORYN
afgeleverd aan Léon, E.

né à Seneffe le 17.3.01
geboren te de de

a été prisonnier politique,
is politiek gevangene geweest,
ayant subi une captivité de
gedetineerd zijnde van

1410 jours

..... suivant décision
volgens beslissing

de la Commission de Bruxelles
van de Commissie van

en date du 17.11.48
in dato



Numéro d'ordre 3216
Volgnummer

Signature du titulaire,
Handtekening van de houder,

Le Ministre,
De Minister,

*Proof of victimisation of
Maria Floryn (issued in
1950) and of Léon Floryn
(issued in 1948)*

The route took her further to Mulhouse, Paris and Lille. Having reached her home country, Belgium, she travelled through Tournai and Brussels to Tervuren, where she finally arrived on 29 July 1945. In March 1950 she was granted the status of a person politically persecuted by the Nazi regime.³⁹⁸ Maria visited St. Lambrecht one more time and returned to those places where she had been put to forced labour. Maria Floryn died in hospital in Leuven (or Louvain), Belgium, in 1986.

Female Jehovah's Witnesses from Germany

After Hitler's coming into power in 1933, persecution of the Bible Students was intensified. They were among the first persons who were deported to the first concentration camps, such as that in Moringen, Germany. Many of them had already been incarcerated in concentration camps for years before they were transported to St. Lambrecht, a sub camp of Ravensbrück. The ten German women made up the largest national group in this small concentration camp.³⁹⁹

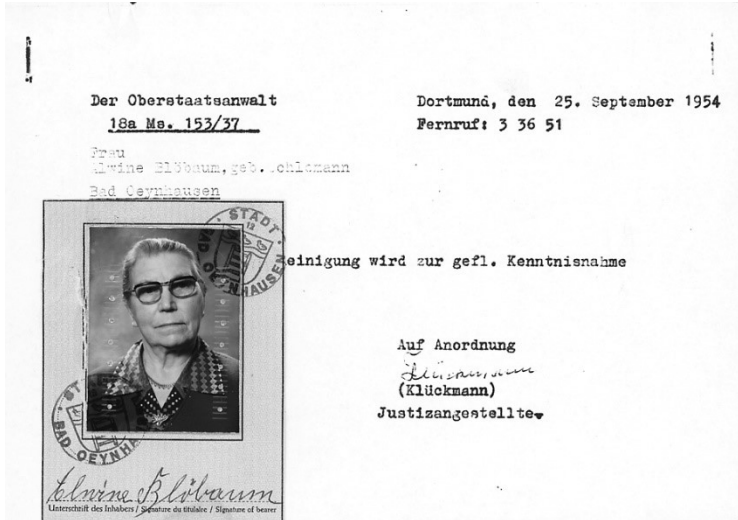
Due to their years of incarceration, they were not acquainted with the then current position regarding the Biblical interpretation and about questions of doctrine. This led to a divergence of opinions in camp Ravensbrück among the Bible Students, principally because many of the Dutch Bible Students were considered 'extreme'. In St. Lambrecht there were no interpretation problems, as none of the Bible Students there were involved in work associated directly or indirectly with the war industry.

Alwine Blöbaum-Schlomann

Alwine Blöbaum hailed from Eidinghausen (Germany). She was born on 28 June 1900 and in 1924 joined the religious community of Jehovah's Witnesses.⁴⁰⁰ Her husband, August Blöbaum, was also a Bible Student. Their son Wilfried was born in 1925. The family lived in Bad Oeyenhausen, where they participated in the underground work of Jehovah's Witnesses after the National Socialists banned the Bible Students in 1933.

*The Blöbaum family
(date of photo unknown)*





Alwine Blöbaum's certificate dated 1954

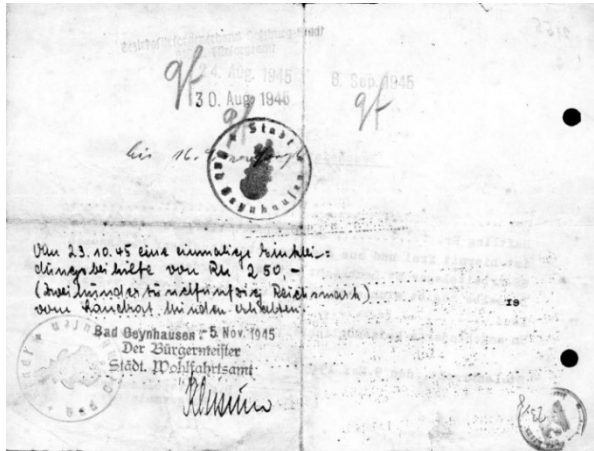
Gestapo searched the Blöbaum family home, but they found no Watchtower literature. Nevertheless, August Blöbaum was arrested that same day at his place of work. The next day Alwine was also taken into custody. She was kept in detention on remand for six months before a special court in Dortmund pronounced her an enemy of the state for having taken part in the illegal activities of the International Bible Students Association. She was given a 10-month prison sentence.

Alwine's husband, August, was so severely beaten while in custody that he had a nervous breakdown. He was rendered unfit for imprisonment and was taken to his parents' home, where his young son had also been taken in. His health remained unstable for the rest of his life.

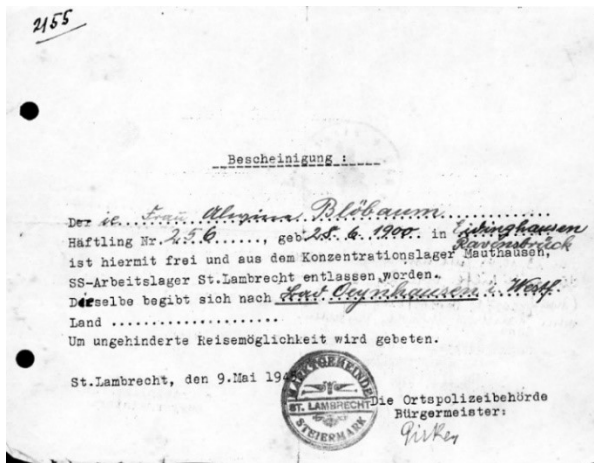
After having served her sentence, Alwine was not released but was deported to the concentration camp at Moringen on 18 November 1937. She remained there until 21 February 1938 when she was transferred to the Lichtenburg concentration camp along with other female prisoners.⁴⁰¹ Alwine was presumably transferred to Ravensbrück concentration camp for women, immediately after its opening. That is clear from her low registration

In 1936 at Lucerne, Switzerland, Jehovah's Witnesses issued a resolution in which they entreated Hitler to cease persecution of the brothers in the faith, as otherwise Jehovah would destroy Hitler and the Nazi Party, after which the Blöbaum family took part in distributing copies of this resolution and huge amounts were stored in their family home. On 14 December 1936 the

number: 256.⁴⁰² Which detail she was assigned in camp Ravensbrück is unknown. We do know that she was exposed to brutal maltreatment, resulting in permanent damage to her health.



Discharge notice St. Lambrecht belonging to Alwine Blöbaum



In May 1943 Alwine Blöbaum was transferred to the SS labour camp at St. Lambrecht. Within this homogeneous group of prisoners, she was seen as one of the 144,000 'anointed', who were looked up to for guidance.⁴⁰³

The tasks assigned to her at St. Lambrecht are unknown. Gerdina Huisman-Rabouw remembers her as being a motherly woman, having a 'sweet disposition and being a kindly sister'.⁴⁰⁴

Although Alwine was liberated from the concentration camp in May 1945 she did not return to Bad Oeyenhausen until September 1945. She had been incarcerated for almost nine years. Back home, she found her husband in a bad state of health, recovering very slowly from the traumatic experience under the Nazi Socialist regime. Eventually he returned to work as a cabinet maker and could once again support his family. The years of imprisonment had also affected Alwine physically.

Alwine Blöbaum passed away in 1981.

Ella Hempel-Zippel

Ella Hempel was born on 4 March 1900.⁴⁰⁵ She lived in Grethen, in Saxony, and was married at the time of her arrest.

Her husband was not one of Jehovah's Witnesses. When Ella was deported to the Lichtenburg concentration camp in 1938, she had to leave her four children behind with her husband in Grethen. In May 1939 all the female prisoners were transferred from Lichtenburg to Ravensbrück. Ella was placed in the so-called model Block 3, side A. The political prisoner and senior block prisoner of the model block, Margarete Buber-Neumann, had contact with Ella, and describes her as being an 'overzealous Saxon',⁴⁰⁶ who swept and polished and checked that the windows and doors were spick-and-span, in compliance with the regulations for a 'model block'.

In Ravensbrück, Ella regularly received letters from home. Her husband sent her letters, invariably with the request for her to return:

'My dear Ella, when will you make up your mind to come home at last? The children are asking for you every day. The household is going more and more to rack and ruin, and the children aren't getting the proper attention. The garden is overgrown with weeds. How

can you be so hard-hearted and leave your nearest and dearest like this? I'm sure God can't want you to do that.¹⁴⁰⁷

Ella Hempel (date of photo unknown)



These lines show that Ella's husband was indirectly putting her under pressure to sign the declaration to renounce her faith. Despite this, Ella remained loyal to her beliefs and, according to Margarete Buber-Neumann, said through her tears: 'Jehovah demands that His followers should leave wife and child – and that means husband as well – and follow Him.'⁴⁰⁸

The Bible Student interpreted this Bible text literally and viewed her imprisonment in concentration camps as a test of her faith, with the painful separation from her family as a consequence.

The female Jehovah's Witnesses, including Ella, were selected for work in St. Lambrecht concentration camp, and were transferred to Styria in May 1943. In St. Lambrecht she was put to work as the prison cook. Ella was often ill. She could not lift or carry heavy loads. She did this same work during the entire period of her imprisonment. Because of this specific assignment, she had close contact with the kitchen staff as she had to cook for both the male and female concentration camp prisoners. It was part of Ella's job to awaken the head housekeeper, Lore Kröll, every day before commencing her own work.⁴⁰⁹ She developed a close motherly relationship with the kitchen help, Margarete Messnarz-Günter. This strictly forbidden, but nevertheless existing, relationship, helped the deeply religious Bible Student to actively practise her faith. She tried to persuade the civilian kitchen staff, and especially Margarete, to turn to the Bible Students' faith. Ella never managed to persuade anyone there to become a Bible Student. Margarete would not be converted, but she and Ella discussed Bible texts and faith in general.⁴¹⁰ By doing this, the Bible Student fulfilled her religious commitment.

Ella Hempel got permission to receive family visits at St. Lambrecht. Her children and husband begged Ella to come home. She replied that she'd stay in the concentration camp until God said it was enough.⁴¹¹ The head housekeeper, Lore Kröll, also remembered the Hempel family visit. She couldn't understand Ella's attitude at all, that Ella viewed her religious conviction as being more important than her freedom and being reunited with her family.⁴¹²

Franziska Herold-Ziegler

Franziska Herold was born on 6 October 1905.⁴¹³

She was transported to Ravensbrück concentration camp on 3 August 1939. Gerdina Huisman witnessed her rapid physical decline, as a direct result of the living conditions in Ravensbrück. Gerdina recalled the deep impression this made upon her: '[Franziska] was a beautiful woman when she first arrived, but by the time she was liberated she looked like a little old crone.'⁴¹⁴

Franziska was put on the list for deportation to St. Lambrecht in May 1943. Her first labour assignment was to help cleaning the cabbages and potatoes in the monastery cellars.⁴¹⁵

Later she was set to work as a chambermaid, after Gerdina was moved to outdoor working activities. This had the advantage that both Franziska and Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen got the same food as the guards in the kitchen. She was a chambermaid up until liberation. And just like Jans Hoogers, she smuggled food for the other female Witnesses into the camp in order to improve their rations. At great risk to herself, she used her 'privileged employment' to support her sisters in the faith. Liberation for all came in May 1945 through the British army and Franziska began on her homeward journey, first travelling southward with the other German Bible Students. In Klagenfurt the German and Austrian women bade the rest of the group and the Spanish ex-prisoners farewell, travelling on via Weyern to Salzburg. From there she continued homeward to Germany.

Helene Leopold

Helene Leopold was born in Germany on 17 December 1903.⁴¹⁶ She first lived in the town of Rochlitz in Saxony, and later on in Weimar.

After her arrest she was deported to the Lichtenburg concentration camp. When camp Lichtenburg was closed down, Helene was transferred to camp Ravensbrück in May 1939.⁴¹⁷ In May 1943 she was transferred to the 'labour camp' at St. Lambrecht in Austria. Nothing is known about her work assignment there.

Anna Schädlich

Anna Schädlich was born on 25 August 1900.

In the Mauthausen concentration camp prison book of September 1944, she is noted as being a German Bible Student.⁴¹⁸

After her arrest she was incarcerated in Lichtenburg concentration camp and from there was transferred to Ravensbrück on 3 March 1939. She arrived at St. Lambrecht in May 1943. Anna was set to work in the garden there. She witnessed Jans Hoogers being punished by the female SS guard for Jans' yodelling.

Anna Schädlich spent at least seven years in three different concentration camps and viewed this as having endured a test of her faith.

Emma Schüler

Hailing from the region of Köslin/Koszalin (Middle Pomerania, now Poland), Emma Schüler was born on 13 November 1898.⁴¹⁹

She was arrested by the Gestapo in 1937 and deported to Moringen concentration camp. Along with a large number of female political prisoners, she was transferred to Lichtenburg concentration camp in February 1938. After closure of this concentration camp in May 1939, Emma arrived in Ravensbrück. In May 1943 she was transferred to the camp at St. Lambrecht.

Emma Schüler spent at least seven full years in concentration camps before being liberated by the British army in 1945.

Paula Johanna Auerbach-Uhlig

Paula Auerbach was born on 14 November 1896 and was a native of Eppendorf near Flöha in Saxony, Germany.

In 1925 she was introduced to the teachings of the Bible Students and a year later, aged thirty, she was baptised.⁴²⁰ She was working as a home help when she was arrested on 27 November 1936. The Special Court in Freiburg near Chemnitz sentenced her to a year's imprisonment on 18 March 1937. This was local news:

‘Once again a “Bible Student” has come before a Special Court. Members of the International Bible Students Association faced charges before the Special Court because of their upholding the organisation in and around Flöha until July 1936, despite the prohibition of their Association and for their further activities of door-to-door selling of “The Watchtower”, which was also banned. [...] Paula Johanna Uhlig from Eppendorf, born on 14 November 1896, was sentenced to one year’s imprisonment. [...] The accused were arrested in November of this year and have been in detention since December. [...] The judgements pronounced show that many of the “Bible Students” were sentenced by the judge because of their stubborn persistence in their enemy-of-state fanaticism. The Court was forced to conclude that punishment never led to improvement, but was aimed at isolating these unreasonable people from the community, to frustrate their activities and to deter others from joining them.’⁴²¹

Paula was deported to the Moringen concentration camp towards the end of 1937. On 21 February 1938 her name was added to the list of political prisoners who were to be



Paula Uhlig with her husband (date of photo unknown)

transported from Moringen to Lichtenburg.⁴²² Alwine Blöbaum was also on the transportation list for this concentration camp. It was probably in the middle of May 1939 that Paula was transferred to Ravensbrück concentration camp for women, which marked the beginning of the most harrowing period of her imprisonment. After spending six years in various concentration camps, Paula was transferred to St. Lambrecht. She was eventually liberated by the British army.

After liberation, Paula Uhlig married Arthur Auerbach.

19.3.27. Bibelforscher vor dem Sondergericht

Das Sondergericht für das Land Sachsen weist in diesen Tagen wieder in Chemnitz, um gegen mehrere Angehörige der Internationalen Bibelforscher-Vereinigung wegen verbotswidriger Betätigung zu verhandeln. Am ersten Verhandlungstag richtete sich die Anklage gegen zehn Männer und eine Frau, die im Bezirk Flöha und Umgebung bis zum Juli 1936 die Organisation aufrechterhalten hatten. Sie gehörten aber nicht zu den schlimmsten Fanatikern, und es scheint, als ob es bei einigen dieser gefährlichen Zeitgenossen allmählich dämmert, daß sie ihre Piennige und sogar Unterstützungsgelder nur ihren Funktionären opfern, wie es früher schon bei den Marxisten so üblich war.

Das Urteil lautete auf zwei Jahre Gefängnis für den 36jährigen Rudolf Georg Hänel aus Borstendorf; ein Jahr und drei Monate Gefängnis für den 35jährigen Kurt Paul Brendel und den 49jährigen staatenlosen Karl Chlupac, beide aus Gahleitz; ein Jahr und zwei Monate Gefängnis für den 39jährigen Erik Georg Uhlig aus Borstendorf, für den 33jährigen Alfred Walter Hermsdorfer aus Gahleitz und den 41jährigen Kurt Willy Rümmler aus Hammerleubsdorf; ein Jahr Gefängnis für die 40jährige Paula Johanna Uhlig aus Eppendorf und für den 40jährigen Emil Bruno Ender aus Borstendorf; zehn Monate Gefängnis für den 48jährigen Karl Oswin Scharschmidt aus Borstendorf; sechs Monate Gefängnis für den 43jährigen Emil Kurt Bauer aus Sobensichte und für den in Freiberg geborenen 48jährigen Ernst Paul Beyer.

The way Jehovah's Witnesses were treated in the district of Flöha/Saxony has been thoroughly documented



Photograph of the young Ella Ulbrich, date of photo unknown.

Ella Ulbrich

Ella Ulbrich was born on 6 October 1900 in Saxony, Germany. She lived in Frankenberg.⁴²³

Exactly when Ella was deported to Ravensbrück is not known. Early in May 1943 she was transferred to St. Lambrecht and was liberated two years later by the British army.

Magdalena Willibald-Sedlmeier

Magdalena Willibald was born on 29 May 1898 in Esting in the district of Fürstenfeldbruck in southern Germany.⁴²⁴

A baptised Catholic, both she and her husband had their names struck off the membership list of the Roman Catholic Church and became Bible Students. The Willibalds attended the meetings of the Bible Students in the Bad-Tölz district and there took part in spreading the religious teachings. They moved to Munich in 1936. Due to the lack of living space, their son, who was born in 1921, grew up in his Grandmother's care. Their daughter, Magdalena, who was then 9 years old, remained with her parents and was brought up in the teaching of the Bible Students. She was baptised in August 1943, when her mother was already imprisoned in St. Lambrecht.

Magdalena Willibald, together with other Jehovah's Witnesses there, distributed copies of 'The Watchtower' magazine during the rule of National Socialism until she and her husband were arrested by the Gestapo in their home on 3 December 1942. At the trial in 1943 she was acquitted but was



Family Sedlmeier with Magdalena as a child (date of photo unknown)

nevertheless kept in custody. The Gestapo deported her to Ravensbrück concentration camp, where she was given registration number 35.027.⁴²⁵

Her husband was indicted on suspicion of *Wehrkraftzersetzung* (subversion of military forces). As opposed to what happened to his wife, he was released from prison after a year of being kept in custody.

In May 1943 Magdalena was deported to the camp at St. Lambrecht. There is no record of the tasks imposed upon her there.

1001

München, 19. Mai 1943

Absender:
Name: *Mrs. Elisabeth Magdalena Willibald*
geboren am *14. März 1898*
in *München*

Meine Anschrift:
Mrs. Elisabeth Magdalena Willibald
Poststr. 19
München

Konzentrationslager Mauthausen
Oberdonau

Folgende Anordnungen sind beim Schriftverkehr mit Gefangenen zu beachten:

1. Jeder Schutzhaftgefangene darf im Monat ~~ein~~ Briefe oder ~~zwei~~ Karten von seinen Angehörigen empfangen und in sie absenden. Die Briefe an die Gefangenen müssen gut lesbar mit Tinte geschrieben sein und dürfen nur 10 Zeilen auf einer Seite enthalten. Gestattet ist nur ein Briefbogen normaler Größe. Briefumschläge müssen angefertigt sein. In einem Briefe dürfen nur 3 Briefmarken à 12 Pf. beigelegt werden. Alles andere ist verboten und unterliegt der Beschlagnahme. Postkarten haben 10 Zeilen. Lichtbilder dürfen als Postkarten nicht versendet werden.
2. Geldsendungen sind gestattet, doch ist dabei genau Name und Vorname, Geburtsdatum, Häftlingsblock und Stubbe anzugeben.
3. Zeitungen sind gestattet, dürfen aber nur durch die Poststelle des K. L. Mauthausen bestellt werden.
4. Lebensmittelpakete sind gestattet. Außer einem Inhaltsverzeichnis sind Beilagen verboten und werden beschlagnahmt.
5. Entlassungsgesuche aus der Schutzhaft an die Lagerleitung sind zwecklos.
6. Sprechertelefonis und Besuche von Gefangenen im Konzentrationslager sind grundsätzlich nicht gestattet.

Alle Post, die diesen Anforderungen nicht entspricht, wird verschuttet.

Der Lagerkommandant.

SAMT 12

Herrn
Martin Willibald

(36) *München 2*
Ergießweiße 4/1
(Rückgebäude) / c. 11

Kreis Muro
St. Lambrecht, Steiermark
K. L. - Mauthausen - Arbeitslager

St. Lambrecht, Steiermark

1943

Q 0170 — 705 44

Deutlich schreiben!

Eilmnachricht

An *Frau Magdalena Willibald*





44 Arbeitslager Mauthausen

in *Mariahof - St. Lamprecht*
Steiermark *Kreis Muro*
(Straße und Hausnummer)

Fernsprecher Nr. _____ (Rufnummer)
oder über _____
Fernsprecher Nr. _____ (Rufnummer)

Telegram to Magdalena Willibald from 1944

Letter from
Magdalena Willibald
to her husband

		Name: Name Фамилия	Willibald geb. Sedimeier
		Vorname: First name Имя	Magdalena
Rechter Daumen Right thumb Палец правой руки		Geburtsort: Place of birth Lieu de naissance Место рождения	Rating
		Geburtszeit: Date of birth Date de naissance Дата рождения	29.5.98
Willibald Magdalena Unterschrift des Ausweisinhabers		Nationalität: Nationality Национальность	deutsch
Ausweis Nr. 08.-1681-		Beruf und Stand: Profession Профессия	Hausfrau
Generalanwaltschaft Refrats-Anerkennung (Ausstellende Behörde)		Familienstand: Marital status État civil Семейное состояние	verheiratet
München, den 15. Juni 1945 		Ständiger Wohnsitz: Residence Résidence Постоянное место-жительства	München
Münchener Polizeipräsident Pelzer		Größe: Height Grandeur Рост	1.51 m
von 2.50 DM bezahlt		Farbe der Augen: Colour of eyes Couleur des yeux Цвет глаз	graubraun
		Besond. Kennzeich. Marks of distinction Marques distinctives Особые приметы	keine
		Kein Personalpapier Not legitimation Nisi pas legitimatio Недействителен как легитимационный вид	

Die Inhaberin wurde aus religiösen Gründen von nationalsoz.-Regime insgesamt: <u>2 Jahre 5 Monate 5 Tage</u> gefangen gehalten. -----
Lager, Haftanstalten Pol.Gef.Mu.-Ettstr., Gef.Mu.- Stadelheim und Gestapo Gef. Mu.-Prinzenstr. 3.12.42 - 21.4.44 KL-Havensbrück und KL-Mauthausen 21.4.44 - 8.5.45 -----
Tag der letzten Entlassung 8.5.45

Magdalena Willibald's victim identification from 1949

After being liberated, she travelled through Klagenfurt to Weyern in Styria, Austria. She reported to the British occupying forces in Weyern on 20 June 1945, and received a residence permit valid until 27 July 1945. Then she travelled to Salzburg. She remained in the Salzburg refugee camp until 27 August, and from there she provided a written notice of her wish to return to her homeland in Bavaria.⁴²⁶ There is no record of the exact date on which Magdalena Willibald arrived in Munich.

On 28 April 1953, she was granted the status of victim of religious persecution under the Nazi regime.⁴²⁷

Meta Klara Winkler

Meta Klara Winkler was born on 26 April 1909 in Dittmannsdorf/Saxony.⁴²⁸

Meta Winkler grew up in a large family. She had three sisters and two brothers. She was evidently brought up by her parents in the Jehovah's Witnesses' faith.

Meta Winkler, who worked as a stocking seamstress, was arrested by the Gestapo



Meta Winkler (left) with her mother and three sisters (date of photo unknown)

on 7 July 1938 in her home region and was deported to the Lichtenburg concentration camp on 2 August 1938. There is no record of Meta's transfer from this camp to Ravensbrück. Her low registration number, 933,⁴²⁹ shows that she must have been taken there in the early days after the founding of the concentration camp, at the end of 1938 or early in 1939. She was placed in block 12, where predominantly female Bible Students were allocated.

There is no record of the tasks imposed upon her in Ravensbrück,

except that they were outside the camp, as Meta Winkler was given a pass which allowed her to leave the concentration camp in order to go to her place of work.

In May 1943 she was put on the transport list for transfer to St. Lambrecht. Nothing is known about the type of forced labour she had to do there.

While Meta was in St. Lambrecht, her brother, Willi, was beheaded at Halle in 1943 for refusing to do military service. Her brother Martin had already died. He had also been arrested because of his faith and had been deported to Mauthausen and other places.

Martin Winkler did not survive the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. He died there on 7 July 1940.⁴³⁰



Der Häftl. ist be-
rechtigt, durch das
Tor des FKL. zum Ar-
beitsplatz zu gehen.
Der Ausweis ist beim
Verlassen und Betre-
ten des Lagers, der
Wache vorzuzeigen.
Verlust des Ausweis
ses ist sofort der
Oberaufseherin zu
melden.

AusweisNr: 246

Zuname: Winkler Der Lagerkommandant

Vorname: Meta

Geb. Dat: 26.4.09

Häftl. Nr: 933

Block: 12

Hauptsturmführer.

Meta Winkler's prisoner identification card for Ravensbrück concentration camp

Meta stood firm in her stance for her faith. She survived three concentration camps, where she was deprived of her freedom and separated from her family for seven years.

After her liberation in May 1945, Meta travelled with her sisters in the faith from St. Lambrecht southwards, to make the return journey to her homeland. On 4 June 1945 she applied to the British occupying army in Klagenfurt to be able to travel via Flöha unhindered to Saxony.⁴³¹ There is no record of the date she arrived in her home region at Dittmannsdorf.

In 1949 Meta Winkler submitted an application for the victim status. She also applied for an allowance for those having been persecuted under the Nazi regime. The Ministry of Labour and Development of the Saxony region rejected this on the following grounds:

'You refused to sign the declaration to boycott the atom bomb. By acting thus, you have detracted from the political significance of the *VdN*⁴³² and promoted the aim of

Neo-Fascism. In addition to this, you take no part in the political and social life of the German Democratic Republic, which is required of a *VdN*.⁴³³

After Meta's liberation from the Nazi regime, she once again became the victim of a totalitarian state. The communist state refused to acknowledge her victim status because of her faith. Thus, she received no recognition as a victim of the Nazi regime, because based on her religious convictions, she remained politically neutral with respect to the communist state and refused to support it.

Female Jehovah's Witnesses from Austria

Eighteen months after the *Anschluss* between Austria and Nazi Germany, Therese Schreiber from Vienna was caught and arrested by the Gestapo. She and Hedwig Hummel formed the smallest group but one in the women's concentration camp at St. Lambrecht, and for two years they were deprived of their freedom and put into forced labour. The life stories of both Austrian women can be reconstructed relatively accurately.

Hedwig Hummel-Weninger

Hedwig Hummel was born in Vienna on 8 April 1903. Her parents were the cabinetmaker Michael Weninger and his wife, Theresia.⁴³⁴

In Vienna, Hedwig attended primary school and secondary school and after that she became a dressmaker. Three years later she took a stenography course and found work in a Viennese firm, where she worked as a secretary for around nine years. In 1928 she married the foreman Franz Hummel, who was five years older than herself.

Hedwig Hummel's initial contact with the Bible Students came about when she attended public talks given by Johann Löffler in 1934. She became a member of the religious association and discussed the Bible with several Bible Students in Vienna. While visiting the Löffler family, she was arrested by the Viennese Gestapo on 20 October 1941.

Geheime Staatspolizei
Staatspolizeistelle Wien
Referat II B/K 2
Zu B.-Nr. 1867/41

Wien I., den 9. Dezember 1941
Morzinplatz 4.
Fernsprecher: A-17-5-80.

Photographierschein

I. Name und Personaldaten: Hedwig Hummel, geb. Weninger, Haus-
halt, geb. am 8.4.1903 in Wien, DRA., christl. freist.,
verh., Wien XII., Tichelgasse Nr. 20/11

ist wegen Betätigung für die IBV.
zu Daktyloskopieren und zur Photographieren.*

Persönlichkeit festgestellt: nein* — ja*) — durch: Ehemann Franz H.
Name und Wohnort: obige Adresse wohnhaft.

II. Die photographische Aufnahme des beigefügten Gegenstandes, Schrift-
stückes, Bildes, Briefes*) ist erwünscht.

Zahl der erbetenen Abzüge: 2

Anruf int.:
(Unterschrift des Referatsleiters oder Vertreters.)

*) Nichtzutreffendes streichen.
*) Persönlichkeit kann nur durch Blutsverwandte und Ehefrau anerkannt werden.

1. Nebenbezeichnete Nachbildung
ist herzustellen.

Anzahl d. zu liefernden Bilder:
a) dreiteilige } für den
b) zweiteilige } Erk.-Dienst
c) einseitige }
d) zu Fahndungszwecken

2. Die Abzüge sind in
Tagen zu liefern.

Photographiert unter Nr. 5275
Bilder geliefert am 16.12.41

W. W. in

Reh

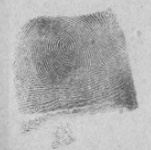
m. n.



Hedwig Hummel in 1941
(Gestapo photograph)

Having been taken into custody at the District Court for Criminal Cases, on 9 December 1941 she signed a statement renouncing her faith in the following words:

'I was given the opportunity to speak to my husband. As the result of his explanation I now understand that my actions were fallacious and that the doctrine of the Bible Students must be considered inimical towards the state. As I am not an enemy of the state and would like to work for the community in the future, I reject the doctrine and the ideas of Jehovah's Witnesses. I certify that in the future I will not engage in any work whatsoever for the organisation. If necessary, I am prepared to accept work manufacturing weapons or ammunition. I have come to recognise that the Bible Students interpret the divine law "Thou shalt not kill" in this way, only in order to undermine the military power of the German people.'⁴³⁵

Name: <i>Hummel</i> Vorname: <i>Lubwig geb. Wemmer</i> Stand: <i>wid. schied. pers. Unfall</i> Geburtslag: <i>8. 4. 1903</i> Geburtsort: <i>Himm</i> Kreis:		<i>mit Foto</i> Index Nr. <i>5275</i> Aufgenommen: <i>9. 12. 41.</i> Blatten Nr.: <i>5275</i> Peri.-Akten: <i>IB/Kr - 1862/41</i>	
Personalbeschreibung: <small>(Die zutreffenden Angaben sind zu unterstreichen.)</small>			
1. Größe: <i>1 64</i> cm <small>(sehr klein, klein, mittel, groß, sehr groß).</small> 2. Gestalt: <u>(stark, unterseht, schlank, schwächlich).</u> 3. Schulterneigung: <u>(schräg, waagrecht).</u> 4. Gesicht: <u>(Farbe, Form, Fülle).</u> <i>dünn, oval, voll</i> 5. Stirn: <u>(sehr hoch, sehr niedrig, zurückweichend, senkrecht, vorspringend).</u>	6. Haar: <u>(Farbe: hell, mittel, dunkelblond, -braun, schwarz, rot, grau, graugemischt, weiß).</u> 7. Bart: <u>(Farbe: hell, mittel, dunkelblond, -braun, schwarz, rot, grau, graugemischt, weiß).</u> 8. Auge: <u>(blau, grau, gelb, gelbbrot, hell, dunkelbraun, schwarzbraun).</u> 9. Augenbrauen: <u>(wenn vom Kopfhaar abweichend, gefärbt):</u> Form: Fülle:	10. Nase: <u>(eingebogen, gradlinig, ausgebogen, winkliggebogen, wellig).</u> <u>Beinberheiten (Vorprung, sehr groß, sehr klein, sehr dick, sehr spitz, aufgestülpt, schief (nach rechts, links), stark sichtbare oder verdeckte Nasencheidewand, Adler-, Trinkernase).</u> 11. Ohren: <u>(sehr groß, sehr klein, sehr schmal, dreieckig, rund, oval, abflachend, sehr anliegend).</u> <u>Ohrflüppchen: (dreieckig, rechteckig, bogenförmig, freihängend, durchlocht, durchzissen).</u> 12. Mund: <u>(sehr klein, sehr groß, dünne Lippen, aufgeworfene Lippen).</u> 13. Zähne: <u>(vollständig, lückenhaft, auffallend groß oder klein, sehr gefüllt, solches Gebiß oben oder unten, Füllungen).</u>	
Am: 		Kontrollfinger:	

Official Gestapo report: Hedwig Hummel in 1941

Whether Hedwig was released from detention on account of this, is questionable, because, two months later, on 11 February 1942, she was arrested by the District Court for Criminal Cases and sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment on the grounds of *Wehrkraftersetzung* (subversion of military forces).⁴³⁶ Hedwig was transferred to the detention centre in Aichach on 6 March 1942. There is no record of when she was sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp. Comments in the historical archives of Jehovah's Witnesses in Vienna show that Hedwig Hummel arrived in Ravensbrück on 20 April 1943, where she was given registration number 21.739.⁴³⁷

Along with the small group of prisoners, Hedwig was transferred to St. Lambrecht at the beginning of May 1943. There is no record of the detail she was assigned to.

After being liberated from the concentration camp in May 1945, Hedwig Hummel returned to Vienna along with the other Austrian Jehovah's Witness, Therese Schreiber.

Therese Schreiber

Therese Schreiber was born on 20 October 1889 in Pfaffenhofen an der Ilm (a municipality in Bavaria, Germany).⁴³⁸

She and her mother moved to Vienna, where from 1925 on she occasionally kept in touch with the Bible Students. In 1927 Therese was baptised as a Bible Student. When groups of preachers were showing the 'Photo-Drama of Creation'-film in Vienna, Therese took an active part in spreading the faith and took over the distribution of religious literature. She also actively proselytised in neighbouring Czechoslovakia. At the time of the military take-over of Austria by the Nazi regime, Therese was working as a salesgirl in a sport and toy shop. When she on the basis of her conscience objected to joining the *D.A.F.*, she was fired. Therese found herself a job as assistant and could therefore support and care for herself and her invalid mother, who suffered from a cardiac complaint.

Therese Schreiber was already supporting the underground activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Austria in 1937, under the leadership of August Kraft. She used a stencil machine to duplicate the Watchtower literature which had been written by Kraft. Up until September 1939 the literature was produced in the cellar of a garden shed at Grinzingerallee 54. The owner of this piece of ground was a Jew who had emigrated in time. Therese Schreiber was arrested on 31 October 1939 when the Gestapo got hold of a distribution list for the Bible Students' magazines, on which her name was written.

Geheime Staatspolizei

Staatspolizeistelle Wien.

Wien I., den 13.11. 1939Referat II B 2
Zu B.-Nr. 1380/39 gMorgensplatz 4.
Fernsprecher: A 17-5-80.

1. Die nebenstehende Person ist:

- a) zu daktyloskopieren.
- b) zu photographieren.

2. Nebenbezeichnete Nachbildung
ist herzustellen.

Anzahl d. zu liefernden Bilder:

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| a) dreiteilige | } für den
Erk.-Dienst |
| b) zweiteilige | |
| c) einteilige | |
| d) zu Fahndungszwecken | |

3. Die Abzüge sind in
Tagen zu liefern.Photographiert unter Nr. 1163
Bilder geliefert am 14.11.39*Gustav
Myl. K.***Photographierschein**I. Die Anfertigung einer photographischen Aufnahme
" " " Nachbildung des beigefügten Bildnisses*) der unten
bezeichneten Person ist erwünscht:**Therese Schreiber**

- a) als gewerbs- und gewohnheitsmäßiger Verbrecher fürs Album*) ?
(Angabe der Verbrecherklasse:)
 - b) zur Personenfeststellung*) ?
 - c) als Zigeuner*) ?
- Der — Die ist vorbestraft, geständig*).
- Bereits photographiert am Neuaufnahme erwünscht.
- Wieviel Abzüge werden zu Fahndungszwecken gewünscht ?


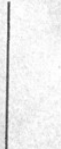



II. Die photographische Aufnahme des beigefügten Gegenstandes, Schrift-
stückes, Bildes, ist erwünscht.Zahl der erbetenen Abzüge: 2Anruf int.: 235*I. V. Dyblak*
(Unterschrift des Referatsleiters oder Vertreters).

*) Nichtzutreffendes streichen.



Therese Schreiber, Gestapo photos (1939)

She was detained in the Gestapo prison in Vienna until 1 March 1940. From there, without trial, she was transferred to the women's concentration camp Ravensbrück, block 5. The orders for *Schutzhaft*, dated 16 December 1939 speak of the work of the International Bible Students Association being a threat to the people and the State. After Therese had been kept in Ravensbrück for about a year in protective custody, she was brought to the Vienna Regional Criminal Court on 19 February 1941, where she remained until 2 July 1941. The reason for this delay was a sitting in which she was accused of producing illegal religious literature. By her own account, she was acquitted. However, the Gestapo did not release her, but transferred her back to Ravensbrück, where she arrived on 9 August 1941. In Ravensbrück Therese was given registration number 2937.⁴³⁹ Therese was assigned the work of an *Anweishäftling*.

Name: Schreiber Vorname: <i>Therese</i> Stand: <i>Ankäuferin</i> Geburtsdag: <i>20. 10. 1889</i> Geburtsort: <i>Stuppenhofen</i> Kreis: <i>Bayern</i>		Index Nr. <i>1163</i> Aufgenommen: <i>13. 11. 39</i> Platten Nr.: <i>1163</i> Perf.-Platten: <i>II B 2</i>	
Personalbeschreibung: (Die zutreffenden Angaben sind zu unterstreichen.)			
1. Größe: <i>1 m 62</i> cm (sehr klein, klein, <u>mittel</u> , groß, sehr groß). 2. Gestalt: (stark, unterseht, <u>schlan</u> , schwächlich). 3. Schulterneigung: (<u>schräg</u> , waagrecht). 4. Gesicht: (Farbe, Form, Fülle). <i>wahl</i> 5. Stirn: (sehr hoch, sehr niedrig, <u>zurückweichend</u> , senkrecht, vorpringend).		6. Haar: (Farbe: hell-, mittel-, <u>dunkelblond</u> , -braun, schwarz, rot, grau, <u>graugemischt</u> , weiß). 7. Bart: (Farbe: hell-, mittel-, <u>dunkelblond</u> , -braun, schwarz, rot, grau, <u>graugemischt</u> , weiß). 8. Augen: (<u>blau</u> , grau, gelb, gelbrot, hell-, dunkelbraun, schwarzbraun). 9. Augenbrauen: (wenn vom Kopfsaar abweichend, gefärbt): Form: Fülle:	
10. Nase: Rücken (eingebogen, gradlinig, ausgebogen, <u>winkligebogen</u> , <u>wellig</u>). Besonderheiten (Vorprung, sehr groß, sehr klein, sehr dick, sehr spitz, aufgetülpelt, schief (nach rechts, links), stark sichtbare oder verdeckte Nasenflügelbewand, Adler-, Trichter-, etc.). 11. Ohren: (sehr groß, sehr klein, sehr schmal, drei-, vieredig, rund, oval, abstehend, sehr <u>ausliegend</u>). Ohrspeichen: (ausladend, rechteckig, bogenförmig, freihängend, durchlöcher, durchreissen). 12. Mund: (sehr klein, sehr groß, dünne Lippen, aufgeworfene Lippen). 13. Zähne: (vollständig, <u>lückenhaft</u> , auffallend groß oder klein, schräg gestellt, falsches Gebiß oben oder unten, Füllungen).			
Am: <i>13. 11. 39</i> 		Kontrollfinger:    	

The Gestapo report on Therese Schreiber in 1939

Therese still remembers the order given by the camp commandant⁴⁴⁰ to renounce her faith in a written statement. She did not sign the statement. Therese was imprisoned in this largest camp for women for almost two years, until her transfer to the 'SS labour camp' at St. Lambrecht on 5 May 1943. At 54 years of age, Therese was the oldest of the small group of prisoners.

Her first assignment in this concentration camp was forestry work. The work was done together with the Spanish prisoners from the men's camp. Afterwards she was put to work with the group working in the garden. It was Therese, along with the other older Bible Students who influenced the general mood among this homogeneous group of prisoners, that Gerdina Huisman referred to as being 'wholesome'.⁴⁴¹



Therese Schreiber, probably after liberation (date unknown)

After liberation from St. Lambrecht, Therese returned by a roundabout route to her home town Vienna. The first part of the journey back to Klagenfurt was arranged by the Spanish prisoners. They parted ways in Klagenfurt and the Jehovah's Witnesses found shelter in a bomb-damaged school. When the Dutch and Belgian sisters-in-faith continued their homeward journey, Therese Schreiber and Hedwig Hummel tried to get back to Vienna. Their route took them past Weyern to Salzburg, where they bade farewell to the ten female Jehovah's Witnesses from Germany. A Red Cross vehicle took them farther as far as Krems. Eventually both women reached Vienna by train, sitting on the shock absorbers of a railway carriage.

Therese found her house in her home town undamaged. Upon arrival in Vienna she immediately became active for the Jehovah's Witnesses' organisation and in time led a Bible study group in Vienna's 10th district. Both she and Peiffer, another female Witness, produced Watchtower literature until their male fellow believers took over. Therese wanted to become eligible for an early pension because of having become

incapacitated during the period of her imprisonment. Whether this ever came about is unsure, but probable, as Therese makes no further mention of having been employed. She continued preaching until she was more than 80 years old.

Therese Schreiber passed away in the sixties of the twentieth century in Vienna, never having married and always having done her best to spread the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses with great dedication.

Female Jehovah's Witnesses from Poland

There is little known about the life stories of the Polish women who had been confined for two years in St. Lambrecht concentration camp. There are next to no written documents of their life stories. All we do know about them, is from the memories of the Dutch Witnesses with whom I spoke personally. Paula Wölfle was the only one of whom there is a record, allowing a somewhat broader life story to be told.

Anna Czudek

There is almost nothing known about Anna Czudek, who was born on 6 July 1897 in Poland. Her name is mentioned twice; first on the register at Ravensbrück concentration camp, then when St. Lambrecht was taken over on 14 September 1944 by the main camp at Mauthausen.⁴⁴²

While at St. Lambrecht, besides her assignment in the forestry where almost all prisoners had to work, Anna was also set to work with Sjaan Pronk as a shepherdess. There were no guards for this work and therefore she had contact with the local farm people.

Antonia Kurcewski

Antonia Kurcewski was Polish and was born on 17 December 1906. There is absolutely no record of her contact with the Witnesses or on which dates the Nazis persecuted and arrested her.

Antonia had been transported from Ravensbrück to St. Lambrecht along with the other women. She was put to work doing all the laundry.⁴⁴³ She also had to iron the head

scarves of all the female prisoners. She often did Margarete Messnarz-Günter a favour by laundering her uniform as well. In return, the kitchen help slipped her food.

Febronia Makurat

Febronia Makurat was born on 4 July 1907 in Poland. When Ravensbrück, under which St. Lambrecht fell, was taken over by concentration camp Mauthausen, Febronia was put on the list of prisoners as a Polish Bible Student.⁴⁴⁴ There is no further information about this Jehovah's Witness.

Elisabeth (Lisbeth) Schütt

Elisabeth Schütt was born on 21 January 1901. Her birthplace is unknown, but in the new book about the prisoners, which was drawn up for Mauthausen concentration camp on 15 September 1944, there is a record of her being a Polish prisoner.⁴⁴⁵ Also the Dutch Bible Students who had been imprisoned with her, remember her as being a Polish native speaker. They called her 'Lisbeth'.⁴⁴⁶

Elisabeth was known as one of the 144.000 'anointed'. Her views were held to be guiding. Both she and Alwine Blöbaum were the chosen leaders of the group of prisoners.⁴⁴⁷

Elisabeth had also been transported from Ravensbrück to St. Lambrecht and was assigned work on the land and in the forestry. In this capacity she also was in touch with the local population of St. Lambrecht. Here Elisabeth got to know a Bible Student living incognito, whom she persuaded to bring bread and wine to the cloister gate for the so-called 'Memorial' celebration, for the imprisoned Bible Students.⁴⁴⁸ Elisabeth's courage made it possible for the religious group to actively practise their faith – such as the above-mentioned faith ritual.

While moving books, Elisabeth managed to 'borrow' a few Bibles and smuggled them into the camp. It has also been mentioned that she put her religious knowledge down in writing in St. Lambrecht to preserve this and at the same time to make it available to her sisters in the faith.⁴⁴⁹

Paula (Paulina) Wölfle



Paula Wölfle aged about 39, Ravensbrück prisoner identification card

1924 she met Bible Students, most of whom had come from abroad to preach in Poland. Paula attended public lectures held in German and Polish by this religious group. In 1925 Paula became an active member of the International Bible Students Association. She spread the religious ideas on so-called home visits, using the leaflet 'Ecclesiastics Indicted'. Paula also supported the preaching work using the portable gramophone with recorded talks and songs. All her efforts were geared to developing her own character, which had to be brought to perfection.

'The years passed thus until WWII broke out in 1939. Before the war, we had already heard that our brothers in Germany were being persecuted because of the truth.'⁴⁵¹ Paula

Paula Wölfle was born on 22 February 1901 in Łódź.⁴⁵⁰

Paula belonged to the German speaking ethnic group and was brought up as an evangelist. She had five older brothers and sisters. She had a special bond with her sister Alma, who was blind. Her mother had been widowed and cared for her family single-handed. At the age of 15, Paula decided to dedicate her life to God: she asked to be allowed to enter a (religious) nursing home. This institution with all its rules, felt like a prison. After a year of the evangelical religious education, Paula took the opportunity of returning to her family farm. Her mother had a broken arm and needed Paula's help.

Disappointed in her Protestant upbringing, she chose to be involved with the Baptists' religious teaching in 1917, but that did not satisfy her 'religious hunger'. In

viewed the Nazi religious persecution as a trial of her own religious beliefs. Her problems arose immediately upon occupation of Poland by the Nazi regime. Paula, who up until then had worked in a factory, refused to give the German salute. This resulted in her being accused within the company of promoting Bible Students propaganda, and she was fired. In October 1940 she was arrested when the Gestapo found Watchtower literature in her house during a search. After two months' imprisonment, Paula was transferred to Ravensbrück in December 1940.

She was registered there under number 5249 and assigned to block 12.⁴⁵² She was the first Bible Student from Poland in Ravensbrück. Paula was zealous in spreading her faith's teachings in the women's concentration camp, just as all newly arrived female Jehovah's Witnesses, who brought the current 'Watchtower ideas' with them. Moreover, they kept a Bible hidden, which a Witness who worked as a stoker had found underneath a pile of books and newspapers. The Bible should have been burned, but the courageous Jehovah's Witness saved it for the communal Bible study. The Bible Students tried to convince other prisoners of the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses during their free time, when they were allowed to walk around on the parade grounds. Paula did this as well.

Paula was evidently assigned work outside the camp, as she had a permit to pass through the gates.

As one of the 24 Bible Students, she was transferred to St. Lambrecht in May 1943. She wrote the following about this 'SS labour camp':

'Sometimes there too we had the opportunity of speaking about the truth to people; although we had to be very careful that the female guard did not notice. We had enough food there to keep us from starvation, but then we [had to] spend long hours doing very heavy work. We had a Bible and could strengthen ourselves daily by God's Word. A few persons there studied with us almost daily, and we sang songs. [...] We were grateful to Jehovah and joyful about the privilege he gave us.'⁴⁵³



Paula Wölfle, presumably after liberation

After her liberation from the concentration camp in May 1945, Paula Wölfle tried to spread the teachings of the Bible Students on her journey back to Poland. She used her time in the several assembly camps for *Displaced Persons* to 'give a witness'.

In September 1945 she finally arrived in her birthplace Łódź, which in the meantime had acquired a sad reputation. Her mother had died in 1942, and Paula's blind sister, Alma, had since then been looked after by friends. Paula did her best to provide for herself and Alma. Due to her bad health caused by the living conditions in the concentration camps, she was only fit to do 'physically light work'. In addition, she decided to join the ranks of the so-called pioneers in order to spread the religious teachings.

In 1950 Jehovah's Witnesses were once again banned in Poland and Paula was arrested. She was held in custody for nine months; her health deteriorated visibly.

After being released, Paula's physical condition was so bad that she had to give up the preaching work.

The last few lines of her biography summarise her life attitude by which she was able to endure persecution: 'Truly thankful to Jehovah, I can look back on the past few years and even now I can use my time in his service knowing that Jehovah will help me to endure and be faithful to the end.'⁴⁵⁴

9 Trauma from the Past

Views on Traumatisation Resulting from Concentrations Camps

Following the life stories of the female Jehovah's Witnesses, who were forced to spend two years of their lives in St. Lambrecht concentration camp, this chapter will cover the development of the severe mental and physical pain brought about by incarceration in the camp. Looking back on the history of the concept of trauma, an attempt will be made to give an up-to-date definition of the term. After that, the theory about trauma resulting from concentration camp imprisonment will be addressed and I will link this to my own study in the next chapter.

Historical Review

In psychology, the concept of 'trauma' has already been recognised for more than 100 years. In the middle of the 19th century, neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot turned to psychologically traumatised patients and treated them with hypnosis, amongst these patients were rape victims.⁴⁵⁵ Moreover, Charcot saw the memory of the traumatic event and not the traumatic experience itself as being the main pathogenic factor.⁴⁵⁶

The concept of 'trauma' is still widely associated with the Viennese neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud. Freud's trauma theory begins with the hypothesis that traumatic events are based on an internal conflict between sexual desires and the social moral code. In 1895, Freud developed a trauma theory in the 'Studies on hysteria' wherein he explained the concept of passion.⁴⁵⁷

After the war in Vietnam, when medicine and psychology were increasingly confronted with pathogenic problems of soldiers suffering from psychosomatic complaints caused by trauma, the term 'hysteria',⁴⁵⁸ that had often been used in diagnoses, was abandoned. From then on, the effects of a traumatic incident were considered as being a post-traumatic stress disorder.⁴⁵⁹ The term 'trauma' had formerly been used as a link between the diagnostic concept 'hysteria' and the phenomenon 'reminiscence'. In more recent times, the concept 'post-traumatic stress disorder' indicates: the effect of, and often

only later recurring, reactions to an overwhelming experience, for example hallucinations, thoughts, or dreams. Cathy Caruth views being traumatised as meaning 'being obsessed by an image or event'.⁴⁶⁰

The Concept of Trauma

The meaning of the term derived from the Greek can be translated as 'injury' or 'wound'.⁴⁶¹ Psychological traumas describe an individual's painful experience, often connected with a permanent change in one's perception of the surroundings. Trauma is a violent infringement of the psychological structure of the individual, combined with an overwhelming feeling of consternation and helplessness. The available psychosocial flexibility of the individual is disabled by the trauma.⁴⁶²

Because of the trauma, the person experiences a reality they are unable to control. Dominant elements of traumas are helplessness, loss of control and fear of the threat of extermination: emotions that deprive people of their sense of security.⁴⁶³ From a scientific point of view, psychological traumas are about the loss of the possibility of satisfying your needs. In attempting to satisfy those needs, distressing fears and aggression arise. If that does not happen, defence mechanisms⁴⁶⁴ of the Ego structure⁴⁶⁵ will be enabled in order to abandon the need for this satisfaction.⁴⁶⁶ These defence mechanisms are methods the Ego uses to counteract the demands of the Id,⁴⁶⁷ thus avoiding conflicts with the Superego and reality.⁴⁶⁸ The Ego structure has several defence mechanisms that are formed in specific development stages during childhood. The foremost of these are: repression, denial, fantasy, rationalisation, primal repression, identification, regression, reaction formation, isolation, introjection, projection, displacement, and sublimation.⁴⁶⁹

Victims of traumatic experiences may develop a post-traumatic stress disorder. Such persons develop a delayed stress reaction which always recurs and remains latently present, long after the traumatic event. They experience emotional numbness in the face of common events, that may be accompanied by a sense of alienation. The side effects may be intensified because of the emotional pain of the reaction to the trauma. These could include sleep problems, survivors' guilt, concentration problems, and heightened startle reactions. The clinical symptoms outlined here may be understood to be conditioned responses to life-threatening impulses.⁴⁷⁰

The Psychoanalytical View of Traumas Arising from Incarceration in a Concentration Camp

The specific damage to the individual's psychological structure, caused by stress during incarceration in a concentration camp, stems from the historical-biographical dimension – from the subjective experience of the traumatic occurrence.⁴⁷¹ In other words, the cause of the trauma ensues from those involved having been subjected to a past situation. Damage to an individual does not arise from incidental abuse, but from a continuous succession of traumatic events typical of the situation in a concentration camp.

Through what has happened to them in concentration camps, a 'realistic psychotic cosmos' ensues,⁴⁷² a world view mainly characterised by the traumatic experiences undergone.

There are many factors which jointly form the traumatic circumstances in concentration camps. Such as:

'being torn away from the familiar socio-cultural environment and the family structure; the permanent fear of being separated from close relatives; facing torture and murder; the always powerless expectation of one's own violent death (by "selection", torture, starvation, forced labour, being subjected to so-called medical experiments, etc.); curbing any initiative, through barbaric re-infantilising; the de-individualisation (by giving persons a number and confiscating all personal possessions); the destruction of private lives and the removal of shame-barriers; systematically disabling the principle of causality (there was no reason given for whatever happened, it was inexplicable); depriving prisoners of the sense of time (there were no clocks and no calendar) thus rendering it impossible to bring structure into their lives; the constant disillusionment and humiliation of a minority destined for destruction.'⁴⁷³

When a trauma cosmos made up of all these elements develops, having an impact on all concerned, this is also referred to as 'cumulative traumatisation' of the victims.⁴⁷⁴

Alfred Lorenzer emphasised that a key feature of the Nazi regime was aimed at destruction of the victim's individuality. The concentration camp structure caused an

interruption of continuity of life for those involved, comparable to a broken identity. Survival hope of the victims was then reduced by the essential artificial infantilisation of the Ego,⁴⁷⁵ that signifies regression. This Ego defence mechanism brings the danger of causing the 'Muselmann syndrome', when regression advances to the oral stage. Total lethargy follows with no will to carry on so that even survival is endangered.

Incarceration in a concentration camp causes traumatisation that permanently destroys the narcissistic libido traits.⁴⁷⁶ This can lead to the disappearance of all Ego and Object occupation and is tantamount to death for the individual.⁴⁷⁷

Stages of Traumatisation

A specific feature of traumatisation through the Nazi concentration camp system is the fact that the total social system – both state and society – took on the role of persecutor.⁴⁷⁸ The persecution was not limited to just a few individuals, but was aimed at the whole group, in our case, at Jehovah's Witnesses as a minority group.

This period of persecution must therefore be perceived as being the first traumatisation period.⁴⁷⁹ Removal of protection of rights signalled the beginning of the persecution, along with the increasingly strong measures taken against Jehovah's Witnesses in the areas where the Nazi powers held influence. Thereby the victims experienced fear that was connected to the attack on the family's integrity and its economic existence. The sudden disappearance of family members and friends and the increase in raids followed by deportation, invariably led to isolation from the familiar community. Familiar environments were dissolved.

Deportation first to the detention centre then to the concentration camp, was the start of the second stage. A loss of rights follows, resulting eventually in imminent life-threatening danger in the concentration camp.⁴⁸⁰

Cohen and Ahearn explained their view of the various stages⁴⁸¹ of the reactions of persons to the traumatic situation in the concentration camp, which I will outline below.

The first stage is characterised by shock, confusion, and psychological desensitisation. It is impossible to understand the full extent of the traumatic experience. Frankl⁴⁸² describes this first stage in the concentration camp as *Aufnahmeschock* (shock of

admission).⁴⁸³ The acute psychophysiological reaction is characterised by a rise in nervous tension: the body reacts with a fight-or-flight response. This triggers a complex biochemical-electrical state of distress, that includes heart palpitations, raised blood pressure or trembling. The psychological state of those concerned is reflected in fits of crying and screaming as well as in sleeping disorders.⁴⁸⁴ This increased activity of the sympathetic nervous system of the individual in a concentration camp, cannot be sufficiently reduced in a normal way, and therefore must find another outlet for subduing the state of acute anxiety.

In this stadium, an emotional bluntness leading to relative apathy will follow the psychophysiological state of acute anxiety. Besides which, the body will try to slow down activity of the parasympathetic nervous system.

A tonic immobility, powerlessness and dissociation are symptoms of total parasympathetic control.⁴⁸⁵ The person incarcerated in a concentration camp is limited in not only his physical range, but also in his emotional range. A traumatic curbing of emotions can lead to a state of 'emotional deafness'.⁴⁸⁶ According to Frankl, that is the equivalent of an emotional death.

'An emotional death of normal emotions is then progressive. At first the prisoner will avert his eyes when forced to line up to watch the punishment of any particular group. He cannot yet bear the sight of people [...] being sadistically tormented. [...] [The prisoner who had passed into the next stage of his psychological changes—author's note] no longer averts his eyes. Apathetic, his feelings numbed, he can watch unmoved. [...] The tortured, the sick, the dying, the dead — all of this becomes such a commonplace sight that, after a few weeks of life in the camp, it no longer causes him distress.'⁴⁸⁷

The apathy, or becoming indifferent, is a necessary protection mechanism for the psyche, hiding reality in the emotional dimension. The individual has a feeling of emptiness, as if they are dead.

This phase is followed by 'automatic action' – the individual's attempt to react to the event. Fixed behaviour patterns take place at a sub-conscious level. There may be no memory of the experiences undergone in this phase.⁴⁸⁸ Under this continuous psychological

strain marked by deprivation, hunger and sickness, the individual tries first and foremost to satisfy his so-called instinctive needs, such as hunger.

The survival issue leads to a radical lowering of the values of all else besides meeting these innate needs. Frankl calls this automatic behaviour, aimed at self-preservation and the related disappearance of higher interests, 'the cultural hibernation of camp life'.⁴⁸⁹

In the third phase, which is accompanied by the feeling of having mastered something, the trauma victim often feels he is running out of energy. This includes disillusionment, becoming emotionally aware of the terrible event.

Victor Frankl expresses this emotional disillusionment that camp prisoners experience, as follows:

'One's inner life in the concentration camp degenerates to [...] a retrospective existence, because one must face a fate that cannot be changed. [...] The tendency to return to the past [...] contributes to the senselessness of the present with all its atrocities. [...] Totally losing one's sense of reality, which is consistent with the elementary way of life of the camp prisoner, one is tempted to let oneself go completely – because everything is meaningless anyway.'⁴⁹⁰

In the last stage the victims try to deal with the changes caused by the traumatic occurrence, and they attempt to reorganise themselves and their lives.⁴⁹¹ Although this is about the period after their liberation, it does not mean that traumatising has ended. According to Keilson, many survivors refer to this stage as the harshest period in their life: you become acutely aware of the level of persecution and the traumatic experiences suffered. Staying in the Displaced Persons Camps led to further traumatising. Only material care was given, and no one took the emotional needs of the victims into account.

The extreme hardship in the concentration camp is characterised by the fundamental denial of the basic needs of the person.⁴⁹²

Survival Strategies During Acute Traumatization

It must be stated first and foremost that, with all that is said here, in the end the survival of the individual prisoner in a concentration camp is merely a question of coincidence. Still, it does seem that certain behaviours have been conducive to survival. Quindeau views the development of this type of behaviour patterns as so-called 'survival strategies'.⁴⁹³

Attempting to see a meaning behind persecution and repression, can be viewed as such a strategy. That is specifically true of Jehovah's Witnesses as a group, where the individual person is part of a larger religious collective.

Judith Kestenbergl particularly emphasises the maintenance of primary narcissism (love of one's own ego) as being of great importance to surviving incarceration in a concentration camp. Memories of the period prior to persecution and arrest are of great significance due to the stabilizing influence on the narcissistic economy.⁴⁹⁴ These 'good memories' have the power to prevent a narcissistic emptiness, despite the amount of destruction of object relations. The Bible Students in particular, managed to create alternatives for the religious community in an amazing way, which made it possible to have a feeling of togetherness and a sense of belonging within the group. Even under the saddest of conditions imaginable, the female Jehovah's Witnesses could derive something meaningful from the situation, by offering mutual assistance, or doing 'good deeds', according to the Christian faith. In this manner, successfully preventing the threat of narcissistic emptiness.

Aggression, channelled outward in the form of work and activity, has likewise contributed to reinforcing the survival instinct.⁴⁹⁵ It was the Bible Students, who took on each task – as long as it was not in conflict with their faith – and carried out their work diligently, and who were known for their 'zealous devotion to duty'. At this point I recall the description Margarete Buber-Neumann gave about cleaning the model barracks in the women's concentration camp at Ravensbrück. Neumann outlines the image of the Witnesses venting their emotions by their furious cleaning efforts. This activity provided an outward target for unleashing their aggression.

In my view, the most significant survival strategy is in maintaining social relationships. The Nazi terror, which was bent on isolation and destruction of the interpersonal trust in relationships, met with collective resistance from the religious community of Jehovah's Witnesses. The female Bible Students upheld friendly consideration

for each other, based on their communal faith, despite the totally inhumane social conditions in the concentration camp. Psychological and physical assistance in various ways created a social safety net that provided a relatively safe shelter for those most seriously threatened – inasmuch as one can speak of safety in connection with camp imprisonment.

Defence mechanisms, such as regression, identifying with the aggressor, fantasising or primal repression during the acute trauma phase, should not be considered from a non-historical perspective. It is essential that the ‘trauma content’ represents the historic occurrence that the person reacts to with specific defence mechanisms. The kind of defence used, will of course depend on the state of the Ego-development and on the personal life history of the individual. By which I mean that the age and life course – thus also the so-called constitution of the individual – play an important role when calling on the defence mechanisms and therefore also on the specific survival strategies. Assuming, just as Erikson⁴⁹⁶ does, that personality development does not end with adolescence, but carries on through various stages in adulthood, then traumatic experiences will influence development stages at that moment. So, the trauma may negatively influence the personality development related to the specific stage of the development goal. My research covered an age group of women between 20 and 55 years old, imprisoned in the concentration camp at St. Lambrecht. According to Erikson’s personality development model, this would affect the development of intimacy, creativity, and integrity of this age group. He considers that the damage caused by trauma will hinder these competencies, leading to a pathological development of isolation, stagnation, and despair. This is therefore detrimental to the self-esteem and the life plans of traumatised persons.

Aleida Assmann suggests that the traumatic damage to Holocaust victims results in the inability to convert the trauma experience into rescue symbols. Trauma and symbol are mutually exclusive.⁴⁹⁷ In other words, the significance of the trauma cannot be abstracted and given a place by endowing a specific value to the symbol. Both Assmann and Lyotard indicate that the trauma records the historical memory, although there is no recollection of this, and it is ‘fixed in the shadows of consciousness as a latent presence’.⁴⁹⁸ Experiences that never got the status of memorable symbols, can also never be forgotten.

The Theory of Trauma

Looking at trauma from a psycho-analytical viewpoint, I refer to Dori Laub, who explains serious traumatising of Holocaust survivors by Freud's death instinct theory.

Freud developed the concept of death instinct by the trauma experiences of survivors of World War I. Such behaviour – namely the tendency of trauma victims to repeat painful traumatic experiences – is contrary to the expectations of the pleasure principle. Freud believed that death is the goal of life. The death instinct was seen by Freud in the aggression and self-destructive behaviour of continually recalling the trauma experience, which would block memories of the actual trauma. Freud also localised the trauma in negative therapeutic reactions, such as repression, by which the remembrance and knowledge of the trauma are rejected; also, in traumatic dreams, wherein an unknown masked memory attempts to penetrate through a different state of consciousness.

In this context, Laub interpreted the defence mechanisms of denial, dissociation, splitting and depersonalisation as being derivatives of the death instinct. Laub views the trauma as activation of the death instinct that takes place at an individual and intergenerational level.⁴⁹⁹

The trauma suffered affects or destroys the survivor's ability to bear witness to his experience.

'The state of trauma is the reaction to occurrences that overwhelm the individual and render him helpless. One is subjected to such occurrences, but they are not experienced as part of the Ego [*italics added by author*], so are not considered suitable for the expected growth and preservation of a productive personality. If one survives the state of trauma [...], the result will be seen in an absence of structure and representative experience in the Ego area. This absence is the primal repression.'⁵⁰⁰

In other words, traumatised persons cannot assimilate the overwhelming experience and thus cannot remember it. By analogy to Freud's death instinct, which focuses on a return to an inorganic world, the trauma demands an emptiness and destruction and leaves a lack of structure behind in the psyche, characterised by the absence of images.⁵⁰¹ According to

literary scholar Cathy Caruth, the trauma syndrome exists only in the framework of perception, as at the time of traumatising the event was undergone in unawareness and therefore could not be fully experienced.⁵⁰²

The trauma thus prevents psychological structure in organizing one's experiences. Laub puts this down to the 'silent activity of the death instinct'.⁵⁰³

Traumas are characterised primarily by the lack of empathic connection during traumatising. In consequence, there can be no empathic relationship formed with oneself. This failure will lead to feelings of detachment and the breakdown or termination of the life story. This will result in loss of representation and coherence as well as loss of the ability to communicate both internally and externally due to the destruction of the responsive Self.

A psychological process that will permanently block awareness is triggered by the traumatic experience, obstructing access to any knowledge of the 'trauma content'. The real power of the death instinct is clearly perceived in 'suppressed awareness', according to Laub. Furthermore, this psychoanalyst developed the 'concept of the empty circle' in which he defends the idea that the origin of the trauma – I call it the trauma-content experience – is preserved in the psyche. An empty circle experience is a state of inner aimlessness as the result of Ego-regression caused by the death instinct.⁵⁰⁴ This aimlessness signifies the destruction of the innermost presence of the empathic bond. The experience terrifies the person involved. To cushion this 'abyss of horror'⁵⁰⁵ the psyche will attempt to employ various defence mechanisms, that – however conflicting this may be – are still easier to bear than the loss of the inner dyad.

Features of Trauma

Dori Laub recounts four features of the historical trauma. These, to my mind, are essential, because Laub specifically points to the social significance when he talks about the effects of crossing generation boundaries as being one of the characteristics of traumas. Werner Bohleber is also convinced that collective traumatising causes specific generation conflicts and types of identification in following generations.⁵⁰⁶

As already explained, trauma means the destruction of form and psychological structure. This is manifest in 'not knowing' about the trauma, an obstinate refusal to

remember their dissociative experience. It is therefore the traumatising itself that rules out knowing about the trauma.

The psychological trauma also displays a vague, non-historical presence. In this way there are no boundaries of location, space or time. Due to there being no beginning and no end to the trauma, it tends to extend to several generations.

Traumas thus form the collective inner representation of reality of several generations. The traumatised person passes on the unconscious structure principle to the next generation, which then assimilates it.

Those who are involved in historical trauma are also affected. Not only the trauma victims, but also perpetrators and witnesses are affected by the historical event or period, albeit in a different manner.⁵⁰⁷

Laub considers that the core of the trauma is based on a total failure of human empathy. By experiencing a 'Self' that is not responsible for the primary needs of others, the intra-psychological system of values for oneself and the other person, disappears. The disjointed communication that follows such an experience, diminishes the victims' ability to keep their integrity and their ability for selfreflection.⁵⁰⁸

Processing a Trauma – Effect of Trauma in the Long-term

The psychological trauma causes a breach in the victim's life. The process of traumatising cannot be reversed. The individual psychological condition prior to the traumatic event can never be regained. I assume that traumas leave tracks that cannot be eliminated and therefore force that person to learn to live with the effects.

The scope of a trauma depends not only on how severe the event was – which in the case of concentration camp experience is extreme – but depends also on the constitutional condition of any previous trauma and on the afflicted person's development phase.⁵⁰⁹

Recovery from a trauma, which according to me can never be completely achieved, is particularly dependent on the reaction of the social surroundings. Concentration camp survivors tell us that empathy for their traumatic experiences is supportive of their ability to cope with life. Dismissive and hostile social behaviour on the other hand was just rubbing salt into the victim's wound and heightened their mistrust of reality.⁵¹⁰ After liberation from

the concentration camp, especially those persecuted under the Nazi regime who were refused acknowledgement as victims of harsh state violence, again suffered from socially isolating experiences. This is therefore a double trauma, further complicating integration after an ordeal, possibly even rendering integration impossible. The more difficulty experienced in coping with post trauma events, the more often psychological disorders⁵¹¹ are observed in those affected.

The long-term effects of traumas affect cognition, feeling and behaviour as well as various physical functions. Michiaki Horie, the Canadian psychiatrist and psychotherapist, has been working on posttraumatic disorders in the above-mentioned areas. According to him, psychological traumas affect cognition. An inability to remember the trauma, being unable to identify it, must be given specific mention here. Moreover, Horie describes the more frequent occurrence of so-called obsessive thinking. Thereby specific ideas connected with the traumatic event pervade awareness and cannot be dislodged. These obsessive thoughts lead to fixation of the traumatic experience that is always on the victim's mind. Obsessive thoughts can also be expressed in perfectionism. Confidence in the present world order is shaken and due to this, those afflicted will try to achieve stability by totally focusing on methodical conduct.⁵¹² Endeavouring to achieve perfection is an attempt to forge a psychological structure.

Another effect of trauma is the emotional regulation disorder, manifested by extreme nervousness of those affected. Other symptoms of this dysregulation are chronic fears, inner tension, and panic attacks.⁵¹³ This is caused by increased levels of aggression, channelled sometimes into uncontrolled screaming. If the aggression cannot be deflated, it will turn into depression.

When trust in the social world is shaken, the trauma will change the self-awareness and the view you have of yourself. This shaken view of social order causes an often-perceived inability to trust and adapt to new situations. Distrust distorts your self-concept and how you view others. This influences the mother-child relationship – supposing the traumatised survivor can start a family.

Symptoms of trauma through concentration camp incarceration are deeply rooted feelings of guilt, where the cause is unidentified, or a feeling of guilt at having survived.

Cognitive impairments in the emotional regulation system will inevitably lead to changes in behaviour and body functions. Substance abuse in traumatised people is to be interpreted as an attempt to influence the emotional instability. Sedatives are usually used for this purpose.⁵¹⁴

Trauma induced somatogenic dysfunctions are noticeable in conversion reactions of various body parts. The psychosomatic complaints are often problems with the digestive tract and in the form of therapy-resistant back pains and headaches.⁵¹⁵ By choosing a body part, the trauma finds a specific physical outlet, because identification of the trauma event is impossible.

Biochemical Model Explaining Trauma Process

Because of the ensuing specific physiological condition, the physical change in the human organism must be determined by a biochemical explanation. This model will show how trauma effects can be understood from a biological viewpoint. In addition, it provides a possible explanation for permanent psycho-physical damage to the organism.

The trauma experience causes acute stress, in turn triggering a specific hormonal reaction in the human body.

Large amounts of neurotransmitters, especially noradrenaline, dopamine and serotonin are thereby poured out from the presynaptic nerve endings into the postsynaptic cleft. The postsynaptic nerve is thereby over-stimulated. After the first sympathetic reaction, the body reacts with inhibition. Due to the increased production of neurotransmitters, a shortage of neurotransmitters develops, while the emptied presynaptic nerve endings cannot keep up with production. On the other hand, there is then an increase in the acetylcholine level. The next development shows a lack of drive and feelings of joylessness. This second-phase switch to a parasympathetic nervous system is characteristic for a dissociative condition. When the presynaptic nerve ending is emptied, the postsynaptic nervous system responds with a reactive sensitivity. The result is then a hypersensitivity of the locus coeruleus.⁵¹⁶ This increase of activity in the locus coeruleus then raises the amount of noradrenaline, that is manifest in extreme nervousness and emotional outbursts. If hypersensitivity of the noradrenaline is present in the nerve fibres between the locus

coeruleus, the hippocampus⁵¹⁷ and the corpus amygdaloideum,⁵¹⁸ then the existing memory images will become obsessive. So-called flashbacks will occur.⁵¹⁹

In addition, every trauma causes an increase in the endorphin level, due to the hormones released from the pituitary gland trying to counteract the stress. The increase in the endorphin level causes not only a numbing of physical pain. It will also affect sensory perception through the effects of the body's own opiates.⁵²⁰ That explains the emotional dissociation and the numbness as well as the feeling of emptiness during the traumatic event.

Time and again in the post traumatic phase, a surge of memories may arise – flashbacks or nightmares, that lead to a reaction in the sympathetic nervous system. The trauma is experienced repeatedly in such situations. The biological cause of this is the abovementioned hypersensitivity of the locus coeruleus and its increased activity.⁵²¹

10 Results

This last chapter will connect the approaches developed in the preceding chapters. To begin with, a summary of the historical information about St. Lambrecht women's concentration camp is given. Then the psychological situation during incarceration in St. Lambrecht and in the main camp at Ravensbrück will be discussed, as well as the psychological and physical impact on the imprisoned women, chiefly extracted from the descriptive biographical interviews. Besides getting answers to the investigative questions, the psychological focus was on the damage to the prisoners' physique and their psyche. Therefore, the results must be compared with the previous chapter's description of the psychoanalytical theories about trauma caused by incarceration in a concentration camp. In conclusion it will be made clear from a psychoanalytical viewpoint whether the thesis about the victims maintaining their spiritual and moral integrity can be verified or whether this must be put into perspective or proved false.⁵²²

Establishment of the concentration camp for women in St. Lambrecht in mid-1943 took place in a time period in which the SS started to take a greater interest in the economic use of 'human capital' from their concentration camps. The reasons for transferring a small group of female prisoners to a place where there was already a concentration camp for men, were mainly based on the increased need for so-called typical women's work to be carried out by the female prisoners. By having women doing kitchen work, cleaning jobs, gardening and agricultural and forestry jobs, full use could be made of the labour force of male prisoners for so-called men's work, construction jobs in the village of Eben, the Verwalter's villa, or for constructing the sewage system. That was the reason that the entire male prison group, without exception all craftsmen, was transferred from Mauthausen to the sub camp St. Lambrecht and then put to work according to their profession. Setting up the concentration camp for women meant that the male prisoners were withdrawn from work that was physically less taxing and had less access to jobs which provided better food, such as in the kitchen or gardening.

There were often guests in the monastery, which could be a further explanation for the request for female prisoners, seeing that the feminine qualities of greater social skills and greater cleanliness are typically attributed to women. The reason for choosing this persecuted religious group was that the SS perceived the female Bible Students' qualities of being diligent, willing and trustworthy labourers, as long as there were no conflicts of faith connected to the work involved. That was never the case in St. Lambrecht, because the women were never put to work in the nearby dynamite factory. The labour of the Jehovah's Witnesses served to help Verwalter Hubert Erhart to achieve his ambitious plans. The SS estate already had barred rooms, making it quick and easy to set up accommodation for a small group of female prisoners, separated from the concentration camp for men.

The SS already had a huge staff shortage by 1943. That is probably one of the reasons for choosing the group of Bible Students, who needed only very little guarding. Guard duty was not considered necessary, and the presence of a female SS guard was only a formality. None of the Bible Students would plan to escape – their reputation was well-known.

Based on the above, it is clear that the concentration camp for women served only economic interests. Because of the importance of their work the female Bible Students received relatively better treatment even though they were exploited. In the final years of the war, the labour potential of prisoners also decreased noticeably as a result of the extermination program of the Nazi camp system. The 'trustworthy female Bible Students' were less and less available as forced labour. This was clear from the request for more female prisoners in 1944, which was apparently rejected, because there were no more additions to this group of prisoners.

The defensive position of the SS in St. Lambrecht regarding the return of sick prisoners to the main camp, probably arose from their wish to maintain their allotted number of prisoners. A decrease in the number of prisoners by transporting them back to the main camp, with no hope of replacements, had evidently to be prevented. This could well be the explanation as to why the camp doctor and the local doctor in the village of St. Lambrecht were called in to attend to the sick Bible Students. The desire for a quick recovery of the sick female prisoners is fully explained by the law of logic behind an exploitative forced labour system.

Economic exploitation was obviously given priority in the women's concentration camp. The importance of a labour force and the lack of this specifically female 'reservoir of prisoner labour', by which the economic interests were served and the subsequent increase of the SS Standartenführer Hubert Erhart's power having been achieved, explains the better living conditions in comparison with the main camp in Ravensbrück or Mauthausen. Better care as regards nutrition, treatment or medical aid was not based on a more humane mindset of the SS staff but was due to the economic aims of the camp leadership.

The homogeneity of the group of prisoners, being exclusively Jehovah's Witnesses, had a positive effect on the mental and moral state of the individual women. All concerned described the atmosphere within the group as being 'pleasant' and 'relaxed'. The companionable sense of solidarity of belonging to an independent entity with set standards, contributed to the social development of character. Separation within the group was unnecessary as none of the female prisoners had been persecuted by the Nazis for any other reason, for instance political reasons. Bible Students were therefore not confronted with summons to participate in political resistance. Thus, it was necessary only to establish boundaries towards the outside world, in the form of resistance to the oppression of the Nazi regime. Particularly in St. Lambrecht concentration camp, but also in Ravensbrück women's concentration, the Bible Students succeeded in committing active opposition, such as by their efforts to convert the civilian staff working in the kitchen. The female Jehovah's Witnesses did not tolerate abuse by the exploitative SS for activities that would go against their convictions, such as any war support efforts. The prisoner's group refusing to do work such as 'angora rabbit breeding' or in the 'vegetable garden' in Ravensbrück resulted in severe punishment, but even this could not daunt these women in their conviction. Their opposition to the Nazi regime was also shown by their smuggling Bibles and religious literature into both concentration camps. While relocating a vast library on the SS estate, they stole several Bibles and hid them in the camp⁵²³ to be used on their free days for their religious book study.

Jehovah's Witnesses in St. Lambrecht even succeeded in obtaining provisions for celebrating the so-called Memorial.⁵²⁴ They had violated the rule forbidding contact with the local population and were able to determine the correct date⁵²⁵ and managed to get the necessary provisions.

Apparently, there was no great rivalry within the group by the one having more agreeable work than the other. The Bible Students carrying out the more agreeable tasks – mostly work indoors – smuggled food for the others into the camp, thereby running the huge risk of being punished.

The Bible Students never took on prison jobs such as that of ‘block senior’. They opposed every attempt of the Nazis to use them as an instrument for the advancement of the concentration camp system.

On issues of faith the members of this group of prisoners relied on the opinion of two sisters in the faith who were recognised as being so-called anointed ones. When possible, these anointed sisters were relieved of their duties by the other group members. That is to say, the other Bible Students did their work when the opportunity arose. The ‘anointed’ could thus take time to put their interpretation of the Bible down in writing.⁵²⁶ By committing these words to paper, important beliefs were preserved so that the entire group was fortified and provided with ‘spiritual food’.

The incarcerated Jehovah’s Witnesses were able to uphold their spiritual and moral integrity because they were in a position to live up to the requirements of their faith and could thereby satisfy the goals of the Superego. The assumption is thus established that the spiritual and moral integrity were maintained as a stabilising factor. At the same time, the Bible Students could not evade the psychological damage inflicted by the camp experiences. Likewise, the physical damage is a reminder of the suffering and the undeniable trait of having been victims of the Nazi regime.

The stages of trauma (Keilson) began for the female Jehovah’s Witnesses with persecution and arrest by the Gestapo or by those in collaboration with the Nazi regime in areas occupied by Hitler’s Germany. These women had been wrested from their families and their daily social activities. The situation arose where the victims, if they wished to remain true to their faith, were helplessly at the mercy of their oppressors. Most of the Bible Students arrested had been in several prisons during their incarceration and had been subjected to various methods of interrogation designed to break the faith of these women in their

religious conviction. The conditions in the prisons, often typified by the appalling hygiene and scanty food rations,⁵²⁷ along with the transport to concentration camps, left an indelible mark on the victims' psyche. 'To be transported like cattle in an open wagon'⁵²⁸ is dehumanising and degrading for the victims, causing a permanent breach of identity with the Ego. Physical damage showed up plainly in these first stages of traumatising. The victims' high stress level arising from the inability to adjust psychosocially to the period of incarceration, led to an immunobiological weakening of the physique that, in addition to an inadequate diet, thus lowered resistance to infectious diseases.

All former camp prisoners described the Aufnahmeschock (Frankl) upon entering the concentration camp at Ravensbrück. At that moment, if it had not already happened, this intimidating experience of an inconceivable new life situation destroyed all uniqueness necessary for individualism. The concentration camp system humiliated new prisoners by forcing them to undress for disinfection in front of the male SS guards who openly watched and inspected them. Having to stand naked in front of strange men with power over the victims, is a demonstration of male oppression of all that is human and feminine and was perceived as a perplexing violation of the rules of moral boundaries.

These women told of crying fits and sleep disorders which are symptoms of the heightened activation of the sympathetic nervous system due to their incarceration at Ravensbrück. The group of victims also told me about the traumatic circumstances of being starved, the hardship of forced labour, constantly expecting one's own death or of losing friends by 'selection' or by torture. When Sophie Hemmink was transported to Auschwitz to die in a gas chamber, the conviction of the Bible Students, that the Other Person must have humane feelings, was shattered. By this loss, one member of the group fell into a severe depression, that did not lift in St. Lambrecht concentration camp.

The victims of camp Ravensbrück were exposed to the 'realistic psychotic cosmos' that became the very essence of the traumatic experiences. The harsh punishment of 'the bunker' made any attachment to human existence seem unreal. The goal was to destroy the identity of the individual.

That the efforts of the Nazis against the group of Bible Students proved futile, can be attributed to their survival strategy. In the first place, the meaning of suffering individually

was exclusively related to their religious conviction, for which the Jehovah Witnesses were willing to give their life.

Furthermore, the mindset of being part of a social group that shared the above-mentioned values, provided mutual support and a sense of security and solidarity. The collective identity, marked by a specific triangle, that the female prisoners derived from being part of the group of Bible Students, could not be destroyed by the concentration camp system.

Their communal faith also made it possible to develop friendships during incarceration, because the faith served as a basis for trust in personal relationships. Developing a social network prevented destruction of the inner bond. Through the integrity and mutual assistance shown by others in the faith, their confidence in the religious collective was strengthened. One example was when the Jehovah's Witnesses in Ravensbrück took the huge risk of smuggling adequate food to their sister in the faith, who was in the hospital barrack with typhoid. By doing so, they saved her life. Finding that this action actually worked, seeing what they had accomplished, must have prevented feelings of being completely helpless.

The group I researched will have experienced a certain amount of psycho-emotional demoralisation – in response to the increase of sympathetic activity of the nervous system – to have been able to withstand the persistent mental and physical strain of hunger, exploitative labour and sickness. The state of complete indifference and sheer apathy described by Viktor Frankl, seems not to have occurred in the group of women in my research. In my view, this is explained by the individual purpose in life, which raised the camp experiences to a trial of faith.

The Bible Students could prevent the narcissistic emptiness (total loss of self-love) in two ways. Firstly, there was the stabilizing memory of good experience prior to the period of persecution and repression. Self-love was then also retained through object binding by staying in touch with their sisters in the faith. This also prevented the destruction of the inner Self.

Automatic actions that only serve to satisfy primitive needs were not developed, as maintaining their social relationships prevented this and they took care that their behaviour was meaningful. The Jehovah's Witnesses were also not overcome by 'cultural hibernation'.

Of all the various groups of prisoners, they had the most dynamic cultural perception by their being active members of their faith. By their acts of faith, they could ward off the destruction of their identity that the Nazis aimed for. As has already been established, they could preserve their spiritual and moral integrity because they managed to meet the demands of a psychological structure, that of the Super Ego.

On the other hand, the demands of the Ego and the Id had to be drastically blocked, because it was impossible to satisfy these demands within the camp system. The Jehovah's Witnesses preserved the possibility of getting rid of suppressed aggression – that represents the driving force of the Id structure – by hard work, in a manner socially acceptable to the group. One example of this was their impeccable cleaning of the model barrack. That had a positive effect on the structure of the psyche. This psychological fact may have escaped the notice of the Nazi powers. At any rate, they could not properly psychologically interpret the disciplined actions of the female Jehovah's Witnesses in this respect.

Gender specific needs obviously went unfulfilled under the camp system and moreover, could not be sufficiently sublimated. This was apparent in the development of amenorrhoea,⁵²⁹ whereby the body reacts pathophysiologically to the persistent psychological strain. Apparently, conditions improved in St. Lambrecht concentration camp. The victims tell of their menstruation periods returning while imprisoned there.

The executions that took place in the roll call area at Ravensbrück, are the trauma experiences that remain engraved in the memories of those who were forced to attend them. In this case, we are talking about damage to the Ego structure. It was impossible for the witnesses of the murder of their fellow prisoners to react in any manner, for instance by undertaking any action or even just removing themselves from the confrontation (transfer of their own will). The individual is thereby robbed of the possibility of meeting the demands of the Ego, which adapts itself to the actual social environment. Such incidents could also disable the Ego's defence mechanisms and have a devastating effect on parts of the psychological structure.

The psychological trauma experienced by the Bible Students was likely worse at the women's concentration camp at Ravensbrück than at St. Lambrecht, as far as one can make a comparison here. In any event, the Jehovah's Witnesses destined for St. Lambrecht faced better living conditions – the reasons for this have been pointed out earlier. In St. Lambrecht

the women were allowed at least a little privacy through having their own beds and a personal space in a chest of drawers. Of essential importance was the increased predictability of the events at St. Lambrecht, which led to better living conditions. This resulted in the lessening of the psychological strain and stress, and in conjunction with this, the reactions of the vegetative nervous system also normalized.

The limited group size in the sub camp also proved to have a positive influence on the psychological state of the individual women. This made it possible for the women to get to know each other better and to build more intense relationships with new persons, which in turn helped keep narcissism (love of Self) in check and brought out their existing social competences.

I perceived the consequences of camp imprisonment at St. Lambrecht particularly in the physiological damage and injuries due to physical exploitation. The main goal at St. Lambrecht was to enforce the greatest amount of work while providing as little food as possible. Even though the quality and quantity of food was much better than that at Ravensbrück, still it was insufficient in amount and diversity for the women who performed physically hard labour. It is significant the oedema and the frequent recurrence of infectious diseases developed among these prisoners. This is attributed to the physical effects of the meagre diet. The immunosuppressive consequences of the stress of living in a camp may well be the cause of boils and tooth decay.

The third phase of trauma according to Keilson, applies to the living conditions in camp St. Lambrecht. This phase is characterised by using up the last available energy resources.

Just how deeply the camp structure is ingrained into an individual's life, is apparent from the change in behaviour affected by the trauma: for several days the Bible Students turned up for roll call, even after their liberation.⁵³⁰ This caught the attention of the cloister pharmacist, who could not sympathise with such behaviour. The pharmacist's anger relates to the voluntarily appearing for roll call after liberation. In consequence, this event has remained in the memories of those involved. According to Erikson, analogous to the development of identity theory, this collective behaviour could point to a stagnation. The Bible Students identified themselves with their role as prisoners even beyond liberation. The

traumatic experience caused a change in behaviour, because it would have been more logical to immediately cease any behaviour that had been enforced by the Nazi regime.

Liberation from camp imprisonment was seen by Jehovah's Witnesses as a triumph by their God over evil. Tolerating the inhumane circumstances was considered a trial of faith which they had overcome because they had remained loyal to their God as well as to their beliefs.

For that matter, liberation did not end the traumatic circumstances for the Bible Students. The journey back home, that occurred in several long stages, was typified by stopovers in Displaced Persons Camps. The Bible Students encountered humiliation there too, for example, by being examined for sexually transmitted diseases.⁵³¹ Diseases delayed the journey for some⁵³² and testifies to the bad state of health of the Jehovah's Witnesses after liberation from the camp.

The survivors of concentration camps Ravensbrück and St. Lambrecht interviewed by me, were also later diagnosed with the consequences of trauma, such as Horie describes for cognition, feelings, actions and physical functions. They make mention of nightmares, from which the victims awoke in panic with a pounding heart, inducing flashbacks. These are scenes from their time spent in Ravensbrück. They also mention frequently recurring thoughts about their time in the camp.

Increased tension, described as a 'too tightly wound up spring' or an 'alarm clock wound up too tightly',⁵³³ points to lasting damage to the Id structure. The urge to scream loudly is also caused by damage to part of the Id. It serves as a channel or outlet of the subconscious, cooped-up anger caused by the traumatic experience of camp life. Increased jumpiness and nervousness that have negatively influenced the rest of their lives, can also be attributed to the emotional regulation disorders caused by trauma.

The shaken social world order, that mainly originated at Ravensbrück camp, where the victims were subjected to an unpredictable social environment in the form of the Nazi machinery, also caused disorders of self-perception and of how other persons were viewed. These in turn influenced the bond between mother and child and caused the victims to feel unable to be a 'normal' mother after their camp experiences. This emotion seemed to be related to a pervasive sense of guilt that targeted their offspring. The survivors tried to put this feeling into words and explained that they wondered whether it had been better if their

children had never been born to a woman who had survived two prison camps. Thereby they expressed their inner aimlessness that is present as a feeling but cannot be reflected because it hinders awareness.

The victims also report somatic symptoms in different parts of the body, which are also related to the trauma due to the camp experiences.

The Dutch fellow-survivors visited each other frequently. Most of them, as well as the Belgian, spent several vacations in the area of St. Lambrecht.

In this respect, in accordance with Freud, we can speak of an activation of the death instinct that repeatedly compelled the victims to visit the place of their trauma and to seek contact with fellow survivors. Seeking their presence in order to relive the identity of a camp prisoner, stems from a subconscious attempt to explain and process the trauma suffered. This aspect of the social identity is also evident in the documents that were kept from the time spent in the camp or, for example, still using a sewing kit that was made in camp St. Lambrecht. These things were integrated as a reminder of this most stressful time of their lives.

In conclusion we can say that the Bible Students of camp St. Lambrecht were first of all given support by their religious community when they were rebuilding their lives after returning to their home country. In particular, they received social help from those who shared their religious norms and values. This was a main contribution towards being able to process the traumatic experiences. The women who survived were also relatively quickly acknowledged in the Netherlands, as well as in Belgium, as having been victims of the Nazi regime. Most of them were granted a disability pension.

The women who returned to East Germany quickly became victims of a suppressive political system for a second time. During the first years after the war, Jehovah's Witnesses there were granted the status of 'victims of fascism'. This was soon revoked, just as the allocation of 'compensation' that the DDR had paid out to persons persecuted by the Nazis. The religious community was banned by the DDR authorities on 31 August 1950. The Ministry of Home Affairs justified the prohibition with the accusation that Jehovah's Witnesses were engaging in activities that were against the law. They were also accused of conducting a systematic witch hunt against the existing democratic order and its laws, under

the cover of a religious organisation, and of importing illegal literature. The foremost reproach was that Jehovah's Witnesses were spies for an imperialistic power. In the first few days after the ban, already more than five hundred members were arrested. Others were forced to sign a written confirmation of no longer associating with the religious community. Many former camp prisoners were affected by this. The court sentenced 674 female Jehovah's Witnesses in the DDR for anti-state activities, espionage and propounding so-called negative war propaganda between 1950 and 1961. The persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in the DDR ended only after forty years, when the ban was lifted in 1990. Those persecuted, who had been branded persecutors, received formal recognition from the state on 14 March 1990.⁵³⁴

In West Germany the focus was primarily on the re-integration of former National Socialists in the first years after the war. They were responsible for governance, war industry and the army. In a country where the population refused to remember and denial dominated, there was less attention given to the rehabilitation of the Nazi victims. The BRD paid little attention to the fate of Jehovah's Witnesses that had been persecuted by the Nazis, also in terms of compensation. In principle, Jehovah's Witnesses had the right to claim compensation under the provisions of law, which states in the first Section that those who had been persecuted 'based on religion', had the right to file a claim. However, such compensation was usually never awarded to Jehovah's Witnesses or their next of kin, who had been convicted because of conscientious objection.

Not until 1997 did the German Bundestag adopt a motion which declared conviction for conscientious objection unlawful and promised the victims a one-off benefit. In West Germany, there was the non-recognition as Nazi victims, while in East Germany, Jehovah's Witnesses were being persecuted.⁵³⁵

The temporary state government in Austria adopted the first law on victim care on 17 July 1945. In this first version they differentiated between victims who had actively committed political resistance and those who had 'only' been persecuted. An official statement which made it possible to claim a pension, was reserved only for those who had 'fought using a weapon or were unconditionally committed in word or deed' for an independent Austria.

Proof of having been a victim of persecution was provided for those victims, including Jehovah's Witnesses, but the benefits were next to nothing, except for a small tax advantage. Pension rights were only gradually given to the victims of persecution. The differences that arose immediately after the war between victims who had been persecuted on account of resistance and victims who had only been persecuted, still exist to this day. Providing evidence for the cause of physical or psychological damage is, down to this day, a major hurdle for the victims for attaining their victim status.⁵³⁶

Summarised, it can be established that in many areas my findings were congruent with the literature about trauma due to incarceration in concentration camps.

Maintaining spiritual integrity was proof of an intact moral strength which the destructive Nazi powers were unable to get a grip on, particularly for the collective of the female Jehovah's Witnesses.

11 Notes

- 1 The video interviews were held by Meinard Tydeman and translated into German by Judith Langwieser.
- 2 See Laub 1999, p. 262.
- 3 Although Tydeman had interviewed all women already many years before, many new items were brought up and were emotionally responded to in a specific manner.
- 4 See Laub 1999, p. 262.
- 5 See Laub 1999, p. 263.
- 6 See Laub 2000b, p. 68.
- 7 Laub 2000b, p. 82.
- 8 See Laub 2000b, p. 83
- 9 The notion is derived from Greek 'chilioi' and means 'thousand'. It refers to the millennium.
- 10 In characterising the religious community of Jehovah's Witnesses, I mainly focused on a scholar of religious studies, Gabriele Yonan.
- 11 See Yonan 1999, p. 10.
- 12 Adventists and Mormons are examples of religious communities that base their faith in the apocalyptic statements in the Bible and came into being in the 19th century.
- 13 See Yonan 1999, p. 10 f. and Malle 2002, p. 13.
- 14 Russell was born on 16-02-1852 as the son of a Scottish-Irish Presbyterian born in Pennsylvania (See Garbe 1999a, p. 43).
- 15 See Yonan 1999, p. 11; Garbe 1999a, p. 44.
- 16 See Garbe 1999a, p. 46 and 50.
- 17 See Garbe 1999a, p. 46 ff.
- 18 See Zipfel 1965, p. 178 f.
- 19 See Zipfel 1965, p. 179, footnote 10.
- 20 See Yonan 1999, p. 11 and Zipfel 1965, p. 176.

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- 21 See Malle 2001, p. 16 f. and Graffard/Tristan 1998, p. 22.
- 22 www.lettertothestars.at
- 23 'Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved' (Acts 4:12; KJ21).
- 24 The relevant scripture reads: 'Put not your trust in princes, nor in a son of man in whom there is no help' (Psalm 146[:3]; KJ21). See also Aigner 2000, p. 10 f.
- 25 See Zipfel 1965, p. 179 f. and Graffard/Tristan 1998, p. 22.
- 26 From: Zürcher 1938, pp. 75-77, Dokument des Ref. 11 1316a/23/6/33; cited after Graffard/Tristan 1998, p. 26 f.
- 27 See Zipfel 1965, p. 181; Graffard/Tristan 1998, p. 24; Yonan 1999, p. 23 f.
- 28 See Yonan 1999, p. 28 f.
- 29 See Yonan 1999, p. 29.
- 30 Translation of the declaration of renouncement for Jehovah's Witnesses, cited after Graffard/Tristan 1998, p. 53.
- 31 The war especially was seen as 'Harmagedon', in which mankind is troubled by Hitler's fight, the 'king of the North', against the Allies, the 'king of the South', and by which the world's time of the end is heralded. See Zipfel 1965, p. 179; Yonan 1999, p. 34.
- 32 See Graffard/Tristan 1998, p. 62.
- 33 See Garbe 1999a, p. 165 f.; Füllberg-Stolberg et al. 1994, p. 322.
- 34 Fraenkel 1974, p. 86.
- 35 Graffard/Tristan 1998, p. 64.
- 36 See Graffard/Tristan 1998, pp. 64 and 69; Füllberg-Stolberg et al. 1994, p. 323.
- 37 Schmidt 2001, p. 82 f.
- 38 See Graffard/Tristan 1998, p. 69.
- 39 PA, interview Berkers, Toos, 16-10-2002.
- 40 See Zipfel 1965, p. 189.
- 41 Moreover, the mass destruction in the concentration camps irreparably counteracted economic growth; one of the many paradoxes of the National Socialist concept. See Zipfel 1965, p. 192.
- 42 See Zipfel 1965, p. 193 f.

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- 43 Duplicate of an unsigned copy of a secret, handwritten diary -- Nr. 39/51/44g, dem Archivstempel "Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer SS - Schriftgutverwaltung - Akt.Nr. Geh./ 20" und dem handschriftlichen Vermerk "überarbeitete Fassung". ('Personal staff of the Reichsführer-SS — Archive administration — Act.Nr. Geh./20' and the handwritten note 'revised edition') (cited after Zipfel 1965, p. 200 f).
- 44 In the countries that were associated with Germany (such as Hungary, Slovakia, Rumania), as well as in the occupied states, the religious community of Jehovah's Witnesses was also persecuted.
- 45 See Malle 2001, p. 19 f.
- 46 www.lettertothestars.at; Gerti Malle speaks of 549 official members of the religious community (see Malle 2001, p. 31). In the period between 1938 and 1945, 560 Austrian Jehovah's Witnesses were arrested, including members of the religious community who had not officially joined the Watchtower Society. From these, about 150 died of the consequences of imprisonment, 51 religious members were killed by guillotine or shot dead (see www.lettertothestars.at).
- 47 See Graffard/Tristan 1998, p. 98.
- 48 See Aigner 2000, p. 13.
- 49 WTA Vienna; DÖW 20100/10676; see also Graffard/Tristan 1998, p. 107 and Malle 2001, p. 19 f.
- 50 WTA Selters i.T., Wölfle, Paulina, biography.
- 51 See Graffard/Tristan 1998, p. 132 f.
- 52 Gerdina Huisman was only 19 years old at the time of her arrest. She was the youngest female inmate at St. Lambrecht concentration camp.
- 53 WTA Vienna.
- 54 See Graffard/Tristan 1998, p. 168.
- 55 See Graffard/Tristan 1998, p. 150.
- 56 See Benz 1990, p. 180-196.
- 57 See Yonan 1999, p. 41.
- 58 For Austria: see Luza 1985, p. 25; Botz 1983, p. 137 ff.; Neugebauer 1986, p. 61 ff.
- 59 Garbe 1999a, p. 515.
- 60 See Garbe 1999a, p. 516.
- 61 See Stadler 1966, p. 12.
- 62 See Botz 1983, p. 137 ff.
- 63 See Garbe 1999b, p. 18.

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- 64 See Garbe 1999a, p. 539.
- 65 See Moos 2000, p. 43 f.
- 66 See Milton 1999, p. 24.
- 67 Yonan 1999, p. 36.
- 68 Yonan 1999, p. 37.
- 69 Dachau or the women's concentration camp Moringen for example were already opened in 1933.
- 70 Between 1935 and 1939 the emblems and markings of Jehovah's Witnesses in the concentration camps varied. In part the group was accommodated separately from prisoners who belonged to a different 'category' (See Milton 1999, p. 25).
- 71 See Garbe 1999b, p. 16 f; Aigner 2000, p. 19.
- 72 Maršálek 1995, p. 282.
- 73 Buber-Neumann 2002, p. 253 f.
- 74 Bunker or punishment block of the women's concentration camp Ravensbrück.
- 75 'The Bible Students, [. . .] in their patient expectation of the world's end always were faithful and willing workers for the SS, mainly as craftsmen, nurses and labourers' (Kogon 2001, p. 71). Their being put to work in SS households, after the war resulted for Jehovah's Witnesses in the unjust reproach of collaboration.
- 76 See Garbe 1999b, p. 17.
- 77 See Garbe 1999b, p. 17.
- 78 See Malle 2001, p. 45; Herzog/Strebl 1994, p. 14; Heike, Irmtraud 1994, p. 221.
- 79 The Lichtenburg concentration camp was established in Schloss Lichtenburg in Prettin near Torgau on the Elbe. It existed as a mixed camp (men and women of different categories of prisoners) from the year 1933 and was already overcrowded at that time. The first transport of 200 women arrived at Lichtenburg in December 1937, and others followed. A total of around 500 female prisoners occupied the concentration camp Lichtenburg during this time period, for the most part these consisting of female Jehovah's Witnesses (see Hesse/Harder 2001, p. 86 ff).
- 80 See Hesse/Harder 2001, p. 129; Herzog/Strebl 1994, p. 14.
- 81 See Füllberg-Stolberg a.o. 1994, p. 9.
- 82 Gerdina Huisman speaks of this fact in the interview of 15-10-2002.
- 83 See Heike 1994, p. 230.

84 See Heike 1994, p. 227 f. Thus the female guards, at least in the large camps for women like the women's concentration camp Ravensbrück, remained more or less anonymous. At St. Lambrecht too none of the interviewed prisoners remembered the names of the female guards.

85 Buber-Neumann 2009, p. 176.

86 See Heike 1994, p. 224 ff.

87 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.

88 See Hesse/Harder 2001, p. 129.

89 See Hesse/Harder 2001, p. 140.

90 Buber-Neumann 2009, p. 193, 194.

91 Buber-Neumann 2009, p. 192.

92 See Hesse/Harder 2001, p. 140.

93 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.

94 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.

95 See Buber-Neumann 2009, p. 166.

96 See Buber-Neumann 2002, p. 294

97 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.

98 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.

99 Buber-Neumann 2009, p. 195.

100 See Buber-Neumann 2009, p. 196; Hesse/Harder 2001, p. 176.

101 See Hesse/Harder 2001, p. 191.

102 See Buber-Neumann 2009, p. 197 f.

103 See Hesse/Harder 2001, p. 188.

104 Buber-Neumann 2009, p. 213.

105 The name by which Katharina Berkers was known was Toos.

106 WTA Emmen, interview Berkers, Katharina, 1985, tape 372.

107 WTA Emmen, interview Volp-Rinzema, Froukje, 31-08-1995.

108 WTA Emmen, interview Berkers, Katharina, 1985, tape 372.

109 Buber-Neumann 2009, p. 214.

110 See Buber-Neumann 2009, p. 243.

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- 111 See Hesse/Harder 2001, p. 154 f.
- 112 WTA Emmen, interview Berkers, Katharina, 1985, tape 372.
- 113 WTA Emmen, interview Berkers, Katharina, 1985, tape 372.
- 114 See Hesse/Harder 2001, p. 160.
- 115 The greatest profiteer from the supply of food parcels was the SS. The parcels intended for the prisoners, that had to be sorted and stored in the cellars of the SS administrative buildings by a few female Bible Students in 'positions of trust', were stolen by wagon (see Buber-Neumann 2009, p. 220).
- 116 Aktion 14f13 ('Operation 14f13') formed the association with the official euthanasia. It meant the death of thousands of inmates in concentration camps and it was adopted by several concentration camps. It served as a try-out for the mass murders that were introduced in the extermination camps. Within the framework of this murdering operation so-called selections were made in Ravensbrück already in December 1941 and January 1942. The selected women were gassed in Hartheim/Linz, Auschwitz and Majdanek. The SS regime also began to perform mass killings in Ravensbrück in 1945. Some 5,000 to 6,000 women from the women's concentration camp Ravensbrück met with an agonizing death in the gas chambers (see Malle 2001, p. 47).
- 117 The first time Kirche des heiligen Lambert im Walde is documented is in a record in 1066.
<http://www.murtal.at/jeunesse/lambrecht.htm>.
- 118 See <http://www.stift-stlambrecht.at>; <http://www.murtal.at/jeunesse/lambrecht.htm>.
- 119 StIA, Schubert Ausgleich, Bericht des Ausgleichsverwalters, S. 53f. Paraphrased after Jagoschütz 1990, p. 17, footnote 20.
- 120 See Jagoschütz 1990, p. 24; Seiler 1994, p. 15.
- 121 'The term Anschluss includes various political notions and events. [...] Anschluss in the restricted sense means the invasion of Austria by the German troops on 12 March 1938, the Bundesverfassungsgesetz über die Wiedervereinigung Österreichs mit dem Deutschen Reich and a corresponding German Reich law of 13 March 1938 as well as the "seizure of power" by the Austrian National Socialists on 11/12 March 1938 (Pfeifer 1941, p. 20 f). For a closer understanding, note should also be taken of the preparation and execution of the referendum on the alliance of Austria with the German Reich on 10 April 1938 as well as the administrative "incorporation" of Austria in the German Reich (Botz 1978, p. 220-243).' Cited after Haas 2002, p. 26.
- 122 See Jagoschütz 1990, p. 29; Seiler 1994, p. 14 f.
- 123 Among others the convent crypt was thereby unearthed.
- 124 See Jagoschütz 1990, p. 32; Seiler 1994, p. 15.

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- 125 See Jagoschütz 1990, p. 34. Erhart's study was situated on the terrain of the present Forest Management Bureau, where all 'service discussions' were also held (PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002).
- 126 StLA, FLD, Rückstellungsakten, Stift Admont und St. Lambrecht, Abschrift; Original in BArch, R/5101/ 21724.
- 127 See Seiler 1994, p. 15.
- 128 See Jagoschütz 1990, p. 77.
- 129 See Seiler 1994, p. 15-19.
- 130 Pastor P. Heinrich Fuchsbichler and Kaplan P. Rigobert Oberleitner; see Seiler 1994, p. 16.
- 131 Seiler 1994, p. 17.
- 132 BArch, (former BDC), Erhart, Hubert, 3. 1. 1899, SSD; Schriftverkehr Hardegg/ Reichsführung Berlin.
- 133 Hereafter the spelling according to the document will be followed. Seiler writes the name with 'ai' (Rainer).
- 134 BArch, (former BDC), Erhart, Hubert, 3. 1. 1899, SSD; Bericht des kommissarischen Verwalters Erhart, St. Lambrecht 15. Mai 1938.
- 135 See Seiler 1994, p. 18 f.
- 136 See Seiler 1994, p. 18.
- 137 PA, letter by Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, of 02-09-2002.
- 138 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 139 See Seiler 1994, p. 30.
- 140 BArch, (former BDC), Erhart, Hubert, 3. 1. 1899, SSD, Urlaubsgesuch für Juli bis September 1938 gerichtet von Erhart an den SS Abschnitt München I (request for leave of absence).
- 141 StLA, FLD-Rückstellungsakten, Stift Admont und St. Lambrecht, O 4414 – 37 P8, Bericht des Oberfinanzpräsidenten Graz vom 12. 8. 1940.
- 142 Käthe Pfeiffer was the Verwalter's secretary and as such, often visited the confiscated monasteries Vorau, Admont and Seckau. She lived in a room in the abbey, immediately above the abbey archway (PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002; interview Kröll, Lore, 18-11-2002).
- 143 See Seiler 1994, p. 21.
- 144 BArch, (former BDC), Erhart, Hubert, 3-1-1899, SSD; Brief vom 18. 12. 1939 an Rodenbücher.
- 145 StLA, FLD-Rückstellungsakten, Stift Admont und St. Lambrecht, L 17 – 151/31 – V/48.

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- 146 StLA, FLD-Rückstellungsakten, Stift Admont und St. Lambrecht, L 17 – 151/31 – V/48; this concerned the monastery building, excluding the ground floor, convent pharmacy, second floor southern wing, adjoining rooms of the western wing, rooms of the southern connecting wing, southeast wing up to the dining hall; the house No. 36 (plot No. 31); the garden with castle chapel and tower building; the southern half of the convent garden; the round building had to be collectively used and maintained; furthermore: in the garden house No. 55 the dwelling in the north-eastern part; at the border a plot suitable for the erection of a blockhouse and a trial field of about 1 ha.; the farm of the Birkbauern-farmstead; the pond; also hunting ground, etc.
- 147 See Seiler 1994, p. 21.
- 148 PA, interview Kröll, Lore, 18-11-2002.
- 149 See Seiler 1994, p. 44.
- 150 Remark by Father Mag. Gerwig Romirer during a tour through the monastery and the conversation with Margarete Messnarz-Günter on 13-09-2002.
- 151 StLA, FLD-Rückstellungsakten, Stift Admont und St. Lambrecht, Beilagen zur Rückstellung St. Lambrecht.
- 152 See Jagoschütz 1990, p. 90 ff.
- 153 See Jagoschütz 1990, p. 92.
- 154 StLA, FLD-Rückstellungsakten, Stift Admont und St. Lambrecht, Beilagen zur Rückstellung St. Lambrecht, Brief von Hans Wotke an die Landeshauptmannschaft für Steiermark vom 3. Juli 1946.
- 155 Hans Hohberg was employed as a chartered accountant and economic advisor at the 'Deutsche Wirtschaftsbetriebe'. Among other things he supervised the financial affairs of the SS companies and had to make a preliminary investigation into all legal acts. He worked closely with Oswald Pohl, who was the leader of economic affairs that had been consolidated into the SS-Wirtschafts- und Verwaltungshauptamt in February 1942. From March 1942 the control of the concentration camps also came under the WVHA. By means of the unlimited power of the SS, which from 1940 onwards also began to extend to the area of economics, they initiated the supply of labour by exploiting the concentration camp inmates (cf. Seiler 1994, p. 22 f.).
- 156 See Seiler 1994, p. 23.
- 157 StIA, book presentation Seiler 12-01-1994, opinion of Ingeborg Kalousek (née Erhart).
- 158 BArch, NS 3/1462 (Collection of the SS-Wirtschaftsverwaltungshauptamt).
- 159 See Seiler 1994, p. 26.
- 160 BArch, NS 3/1462; letter from Hohberg to Erhart of 13-05-1941.
- 161 BArch, NS 3/1462; letter to Erhart of 18-08-1941.

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- 162 These are the plots of land in the Admont area. BArch (former BDC), Erhart, Hubert, 03-01-1899, SSD.
- 163 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 164 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 165 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 166 Margarete Messnarz-Günter was called up for the RAD on 01-02-1942. As she had to serve in the convent kitchen of St. Lambrecht, membership of the BDM was undesirable. The reason for this was presumably that no information should leak out to the village due to her work in the confiscated monastery in which a concentration camp was established.
- 167 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 168 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002; interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 169 Lore Kröll left St. Lambrecht on 15-07-1944. She was succeeded as head housekeeper by Mrs Richter (information over the telephone by Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, Dec. 2002).
- 170 There were several guest rooms on the ground floor of the wing where offices and boardrooms have now been installed. On the upper floor the present meditation room and the conference hall were also used as guest rooms. These rooms are still used to accommodate guests today.
- 171 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 172 The work in both kitchens included the care for the concentration camp's inmates and for the civil staff as well as for the guards. There was no separation between the two kitchens, only the range separated the organizational units.
- 173 The testimony by Lore Kröll of 15-07-1944 shows there were 220 persons to be cared for. Probably the camp inmates are included in this number (PA, interview Kröll, Lore, 18-11-2002 and interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002).
- 174 See Nischelwitzer 1998, p. 63; Seiler 1994, p. 34.
- 175 See Seiler 1994, p. 34.
- 176 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 177 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 178 The administration of the St. Admont monastery was transferred to Erhart on 19 July 1938, the monasteries Seckau and Vorau followed in April 1940. Seiler notes that reasons were not given for the seizure of the monastery at this time. See Seiler 1994, p. 19.

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- 179 The decoration mentioned here is the Gold Cross of honour of the 'Kärntner Abwehrkämpferbund' (Carinthian Defensive Battle). Shortly before his death in 1985 (!) he received the Great Golden Decoration of Honour of the State of Carinthia. AAS, Nachlass der (posthumous works by) Napola/Parte Ing. Hubert Erhart.
- 180 BArch, (former BDC), Erhart, Hubert, 03-01-1899, SSD; Lebenslauf.
- 181 The Austrian National Socialist party was forbidden by Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuß in the summer of 1933. See Williamson 2000, p. 39.
- 182 See BArch, (former BDC), Erhart, Hubert, 03-01-1899, SSD; Lebenslauf.
- 183 BArch, (former BDC), Erhart, Hubert, 03-01-1899, SSD; Lebenslauf p. 3.
- 184 '[...] [Because] my wife had to consider that her fortune to the value of ATS 25,000 could be confiscated, whereby she ran the risk of losing the means to support her three children and could also be arrested, I had arranged for my family to come to Yugoslavia in November 1934.' BArch, (former BDC) Erhart, Hubert, 03-01-1899, SSD; Lebenslauf p. 4.
- 185 BArch, (former BDC), Erhart, Hubert, 03-01-1899, SSD; Lebenslauf.
- 186 BArch, (former BDC), Erhart, Hubert, 03-01-1899, SSD; testimony of the centre for refugee aid Yugoslavia in Varaždin. The signature under the document is indecipherable.
- 187 BArch, (former BDC), Erhart, Hubert, 03-01-1899, SSD; Lebenslauf.
- 188 BArch, (former BDC), Erhart, Hubert, 03-01-1899, PC.
- 189 BArch, (former BDC), Erhart, Hubert, 03-01-1899, SSD; with the BDC-acts are the minutes of the interrogation by Lohmann and Feinauer, who acquitted Erhart as far as National Socialism was concerned.
- 190 BArch, (former BDC), Erhart, Hubert, 03-01-1899, PC.
- 191 BArch, (former BDC), Erhart, Hubert, 03-01-1899, SSD.
- 192 BArch, (former BDC), Erhart, Hubert, 03-01-1899, SSD.
- 193 BArch, (former BDC), Erhart, Hubert, 03-01-1899, SSD.
- 194 BArch, (former BDC), Erhart, Hubert, 03-01-1899, SSD; Personalbericht (personnel report) from 30 July 1937. Gestapo
- 195 See Seiler 1994, p. 18.
- 196 Family: wife E., née Kuschinsky; children: H. 03-08-1925 (male), killed in action 18-09-1944; I. (female) 13-09-1923; I. (female) 21-12-1927; U. (female) 21-08-1920. The wife and all children (except the one born in 1920) were party members.

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- 197 BArch, (former BDC), Erhart, Hubert, 03-01-1899, SSD; PC. SS-Standartenführer corresponds with the military rank of Oberst (colonel) (see Krammer/Bartsch 2002, p. 242).
- 198 BArch, (former BDC), Erhart, Hubert, 03-01-1899, SSD.
- 199 The Volksgerichtsprozessakt (legal action of the People's Courts) LG Graz Vr 4866/48, that was taken over from the Styrian court by the Styrian State Archive (according to information by Dr. Elisabeth Schöggel-Ernst, who personally performed the take-over), could not be found there. It could not therefore be ascertained whether Erhart underwent his punishment.
- 200 This settlement still exists and is generally known under the name of Stiftssiedlung (monastery settlement).
- 201 The first Styrian sub camp of Mauthausen was already established in Bretstein in the summer of 1941. An average of 80 prisoners were recruited to care for the fowl and sheep and for the construction of a road for freight transport. This sub camp of Mauthausen was dissolved on 30-09-1943 (Maršálek 1995, p. 39).
- 202 AMM, B 44/ 5; DA 23.387; Rabitsch 1967, p. 111.
- 203 DA, A 499/ 32.788. Allegedly an elder German prisoner died of an illness and was buried at the Neumarkt graveyard (DA A 1562/ 34.814; A 1562/ 34.815). However, investigation of the diocesan archive Graz (checking the lists of the deceased) gave no information. This sub camp, which just as St. Lambrecht/males at first also fell under the concentration camp Dachau and later under Mauthausen, will not be entered into here. The following literature is referred to: Rabitsch 1967; Seiler 1994; Seiler, Dietmar. In: A.E.I.O.U., draußt bist du, draußt bist du noch lange nicht. Das andere Heimatmuseum. 1. Abteilung; o.S. 1996; Farkas, Anita: Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungsarbeit in der Steiermark. Auf den Spuren der Erinnerung an die Konzentrationslager Aflenz, Peggau und Schloß Lind. Phil. Diplomarbeit, Klagenfurt 2001.
- 204 This was the former gymnasium of the choristers' convent, that had been dissolved in 1932. The room had already been barred and was accessible only by a single staircase.
- 205 See Seiler 1994, p. 28 f.
- 206 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 207 See Nischelwitzer 1988, p. 60.
- 208 PA, interview Kröll, Lore, 18-11-2002.
- 209 Goschin lived in a room next to the rooms of Kröll and Pfeiffer on the upper floor of the abbey wing. A house was under construction for him in St. Lambrecht, but he never lived there as he had been dismissed prior to completion (PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002; interview Kröll, Lore, 18-11-2002; interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002).
- 210 The sub camps St. Lambrecht and Schloss Lind were taken over by the Mauthausen main camp from 20 November 1942.

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- 211 See Seiler 1994, p. 34.
- 212 See Seiler 1994, p. 29.
- 213 AMM, Materialsammlung Lauritsch: DA, schriftlicher Bericht von Jan Kosinski, 20. 9. 1987.
- 214 Nischelwitzer 1988, p. 60.
- 215 See Nischelwitzer 1988, p. 60. A great number of female conscripts from Slovenian Celje had been accommodated in the boarding houses in the municipality St. Lambrecht. Jagoschütz seems to link the transference of the camp commander to the relationship with a girl (see Jagoschütz 1990, p. 89. PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002).
- 216 His name also exists on the transport list from Dachau of 12-5-1942 (DA, 23.387).
- 217 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002. The bread had to be weighed by Messnarz-Günter. She doesn't remember the amount per inmate.
- 218 PA, letter from Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, of 02-09-2002. The Yugoslavian kitchen-helpers were often switched. Anna was an inhabitant of St. Lambrecht, whose surname regrettably could not be discovered. She had a room in the abbey but used to sleep at home now and then (PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002).
- 219 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 220 His name figures on the list of the first transport of prisoners from Dachau of 12-5-1942 (DA, 23.387).
- 221 PA, letter from Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, of 02-09-2002.
- 222 Ludwig Lach was born in Graz on 06-10-1910 (prisoner registration Nr. 14888). After being sent back to Mauthausen he was transferred to the Eisenerz concentration camp on 13 July 1943, and released on 4 May 1944 (AMM Y 36, Häftlingszugangsbuch der politischen Abteilung [prisoners' book of the political department]). In the Eisenerz concentration camp Lach had the job of Lagerälteste (senior camp prisoner). There he allegedly had protected Jehovah's Witnesses against reprisals by the camp commander (interview Otrebski, 2000). Jan Ludwig Lach died in Salzburg in 1982 (information from the population registry).
- 223 PA, interview Kröll, Lore, 18-11-2002.
- 224 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 225 PA, interview Kröll, Lore, 18-11-2002.
- 226 Heinrich Schöller, born 16-07 or 16-06-1881. The Christian name of Heinz found in the "Friedensplanübersicht" (Summary of peace plan) of Mauthausen concentration camp, corresponds with the shortened form of the name Heinrich. Schöller's NS membership number was 204.733. See BArch, (former

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- BDC) SSD, Personalakten Schöllner, Heinrich; BArch Ludwigsburg, BALB: B 162 AR 6901589 Bd. II, S. 368 und 373.
- 227 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 228 The frequent exchange of the SS security staff was above all because the wounded and men no longer fit for the war were transferred to St. Lambrecht to recuperate (PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002).
- 229 See Seiler 1994, p. 33; Nischelwitzer 1988, p. 62 f.
- 230 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 231 See Seiler 1994, p. 35 f.
- 232 Seiler 1994, p. 36 f.
- 233 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 234 According to information from Gerdina Huisman this was 'the talk of the town' (interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002).
- 235 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 236 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 237 On 15 May 1944 it is stated that a prisoner was transferred from St. Lambrecht to the concentration camp Mauthausen, on 16 May 1944 the prisoner is transferred back to St. Lambrecht (see Seiler 1994, p. 39).
- 238 AMM, Materialsammlung Lauritsch: Korrespondenz Berlin - St. Lambrecht..
- 239 See Seiler 1994, p. 38 f.
- 240 AMM, Materialsammlung Lauritsch: Korrespondenz Berlin - St. Lambrecht, Schriftstück vom 22. März 1944.
- 241 AMM, Materialsammlung Lauritsch: Korrespondenz Berlin - St. Lambrecht, Schriftstück vom 4. Juli 1944.
The information on the transfers of prisoners has been taken from the list in Seiler 1994, p. 38. They stem from the transport lists of the collection Freund/Perz, D-Mau 4.
- 242 See Seiler 1994, p. 38.
- 243 For example, the inmates had to crawl on their bellies on the Abbey courtyard (interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002).
- 244 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 245 StIA, book presentation Seiler 12-01-1994, opinion of Ingeborg Kalousek (née Erhart).

246 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.

247 The survivors interviewed by me stated that all female prisoners were transferred to St. Lambrecht in one single transport. Only one Polish woman fell ill in the sub camp and was transferred back to Ravensbrück. Thereafter the number of inmates remained the same (PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002). The number of inmates as estimated by Seiler (and Baumgartner, who also refers to the just mentioned author) of at first 30 women should be considered correct. His information is probably based on the memories of Josef Nischelwitzer (exact quotation of sources is absent). Furthermore, contact between Nischelwitzer and the female inmates allegedly had remained limited. This former inmate was transferred back to Mauthausen in the exchange described in Chapter 3 of all inmates at the end of May/beginning of June 1943, shortly after the arrival of the female Bible Students.

248 PA, interview Kröll, Lore, 18-11-2002.

249 Corstiaantje Pronk mentions 4 May 1943 as the date of departure from the women's concentration camp at Ravensbrück for St. Lambrecht. According to her statement the prisoners passed two days at a railway station before being taken to the sub camp (WTA Emmen, data on C. Pronk from 13-02-1958; Pronk, Cobie, video interview, 10-09-1999). Considering a journey of about two days the prisoners likely arrived in St. Lambrecht on 8 May 1943. Jans Hoogers-Elbertsen also remembers they were imprisoned in Ravensbrück women's concentration camp until 4 May 1943 and that she arrived at St. Lambrecht on 8 May 1943 (WTA Emmen, Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, report 12-02-1953). Therese Schreiber says that she was transferred to St. Lambrecht on 05-05-1943 and that she arrived there on 09-05-1943 (DÖW, 20100/10676, Eidstattliche Erklärung, Schreiber, Therese).

250 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002; interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.

251 Jane Gerda B. was born in Słagan, Silesia, on 05-10-1880. BArch/ Ludwigsburg, ARZ 77/72, Band II; MGR/ StBG, Ra 9/2.

252 In a list of savings balances from Ravensbrück the name of B. turns up again, together with the date 07-11-1944. This might mean that B. was already employed at Ravensbrück women's concentration camp in October 1944 and so left St. Lambrecht in September 1944. MGR/StBG, Ra 17/893.

253 BArch/Ludwigsburg, ARZ 77/72, Band II; furthermore cf. Baumgartner 1997, p. 129.

254 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.

255 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.

256 In a conversation with Lore Kröll, former head housekeeper, she describes all these inmates as lesbians. I regard this as a defense mechanism in the shape of a reversal into the opposite.

257 Cf. Grit 1999, p. 166; Maršálek 1980, p. 117 and Baumgartner 1997, p. 131, footnote 131.

258 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.

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- 259 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 260 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 261 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 262 She was referred to by her maiden name, Rabouw (AMM, K5/6).
- 263 At the beginning there were six Polish women, one of whom was sent back to the Ravensbrück main camp shortly after arrival. Her name is unknown.
- 264 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 265 PA, interview Pronk, Cobie, 18-10-2002.
- 266 PA, interview Pronk, Cobie, 18-10-2002.
- 267 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002; interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 268 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 269 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 270 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 271 PA, interview Pronk, Cobie, 18-10-2002.
- 272 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 273 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002; interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 274 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 275 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002; interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 276 WTA Emmen, interview Berkers, Katharina, 1985, tape Nr. 372.
- 277 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002; interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 278 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 279 In concentration camp Ravensbrück, two female Bible Students checked the new arrivals for lice (cf. Buber-Neumann 2009, p. 163 f); PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 280 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002; WTA Emmen, interview Volp-Rinzema, Froukje, 31-08-1995.
- 281 PA, interview Berkers, Toos, 16-10-2002; WTA Emmen, interview Volp-Rinzema, Froukje, 31-08-1995.
- 282 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 283 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002; interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.

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- 284 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 285 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 286 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 287 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 288 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 289 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 290 PA, interview Kröll, Lore, 18-11-2002. Margarete Messnarz-Günter described Lore Kröll as 'a very nice person', who proved to be generous when someone aroused her sympathy or when she felt that this person deserved a reward for certain achievements (PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002).
- 291 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002; PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 292 WTA Emmen, interview Berkers, Katharina, 1985, tape Nr. 372.
- 293 WTA Emmen, interview Berkers, Katharina, 1985, tape Nr. 372.
- 294 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 295 PA, interview Berkers, Toos, 16-10-2002.
- 296 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002; PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 297 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 298 WTA Vienna, Schreiber, Therese, biography; PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 299 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 300 WTA Emmen, Pronk, Corstiaantje Pronk-van den Oever, letter of 12 March from St. Lambrecht (the indication of the year on the envelope is illegible as the letter is damaged).
- 301 PA, interview Pronk, Cobie, 18-10-2002.
- 302 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 303 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002; PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 304 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002; PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 305 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002; PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 306 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 307 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 308 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002; PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.

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- 309 WTA Selters/i.T., Maurer, Berta; the cited letter fell into the hands of the female Jehovah's Witnesses (cited after Hesse/Harder 2001, p. 184).
- 310 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 311 Her name is unknown.
- 312 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 313 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 314 Melaena; causes included inflammation and ulcers that may have arisen from the severe stress caused by the conditions in the camp (cf. Pschyrembel 1993, p. 204).
- 315 WTA Emmen, interview Volp, Froukje, 31-08-1995.
- 316 PA, interview Pronk, Cobie, 18-10-2002.
- 317 PA, interview Berkers, Toos, 16-10-2002.
- 318 PA, interview Berkers, Toos, 16-10-2002.
- 319 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 320 PA, interview Berkers, Toos, 16-10-2002.
- 321 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 322 PA, interview Berkers, Toos, 16-10-2002. The former head housekeeper too remembers this fact. She had no sympathy whatsoever for the strong conviction of the Bible Students, who refused to renounce their faith (PA, interview Kröll, Lore, 18-11-2002).
- 323 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002; PA, interview Berkers, Toos, 16-10-2002.
- 324 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 325 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 326 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 327 PA, interview Pronk, Cobie, 18-10-2002.
- 328 PA, interview Berkers, Toos, 16-10-2002.
- 329 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 330 PA interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002; interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 331 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 332 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.

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- 333 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 334 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 335 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 336 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002; PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 337 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002; interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 338 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 339 PA, interview Berkers, Toos, 16-10-2002. Because the other Dutch interviewees cannot remember this fact, these religious writings may have been confused with those smuggled into Ravensbrück. The fact that Toos Berkers remembers having been given the Bible by the baker of St. Lambrecht, however, is inconsistent with this. It appears to be certain that Biblical writings circulated in both concentration camps.
- 340 WTA Emmen, interview Volp, Froukje, 31-08-1995.
- 341 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 342 Jehovah's Witnesses celebrate the 'Memorial' on 14 Nisan after sundown, in accordance with the calculation of the Jewish calendar used in the first century. The month of Nisan began at sundown, as soon as the crescent after the new moon closest to the equinox was visible in Jerusalem.
- 343 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002; WTA Emmen, interview Volp, Froukje, 31-08-1995.
- 344 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 345 All survivors of the women's concentration camp St. Lambrecht interviewed by me could remember neither entries nor transfers back into the main camp.
- 346 Wilfried Krallert additionally held a management position with the Amt VI G des RSHA. This department stemmed from the Auslandsnachrichtendienst (Foreign Intelligence Service) under the SS-Sicherheitsdienst (SS Security Service), (cf. Seiler 1994, p. 44).
- 347 AMM, Materialsammlung Lauritsch: Korrespondenz Berlin - St. Lambrecht.
- 348 See Seiler 1994, p. 45.
- 349 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 350 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002; WTA Emmen, interview Berkers, Toos, 1985, Nr. 372; PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 351 See Seiler 1994, p. 46.
- 352 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 353 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002; interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.

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- 354 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 355 See Baumgartner 1997, p. 132; Rauchensteiner 1995, pp. 241-278.
- 356 See Seiler 1994, p. 48.
- 357 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 358 WTA Emmen, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-03-1993.
- 359 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 360 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002; interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002; WTA Vienna, Lebenslauf (biography) Schreiber, Therese.
- 361 WTA Vienna, Schreiber, Therese, Lebenslauf .
- 362 WTA Vienna, Schreiber, Therese, Lebenslauf .
- 363 WTA Emmen, interview Pronk, Cobie, 10-09-1999; PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 364 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002; WTA Emmen, interview Berkers, Katharina (Toos), 1985, Nr. 372; WTA Emmen, interview Volp-Rinzema, Froukje, 31-08-1995.
- 365 PA, interview Pronk, Cobie, 18-10-2002.
- 366 The biographical sketch is based on the following material: WTA Emmen, Berkers-van Lierop, Katharina, interview, 1985, no. 372; WTA Vienna, collected data, 30-10-2001; WTA Emmen, summary interview Willemson-Berkers, Lucia; WTA Emmen, prisoner identification card no. 17 Berkers, Petronella, FKL Ravensbrück.
- 367 WTA Emmen, Berkers-van Lierop, Katharina, interview 1985, no. 372.
- 368 The distinctly well-groomed figure of the 91-year-old lady made a deep impression on me as her conversation partner and made it easy to understand how important an attractive appearance was for her, also during her incarceration.
- 369 PA, interview Berkers, Toos, 16-10-2002.
- 370 PA, interview Berkers, Toos, 16-10-2002.
- 371 WTA Emmen, information from Sis. G. Huisman-Rabouw of 16-02-1958; WTA Emmen, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-03-2002; PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 372 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 373 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 374 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.

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- 375 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 376 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 377 WTA Emmen, interview Sis. Elbertsen; WTA Emmen, data on Jansje Hoogers-Elbertsen of 12-02-1958; WTA Emmen, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 30-08-1993; PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 378 WTA Emmen, Häftlingsausweis (prisoner identification card) no. 38, Elbertsen, Jansje, FKL Ravensbrück; MGR/SBG, Ra 34/631. Additionally, her name is recorded on the official list Tote und Überlebende (The Dead and Survivors), of prisoners from the Netherlands (MGR/SBG, Ra 41/962).
- 379 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 380 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 381 PA, interview Kröll, Lore, 18-11-2002.
- 382 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 383 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 384 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 385 WTA Emmen, letter of 27-02-1945 to Stichting 1940-1945, Amsterdam (Foundation 1940-1945).
- 386 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 387 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 388 WTA Emmen, declaration of release St. Lambrecht; WTA Emmen, information from Sis. C. Pronk of 18-02-1958; WTA Emmen, Pronk, Cobie, video interview 10-09-1999; PA, interview Pronk, Cobie, 18-10-2002.
- 389 PA, interview Pronk, Cobie, 18-10-2002.
- 390 PA, interview Pronk, Cobie, 18-10-2002.
- 391 WTA Emmen, Volp, Froukje, declaration of release St. Lambrecht; WTA Emmen, interview Volp, Froukje, 31-08-1995; PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 392 WTA Emmen, letter from J. K. Rinzema of 1 September 1943.
- 393 PA, interview Berkers, Toos, 16-10-2002.
- 394 WTA Kraainem, Hernalsteen-Floryn, Maria, database; repatriation card; WTA Kraainem, Floryn, Célestin, report on his mother, 22-11-1995.
- 395 Léon Floryn's prisoner registration number was 46.522 (WTA Selters i.T., Doc. 08/01/44).
- 396 WTA Selters i.T., Doc. 08/01/44.
- 397 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002; interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.

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- 398 WTA Kraainem, Hernalsteen-Floryn, Maria, Carte de Prisonnier Politique.
- 399 It was not possible to compile a well-founded biography on all German female Jehovah's Witnesses, as there was no data to be found for some of them.
- 400 WTA Selters i.T., data collection, Blöbaum, Alwine; WTA Selters i.T., Doc. 25/09/45, declaration of reversal of the judgement; WTA Selters i.T., account given by Blöbaum, Wilfried, 12-04-1999.
- 401 WTA Selters i.T., transport list from 21-02-1938; file from the office of the state police on Blöbaum, Alwine, II D-4526/37.
- 402 WTA Selters i.T., Doc. 09/05/45; declaration of release.
- 403 PA, interview Pronk, Cobie, 18-10-2002.
- 404 WTA Emmen, interview Huisman, Gerdina 15-03-2002.
- 405 AMM, K5/6; WTA Selters i.T., data collection on the female Jehovah's Witnesses incarcerated at St. Lambrecht.
- 406 Buber-Neumann 2009, p. 191.
- 407 Buber-Neumann 2009, p. 201.
- 408 Buber-Neumann 2009, p. 201.
- 409 PA, interview Kröll, Lore, 18-11-2002.
- 410 PA, interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 411 PA, interview Berkers, Toos, 16-10-2002.
- 412 PA, interview Kröll, Lore, 18-11-2002.
- 413 AMM, K5/6; WTA Selters i.T., data collection.
- 414 WTA Emmen, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-03-2002.
- 415 According to statements by Toos Berkers the German sisters in the faith also cooperated with her in the Abbey cellars (PA, interview Berkers, Toos, 16-10-2002).
- 416 AMM, K5/6.
- 417 WTA Selters i.T., data collection, Leopold, Helene.
- 418 AMM, K5/6; WTA Selters i.T., data collection, Schädlich, Anna (NR-1297, NR-891).
- 419 WTA Selters i.T., data collection, Schüler, Emma; WTA Selters i.T., Doc. 21/02/38; AMM, K5/6.
- 420 WTA Selters i.T., data collection, Uhlig, Paula Johanna; WTA Selters i.T., Doc. 05/02/37.

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- 421 WTA Selters i.T., PER 19/03/37.
- 422 Das Aktenzeichen der Staatspolizeistelle von Paula Uhlig lautete f 4 - 5117/ 36 C. (The file number at the office of the state police on Paula Uhlig was f 4-5117/36 C)
(WTA Selters i.T., Doc. 21/02/38).
- 423 AMM, K5/6; WTA Selters i.T., data collection, Ulbrich, Ella.
- 424 WTA Selters i.T., Doc. 15/06/49; WTA Selters i.T., data collection, Willibald, Magdalena; ZZ-Willibald, Magdalena Martin, St-K 741.
- 425 WTA Selters i.T., letter by Willibald, Magdalena, 09-01-1945.
- 426 WTA Selters i.T., Doc. 27/08/45.
- 427 WTA Selters i.T., Doc. 15/06/49, identity card Nr. OB.-1681-.
- 428 WTA Selters i.T., Doc. 30/07/38 (1); Doc. 04/06/45.
- 429 WTA Selters i.T., identity card, Winkler, Meta, Doc. 00/42 (2).
- 430 WTA Selters i.T., data collection, Winkler, Meta.
- 431 WTA Selters i.T., Doc. 28/11/50 (1).
- 432 Short for Vervolgte/r des Naziregimes (person persecuted by the Nazi regime).
- 433 WTA Selters i.T., Doc. 11/10/51 (1).
- 434 DÖW, 20000/H740; WStLA, SHV 6350/47; WTA Vienna, data collection, Hummel, Hedwig.
- 435 WStLA, interrogation protocol, Hummel, Hedwig, 09-12-1941.
- 436 DÖW, 14257.
- 437 WTA Vienna, data collection, Hummel, Hedwig; DÖW, declaration by the council of St. Lambrecht from 09-05-1945.
- 438 DÖW, 20100/10676. Despite her Bavarian descent Therese Schreiber was designated as an Austrian female Bible Student, she probably obtained her Austrian citizenship after her move to Vienna. WTA Vienna, Schreiber, Therese, biography; WTA Vienna, notes by Gsell, Heidi, on Schreiber, Therese.
- 439 DÖW, 20100/10676 (Freiheitsbescheinigung [declaration of release] St. Lambrecht).
- 440 Leadership of the Ravensbrück concentration camp was taken over by Max Koegel in 1939/40, who formerly had been Direktor of the women's concentration camp Lichtenburg. He remained in this function until the middle of 1942. Thereafter Fritz Suhren led the women's concentration camp Ravensbrück until 1945 (see Füllberg-Stolberg 1994, p. 222).

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- 441 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 442 WTA Selters i.T., data collection, Czudek, Anna; AMM, K5/6.
- 443 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002; interview Messnarz-Günter, Margarete, 13-09-2002.
- 444 AMM, K5/6.
- 445 AMM, K5/6.
- 446 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 447 WTA Emmen, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-03-2002.
- 448 PA, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 449 WTA Emmen, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-03-2002.
- 450 WTA Selters i.T., Wölfle, Paulina, biography.
- 451 WTA Selters i.T., Wölfle, Paulina, biography.
- 452 WTA Selters i.T., Doc. 12/40 (2), prison document Nr. 255, Wölfle, Paula, FKL Ravensbrück.
- 453 WTA Selters i.T., Wölfle, Paulina, biography.
- 454 WTA Selters i.T., Wölfle, Paulina, biography.
- 455 In hypnotic trance, access can be obtained to certain memories that remain inaccessible under normal circumstances. With the help of hypnotic suggestion, various memory skills can be integrated. Charcot used hypnosis to overcome a traumatic event. His aim was to break through its effect in the present and thereby to cure the patient (see Roth 1998, p. 158 and 166).
- 456 See Roth 1998, p. 156.
- 457 See Horie 1997, p. 22 f.
- 458 Hysteria is understood to mean a purposeful psychogenic affliction that is characterised by symptoms of a physical and/or spiritual nature. Emotionally severely overburdening events are seen as the cause. Apart from psychical symptoms like delusions, emotional outbursts, twilight states or amnesia, physical symptoms of illness are also part of hysteria. These include sensory disturbances in the shape of blindness or deafness, numbness, paralyses, tics, etc. (see Arnold, et al 1997, p. 947). Sigmund Freud presupposed a relationship between the symptoms of hysterical patients and the uterus (Greek 'hysteria'). Therefrom he derived the notion of hysterics (see Horie 1997, p. 22).
- 459 Horie 1997, p. 23.
- 460 Caruth 2000, p. 85.
- 461 Duden 2001, p. 1008.

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- 462 Horie 1997, p. 13.
- 463 Horie 1997, p. 13.
- 464 The concept stems from the psychoanalysis.
- 465 According to Freud, three basic forces located in the subconscious, form the personality: instinctive needs, rational thought, and moral standards. These dynamics form the behaviour, feeling and thinking of the individual. The 'I' distinguishes itself from the id (instinctive needs, urges, impulses) in the first years of life of infantile development of the psyche. Gratification of the Self-impulses is bound up with conformity to reality. To control undesirable id-impulses the 'I' develops basic strategies – the defence mechanisms (see Comer 2001, p. 46).
- 466 Arnold, et al 1997, p. 2356.
- 467 'With the concept of "id" Freud meant instinctive needs, urges and impulses. The id always aims at [immediate; author's remark] gratification. Freud was [...] convinced that all id-instincts are essentially of a sexual nature [...] With the concept of libido Freud meant the sexual energy, that [...] feeds the id' (Comer 2001, p. 46).
- 468 Arnold, et al 1997, p. 16.
- 469 Comer 2001, p. 48 f; Arnold, et al 1997, p. 16.
- 470 See Zimbardo/Gerrig 1999, p. 379.
- 471 See Quindeau 1995, p. 39.
- 472 Eissler 1963.
- 473 Grubrich-Simitis 1979, p. 997. Cited after Quindeau 1997, p. 40 f.
- 474 The concept stems from Kahn (1963).
- 475 See Quindeau 1995, p. 41.
- 476 Freud understood libido to be the human sexual energy reserve. In the narcissistic stage of development after birth, the libido is selfish, that is, directed towards the individual. Only when conception of objects has been developed – that is, the symbiotic stage has been overcome when the infant sees himself as one with the mother – then the libidinal energy can also be directed to objects. Love of oneself and object love form a dialectical unity of drive and non-drive feelings. This is called 'narcissism' (Krefting 1999).
- 477 See Quindeau 1995, p. 42.
- 478 See Quindeau 1995, p. 42.
- 479 Keilson's 'persecution and traumatizing classification' (1979) has been adopted in what follows.
- 480 See Quindeau 1995, p. 43.

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- 481 Numerous investigations have been performed on the physical and mental consequences of calamities. The phase classification of Cohen and Ahearn from 1980 is represented here (see Zimbardo/Gerrig 1999, p. 378).
- 482 Viktor E. Frankl was born on 26 March 1905 and he was a physician and psychologist in Vienna before being deported to various concentration camps by the Nazis. He survived Auschwitz and returned to his native city, where he obtained a chair in neurology and psychiatry at Vienna university. Frankl founded a psychotherapy – the logotherapy – in which his camp experiences are incorporated. So his camp imprisonment between 1942 and 1945 has influenced this existential therapy procedure, in which the client is supported so as to give sense and spiritual meaning to his existence by dealing with his own sufferings (see Comer 2001, p. 56; Frankl 2002, author's remarks).
- 483 Frankl 2002, p. 24.
- 484 Horie 1997, p. 49.
- 485 Horie 1997, p. 49. Dissociation is a process-like event, in which certain thoughts or mental activities lose their normal relation to the rest of the personality. These are split off and function, so to speak, independently. Thus, logically irreconcilable thoughts and feelings and attitudes may be maintained together without leading to an intrapersonal conflict (cf. Arnold et al 1997, p. 383). More than a hundred years ago, the French psychiatrist Pierre Janet already pointed out that he found these phenomena in patients with so-called hysterical symptoms. The individuals had lost the capacity to integrate mentally overwhelming events in their memory. So, dissociation forms a further symptom of traumas (see Horie 1997, p. 64).
- 486 Horie 1997, p. 50.
- 487 Frankl 2002, p. 42 f.
- 488 Zimbardo/Gerrig 1999, p. 378.
- 489 Frankl 2002, p. 60.
- 490 Frankl 2002, p. 117.
- 491 Zimbardo/Gerrig 1999, p. 378.
- 492 See Quindeau 1995, p. 44.
- 493 See Quindeau 1995, p. 45.
- 494 Kestenberg 1990, p. 40.
- 495 See Quindeau 1995, p. 47.
- 496 See Horie 1997, p. 81, table 'Stages of development of personality according to Erikson'.
- 497 See Assmann 1998, p. 151.
- 498 Assmann 1998, p. 148.

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- 499 See Laub 2000, p. 860.
- 500 Kinston/Cohen 1986, p. 178, cited after Laub 2000, p. 861.
- 501 See Laub 2000, p. 861.
- 502 See Caruth 2000, p. 85.
- 503 Laub 2000, p. 862.
- 504 See Laub 2000, p. 866 f.
- 505 Laub 2000, p. 866.
- 506 See Bohleber 1998, p. 256.
- 507 See Laub 2000, p. 866 f.; Laub 1999, p. 263.
- 508 Laub 1999, p. 263.
- 509 See Horie 1997, p. 83 f.
- 510 See Horie 1997, p. 55.
- 511 Psychological disorders do not mean pathologies in the medical sense of the polarity of health and illness. This concept should only describe changes in the various human systems that would not show these reactions without traumatic experiences of the individual.
- 512 Horie 1997, p. 64 f.
- 513 Horie 1997, p. 66.
- 514 Horie 1997, p. 73.
- 515 Horie 1997, p. 71.
- 516 The locus coeruleus is a blue-grey part of the brain to the side of the front part of the diamond groove. It contains numerous pigmented ganglion cells (see Pschyrembel 1993, p. 892).
- 517 The hippocampus is a part of the limbic system that deals with emotions.
- 518 The so-called amygdala is also part of the limbic system and is in the region of the temporal lobe (see Pschyrembel 1993, p. 283).
- 519 A flashback is when memories of a past trauma feel as if they are taking place at the current moment. It can be triggered by minor stimuli, for example by smell or sound. Furthermore, it may be accompanied by pseudo-hallucinations or transitory confusion (see Horie 1997, p. 50).
- 520 See Horie 1997, p. 98 f.
- 521 See Horie 1997, p. 112.

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- 522 The statements on this subject are also insights gained from self-found oral history-data. Only three interviews could be conducted with women from among the victims. Thus, the results may be regarded as a descriptive overview of the traumatic camp experiences of a few individuals that cannot be applied to the collective in a generalising way.
- 523 WTA Emmen, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 30-08-1993.
- 524 Bread and wine.
- 525 The 'Memorial' must be celebrated on a specific day of the year.
- 526 WTA Emmen, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 30-08-1993.
- 527 WTA Emmen, interview Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 30-08-1993.
- 528 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002; Hoogers-Elbertsen, Jans, 16-10-2002.
- 529 Failing of the monthly menstruation.
- 530 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 531 PA, interview Berkers, Toos, 16-10-2002.
- 532 Sjaan Pronk got an appendicitis; Gerdina Huisman got a severe laryngitis during the journey home, so that for weeks after her arrival in the Netherlands she could only communicate by writing.
- 533 PA, interview Huisman, Gerdina, 15-10-2002.
- 534 See Garbe 1998, p. 306 ff and Garbe 1999a, p. 543.
- 535 See Garbe 1999a, p. 543 and Garbe 1998, pp. 303-306.
- 536 See Bailer-Galander 2003, pp. 110-114.

12 Consulted Archives

Abbey Archives Seckau (AAS), Seckau

Archives Museum Mauthausen (AMM), Vienna

Archives of Diözese Graz/Seckau (DA), Graz

Archives of the KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau (ArDa), Dachau

Archives of the Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück (MGR), Fürstenberg

Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance – Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes (DÖW), Vienna

Federal Archives Branch Office Ludwigsburg – Bundesarchiv Aussenstelle Ludwigsburg (BArch/Ludwigsburg), Ludwigsburg

Federal Archives – Bundesarchiv Berlin (BArch), Berlin

Historical Archives Watchtower Society Emmen, the Netherlands (WTA Emmen).
Emmen

Historical Archives Watchtower Society Kraainem, Belgium (WTA Kraainem), Kraainem

Historical Archives Watchtower Society Selters in Taunus, Germany (WTA Selters i. T.),
Selters

Historical Archives Watchtower Society Vienna, Austria (WTA Wien), Vienna

Historical Archives Watchtower Society Warszawa, Poland (WTA Warszawa), Warsaw

Monastery Archives St. Lambrecht (StiA)

National Archives of Styria (StLA), Graz

Private archives Farkas, Tillmitsch (PA)

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14 Abbreviations

AAS	Abteiarchiv Seckau – Abbey Archives Seckau
AMM	Archiv Museum Mauthausen -- Archives Museum Mauthausen
ArDA	Archiv der KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau -- Archives of Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site
BArch	Bundesarchiv -- Federal Archives
BDC	Berlin Document Center -- Berlin Document Centre
BDM	Bund Deutscher Mädels -- League of German Girls
BGB	Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch -- (lit.: Civil Law Book) Civil Code
BRD	Bundesrepublik Deutschland – West Germany
DA	Archiv der Diözese Graz/Seckau -- Archive of the Diocese Graz/Seckau
DAF	Deutsche Arbeitsfront – German Labour Front
DDR	Deutsche Demokratische Republik – East Germany
DÖW	Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes – Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance
DWB	Deutsche Wirtschaftsbetriebe – German Economic Enterprises Ltd.
e.V.	Eingetragener Verein – Registered association
FKL	Frauenkonzentrationslager – Women's concentration camp
FLD	Finanzlandesdirektion -- Regional Finance Directorate
Gestapo	Geheime Staatspolizei – Secret State Police
IBV	Internationale Bibelforscher Vereinigung – International Bible Students Association

IST	Internationaler Suchdienst des Internationalen Komitees vom Roten Kreuz -- International Tracing Service of the International Committee of the Red Cross
KLM	Konzentrationslager Mauthausen – Concentration camp Mauthausen
KZ	Konzentrationslager – Concentration camp
LBA	Lehrerbildungsanstalt/Lehrerinnenbildungsanstalt – Teacher-training institute
LG	Landesgericht – Regional court
MGR	Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück – Memorial Museum Ravensbrück
NS	Nationalsozialismus – National Socialism
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei – National Socialist German Workers' Party
NSKK	Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrkorps – National Socialist Motor Corps
OKH	Oberkommando des Heeres -- High Command of the Army
OKW	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht – High Command of the Armed Forces
PA	Privatarchiv – Private archive
RAD	Reichsarbeitsdienst – State Labour Service
RFSS	Reichsführer-SS (= Heinrich Himmler) -- title held by head of the Schutzstaffel
RGBI	Reichsgesetzblatt – Reich Law Gazette
RKG	Reichskriegsgericht – Reich Court-Martial
RSHA	Reichssicherheitshauptamt – Reich Security Main Office

RuSHA	Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt – Race and Settlement Main Office
SA	Sturmabteilung – Storm Detachment, Stormtroopers
SD	Sicherheitsdienst – Security Service
sic	error of transcription (Latin, in full: sic erat scriptum – thus was it written)
SS	Schutzstaffel – Protection Squadron
StiA	Stiftsarchiv St. Lambrecht – Monastery Archives St. Lambrecht
StLA	Steirisches Landesarchiv -- National Archives of Styria
Stubaf.	Sturmbannführer – Major
VdN	Verfolgte(r) des Naziregimes -- Victim of the Nazi regime
WStLA	Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv – Vienna City and Provincial Archives
WTA	Wachturmgesellschaft Geschichtsarchiv – History Archives Watchtower Society
WVHA	Wirtschafts- und Verwaltungshauptamt – Main Economic and Administrative Office

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16 Glossary

Anschluss Annexation of Austria to the German Reich in March 1938.

Anweishäftling Supervisory prisoner.

Arbeitsdienst (see Reichsarbeitsdienst)

Aufnahmeschock Shock of admission.

Blockälteste Senior block prisoner in charge of a barrack in the concentration camps.

Bundestag Parliament.

Deutsche Arbeitsfront (DAF) German Labour Front.

Deutsche Wirtschaftsbetriebe (DWB) German Economic Enterprises Ltd.

Displaced Persons Camps A temporary facility for displaced persons (DP), whether refugees or internally displaced persons.

Gauführer Head of Regional Administrative District. Supreme territorial or regional Nazi Party authority.

Gauleiter Party leader of a regional area branch of the Nazi Party, the head of a Gau or Reichsgau.

Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service.

Gestapo Secret State Police.

Häftlingsausweis Prisoner identification card.

Herrenmensch Member of the master race.

Juliputsch A failed coup attempt against the Austrofascist regime by Austrian Nazis from 25 to 30 July 1934.

Lehrerinnenbildungsanstalt (LBA) Teacher-training institute for women.

Ortsgruppenleiter Local group leader.

Ostmark Eastern frontier. Original Nazi term for Austria.

Publikationsstelle Publication Centre.

Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt (RuSHA) Race and settlement main office
Reichsarbeitsdienst (RAD) Reich Labour Service
Reichsführer-SS Highest rank in the SS, held by Heinrich Himmler.
Reichsgau Each of the eleven regions formed of annexed territories after 1939.
Reichskanzlei Reich Chancellery.
Reichskanzler Reich Chancellor.
Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA) Reich Security Main Office.
Reichsstatthalter Reich Governor, President.
Reichsverein für Volkspflege und Siedlerhilfe Reich Association for People's Welfare and Settlers' Support.
SA-Sturmbannführer Middle-ranking officer in the SA, equivalent to Major.
Schutzhaft Protective custody.
Schutzhaftlager Protective custody camp.
Schutzstaffel (SS) Protection Squad or Security Squad.
Sicherheitsdienst (SD) Security Service of the SS.
SS-Brigadeführer Brigadier.
SS-Gruppenführer Major General.
SS-Hauptscharführer Captain.
SS-Oberscharführer Staff sergeant.
SS-Obersturmbannführer Lieutenant Colonel.
SS-Obersturmführer Lieutenant.
SS-Standartenführer Colonel.
SS-Sturmbannführer Major.
SS-Totenkopfverbände SS Death's-Head Units.
SS-Untersturmführer Second lieutenant.
Staatsrealschule Secondary School or High School.
Ständestaat Federal State of Austria (1934-1938).

Sturmabteilung (SA) Storm Troop. Paramilitary organization associated with the Nazi Party.

Südostdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft der Hochschullehrer Southeast German Research Association of Professors.

Systemzeit Nazi derogatory term for the Weimar Republic (1919-1933).

Verordnung zum Schutz von Volk und Staat Decree of the Reich President for the Protection of the People and State (Reichstag Fire Decree) (February 28, 1933).

Vervolgte(r) des Naziregimes (VdN) Victim of the Nazi regime.

Verwalter Administrator.

Volksdeutscher Ethnic German.

Volkssturmkommandant Home Defence Unit Commandant.

Vorläufige Fürsorgeerziehung gemäss §67 des Reichsgesetzes für Jugendwohlfahrt Provisional welfare education in accordance with §67 of the Reich Act for Youth Welfare.

Waffen-SS Armed fighting branch of the SS.

Wehrkraftersetzung Demoralisation of the war effort. The Nazis made it a capital offence.

Wehrmacht Armed forces

SS-Wirtschafts- und Verwaltungshauptamt (WVHA) Business Administration Main Office of the SS.

Zellenbau Cell block.

17 The Author

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In May 1943, a women's concentration camp was founded in the confiscated Benedictine monastery of St. Lambrecht. In this sub camp of the concentration camps Ravensbrück and Mauthausen, 23 Bible Students were forced to perform hard labour. For the women who came from Austria, Germany, Poland, Belgium and the Netherlands, this SS work camp was the last station of a long odyssey through several concentration camps of the Third Reich.

Anita Farkas reconstructed the history of the St. Lambrecht women's concentration camp, including the life stories of the women who were persecuted there for religious reasons.

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