

TITLE - Beckmann, Walda  
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NOTES -  
CONTENTS -

Tape 1  
Childhood - 1933

1:01:00Walda was born in a small village near a lake in northern Germany between Hamburg and Cuxhaven in December 1914. In 1933 she lived in Hamburg.

1:03:00She was sent to a camp in Bulsbuettel (ph) around 1937 after the Gestapo found out about her activities as a Pioneer, a leader of Jehovah Witness meetings.

1:05:00She was put into a small regional prison (date is unclear) in Oosten (ph) with her mother, aunt, and grandmother whom she had converted in 1932.

1:06:00In this prison a letter reached her in a cauliflower of brother Matthies (ph), the pioneer of the group she was now heading. Matthies, from the town of Stade, was in a concentration camp (unknown). It was the last time she heard of him.

1:07:00 She stayed there four weeks and then was displaced to Harburg (not Hamburg), where she stayed two months.

1:09:00During the first years when Walda was in and out of prison, her apartment would be searched continuously by the Gestapo for congregations and literature. For the secret congregation with other brothers and sisters she had installed a secret electric ringer that would warn of people at the door. This went on throughout 1933-45 when she was not in prison.

1:09:30She was a very active Jehovah's Witness and known by the Gestapo. She therefore had to move around frequently, because Gestapo kept following her.

1:13:00Walda would say she is a Jehovah Witness when looking for rooms. One of the landlords that let her stay at their apartment (for many were wary of Jehovah's Witnesses) was named Setters. Walda lived at Setters with another girl from Stade.

During an aerial bombing Mr. Setter was killed and again she had to move out.

1:13:30 Some people would take her and help here like the Setters, or they would tell the Gestapo of here undertakings as a Jehovah Witness.

1:14:00 She had to find new jobs as well, had to keep on moving. She goes to prison again (does not mention date/time frame difficult to follow) but they cannot keep her for lack of evidence.

1:14:30 She was a printer of the Wachturm, the magazine of the Jehovah Witnesses. She was given the matrixes from others, which remained anonymous. Printed in underground, not in her rooms.

1:15:00 Literature was brought into Germany from Switzerland.

1:16:00 Jehovah Witnesses did not in general know each other but kept to themselves or very small groups. Walda once met another Jehovah Witness, the daughter of a pastor, who gave her matrixes from which she would print the handouts, in a car of the Gestapo, which she later met again in the concentration camp (she says it is a concentration camp) Bulsbuettel (ph): "Are you also..." Walda asked, without ending the question. The other nodded and they were happy to have found each other.

1:16:30 The camp she describes as a long corridor with bars that one does not fall down below. Single cells were placed door next to door. They were small. If opened Walda would have to scream: "Schutzhaftgefangener Beckmann" (literally "prisoner to keep safe")

1:17:00 She had no watch in the cell, no mirror, no one to talk to for days. Even the guards (female) would not talk to her. She was allowed a 10-15 minute walk per day. Procedure: Step out of the cell, nose against the wall, then rigid walk in outside yard. She could not tell how long she was in the prison.

1:18:00 For half a year she was frequently brought into interrogation with the Nazis in the Hamburg Stadthaus. At first she was put into tiny dark cells for hours. Sometimes they would forget her. Hunger was always present at these times. At the interrogation tee and chocolate was placed in front of her.

1:18:30 They wanted to know who else was a Jehovah Witness but Walda would never answer. She stayed true to her belief throughout and after the Second World War.

BREAK 20:00, Monday 24

1:21:00 In 1933 congregations of Jehovah Witnesses was prohibited by law. She would take her bicycle and drive to the outskirts of the village to become the pioneer of a group of Jehovah

Witnesses, after Matthies had been imprisoned.

1:23:00The prohibition of Jehovah Witnesses was known throughout Germany and even the church leaders of small towns would literally slap her in the face should they find out what she was doing.

1:25:00Walda was put to jail for the distribution of prohibited literature about the Jehovah Witnesses for two months the first time. She was imprisoned again for two months for not saluting to SS-guards passing by with the Hitler-greeting.

1:26:00In the camp/prison walks, the inmates would have to walk with five meter distance between them. No conversation allowed. Walda recognized a number of Jehovah Witnesses.

1:26:30At one time in the prison, another woman covertly gave her a note. Back in the cell, a female guard demanded the note from Walda. Walda looked at her for a long time and the guard let her keep it. Had the guard taken the note, Walda would have been punished severely, maybe even with death.

1:27:00The interrogations continued. She remembers one of the soldiers saying: "Give up girl, you'll never get out of here." Brothers were beaten and mistreated. One night a woman was thrown into her cell with beautiful black hair. She was a Jehovah Witness as well. Then she was placed in another cell shortly after.

1:28:00In 1946 Walda saw her again at a Wachturm-meeting in Hamburg. Her black hair was white, her eyes blind from working at a fabric plant in one labor camps. The fabric destroyed her eyes.

BREAK

1:29:00In her cell she could hear the screams of people. They were brought to the cellar and beaten. One time she dared look out her window. She saw bald-headed men carrying trashbin-like objects on their backs and being drilled to "go up and down".

1:29:30One SS-man once said to her Goebbels had given a speech in which he stated that bad elements of the country would be sentenced to death. And that she was such an element.

1:30:00Walda was willing to die for her cause and fought for it under the given circumstances.

1:31:30One night Walda was taken out of her cell and brought to one of the administrators. "I know everything", he said, "even without your information. You are a courageous woman." The sentence for Walda was a further year in prison.

1:34:00A lot of the literature for the Wachturm also came out of

Czechoslovakia.

1:36:30 She was sent to Huetten concentration camp.

1:37:00 She did not know about Buchenwald or Auschwitz, because she was isolated. She couldn't write to her mother directly, but once threw a letter out of her window from Huetten which did reach her mother in Isensee.

1:40:00 She was never unemployed when she was free.

1:41:00 She has not lost belief and thinks we should believe in the Wachturm for a later time.

1:41:30 People were allowed to have the Bible under Hitler.

1:44:00 In her cell, she didn't even know if she could talk anymore. It was different than a concentration camp with its bunk bed system and large halls. She was isolated in the cell.

1:47:00 In 1946 she came back from another country (not specified) and had to go through another camp in Staumuende (ph) near Paderborn. This camp was set up by Americans and the British to find any Nazi-sympathizers. This procedure was called "Entnazifizierung".

1:47:30 It was a very cold year. They could not wash themselves for the water was frozen in the sinks.

1:49:00 She then worked in a hospital as a assistant.

1:51:00 One of her patients was a small girl with bullet wounds (Walda points to her upper chest). Walda says this girl was meant to be a medium, fortuneteller for Hitler. She was not good though as a medium. She was then taught how to shoot and was sent to spy on Goebbels and Goering. "It is unbelievable what Hitler was capable of", Walda says.

1:52:00 Walda lived in Hamburg until 1960, when she moved to Stuttgart.

1:55:00 END

(taken down by Anton Oenning)