

-TITLE-WALTER STEINFURTH
-I_DATE-JULY 1991
-SOURCE-JEHOVAH WITNESS
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY-EXCELLENT
-IMAGE_QUALITY-EXCELLENT
-DURATION-
-LANGUAGES-GERMAN WITH EXCELLENT TRANSLATION
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-
-CONTENTS-

Walter was born in 1919 in Stalzone Schalsund?? (sp??) in East Germany. He had two younger sisters, both of who living in North Germany, at the time of this interview. His mother died, when he was 3 years old.

:02 He completed elementary school education, then was apprenticed as a gardener. He remained a gardener. Post war he earned his living by selling leather goods and insurance, which allowed him to attend to J.W. business during the weekends.

:03 His family's religious background was Protestant Evangelical, but not devout.

:04 Situation in Germany in 1933? Unemployment issues were very difficult, so that many people hoped that the new regime would increase employment. His father did not have great hopes for the new regime, but his mother (stepmother?) did.

:07 He had heard of the imprisonment of Jews and Gypsies.

:08 The Church's involvement in the regime had been minimal in the beginning, but gradually it became evident that the clergy supported the regime.

:09 He was introduced to J.W.'s faith through a colleague at work. This man had been a full time pioneer in the Netherlands for a while.

:10 Thoughts re pacifism? he had never supported the Nazi regime, and the company which employed him had never put any pressure of his to support the regime.

:11 Reaction to the 1939 invasion of Poland? He thought that the war was a crime, because killing people was never justifiable.

:12 He was baptized a J.W. in 1942.

:14 He was called up for military service in 1936 (?). He was assigned to the Luftwaffe. He was a member of an airport crew, performing work on the base (in the uniform shop). He lived off base (in Berlin) with his wife and his parents-in-law. He married in 1941. (Dates are very unclear in this interview.)

:15 Racial indoctrination? Little indoctrination re Jews. Indoctrination focused on Slave being lesser people.

He continued to meet with J.W.'s and with the brother who had introduced him to J.W.'s faith. He was especially interested in the songs.

:18 When did he change his view re the war effort? In 1943 his trop was moved (or about to be moved) to the Eastern front. At that point he requested CO status.

:20 he had written a letter to the High Command, explaining his refusal of further military service. The stance taken was a pacifist stance, explaining that he saw war as a political move, while his religion taught him: "Thou shalt not kill."

:22 He never received a written reply. However he was arrested and taken for trial in a Berlin (military?) court. He was sentenced to detention.

:23 Originally he was confined in solitary confinement and he was kicked and beaten with the authorities were not satisfied with his answers during interrogation. However, the authorities did realize that no matter what, he would stick to his views.

:24 His feelings re writing his letter? He prayed a lot and trusted that the truth would finally win out, realizing all the while that he might lose his life for his faith. He continued to trust in God.

:26 Which jails? His interrogations took place in Tegel (Berlin) and in Spandau. Imprisonments in Spandau and Targun, later to be transferred to Milowics concentration camp, near Prague.

:29 Had he been pressed to change his (religious) mind? He had only one conversation with a Protestant chaplain, who did try to teach him the difference between killing (in war) and murder. This chaplain, during his one conversation, realized that Walter would never change his mind. This particular chaplain later became the Bishop of the Evangelical Church for all of Germany. (Chaplain's man: Debelius).

:33 Treatment in prison? He remained in Tegel and Spandau about 6 months. The food was very bad, consisting of rice and so-called fish soup, sometimes supplemented by rotten (inedible) potatoes.

:36 How was the treatment of the other soldiers? He was pretty isolated, but occasionally was able to talk with them, times he used to inform them of J.W.'s faith.

:37 The prisoner ship was a mixture of homosexuals and criminals. He again emphasizes that he was pretty isolated, with few occasions to discuss the Bible with other prisoners and guards.

:39 Transport from Spandau to Targun took place by train, as was transfer the next time. Transportation experiences were very hard, because the prisoners were shackled and there was great overcrowding, with only buckets serving as toilets. Transports took place on weekends, so that arrival at next prison was particularly difficult.

:43 Jews and political prisoners were kept apart from the other prisoners.

:46 In Targau treatment was worst. Work assignment they were in a glass factory.

:47 Had he heard of concentration camps for Jews and Gypsies? Yes, but he knew on details.

:48 Did he know that J.W.'s were in camps? Yes, because his father in law, a J.W. was in a concentration camp. (He had married in 1941).

:49 From Targau he was moved to Milowics. (No dates are given.) There he first worked in a stone quarry. Later he worked as a gardener. Some of the time he worked in non-prison Czechs, who were very protective towards the prisoners. The guards there, too, were considerably better than during his prior experiences. The guards were older and more lenient.

:52 On July 20, 1944, the date of the attempted assassination of Hitler, some Czechs tried to get the prisoners some weapons, but this operation fizzled.

:53 What were his sources of information? Czechs, but only sometime after the events.

:54 Did he get discouraged? He was always convinced that the war would end sometimes, but he didn't think that it would last as long as it did, in fact. However, he trusted always that the coming Kingdom would solve all problems, including end of war and end of Nazism.

:57 once every four weeks he received a letter from his wife, who was a J.W. and very supportive of him and his stance.

:58 Did he know of atrocities in other camps? Did not know any details.

:59 (German) soldiers' spirit toward the end of the war? It was clear that they no longer had any hope of victory, and were expecting the end of the war.

1:00 In 1945 he was very glad that the war had ended. Upon return life was very difficult in the beginning, but he had a chance of being useful to the J.W.'s. He became a J.W. overseer. (It is clear that he returned to East Germany. In 1951 the Communists banned J.W. He was re-arrested. (Again, dates are lacking).. He was released in 1960. Thereafter he moved to West Germany.

1:04 How was he freed in 1945? As the Russians approached, the Germans organized transport of prisoners back to Germany. They were sent to Frankfurt am Oder, but since Russian troops had moved in there, he went (by himself) to Berlin, and moved in with his wife's relatives, until the end of the war.

1:07 During his imprisonments he wore prison uniforms: grey with yellow stripes. No J.W.'s insignia.

He had had a son in 1942.

1:10 Reunion with his wife and son was joyful. He had last seen them in 1942, in Berlin. Asked to describe his emotions re reunion, Walter bursts into tears, and then, in choking voice, states: "Indescribable."

1:12 In retrospect what are his feelings re his experiences 1942-1945? he is convinced that his survival was due to God, and made possible by his belief in God. He knows of many J.W.'s who lost their lives, including the man who originally introduced him to J.W.'s faith. That man was executed. He is grateful that he can still serve Jehovah.

1:15 he has been a J.W.'s overseer in Frankfurt (am Main) for the past 30 years, a leadership position he recently handed over to a younger generation. In the middle 1980's he organized a J.W.'s convention in Frankfurt.

1:17 He introduced his wife (B.D. 1920), and a photograph of their son is shown.

1:19 Wife states that she was in full agreement with her husband's stand and his principles.

1:21 Documents shown: copy of his letter of refusal of military service, and a document, stating his release from imprisonment.
.END.