

-TITLE-EDWARD WARTER
-I_DATE-OCTOBER 21, 1988
-SOURCE-JEHOVAH WITNESS
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY-GOOD
-IMAGE_QUALITY-GOOD, SOME FLAWS
-DURATION-1 HOUR 35 MINUTES
-LANGUAGES-ENGLISH AND GERMAN ACCEPTABLE TRANSLATION
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-
-CONTENTS-

1:01:30 Ruth Warter was born June 13, 1905. Edward was born November 20, 1901. Both are from Memelland (Lit: Klaipeda). in 1933, they were 28 and 32 years old, respectively.

1:02:45 The first Nazi persecutions of Jehovah's Witnesses in Memellang occurred in 1940. At the time, Ruth and Edward lived in a farm. When the Nazis came, they searched homes and offices for literature, but could find nothing, because everything was buried or hidden in the barn.

1:03:45 Although they had gotten rid of most of their literature, the Waters still had a good deal of materials from Lithuania. After march 1933, the Jehovah's Witnesses did not print any new literature in Germany, but they continued to import it from Holland and Czechoslovakia, later from Switzerland, with the help of people who brought materials secretly.

1:06:00 Until 1939, no one bothered the Jehovah's Witnesses; the Memelland only became part of the Third Reich in 1939. In 1939, Hitler's troops came in airplanes roared, and the first searches of Jehovah's Witness homes occurred. The Nazi put all the literature, pictures, Bibles and calendars together, took it to the marketplace, and burned them in a huge fire.

1:08:10 The Jehovah's Witnesses were the only religious group (other than Jews) to be bothered by the Nazis. No other churches had similar complaints. A possible reason for this is the Jehovah's Witnesses had been prohibited in Germany since 1933.

1:10:00 No one was forced to salute the Swastika, but it was the law that they should. Ruth could never get herself to greet anyone with "Heil Hitler."

1:11:00 Edward was first arrested for refusing to serve in the Army. He was tried in Berlin, then sent to Stutthof, near Danzig (Pol: Gdansk).

1:11:30 At Stutthof, Edward was immediately made to work. Fortunately, they were already some Jehovah's Witnesses in the concentration camp, and they arranged for his to get a job indoors. Edward became a tailor; other lucky ones became shoe-makers. Working indoors gave the inmates some protection, while the people assigned to outdoor labor usually "Didn't last very long."

1:12:45 The inmates woke up at 5 a.m. every morning. They were usually not very well-rested, because they had to share their beds with as many as three people, with two men facing one was and the other two's head at their feet. The beds were set up with three bunks each, and blankets were scarce, so they were often taken by the men on the top bunks, leaving the men in the lower bunks with nothing. Edward remembers an incident when he tried to sleep on the floor, because there were 3 big men in his bed. The kapo came in and kicked him until he got into his bed.

1:14:20 Edward did not see any Jehovah's Witnesses being mistreated by the Nazi, but this might be because he was only in the concentration camp for 2 years, and he was only taken to and from work every day. He did witness hangings of people who had broken the rules. These hangings were held at noon before lunch, and the prisoners were forced to watch. None of the Jehovah's Witnesses were ever hanged at this camp, to Edward's knowledge. The worst punishment he saw inflicted on a Jehovah's Witness was the "Bock," where prisoners were put on a block and flagged with a horse whip.

1:16:00 Every month, the Jehovah's Witnesses were taken to the commander's house, outside the camp (all the SS people lived outside the camp). On these visits to the commander, the Jehovah's Witnesses were told that if they renounced their faith in writing - by signing a prepared document -, they would be set free. Nobody every accepted the offer. When they returned to the camp, they would sign their songs, and their fellow inmates would cheer for them. The commander was furious that he could not break any of them; at the same time, his wife took Jehovah's Witnesses to work in the house, because they were trustworthy.

1:18:00 Another Jehovah's Witness, "Brother Scheider," also witnessed all these things; he is still alive, and he and Edward have kept in touch through letters.

1:19:00 Ruth was only arrested in 1943, after she tried to smuggle a letter in for a Jehovah's Witness who was in jail. The guards were generally lenient, especially this late in the war, but the letter came into the wrong hands. Ruth was put in jail (Untersuchungshaft) for 3 weeks.

1:21:00 Ruth managed to keep her children throughout the Nazi's period, effort to take them away from her. They told her that she was not capable of bringing up her children in the "Nazi spirit," because she read the Bible every day and was religious. But her children did well in school, so the Nazis had no excuse to take them. They asked the children if they had seen anyone bringing Jehovah's Witness's literature into the house, but they said they knew nothing.

1:23:20 The Jehovah's Witnesses' neighbors treated them well trying to help them when the Nazis came. This was because the Jehovah's Witnesses had been friendly to their neighbors before. The readers of "Awake" (?) magazine also helped them.

1:25:15 In Edward's concentration camp, the Jehovah's Witnesses managed to continue to practice their religion. They had Sundays off, and then, the Jehovah's Witnesses would meet in the shoe-makers' shop to read and discuss the Watchtower together. Edward does not know where the pamphlets came from. The Jehovah's Witnesses preached to many people, especially to Jews, often taking advantage of the fact that the Jews asked them what the purple badges they wore stood for.

1:29:00 The Jehovah's Witnesses sometimes helped each other, but the Wartars had a farm (Pachtgrundstuck), so they did not need help and did not receive any. The Jehovah's Witnesses also supported their church. As the war progressed, they did not have much literature, but when they got something, they would read it, then distribute it.

1:32:00 The Wartars moved around a lot, so they have no documents or photos from the Nazi period. After leaving the Memelland, Ruth went to Siberia, then Tbilisi (?). Edward was sent to Denmark from the concentration camp and returned in 1946. Edward spent half a year in Denmark after the war ended, then returned to the Memelland. In 1951, Stalin ordered all Jehovah's Witness leaders to be arrested and banned to Siberia. Edward had heard of such plans early on, right after he was liberated. This did not discourage him, however, and he and a Ukrainian friend started distributing Jehovah's Witness literature in Litaven (German: Lithuania). When the Russians arrested the Jehovah's Witnesses, they accused them of being American spies. They were taken to Vilnius, where they were tried and convicted, then they were sent to a place far north in Russian. Their families were sent to Siberia.

1:37:00 In Siberia, the prisoners had to work very hard, only taking a bread on the national holidays. The Russians had prohibited the Jehovah's Witnesses, just like in Germany.

1:38:15 Edward was taken out of the concentration camp may 5, 1945, and put on a boat to the Baltic Sea, along with 12 other Jehovah's Witnesses, just like in Germany.

1:40:00 The prisoners had to wear their uniforms in the boat. Edward does not have a number engraved in his arm, because by the time he got to the camp, they no longer numbered the newcomers.

1:41:00 The non-Jewish prisoners knew of the selections that occurred when the Jews came to the camps, and how some were put on the left, and some on the right. The shoe-makers' barracks were near the fence, and across were the Jews' barracks, so they could see them. The Jews (he seems to be speaking of the women) were all sick, and the Nazi loaded them into trucks, the corpses and the half-dead alike, and took them to ditches. There, they threw them in, all together, poured tar over them, and burned them. Some were burned alive. The smell reached the camp, and took away the inmates' appetite. The people on the commandos that did this to the Jews were the only ones allowed to drink, and they got drunk on Vodka. Jehovah's Witnesses did not work on these commandos.

Once, Edward had to work in the Jewish women's barracks. He took two bottles of water with him, and the women threw themselves by the hundreds to at least wet their hands a little, so they could moisten their lips. When they did this, the Gestapo women flagged them furiously. The Jehovah's Witness could not do much to help the Jews. but tried to console them and preach to them.

1:46:40 The Wartners now live in Western Germany because Ruth's sister got them a visa, and because they were allowed to leave when they got old.

1:48:00 They were all under the "Kommandantur" when Edward got out of the concentration camp. The Russians condemned him to 10 years in prison; his family was banned to Siberia for life. By working extra hours, Edward had his sentence reduced, and was released in 1960. At this point, he went to Tbilisi (ph). When he retired in 1969, he was allowed to return to Germany. Some Jehovah's Witnesses are still in Russia.

1:59:50 Memelland (Lit: Klaipeda) was under Litauen, and was autonomous before Hitler came in. It had been part of the German Reich until 1918.

2:00:00 In 1945, when they knew, the Russians were coming, the Germans loaded the prisoners into a boat, and took them to Baltic, where they were supposed to be headed for an island. The area around the island was mined, however, but somehow the prisoners made it through, to everyone's surprise. They came to the island, then they left again, and their boat, which was in bad shape, started to capsize. The prisoners saved themselves by swimming to Denmark.

2:05:00 There were 5 Jehovah's Witnesses congregations in Memelland. Only a few Jehovah's Witnesses were sent to the camps, since many others had been put in jail for refusing to enlist in the army. Two Jehovah's Witnesses were shot, one at the beginning and one at the end of the Nazi periods. They were shot publicly, before the military corps. The families just got an announcement of their deaths.

2:08:45 In Memelland (Lit: Klaipeda) the Jehovah's Witness parents were allowed to keep their children; Ruth knows that in another town, one family's children were taken away and given to relatives who were not Jehovah's Witnesses.

2:10:15 The Catholic and Protestant clergy did not try to defend the Jehovah's Witnesses from the Nazis. When the Nazis wanted Edward to enlist in the army, they called Ruth in to convince her to help them. When she refused, they had a Protestant clergyman talk to her. The clergy of other churches said the Jehovah's Witnesses were wolves in sheep's clothes.

2:14:45 Edward was the only Jehovah's Witness from Memelland in his concentration camp; others were in prison or had died.

2:15:45 When Edward was in the concentration camp, a Catholic priest came to him and told his Hitler had been sent by God to save mankind. Edward protested and tried to prove it with the Bible.

2:18:15 Ruth elaborates on her last story. The official who dealt with her was writing to his nephew, encouraging him to enlist. He told her he felt her ideas were good, but the world was not prepared for them yet. Mentions "temptations" from the Nazi.

2:23:00 The Russians' interrogatories were far worse than those from the Germans. Under the Russians, prisoners were hardly allowed to sleep, and they had things put in their food. Edward describes his interrogatory in Russia, then talks at length about the present situation in Russia.

2:31:00 The Wartars received monetary compensation from the German government for the years they lost in the concentration camps in Germany and in Russia. Edward received 11,000 DM for his time in Stutthof, and he and Ruth received 30,000 DM each for their time in Russia.

2:32:00 HERE THE RECORDING BREAKS OFF
.END.