

Aloyse ELBISSER RG-50.028.0098

Interview Summary

Aloyse ELBISSER was born on the 9th of November 1918 in Romanshorn in Switzerland.

At the end of 1942, the German authorities decided to enlist into the Army all those living in the Alsace Lorraine region of France. This presented a serious question of conscience for Aloyse as his knowledge of the Bible was still limited at this time. He had one of three options: fleeing to Switzerland with all the risks involved, joining the German Army or refusing to go into the Army due to his faith.

His sister advised him to get baptised. Despite the obvious risks such a decision entailed, he was baptised at the home of brother Genevois.

Aloyse said that he 'had gained the strength to obey God rather than men'. He failed to see how he could go and 'kill people that he didn't know in a foreign country' just 'to satisfy the ideologies of some higher authorities'. He preferred to obey God, because 'if he was going to suffer, it might as well be for a worthy cause'.

Aloyse's father lived in fear of the authorities as he had already suffered great loss, one of his sons had been declared missing in action and the other one had been arrested on the 23rd February 1943 trying to escape the country and flee into Switzerland. He was then interned in a concentration camp.

Aloyse was called to the military draft board. He refused to show up on the day of the convocation to make it clear that he was not prepared to volunteer to go into the Army. He explained before the board, 'I am a Christian Witness of Jehovah'. He was arrested, taken to the Gestapo and sent to Mulhouse prison and then transferred into the Schirmeck concentration camp in the Alsace region of the Lower Rhine.

From the outside, on the street, the camp looked like a military camp. After going through the four-metre high (just over 13 feet) iron gates, prisoners were met by SS guards armed with clubs. The prisoners were constantly threatened and mistreated. Aloyse fell seriously ill. He was no longer able to eat or sleep and had to work from seven in the morning until six in the evening, raking stones, "I was a walking skeleton" he said.

Later, he was summoned to Strasbourg for questioning by the Gestapo.

Sometimes on Sunday afternoon, Aloyse and the other inmates, who were being held under the same charges, were able to get together. This gave them the opportunity to "speak about God's word and to encourage each other".

April 1945: The detainees were between Rastadt and Freudenstadt in Germany as the French troops were crossing the Rhine.

On the 18th of April 1945 the German troops panicked, fled the camp and handed over the detainees to the TODT organization (a civil and military organisation that existed at this time in Nazi Germany).

On the 20th of April, they were able to make their way back into France.