

Johann Albert RG-50.028.0121.01.01

Summary of Interview

Johann Albert was born on November 14, 1914, in Kirchenlamitz, Oberfranken, Germany. Father: Elias Albert. Mother: Margaret Albert. Siblings: Fritz and Elizabeth.

Johann “Hans” Albert was raised in a religious Lutheran family. Widespread poverty in the years after World War I paved the way for Hitler and the Nazi party to gain momentum. Hans’ father did not like Hitler and said that if Hitler came to power, Germany would become a police state. The Nazis worked to gain control of the population by involving at least one member of each family in one of Hitler’s organizations, which included youth organizations for boys and girls. Hans and his family heard that Hitler was eliminating opposition to the Nazi party by sending Communist and Socialist leaders to concentration camps. Later, Jews and Jehovah’s Witnesses were also arrested and sent to camps. Although they knew people were being sent to concentration camps, most Germans were unaware of what was actually going on in them.

When Hans was 19 and a member of a Christian youth organization, he felt that something was wrong because the swastika flag was displayed in the church. Hans asked the minister what to do if he was drafted because he understood that “thou shalt not kill” was one of the Ten Commandments. His minister told him that the Bible says Christians must be obedient to the governments, and so he should go to war if asked. Hans was conscripted in 1936 and worked in communications for two years. In October 1939, he was called up to join the German Air Force and became a sergeant. He served in Czechoslovakia and France before requesting to go to Russia. He wanted to know what it was like there. Hans soon realized that the Germans were severely outnumbered in Russia and that Germany would not win the war. Hans deliberately delayed taking his furlough until the summer of 1943, when the situation for the German forces became very dangerous in Russia. Hans never saw the men in his company again because they were either captured or killed while he was away on furlough.

In 1944, Hans was wounded by Russian shrapnel and spent over six months in the hospital. Then, he was sent to the Ruhr Valley to recover. As American tanks and planes approached, Hans and other wounded soldiers took shelter in the basement. They all surrendered to the Americans and were eventually taken to a POW camp in France. Thousands of German prisoners died in the camp. After an investigation, the commander who was Jewish was replaced. Hans was released from the camp after six months. He was relieved that the war was over because fighting in war was against his principles. He returned home to Germany in October 1944.

Hans found work in the porcelain factory where he had worked as a youth. At that factory, a coworker who was one of Jehovah’s Witnesses gave Hans a book, *The Harp of God*, printed by the Watch Tower Society. After reading the entire book that night, Hans declared: “That’s it! That’s the truth!” He was eager to learn more about God’s purpose to transform the earth into a paradise, so he met with a small group of Witnesses to study the Bible. After three weeks, Hans started to go from door-to-door in his small town to share what he had learned. Hans felt that many people realized that the church did not preach what was in the Bible and they did not like having to pay taxes to support the church. In two years, two congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses were established in the area.

Hans returned to speak to the minister at his former church and asked him why he didn't refer to the Old Testament in the Bible and why he didn't go out preaching to people about God's Kingdom. The clergyman replied that he could not do that because he would lose his job if he didn't do things according to the traditions of the church.

Hans was baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses in 1948. His parents and sister also became Jehovah's Witnesses. Hans met Martha, a young Jewish woman, at the porcelain factory where he worked, and they eventually married. In 1951, they emigrated to the United States and settled in California where Hans found work. In 1977, Hans attended an international convention of Jehovah's Witnesses in Munich, Germany.

Keywords

Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witness literature – The Harp of God

Watchtower Society