

*Günter Cordier Interview*

**Interview with Dr. Günter Cordier**

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Interview by Director of History Museum, Menden, Germany

Interview Translation by Ari Kloke, Denver, Colorado

Translation edited by Robert and Carol Culbertson, Centennial, Colorado

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*Editor's Notes:*

1. *How we are connected: The patriarchs of the Meyer family from Harzgerode, Germany were Selmar and Fanny (Wolff) Meyer. They had 9 children. They had a daughter, Anna. Her daughter was Käthe Meyer Cordier and her son is Günter Cordier, who gives his personal testimony here. Anna's older sister, Bertha, was my great-grandmother; her son, Ernst was my grandfather.*
2. *The recorded interview starts after Günter has already started the verbal interview, and picks up accordingly.*
3. *The translation is divided into four chapters, coinciding with chapters on DVD.*
4. *The interview is not in chronological order; it jumps around in time. The notes try to help you keep it all straight.*
5. *Although he lives in Dortmund now, Günter's hometown is Menden, near Dortmund, where he lived when the bad times started, hence the references to places in that town.*
6. *Ursula is Günter's second wife.*
7. *The translator Ari Kloke's notes are in italic parentheses, sometimes containing "Ari:".*
8. *Our notes are also in italic parentheses, preceded by "Ed. Note:".*

## Günter Cordier Interview

### **Chapter 1**

Günter: ...that's what they're talking about, those who return from Iran and Afghanistan, Pakistan, from Iraq – I keep hearing over and over that the soldiers return, deeply disturbed. Seems that is described by doctors as if this were not the case (*with soldiers*) in the past. It was also like that after WWII; war hasn't become more brutal...but rather I am of the opinion that what the soldiers experienced in the last war (*WWII*) corresponds with what young people (*soldiers*) go through today.

A few days ago on TV, there was a report in the news about a young, female army medic in Kosovo who was walking with a 9-yr-old child, holding the child's hand. She ran into a man who proceeded to shoot the child – while she was still holding its hand! Those are of course the kind of experiences a person can never be free from.

*(Cut, Günter asked if he'd also like something to drink)*

I keep hearing again and again that when the soldiers come back, they are so deeply psychologically disturbed – today it is evident; back then no one noticed. It's not at all anything out of the ordinary. And I am under the impression that I also suffer from such a disturbance, considering that the images never go away. What I experienced was so indelibly disturbing, and it began during my relatively young childhood years. When Hitler came to power, I was (*long pause*) 12. My memories of, as well my ability to remember this period in detail, are completely intact – insofar as my memory functions at all at this point! (*big smile*)

Interviewer: About THAT I have absolutely no doubt! It's amazing. I wonder if when I'm 90 I'll be sitting there, as fit as you are now!

Günter: Well, of course one has to ask what I am still doing here at the age of 90, period. (*big smile*) Yet, but... I have, I have difficulties with vocabulary recall, all the time. Began a year or two ago. Can't think of the right word. I am horrible at remembering names, and as a radiologist, I had to learn so many proper names and master subject knowledge, documentation. My profession consisted of documentation of findings; I had to write a lot and I believe that I wrote excellent reports. (*Sits back in chair*) I couldn't do that any more. Those days are over. (*Leans forward*) I wouldn't want to return to my profession now, even though I was committed – with all of my heart and soul -- to being a physician. And with success, too (*huge grin, looks proud*).

*(Ed. Note: Günter wrote out the diagnosis of his condition for us, calling it "Amnestische Aphasie", which is amnesic aphasia, the defective recall of specific names of objects.)*

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Yes. I, uh...my childhood experience transpired for the most part during the Nazi era. It began on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January, 1933, when Hitler came to power. We had a primitive radio, and the torchlight procession taking place in Berlin on this occasion was broadcast, live. My father, my two siblings and I, lay in bed. We all the flu, my mother was taking care of us, and our ears were glued to the radio as we listened to the broadcast of the torchlight procession along Unter den Linden, Brandenburg Gate. And at the same time – it was a severe winter, 1933 – one of the heating pipes in our home broke and it began to flood all over the place, as all of 4 of lay in bed!

My father said at the time not that it was the beginning of the end, but rather that it was the beginning of a difficult time for us. He was familiar with that book by Hitler...Mein Kampf. And in the “Kampf,” Hitler detailed exactly what he wanted to do with the Jews. My mother was Jewish, and in 1935, the Nuremberg Race Laws went into effect. These laws announced the plan to annihilate Jews in Germany.

*(Günter gets up and walks to bookshelf, returns to chair)*

I have the text of the Nuremberg Laws in a reference book from Leipzig from during the Hitler era; the Bibliographic Institute in Leipzig, 1935. What the Nazis had planned is explained here in exact detail. And then it was codified into law. The specifics as to how the laws would be executed are not included here, but it was a horrible set of laws. It even went so far that after my father died in 1942, we weren't protected anymore. The family didn't have any more protection from the Nazis. My father still lay... he died of upper lobe tuberculosis in both lungs that he had contracted while serving in WWI. The tuberculosis returned during the first few years of the war. That was the cause of death. And he was still laid out in his casket in the room next to the living room, my sister's room. *(To the interviewer)* I don't know if you remember? He was still laid out, he wasn't even buried yet when the Gestapo came for my mother's particulars. And he was lying in the next room. That is how it began.

Interviewer: We should actually already be filming this. The way you tell this is so interesting...

Videographer: *(whispers)* The tape is already running.

Interviewer: *(notably relieved)* The tape is already running. *(to videographer)* You are with the program! *(to Günter)* Would you like to begin telling your story, or would you prefer me to ask questions?

You are doing such a wonderful job. Simply begin by talking about your youth, and we'll take it from there.

Günter: Won't it be a bit chaotic when we're done?

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Interviewer: It's no problem at all. We can cut and splice as needed. Tell the story as it occurs to you, and we have a few notes to go on, too.

Günter: Ja, ja.

Ursula (*offering coffee to interviewing team*): You'll help yourselves, no? It's not just here to look at.

Günter: And, yes. Where was I?

Ursula: The Gestapo had come...

Günter: Yes. And even before that, our family business was taken away from us. I believe that happened in nineteen hundred and... thirty eight, thirty nine. It could also have been in 1940. At any rate, the firm Roccoco, which belonged to my father, had a factory in which iron saws were produced with a sawing machine using an oil pressure pump, a sawing board attached to a bow of sorts (*Günter forms an arch with his hands*). Iron blocks and poles ranging up to 40 cm in diameter were sawed there. Production went well in the business, and that's why the firm became an armaments factory later on. And because it was an armaments factory, my father was dispossessed of it via a business man from Iserlohn, who was sent as buyer. His name was Schlingensieb, a prominent National Socialist.

Ursula: But the main reason the firm was dispossessed was not because of the armaments, but because your mother was a Jew.

Günter: That was the reason, of course. He had to sell it, and became the equivalent of an employee in his own business.

Ursula: Or he could have gotten divorced – that would have been possible.

Günter: He was repeatedly pressed to do that. "Get divorced and you can keep your company." That he did not do. That was right at the time when I came of age (21?); that is when he died. I was the only one in the family that was eligible to be his heir. And...ja...the firm was returned to us in 1947, but we had to purchase it! That was the absurd thing about the whole situation. First we were dispossessed of the company, then we had to buy it back. It was taken away from us for about a pittance, and then when the whole story was over, we had to buy it back. (Ed. Günter was born in 1921)

Ursula: How? I don't understand. I thought 'dispossession' means that something is taken away, and you're saying that there was a payment involved?

Günter: Yes, they paid something for it. They did. That is true. And...you don't quite have it right, either.

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Ursula: No, I don't. To me, 'dispossession' means taking away.

Interview: Yes, but probably in exchange for a negligible sum.

Günter: Yes, they balanced the books and falsified the figures. The way that went down back then, there was nothing we could say or do about it. And what happened next was that the company's general power of attorney, Diamant was his name, took over the firm, and then later my brother – until, I believe, about 1960. The company went bankrupt. These machines weren't needed any longer and don't exist any more.

The site of the firm was located past today's district court building, on Anker Weg. *(to interviewer)* You know that, don't you? We moved to Bismarck Strasse, behind the barracks.

*(Ed. Note: There is a lot left out in this section of the interview, which will be filled in later. Here is a short chronology: Günter's non-Jewish father died in 1942. After that his Jewish mother had to wear the yellow Star of David that denoted a Jew. Because a half-Jew could not get into schools or the army, Günter worked at his father's iron foundry in Rödinghausen. In April 1944 he was arrested and immediately sent to France on a work-gang, as was his brother. His mother and sister were sent to a concentration camp. He was 22 at the time of his arrest.)*

Ja, then my father, then my father died and there we were, practically helpless, together with my mother. My mother wasn't allowed to leave the house any more at night; she wasn't allowed to go to the movies. Her movement was restricted. On the first of April, 1944, during the war, my brother and I were arrested by the head of the employment agency in Menden. His *(last)* name was Peters. What I experienced with Peters makes for a very interesting story. He took us, together with Eduard Einacker – that was a gypsy from... *(to the Interviewer)* you know that name? Peters took me, my brother, and Einacker to the employment agency in Dortmund. That's where the so-called "Jewish half-breeds" according to the Nuremberg Laws were taken. They were brought together there; I estimate that there were about 50 or 60 of us. Strangely enough, very many were from Dortmund. I ran into many people I knew there from Dortmund.

There I met Helmut John, who would have been my future brother-in-law. Helmut John was the company secretary of the chain factory in Kauldorf *(sp?)*. He was from Lippstadt, where his parents owned a successful fish business – the only fish shop in Lippstadt. He had a sister, and she would have been my future Ursula. *(Ed. Note: The sister later became Günter's first wife.)* This person, Helmut, a guy as big as a bear – was killed by my side during an aircraft strafing in France. We were both lying beneath a large tree, and the construction site we had been working at was for railroad track repair. That was immediately after the Allies landed in Normandy – 1944, in July. He died next to me on July 28<sup>th</sup>. As

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the bombs came down, a lot of gravel went up, and a huge chunk of clay came down and hit him on the back of his neck, killing him instantly. Later, I was in touch with his parents. He and I were very close during this camp imprisonment. And, uh...

Ursula: But Günter, perhaps you should say more about what happened in Dortmund, where you met. Perhaps a little more about what happened, chronologically, and about the work you were forced to do. Otherwise no one will know.

Günter: We were put on a freight train to Paris, taken to the Motier Barracks in Porte des Lilas, a suburb of Paris. Huge barracks complex. My estimate is that there were 1100 to 1500 of us – “half-breeds” from all over Europe. Austrians, Hungarians, Poles. We were registered and numbered, placed in groups of 100. My brother fell ill and was placed in a military hospital. Thus we were separated in Paris. I was placed in a 100-group together with Helmut John and many people from Dortmund. (Ed. Günter’s brother was Walter, Jr.)

We were moved to Le Lude, a very small town with a beautiful castle on the Petit Loir River - a tributary of the Loir River. We were quartered in a textile factory. And from there we had to walk about 10 km each morning to a “Championszug” (Ed. Note: “zug” is train, but I could not find the meaning of this word; maybe some kind of train building?) that was converted into a storage facility for V-2 munition. V-2’s (“retaliation weapons”) were rockets that were fired from Germany upon England back then. That was a system that spanned 36 km that were worked by 1100 people, 24/7. We joined them.

From there we were sent to build railroad tracks, as the low-flying Allied planes stepped up their campaign of bombing traffic routes – predominately railroad tracks, but roads as well. Again, that was immediately following the Allied landings in Normandy and Brittany. Then we were in Chateau du Loir (?) and Château Grand xxxx (?). All of this was near Alliere (?) – the whole story takes place in that area. Le Lude was that textile factory we were staying at; one corner of a defense triangle consisting of Le Lude, Le Flèche and...I always forget the name of the last one. There was one more town. (Ed. We think the third town of the triangle is Le Mans). And this defense triangle was always targeted during bombings. It was such that all of the train connections in this triangle were bombed so that nothing and no one on the inside could leave. A huge medic train went back and forth, until it couldn’t leave anymore because of the bombed-out tracks.

(Ed. Note: I could not find any towns with names like those in Allier region of central France. However, I did find these towns close together in the Sarthe area of the Pays de la Loir region of NW France, south of Le Mans: Le Lude, La Flèche, and Chateau-du-Loir. They are on the Loir River, which feeds into the Sarthe, which feeds into the Maine, which feeds into the Loire, so it must be what

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*he means by Petit Loir (“small Loir”). Given that I do not generally believe in coincidences and that Sarthe area is closer to Normandy than is Allier and would therefore be a more likely bombing target, my best guess is that these are the towns he is referring to. Maybe he meant Angers (a larger town nearby), not Allier, or maybe Ari misunderstood him. In any case, I have no doubt that these are the correct towns.)*

For the most part, I was assigned to do medic work. I had said I would study medicine – which I in fact planned to do, but hadn’t been able to up until that point because thanks to the Nuremberg Laws, I was as good as no longer German, no longer a German citizen. All of the attempts back then, primarily by mother, to have us be recognized as “normal” German citizens of the Reich, e.g. petitions to the Head of the Wehrmacht (*Germany Army during the Third Reich*), to the leaders of the (*Nazi*) party in Berlin – they were all struck down, denied. And all of my father’s attempts to have me study at a technical college – I was supposed to become an engineer and take over the family business – failed.

During the war (*Ed. Note: until he was arrested*), I was imprisoned and then sent to work in the family business as mechanical engineer. Before that, I interned at the iron foundry in Rödinghausen (*Ed. Note: a ways NE of Dortmund, north of Herford*). That was really interesting for me. When I introduced myself at the foundry, I met Max Becker, and he said, “You are the fourth generation of descendants from your family that has worked at this firm.” I hadn’t known about that at all. Then I learned that my father had been an apprentice in the foundry office. My maternal grandfather and his father had been the chief planners for the “Grau gießerei” (*loosely translated Gray cast iron foundry*) in Rödinghausen. Together with my grandfather came the foundry workers from Harzgerode, where my grandfather was from. There was a Mr. Weingarten, a senior master (*meister*), who was originally from Harzgerode. He and my grandfather came there together as apprentices.

My grandfather (*Ed. Note: Selmar Meyer*) had a large iron foundry in Harzgerode. My mother, Käthe’s father. It employed about 1100 workers back then. A huge complex. (*To the Interviewer*) Did you get to see Gitta’s photo album? (*Gitta was Günter’s sister.*)

Interviewer: Yes, she showed me photos, but I am not sure I remember those particular ones. She showed me family photos, and those were included.

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### Chapter 2

Günter: We were talking about the iron foundry in Rödinghausen, right? I worked there for half a year as an apprentice and learned a lot. Since I wasn't allowed to go to college, my alternative was to work in my parents' business. So I am actually a well-trained mechanical engineer who knows a lot about various machines and mould-making.

The company was called "Roccoco" and had been founded by my father. My grandmother had provided the funds for the start-up; she financed the business. An engineer came from England, named (*unintelligible*). He died a few years before my father and didn't experience any of that.

So while we were in France, the connection to my family was completely cut off. There was no mail. I wrote twice, and these letters that I wrote are still in my possession because they came back to me. My mother never received them. She didn't know what happened to my sister, either, who was arrested shortly after me and my brother, and sent to a camp exclusively for "half-breed" Jewish females, including Suze Grar, who was from Hema (*Hemer?*). She ended up in camp in Hacken (*Hagen?*) belonging to the Gloeckner Company. Shortly thereafter, my mother was arrested and deported to Theresienstadt. At first she was imprisoned in the Menden jail – a completely innocent woman who had never hurt anyone! A loving mother, sent from prison to prison, five or six of them, until she was turned over at Theresienstadt, the concentration camp.

*(Ed. Note: Hema is probably Hemer, just south of Dortmund. Hacken is probably Hagen, also just south of Dortmund. It could be Häcken, NE of Cologne, but I suggest staying with Hagen because of its proximity and pronunciation.)*

We were in France until late fall (1944), my brother and I, but I didn't have any idea what had happened to him.

Interviewer: He had been in a military hospital, and then you didn't see him again?

Günter: No, I didn't see him again until afterwards, when we were in Menden. To get back to my story again, the Allies kept coming closer, and one of my comrades defected to the American side, and the rest of us were all in the same situation: We had no news of our family members, we had no idea what was going on, so we went back to Germany – in part using stolen bikes, we rode right across France, through Luxembourg, and I was ordered to work in Westphalia region, where we had to bunker and dig fox holes. The armaments had been removed from the Westphalia bunkers and taken to Normandy, to the coast, where they were destroyed. Thus the bunkers in Westphalia, which had been built with a lot of effort as early as 1936, were without weapons and were of absolutely no use anymore.



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So we attempted to install Czech guns in the bunkers, which didn't fit at all. They were too long, and therefore we had to dig niches into the concrete walls, using hammers and chisels. Part of the time we had to sleep in these bunkers.

On Christmas Eve, Christmas, 1944, that was one of the saddest Christmases I've ever experienced. We were in a Westphalia bunker, without blankets, without mattresses, and it was horribly cold. I can say though that nothing happened to me. We survived all of that. We were constantly patrolled by SS-guards who reported to Organization Todt (*Ari: Third Reich civil and military engineering group*). All of these repercussions against the Jewish "half-breeds" transpired under the auspices of Organization Todt, which was a politically organized Department of Construction. They built the giant stadium for the Nuremberg party conventions, and worked all over. And often the Jewish "half-breeds" were placed at their disposal. And I was one of them.

The Allies were making their way to Westphalia and I received marching orders taking me back deeper into German territory, sending me to Wuppertal, into the Saar region, in the bunkers near St. Ingbert. I was in Siegelbach.

*(Ed. Note: St. Ingbert is way south of Dortmund, near the French Border at Saarbrücken. Wuppertal is SW of Dortmund near Düsseldorf. So his Wuppertal reference may be one paragraph early in his train of thought. See next paragraph.)*

We kept getting pushed back, forth and around. And then I got sent in a dangerous way to Wuppertal, Wichlinghausen, where a Gestapo headquarters was located. There they were trying to reorganize use of the Jewish "half-breeds." There were a whole bunch of Jewish "half-breeds" there. We called it "Mischlingshausen" instead of "Wichlinghausen." (*Ed. Note: "Mischling" means "mongrel" or "half-breed"*) From there I was sent to Essen, and received orders to go to Kirchlengern, near Herford, Bunde. I went through Menden; that was during the first few days of January (1945). I believe I stayed with my aunt in Menden for three days. (*To Interviewer*) You aren't familiar with the large "Atelierhaus" on Zeppelinstrasse, are you? The large one?

Interviewer: That's not where Gitta lived was it?

Günter: No, that is where I was born.

Ursula: Where Ewa Cordier lives, the building that used to be there.

Interviewer: Ah, yes. On the corner.

Günter: A large, single-family house. A three-story residence. The Kissingsche house was next door. I believe the original is still there.

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Interviewer: The Bauer family house, wasn't that there?

Günter: Yes. Those were the three buildings.

Interviewer: Ach. That was there, too. Ok. That gives me a sense of where that is.

Günter: That's the building that later belonged to my brother. He got that house, my sister got the place I was born on Zeppelin Street, and I received a land parcel by the family business. That is the place where Tegler Cordier now lives. The parcel that Tegler's home is on used to belong to me.

Ursula: Isn't that near the District Court?

Günter: Yes. The company was located behind the Court. That whole parcel belonged to the company. At any rate, I traveled through Menden and happened to run into my cousin, Wolfgang. Wolfgang was a little bit younger than me, and was ambitious. He really wanted to attain the rank of officer, which was an absurd thing to want three or four months before the end of the war. I told him to stick around and try not to get sent to the war front. He said, "No, I want to become an officer and I am returning to the front." That was the last time I ever saw him, because he departed for Berlin, where a relative of his mother was the head physician at a large military hospital. That's where he went. And he (*Ari: the relative*) also told him to stay here, make yourself sick... (*Ari: In German, "mach Dich krank"*)

Ursula: No, I'll write you a doctor's letter ("ich schreibe Dich krank")

Günter: But they did all get sick, didn't they? No, he said, I'm going to the front, and it's likely that he fell a few days later. No one ever heard from him again. Gone.

*(Ed. Note: We assume that Wolfgang was a cousin on his father's side and hence not Jewish, else it was unlikely he could have been in the army.)*

In the meantime, I was in Kirchlengern as a medic.

Ursula: My husband still has his medic's case. (*Everyone laughs, including Günter.*)

Günter: A sort of bag. I still have the suitcase I had with me during the entire camp period.

Interviewer: Do you still have that suitcase?

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Günter: I don't have it any more. It contained my stamp collection; I had put my stamps in there later. And I gave the suitcase to my son.

Ursula: It was a small suitcase (*demonstrates length and width with her hands*)

Günter: He probably still has it. How come? Are you interested in it?

Interviewer: Ja! The medic's bag and the suitcase, I must admit!

Ursula: The thing I think would be very interesting is something we haven't even considered putting together. (*To Günter*) I don't know if you said much about your school boy years.

Interviewer: No, he didn't.

Ursula: The documents in which the school principal vouched for your moral values...

Günter: Not my moral values, but my Aryan values. That the Aryan values deep within me were still be found.

Interviewer: Noooo.

Günter: So that I could qualify to become a soldier and have the rights of a citizen once again. I have an Army I.D., but inside it says "N-Z-V" (nicht zu verwerten), invalid or not to be used.

Ursula: Later you'll have to talk about your youth and childhood, and everything your parents, especially your mother did to try to have you recognized as an equal member of society. They even wanted him to become a soldier...

Günter: That was the prerequisite for any sort of future career.

*(Ed. Note: At this time, in the interest of getting the translation done on budget and in time to take it on a trip to Oklahoma, we asked Ari to just summarize the rest of the interview, not translate word-for-word. Possibly we can get the exact translation completed later.)*

### **Continuing as summary...**

Ursula asks if the document from the director of the school is located in a particular place in the home and goes to get them. The interviewer confirms how interesting it would be to see the documents related to Günter's story.

Ursula returns from short phone call with Günter's daughter, Janetta, who has expressed keen interest in receiving a copy of the interview in progress,

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uncensored, as her father doesn't talk all that much about what happened back then.

Günter offers to send the previously mentioned suitcase off with the museum crew. Ursula describes the case, but isn't sure what it was originally intended for. The shape is elongated, with a strange belt attached underneath, perhaps for cavalry. She says we'll see it a bit later.

Günter tells of arriving in Kirchlengern and of staying with the only remaining doctor in town, one who shared Günter's circumstances and who survived unharmed because he was the only doctor.

Günter tells of how Hitler had said that he decides who is Jewish and who isn't (*Ari: that was actually Hermann Goering, not Hitler...*), yet he had someone high in the military ranking who himself was a half-breed (*General Feldmarschall Milch*). (*The later*) Federal Chancellor Helmut Schmidt was one-quarter Jewish. He was also in the military. It varied from case to case. In France we had heavily decorated officers, recipients of the Iron Cross. They had been released from their positions, but kept their medals. The Nazi-driven racial hygiene was rather random.

Günter stayed with Dr. Buthenot in Kirchlengern. He was ordered to work at a small first aid station serving about 40 slave laborers who had been arrested off the streets in Italy and elsewhere and sent to work. They were all sick with tuberculosis or malnutrition. Those were the last men they could find out there. They were supposed to work in Germany, but they were so sick that they... (*Günter laughs and seems to think this is quite ironic/funny*).

Ursula brings the medic's case in. The interviewer can hardly believe it still exists. She opens it and examines the original contents that Günter kept from the last time he used it. Günter says she can take it to the museum. He says he doesn't need it any more...or does he? Everyone laughs.

Günter says he seldom needed it. He used it in France when a first aid train was bombed and he provided medical assistance.

Ursula mentions that Günter had said earlier that not only Jewish "half-breeds" were brought to collection points, but gypsies as well. Interviewer wonders what happened to Günter's gypsy comrade, Eduard Einacker. Günter found his grave in close proximity to that of his sister, Gitta. Einacker had become the leader of Günter's hundred-group near Paris, but had never heard from him again.

Hans Fuss from Iserlohn had spoken perfect French and had been part of same group.

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Ursula brings up how these men were sent as “cannon fodder” into dangerous areas that were being bombed.

Back to Kirchlengern, famous back then for being HQ of Cigarette Factory Heinicke (*sp?*), 5 km away in Bunde, a center of tobacco processing. Kirchlengern cemetery is the final resting place for many of these workers. Günter tried to obtain medicine to help sick workers with help of Dr. Buthenot. He was there from beginning of May (1945), still wearing a green uniform - sans lapels or rank, no swastika, and no Star of David. He mentions that his mother had to wear the star immediately following the death of Günter's father. He heard that in Südlengern there was bread to be had, and he made his way there with another medic. On the way to find bread, they had their first encounter with American soldiers, in a jeep, in which 3 or 4 German soldiers, prisoners, already sat.

Günter: “My English is poor, but I never spoke as well as I did at the moment the Americans arrived!”

The Americans fortunately did not have any room for Günter, otherwise he fears they would have captured him, too. And that ended his working stay in Kirchlengern. Günter went to the Central British Command, located in Herford, in an attempt to be able to contact his mother or find out what happened to her. The Commander used CB/telephone to try to reach Theresienstadt (concentration camp in Czechoslovakia), but he kept reaching Russians instead. Günter's mother returned in August (1945). Günter learned from her that the Russians had liberated the camp.

Ursula speaks of how Günter had spoken earlier (when she met him long ago) about having returned to Germany from France, but about how others from his hundred-group surrendered to the Americans instead. She wonders why he didn't do that, too, rather than returning to Germany, where he would be persecuted. Günter says that the reason he returned to Germany was because he didn't have any contact with his mother. (*Ed. Note: He returned to Germany to find out what had happened to his mother, rather than go to the relative safety of the Americans.*)

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### **Chapter 3**

Günter tells that when the Americans arrived (*in Menden*), they barricaded Zeppelinstrasse and occupied the family home. Fortunately there was little damage and loss at the home. Günter moved in with his aunt, upon his mother's return, into the home of his grandparents. He lived in the home of local group leader Strackmann. (*Ed. Note: From a statement later, these appear to be different houses at different times.*) Günter had no idea what happened to Strackmann, but he DOES know what happened to Peters! He heard that a group of foreigners had locked Peters in a box and wanted to drop it off a bridge behind the slaughter house.

While Günter served as medical assistant for 4 months in Menden as part of his studies in the hospital surgery department, responsible for male patients, he came across Peters, who had been operated on for tuberculosis and was in great pain. Günter treated him without letting Peters know that he recognized him. Günter imagines though that Peters knew good and well who he was, even though he (Peters) did not let on. Peters was certainly a driving force in persecuting the Jews.

Shoemaker-master Berger, baker-master Icht, saddle-master Stracke, and carpenter-master Kleske all lived within 100-200 meters. Günter's family was friends with all of them. Berger had an apprentice, Koester, who sold insurance, and had two sons – Karl was one of them, and Günter spent a lot of time with him. The Koesters got news on the same day that both of their sons were killed in action.

Another young man Günter spent a lot of time with was Hans Handelhof. Hans was badly injured at the beginning of the war. He went to school in Mannheim, got his PhD, and became head of the employment office in Muenster. Günter spent a lot of time with him.

Günter recounts his own studies and medical internships, leading to his education as a radiologist. He X-rayed 10 to 15 stomachs each day at the only clinic in Germany conducting brain operations at the time.

Ursula asks Günter to come back to the discussion of his friends from back then and the reality that it was dangerous for them to pal around with a half-Jew.

*(Ed. Note: We assume that the friends Günter mentions in this section were Aryan, not Jewish.)*

Interviewer and Günter discover that Günter's former friend, Willi Icht, was related to her grandmother (Theresa), whose maiden name was Icht.

## Günter Cordier Interview

Günter says that Mr. Berger was an especially nice person. His son was head of Sporthaus Karstadt department store in Dortmund. Günter met him, coincidentally, while shopping there without having previously known about him.

At the time of being arrested by the Nazis (*April 1944*), Günter received written notice to appear on a given day in the morning at the Menden train station. He had no idea what would become of himself and others, or where they were being sent. Mr. Berger decided to come along to see what would happen. He observed secretly and was able to relay a message to Günter's mother about what had happened once they were taken to Dortmund.

Günter lived in Strackmann's former house on the Perlenberg, near Rudi Hesse's house, for two years. (*Ed. Note: See the earlier statement about living in Strackmann's home.*)

Günter was only back in Menden sporadically after 1944. He stayed with his mother, back in their own family house by then. His mother returned in August of '44. (*Ari: He means 1945. Theresienstadt was not liberated until 1945.*) She had worked in the discharge office of Theresienstadt – no one had any personal documents any more. She met interesting people, including her own aunt, Marta, who she brought back with her to Menden.

Ursula: We have a letter from her, written after the 8<sup>th</sup> of May.

Günter goes to get documents from his childhood, opens briefcase to show interviewer. Coffee continues to flow thanks to Ursula's hospitality. (*Ari: ☺*)

Günter pulls out a folder entitled "Original Documents: Persecution," and laughs at the irony of the title.

He has a letter from the Head of Wehrmacht stating that he does not qualify to serve as regular soldier.

He reads a letter of recommendation from the Director of School from 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

He shows a letter of rejection from Heads of Heidelberg University and Technische Hochschule Karlsruhe.

*(Ed. Note: The letters listed above inform Günter that he has been rejected because of the laws; i.e., because he is half-Jewish. The letter from his 8<sup>th</sup>-grade school vouches for his Aryan values, in an attempt to get him "rehabilitated" so he could get into school or join the army. It did not work.)*

Interviewer contemplates how a young man must have felt to receive such letters, putting such a damper on the future. She would like to be able to copy the

## Günter Cordier Interview

documents. Günter will lend them to the museum, but wants them back. He had bad experiences in the past with documents not being returned.

Günter shows his I.D. from Organization Todt, Wehrmacht I.D.'s, etc., to be copied by museum and returned with DVD of interview

*(Ed. Note: Thanks to Günter's grandson Martin Ramm of Wiesbaden, we have translated copies of all the above documents.)*

There is further discussion of documents and which ones the Museum will borrow.

Günter loaned negatives to his brother and copies of 25-30 pictures from Harzgerode and never got them back.

There is discussion of longer-term loans to Museum, the process, and whom to speak to.

Günter relates the irony of being turned down by so many medical schools, and then of receiving offers from three different ones after the war. He began studies in Bonn during the first post-war semester offered. He chose Bonn because of its relative proximity to Menden. He jokes about needing to return home at least every two weeks to have his laundry done. *(Ari: ☺)*

Interviewer asks about Christmas 1944, the saddest one. Günter talks about work in front of the bunkers, repairs to be made and niches hammered into concrete walls.

Günter says he was good in school, but it is not so interesting to tell about. His art teacher, Schulz, was friends with his father, and therefore gave Günter a harder time because of it!

Günter tells of "State Youth Day" that pupils participated in during his youth, and the games. Günter wasn't allowed to participate; he was banned.

Günter says that actually going through that period felt different at the time than it is considered today.

Günter remembers "Night of Broken Glass" ("*Kristallnacht*"), Nov. 9, 1938. His impression was that the town was empty as he made his way to the charred synagogue. He saw prayer books lying on the street.



## Günter Cordier Interview

### **Chapter 4**

Günter had gone to investigate what had happened. Smoke was coming out of the synagogue as it burned. The windows of Sampson's corner store were covered with spray paint. The destruction of the synagogue is attributed to people who were not from Menden, "foreigners."

He went to school with Erich Eichengruen, son of a tailor. The Eichengruens immigrated to Palestine and changed their name to Aloni. Jenny Aloni, nee Rosenbaum, is a poet, not from Menden. Günter stayed in touch with him (*Erich?*).

There was no contact with other Jewish families after the war. The Frankenbergs and Bauers were other families Günter had known. Parents kept very much to themselves during that era; it is possible that others shunned them. They were certainly isolated.

Günter recounts friends from his earlier school days, i.e. Rudi Brohl, later owner of paper factory Rheinhard & Cohen, with whom he was good friends. Rudi is one of the few people Günter is still friends with to this day, including Harry Roth. All of the others have already passed on.

There were 72 pupils in 6<sup>th</sup> grade at Augusta School, which was near the church, at Kirchplatz. They had to go back and forth between the gymnasium and school.

A discussion then occurs between Ursula and Interviewer about Günter not telling much about his Nazi era experience, and about the presence of silence around the fact that his mother did not share much regarding Theresienstadt. In both cases, it would have been necessary to go ahead and ask the questions.

Videographer comments on the traumatic nature of the things Günter saw and heard and how impossible they are to digest. He asks if that was the reason Günter hadn't spoken much of them.

Günter says those things cannot be processed, characteristic of post-traumatic stress disorder. He still has nightmares to this day. The intensity and frequency of the return of memories is increasing with age.

Ursula: "Sometimes Günter wakes up in the morning and says, 'last night they were after me from all sides.'"

Günter: "That is the speechlessness of the witness." Very few survivors speak in public, despite the importance of their testimonies.

Günter returns to the discussion of what transpired after the Allies landed. It was a hot summer night, 1944. They lay outside of the factory because it was so hot.

## Günter Cordier Interview

*(Ed. Note: Probably the textile factory in Le Lude, France, where they were quartered.)* He saw lights. He found out the next day that the Allies had landed, which they were happy to hear. Upon receiving the news, Günter's friend Helmut began singing "O danke, danke Gott" (O thank you, thank you God) as loud as he could.

*(Ed. Note: Remember that Helmut was killed just one month later, in July 1944, in an Allied strafing attack.)*

Günter talks about having packed for "work service." What should he put in the suitcase? How long would it last? His shoes gave out early. Günter: "I wrote my mother that we were hopping from cow pie to cow pie because we didn't have any shoes."

Günter looks for the document confirming which hundred-group he had belonged to as part of Organization Todt: 42<sup>nd</sup> Hundred Group. He talks about what was included with his uniform – a kind of slippers, not real shoes.

Interviewer inquires as to whether the small suitcase Günter had used during the war and later given to his son might be returned, and if the stamp collection it contained might find a new home (so that the museum could have the case). Everyone laughs. She would like to include it in the museum exhibit.

Günter has cards of congratulation sent to his family upon the occasion of his birth, plus a family tree which his mother had created and stressed the Aryan side of the family – in hopes of having her son recognized by society. The Cordiers were pharmacists. There is discussion of who owned the Menden town pharmacy at various times. Günter has a letter written by his grandfather to the town magistrate explaining that under no circumstances would a second pharmacist be admitted to practice, as his family would otherwise starve to death. Everyone laughs.

Interviewer tells a story about the death of one of the pharmacists who got drunk on New Year's Eve. There is talk of the sale of schnapps at pharmacy, Franzbrandwein.

Günter's mother came from a huge clan in Harzgerode; Gitta told about it. Ursula shows a picture of the Meyers and Günter's great-grandmother, Fanny Meyer, née Wolff. She's wearing a brooch with a picture of her husband (*Selmar Meyer*) on it.

There is a picture of Gerda Meyer, younger cousin of Günter's mother Käthe. Günter's family took care of her until the age of nearly 100. She is buried in Schwerte / Waldfriedhof.

## *Günter Cordier Interview*

*(Ed. Note: We visited Gerda's grave in September 2011. It is just a little walk from Günter's house in Dortmund, in possibly the most beautiful park-like cemetery we have ever seen.)*

There is a small picture of an ancestor of his mother, a cantor from Osterode.

Selmar Meyer was the grandfather of Günter's mother Käthe; but Günter never met him.

*(Ed. Note: Selmar Meyer was also the grandfather of Ernst Sonnenfeld, Carol's grandfather.)*

*(Unfortunately the video breaks up here during the last few minutes, but not before the Interviewer proclaims the session as a never-ending treasure chest!).*